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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK PARTNERS OF THE OUT-TRAIL ***



"Jim urged the pack-horse he was leading and came up with Carrie"

PARTNERS OF THE OUT-TRAIL

BY HAROLD BINDLOSS

Author of "THE BUCCANEER FARMER," "THE LURE OF THE NORTH,"
"THE GIRL FROM KELLER'S," "CARMEN'S MESSENGER,"
"BRANDON OF THE ENGINEERS," "JOHNSTONE OF THE BORDER," ETC.

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PART I—THE LINESMAN

PARTNERS OF THE OUT-TRAIL

CHAPTER I

THE BROKEN WIRE

Winter had begun and snow blew about the lonely telegraph shack where Jim Dearham studied an old French romance. He read rather by way of mental discipline than for enjoyment, and partly with the object of keeping himself awake. Life is primitive in the British Columbian bush and Jim sometimes felt he must fight against the insidious influence of the wilds. Although he had chosen the latter when the cities palled, he had studied at McGill, with a view of embarking on a professional career. Want of money was the main obstacle, but love of adventure had counted for much. His adventures had been numerous since he left the university, and he now and then tried to remind himself that he was civilized.

Outside the shack, the stiff dark pines rolled back to the frozen North where a new city fed the mining camps. Jim had been up there and had found some gold, besides a copper vein, but when he got his patent for the latter his funds ran out and he returned to the South and followed a number of occupations. Some were monotonous and some exciting. None paid him well. Now his clothes were old and mended with patches cut from cotton flour-bags; his skin was browned by wind and frost. He was thin and muscular, and his eyes had something of the inscrutable calm that marks the Indian's, but the old French romance and one or two other books hinted at cultivated taste. As a matter of fact, Jim was afraid of getting like an Indian. Life in the wilds was good, but one ran some risks.

The shack was built of logs, notched where they crossed at the corners and caulked with moss. There was a stone chimney, and a big wood fire snapped on the hearth. Jim sat close to the blaze in a deerhide chair, with his old skin coat hung over the back to keep off the stinging draughts. He could see the telegraph instrument. His and his comrade's duty was to watch it day and night, because theirs was a bad section and accidents happened. Jake had gone hunting and since the gale outside was freshening Jim wondered why he stopped so long.

After a time Jim put down his book and mused. By comparison with the ragged tents in which he had lived in the northern barrens, the shack was comfortable. Axes and tools for mending the line stood in a corner; old clothes, slickers, and long boots that must be mended occupied another. A good supply of provisions was stowed on some shelves; a rifle and a shotgun hung on the wall. He had all a man needed in the woods and admitted that he was lucky to have so much, but the rudeness of his surroundings sometimes jarred. This was strange, because he had never known luxury. He wondered whether he had inherited his dislike for ugliness, and the instincts of which he was now and then vaguely conscious. It was possible, for his father, who died when Jim was young, had come from the Old Country.

Then he dwelt with languid enjoyment upon something that happened when he was a waiter at a fashionable restaurant at Montreal. A party of English tourists came in one day for lunch. Jim remembered the scene well: the spacious room with the sunshine on the pillars and the reflections on glass and silver; the flies about the tables, the monotonous throb of the electric fan, and the strangers looking for a place. There were two men, one older than the other, and a girl. Jim had often pictured her since, and always with a curious satisfaction. It was not that she was beautiful, although her face was finely molded and her movements were graceful. It was her

delicate fastidiousness and the hint one got of refinement and cultivation. Although she smiled now and then, Jim remembered her calm and the tranquillity of her voice. He had not met a girl like that before, but she went away with the others, one of whom gave him a dollar, and it was ridiculous to imagine he would see her again.

This, however, was not important and he got up and went to the telegraph instrument. He called the next station and was satisfied when he got an answer. Some Government messages that must not be delayed were to be sent North and the line was working well. Jim went back to his chair and soon afterwards leaned forward, listening. He heard the wind in the pine-tops and the thud of snow, shaken from the tossing branches, on the roof. That was all, but he had trained his senses in the woods until they worked unconsciously. Somebody was coming and he knew it was not Jake.

A minute or two afterwards he heard steps in the snow. The steps were heavy, as if the men were tired. Somebody knocked and Jim opened the door. Two men came in and throwing down their packs shook the snow from their ragged furs. Their boots were broken, their leggins badly worn, and their faces were pinched with cold.

"I don't suppose you'll turn us out. It's what our packers call pretty fierce to-night," one remarked.

"Certainly not," said Jim. "Come right up to the fire. How did you make the shack?"

The strangers advanced and Jim hid his surprise, although they were the men whose lunch he had served at the Montreal restaurant. He had learned in the wilds something of the Indian's reserve.

"We hit the wire at dusk," one replied. "We had been climbing with a party of the Canadian Alpine Club, and stopped among the high ranges longer than we meant. In fact, the snow rather surprised us. The others had gone before we started and we had a rough time coming South."

"You didn't make it without packers," said Jim, who knew they were English.

"We left the boys some distance back. There was not much shelter at the camp and although they were satisfied, we resolved to follow the line and try to find a shack. The boys will, no doubt, arrive in the morning."

Jim nodded, because a line was cut through the forest for the telegraph wires.

"You ran some risk. If you camped at sundown, it's a while since you had supper. I can give you coffee and a hot bannock."

He put the kettle on the fire and when the meal was over studied his guests as they lighted their pipes. One was about thirty years old, and in spite of his ragged clothes, Jim thought him a man with cultivated tastes and wide experience. The other was young and looked frank. He had a refined, intelligent face and was like the girl whom Jim had seen at the restaurant; she was, perhaps, a relation. For a time the strangers talked about their journey and then one looked at Jim rather hard.

"Haven't I seen you before?"

Jim smiled. "At Cibbley's as you go to the new post-office at Montreal."

"Oh, yes! It was a very well-served lunch," said the other and picked up the French romance. "A curious book, but rather fine in parts. Do you understand the fellow?"

"On the whole. I like him; you feel he has a grip. Still he's puzzling now and then."

"These French' writers are puzzling; always trying to work off an epigram," the younger man remarked. "However, I suppose there's as much French as English spoken at Montreal and Quebec."

"Not French like this," the other said with a smile. "I doubt if an up-to-date *boulevardier* would own it for his mother's tongue. You would be surprised if you heard our Cumberland farmers use Chaucer's English."

"I don't know; they go back beyond him now and then. When they count their sheep I imagine they talk like Alfred or Canute. But suppose you give us an example of ancient French."

The older man opened the book and after turning a number of pages read a passage with taste and feeling. Then he looked at Jim.

"He's primitive; our thoughts run in another groove. But I daresay there's something archaic about Quebec French and you perhaps know the latter. Have I struck the right note?"

"Hit it first time! Anyhow, you've got my notion of what he meant," Jim replied. Then he paused and added thoughtfully: "But I don't know if we're as different as you think. In the North, men get back to primitive things."

The other nodded. "It's possible. One certainly gets a primitive hunger and learns something about bodily needs."

Jim lighted his pipe and mused. He had not talked to cultivated people since he left McGill. He felt rather moved and quietly excited; the strange thing was, their English voices and manner were not new. In a way, it was ridiculous, but he felt as if he had known them, or others of their kind, before.

"You are from the Old Country and your friend seems to know Cumberland," he said. "Do you know Langrigg Hall?"

He thought the older man gave him a keen glance, but next moment his face was inscrutable and with a little gesture of satisfaction he stretched his legs to the fire. His companion, however, looked interested.

"Why, yes," said the latter. "But there are a number of Langriggs in the North of England."

"At the place I mean there is a marsh."

"Then, I do know the hall. It stands upon a low ridge—what we call a knowe—with the big fells behind and the sands in front. At low-water, a river winds about the flats. It's a fine old house, although it's small."

"Isn't there a square tower with a battlement? The roof beams in the older part are bent, not straight."

The other looked surprised. "Have you been there?"

"No," said Jim, thoughtfully. "I've never left Canada, but a man I knew used to talk about Langrigg. I expect he told me about these things; he is dead now."

He glanced at the older man. The latter's eyes were half-closed and his pose was slack, as if he were languidly enjoying the warmth, but Jim thought he had been listening. Then he wondered why the other's short description had given him so distinct a picture; he could see the rugged blue hills in the background and the river winding among the sands. After all, his father had not talked about Langrigg often; in fact, only once or twice, when he was ill. Moreover, Jim reflected that he himself had used no Western colloquialisms; he had talked to the strangers like an Englishman.

"Then your friend must have been at Langrigg. It looks as if he knew the hall well," remarked the younger man.

His companion roused himself with a jerk. "I was nearly asleep. Give me your pouch; my tobacco's out."

He filled his pipe and turned to Jim. "Hope I didn't interrupt. I forget what we were talking about. It looks as if you didn't like a waiter's job."

Jim laughed and went to the telegraph, which began to click. He read the message and calling the next station waited for a time, and then turned to his guests.

"Line's broken and I've got to leave you. You can use the bunks; my partner must sit up and watch the instrument when he comes back. You can tell him I've gone to look for the break."

"Do you know where the break is?" the younger man asked.

"I don't know," said Jim, putting on his fur cap and old skin coat. "It mayn't be far off and it may be some distance. All I know is it's between here and the next shack."

"We found it hard to face the wind and there's more now."

Jim smiled. "One gets used to storms up here and the line must be mended. Some important messages from Ottawa are coming along."

He picked up some tools and when he opened the door the others heard the scream of the gale. The flames blew out from the snapping logs and an icy draught swept the room and roared in the chimney. Then the door shut, the fire burned steadily, and all was quiet in the shack.

"Our host excites one's curiosity," said the younger man.

"You mean he excited yours. You're an imaginative fellow, Dick."

Richard Halliday had remarked that since they reached the shack Mordaunt had not called him Dick and vaguely wondered why. Lance Mordaunt generally had an object. Dick doubted if he had been as sleepy as he pretended when he asked for his tobacco pouch.

"Oh, well," he said, "if we were in England, you wouldn't expect to find a fellow like this using his leisure to study old-fashioned French."

"We are not in England," Mordaunt rejoined. "When you judge Canadians by English standards you're likely to get misled. The country's, so to speak, in a transition stage; they haven't developed schools of specialists yet, and an intelligent man can often make good at an unaccustomed job. This fellow, for example, was a waiter."

He picked up the romance and put it on a shelf. Mordaunt was generally neat and Dick noted that he replaced the book in the spot from which it had been taken and put the rest against it.

"Anyhow, it's curious he knew about Langrigg," Dick insisted.

"I don't think so," said Mordaunt, carelessly. "A number of our farmers' sons have emigrated. He stated he had not left Canada and the man who told him about Langrigg was dead."

"The man who ought to own Langrigg vanished in Canada."

"On the whole, I imagine that's lucky. The trustees spent a large sum in trying to find him and were satisfied he was dead. His age made this probable."

"But he might have had a son."

"Of course," Mordaunt agreed. "Suppose he had a son? The fellow obviously knows nothing about his inheritance; and for that matter, Langrigg is not worth much. I expect he's engaged in some useful occupation, chopping trees or keeping store, for example, and is, no doubt, satisfied with his lot. I don't suppose he is the kind of man you would like to see at Langrigg. Besides, if he turned up, a number of people would suffer."

"That is so," Dick said thoughtfully. "After all, however, if Franklin Dearham had a son, he ought to be at Langrigg. Joseph left the hall to Franklin and his heirs."

Mordaunt smiled. "It was as illogical as other things Joseph did. He was not a good business man and spent the most part of his money after he quarreled with Franklin and turned him out. Then, shortly before he died, when Franklin had vanished and the estate would hardly pay its debts, he left him Langrigg. However, the thing's done with, and if I found Franklin's heir, I doubt if I'd feel justified in meddling. Matters like this are better left alone." He got up and stretched himself. "Now I'm going to bed."

He got into the nearest bunk, which was filled with spruce-twigs and wild hay, and soon went to sleep, but for a time Dick sat by the fire. The linesman had excited his curiosity; it was strange the fellow knew about Langrigg. Then he was obviously a man with rather unusual qualities and character; his books indicated this. Dick resolved to find out something about him when he returned.

By and by the other linesman came in with a mule-tail buck, and when Dick gave him Jim's message sat down by the telegraph. Dick went to bed and did not wake until his packers arrived at daybreak. The linesman was watching the telegraph, but the finger had not moved and he owned that he was getting anxious about his comrade.

Dick suggested that they should look for him, but on the whole the linesman hardly thought this necessary. He said the man from the next post would have started to meet Jim. Then Mordaunt wanted to get off. The snow had stopped, the wind had fallen, and if they missed this opportunity, they might be held up by another storm, while their food was getting short. Dick hesitated, but Mordaunt generally led him where he would and after some argument he agreed to start. Half an hour later they left the shack and pushed on down the line.

CHAPTER II

IN THE SNOW

When Jim left the shack the cold pierced his furs like a knife. For a few moments he heard nothing but the roar of the gale and could hardly get his breath. His eyes ran water and the snow beat his smarting face. Then he braced himself, for he had gone out to mend the line on other bitter nights and could not lose his way. Where the telegraph runs through the forests of the North a narrow track is cut for packhorse transport to the linesmen's posts, and one could not push between the trunks that lined the gap without finding thickets and tangles of fallen logs. The track, however, was not graded like a road. Outcropping rocks broke its surface, short brush had grown up, and although the snow had covered some of the obstacles its top was soft.

For a time the trees broke the wind, and Jim pushed on, hoping that he might soon find a trailing wire, but the posts loomed up, undamaged, out of the tossing haze. Luck was obviously against him, and he might be forced to walk half-way to the next shack, from which the other linesman would start. The snow was loose and blew about in a kind of frozen dust that was

intolerably painful to his smarting skin. Although his cap had ear-flaps, he could not cover his mouth and nose, and the fine powder, dried by the cold, clogged his eyelashes and filled his nostrils. His old coat did not keep out the wind and, although he was in partial shelter, he was now and then compelled to stop for breath. The gale was getting worse and, as sometimes happens when a blizzard rages, the temperature was falling.

Jim's flesh shrank from the Arctic blast, but he knew that in the North bodily weakness must be conquered. In the stern battle with savage Nature prudence is a handicap; one must risk all and do what one undertakes since there is no place in the wilderness for the man who counts the cost. Moreover, Jim had fought harder fights, when his strength was lowered by want of food, and he went forward, conscious of one thing: the line was broken and must be mended. There was no other way. He must give up his post if he could not make good.

In the meantime his physical senses, developed in the wilds, worked with mechanical regularity and guarded him. He could not hear much through his fur cap and often for some moments could not see, but he stopped when a tossing branch broke off and struck the snow in front, and sprang forward when a fir plunged down a few yards behind. He could not have stated that he knew the danger, but he avoided it where a stranger to the woods would have been crushed.

Perhaps the going was the worst. Plowing through the loose snow, he struck his feet against outcropping rocks and sometimes stubbed them hard on a fallen log. In places he sank deep; the labor was heavy and wind and cold made it awkward to breathe. His lungs seemed cramped; the blood could not properly reach his hands and feet. It was a comfort that they hurt, because when he no longer felt the painful tingling the real trouble would begin. One cannot feel when one's flesh is frozen. He could not have seen his watch had he taken it out, and doubted if there was warmth enough in his body to keep it going, because watches and gun-locks often freeze in the North. For all that, he knew how long he had left the shack and how much ground he had covered.

Men like Dearham learn such things, and by the half-instinctive faculties they develop Canadian traffic is carried on in winter storms. Telegraph linesmen in the bush and railroad hands on mountain sections use powers beyond the imagining of sheltered city men. They make good, giving all that can be demanded of flesh and blood; the wires work and Montreal-Vancouver expresses keep time in the snow.

One thing made Jim's task a little easier. The wire was overhead and when he reached the break he would see the trailing end. The trees had been chopped back; there was nothing to help the current's leap to earth, and he would not be forced to cut and call up the next shack with his battery. He wanted to find a fallen post, but as he struggled forward the half-seen poles came back out of the icy mist in an unending row. He had been out two hours and had not reached the worst spot. The line had no doubt broken at Silver's Gulch.

Some time afterwards he stopped and leaned against a post. The woods broke off behind him and in front a gap, filled with waves of snow, opened up. He could not see across; indeed, for a few moments, he could hardly see at all, but the turmoil that came out of the dark hollow hinted at its depth. He heard the roar of tossing trees far below and his brain reproduced an accurate picture of the gulch that pierced the high tableland. It was wide just there, but narrowed farther on, and a river, fed by a glacier, flowed through the defile. The river was probably frozen, although it ran fast. The wires went down obliquely, and in one place there was a straight fall of a hundred feet. The rest of the rugged slope was very steep and one needed some nerve to follow the row of posts when the light was good.

Jim did not hesitate when he had got his breath. With a blizzard raging, his job would not bear thinking about. He let go the post and slipped down some distance. When he stopped he got up badly shaken and crawled down cautiously, trying to keep the line in sight, but it was not a logical sense of duty that urged him on; he only knew he must not be beaten. He fought instinctively, because this was a region where to give ground in the battle generally means to die.

He reached a bend of the line where a post stood on a broken pitch that was almost a precipice. Twenty or thirty yards below it became a precipice and Jim met the full force of the wind as he crept round the corner. Then he saw a trailing wire, and, a little farther on, a broken post that had slipped down some distance. Crouching in the snow behind a rock for a few minutes, he thought hard. Although the post was short and not very heavy, he could not drag it back while the wire was attached. The latter must be loosed, and fixed again when the post was in its place, but it would be enough if the line was lifted a foot or two from the ground. Proper repairs could be made afterwards; the important thing was the Government messages should not be held up. For all that, it would be hard to reach the spot.

He crawled down and stopped beside the post. The snow was blinding, the wind buffeted him savagely, and since he was near the top of the precipice it was risky to stand up. His fur mittens embarrassed him, but he could not take them off, because when the thermometer falls below zero one cannot touch steel tools with unprotected hands. After some trouble, Jim loosed the wire and then saw the broken ends would not meet. However, since the line curved, a post could be cut in order to shorten the distance, and he crawled back to the spot where he had left his ax. Had he not been used to the snowy wilds, he could not have found the tool.

He cut the post and, with numbed and clumsy hands, joined the wire, but it must now be raised from the ground. It was impossible to get the fallen post on end and had he been able to do so powder would have been needed to make a hole. He could, however, support the post on a rock, and he floundered up and down in the snow, looking for a suitable spot. When he found a place, it was some way from the post, which was too heavy to move, and he went cautiously down hill for the other. Although this was lighter, he did not see how he could drag it back to the level he had left, and he sat down behind a rock and thought.

His coat and cap were heavy with frozen snow that the wind had driven into the fur; in spite of his efforts, he was numbed, and the gale raged furiously. The snow blew past the rock in clouds that looked like waves of fog; he had been exposed to the icy blast for three or four hours and could not keep up the struggle long. The warmth was leaving his body fast. Yet he did not think much about the risk. His business was to mend the line and his acquiescence was to some extent mechanical. To begin with, he must get the post up the hill and he braced himself for the effort.

He could just lift the butt and, getting it on his shoulder, faced the climb, staggering forward a few steps while the thin end of the post dragged in the snow, and then stopping. It was tremendous labor, and he knew he would need all the strength he had left to reach the shack, but in the meantime this did not count. Getting home was a problem that must be solved after the line was mended.

At length he reached the spot he had fixed upon, fastened the wire to the insulator, and lifted the top of the post a few feet. The job was done, but his body was exhausted and his brain was dull. He had made good and was conscious of a vague satisfaction. He could not, however, indulge feelings like this: he must now nerve himself for the effort to get home.

He went down hill a little, in order to shorten the curve; and it was then, when he had conquered, his luck failed. His foot slipped and when he fell he started a small snowslide that carried him down. He could not stop, the dry snow flowed about him like a river, and he knew there was a precipice not far below. The snow carried him over a ledge; he plunged down a few yards, and brought up against a projecting rock. The blow shook him, he felt something snap, and for a minute or two nearly lost consciousness. Then he was roused by a sharp prick and a feeling that something grated in his side. He knew what had happened: one, or perhaps two, of his ribs had broken and an incautious movement had driven the broken end into the flesh.

The mechanical injury, however, was the worst, since Jim was too hard to collapse from shock, and he lay quiet, trying to think. One could walk in spite of a broken rib; Jim had known badly injured men walk two or three hundred miles to reach a doctor, but the blizzard would try his strength. It was a long way to the shack and farther to the next post, but on the whole he thought it prudent to make for the latter. The linesman, finding the line broken, would set out to look for the break, and when Jim met him his help would be useful. In fact, it might be necessary.

He felt a sharper prick as he got up, but he followed the posts down the gulch and toiled up the other side. His breathing was labored and painful as he climbed the rugged slope. At the top the ground was roughly level and the tossing pines gave some shelter from the wind. Jim coughed now and then and thought there was a salt taste in his mouth. This looked ominous and the stabs caused by his jolting movements hurt, but he would not think about it. It was pain, not blood, that gave him the salt taste. He had done his job and begun a harder fight. The claim of duty had been met and now he was fighting for his life.

The pines roared as he struggled on and at times a blinding haze of snow filled the gap. He had thrown away his tools, but his coat was getting heavy. Now and then he tried to brush off the snow and wiped his lips. The salt taste was plainer; but he was not going to admit he knew what it meant and was glad he could not see his mittens when he took them from his mouth. Speed was important and he labored on. He could not remember afterwards how long he stumbled forward, but at length he stopped and stood swaying dizzily when an indistinct object loomed through the snow. It was like a man and came towards him.

"Hallo! Why, Pete——" he gasped and with an effort reached and leaned against a pine.

The other stopped. "It's Pete, all right: but what d'you allow you're doing on my piece of the section?"

"Reckoned I might meet you coming along," Jim replied, leaning hard against the tree. "You can take the back trail. The line's fixed."

"That's good. But why are you heading this way? I don't get you yet."

"I fell down the gulch. Some ribs broke."

"Ah!" said Pete. "Which side?"

Jim indicated the spot where he felt the stabs and Pete went to his other side.

"It's a blamed long hike to my shack, but you've got to make it. If we stop here, we freeze. Put your arm on my shoulder."

They set off, and Jim was glad to use such help as the other could give. He was getting dull and began to doubt if he could reach the shack, but although both would freeze if they stopped, Pete would not leave him. It was not a thing to argue about. Pete was a white man and in the North the white man's code is stern. One here and there might have a yellow streak, but as a rule such a man soon left the wilds. Anyhow, Pete was going to see him through. Both would make the shack, or both would be buried in the snow. It was not a matter of generous sentiment; one did things like that.

They made it somehow, at a cost neither afterwards talked about, for at length a pale glimmer pierced the blowing snow. Then the dark bulk of a building loomed up ahead and Pete pushed open a door. He was forced to use both hands to shut the door and Jim, left without support, staggered into the room. His head swam, his eyes were dim, and his chin was red. There was a chair, if he could reach it, but it seemed to be rocking about and when he stretched out his hand it had gone. Next moment he fell with a heavy thud. He felt a horrible stab, a fit of coughing shook him, and he knew nothing more.

CHAPTER III

THE THIRD PARTNER

Some weeks after he mended the line, Jim sat by a window in a small frame house at Vancouver city. He had been very ill and knew little about his journey on a hand-sledge from the telegraph shack to the railroad. There was no doctor in the woods and Jake Winter, his helper, engaging two Indians, wrapped Jim in furs and started in a snowstorm for the South. It was an arduous journey, and once or twice Jake thought his comrade would succumb, but they reached the railroad and he put Jim on the cars.

Now Jim was getting better and had left his bed for a rocking-chair. The house stood on the hill, and he looked down, across tall blocks of stores and offices, on the Inlet. Plumes of dingy smoke from locomotives burning soft coal moved among the lumber stacks, a tug with a wave at her bows headed for the wharf, the water sparkled in the sunshine, and there was a background of dark forest and white mountains. The picture had some beauty that was not altogether spoiled by the telegraph wires, giant posts, and advertisement signs. These emphasized the contrast between the raw and aggressive civilization that is typical of Western towns and the austerity of the surrounding wilds. In the foreground were steamers, saw-mills, and street-cars; in the distance trackless woods and untrodden snow.

The house stood in a shabby street and on the ground floor Jake's mother and sister sold drygoods and groceries. The business was not remarkably profitable, but Mrs. Winter was a widow and Carrie had sacrificed her ambitions for her sake. Now she sat opposite Jim, whom she had nursed. Carrie did not know much about sickness when she began, but she was capable and Jim liked to have her about. She knew when to stimulate him by cheerful banter and when he needed soothing. Carrie could be quiet, although she could talk. Jim imagined all girls were not like that.

He studied her with languid satisfaction. Carrie was tall and vigorous: he had seen her handle heavy boxes the transfer men dumped on the sidewalk. She did such things when Jake was not about, and Jim knew she baked the cakes and biscuit Mrs. Winter sold. For all that, her strength was not obtrusive; her movements were graceful and when not occupied she was calm. She had some beauty, for her face was finely molded and her color was warm, and Jim liked her level glance. He liked her voice; it was clear without being harsh, and she seldom used smart colloquialisms. In fact, Carrie was not the girl one would expect to meet at a second-class store.

"You are looking bright this afternoon," she remarked.

"I feel bright," said Jim. "For one thing, I've got up, and then you have been here some time. You brace one. I felt that when I was very sick."

Carrie laughed. "You're trying to be polite!"

"No," said Jim, whose brain did not work quickly yet; "I don't think I tried at all. The remark was, so to speak, spontaneous. You helped me get better; you know you did!"

"Oh, well," said Carrie, smiling, "you needed some control. You wouldn't take the doctor's stuff and we couldn't keep you quiet. I reckon you are pretty obstinate."

"One has got to be obstinate in the North."

"That's possible. It's a hard country and Jake took some chances when he brought you out across the snow. Do you remember much about what happened when you were on the trail?"

"I don't," said Jim, in a thoughtful voice. "All I do remember is the talk I had with two Englishmen who made the shack just before I went to mend the line. I've been bothering about the fellows since."

"But why?"

Jim pondered languidly. If he kept on talking, Carrie might stop; moreover, he wanted to formulate his puzzling thoughts and Carrie was intelligent. He would like to see if he could make her understand.

"To begin with, they were people who had traveled and knew the world; I know the North and some Canadian cities, but there I stop. The curious thing was, they didn't talk like strangers; I felt I'd got their point of view."

"Did you like them?"

"I don't know. I might have hit it with the younger man; he was frank and I reckon he meant well, though you got a hint of something careless and weak. There was more to the other fellow; you couldn't tell right off if you'd trust him or not. But I'm afraid I make you tired."

"Oh, no," said Carrie, and was silent for a few moments.

She was frankly interested by Jim. For one thing, she had helped him to get well and this gave her a motherly curiosity. Then his remarks seemed to promise a clue to something she had found puzzling. In a way, Jim was different from the young men she knew. The difference was elusive, but she felt it now and then.

"Well," she said, "why don't you go on?"

"I'd met the men before," Jim resumed with a laugh. "Handed them their lunch at the Montreal restaurant; they had a girl with them then. I'd certainly not met a girl like that, but somehow I'd a notion I could get in touch with her."

"What kind of a girl was she?" Carrie asked, with keener curiosity.

"The kind we call a looker, but it wasn't that. She was fine-drawn, if you get me; clever and fastidious. I think fastidious is the word I want. She belonged to clean, quiet places where everything is right. That's what made my notion I understood her strange. You see, I have had to struggle in the dust and mud."

Carrie imagined Jim had, so far, come through the struggle without getting much hurt or soiled. He wore no obvious scars. She smiled, and he resumed: "Perhaps the strangest thing was, they knew a place in the Old Country my father sometimes talked about."

"Did you tell them your father knew the place?" Carrie asked, for the clue was leading her on.

"I did not; they were strangers," Jim replied, and she saw he had a reserve that was not common in Canada. "Besides, my father didn't talk about Langrigg much. Still I had, so to speak, got the place; I could see it. I wonder whether one remembers things one's parents knew."

"It doesn't look possible," Carrie replied. "But do you know your father's people?"

"I don't," said Jim, with a touch of dryness. "There was a Joseph Dearham who lived at Langrigg. I imagine he was my grandfather, but he and the others left my father alone and we cut out the lot."

"Were your father and you like each other?"

"Not in a way. I reckon I'm like my mother, but my father has kind of faded; I'm often sorry I can't locate him well. He was not the man to go far in this country. Things I do remember show he had fine grit, but he hadn't punch enough. I think he was too proud to grab what was his."

"You are not like that?"

Jim smiled. "I take what's mine, but I don't want more. You see, I had to hustle for my mother's sake and I'd got the habit when she died and left me all alone. Well, that's all there is to my story, and I've certainly made you tired."

"You are tired," Carrie replied. "Go to sleep. I have made you talk too much, and must get busy."

She went off and Jim mused about her. Carrie was not like the English girl, but she had charm and he felt she was somehow wasted at the shabby store. She was pretty and clever; although she was kind, she was sometimes firm. Then his eyes got heavy and he went to sleep. When he woke Carrie had come back and was lighting the lamp. Jake had entered with her and put a tray on the table.

"Supper's served," he said. "It's better hash than you used to hand out in the woods, and

Carrie has fixed some hot biscuit with Magnolia drips in the way you like. Well, you better get busy, and we'll play we're in camp. I'll locate at the bottom of the snow bank."

Jake sat down on a rug, with his back to the wall and a plate on his knee, and Jim's thoughts wandered. He had got the habit of remembering things when he was ill, and the little shabby room, with the cheap rug on the rough, stained floor, seemed to melt like a dissolving view. He saw black pines, with the moon shining between their stiff branches, wood smoke drifting past, and a red fire snapping in the snow. Jake wore ragged furs and his eyes twinkled, as they twinkled now. Jake was a humorous philosopher and if his humor was sometimes thin his philosophy was sound. He was white; one could trust him. Then Jim came back to the room above the store. He liked the way Jake waited on Carrie, although Jake owned he had not been a success when he made a trip in the Mount Stephen dining-car.

"We're going to talk business," Jake remarked presently. "I've been getting after the telegraph department since we came home and one of the construction bosses was in town today. He allowed you made good the night they sent the Government messages through, and if we wanted the contract for the new line they're going to run across the ranges, he'd back our tender."

"Jim isn't well enough to go back yet. You mustn't bother him," Carrie said firmly.

"We can't do much until the thaw comes," Jake rejoined. "It's a fighting chance and I don't see many chances for us in this old town."

Carrie looked thoughtful. She knew the wilds would draw Jake back and Jim must soon go, but the North was a stern country and she wanted to keep them for a time. She was honest and owned that she wanted to keep both.

"Can you finance the job?" she asked.

"It's going to come hard, but we might put it over. Our pay was pretty good and the construction boss could get us a check as we go on if the work was approved. Of course, if we were pushed, we could sell out the Bluebird. The assay's all right and one or two of the big syndicates are looking up copper. Still I don't want to sell."

"You mustn't sell."

"Very well," Jake agreed. "What you say about it goes."

Jim looked up with some surprise. Jake and he had done enough work on the copper vein to get their patent, but could develop the mine no further without capital. Jim did not understand what Carrie had to do with this.

"He doesn't know," Jake remarked, and turned to Jim with a smile. "We put in the stakes and filed the record, but Carrie's a partner. She helped us out."

"Ah," said Jim, "I begin to see!"

He felt disturbed. The placer gold they had found was all spent before they proved the copper vein. Food cost much and nobody would let them have supplies. Copper mines were hardly thought worth exploiting then, since transport was expensive. When it looked as if they must give up the claim, Jake got some money from home, and now Jim knew who had sent the sum. He did not know how Carrie had saved it, but she must have used stern economy.

"You don't like my sending the money?" she remarked, with a quick glance at Jim.

"I don't like to think of your going without things you probably wanted and ought to have had. We could have let the mine go and worked for somebody else."

Carrie laughed. "I don't know if you're nice or not. Anyhow, I had the money; I'd been clerking for a time at the Woolsworth store and they had given me a good job. Why shouldn't I send Jake the money I didn't know how to spend?"

"You're exaggerating," Jim rejoined. "A pretty girl can always spend money on hats and clothes. In fact, I think she ought."

"Now you're certainly nice, but we'll let it go. Your taking the money made me a partner, and in the meantime the Bluebird is not for sale. If you wait long enough, somebody will give you what the mine is worth."

"I think so. Copper's hard to smelt and when transport's expensive speculators stick to gold, but things will be different now the country's opening up. We will hold the patent until you are willing to sell."

"Thank you," said Carrie. "It cost you something to prove the vein, up there in the melting snow, and no greedy city man is going to get your reward. However, we'll get on. If they give you the telegraph contract, I'm going North."

Jim turned to his comrade. "She can't go! You had better tell her it's impossible."

"I'll leave it to you. There's not much use in telling Carrie she can't do a thing when she thinks she can."

Jim began a labored argument about the hardships and the ruggedness of the country and Carrie listened with inscrutable calm. Then she said, "You don't want me to go?"

"It isn't that. You don't know what you are up against."

"I have a notion," Carrie remarked with some dryness. "Perhaps you imagine all goes smooth and I have a soft job here?"

Jim was silent. He was sometimes sorry for Carrie, but she resumed: "You haven't lived in a shabby street, doing chores you don't like and trying to please people who are often rude. Well, I've stood for it a long time, for mother's sake; but now cousin Belle is coming, and she knows all there is to know about keeping store. Do you think a girl ought to be kept at home? That she never hears the call of adventure like the rest of you?"

"Adventure palls. One soon gets enough," said Jim. Then he saw Jake's smile and added: "After all, I don't know——"

"I know," said Carrie. "You are going back, and I am going too. But you won't have to take care of me. I mean to manage things."

"She has some talent that way," Jake observed. "If you're not very firm, Jim, she'll manage you. But what's your particular job, Carrie?"

"Supplies. When it comes to handling foodstuff, menfolk don't know how to buy. Then they waste, and the hash a man camp-cook puts up is seldom fit to eat."

"There's some truth in that," Jake remarked with feeling. "It looks as if you had got your program fixed."

"I have," said Carrie, with resolute quietness. "I'm going."

Jake smiled at his comrade. "You had better agree. When Carrie talks like that she can't be moved by argument. Anyhow, the trail's broken to the wirehead and if she gets tired she can come back."

"I may get tired," said Carrie. "But I shall not come back. There's another thing: I have a share in the Bluebird and want a stake on the telegraph line. Well, I've saved a hundred dollars."

"Carrie's pile!" Jake remarked. "She means to throw it in; that's the kind of girl my sister is. As a business proposition, our venture's humorous. We haven't capital enough to stand for one setback, and if luck's against us we'll sure go broke. To begin with, I've got to put up a big bluff on the construction department in order to get the job; look as if I owned a bank roll and didn't care if we got paid or not. Well, one takes steep chances in this country, and I allow there's something to be said for the small man who goes out with an ax, five dollars, and a bag of flour, to make a road or build a log bridge. Folks don't know how much he means and all he has to stand for."

Carrie's eyes sparkled. "You and Jim know. I'm going to find out."

Then Mrs. Winter came in. She was a pale, quiet woman whom Jim had thought dull until he saw her work. She listened, making a few remarks, while Jake talked about their plans.

"Well," she said at length, "your cousin is coming and she'll help me run the store. It has certainly got to be run; you'll need some money if you go broke."

"We're not going broke," Carrie rejoined with a hint of emotion. "Jake has got to make good for your sake. Some day we'll sell out the business and you shall rest as long as you like."

Mrs. Winter smiled, rather wearily. "I don't know if I'd like to do nothing; I've hustled so long. Still I've sometimes thought I'd like to find out how it feels just to sit quiet for a piece. Now the oven's good and hot; there's a batch of biscuit ready and you'd better come and help."

She took Carrie away and when they had gone Jake looked at his comrade.

"I allow the women's part is most as hard as ours, and Carrie hit it when she said I had to make good."

Jim nodded. "I like your sister, and your mother's very fine. I want to help you help them all I can."

"Sure, I know," said Jake, and then his eyes twinkled, for he had noted Jim's slight awkwardness. "You went rather farther than you meant, didn't you? Your English streak makes you shy, but you won't hurt my feelings; I'm all Canadian. Now, however, you are going to bed."

Jim went to bed and soon went to sleep. He was not well yet and had had an exciting day.

CHAPTER IV

ON THE TRAIL

Heavy rain swept the valley, the evening was cold, and Jim stood near the big rusty stove at Tillicum House, drying his wet clothes. He had eaten a very bad supper and imagined the wooden hotel on the North trail was perhaps the worst at which he had stopped. The floor was torn by lumbermen's spiked boots; burned matches and the ends of cheap cigars lay about. The board walls were cracked and stained by resin and drops of tarry liquid fell from the bend where the stove pipe went through the ceiling. A door opened on a passage where a small, wet towel hung above a row of tin basins filled with dirty water. There was no effort for comfort and Jake, who was tired and did not like the hard chairs, sat, smoking, on a box.

Outside, shabby frame houses ran down hill to the angry green river where drifting ice-floes shocked. Dark woods rolled up the other bank and trails of mist crawled among the pines. Patches of snow checkered the rocks above; in the distance a white range glimmered against leaden cloud. The settlement looked strangely desolate in the driving rain, but the small ugly houses were the last Jim's party would see for long. The wagon road ended there and a very rough pack trail led into the wilds. There was another hotel, to which the men Jim had engaged had gone.

"Where's Carrie?" he asked by and by.

"I guess she's tired," Jake replied. "It has been pretty fierce for Carrie since we left the cars."

Jim frowned. They had been some days on the road and the rain had not stopped. It was cold rain; belts of road were washed away and the rest was full of holes, in which the loaded wagons sometimes stuck. The men got wet and their clothes could not be dried, and Carrie was not sheltered much by a rubber sheet, while when they struck a wash-out all were forced to carry their tools and stores across slippery gravel. Carrie had not grumbled, but it was rough work and Jim knew she must have felt some strain.

"She oughtn't to have come," he said. "Why weren't you firm?"

"I've a notion you agreed; but if you imagine I could have kept her back, you don't know Carrie yet. Anyhow, the bad weather won't last and we must make the head of the wire soon. Summer's short."

Jim nodded. They had grounds for speed that disturbed them both. Supplies and transport had cost more than they calculated; wages were high, and their money was running out. It was obviously needful to push on the work until enough of the line was finished to justify their asking for some payment. While Jim mused a man came in. The stranger was big, and looked rather truculent, although he wore neat store-clothes and new long boots. His glance was quick and got ironical when he fixed his eyes on Jake.

"Been some time beating it from the railroad, haven't you?" he asked.

"I expect the trip has been made in better time," Jake admitted. "We struck a number of wash-outs and didn't want to leave our truck along the road."

"You were short of transport."

"We had all we could pay for. Transport comes high."

"When you leave the railroad, everything comes high, as you're going to find out. Guess your trouble is you haven't enough capital."

"The trouble's pretty common," Jake rejoined. "You don't find rich men hitting the trail to the woods."

"A sure thing," said the other. "Well, you're not going to get rich cutting the new telegraph line. Your outfit's not strong enough; you haven't stores and tools. Tell you what I'll do; I'll give you seven hundred and fifty dollars to let up."

"I don't know if you're generous or if you're rash," Jake remarked with a twinkle. "The truck we're hauling in cost us more than that."

"I'll take it at a valuation and you can find the men to fix the price."

Jake looked at Jim, who pondered and hesitated. He was dispirited and tired, and felt that the chance of their carrying out the contract was not good. It would be something of a relief to get their money back.

"I don't know who you are and why you want to buy us off," he said.

"Then I'll put you wise. I'm Probyn, Cartner and Dawson's man. They wanted the new branch-line job, and if you get out, it, will go to them. Anyhow, you can't put it over. The bush is thick in the valley and there's loose gravel on the range that will roll down when you cut your track."

"Loose gravel's bad," Jake remarked. "If there's much of it, I don't see why Cartner and Dawson want the contract."

"For one thing, they reckon it's theirs. Then they have money enough to get to work properly. You have taken up too big a job, and now's your chance to quit. If you're prudent, you won't let it go."

Jim pondered, for he thought he had got a hint. Cartner and Dawson were contractors and with one or two more did much of the public work. In fact, it was said that the few large firms pooled the best jobs and combined to keep off outsiders. Jim had been somewhat surprised when Jake secured the contract and imagined this was because it was not large enough for the others to bother about. The branch line was short.

"Oh, well," he said as carelessly as he could, "we've got to try to put it over. Seven hundred and fifty dollars wouldn't pay us for the time we've spent."

Probyn leaned forward. "You want to call me up? Well, I'll stand for a thousand dollars, but that's my best."

Jake looked at Jim and both hesitated. A thousand dollars was a useful sum, and in a way they would get it for nothing. Cartner and Dawson would pay, but if the offer were refused, their opposition must be reckoned on. It was obvious that they did not mean to allow poaching on the preserves they claimed. Then Jim thought about Carrie, and felt half ashamed of his caution. She was a partner and although she did not know the difficulties she would not hesitate. He did not know if he was weak or not, but he did not want her to think he had no pluck. While he mused, Carrie came in, looking pale and tired, but she stopped and gave Probyn a direct glance.

"Who is this?" she asked.

"He comes from Cartner and Dawson, the big contractors, and wants to buy us off," Jake replied. "He offers a thousand dollars if we'll get out."

"Ah!" exclaimed Carrie. "What did you say?"

"We haven't said much. We were thinking about it when you came in."

Carrie's eyes sparkled and her tired look vanished. "It won't stand for thinking about! Tell him you undertook the job and are going to make good."

Jake shrugged humorously and turned to Jim. "Well, I guess we needed bracing. What do you say, partner?"

"We'll hold on."

Probyn frowned. "Is the dame a member of the firm?"

"She is," Jake said, smiling. "In fact, when we're up against it, she's the boss partner."

"Very well. I want you to get this, miss. Here's a thousand dollars; they're yours for picking up and you take no risk. If you refuse and hold down the contract, you'll certainly go broke."

"It's possible," said Carrie. "All the same, we mean to hold it down."

Probyn shrugged. "Then I quit. If you can put the job over, you're luckier than I think."

He went off and Carrie sat down. "Looks as if I came along when I was needed. The fellow talked in hints. What did he mean?"

"It's pretty obvious," Jake replied. "His employers don't like our butting in. Since they can't buy us, they'll try to freeze us out."

"Then I reckon we must fight."

Jake looked thoughtful. "They're strong antagonists; but I've a notion there's somebody on our side. In fact, I was puzzled when we got the contract. It's not often a job of this kind goes past the others, but the department may be using us to see if it's possible to shake the combine." He paused, and laughed as he resumed: "Anyhow, we have made the plunge and if we're not going under have got to go ahead."

Jim agreed and for a time they talked about something else, but next morning Jake got a jar when he went to load the pack-horses and found two of his helpers gone.

"They pulled out at sun-up," one of the rest explained. "A stranger came along, looking for choppers; offered fifty cents more than you promised, and Steve and Pete went off with him."

"He'll probably shake them in a week," Jake replied. "Still fifty cents a day's some inducement, and all of you can chop."

The packer laughed. "That's a sure thing! We reckoned we were fixed well and had better stop with a boss we knew. Besides, now we've a dame for commissary, the hash is pretty good."

Jake went back to the hotel, disturbed about Probyn, but satisfied with his men. The two who had gone were strangers, but two of the rest had been with him in the North and the others had worked upon the telegraph line. One could trust them. For all that, he was quiet when they set off on the muddy trail that plunged into the bush. A cold wind blew the rain in their faces, the horses stumbled in the holes, and the wet men grumbled as they plodded through the mud. They knew the wilderness and felt themselves a small company for the work they must do. Moreover, Jake imagined they might have to meet the antagonism of rich and unscrupulous rivals.

"You don't say much," he remarked to Jim.

"One doesn't say much the morning one pulls out to start a big job. Anyhow, I'll own it's not my habit. For one thing, I know what we're up against," Jim replied. Then he saw Jake's twinkle, and smiled. "My notion is you have been quieter than me."

"Oh, well," said Jake, "you're not always very bright, but this trip's a picnic after some we've made. If we go broke, we can come down again; the last time we took the North trail we had to make good or freeze."

"You hadn't your sister with you then."

"That's so," Jake agreed. "I reckon it makes some difference. Perhaps you had better go ahead and talk to her. Carrie's rather fed up, but she mayn't be as frank to you."

Jim urged the pack-horse he was leading and came up with Carrie, who was a short distance in front. He wondered what he had better talk about, but found it easier to amuse her than he had thought. Carrie did not look tired now; she had a touch of color and her eyes were bright. She laughed at his remarks, although he admitted that his humor was clumsy, and did not seem to mind when the horse splashed her with mud. Carrie had pluck, but he imagined her cheerfulness was forced. By and by a knot on the pack-rope slipped and some tools and cooking pans fell with a clash. When Jim began to pick them up Carrie stopped a yard or two in front.

"You needn't hurry; I'll go on," she said. "It's cleaner away from the horses, and one can look for the dry spots."

Jim gave her a quick glance. Although she smiled, her voice had a note of strain. It had not been easy for her to pretend and he had forced her to the effort.

"I'm sometimes dull, but I mean well," he said apologetically.

"Of course, you meant well. Jake sent you, didn't he? He knows something about my moods."

Jim colored and, seeing his embarrassment, she laughed.

"You don't deserve that; I get mad now and then. The thing's my fault, any way. I started well, but hadn't grit enough to keep it up. However, hadn't you better pick those pans out of the mud?"

Jim replaced the articles and when he had refastened the load waited for Jake.

"It looks as if Carrie had turned you down," the latter remarked.

"I'm not surprised," Jim rejoined. "I've been talking like a drummer when she wanted to be alone."

"Oh, well," said Jake, "you haven't a very light touch, but I expect she saw your intention was good."

"She did not; she saw you had sent me. Your sister is cleverer than you think."

Jake grinned and pulled his horse round a hole. "They're all cleverer than we think. Sometimes it's an advantage and sometimes a drawback. Anyhow, I guess I won't meddle again. Carrie will make good if we leave her alone——"

He turned, for the horse behind them pushed forward and bit the animal he led.

"Watch out!" he shouted. "Drive your beast on!"

Jim did so and then stopped a few yards off, while the animals plunged round each other and

a man behind ran up. Jake, sticking to the bridle, was dragged about; his horse's load struck against a tree and a flour-bag burst. While he tried to stop the white stream running from the hole, the other horse seized his arm and shook him savagely. Its driver joined in the struggle with a thick branch, and the men and animals floundered about the trail while the flour ran into the mud.

"Let up with the club!" Jake shouted. "The dried apples have gone now. You have hit the bag."

"Hold your beast, then," gasped the other. "This trouble's not going to stop until mine gets in front."

Jake with an effort pulled the kicking animal between two trees and there was quietness when the other passed. It looked round for a moment, and then plodded forward steadily while the desiccated apples ran down on the trail.

"Now we'll stop and fix those bags," Jake remarked. "Why in thunder did you let the brute go, Bill?"

"He was mushing along good and quiet and I wanted to light my pipe. Reckon he forgot he wasn't in his place."

Then they heard a laugh and saw Carrie close by. Jake was covered with mud and flour, and his hat, which had been trampled on, hung over his hot face.

"You look the worse for wear," she said.

"I guess I feel like that," Jake replied, indicating his torn overalls. "Putting some of the damage right will be a job for you, but my hat's past your help. You wouldn't think it cost three dollars, not long since!"

"But what was the kicking and biting about?"

"You heard the explanation! Bill's cayuse forgot he wasn't in his proper place. When he remembered, he tried to get there."

"I don't understand yet."

"A pack-horse knows his place in the row. He's a creature of habit and hates to see another animal where he ought to be, but Bill was late in loading up and we didn't stop for him. If I'd known what was coming to me, I'd have waited. Now you have got the thing."

Carrie laughed and Jim noted there was no reserve in her amusement. Her moodiness had vanished.

"It's ridiculous, but you must indulge him another time," she said. "Food is dear."

They went on with lighter hearts. The struggle and Carrie's laugh had braced them, and by and by bright sunbeams touched the trunks beside the narrow trail.

CHAPTER V

CARRIE'S WEAK MOMENT

The rain had stopped and big drops fell from the dark firs about the camp. Daylight was going; all was very quiet but for the distant sound of falling water, and the smoke of the sulky fire went straight up. White chips and empty provision cans lay beside the freshly-chopped logs. Jake had left camp after supper, the men had gone to fish, and Carrie had taken off her wet boots and sat by the fire, trying to dry her clothes. For the last three or four days the party had traveled across very rugged country, and had now reached the spot where the new line would branch off.

Carrie was cold and depressed. One of the men who joined Probyn was cook, and although she had undertaken his duties cheerfully she found them harder than she thought. Then when they pitched camp the wood the men brought was wet, the fire would not burn well, and the extra good supper she had meant to cook was spoiled. This was the climax of a number of small troubles and hardships, and Carrie's patience had given way. By and by, Jim came out of the gloom and stopped by the fire.

"Crying, Carrie! Why is that?"

Carrie, who had not heard his steps, started and tried to hide her feet behind her draggled skirt.

"I wasn't," she said, rather sharply. "Anyhow, if I was, you oughtn't to have noticed."

"Perhaps not. Jake told me not long since my touch wasn't light. But what has gone wrong?"

"It's all gone wrong," she answered drearily. "I oughtn't to have come. Supper was the last thing——"

"The supper was quite good," Jim declared.

"Quite good! Well, I suppose that's all you can say for it honestly. If you liked it, it's curious you didn't eat very much. Then, you see, I can cook, and I wanted to make a little feast to celebrate your beginning the job."

"Nobody could cook at a fire like that. Besides, folks are not fastidious in camp. When you're chopping and cutting rock all day, you can eat whatever you get."

"Your touch is certainly not light; I'd sooner you were fastidious," Carrie rejoined.

"Looks as if I'd taken the wrong line," Jim said gently. "I hate to see you disturbed."

"Do you hate it very much?"

"Yes," said Jim. "That's why I'm awkward."

Carrie gave him a quick glance and turned her head. The firelight touched his face and she noted his grave sympathy.

"Oh!" she said, "I'm a silly little fool! I would come—although I knew you didn't want me."

"I thought you would find things hard," Jim replied, with some embarrassment.

"I do find them hard; that's the trouble, because they're really not hard. The fault's mine; I haven't enough grit."

"You are full of grit," Jim declared. "I've known men knocked out by an easier journey."

"You're trying to be nice and I don't like that. I didn't want you to come just now, but since you have come, sit down and smoke. I meant to be a partner and help you both along."

"But you have helped——"

Carrie looked up quickly. "Oh, you are dull! You don't see I want to confess. It's sometimes a comfort to make yourself look as mean as possible. Afterwards you begin to imagine you're perhaps not quite so bad."

"I don't know if it's worth while to bother about such things," Jim remarked.

"You don't bother. When you're on the trail, you're occupied about the horses and how far you can go. Nothing else matters, and Jake, of course, never bothers at all. He grins. But I insisted on coming and when the man at the hotel wanted to buy you off I made you refuse. You know I did. You were hesitating."

"On the whole, I'm glad you were firm."

"It was easy to be firm at the hotel, but I ought to have kept it up. I was vain and sure of myself, when I'd come up in a wagon, over a graded road."

"The road was pretty bad," said Jim.

"Anyhow, it was a road and I sat in a wagon," Carrie rejoined. "When the road stopped and we hit the real wild country, I got frightened, like a child. What use is there in starting out, if you can't go on?"

"You have gone on. I don't think many girls from the cities would have borne the journey with an outfit like ours. But I don't quite get your object for leaving home."

"Ah," said Carrie, "you have done what you wanted, although it was perhaps hard. You have tasted adventure, seen the wild North, and found gold. You haven't known monotony, done dreary things that never change, and tried to make fifty cents go as far as a dollar. If you had talents, you could use them, but it wasn't like that with me. I don't know if I have talent, but I felt I could do something better than bake biscuit and sell cheap groceries. I longed to do something different; to go out and take my chances, and see if I couldn't make my mark. Then I wanted money, for mother's sake. So I came, but as soon as I got wet and tired I was afraid."

Jim pondered. Carrie had pluck; it meant much that she had owned her fears. She meant to conquer them and he imagined she looked to him for help. His business was to give her back her confidence, but this could not be done by awkward flattery. In the meantime, he looked about. The fire had sunk, the moon was rising, and through a gap between the trunks one could see a dark gulf, out of which thin mist rolled. The vapor streamed across long rows of ragged pines

that ran up among the rocks until they melted in the gloom. In the distance, a glimmering line of snow cut against the sky. The landscape had grandeur but not beauty. It was stern and forbidding.

"I think we are all afraid now and then," he said. "I never hit the North trail without shrinking. Perhaps it's instinct, or something like that. In the cities, man lives in comfort by using machines, but he's up against Nature all the time in the wilds. She must be fought and beaten and he must leave behind the weapons he knows. Up North, a small accident or carelessness may cost you your life; an ax forgotten, a bag of flour lost, mean frostbite and hunger that may stop the march. You have got to be braced and watchful; it's a grim country and it kills off the slack. But we are only on its edge and things are different here. If we are beaten, we can fall back. The trail to the cities is open."

"Would you fall back?" Carrie asked.

"Not unless I'm forced," Jim answered with a laugh.

"Nor will I," said Carrie. "I've been a fool to-night, but if I'm up against silly old things like instincts, I'm going to put them down."

"You will make good all right. But what did your mother think when you resolved to come with us?"

Carrie hesitated, and then gave Jim a level glance.

"You didn't see mother much. She was busy; she's always busy, and you don't know her yet. She's quiet, you don't feel her using control, but one does what she wants, and I can't remember when that was wrong. Well, I suppose she felt, on the surface, I oughtn't to go. It was the proper, conventional view, but when it's needful mother can go deep. I think she was willing to give me a chance of finding out, and trying, my powers; she knew I wouldn't be so restless afterwards, if I was happier or not." Carrie paused and there was a touch of color in her face as she resumed: "Besides, she knew she could trust Jake and I think she trusts you."

Jim said nothing. It looked as if the little faded woman who had been occupied about the store all day had qualities he had not imagined, although he now remembered he had sometimes got a hint of reserved force. All was quiet for a minute or two while he mused, and then they heard steps and Jake came up.

"I've been prospecting up the line. We have got our job," he said.

"What's the trouble? Bush pretty thick?"

"Rocks! They're lying loose right up the slope and it's going to cost us high to roll them away. Then it's possible another lot will come down."

Jim frowned. They had undertaken to clear a track of stated width, along which pack-horses could travel, as well as fix the telegraph posts; and a bank of big loose stones would, be a troublesome obstacle. Much depended on the steepness of the hillside and he had not yet seen the ground.

"If we have to build up and underpin the line, it will certainly cost us something," he said. "However, we'll find that out as we go on. The main thing is to start."

"I allow that's so. When you start you finish," Jake remarked. "Still dollars will count in this fight and we may go broke."

"It's possible. Anyhow, we'll hold on until we are broke."

Carrie laughed. "And that's all there is to it, Jim? I like your way of looking at things. It's simple and saves trouble."

"It puts it off," Jim rejoined dryly. "The trouble sometimes comes at the end. But it's rather curious how often you can make good by just holding on."

"Oh, well!" said Carrie. "I hear the boys coming. Go and see if they have caught some fish."

Jim went off and presently returned with a string of big gray trout. Sitting down, he began to sharpen his knife, but Carrie stopped him.

"Leave them alone! How many will the boys eat for breakfast?"

"To some extent, it depends on how many they get. If they're up to their usual form, I reckon they'll eat the lot. But what has that to do with it? I'll fix the trout."

"No," said Carrie. "Give me your knife."

"Certainly not. Do you like dressing fish?"

"I expect I'll hate it, but I'm going to try. Do you want me to struggle with a small blunt knife?"

Jim looked hard at her. Her mouth was firm and he knew what her touch of color meant.

"I undertook to help cook," she resumed, and smiled. "It's curious how often you can make good by just holding on! Now, however, you and Jake can go away."

They went off, but presently Jim sat down and lighted his pipe. Although he approved Carrie's resolve to be useful, he felt annoyed. She had pretty white hands; he did not like her dressing trout. Yet somebody must cook, and now the gang was two men short, he did not know whom he could spare. It was not a job for Carrie, but she was obstinate. There was no use in going back, because she could beat him in argument, and he went to his bed of fir branches in a bark shack the men had built. Carrie had a tent, with a double roof that would keep out rain and sun. Jim had seen to this, although the tent was expensive.

He got up rather early, but when he went out a big fire burned between the parallel hearth logs. Aromatic wood-smoke hung about the camp in a thin blue haze. There was an appetizing smell of cooking, and Carrie got up from beside the logs as he advanced. She gave him a cheerful glance, and then stood looking past him to the east. Mist streamed out of the deep valley and rolled across the climbing pines; in the distance, snow cut, softly blue, against the dazzling sky. Carrie looked fresh and vigorous. There was color in her face and her eyes were bright.

"How long have you been about?" Jim asked.

"An hour," she said, smiling. "I was often up at daybreak at home, and it was different there. The street looked mean, the store smelt stale, and all was dreary. Sun-up is glorious in the bush."

"Sometimes! I have wakened half-frozen and felt most too scared to look about."

"Ah," said Carrie, "I was scared last night, but last night has gone and can't come back. I'll own I don't like the dark."

Jim studied her. Her pose was unconsciously graceful; her tall figure and plain gray dress harmonized with the background of straight trunks and rocks. Her head was slightly tilted back as she breathed the resin-scented air. Jim thought she looked strangely virile and alert.

"You belong to the dawn," he said.

Carrie laughed, a laugh of frank amusement, untouched by coquetry. "Oh, Jim! You're not often romantic."

"I suppose that is so," he agreed. "Anyhow, my feeling was quite sincere. You *are* like the dawn."

She turned her head for a moment and then said carelessly: "Let's look if the bannocks I made are cooked."

Jim scattered a pile of wood ashes and lifted two or three large thick cakes from the hot stones beneath. He broke off a piece from one and when it cooled began to eat.

"I imagine this is the best bannock that was ever made in the bush," he remarked.

"Do you feel you must be nice?"

"No," said Jim. "In a way, I don't care if I'm nice or not. The bannock is first grade; I think that's all that matters. If you don't mind, I'll take another bit."

Carrie laughed. "Looks as if one could make you happy by giving you things to eat! But let's see if the trout are fried; I've got the spider full."

She put the fish on a big tin plate and while she made coffee Jim beat a piece of iron that hung from a branch. The sharp, ringing notes pierced the shadows and half-dressed men came out of the shack and plunged down the slope to the river.

"Some of them would be mad if they knew I'd roused them out ten minutes early," Jim remarked. "A breakfast like this, however, is too good to spoil. Now if you'll let me have the coffee, I'll take the truck along."

He came back with the empty plates in about a quarter of an hour, for Canadian choppers do not loiter over meals, and Carrie, sitting on the hearth log, looked up anxiously.

"Well?" she asked, "were the boys satisfied?"

"They were. I don't think I could have stood for it if they were not. One allowed he hoped Probyn would keep the cook we lost. The others were enthusiastic."

Carrie blushed. "I'm glad. I was tired when things went wrong last night."

"The trouble is, you can't go on. It's one thing to superintend, and cook a meal now and then, but quite another to cook all the time."

"But this is what I want to do."

"It can't be allowed," Jim declared.

Carrie put down the forks she was cleaning. "You look very firm and solemn, but you can't bluff me. Are you and Jake very rich?"

"You know we're not rich."

"If you want to put your contract over, you have got to work, and it's obvious you can't work and cook. Then, if you bring in a man to cook, he couldn't do much else and wages are high. Aren't they high?"

"I suppose they are," Jim agreed.

"Very well! I came because I wanted to be useful, and if you won't let me, I'll go back. Then Jake and one of the boys would have to go down with me to the railroad. That would be awkward, wouldn't it?"

"It certainly would be awkward. Do you mean you'll insist on taking two of us away from the job unless I give in?"

Carrie smiled. "Yes, Jim. If you're going to be obstinate, there's no other plan. Besides, you see, the trail's rough and I couldn't go very fast."

"I'm beaten," said Jim. "You will do what you like. You're a good sort, Carrie, and if you find the job too hard, you can stop."

"I may find it hard, but I don't know if I'll stop. Anyhow, your control is gone. If you are not very nice, I'll spoil the hash, and then you'll have trouble with the boys."

Jim got up, moved by her pluck and yet half annoyed, for he had meant to make things easy for her. Before he went off she laughed and remarked: "You'll find Jake will understand why you gave way. Sometimes he bluffs mother; he never bluffs me."

CHAPTER VI

ROLLING STONES

Sweet resinous smells drifted down the hill. The mists were melting and Jim lighted his pipe and thoughtfully looked about. The sun had just risen above the distant snow and a streak of blue smoke, drawn across the woods, marked the camp. Breakfast would not be ready for half an hour, but he knew Carrie had been occupied for some time, although he had stolen out of camp without talking to her.

Jim did not like her working as she had worked for the last week or two, and if he had stopped they might have begun an argument. He would have gained nothing by this, for Carrie was obstinate and he admitted that he was now and then impatient. Carrie was plucky and they needed help, but cooking for the hired men was not the kind of thing she ought to do. Then he had been disturbed in the night by a rattle of stones, and now saw he must grapple with a difficulty that was worse than he had thought.

The hillside ran up steeply to a wall of crags, split by frost and thaw. Tall firs clung to the slope where they could find a hold, but there were gaps, in which broken trunks lay among the rubbish a snow-slide had brought down. Then, for some distance, large, sharp stones rested insecurely on the slope, and Jim imagined that a small disturbance would set them in motion. Below the spot where he sat, the stones ran down into a gulf obscured by rolling mist. The turmoil of a river rose from the gloomy depths.

A row of telegraph posts crossed the stony belt, but one or two had fallen in the night and Jim carefully studied the ground. His business was to put up the posts and clear a track in order to protect them from damage and enable pack-horses to travel along the line. It was plain that the stones were an awkward obstacle, but this was not all. As a rule, the provincial Government allowed the small ranchers to undertake the construction of telegraphs, rude bridges, and roads. The plan helped the men to stop upon their half-cleared holdings, but it was not economical and rich contractors had recently got the large jobs. Jim imagined they meant to keep the business in their hands and he knew something about political influence and graft. His contract was not important but he had grounds for believing the others resented his entering the field, and if he

got behind schedule, the agreement might be broken. Well, he must not get behind, and when he went back for breakfast he had made his plans.

Afterwards he got to work and rolled the stones down hill all day, without returning to camp for dinner. It was getting hot, and in the afternoon fierce sunshine beat upon the long slope. The shadow of the pines looked inviting and Jim felt that half an hour might be occupied profitably by a quiet smoke and review of the undertaking, but resisted the temptation. The argument was false; he was a working boss and must set the pace for his men. His back began to ache, he tore his old blue shirt, and bruised his hands, while as the shadows lengthened he got disturbed. Rolling heavy stones was slow and expensive work. It kept him from getting forward and wages were high. When the sun was low he stopped to wipe his bleeding hand and saw Jake leaning on his shovel.

"I've let up for a minute or two to think. Sometimes it pays," Jake observed.

"It depends on what you think about," Jim rejoined. "I don't know if there's much profit in wondering what's for supper."

Jake smiled. "Perhaps not. I reckon you thought how you could hit up the pace. My notion is, you've put it most as high as the boys will stand for."

"In this country, it's usual to work as hard as the boss."

"Something depends on the boss," Jake said dryly. "When we're up against a hard streak, you are near the limit."

Jim gave him a sharp glance. "Do you mean anything in particular? Aren't you satisfied with the boys?"

"On the whole, they're a pretty good crowd. There are two I'm not quite sure about."

Jim's eyes rested on two men who were languidly throwing stones down the hill. "I think we agree, but they have earned their pay so far, and I mean them to go on."

He stopped and the men put down their tools, for a sharp, ringing noise rolled across the woods. When they reached camp Jim was surprised to note two hobbled horses among the springing fern. The big pack-saddles stood near the fire and a man was helping Carrie to fill the tin plates. He stopped when Jim advanced, and Carrie said, "This is Mr. Davies; he was at the Woolsworth store with me."

Jim said he was glad to see him and studied the fellow when they sat down. Davies was young and rather handsome. He wore overalls, long leggings, and an expensive buckskin jacket, but although his skin was brown, he did not look like a bushman. In fact, Jim thought him a type that is common in Western towns; superficially smart, and marked by an aggressive confidence. He was somewhat surprised the fellow was a friend of Carrie's; Jim had not expected her to like that kind of man, but hospitality is the rule in the bush and he tried to be polite. When supper was over and they lit their pipes he asked:

"Have you come to see the country, Mr. Davies?"

"I'm out on business; going through to the new settlement. I belong to the Martin outfit and we're bidding on the construction of a new bridge."

"Ah," said Jim, for Martin was a contractor and one of the ring. "This is not the shortest way to settlement," he added.

"It is not," Davies agreed. "I reckoned I'd go in up the Vaughan river and hired two Indians who know the way. Wanted to look at the country; there's some talk about making a new wagon road. Then, you see, I knew Miss Winter and heard she was at your camp."

Something about Davies' manner hinted that the girl and he were good friends, and Jim was sorry Carrie was not there, since he wanted to see how she accepted the fellow's statement. For no very obvious reason, Davies jarred him.

"Looking for a wagon road line is a different job from keeping store," he remarked.

"I did keep store, but I've had other occupations and know the bush. If I didn't know it, they would have no use for me in the Martin gang."

Jim nodded. The fellow was plausible, and in British Columbia a man often puts his talents to very different uses. He thought Davies had talent, although perhaps not of a high kind. By and by the latter got up.

"If the boys are going fishing, I'll try my luck with them," he said. "I'd like a few gray trout and have brought a pole."

Two or three of the men picked up rods they had made from fir-branches, and when the party set off Jim walked across to the fire where Carrie was sitting.

"Davies has gone off to the river," he remarked. "It's curious!"

"Why do you think this curious?"

Jim hesitated, feeling that tact was needful. He was not jealous about Davies. Carrie and he were friends; he liked her much, but she had not inspired him with romantic sentiment. His imagination dwelt upon the girl he had met at the Montreal restaurant. For all that, he was puzzled.

"Well," he said, "it looks as if he had come out of his way in order to see you."

"Did he tell you this?"

"No," said Jim. "He hinted at something like it. I suppose you knew him well?"

Carrie gave him a quick glance. His face was thoughtful and he frowned. She was quiet for a moment or two, and then smiled. "I do not know him well. He was at the Woolworth Store, but his was a better post than mine, and we didn't often meet. In fact, I don't think I liked him much."

"Ah," said Jim, whose satisfaction was plain. "Well, of course, it is not my business."

"But you're rather glad I didn't like him?"

"Of course," said Jim. "The fellow's a poor type; not your type——"

He stopped with some embarrassment and Carrie laughed.

"We'll let that go. You are puzzled, Jim?"

"I am. Why did the fellow hint he'd come because he wanted to see you? He said something about looking for a line for a wagon road, but he'd have struck the valley the road will go through sooner if he'd pushed on east. I can't see what he did want."

"Perhaps he had some reason for stopping at our camp and felt he must account for his coming out of his way."

"Yes," said Jim. "I believe you've hit it."

"Well, now you know I don't like Davies and you have found out why he's here, you ought to be satisfied."

"But I haven't found out why he's here; that's the trouble," Jim rejoined, and was silent for a few moments. "However, perhaps you have put me on the track," he went on. "I was something of a fool when I wanted to leave you behind. You have helped us all the time. But you haven't enough wood for morning; I'll go and chop some."

He went off and Carrie sat quietly by the fire. There was faint amusement in her eyes, but they were soft. By and by the light began to fade and rousing herself she made some bannocks for breakfast. When Davies came back with a string of fish she had vanished and the light that had burned in her tent was out.

Next morning Davies left the camp and Jim sent three or four men to build a wall to protect the line, while he and some others put up the posts. Their progress was slow, because it was necessary to make the wall strong and Jim was occupied for a week before he was satisfied with the length he had built. He thought it ought to stand, but felt disturbed when he calculated what the extra work had cost. It was, however, a comfort to know he had covered the worst ground, and soon after supper one evening he went off in better spirits than usual to a little bark shelter he had built for himself.

He was tired and soon went to sleep, but after some hours awoke. He supposed he was rather highly strung after working hard, because he did not feel sleepy, and lifting his head he looked about. The end of the shelter was open and the pines outside rose like vague black spires, their tapered tops cutting against the sky. Although there was no moon, the first row of trunks stood out against the deeper gloom behind. One could smell the resin and the warm soil, damped by heavy dew. All was very quiet, but after a few moments Jim began to listen. He had lived in the wilds, his senses were keen, and sometimes he received unconsciously impressions of minute noises. Although the stillness was only broken by the turmoil of the river far down in the valley, he imagined it was not for nothing he had wakened.

Then he raised himself on his elbow as he heard another sound. It was very faint, but somehow definite, although he could not tell what it was. A few moments afterwards, he knew; a stone was rolling down hill and disturbing others as it went. Then there was a sharp crash and a rattle that began to swell into a roar, and Jim, leaping up, ran along the hill. The bank he had built had broken and the stones behind it were plunging down.

When he reached the line he struck his foot against a rock and stumbled. The ground was rough, the night was dark, but it was unthinkable that he should stop. He clenched his hands and ran, although he did not know what he could do. When trouble threatened he must be on the

spot. In the meantime, the noise got louder. He heard great blocks strike the ledges down the slope and smash; trees broke and branches crashed, while behind the detached shocks there was a steady, dull roar of small gravel grinding across the rocks and tearing up the brush. The wall had obviously gone and its collapse had started a slide that might not stop until all the stones above the line had run down. If so, they might plane off a wide belt of hillside and carry the soil and broken timber into the valley. Then Jim would be forced to dig out another line.

He gasped as he labored on, but the uproar had begun to die away when he reached an opening in the thin forest. At sunset, straggling trees had dotted the slope, but they had gone and, so far as he could see, nothing but a few stumps broke the smooth surface of the hill. The wall had vanished with the line it was meant to protect. Now and then a big stone rolled by, but Jim did not think about the risk. He must try to find out if much of the surface was left and if there was rock beneath.

When he left the end of the line, small stones slipped away from his feet and plunged down into the dark. This was ominous, since gravel is awkward stuff to work among when it does not lie at rest. However, with plenty of stakes and some underpinning, he might be able to build up a new bank. By and by his foot struck something sharp and he looked up. He had kicked the edge of a large, ragged stone, and an indistinct, broken mass ran up the hill. The blocks had obviously come down from the bottom of the crags and, since they had gone no farther, the pitch was easy enough for them to lie. This would enable him to clear a line across the mass and build a fresh bank.

Jim sat down and took out his pipe. He had lost his labor and money he could not spare, but it was possible to run the line across the treacherous belt, although he was half afraid to count the cost. When he struck a match Jake came up and indistinct figures moved in the gloom behind.

"Have you any use for us, Boss?" one asked.

"Nothing doing now," said Jim. "We'll get busy in the morning."

The man looked about and then remarked:

"Something started the blamed wall off and I guess she didn't stop until she hit the river. It's surely bad luck!"

"It is," said Jim. "Anyhow, we took this job and are going to make good. I don't want you and you'll probably need some sleep."

"I reckon that's so, if you mean to speed us up," the other agreed, with a laugh, and when he went back to the others Jim lighted his pipe.

"A nasty knock, but not a knock-out," Jake remarked. "At sun-up we'll have a better notion ___"

"Oh, yes," said Jim, rather impatiently, and added: "I've been wondering why I wakened."

"I reckon that's plain enough. The noise would have roused me three miles off."

"It was before the noise began," Jim replied, in a thoughtful voice. "I think something woke me, but don't know what it was."

"Tom remarked that something had started off the wall. I allow he mayn't have reflected much, but perhaps it's significant he and you agree."

Jim was silent for a minute or two, and then asked: "Did all the boys come along?"

"So far as I remember. I didn't count."

"Well," said Jim. "It's too soon to state what I think. After all, I don't know very much."

Jake said nothing. He knew his partner was generally marked by a grim reserve after a bad set-back. When Jim was ready, he would talk, and in the meantime Jake imagined his brain was occupied. Crossing the track of the landslide cautiously, they returned to camp, but when they reached it Jim lighted his pipe again and did not go to sleep.

CHAPTER VII

A COUNCIL

Jim got up at daybreak and went to the spot where the landslide had carried away the line. A

hundred yards had gone and a great bank of soil and gravel ran down at an even slant to the river, where the current foamed about the rubbish that blocked its channel. The slope was dotted by broken trees and rocks, and in one place farther up a belt of smaller stones rested loosely at the top of a steep pitch. Jim thought a slight disturbance would start another slide.

He had wasted a week or two's labor and saw it would cost him some time to clear the ground before he could get to work again. Even then, there would be a risk of the new line's being swept away. This was daunting, because money was short and he had no margin to provide against expensive accidents. When he took the contract he had trusted much to luck, and now his luck was bad.

Moreover, the thing was puzzling and his curiosity was aroused. He imagined he had made the line secure, and had worked among treacherous gravel in shallow mines long enough to know something about the job. The wall had obviously broken and started the landslide when it gave way, but he could not see why it had broken. This, however, must wait. He meant to solve the puzzle, but, to begin with, the line must be run across the gap and he occupied himself with the necessary plans. His habit was to concentrate and, sitting absorbed, he studied the ground until he felt a touch on his arm. Then he looked up with a start and saw Carrie.

"I'm sorry, Jim," she said. "Is it very bad?"

"It's bad enough," said Jim, who began to get up, but she stopped him.

"Never mind; sit still! You're very polite, but I don't know if you need always use your best manners."

"I don't know if I do," Jim rejoined. "Sometimes I'm too savage; I'm rather savage now. But don't you like me to be polite?"

"If you get what I mean, I want you to feel I'm a working partner."

"You are a partner," Jim declared. "In fact, you're a remarkably useful member of the firm."

Carrie gave him a smile. "Thank you! But you mustn't feel this bad luck too much. You've met worse."

"Much worse, but it was in the North, where we knew what we were up against and had nothing to lose. It's different now; I've staked all I've got on this undertaking. So has Jake; and then you have joined us. I hate to think about your going back to the city broke."

"Oh," said Carrie, smiling, "that doesn't count at all. Besides, we're not going broke. We may have some set-backs, but we'll make good."

"We'll try; but that's another thing. I don't know why you're so confident."

Carrie studied him with a twinkle of amusement. "I am confident. You're not a quitter, and it's wonderful what one can often do by just staying with a thing!"

"The trouble is, you can't stay with this particular job when your money's gone. That's the difference between it and placer mining in the North. Up there, we had no wages to pay, and could stop and root up the tundra until we froze, and when our money is spent the boys will light out."

"But you'll stay until every dollar is gone."

Jim laughed. "It might be prudent to pull out before; but I rather think I'll hold on."

"Ah," said Carrie, "that's what I like! You're bracing up; I knew you would! However, I must go back. Breakfast must be cooked."

Jim went with her, feeling comforted. Carrie did not know much about the mechanical difficulties, but her confidence was inspiring. In a sense, the thing was illogical; the difficulties would not vanish because she did not see them. It was ridiculous for him to feel cheered, but he was cheered and he glanced at Carrie as they went along. She was pretty and her impulsive frankness was often charming; but somehow he did not think of her as an attractive girl. She was a partner whom he trusted and a staunch friend. Yet he had been annoyed by Davies' stopping at the camp and had felt relieved when she told him she did not like the fellow. This was strange, but Jim gave up the puzzle and helped Carrie with breakfast when they reached the camp.

When the meal was over he got to work and did not come back until supper was ready. Jake and he had not time for quiet talk all day, but there was something to be said, and when the men went off to fish, Jim sat down opposite Carrie, while Jake lay among the pine-needles close by. The shadows had crept across the camp and the hollows between the rows of trunks were dark. The snow had changed from white to an ethereal blue and the turmoil of the river hardly disturbed the calm.

"Have you any notion yet what started off the wall?" Jake asked.

"I have," said Jim. "The trouble began at the underpinning. A king post broke and let down the stones."

"So far, we are agreed. But do you know why the post broke? We used good logs."

"I don't know. Although it may take some time, I'm going to find out. We can't have this kind of thing happening again."

Jake nodded. "Perhaps I have got a clew. When Davies was here, he said he'd like to go fishing and some of the boys went along."

"That is so," Jim said with a puzzled look.

"The two who moved first were the boys we allowed we were not quite sure about. I don't know if it means anything, but when they got to the river, they and Davies lost the others."

"It may mean much," Jim said quietly. "The clew's worth following."

Carrie's eyes sparkled as she interrupted: "Do you imply Davies hired the boys to wreck the line?"

"I allow it's possible," Jim replied in a thoughtful voice.

"And I cooked an extra good supper for him!" Carrie exclaimed. "I'm beginning to understand why folks get poisoned. But now you know, what are you going to do about it?"

"We don't know," said Jim. "That's the trouble. We have got to wait."

Jake made a sign of agreement and Carrie said nothing. She knew her brother and imagined she understood Jim's quietness. After a time, the latter resumed: "I've been thinking, and the matter puzzles me. We're up against the big contractors. They'd be glad to see us broke and Probyn took two of our outfit when we stopped at the hotel. But he was willing to buy us out and his offering the boys higher wages was, in a way, a fair deal. I allow he left two we didn't trust."

"The two who went fishing with Davies!" Carrie remarked.

"That is so," Jim agreed. "Davies, however, works for another boss. It's possible the big men would pool their resources to freeze us off, but I know something about Martin and doubt if he would play a low-down game."

"Davies might," said Jake.

"I think he did," Carrie interposed, and her voice was sharp. "In fact, it's obvious. He's poison mean; I knew this at the store."

"I didn't like him," Jim replied and added thoughtfully: "After all, the contract's not important, from the big men's point of view. No doubt, they'd sooner we let up, but somehow I can't see their finding it worth while to get after us."

"It is puzzling," Jake admitted; "I think we'll let it go. If we have any fresh bad luck, our money will run out long before we can make good. This would leave us without resources except for the Bluebird claim."

Jim frowned. "I'll hold on while I have a dollar, but I don't want to sell the mine. For one thing, we couldn't get a price that would help us much, although I expect northern copper claims will soon be valuable. The country's fast being opened up and some day there'll be a railroad built."

"Perhaps it's significant that Baumstein made us another offer for the Bluebird."

"When did he make the offer?" Jim asked sharply.

"When you were ill; I refused. Thought I'd told you. He raised his limit a thousand dollars."

"Shucks!" said Jim. "Does the fellow think we'll give him the mine? Anyhow, I'd sooner not sell to Baumstein at all. He's a crook and has made his pile by freezing poor men off their claims."

Jake smiled. "Poor men with mines to sell get used to freezing, and if we refuse to deal with anybody whose character isn't first grade, we're not going to progress much. I doubt if rich folks who like a square deal are numerous."

"There are some," said Jim. "For all that, the unscrupulous, grab-all financier is a blight on the country. The prospector risks his life in the struggle with half-frozen tundra bog, rotten rock, and snow, and the other fellow, with his net of bribes and graft, gets the reward. But, we won't stand for that kind of thing."

"Let's be practical. We're not running a purity campaign, and it looks as if nobody but Baumstein is willing to buy the mine."

"Then my proposition is, we hold tight until the Combine come into the field. They'll be forced to get busy before long, and while I don't know if all their deals are straight, they're better than Baumstein's. In the meantime, we have got to stay with this telegraph contract while our money lasts."

There was silence for a moment or two and Carrie's eyes rested on Jim. He looked tired, and his brown face was thin, but his mouth was firm. Jim was resolute; she sometimes doubted if he was clever, but he could hold on. Had he been weak or greedy, he would have sold the copper vein and taken Probyn's offer to let the telegraph contract go. Perhaps this would have been prudent, but she was glad Jim had refused. She wanted to think he would not give way.

"Well? You claim you're a partner!" Jake remarked with a twinkle.

"Jim's plan is my plan," she said quietly.

"Then it goes," Jake agreed, and gave her a curious glance when Jim got up and went off across the hill. "I don't know if you're rash or not, but you're playing up to Jim. Since I've known you to be cautious, your object isn't very plain."

Carrie hesitated, although she was generally frank with Jake. "Oh, well," she said, "I feel he ought to take a bold line; that's the kind of man he is."

"Rather a romantic reason. Particularly as his boldness may cost us much."

"I'm tired of thinking about what things cost," Carrie rejoined. "Sometimes it's fine to take one's chances. I'm going to be rash, if I want."

"After all, it may pay as well as the other plan. However, if you mean to sketch a leading-character part for Jim and see he plays it as you think he ought, perhaps he deserves some sympathy and you may get a jolt. Jim's not theatrical."

"I hate theatrical people," Carrie declared.

Jake laughed. "You hate posers. You feel you'd like Jim to play a romantic part, without his meaning it? Well, I expect he'll miss his cues and let you down now and then, but he certainly won't pose."

"You're rather clever sometimes," Carrie admitted, with a blush. "But I think we have talked enough and I want some wood."

She sat for a time, thinking, while the thud of Jake's ax rang across the bush; and then went off to her tent with an impatient shrug.

"I mustn't be a romantic fool," she said.

For the next eight or nine days Jim and the men were occupied running the line across the gap. When he had done so, he stole quietly out of camp for three or four nights, and returning before daybreak, imagined nobody had remarked his absence. Then, one morning, Carrie came up as he was lighting the fire.

"You look tired, Jim," she said. "If you mean to work hard, you must get some sleep."

Jim gave her a sharp glance and she smiled. "You see, I know your step!"

"Ah," said Jim, who did not grasp all her statement implied, "you are very smart, Carrie, and it's plain that I am clumsier than I thought. But do you think anybody else heard me?"

"No. I listened and all was quiet. However, if it's needful for somebody to watch, you must let Jake go."

Jim shook his head. "I've got to see this thing through. Somehow I imagine I can do so better than Jake."

"But you can't keep it up, after working hard all day."

"It won't be for long. We'll break camp soon and move to the next section. You're a good sort, Carrie, but you really mustn't meddle."

Carrie blushed. "I won't meddle if you forbid it. All the same, I'd hate to see you worn out and ill. You're boss, and it would be awkward if you lost control."

"It's only for another night or two. The fellow I'm watching for will have to try again, or let up, before we move camp."

"But if you caught him, you and he would be alone."

"Yes," said Jim, whose face got hard, "that's what I want. If I'm on the right track, the thing must be fixed without the boys knowing."

Carrie hesitated and then made a sign of acquiescence. "I don't like it, Jim, but reckon you can't be moved. Anyhow, you'll be cautious."

Jim promised he would not be rash and went off, half amused, to get some water. Carrie was very staunch, but he did not want her to be disturbed about him. He was sorry she had heard him steal out of camp.

In the evening Jake came for a gun he kept in the tent. The game laws that limit the time for shooting are seldom enforced against bush ranchers and prospectors who kill deer and grouse for food.

"I'd better oil the barrels to keep off the damp," he said. "It's a pretty good gun."

Carrie watched him push across the top lever and open the breech.

"Is that where you put the cartridges?" she asked.

"You push the shells forward with your thumb, and then shut the gun—like this!"

"Then all you have to do is to pull the trigger?"

"Not with this type of gun. You see, the hammers have rebounded half way, but you must pull them farther back before it will go off."

"Suppose you miss and want to shoot again?"

"You push the lever sideways, the barrels swing down, and the empty shells jump out. That's all!"

"It looks easy," Carrie remarked. "I've sometimes wondered how one used a gun. There's nothing more to shooting than there is to making bread."

"Maybe not," Jake agreed with a grin. "I reckon a bad cook is as dangerous as a bad shot. If you miss with a gun, you have done no harm, but I've eaten bannocks that get you every time."

When he had finished he hung the gun to the tent pole and went off, but Carrie took it down, and carefully opened and shut the breech. After doing so once or twice, she was satisfied and put back the gun. Then she went to a little bark store where their food was kept, and picking up a bag of flour that had been opened, weighed it in her hand. It was lighter than it ought to be, and this had happened before. Next she examined a piece of salt pork and imagined that some had gone, while when she carefully looked about she noted a few tea leaves on the floor.

Carrie did not think she had spilt the tea, and knitted her brows. Somebody had been stealing food, but the man had not taken much and had tried to do so in a way that would prevent its being missed. For example, he had gone to the flour bag twice and had cut the pork from both sides of the slab. Carrie thought this significant, but resolved to say nothing.

CHAPTER VIII

JIM KEEPS WATCH

The night was not cold and Jim had some trouble to keep awake as he sat with his back against a tree a short distance above the mended line. He had dug out a track and built a new wall to hold up the stones, and in the morning the camp would be moved. Now he was very tired, but he meant to watch for another night.

There was a half moon and puzzling lights and shadows checkered the hill. In some places the trees rose like scattered spires; in others they rolled down the slope in blurred dark masses. Behind the woods snowy mountains cut against the sky. The dim landscape was desolate and savagely grand. It had the strange half-finished look one notes in Canada.

In order to banish his drowsiness, Jim gave himself up to wandering memories. He knew the North, where he had risked and endured much. He had seen the tangled pines snap under their load of snow and go down in rows before the Arctic gales; he had watched the ice break up and the liberated floods hurl the floes into the forest. He had crossed the barren tundra where only moss can live and the shallow bog that steams in summer rests on frozen soil.

Raging blizzards, snowslides, crevassed glaciers and rotten ice were things he knew; there were scars on his body he had got in stubborn fights. So far he had conquered; but he owned that he had had enough, and tried to picture the Old Country his father talked about. Its woods were not primitive jungles, wrecked by gales and scorched by fires; men planted and tended them and

the trees had room to grow. White farmsteads with gardens and orchards dotted the valleys; the narrow fields were rich with grass and corn. Then there were wonderful old houses, stored with treasures of art.

Well, he meant to see England some day and he began to think about the girl he had met at Montreal. She seemed to stand for all that was best in the Old Country; its refinement, its serenity, and ancient charm. One did not find girls like that in Canada; they were the product of long cultivation and sprang from a stock whose roots went deep into the past. Jim wondered with a strange longing whether he would see her again.

Perhaps it was the contrast that presently fixed his thoughts on Carrie. Carrie was a type that thrived in virgin soil; she was virile, frank, and unafraid. Her emotions were not hid by inherited reserve. One could imagine her fighting like a wildcat for the man she loved. Yet she had a fresh beauty and a vein of tenderness. Jim was fond of Carrie but not in love with her. He wondered whether he might have loved her had he not met the English girl, but pulled himself up. This kind of speculation led to nothing, and he began to look about.

The shadows of the pines had got shorter and blacker as the moon rose; the hill was checkered by their dark bars. He could not see far down the valley, because it was full of mist. The great hollow looked like a caldron in which the river boiled. Its hoarse roar echoed among the rocks and made a harmonious background for smaller and sharper notes. A faint breeze sighed in the pine-tops and now and then there was a tinkle of falling stones.

Jim saw some stones roll down and stop at the wall he had built. This ran in a gentle curve across the slope and shone like silver in the moonlight. In places, it was broken by shadows that seemed to tremble and melt. Jim knew he was getting sleepy and tried to rouse himself. It was something of an effort, because he had not slept much for a week, but by and by the strain slackened and he got suddenly alert.

An indistinct object moved where a shadow fell across the wall, and Jim knew it was a man. He was conscious of a grim satisfaction; he had watched for the fellow when brain and body needed rest, and now he had come. Moreover, his object was plain. The wall was underpinned, supported by timbers, and if a log that bore much weight were cut, the stones would fall and bring down the rest. One could not hear an ax at the camp, the falling wall would sweep away the chips, and the fellow, stealing back, would join the men the noise brought out. Jim thought he could get near him by using the rocks and trees to cover his advance, but the other could hide among them if he were alarmed, and it might be prudent to let him get to work. The stealthy figure avoided the moonlight.

The thud of the ax echoed across the woods, and Jim, taking care that he had a dark background, went cautiously down hill. He did not carry a pistol. On the whole, he thought one was safer without a gun, but he had brought a thick wooden bar with an iron point that they used for rolling logs. Getting behind a tree, he stopped near the wall. The regular strokes of the ax indicated that the other was not disturbed, and Jim, looking down from higher ground, could see the upper part of his body as he swung the tool. The sharp blows implied that he was chopping hard.

After measuring the distance, Jim sank down and crawled to the top of the wall. Since the other had an ax, surprise would be a useful, and perhaps necessary, advantage in the attack. Jim meant to attack; there was no use in talking before the fellow was in his power. As he crept forward a few stones rolled down the hill. He wondered what had disturbed them, but thought it imprudent to turn round, and lay quiet for a few moments, when the chopping stopped. He could not see the man now, because he was hidden by the top of the wall.

The chopping began again, and Jim, crawling a few feet, seized the stones on the edge and threw himself over just after the ax came down. He fell upon the man and tried to seize him, but although both were shaken by the collision, the other avoided his grasp and staggered back. Jim followed and, swinging his bar, struck with all his strength. The other caught the blow on the curved shaft of the ax, and Jim's hands were badly jarred. The vibration of the hard wood numbed his muscles, his fingers lost their grip. It looked as if he had been clumsy and rash, for the advantage was now with his antagonist, because the ax was longer than the bar. Moreover, the Canadian bushman is highly skilled in the use of the dangerous tool. For all that, Jim had begun the fight and meant to win. The fellow had taken a bribe to ruin him.

He lifted the bar, struck hard, and missed as his antagonist stepped back. Then the latter swung his ax and Jim bent from the waist as the shining blade swept past. They were now in the moonlight and he saw the other's face; it was the man who had gone fishing with Davies, and he gave way to a fury that banished caution. The fellow had a longer reach and looked cool; indeed, he seemed to be studying Jim with ironical humor. While the latter, breathing hard, watched for an opening, he lowered his ax.

"Suppose we quit fooling and talk about the thing?" he said.

"I'm not fooling," Jim rejoined.

"Anyhow, you'd better quit. I could get you with the ax, if I wanted, but I've not much use for

that. I'd sooner you stopped here while I light out."

"You'd starve before you made the settlement."

"I guess not. There's enough flour and pork in a cache to see me through."

"The trouble is, you can't make the cache," said Jim. "I've watched for you since the first wall broke and you earned the money Davies promised. Put down the ax and start for camp."

"Davies?" said the other. "Do you mean the guy who came along with the Indian packers?"

"Are you pretending you don't know the man?"

"It doesn't matter, anyhow," the other rejoined. "I'm not going back to camp, and there's something coming to you if you try to take me."

Jim meant to take him and wondered how far he could trust to bluff. If he could get near enough, he might knock out the fellow with the bar and yet not do him a serious injury. The ax was dangerous, but it was possible the other would hesitate about using it. In Canada, crimes of violence are generally punished, and even in the wilds offenders seldom long escape the Northwest Police. Yet there was a risk.

"You are coming with me," he said, and advanced with lifted bar.

The other cut at him and he narrowly missed the blow. He tried to run in before the fellow could recover from his swing, but was not quick enough. The ax went up and he met the blade with the bar. The keen steel beat down the wood and went through when it met the ground, and Jim was left with a foot or two of the handle. Stepping back, he hurled it at his antagonist and heard it strike with a heavy thud. The fellow staggered, but did not fall and, getting his balance, advanced on Jim. The blow had roused him to fury and he saw that caution was useless. They must fight until one was disabled.

Jim gave ground, breathing hard and watching for a chance to grapple while he kept out of reach. The sweat ran down his face, he was savage but cool. The worst was, he must move backwards and could not see the holes in the uneven slope. When he had gone a few yards he heard a shout and his antagonist looked round.

"Stop right there!" said somebody, and Jim saw Carrie standing above them on the wall. She was in the moonlight and balanced a gun. Her face was white but resolute.

"Put down your ax. I mean to shoot!" she said.

Jim thought quickly. The distance was short, but he had not seen Carrie use a gun. She might miss and have some trouble to re-load. Besides, he must save her the need for shooting, and the other's hesitation was his opportunity. Pulling himself together, he leaped upon the fellow, who stumbled and dropped his ax. Jim seized him round the waist and a savage grapple began. They swayed to and fro, kicking the ax that neither durst stoop to reach. The chopper's face was bleeding; Jim labored for breath, but he was moved by anger that gave him extra strength. The chopper felt his resolve in his tightening grip and knew it would go hard with him if he were beaten. It was plain that the boss meant to exact stern justice and he fought with instinctive fury for self-preservation.

The primitive passions of both were unloosed. They strained and grappled like savage animals, and for a time their strength and stubbornness seemed evenly balanced. Then luck gave Jim an advantage, for as the other trod upon the ax the long handle tilted up and got between his legs. He stumbled, and Jim, with a tense effort, lifted him from the ground. Then, gathering all his strength, he tried to throw him backwards, but lost his balance, and both plunged down the slope.

The pitch was steep and they rolled for some distance until they struck a rocky ledge. The chopper let go, slipped across the ledge, and vanished. Jim, jarred by the shock, lay still for some moments, and when he got up awkwardly saw nothing among the rocks and trees below. A rattle of gravel came out of the gloom, but it sounded some distance off. Then he heard a step and saw Carrie. She held the gun and was breathless. Her look was strained and her face white.

"Are you hurt, Jim?" she asked.

"No; not much, anyhow. Go back to the track. Give me the gun."

"Why do you want the gun?"

Jim made an impatient gesture. He had forgotten that Carrie had come to his help, and although he noted, mechanically, that she was highly strung and bearing some strain, he did not dwell on this. His antagonist had got away. He wanted to go after him, not to talk.

"The brute's not far off, and unless I'm quick he'll light out. Give me the gun!"

"I won't," said Carrie.

She stood a few yards above Jim, and jerked out the cartridges. Stooping swiftly, she picked them up and threw them among the trees. Then she laughed, a strained laugh, and held out the gun.

"You may have it now," she added. "You can't find the shells."

"Then I'll go without them," Jim rejoined, and plunged down the hill.

When he had gone a short distance he stopped. His leg hurt and he had a dull recollection of a blow. His leg was not cut; perhaps the chopper had hit him with the flat of the ax or he had struck it on the rock. Anyhow, he was lame and could hardly keep his balance on the rough slope. There was no use in going on like that, particularly as he heard a faint rattle of gravel some distance off. It was obvious that the chopper had got away and Jim awkwardly climbed back. Now he was getting cool, he began to see what Carrie had done and when he joined her he felt embarrassed.

"I'm sorry; I expect I was very rough," he remarked.

"Oh," she said, "that doesn't matter! I think I understand. Besides, you are hurt."

"Leg's stiff; that's all. I ought to have remembered. But, you see——"

Carrie smiled. "You mean you didn't think about me at all? You had concentrated on catching the fellow."

"Something like that," Jim admitted. "I ought to have thought, and after a few minutes I did think."

"When you found you couldn't walk?"

"Well," said Jim, awkwardly, "I now see how mean I was." He paused and resumed with sincere emotion: "If you hadn't come, the brute would have cut me down."

Carrie's rather ironical amusement vanished and she colored. "It doesn't matter, Jim. All that's important is, I did come. But you are lame and mustn't stand."

"I can stand as long as you can stand," said Jim, who pulled off his jacket and threw it on the ground. "You'll find this softer than the stones." He sat down opposite her and resumed: "Now, how did you happen——?"

"I found some flour and pork had gone. Since one can't get food between here and the settlement, it looked as if somebody meant to pull out before we broke camp."

Jim nodded. "The fellow said he'd made a cache. You're very smart. But why didn't you tell Jake?"

"I suppose I ought to have told him," Carrie replied.

He mused for a few moments and then broke out: "We have taken you for granted. When a thing needs doing you don't talk, but get to work. Perhaps this has drawbacks; it doesn't always strike one how fine you really are."

Carrie said nothing, and he went on. "Now I come to think of it, I've been strangely dull. You have cooked for us, and cared for us in ways we didn't know. I'd sometimes a notion my clothes were wearing longer than they ought—there was a jacket I meant to mend and when I got it out one evening I couldn't find the hole." He paused and spread out his hands. "Well, that's the kind of fool I am and the kind of girl you are!"

"The hole had bothered me for a long time. It was getting bigger and one doesn't like untidiness."

"I've been very dull, but so has Jake," Jim declared. "I saw a neat patch on his overalls and thought he'd made a better job than he generally does when he starts sewing. I imagine he doesn't know how that patch got there."

"I don't think he knows there is a patch," Carrie rejoined.

"It's possible," Jim agreed, and studied her, for the moon was bright. Her plain dress was very neat and seemed to have stood rough wear well. Besides, it was remarkably becoming; Carrie was tall and graceful. In fact, she was prettier than he had thought.

"The way you keep your clothes is rather wonderful," he went on. "One never sees you untidy; all you wear looks just as it ought to look. One feels it wouldn't look half as well if it was worn by anybody else. Yet you're generally occupied and your work's not clean. I can't touch a cooking pot without getting black, and Jake gets blacker."

Carrie laughed to hide a touch of embarrassment. Jim was not trying to flatter; she saw he was naïvely following a new line of thought.

"Well, we must get back to camp," she said. "Can you walk?"

Jim got up quickly and gave her a suspicious glance. "I can walk to camp. I ought to have gone right off and sent the boys after that chopper. Looks as if you meant to keep me."

"I did mean to keep you. Let him go, Jim. He won't come back, and we have had trouble enough."

"He has not had much trouble," Jim rejoined. "However, I doubt if we could catch him, and I want the boys to move our truck at daybreak. Then, in a way, I'd sooner they didn't know. Of course, I've got to tell Jake."

"You mustn't tell him I came," Carrie said, firmly.

"Why not?" Jim asked with some surprise.

Carrie hesitated. "Oh, well, I don't want him to know. For one thing, he might think I was rash——"

"You were splendidly plucky," Jim declared. "Of course, I won't tell Jake, if you'd sooner not. For all that, I don't understand——"

"It isn't worth puzzling about," Carrie answered with a smile, and they set off.

CHAPTER IX

AN HONEST ANTAGONIST

It was very hot on the rocky hill, and Jim stopped in the shade of a stunted pine, for he had gone far through the bush. His Hudson's Bay blanket and a bag of food, made up in a pack with straps for his shoulders, and a small ax, were a rather heavy load. When he had lighted his pipe he looked about. Tangled forest rolled up the hills wherever the stiff, dark pines could find soil in which to grow. Some were charred by fire and the tall rampikes shone silver-gray in the strong light; some were partly uprooted by storms and leaned drunkenly against each other.

At the head of the valley there was a faint blue haze, and Jim, knowing this was the smoke of a camp fire, began to muse. Now he would soon meet the man he was looking for, he doubted if he had been wise to come, and wondered what he would say. He had set off when an Indian reached the telegraph line and stated that a white man with a number of packers was camped in the valley. Jim imagined the man was Martin, Davies' employer, and meant to see him. He did not know if Davies was with Martin or not.

By and by he set off, avoiding fallen trees and scrambling across round-topped rocks. It was rough work and he was tired, but he could get forward without using the ax, which he had been forced to do when he fell among the horrible devil's club thorns. For all that, dusk was falling when he came to an opening by a creek where a big fire burned and a double-skinned tent stood at the edge of the trees. Six or seven sturdy packers lounged beside the fire, and Jim saw this was not a poor man's camp. For a few hot weeks, a traveler need suffer no hardship in the North, if he can pay for packers and canoes. A double-roofed tent will keep out sun and rain and a mosquito bar will keep off the flies, but packers who carry comforts cannot carry tools, and a utilitarian journey is another thing.

Jim was not traveling for pleasure and had gone alone. He was mosquito-bitten and ragged, and his boots were broken. The packers looked up with languid curiosity as he advanced, and when he asked for the boss one indicated the tent. Jim stopped in front of the tent and a man came out. He wore clean summer flannel clothes and looked strangely neat, but he was sunburnt and strongly made. Something about him indicated that he knew the bush and had not always traveled luxuriously.

"Are you prospecting?" he asked. "If you have struck us for supper, you can see the cook."

"I came to see you, and got supper three or four miles back. I'm Dearham, of Winter & Dearham. You have probably heard about us."

"Sure," said Martin, rather dryly. "You hold the contract for the new telegraph line. Somebody told me there was a dame in the firm."

"My partner's sister; I expect Davies told you, but don't see what this has to do with the thing."

"Sit down," said Martin, indicating a camp-chair, and then beckoned one of the men. "Bring

some green bark and fix that smudge."

The man put fresh fuel on a smoldering fire and pungent blue smoke drifted about the tent.

"Better than mosquitoes; they're pretty fierce, evenings," Martin remarked. "Will you take a cigar?"

"No, thanks," said Jim. "I'll light my pipe."

He cut the tobacco slowly, because he did not know where to open his attack. Martin was not altogether the man he had thought and looked amused. He was a bushman; Jim knew the type, which was not, as a rule, marked by the use of small trickery. Yet Martin could handle money as well as he handled tools.

"Won't you state your business?" the contractor asked.

"I expect you and the Cartner people didn't like it when we got the telegraph job?"

"That is so. We thought the job was ours," Martin admitted.

"And you got to work to take it from us?"

"How do you mean?"

"To begin with, Probyn, Cartner's man, offered us a thousand dollars to quit."

"A pretty good price," said Martin. "Since you didn't go, I don't see why you are bothering me."

"It looks as if you and Cartner had pooled your interests. When we got to work, your man, Davies, came along and tried to hold us up. It was not his fault he didn't; the fellow's a crook."

"I haven't studied his character. In some ways, he's useful," Martin rejoined coolly. "Well, you reckon I sent him! How did he try to embarrass you?"

"Don't you know?"

"It's for you to state your grievance."

Martin's face was inscrutable; one could not tell if he knew or not. It was curious, but Jim could not take it for granted that he did know and he told him about the broken wall.

"You imagine Davies paid the fellow to cut your underpinning?" the contractor remarked.

"The thing's obvious."

"Then I don't understand why you came to me. There's not much advantage in telling your antagonist he has hit you pretty hard."

"I wanted you to understand that you hadn't hit us hard enough. Your blow was not a knockout, and we mean to guard against the next. We have taken the contract and are going to put it over; I want you to get that. You can't scare us off, and while I don't know if you can smash us or not, it will certainly cost you high. Hadn't you better calculate if the thing's worth while?"

"You were far North for some time," Martin said carelessly.

"I was," Jim admitted with surprise, for he could not see where the remark led. "So were you."

Martin nodded. "A blamed hard country! Looks as if we were both pretty tough, since we made good yonder, and I think I get your proposition. Your idea is, we had better make terms than fight?"

"Something like that," Jim agreed.

"Very well," said Martin, who paused and smiled. "Now I'll tell you something. I don't like your butting in, but I did not put Davies on your track."

Jim looked hard at him, and although he was surprised did not doubt his statement. "Then, I imagine he made the plan himself; wanted to show you he was smart, but said nothing when it didn't work as smoothly as he thought."

Martin was silent for a few moments and Jim imagined he was thinking hard. Then he said, "It's possible; that's all."

"Perhaps the Cartner people sent him without telling you," Jim suggested.

"Cartner made you a square offer, and you can't grumble much because Probyn hired your men. Cartner is hard and I allow he'd like to break you, but I haven't known him play a crooked

game."

"Then I can't see a light at all."

"It's puzzling," Martin agreed.

Jim filled his pipe again and pondered. There was something strange about his talking confidentially to a man he had thought an unscrupulous antagonist, but he was persuaded that Martin was honest. The latter seemed to be considering, for Jim saw his brows were knit when the firelight touched his face. It had got dark, but the fire leaped up now and then and threw a red glow upon the rows of trunks. The creek shone and faded; sometimes the smoke curled about the tent and sometimes blew away.

"You struck copper up North," Martin resumed after a time. "Has anybody tried to buy your claim?"

"Baumstein gave us an offer twice."

"Ah," said Martin, thoughtfully, "I suppose you wouldn't sell?"

"Not at his price. We thought we had better hold on; some day the Combine might buy."

"A pretty good plan," Martin agreed. "There'll be a demand for Northern copper before long. Well, I see you have a blanket. You'll find a bed in the tent."

"I picked a spot to camp a piece back," Jim said rather awkwardly, as he got up.

Martin laughed. "Since you reckoned Cartner and I were on your track, you felt you'd sooner not stop with me? Well, I don't think that ought to count. If we could have bought you off or scared you off, we might have done so, but since you are resolved to put the contract through, we'll be satisfied with seeing you don't get another. If you stop, you'll get a better breakfast than you can cook."

Jim's hesitation vanished and he went into the tent.

Next morning he got breakfast with Martin, and when he was going the latter remarked: "I guess you understand you needn't bother about our getting after you. Go ahead and finish the job."

"Thanks," said Jim, smiling. "Unless we go broke, we mean to finish."

"Very well," said Martin, "if you have to choose between quitting and selling your copper claim, you had better let the telegraph contract go." He paused and gave Jim a level glance. "Looks like interested advice, but I guess it's sound."

Jim strapped on his pack and started down the valley. He reached the telegraph camp three or four days afterwards, and in the evening told Jake and Carrie about his interview.

"Perhaps it's strange, but I really don't think we're up against Cartner and Martin," he concluded.

"We're up against somebody who hasn't many scruples," said Jake.

"That is so," Jim agreed. "I suggested that Davies might be playing a lone hand. Martin admitted that it was possible, but didn't look satisfied. In fact, I imagined he was thinking hard. Of course, the obvious line was to doubt his honesty, but somehow I didn't."

"The obvious line's not always best," Carrie interposed. "My notion is, it's a foolish habit to take it for granted your antagonist is a cheat. But what is he like, Jim?"

"Big and rather quiet, although he had a twinkle. Weighs all he says, and you feel that if he's satisfied he doesn't mind if you are or not. We know he was up North for some time; he looks like it, if you get me."

Jake nodded, for the men who push far into the frozen wilds conform to a type. Struggles with cold and hunger leave their mark, endurance breeds stubbornness, and fronting perils gives a quiet courage that makes for candor. The man who has conquered fear is not tempted to be mean.

"There are bad men, in some of the big camps, but no smooth rogues," he said.

"Martin is certainly not a smooth rogue," Jim declared. "I thought it curious he told me to hold on to the copper and let the contract go, if we couldn't stick to both. He admitted it looked as if he was playing for his side when he gave me the advice."

"Well," said Jake, thoughtfully, "if he meant to gain his object that way, it was a fool plan, but we know Martin's clever. To jump at a shallow suspicion is a blamed lazy habit that often puts you wrong. If he didn't mean well, I can't see what he did mean."

"I can't see," Jim agreed.

"Better let it go," Carrie interposed. "I like that man. If you have drawn him right, I think he could be trusted. However, you look as if you had been among the devil's club. What are you going to do with your clothes?"

"If you insist, I meant to hide them," Jim owned with a laugh.

"So I thought," said Carrie. "Bring them to the tent instead. If you don't, I'll come for them in the morning."

Jim promised to bring the clothes and lighted his pipe, feeling somewhat moved. He knew now how much he and Jake owed Carrie, and the thought she gave their comfort. If things went smoothly, it was because Carrie made them go; but this was not all. She was not satisfied with controlling the camp; Jim was beginning to see that now and then she controlled their talk and helped their decisions. She was a girl and had, for the most part, lived at a shabby store, but he admitted that her judgment was often sound. Carrie had qualities. Then he started, for she looked at him with a smile.

"What are you thinking about, Jim?" she asked.

"I was wondering how we would have got on if we hadn't brought you," he replied.

Carrie laughed. "I know. Yet you wanted to leave me!"

"If I did, I was a fool."

"No," said Carrie, thoughtfully, "you are not a fool, but sometimes you're rather dull. Now you're half asleep and had better go to bed."

Jim knocked out his pipe and went.

A few days afterwards he started for the settlement with two of his men. They were good workmen and Jake was unwilling to let them go, but they had been with Jim in the North and he needed helpers whom he could trust, for he was going to make a bold experiment. He needed food, powder, and tools, and it was hard to keep the camp supplied. Pack-horses could not carry much over the mountain-trail and the freighters' charges were high. Jim imagined he could bring up the goods cheaper by canoe, although the plan had drawbacks.

He reached the settlement, and after waiting a few days sat one evening on the hotel veranda. Burned matches and cigar-ends lay about the dirty boards; the windows of the mean ship-lap house were guarded by fine wire net. The door had been removed, and a frame, filled in with gauze and held by a spring, slammed noisily when one went in or out. For all that, the hotel was full of dust and flies, and mosquitoes hummed about the hot rooms at night. The snow had melted below the timber line and a long trail of smoke floated across the somber forest. A fire was working through the trees and a smell of burning came down the valley.

Three or four men in ragged overalls lounged about the veranda, and the landlord leaned against a post. He wore a white shirt with gold studs, and his clothes were good.

"Now you have got your truck, I reckon you'll pull out," he remarked.

"We start up river at daybreak."

"Then you're surely foolish. If you can't make it, there's trouble coming to you next time."

Jim understood the hint. The pack-horse freighters had enjoyed a monopoly of transport to the mining camps. The river was off the regular line, and its navigation was difficult except when the water reached a certain level, but if Jim's experiment proved that supplies could be taken by canoes transport charges would come down.

"There are some awkward portages, but I think I can get through," he said.

"I wasn't figuring on the portages," the landlord rejoined, meaningly. "Somas Charlie's a tough proposition to run up against." He indicated a man coming along the road. "Somas has his tillicums, and around this settlement what he says goes."

In the Chinook jargon, *tillicum* means something like a familiar spirit, and Jim thought he saw what the other implied. He had had trouble to get articles he needed and had met with annoying delays; and he studied the advancing freighter with some curiosity. Somas was big and powerful and walked with the pack-horse driver's loose stride. He had a dark face, cunning black eyes, and very black hair. It looked as if Indian blood ran in his veins. He came up the veranda steps and gave Jim an ironical glance.

"Got your canoes loaded up?" he asked.

"Not yet; the truck is ready," said Jim, who had thought it prudent to put his goods in a store.

"It's a sure thing you're not going to take your canoes through. Say, I don't want to see you lose the grub and tools. Drop the fool plan and I'll take off a cent a pound."

"If you had offered that before, we might have made a deal. You're too late."

"Thought you were bluffing; I guess you're crazy now. You can't make it, anyway."

"I'm going to try."

The freighter shrugged. "Trying's going to cost you something; you'll feel pretty mean when you meet the bill. Fools like you make me tired." He beckoned the landlord. "Get on a move; I want a drink."

He went into the hotel and when the door slammed Jim was thoughtful.

CHAPTER X

THE RAPID

In the morning Jim started with three canoes and a few Indians whom he had engaged at the settlement, because the Siwash are clever river men. Sometimes they tracked the canoes, floundering along the rough bank with a line round their shoulders; sometimes they poled against the rapid stream; and now and then carried the craft and cargo across a rocky portage. The canoes were of the Siwash type, cut out of cedar logs and burned smooth outside. The high bow was rudely carved like a bird's head; the floor was long and flat. They paddled well and a strong man could carry one, upside down, on his bent shoulders. Jim had loaded them heavily, and the tools and provisions had cost a large sum.

His progress was slow and he was tired and disturbed when one evening he pitched camp after toiling across a long portage. Speed was important and he had been longer than he thought, while he did not know if he could force his way up the dark gorge ahead. Besides, an Indian had shown him the print of somebody's foot on a patch of wet soil. There was only one mark and in a sense this was ominous, since it looked as if the fellow had tried to keep upon the stones. Moreover, he wore a heavy boot, and Jim could not see why a white man had entered the lonely gorge where there were no minerals or timber worth exploiting.

After supper he got ready to start again at daybreak. This was his usual plan, because one's brain is dull when one rises from a hard, cold bed at dawn, and in the wilds to leave tools or food behind has sometimes disastrous consequences. He saw he had forgotten nothing, and when dusk was falling rested for a time on the bank, although he thought it prudent to sleep on board. Up stream, the water threw back faint reflections, but its surface was dull and wrinkled where it narrowed at the top of the rapid, round which he had carried the canoes. Then it plunged down into gloom that was deepened by a cloud of spray and its hoarse turmoil echoed among the hills. A few charred rampikes rose behind the camp, and Jim sat beneath one, with his back against a stone. He had thrown off his jacket and his thin overalls were wet. His back and arms ached and his feet were bruised.

He pondered about the footstep. The pack-horse trail running North was not far off, and while he slowly poled up stream the freighter could have reached the river in front of him. When they talked at the hotel, the fellow's manner was threatening, but Jim hardly thought he would meddle. His party was strong, and if the other had meant to do him some injury, it was hardly probable he would have uttered his dark hints while the landlord was about. After all, the hints might forecast the difficulty Jim would have to engage transport another time. Still, somebody had passed the spot not long since.

The gloom deepened, and although some light would linger in the sky all night, it was nearly dark at the bottom of the gorge. The packers lay about the fire, and by and by Jim, calling one of the Siwash, hauled the first canoe to the bank. When they got on board, he let the craft swing out with the eddy, and the row, curving as the current changed, rode behind a half-covered rock a short distance from the stones. Blurred rocks and trees loomed in the mist up stream; below, the foaming rapid glimmered through the spray. The river, swollen by melting snow and stained green by glacier clay, was running fast.

There was not much room in the canoe, for bags of flour occupied the bottom and a grindstone and small forge were awkward things to stow. Jim, however, found a spot where he could lie down and the Indian huddled in the stern. He was a dark-skinned man, dressed like the white settlers, except that he wore no boots. As a rule, he did not talk much, but by and by he put his hand in the water as if to measure the speed of the current.

"*Contox hiyu chuck*," he said in Chinook.

Jim imagined he meant the river was rising and did not know if this was a drawback or not. A flood might make poling harder, but it would cover the rocks in the channel and probably leave an eddying slack along the bank. He agreed with the Indian, because the rock to which they had moored the canoe was getting smaller. It made a kind of breakwater, but it would be covered soon and the craft would feel the force of the current. Still they ought to ride safely, and an angry wash now beat against the bank of gravel where they had landed. There was no other landing, for, below the camp, the river ran in white waves between the rocks.

Although Jim was tired, he could not sleep. For one thing, he had lost time at the settlement and on the river; Jake was waiting for the tools, and since wages were high, delay was costly. Then the gorge echoed with pulsating noise. The roar of the rapid rose and fell; he heard the wash of the eddy against the bank, the sharp ripple where the current split upon the rock, and the rattle of gravel striking the stones. The canoes rocked, swung to and fro, and brought up with sudden jerks. He did not know if the Indian slept, but if he did, a new note in the confused uproar would waken him.

After a time, the fellow moved, and as his dark figure rose Jim became alert. The Indian was looking fixedly ahead, but Jim could see nothing in the gloom. He noted mechanically that the rock had vanished; its location was marked by a wedge-shaped streak of foam. He signed to the Indian, who grunted but did not speak.

Then there was a crash as something struck the rock and a vague dark mass rebounded from and swung round the obstacle. It rolled, and half-seen projections vanished and appeared again. Jim got on his knees and seized a pole, because he imagined a big log with broken branches was driving down on them. A river canoe is unstable, and to stand on the cargo might capsize her. He found bottom with the pole and saw the Indian paddling hard. The row of canoes swung towards the bank, but the backwash caught them and it looked as if they would not swing far enough. Jim felt the veins on his forehead tighten and the pole bend as he strained with labored breath.

The log came on; its butt under water, its ragged top riding high and swinging round. There was a heavy shock, the canoe lurched, and a broken branch began to drag her down. Jim could not push off the grinding mass and, letting go the pole, seized an ax. He cut the mooring line to ease the strain, but when the rope parted and the log swung clear he was faced by another risk; unless they could reach the gravel bank, they would go down the rapid. He could not find bottom now, and while he tried the log struck the next canoe. His canoe swerved outshore, the row was drifting fast, and he shouted as he felt for the ax.

It was, however, obvious that the men in camp could not help much and he nerved himself to make a hard choice. If he held on, all the canoes would go down the rapid; if he let two go, one might be saved. He cut the line made fast astern, the log and canoes vanished, and he and the Indian strained their muscles. They had lost ground they could not recover; the gravel bank was sliding past, and angry waves leaped about the rocks below. Somehow they must make the bank before they were carried down. There was some water in the canoe; Jim heard it splash about. She was horribly heavy and his pole would not grip the bottom. When it slipped the current washed its end under the craft.

He threw the pole on board and found a paddle. The canoe rocked on a white eddy, but he got her head round and the revolution carried her towards the shore. They must drive her in before the backwash flung her off, and for some moments he labored with weakening arms and heaving chest. Then a packer plunged in, the bow struck ground, and Jim jumped over. He was up to his waist in the white turmoil, but another packer seized the canoe and the Indian thrust hard on his bending pole. The bow went farther into the gravel and with a savage effort they ran her out. Jim leaned against a rock, trying to get his breath, and when he looked about the other canoes had vanished. His tools and stores had gone for good.

Now there was no need for watchfulness, he could sleep, and he lay down by the fire. When he wakened day was breaking, and beckoning the Indian he set off up the gorge. He had an object for his dangerous climb across the slippery rocks, and he noted that the stream flowed evenly along the bank. This implied that if a log were rolled into the water on his side of the straight reach, it would probably strike the rock behind which the canoes had been tied.

After a time, when the roughness of the ground forced them high above the water, the Indian indicated a clump of willows through which somebody had pushed. He declared two white men had gone through and one had carried an ax. Jim had been looking for a white man's tracks and his face got stern as they climbed a neighboring gully. At the top he sat down and sent the Indian to look about. If the other men had gone down again to the water, they must have had some grounds for doing so, and Jim thought he knew what the grounds were.

The Indian found steps in a boggy patch, and Jim, descending a ravine farther on, came back to the river bank. Here and there a tree had fallen into the ravine and two or three battered trunks lay on the gravel at the bottom. A hollow in some disturbed gravel at the water's edge indicated that another log had rested there, and Jim let the Indian examine the ground. By and by the latter began to talk.

He said the marks had been made by a trunk with branches broken short; one could see where it had rolled into the stream. The ravine was steep, but the other logs had not slipped

down; the missing trunk had been helped on its way. In one place, the top had been lifted; in another, a pole had been pushed under the butt. Some of the gravel was scratched, as if it had been trodden by nailed boots. A man using a lever would push it back like that.

Jim nodded, because he knew something about woodcraft and thought the Indian had read the marks correctly. Now and then the fellow said "*Contox*," and Jim understood the Chinook word, which, roughly, means to know, rather implied supposition than certainty. For all that, if the Indian doubted, he did not. He knew the log had been launched where the current would carry it down on the canoes, and when he went back to camp his mouth was set hard.

After breakfast he broke up the party and, sending the Indians off, started again with the two white men. The canoe would not carry all, but this did not matter, since, for the most part, she must be tracked from the bank, and when they poled her one man could travel through the bush and overtake them at the next rapid. It was a strenuous journey and Jim was worn out when he climbed the hill to the telegraph camp. It was about six o'clock in the evening and the men had not returned from work, but Carrie was cooking and got up with a cry of welcome when he came out of the woods. She stopped, however, when she saw his gloomy face.

"What's the matter, Jim?" she asked. "Are you hurt or ill?"

He dropped the heavy bag of flour he carried and forced a smile. "Does it look as if I were ill? I've lost two canoes and their loads."

"Oh, Jim!" said Carrie, and added: "After all, it isn't so very important."

"Not important?" Jim exclaimed.

Carrie hesitated. "Oh, well; never mind. Where are the boys? You haven't lost *them*?"

"They're coming," said Jim, who sat down on a log, feeling embarrassed.

He was dull. Carrie had been disturbed about him because he had been away longer than he thought, and her obvious relief when she saw he was not injured was soothing. He needed soothing, since the loss of the canoes and stores weighed heavily, but Carrie had made him feel this did not matter much so long as he was safe. Although he could not agree, it was a comfort to know her satisfaction was sincere. Carrie always was sincere.

She was quiet and he resumed in an apologetic voice: "I felt mean about coming back like this; losing the truck is going to make things harder for you. Then I bought some new cookers; the steam went through a row of pans and I thought they'd save you work. There was a piece of stuff at the dry goods store the girl told me would make a dress; but it went down the rapid with the cookers."

Carrie gave him a gentle glance. "You bought them: the rest was an accident."

"It was not an accident, but we'll talk about that again. I'm glad to get back; I'm always glad to get back now, though I didn't bother about it much when we camped in the bush before."

Carrie took off the lid of a cooking-pot and while she was occupied the packers arrived with their loads. Soon afterwards Jake and the other men came up and they got supper. When the meal was over Jim told his story and Jake looked thoughtful.

"The obvious explanation is, the freighter tried to stop you by turning loose the log," he said. "I don't know if we ought to count on this; but we'll take it first."

"I'm doubtful," Jim replied. "Somehow I feel the fellow was bluffing; he wanted to scare me so I'd agree to his terms. Although I reckon he meant to charge me high when I came to him next time, I don't think he sent the log down. I haven't much ground for the conclusion, but there it is."

"In some ways, you're not a fool," Jake remarked with a twinkle. "I've known judgments you hadn't much ground for turn out sound. Very well; we come to the big contractors. Did they hire somebody to stop you?"

"It looks like that, but I imagine Martin's playing straight and he declared the Cartner people wouldn't use a crooked plan."

"Then who did try to stop you?"

Jim shrugged and his face got hard. "I don't know yet. We must wait."

"Very well," said Jake. "We'll trust our luck and hold on while we can, although I expect it won't be very long."

Jim did not answer. He was tired and now the reaction from the strain had begun, was glad to indulge his bodily and mental lassitude. The springy branches on which he lay were comfortable and the camp, with the red firelight flickering on the trunks and Carrie sitting by the hearth-logs, had a curious charm. She, so to speak, dominated the tranquil picture and gave her rude

surroundings a homelike touch. On other expeditions, when Carrie was not there, Jim had thought about his camp as a place at which one slept. Now it was something else; a place from which one drew strength and cheerfulness. There was something strangely intimate about it; he was glad to get back.

CHAPTER XI

A CONFIDENTIAL TALK

Shortly after Jim's return, a prospector stopped one evening at the camp.

"There was some mail for you at the settlement, and as I figured on using your line to get into the bush I brought the packet along," he said.

Carrie gave him supper and when he joined the other men Jim opened the packet. In the evening they had leisure for rest and talk, and after the strain and bustle of the day, Jim enjoyed the quiet hour. The air got sharp when the sun sank, the fire they gathered round drove back the creeping shadows, and the pungent smoke kept the mosquitoes off. Sometimes he bantered Carrie and sometimes lounged in contented quietness, watching her while she sewed. Carrie was generally occupied.

"How is your mother getting on?" he asked when she put down the letter he had given her.

Carrie smiled. "She is getting on very well. My cousin keeps store satisfactorily, and I don't know if I'm pleased or not. It's nice to feel you're wanted and people miss you when you're gone."

"If there's much comfort in the thought, you are certainly wanted here."

"The trouble is, one's friends often say what they think one would like to know," Carrie rejoined. "I'm not sure I'd have minded much if mother had owned that Belle breaks things and sometimes forgets how many cents go to the dollar when she makes up a bill. S'pose I'm mean, but Belle does break things."

"You are never mean and I was quite sincere."

"Perhaps you found new buttons on your overalls and that accounted for something."

Jim half consciously moved his hand to his jacket and then stopped. "I'm afraid I didn't know the buttons were there. After all, it ought to persuade you of my sincerity."

"Sometimes I'm not certain if you are nice or not. But is there anything important in your letters?"

"One or two people want to know when we mean to pay our bills; I'm sorry we can't satisfy their curiosity just yet. Then there's a letter from Baumstein. He'll give us an extra five hundred dollars for the Bluebird."

"Ah!" said Carrie. "It's strange he makes the offer when we need money so!"

"It is strange," Jake broke in. "Almost looks as if the fellow knew how we were fixed. But we're not sellers, and, for a clever crook, Baumstein is too keen."

"He states he has reached his limit and we won't get another chance," Jim remarked.

Jake pondered and then resumed: "The thing's puzzling. I can't see why Baumstein's fixed on buying a claim that nobody else wants, but you can reckon it a sure snap for him when he makes a deal. There's the puzzle! The ore is pretty good, but that's all. We were kind of disappointed by the assay. The specimens looked better than the analysis proved."

"I was certainly disappointed and surprised," Jim agreed. "Suppose we ask the prospector about it? He has tested a good many mineral claims."

They waited until the prospector returned to the camp, when Jake gave him some bits of broken rock.

"Feel those and tell me what you think about the metal they carry," he said.

The other examined the specimens and weighed them in his hand.

"If you've got much rock like that, it's a pretty good claim."

"Do you reckon the stuff would come up to assay?" Jake asked, giving him the analyst's

report.

The prospector looked at him rather hard. "Come up to assay? If the bulk's like these specimens, it ought to pan out better than the figures show."

He stated his grounds for believing this, and Jake knitted his brows. "I expect you know the big mining men and what they're doing. Have you heard if Baumstein is looking for Northern copper?"

"He bought a claim called the Darien not long since."

Jim smiled. "The Darien? The next block to ours, but the vein begins to peter out before it crosses their boundary."

"When Baumstein gets the next block, you want to sell him your lot or watch out," the prospector rejoined. "If he can't buy you up, he'll make trouble for you. I reckon he knew what kind of ore the Darien boys had got."

"Yes," said Jim, "I imagined something like that."

He said no more about the mine, and next morning the prospector resumed his journey. After this, for a week or two, nothing broke the monotony of their strenuous toil, until one day Martin and his packers arrived.

"I'm going down to the settlements and thought I'd strike your camp and stop a night," he said. "The woods get lonesome, and your line's a pretty good route to the pack trail."

Jim was somewhat surprised, but he took Martin to Jake and went to tell Carrie.

"I wanted to see that man and you had better leave him to me," she said. "To begin with, I'll give him the best supper I know how to cook. Get busy and fix the fire while I see what we've got that's extra nice."

"If you get after him, he's bound to give in," Jim remarked. "However, I want you to study the fellow and tell me what you think."

"Then you would trust my judgment?"

"Of course. In many ways, it's as good as ours."

Carrie laughed. "Sometimes," she said, "you're very modest, Jim."

Martin ate a remarkably good supper and afterwards talked to Carrie with obvious satisfaction. Like the most part of the men who venture much in the wilds, he was marked by a grave quietness, but he had for all that a touch of humor. By and by he turned to Jim and asked: "How are you getting on? Have you struck fresh trouble since I saw you?"

Jim related his adventure at the rapid and Martin gave him a keen glance. "I reckon you had an object for telling me, but I don't quite get it. You think I hired the man who sent down the log, or you know I didn't."

"He knows you didn't," Carrie declared.

"Thank you," said Martin. "I imagine what you say goes at this camp."

"Some way. I belong to the firm."

"It goes all the way," said Jim. "I often think Miss Winter is really the head of the firm."

Martin's eyes twinkled. "Well, you're both making good; I've been looking at the line you've cleared, and I've not often struck a supper like this in the bush. Makes me feel I want to fire my cook." Then his tone got grave. "Anyhow, I had nothing to do with wrecking your canoes and don't think the freighter had. You see, I sometimes hire Somas; he'll put the screw to you if he reckons you can be bluffed, but he's not a crook."

"Then we can rule him out," said Carrie. "I imagine you don't make mistakes."

"Making mistakes about trusting folks sometimes costs you high," Martin remarked. He looked at her thoughtfully and then smiled. "One could trust you all the time."

"Well," said Carrie, "I suppose I gave you a lead, but there's no use in our trying who could be nicest, because I'd certainly beat you. I expect you don't often try and it's a girl's business."

In the meantime, Jim had studied both. He thought he knew Carrie's worth, but somehow the other's approval made it plainer. Although Martin's humorous frankness jarred, Jim recognized its note of sincerity. On the whole, he liked Martin, but he would sooner Carrie did not play up to the fellow. By and by Martin turned to him.

"When I was last at Vancouver a man called Mordaunt asked some questions about you."

"Mordaunt?" said Jim, with a puzzled look.

"He stopped at your telegraph shack."

"Oh, yes; I only met him once before and didn't learn his name. What did he want to know?"

"All I could tell him about you. He was something of a high-brow Englishman and used tact, but I reckoned he was keen on finding out what kind of man you were."

"You couldn't tell him much."

"That is so," said Martin, rather dryly. "In fact, I didn't try."

"Oh, well, it's not important," Jim replied. "Perhaps my books roused his curiosity. They were not the books he'd imagine a telegraph linesman would read. But did he tell you much about himself?"

"He did not. An Englishman like that doesn't talk about himself."

Jim agreed carelessly, but was thoughtful afterwards, and when Martin went off with Jake, stopped by the fire and mused. After a time he looked up and saw Carrie sitting in the shadow. Now and then the flickering light touched her face and he thought she studied him.

"I suppose you're thinking about that Englishman?" she said.

"Yes. It's rather strange he asked Martin about me."

"Perhaps he knows your relations."

"It looks like that," Jim agreed.

"And he was with the girl you met at the restaurant! I expect she was a relation of his. Aren't you curious?"

Jim imagined Carrie was curious, but one could be frank with her, and he wanted to formulate his thoughts.

"In a way, I am curious," he admitted. "I would like to see the girl again. Still, I think it's really as a type she interests me."

Carrie smiled. "It isn't as a type a girl gets interesting, Jim."

"It would be ridiculous to think about her in any other way. I've had nothing to do with girls like that; she's the first I've met."

"Oh, well," said Carrie. "Don't you want to learn something about your English relations?"

"No," said Jim, in a thoughtful voice. "In a sense, I'm half afraid."

"Afraid?" said Carrie.

He was silent for a few moments and then resumed: "On the whole, I've been happy. I feel I've got my proper job and am satisfied. For all that, when those Englishmen talked to me at the shack I had a strange notion that I knew things they knew and belonged to a world I hadn't lived in yet. Sometimes at McGill I got a kind of restlessness that made me want to see the Old Country. I fought against it."

"Why did you fight?"

"For one thing, it's obvious I belong where I am; I can make good in this country, I know my job. Something pulls another way, but I don't want to go."

"Ah," said Carrie, "I think I understand. Still, there's the adventure, Jim. And if you didn't like it in England, you could come back."

"There's a risk. I expect it's hard to get back when you leave your proper place. Then I have much I value; you and Jake and the boys who work for me. I stand on firm ground here; ground I know and like. In the Old Country it might be different——"

"Do you mean you might be different?"

"You are clever, Carrie. I think I do mean something like that. I feel now and then as if there was another Jim Dearham who, so to speak, hadn't developed yet. In a way, I'm afraid of him."

Carrie looked thoughtful, but her eyes were soft. "Jake and I are satisfied with the Jim we know. Still, perhaps, you ought to give the other his chance." She paused, and her voice had a curious note when she resumed: "If I were a man, I'd let nothing stop my development."

"You have grit," Jim said, smiling. "Grit that would carry you anywhere and makes you

something of an aristocrat. So long as you're not afraid you must be fine. Well, I suppose I made good when I was up against rotten ice and sliding snow, but when I think about what I have and what I'd risk, my pluck goes."

"Sometimes you're rather nice, Jim, and you're a better philosopher than I thought," Carrie remarked. She got up and, stopping a moment, gave him a half-mocking glance. "But I wonder what you'd get like if you went to the Old Country and met that English girl!"

She went off and Jim sat by the fire with his brows knit. Perhaps he had talked too much and bored Carrie, but he suspected that she had led him on. By and by he roused himself and went to chop some wood. Martin did not start in the morning, as his hosts had expected. He said his packers needed a rest and loafed about the camp, sometimes talking to Carrie and sometimes watching Jake and Jim at work. Next morning, however, he said he must go, and while they were at breakfast turned to Jim.

"In the bush, one often runs up against obstacles one did not expect. If you find you can't put your contract over, I'd like you to send me word."

"I don't see why we should bother you," Jim replied with some surprise.

Martin smiled. "For one thing, you had a notion the Cartner people and I were playing a crooked game. Then you're making a good job, and I wouldn't like to see you beat."

"We imagined you wouldn't like our butting in on jobs you thought were yours," Jake observed.

"That is so," said Martin. "If I help, I'll make a proposition, to which I guess you'll be able to agree. In the meantime, we can let it go. Looks as if you'd make good anyhow."

He began to talk about something else and when he set off Jake and Jim went with him down the line. After a time, he stopped them.

"I must hit the trail and not keep you from your job," he said. "I reckon you'll put it over, but if you want some backing, remember my offer stands."

He paused and gave Jake a steady glance. "I like the way you have treated me; your sister is a queen."

Then he went on with his packers and Jake and Jim returned quietly to camp.

CHAPTER XII

FIRE

The light had got dim, and Carrie put down her sewing and looked about. A belt of yellow sky glimmered above the distant snow, but the valley was dark and the pines rolled in blurred masses up the hill. Thin mist crept out of the deep hollow and Carrie shivered when a cold wind shook the trees. She was beginning to know the wilds, and now and then their austerity daunted her. By and by a red twinkle in the distance drew her glance and she turned to Jim.

"What is that?"

Jim looked and frowned. "Ah," he said, "I'd begun to think our luck was too good!"

"But what is the light?"

"A bush fire."

Jake indicated the drift of the smoke from their cooking fire. As a rule, the valleys of British Columbia that open to the west form channels for the Chinook wind from the Pacific, but now and then a dry, cold current flows down them to the coast.

"It won't bother us unless the wind changes," he remarked. "In this country, however, the wind generally does change when you'd sooner it did not, and it's not safe to trust your luck much. Looks as if Nature had put up her shingle on the mountains, warning the white man off."

"But white men do live in the mountains," Carrie objected.

"Men who are strong enough. They must fight for a footing and then use the best tools other men can make to hold the ground they've won. We're scouts, carrying axes, saws, and giant-powder, but the main body must coöperate to defend its settlements with civilization's heavy machines. It's sure a hard country, and sometimes it gets me scared!"

Carrie laughed. "You're romantic when you talk about the North. Could the fire bother us?"

"That depends. It couldn't burn the line, though it might burn the posts. If it spread and rolled up the valley, it might put us off the ground and stop the job."

"While we waited the boys would have to be fed and wages would run on," Carrie said in a thoughtful voice. "How do the fires start?"

"Nobody knows. I allow it looks ridiculous, but my notion is some fires start themselves; you'll find them burning in belts of woods the Indians and prospectors leave alone. Some are probably started by cooking fires. The man who knows the bush is careful; the tenderfoot is not."

"Then you don't think somebody may have had an object for lighting this fire?"

"On the whole, I reckon not. The chances against its bothering us are too steep. For all that, I'd like it better if the blaze went out."

Carrie said nothing, and for a time they watched the light. Sometimes it leaped up and sometimes it faded, but it got larger, and when they went to bed a red reflection played about the sky. In the morning there was no wind and a heavy trail of smoke stretched across the hills. In places, a bright flicker pierced the dark trail, and Carrie noted a smell of burning when she filled the kettle. Then she saw Jim watching the smoke.

"It's nearer and bigger, isn't it?" she asked.

"Yes," said Jim, quietly. "It's bigger than I like. We'll go along and look at it after breakfast."

They ate quickly and when the meal was over Jim and Carrie set off while Jake went to work. It was not easy to push through the tangled bush, and now and then Jim was forced to clear a path with his ax. After a time he stopped behind a trunk and touched Carrie, who saw an animal leap out from the gloom. It cleared a big fallen branch with a flying bound, vanished almost silently in a brake of tall fern, and shooting out with forelegs bent sprang across a thicket. Carrie thought it hardly touched the ground. It was wonderfully swift and graceful, and although the forest was choked with undergrowth and rotting logs all was very quiet when the animal vanished.

"Oh," she said, "I'm glad you stopped me! I haven't seen a wild deer before."

"They are hard to see," Jim replied. "If they're standing, they melt into their background at a very short distance. However, I didn't like the way that deer was going. It passed pretty close, without seeing we were about."

Noting that the scramble had tired her, he began to rub his ax with a sharpening stone, and Carrie mused while she got her breath. By and by she looked up and saw his twinkling glance.

"Yes," she said, "I was thinking rather hard; I thought it was good for me to come North. All was always just the same at the store; the dull street, the mean frame houses, and the stale smell of groceries. There was nothing different; you knew you would do to-morrow what you did to-day, and you had made no progress when the reckoning came. If there was money enough to pay the bills, you were satisfied, and sometimes there was not. But I really mean you felt you had made no progress of any kind; you were slipping back."

"Slipping back? I'm not sure I get that——"

"Sometimes it's hard to put you wise, but perhaps slipping back wasn't altogether right. I meant things were moving on and leaving me behind. The time I could be happy was going and soon I'd be old and sour. I didn't want to feel I'd done nothing and had never tasted life. Well, my chance came and I pulled out."

"I'm afraid you haven't had your good time yet," Jim remarked.

Carrie's eyes sparkled. "One always wants something better, Jim, but I've begun to live. I've seen the woods and the wild back country; I'm helping at a big job."

"Your help is worth much, and if we put the job over, you can have the things a girl is supposed to like; for example, pretty clothes, opera tickets, a holiday at a fashionable summer hotel. They're things you ought to have."

"I do like pretty clothes and think I'd like to meet smart people. The trouble is, they would know I didn't belong where they belonged and might leave me out. Do you think that would happen, Jim?"

"Certainly not," Jim declared. "Girls of your type don't get left out. I dare say pretty girls are numerous, but you have a calm and a confidence that make their mark."

Carrie smiled, but there was some color in her face. "I suppose you mean to be nice. Yet you have seen me serving at the store and cooking for the boys!"

"I've seen you nursing me when I was ill and hope I'm going to see you wear the smartest clothes money can buy. But there's much to be done first and I'm bothered about the fire."

They pushed on while the smell of burning got stronger, and presently came to a rocky hill. Its top cut off their view, but a dingy cloud rolled up behind it and as they climbed the air got hot. When they reached the summit Carrie gasped and her eyes opened wide.

The spur commanded the valley and the fire that had run through the woods below. In the foreground a wall of tossing flame threw out clouds of sparks, and leaping up here and there, ran in yellow trails to the top of the tall firs. It advanced slowly, with an angry roar, licking up the dry brush and branches before the big trunks caught. In front they were hung with streamers of flame, farther off they glowed red, and in the distance smoldering rampikes towered above a wide belt of ash. Now and then one leaned and fell, and showers of sparks shot up as if the log had exploded.

The shock of the fall hardly pierced the confused uproar, and Carrie, shielding her scorched face with her hand, was appalled by the din. Green wood split with detonating cracks, the snapping of branches was like musketry, and the flames roared in a deep undertone. Her dress fluttered, for eddying draughts swept the rocks. She was dazzled but fascinated, unconscious of heat and fear, for she had not seen or imagined a spectacle like this.

"It's tremendous!" she said in an awed voice.

"Pretty fierce," Jim agreed. "A bush-fire's a big thing, but it doesn't grip you like the break up of the ice. When the river bursts the jam, the floes grind the rocks smooth and rub out the pines. You can hear the wreck drive down the channel a day's journey off."

"I thought it a silent country. It's often so quiet it makes one half-afraid."

Jim nodded. "Something forbidding in its quietness that's like a threat? Well, it wakes up and gets busy in a dramatic way now and then. If you want to live in the mountains, you've got to be watchful."

A wave of smoke rolled about them and sparks drove past like hail. A fiery shower fell on Carrie's thin dress and Jim, seizing her, beat them out. This was needful and he began without embarrassment but presently thrilled, and Carrie's scorched face got red as he ran his smarting hands across the thin material.

"Keep still!" he said, roughly. "It's light stuff and will soon catch fire."

Then, picking off a glowing cinder, he took her arm and they started down hill. When they came out of the smoke he was breathless and Carrie gasped.

"Oh, Jim, you have burned your hands!" she said.

"Not much. They're hard and I have often hurt them worse. It's your dress that bothers me. Look at the charred spots."

"But you're not to blame for that."

"I am to blame. I oughtn't to have let you stay."

"I wanted to stay."

"That doesn't matter," Jim declared. "My business was to take care of you. In fact, it's my business all the time."

"Something of a responsibility, Jim!" Carrie remarked. "However, I think we'll go on."

They stopped again before they reached the camp, for pushing through tangled bush is hard work, and Carrie sat down on a fallen trunk.

"Isn't the fire moving up the valley?" she asked.

"It is," Jim said, frowning. "Fires sometimes do move against a light wind. However, we won't talk about this yet." He paused and touched her dress. "Here's another big hole. You can't mend the thing."

"I'm afraid not," Carrie agreed.

"And the blue one has a nasty tear, besides the stain where Jake spilt the coffee. I must make a trip to the settlement when the fire burns out."

"You mustn't go," said Carrie, firmly. "You can't leave your job. It's much more important than my clothes."

"For all that, I am going, as soon as I can. When we were talking not long since I began to think. We have taken your help for granted, without reckoning what it cost; but it has hurt me to

see you occupied with the cooking-pots."

Carrie gave him a level, smiling glance. "It's for Jake and you and the boys. In a way, you're all mine, and I'm rather proud of my family."

"We are yours," Jim declared. "In fact, we were lucky when you, so to speak, took us under your wing. You have a kind of protective instinct that makes you look after folks and makes them trust you; but you oughtn't to be cooking for a crowd of hungry men. I've seen your face scorched, and sometimes you burn your hands. Then your being forced to wear those faded and mended dresses makes me angry."

She laughed, but the careless note in her voice was rather forced. "Don't be foolish, Jim! If I had lots of smart clothes, I couldn't wear them while I work about the fire."

"That is so," he said, frowning. "You oughtn't to work about the fire."

"Oh, well, it's too late to bother now. For one thing, I have educated the boys; they wouldn't eat the hash you or Jake could cook. But I expect you want to get to work and we had better make the camp."

When they reached the camp Jim got to work. He was anxious, but admitted that the fire might die out on a stony belt where the bush was thin, and perhaps he need not fear much trouble unless a Chinook wind drove the flames up the valley. Moreover, since there was a risk of his being stopped, it was prudent to push on.

For two days he strained his muscles and urged the men; and then, one evening, sat in his usual place, listening rather moodily while Jake and Carrie talked. The evening was calm and the smoke had not advanced, although it now covered much of the sky. The men had not gone to fish and lounged about the shack. They were tired and quiet, for Jim had driven them hard all day. He let his pipe go out and pondered. Perhaps his disturbance was not logical, but his habit was to concentrate on the work he undertook and it would hurt to own himself beaten and let the contract go. He had not been badly beaten yet, and he had a vein of rather grim tenacity.

After a time, Carrie's laugh banished his moody reflections and he looked up. The firelight touched her, and although her eyes sparkled her pose was slack. Now he studied her carefully; her face was getting thin. She was obviously playing up to Jake, and he imagined their banter was meant to cheer him. Carrie's clothes were shabbier than he had thought, but they did not spoil her unconscious grace. It was unconscious grace, because Carrie did not pose. She looked at home and somehow made the camp look homelike. She was unembarrassed in the woods, as she was at the store. Jim wondered whether, if they carried out the contract and earned the pay, she would hold her own in different surroundings; among fashionable women at summer hotels, for example. Somehow he thought she would. Then a curious feeling of tenderness moved him. Carrie looked tired and he owed her much.

"I wish you would put down that sewing," he said. "You are hurting your eyes."

"Very well," Carrie agreed. "I wasn't getting on fast, and when you are bothered you have to be indulged. Looks as if you were bothered, Jim."

"I suppose I've got the habit," he replied. "Anyhow, I don't like your sewing when you have hustled round all day."

Carrie laughed. "You and Jake are rough on clothes and somebody's got to mend."

"No," said Jim. "In this country, mending's not economical. It's cheaper to throw away the things and buy another lot."

"Where are you going to buy new clothes, Jim?"

"That is something of a difficulty. I was talking about the principle. You're too practical."

"Oh, well," said Carrie, "I suppose I'm not romantic. Unless you're romantic in the right way, you're ridiculous. I expect it's easier to be useful."

"Jim will agree," Jake remarked. "He judges people by their talent for doing things, but you can't fix a standard for everybody. He reckons I do too little; I allow he does too much."

He stopped and looked about. There was something oppressive in the heavy calm. The smoke went straight up and the pine twigs did not move. For a minute or two he waited with a feeling of tension and the others were silent. Then the pine tops shook and were still again. Jim got up abruptly.

"That draught's not from the east!"

Jake struck a match. The flame burned upright, and then flickered and slanted.

"No," he said, "it's blowing up the valley."

The flame went out, the pine-tops shook and did not stop. The air got hot and a smell of burning stole into the camp.

"I reckon it's a *Chinook*," Jake remarked.

Jim nodded and his face got stern. "I have expected it all day. The fire will roll up the valley and I don't know where it will stop. We must break camp to-morrow and pitch farther along." He turned to Carrie. "Can you be ready to start for the settlement in the morning?"

"No, but this doesn't matter, because I'm not going."

"You must. The bush will burn like a furnace."

"Do you and Jake mean to quit?"

"You ought to see we can't quit."

Carrie smiled. "I do see it, but if you have good grounds for stopping, so have I. Your grounds, in fact."

"Shucks! You're ridiculous. In a way, of course, I don't want you to go."

"Thank you! Was it hard to own that, Jim? However, you won't have to make the effort to send me off, because I mean to stay."

Jim turned to Jake. "This job is yours; I don't see why you put it on to me. She's your sister and you ought to have some control."

"My control doesn't count for much," Jake admitted with a grin. "Besides, I allow you are the head of the firm."

"If I'm head, some responsibility goes with the post——"

"I suppose I am rather a responsibility," Carrie interposed. "After all, you are not very old and don't know much about managing an obstinate girl."

"I don't want to manage you," Jim rejoined. "My notion is, you have quietly managed us."

"Ah," said Carrie, "it looks as if you're really cleverer than I thought!"

Jim tried to hide his annoyance. "I wish I was clever, or somebody else had my job. Anyhow, you can't stop. In a day or two the line will be smothered in smoke, and we may be forced back among the rocks where we can't take your tent. I don't see how we're going to get provisions through."

"After all," said Carrie, "I don't think I'd catch fire sooner than you and Jake, and I certainly don't eat as much. Then I can save where you would waste." She paused and gave Jim a half-mocking smile. "I imagine you mean well, but I've resolved to stay."

Jim made a resigned gesture. "Then I expect there's no more to be said! Well, I'm tired and we must get busy again at sun-up."

He rose, stretched his arms, and went off.

CHAPTER XIII

JIM'S LUCK TURNS

When the others went off Carrie did not move. The smoke was getting thick, the air was hot, and now all was quiet she heard the roar of the fire. She pictured it creeping through the bush: the flames leaping from branch to branch, the red glow among the trunks that cracked and tottered, and the crash when one fell. Now and then she thought she heard the shock, but it was scarcely distinguishable through the dull roar. The noise was strangely daunting.

Carrie meant to stay. She must hide her fears and smile. This was not a new line; life was not easy for a girl who must work for all she got, and she had known care. Now and then unsatisfied creditors had threatened to close the store, but when tears were near her eyes she had forced a laugh. There was much she could do in camp; she could see the men were fed and try to cheer them when they came back gloomy and tired. Sometimes a joke was strangely encouraging. By and by she got up and went to her tent.

In the morning they broke camp and moved up the valley, but although the fire was

advancing Jim did not go far. They might soon be driven back among the rocks, where there were no trees to burn, and he meant to work as long as possible. Besides, transport was difficult and he must have an open trail behind him. Jim was getting anxious about this, because if the fire followed them up, provisions must be brought across the burning belt.

It was characteristic that he took command. Although Jake had banteringly called him the Boss, they had no agreement about the matter. When things were normal each did what he thought needful and they seldom jarred. Now, however, Jim half consciously assumed firm control, with his comrade's support. He made all plans, and the men seeing he had a leader's talent obeyed cheerfully.

For some days their resolution was hardly tried. The fire rolled up the valley and for the most part they worked in thick smoke. At times the heat was intolerable, and when the wind freshened showers of ash and sparks fell about them. Although the fire did not advance fast, their progress was slow. Heavy stones must be rolled away, treacherous gravel must be walled up and the line roughly graded. Ashes stuck to the men's wet skin and they were often scorched by the hot wind. Then, at the close of each exhausting day, the camp must be moved to the end of the cleared track.

There was not much grumbling. The men were hard and stubborn, but Jim doubted if they could bear the strain long. He himself was worn out, he could not relax at night and did not sleep. Jake's scorched face was getting pinched. Carrie alone was cheerful and tried to ease the crushing strain when they rested for an hour after the evening meal. The meal was always ready and Jim noted that the bill of fare was better than before. Yet, sometimes when Carrie did not know he was studying her, he thought her figure drooped and her eyes were dull. He said nothing, but he was moved by pity and gratitude.

At length, one day when the wind was fresh and the fire had got ominously close, he made a hard decision. Since he could not keep in front, he would follow the blaze, which would lick up the brush and do some part of his work. The trouble was, he must wait until the conflagration passed and the burned ruin cooled, while wages mounted up and food got short. He said nothing to the others, but when evening came and the tired men struck the tent he indicated a bare rocky slope.

"We'll make the big stones yonder, boys. Keep this side of the juniper scrub."

The men's grim faces relaxed and one laughed. They saw the struggle was over for a time and the boss had made another plan. All had had enough and badly needed rest. Carrie, however, looked at Jim thoughtfully.

"I know you're not giving up, but I don't understand."

Jim smiled. "I may have to give up, but not yet. In the morning the fire will reach the line. We are going to lie off and let it pass."

"Ah," said Carrie, with a hint of relief. "Can we wait?"

"It will cost us something and we can't wait long, but perhaps this won't be needful. Now give me that bundle. The ground is rough."

"I won't," said Carrie, moving back as he tried to take the bundle she had made of some clothes. "You have an ax and a big bag of flour. Would it hurt very much to own that you sometimes get tired?"

Jim laughed but did not answer, and they went up the hill. They pitched camp among the rocks and in the morning Jim climbed the range behind the spot. He did not come back until dusk, but saw no way of bringing the supplies he would soon need across the rugged hills. One could not get up the valley, for looking down from the heights, he could see behind the fire and the ground was strewn with fallen trees. Some would burn for long and the ashes and hot stones would not cool soon, while the rampikes that stood above the ruin would come down when a strong gust shook them. A *brulée* is dangerous when the wind blows, and sometimes in a calm.

For the next few days the fire raged below the camp, and when Jim ventured down hill he was driven back by heat and smoke. The fire was rolling up the valley, but the wreckage it had left smoldered and now and then broke into flame. Half-burned underbrush suddenly blazed and blackened logs glowed in the wind. There was nothing to be done but use patience, and in the meantime the wages bill was mounting up and food was getting short.

Then, one day, the wind dropped. The distant peaks got hazy, the shining glaciers faded, and the outline of the rocks was blurred. Although the sun was dim, it was very hot, and Jim felt morose and gloomy as he loafed about the camp. There was no use in going down to the line, and he durst not hope for rain. After a few hours the wind might freshen and the sky clear. He had nothing to do and the reaction from the strain he had borne had begun.

"We miss the trout," Carrie remarked, as she cooked supper. "Jake tried to get down to the river but couldn't make it."

"I'm afraid we'll soon miss the flour and salt pork. When they're gone the boys will pull out," said Jim, and then forced a laugh. "Anyhow, if Jake had got down, I doubt if he'd have caught much fish. I don't know a good bait for boiled trout."

"The flour's not gone yet," Carrie rejoined. "We'll hold on while it lasts and it's going farther than you think. Somehow I don't feel as if we'd be beaten."

"We have come near it," said Jim, with rather grim humor. "One gets used to that, and resolution counts when you're fighting a snowslide or a flood; but we're up against another proposition now. It's so to speak, mathematical; nothing coming in and much going out! When we have no stores and money left we *must* quit."

"I suppose we must, but I'd hate to see you let the job go and would feel mean myself. After all, something may happen before we are forced to quit," Carrie replied, and added with calm confidence: "Something is going to happen."

"You have an optimism that can't be cured," Jim rejoined. "However, I don't know if I'd like it cured."

He knocked out his pipe and began to cut some tobacco, but stopped abruptly and looked up.

"What's that?" he asked as something pattered on the stiff foliage of a juniper.

"Big drops," said Carrie. "I felt a few before."

Jim got up. The light was going and it felt cool, but the sky up the valley was not clouded much; he could not see the other way. Then a few large cold drops fell on his upturned face and next moment there was a quick splashing on the dusty juniper. He drew a deep breath and shook off his languidness.

"It's coming; heavy rain!" he cried. "We'll make good, after all. But let's move the stores."

Carrie laughed happily. "You said I was too practical! Who's practical now? But sometimes you get things mixed; you reckoned not long since I was an optimist."

"I did," Jim admitted. "Practical planning and optimism make a strong combine, and I imagine they are going to carry us through. But let's move the stores."

He called the men, and as they got all that would spoil covered there was a rush of cold wind and the rain beat upon the camp. It rains hard in British Columbia and often rains long. They knew that by morning the rocks would run water and the deluge would quench the smoldering wreckage; it might even quench the fire.

After a day or two Jim moved his camp to the line, and one afternoon when he was working in the rain stopped and straightened his aching back. Fine ash that had turned to mud smeared his wet slickers; his face was thin and gloomy. His money was nearly gone, and although the fire had burned out he did not see how he could finish his contract.

The tangled brush had vanished and wet ashes covered the ground. Half-burned logs lay about, and here and there small trees, leaning at sharp angles with blackened branches locked, held each other up. In places, big charred rampikes stood in rows like colonnades. The nearer rows looked black; farther off they shone in the rain with a curious silver gleam. The fire had helped to clear the ground, but wet men were at work with axes and saws.

By and by Jim looked round. Somebody had shouted and it was not one of his gang. The shout came from some distance off and while he tried to locate the spot a rampike slanted over and broke off. The burned trunk struck the ground with an echoing crash and a cloud of ash rolled up like smoke. There was now a gap in the row and as the ashes blew away Jim saw pack-horses in the opening.

"Who is it?" he asked Jake.

"A Government outfit, I expect. Prospectors don't load up with tents and stores like that."

"If they're Government men, it means somebody from the telegraph department is coming to look at our job."

"Yes," said Jake. "I reckon we'll soon know our luck." He waited for a few moments and added: "It's the boss surveyor."

The surveyor presently joined them and remarked: "As I have business at the new settlement, I thought I'd see how you were getting on."

"We might have got on faster, but we have had trouble all the time," said Jim.

"Looks like that. I examined the work you've done as I came along and on the whole allow it's a pretty good job. However, we'll talk about that later; the boys are tired and I'm glad to make your camp."

The pack-horses were unloaded and when the tents were pitched the surveyor's cook helped Carrie to prepare an unusually good meal. When it was over the party sat outside the surveyor's tent, which had a double top stretched on poles beyond its front. The surveyor studied their faces with understanding, for he knew the wilds and noted signs of strain. He thought all had a fine-drawn look.

"It's obvious that you have been up against it," he remarked. "The big landslide must have made you trouble and no doubt the fire cost you something. Running a camp is expensive when transport's high."

"That is so," Carrie agreed feelingly. "It's curious, but I think the boys eat most when they have nothing to do."

The surveyor gave her a sympathetic smile. "I imagine you don't stint them, if this supper is a good example." He turned to Jim. "You're behind schedule, but if you have no more bad luck, I reckon you ought to finish on time."

Jim said nothing. He doubted if he could finish the job at all, and wondered whether the other suspected his embarrassment. He meant to ask for some payment, but it might be risky to admit that money was urgently needed. Jake gave him a warning glance, although he was silent, and the surveyor looked about and noted much.

Jim's long boots were broken and his slickers were torn, Winter's carelessness was obviously forced, but the surveyor's study of Carrie gave him the plainest hint. Although she was neat, he thought an attractive girl would not, without good grounds, wear clothes that had shrunk and faded and been mended as often as hers.

"Well," he resumed, "I expect you know payment in part is sometimes allowed before a job is finished, but when we made our agreement nothing was stated about this."

"The custom has drawbacks for the people who let the contract," Jake remarked.

"Very true," agreed the surveyor. "Then you don't mean to bother us for money?"

"It would, of course, be useful," Jake admitted in a thoughtful voice. "However, if the office doesn't see its way——"

"You would be satisfied to wait?"

Jim frowned. Jake's pretended indifference was prudent, but he had overdone the thing. While Jim wondered how he could put the matter right Carrie interposed.

"My brother is generally hopeful. In a way, that's good, but sometimes he's rash."

The surveyor's eyes twinkled. "Do you mean he's rash just now?"

"Yes," said Carrie, "I really think I do mean this."

"I didn't know if it was rashness or common bluff."

Jake grinned rather awkwardly and Jim colored, but Carrie fixed her eyes on the surveyor.

"It was all bluff from the beginning. We hadn't the money we needed when we took the contract, and since then we have never had proper tools and help enough."

"In fact, you had nothing much but obstinacy and grit? They sometimes go far in the bush; but I don't know if they'll go far enough to carry you through. Perhaps you had better be frank."

"I generally am frank. Bluffing's dangerous, and my brother didn't know when to stop. Anyhow, unless we get some money soon, I'm afraid we'll go broke."

"Perhaps it's strange, but I rather suspected this," the surveyor rejoined. "Well, I'd like you to put the contract over. You have done good work up-to-date and I'll risk giving you an order on the pay office. If you'll wait while I get a form, I'll do it now."

He went into the tent and Carrie smiled at the others. Jim was conscious of keen relief and a touch of annoyance. Although Carrie had saved the situation, he had let her undertake an awkward task that was properly his. Then the surveyor came back and gave her a document.

"I imagine you are sometimes rash," he remarked. "Didn't you see the line you took was risky?"

"No," said Carrie, smiling; "I wasn't rash at all. I know when I can trust people and didn't think you would let us down. All the same, I knew you wouldn't give us a pay order unless you saw we'd make good. Well, we are going to make good, and now that's done with, we'll talk about something else."

The surveyor laughed and began to talk about his journey, but Jim noted that he gave Carrie

an approving glance. Next morning he went on and the others resumed their work with quiet confidence. The financial strain had slackened and they were not afraid of the physical difficulties that must yet be grappled with. Rocks and trees could be moved so long as the men were paid and fed. Still the fight was not over and their courage was tried when they carried the line along the moraine by a shrunken glacier and across a broken range. At length, one evening, Jim took Carrie up a hill and when they reached the top indicated a river that sparkled among the trees below.

"Follow it down and look across the big pines on the flat," he said.

Carrie looked and saw a thin, blue haze floating about the trees.

"Oh!" she cried, "it's smoke."

"The high smear against the rocks is from a mine stack, and I think I see the steam from a sawmill by the river," Jim said quietly. "The line will soon be finished, and you have helped us out."

The color came into Carrie's face and her eyes shone. "Perhaps I have helped some; if I have, I'm glad. Now I'm proud of my family. You have put it over."

"We came near being beaten," Jim replied with some emotion. "I think, if you had not been with us, we would have been beaten."

Carrie gave him a level glance. "It's done with, Jim. I wanted you and Jake to make good, for your sake and mine. You see, if you couldn't have stood for it, I'd have lost confidence in myself."

"I'm not sure I do see," Jim replied, as they started down hill.

"It's good to concentrate, but perhaps you concentrate too much," Carrie resumed by and by. "You see things right in front; you don't look about."

"I suppose I am like that," Jim admitted. "I don't know if it's good or not."

Carrie smiled rather curiously. "We didn't choose our characters; they were given us. I wonder what would have happened had we been different——"

She stopped as they climbed across a fallen tree and said nothing more until they reached the camp.

CHAPTER XIV

THE RECKONING

When the line reached the settlement Jim and his party returned to Vancouver. Shortly after their arrival Martin came to see them.

"I've been in town some time, and seeing a notice in the *Colonist* that you had finished the job, thought I'd like to tell you I was glad," he said.

Carrie thanked him and by and by he asked: "Have you had a fresh offer from Baumstein for your copper claim?"

Jim said they had not and Martin smiled. "I reckon the offer will arrive, and now he knows you have got your pay he'll put up his price."

"If it does arrive, we won't reply," said Carrie, firmly.

"I don't know if that's a good plan," Martin remarked. "Baumstein will offer about half as much as he's willing to give, but I'd take hold and negotiate until I thought he'd reached his limit. It will be under what the claim is worth. Then I'd go along and try the Combine."

"Would they buy?" Jim asked.

"Go and see. Although Baumstein's pretty smart, he doesn't know they're quietly investing in Northern copper; I do. There's another thing; if you have got specimens, send some for assay to a different man."

Jim pondered. The analysis of the ore was not as good as he had expected and the miner who had examined the specimens at his camp agreed. For all that, assayers were generally honest and skillful.

"What's the matter with the man I went to?" he asked.

"He's sometimes soused and you can't trust a tanker. Then he's extravagant."

"Ah," said Jim. "Is that all?"

Martin gave him a dry smile. "I happen to know Baumstein lent him money. It's possible he meant to get value for a risky loan."

The others said nothing, but they saw the significance of the hint and Jim's face got stern.

"There's something else," Martin resumed. "Davies has left me and gone back to Baumstein."

"Gone back?" Jake exclaimed.

"Sure," said Martin, quietly. "I didn't know he'd worked for the fellow when I hired him. Now I've a notion he's been Baumstein's man, not mine, all the time."

Jim clenched his fist and Carrie's eyes sparkled. "We're up against a poisonous crook," she said, and looked at Jim. "You see why he made us trouble? He wanted to break us, so we'd sell him the Bluebird cheap."

"It's pretty plain. All the same, I don't see what I ought to do about it. Martin's plan doesn't quite meet the bill: I'd sooner try something a little more vigorous."

Carrie shook her head. "You mustn't be a fool! The best way to play that kind of man is to use him. When he finds out it will hurt most."

Jim hesitated. He remembered the blow they had got at the beginning of the struggle and all that Carrie had borne. Baumstein's plot had drained their resources and made her suffer.

"Martin's plan is best; you must agree," she urged.

"Very well," said Jim. "Jake can see the fellow and begin the negotiations; I'll come in afterwards. Jake's something of a philosopher, but I'd probably spoil the plot if I met Baumstein before I cool."

Martin gave them some useful advice and then went away, and a few days afterwards Baumstein sent a message. Jake played his part well; indulging the other's pretended indifference and arguing for better terms. Sometimes he seemed on the point of yielding, and then on his next visit found grounds for delay. At length, when Baumstein was getting impatient, Jake took Jim to the office.

Baumstein occupied a revolving chair in front of a fine hard wood desk, and gave the others a sharp glance as they came in. The office was very well furnished and Baumstein wore fashionable clothes. There was a fine diamond in his ring. This annoyed Jim, who knew that while hard-bitten prospectors braved the risks of starvation on the snowy trail, greedy company-floaters often got the reward.

"I hope you have come to clinch the deal," Baumstein remarked. "I've met your partner as far as I can, but the bargaining has gone on long enough."

"Then you can't raise your price?" Jim asked.

Baumstein studied him. Winter had been compliant and apparently anxious to sell, but there was something puzzling about his partner. Baumstein got a hint of sternness that he did not like. For all that, bluff paid when one dealt with poor men.

"No," he replied, dryly. "Your partner has raised me to my limit and I've got to stop. You can agree right now or quit."

"Oh, well," said Jim. "If you have gone as far as you are able——. May I use your telephone?"

"Certainly," said Baumstein, and when Jim, picking up the instrument on the desk, called the exchange, suddenly straightened himself. He knew the number for which Jim asked.

"Winter and Dearham," said the latter. "Mr. Lamson? All right; I'll come along and fix things. We'll record the transfer when you like."

Baumstein swung round his chair and his face got red.

"What's that you told Lamson? What does it mean?"

"It means I've sold the Bluebird claim."

"Then, you have been negotiating with the Combine all the time? Why in thunder did you come to me?"

"For one thing, we wanted to find out how much you would bid. It would be safe to ask

another party more than you would give. We didn't know how much we ought to get."

Baumstein clenched his fist. "You used me for a base to bluff from; reckoning you'd fall back on me if you couldn't put it over?"

"No," said Jim. "We didn't mean to deal with you at all. You helped us get a proper price; that was your job."

They looked at one another, with mouths set hard, and then Baumstein broke out: "You swine!"

"Stop there," said Jim, with ominous quietness. "I'm back from using the ax in the bush and feel very fit. To put you out of your office would give me the keenest satisfaction and would be cheaper than getting after you through the court."

"Shucks!" exclaimed Baumstein. "What are you giving me?"

"I reckon you know. You put Davies on our track; he broke the line, and sent a log down on our canoes. He's smart and both plots worked before we found him out. But we did find him out."

Baumstein hesitated, wondering how much was supposition and how much Jim really knew.

"You'll be blamed foolish if you go to law with a tale like that."

"We don't propose to bother, because I think we're even. You helped us sell our claim and the Combine know what you were willing to pay. We raised them some; one could take it for granted you wouldn't reach just value."

"You told them what I offered?" Baumstein shouted.

"We did," Jim said, smiling. "I expect they got a useful hint. In fact, if you want to control Northern copper, you had better get busy. It looks as if the Combine were on your track." He paused and beckoned Jake. "Well, perhaps there's enough said. We mustn't keep you."

They went off and left Baumstein sitting very still with his fist clenched.

A few days afterwards, Jim and Jake waited for Carrie one evening on the veranda at the store. Mrs. Winter had refused to sell the business, but Jake had engaged extra help and they had arranged for a long holiday. The store, standing back from the rough board sidewalk, was small and shabby; the street was torn by transfer-wagon wheels. A Chinese laundry and a pool-room occupied the other side. Sawmill refuse and empty coal-oil cans had been dumped in a neighboring vacant lot. Mean frame houses ran on from the store, some surrounded by a narrow yard, and some with verandas covered by mosquito gauze so that they looked like meat-safes. The neighborhood was strangely unattractive, but one could see the sparkling Inlet and the dark forest that rolled back to the shining snow.

Jim, sitting in an old rocking-chair, was quietly satisfied. After taking Mrs. Winter and Carrie to lunch at a smart hotel, he had loafed about the city without feeling bored. It was nice to know he had nothing to do and had money to spend. In fact, he had relished a novel enjoyment when he visited some shops and bought presents for his hosts without thinking what they cost. Now he languidly looked back on the years that had gone so quickly since his parents died. They were strenuous years, marked by hardship, toil, and adventure, for Jim had not known monotonous quietness. Even when he studied at McGill, he had worked between the terms in order to pay the fees. Afterwards, finding no field for such talent as he had, he had sold his labor where he could. He had seen much and learned much, but he was young and had a curious feeling that there were fresh experiences in store. By and by he banished the memories and looked at Jake.

"I smile when I think about the time I hit Martin's camp, pretty hungry and ragged, and got after him about his sending Davies on our track," he said.

Jake laughed. "After all, I guess you took a useful line. Made him feel he'd got to show us he wasn't a crook."

"Why did he want to show us? What we thought wouldn't matter a hill of beans."

"The fellow's white," Jake replied.

"Martin is white," Jim agreed, looking at Jake rather hard. "We were getting pretty near the rocks when he gave us a lift."

Jake nodded. When their money was very low after the fire, Martin had suggested an arrangement that had worked for the benefit of all. Jake hoped his comrade would be satisfied with his vague assent, but doubted.

"Why did he help?" Jim resumed. "The profit he got wasn't worth his bothering about."

"If you mean to know, I reckon he thought Carrie would like it."

"Ah," said Jim, frowning, "I suspected something like this! Well, we owe Martin much, but I'd sooner not think we let him give us a lift for your sister's sake. You ought to have refused."

"I didn't know. The thing's got obvious since."

"But you know now?"

"Yes," said Jake, "my notion is, Carrie could marry him when she liked."

"Do you think she sees it?"

Jake smiled. "Carrie's not a fool. If you and I see it, the thing is pretty plain. All the same, I imagine she is quietly freezing him off."

Jim was conscious of a rather puzzling satisfaction. "Martin's a good sort and he's rich; but there's no reason Carrie should take the first good man who comes along," he said. "She ought to get the very best. However, it's not my business and I don't know if it's yours."

"It's Carrie's," said Jake, rather dryly. "She's generally able to manage her affairs. In fact, I allow she was successful when she managed ours——"

He stopped, for the door opened and Carrie came out. She held a newspaper and looked excited.

"You had better read this advertisement, Jim," she said.

Jim saw the newspaper was printed at Montreal two years before. He glanced at the place Carrie indicated, started, and then looked straight in front.

"How did you get the thing?" he asked after a moment or two.

"Mother bought some old paper for packing. She took this piece just now to light the stove and saw the notice. But are you the man they want?"

"Yes," said Jim, quietly. "Franklin Dearham was my father."

Jake picked up the newspaper and they were silent for a few moments. Then Carrie asked: "What are you going to do about it?"

"To begin with, I'll write to the lawyers at Montreal," said Jim, who knitted his brows. "After that I don't know. The advertisement is cautious, but it looks as if Joseph Dearham was dead. I don't think my father expected to inherit his property. It's puzzling."

"Was Joseph Dearham rich?" Jake asked.

"He had some land and money and the old house at Langrigg. I've often thought about Langrigg, but I'd sooner the lawyers had left me alone."

"Why?"

"I've been happy in Canada. I've friends I trust, I'm making good, and don't want to be disturbed."

Carrie gave him a quick glance, but he went on: "Then we meant to take a holiday, and it looks as if I might be wanted in the Old Country."

"If you go, they may keep you."

"I feel I have got to go, although I don't like it," Jim replied with a puzzled look. "Something pulls and I resist. However, come along. We're going to the park."

They set off and Jim tried to talk. Carrie helped him and for a time they laughed and joked, but the jokes got flat and all were rather quiet when they went home. They felt a disturbing change was coming; things would not be the same. Next morning Jim wrote to the lawyers, who asked him to meet a member of the firm at Winnipeg. He grumbled and hesitated, but went and did not return for some time. On the evening after his arrival he and the others sat talking in a little room behind the store.

The room was cheaply furnished. The rough black pipe from the basement stove went up the middle and a threadbare rug covered half the floor. Mrs. Winter, looking worn and faded, occupied a rocking-chair. She was better dressed than when Jim first came to the house and he thought the rather expensive material had been chosen with taste. The quiet woman had a touch of dignity, although she wore the stamp of toil. Carrie, sitting opposite, had been occupied in the store all day and had refused to change her working clothes. Since Jim's return was something of an event, Mrs. Winter was puzzled by her obstinacy.

"I'm glad to be back," Jim remarked. "Winnipeg is a fine city, but I feel Vancouver's home."

Mrs. Winter smiled, but the look Carrie gave Jim was half ironical.

"You are glad to get back here? After stopping at a big hotel!"

"I am glad. The hotel was crowded and never quiet. They had noisy electric elevators that went up and down all night, and it wasn't much better when I dined at smart restaurants. Thought I'd find this amusing, but I didn't. Had to push for a place at the tables and the waiters were slow. I felt I wanted to hustle round with the plates."

"Sometimes you're rather clever, Jim," Carrie said, meaningly. "But I expect you liked the cooking."

"It was tolerable, but no food I've got was half as good as the trout and bannocks we picked out of the hot spider in a valley of the North. Then there's no drink as refreshing as the tea with the taste of wood smoke I drank from a blackened can."

"It didn't often taste of smoke," Carrie objected.

"Carrie can cook; she owes that to me," Mrs. Winter interposed. "She was ambitious when she was young and declared she had no use for studying things like that, but I was firm."

"I wonder whether she's ambitious now," Jim remarked.

"I've got wise," said Carrie. "I know where I belong."

Mrs. Winter looked at them as if she were puzzled, and Jim knitted his brows.

"I don't know where I belong. That's the trouble, because it may hurt to find out. But how have you been getting on while I was away?"

"Trade's pretty good, thank you," Carrie replied. "We have sold as much sweet truck as I could bake. The groceries have kept Belle hustling."

"Shucks!" said Jim, impatiently, and turned to Jake. "You ought to make your mother sell out."

"He tried," said Mrs. Winter. "I won't sell. Jake has some money now, but he's not rich and may hit a streak of bad luck. My children must go out and fight for all they get, but I want them to know there's a little house in the home town where they can come back if they're hurt and tired. Besides, I've kept store so long I've got the habit. Anyhow, you have told us nothing about your business and we're curious."

"Jake and Carrie don't look curious," Jim remarked dryly. "Well, I went to the lawyer's room, mornings, and answered his questions, read the night-letters the Montreal office sent him, and waited for replies to their English cablegrams."

"But what did he say about your claim?"

"I don't know if it will interest your son and daughter, but I'll tell you. There are some formalities yet, but the fellow seems satisfied I'm Joseph Dearham's heir, and I'm going to England soon. Whether I'll stay or not is another thing. Well, we had arranged for a long holiday, and I don't mean to be cheated. I'm going to take you all to the Old Country."

Carrie colored, but Jake smiled. "Did you tell the lawyer about this plan?"

"I did not," said Jim, with a rather haughty look that Carrie thought was new. "Langrigg is mine. It's my pleasure to show it to my friends."

Mrs. Winter looked disturbed. "You are kind, Jim, but I'm an old woman and have never gone far from home. Your relations mightn't like me."

"I don't know yet if my relations will like me. Anyhow, they have got to approve my guests. I wanted you to sell the store, because, if I'm satisfied with Langrigg, you mayn't come back. There's no real difficulty about your coming. In fact, you have got to come."

Mrs. Winter hesitated, as if she were thinking hard, and then her gentle face got resolute. "Very well. I'd like Carrie to see the Old Country."

Jim turned to the others with a triumphant smile. "It's fixed. Your mother will need you, Carrie, and I'll need my partner. We have put over some hard jobs and I imagine I'm up against another now. I want you, Jake; you have got to see me out."

"Since I don't know your folks and their habits, it isn't plain how I could help," Jake replied.

"I don't know much. What about it? We made good prospecting when we had never used the rocker and thawed-out gravel. We graded the pack-trail across Snowy Range when we didn't know how to drill and start off giant-powder. Well, we're going to make good at Langrigg if I stay."

"Then I'll come, for a time," Jake agreed and looked at Carrie.

"I wouldn't like to be left alone," she said and smiled.

Jim was satisfied. He had carried out his plan and it was significant that Carrie was willing to go; if Martin had attracted her; she would sooner have remained behind. In a way, he thought it strange that Mrs. Winter, from whom he had expected most opposition, was the first to agree, but this was not important.

After a time they went to the Stanley park, where Jake and Mrs. Winter met somebody they knew. Carrie sat down on a bench under a giant fir and Jim lighted a cigarette.

"You and Jake rather puzzled me," he remarked. "You weren't curious; I'd a feeling that things were not the same."

Carrie gave him a steady look. "I'm afraid we were very mean—but there was a difference. You were one of us when you went away; you came back an English landowner."

"Ah," said Jim, "I think I see! You wanted to give me a chance to drop you? Did you think I would?"

"No," said Carrie, blushing. "But it was possible. Cutting the line was different; it was a business proposition." She paused and added with a hint of regret: "It's finished now."

"Sometimes I think you're sorry."

Carrie said nothing and he went on: "Was Jake's throwing up his job and bringing me down from the shack a business proposition? Your nursing me and our long talks by the camp fire? Did you think I could forget these things? Did you want me to forget?"

She looked up, with some color in her face. "Not in a way, Jim, but we took the proper line. We felt you ought to have a chance to let us go."

"And now I hope you're satisfied, since you have found out I'm not as shabby as you thought."

"Oh, well," said Carrie, smiling, "I suppose we do feel some satisfaction."

Then Jake and Mrs. Winter returned and they went to the Canadian Pacific station, where Jim asked about the steamship sailings.

PART II—THE LANDOWNER

CHAPTER I

JIM COMES HOME

The car ran out from the tall hedgerows that bordered the narrow road and at length Jim could look about. He had not been able to see much on his way from the station where Mordaunt had met him, and now he had an unbroken view he studied the English landscape with keen curiosity. On one side, rugged mountains rose against the lowering sky, but a moving ray of sunshine touched the plain below. In front, the road ran across a marsh, between deep ditches where tall sedges grew. Beyond the marsh, wet sands stretched back to the blurred woods across a bay, and farther off, low hills loomed indistinctly in the mist.

Jim noted that the landscape had not the monotony he had sometimes felt in Canada. The fields behind the marsh looked ridiculously small, but some were smooth and green and some dotted by yellow stocks of corn. Then there was a play of color that changed from cold blues and grays to silver and ochre as the light came and went. White farmsteads, standing among dark trees, were scattered about, but the country was not tame. The hills and wide belt of sands gave it a rugged touch. There had been some rain and the wind was cold.

As the car jolted along the straight road between the ditches, Jim began to muse. He had felt a stranger in London, where he had stopped a week. He knew the Canadian cities, but London was different. Yet since he left the station the feeling of strangeness had gone; it was as if he had reached a country that he knew. He wondered whether he unconsciously remembered his father's talk, or if the curious sense of familiarity was, so to speak, atavistic. This, however, was not important, and he glanced at Carrie, who sat behind with Mrs. Winter and Jake.

Carrie had frankly enjoyed her holiday; indeed, Jim thought she had felt more at home than he when they were in town. Somehow she did not look exotic among the Englishwomen at the hotel, and when Mordaunt met them at the station she had, with a kind of natural tact, struck the proper note. She knew Mordaunt was a relation of Jim's, but she met him without reserve or an

obvious wish to please. If either were conscious of surprise or embarrassment, Jim thought it was Mordaunt. Presently the latter indicated a low ridge that broke the level marsh. It rose against the background of misty hills, and a creek that caught the light and shone wound past it to the sands. In one place, a gray wall appeared among stunted trees.

"Langrigg," he said. "We'll arrive in a few minutes."

He blew the horn, a boy ran to open a gate, and as they climbed the hill Jim saw a stripped cornfield, a belt of dark-green turnips, a smooth pasture, and a hedge. Then a lawn with bright flower-borders opened up, and on the other side a house rose from a terrace. Its straight front was broken by a small square tower, pierced by an arch, and old trees spread their ragged branches across the low roof. The building was of a type not uncommon in the North of England and had grown up about the peel tower that had been a stronghold in the Scottish wars. There were barns and byres in the background, and it was hard to tell if Langrigg was a well-kept farm or a country house.

The strange thing was, Jim knew it well. He felt as if he had come to a spot he often visited; in fact, he had a puzzled feeling that he had come home. Then he saw people on the terrace and the car stopped. He jumped out and after helping Mrs. Winter down got something of a shock, for as the group advanced he saw the girl he had met at the Montreal restaurant. For a moment he forgot Mrs. Winter and fixed his eyes on the girl. She moved with the grace he remembered, and her white dress outlined her figure against the creeper on the wall. She was rather tall and finely, but slenderly, proportioned, and when she looked up he knew she was as beautiful as he had thought. Then he roused himself and went forward with his friends.

Mordaunt presented him to Mrs. Halliday, who gave him her hand with a gracious smile.

"I knew you when the car came up the drive. You look a Dearham," she said. "Since Bernard is unwell, we thought we ought to come and welcome you." Then she beckoned the others. "My daughter, Evelyn, and my son, Dick."

The girl glanced at Jim curiously, as if puzzled, but her brother laughed.

"This is something of a romantic surprise!" he said. "Perhaps it's curious, but I've thought about you since the night of the blizzard when we came to your shack."

Jim indicated his party. "I want you to know my Canadian friends; I owe them much. Mrs. and Miss Winter from Vancouver city, and my partner, Jake."

Mrs. Halliday had studied the group, but she gave them another glance. She thought Mrs. Winter was not important. The thin, tired woman was of a common type and had obviously come from a rude Canadian town: Mrs. Halliday did not know much about Vancouver. The girl, however, had individuality and a touch of beauty; Mrs. Halliday felt she must be reckoned on. The young man puzzled her, because she could not place him. In some ways, he looked like a rather superior workman, but he was unembarrassed, and although he waited calmly, she imagined he was amused. On the whole, they were not the guests one generally received at an English country house, but Mrs. Halliday knew her duty and welcomed them with a gracious air.

They went in and Jim heard with satisfaction that the others meant to dine with him, because he wanted to talk with Evelyn. He came down as soon as he could, hoping he might find her in the hall, but nobody was there and for some minutes he looked about. The hall occupied the lower story of the tower. It was square, and roughly-hewn beams, slightly curved, crossed the ceiling. The spaces between were paneled with dark wood and an oak wainscot ran round the wall. Half of one side was occupied by a big fireplace and its old, hand-forged irons. The carved frame and mantel were Jacobean and obviously newer than the rest. The old windows, however, had been enlarged and a wide casement admitted a cold light.

By and by, Mordaunt came in. The latter was thin and dark; his face was rather inscrutable, but he had a superficial urbanity. Jim wondered what lay beneath this, and imagined it might be long before he found out. Until he got down from the train, they had not met since Mordaunt came to the telegraph shack, and Jim did not know if he liked the fellow or not. After a time, there was a step on the stairs that went up the wall, and Jim looked up, half expecting to see Evelyn. At first he was conscious of some disappointment, for Carrie was coming down.

"By George!" said Mordaunt, softly.

Jim understood the exclamation, for he had not until now realized that Carrie was beautiful. Her color was rather high and her face looked strangely clean-cut against the background of dull brown oak. Her eyes were a curious gray that changed to sparkling hazel-brown with the light; her hair was brown with a coppery gleam, and her dress a soft green. Jim had not seen the dress before and did not know if it was the latest fashion, but he felt that Carrie's choice was good. It was not that the harmonious color gave her beauty; the effect was deeper. The girl had a touch of dignity that was rather natural than cultivated.

She lifted her head and smiled as she went up to Jim, and asked, as if Mordaunt was not there: "How do you like me?"

"In a way, you're wonderful," Jim replied. "Of course, I knew that before—when you nursed me, and in the woods—but somehow I hadn't expected *this*! When did you get the dress?"

"When we were in London. I hadn't long, but I wanted to be just right," Carrie answered with a blush. Then she laughed. "You're very nice, Jim; but do I really fit in?"

"Marvelously," Mordaunt interposed. "If my opinion is worth much, you look as if you belonged to Langrigg. That is, you go back, beyond our times, to the folks who built the peel to keep out the Scots."

Jim nodded. Mordaunt had said what he himself had vaguely thought. The fellow was sensitive and had felt the girl's virility. Jim was a little surprised that Carrie, who knew nothing about the Border wars, seemed to understand, for she gave Mordaunt a quiet but rather piercing look.

"Well," she said. "I have been up against Nature, where she's raw and savage, in the woods."

"Perhaps that accounts for it," Mordaunt replied, smiling. "Nature is savage in the frozen North; perhaps Jim told you I have been there. But I imagine you made good."

"Jim made good. I like to think I helped."

"I expect your help was worth much!" said Mordaunt.

Carrie's glance rested on him calmly and he felt that she needed study. She did not speak, however, and Mrs. Halliday and the others came in. After a few minutes they went to the paneled dining-room and Jim forgot Carrie when he sat down by Evelyn. Her color was subdued, her skin, for the most part, ivory white, and she had black eyes and hair. Although rather tall, she looked fragile, but she was marked by a fastidious grace and calm that Jim thought patrician. This was not the word he wanted, but he did not know another.

"It's curious, but I seem to know you," she said, presently.

"I don't think it is very curious," Jim replied. "You see, I met you at the restaurant near the post-office in Montreal."

"Yes," said Evelyn, with a puzzled look, "I remember our going there, but we didn't talk to anybody."

"I brought your lunch," said Jim, fixing his eyes on her face.

"Then you were the waiter?" she remarked, tranquilly.

Jim smiled. He felt that she had passed a rather awkward test and he was satisfied.

"Since you must have waited on a large number of people, it is strange you remembered me," she resumed.

"No," he said. "I hadn't met an English woman of your kind before, and, for that matter, I haven't met one since." He paused and added: "I expect this accounts for it."

Evelyn's eyes twinkled. He was obviously sincere and she felt amused. He was a new and rather good type, she thought. His figure was athletic: his face was thin and brown, his glance was steady but searching, and she liked his quiet manner.

"But you had other occupations besides waiting, hadn't you?" she asked.

"I was a miner in the North for some time."

"That must have been interesting. Were you successful?"

"I found a copper vein and was lucky enough to sell it rather well."

"Then, is it difficult to sell a mine?"

"As a rule, it's much harder than finding one," Jim answered, with a smile. "In general, the miner struggles with half-thawed gravel that often fills up his shallow shaft, and sometimes nearly starves in the tundra bogs, while the man with money enough to work the vein gets the profit. It cost us something to hold on until we got a just price."

Evelyn did not know much about the Canadian North, but she could imagine his holding on. "I expect you will find Langrigg different from the British Columbian wilds," she said. "Do you feel strange here?"

Jim looked about. The long room was paneled, the ceiling was low, and the wide casement commanded a view of the level marsh and shining sands. It was different from the dark pine forests and snowy peaks of British Columbia. The fine old china and silver, tall candlesticks, and the flowers on the table were in marked contrast with the rude furniture of camp and shack.

"No," he said, thoughtfully. "When one has wandered about a new country, meeting all kinds of people and doing all kinds of jobs, I imagine one would not feel very strange anywhere. Besides, I've a curious notion that I have come home."

"After all, you are a Dearham; perhaps this accounts for something," Evelyn remarked and glanced at Carrie. "Did you meet your friends when you were at Montreal?"

"Jim met us in Vancouver. Jake brought him to the store when he was ill," Mrs. Winter replied.

"The store?" said Evelyn.

"Mrs. Winter means a shop," Mordaunt explained.

"Oh," said Evelyn, "that is interesting! What did you sell?"

"Most everything people wanted. Dry goods, groceries, sweet biscuits—you'd call it cake—and we had quite a trade in Sundaes."

"What is a Sunday?"

Mordaunt laughed. "A little delicacy you consume on the spot. I imagine it's sometimes an ice and sometimes a sweetmeat, or a cleverly mixed drink. Perhaps it's oftenest enjoyed on Sundays and holidays, but they don't spell it with a *y*."

"I must try to remember. But who made these nice things?"

"Carrie," said Mrs. Winter, with a look of pride. "She baked the biscuit, too."

"I don't think I should like baking. One must get so hot," Evelyn remarked, and turned to Carrie. "Was it hard work?"

Carrie was talking to Dick Halliday, but she looked up and laughed, although there was a touch of color in her face.

"Oh, no," she said. "Anyhow, it was not as hard as cooking for the boys in the woods. I did all the cooking, and they liked the hash I put up."

Jim thought Carrie's western accent was rather marked and wondered why she had said *hash*. Evelyn's questions had been asked with languid good humor, as if she meant to draw Carrie into the talk, but somehow Jim got a hint of antagonism between the girls. This puzzled him and he was glad when Mrs. Halliday began to talk about something else. Evelyn did not support her much, but Mrs. Halliday was firm.

"You must tell us about your adventures," Evelyn said, as they got up, but when they went on the terrace Jim followed Carrie. Although he wanted to talk to Evelyn, Carrie must not feel neglected. She gave him a rather curious smile when he stopped by the stone bench she occupied.

"I allow your English relations have first claim on you to-night," she remarked. "You can talk to me when you like."

"A new claim doesn't wipe out older ones," Jim replied.

"I suppose that is so," Carrie agreed. "You're rather obvious, Jim, but you mean well."

Then she got up and joined Dick Halliday, and Jim felt puzzled.

CHAPTER II

JIM'S GUESTS

After breakfast next morning Jim and his friends went out on the terrace. The tide was full and the woods across the bay looked like islands. A line of white surf marked the edge of the marsh, which ran back, broken by winding creeks, to the foot of the rising ground. Sometimes a gleam of sunshine touched the lonely flats and they flashed into luminous green, silver, and yellow. Then the color faded and the light moving on forced up for a few moments the rugged blue hills against their misty background. The landscape had not the sharp distinctness common in Canada; it was dim and marked by an elusive charm.

Jim began to think about Evelyn. She was somehow like the country. Her charm was strong but not obtrusive. One could not, so to speak, realize Evelyn at a glance; she was marked by

subtle refinements and delicacies that one rather felt than saw. Her English reserve was fascinating, because it hinted at the reward one might get if one could break it down. Carrie, too, was thinking about Evelyn, Mrs. Winter was sewing, and Jake occupied himself by cleaning an old pipe.

"It's some time since we broke camp on the telegraph line," Carrie remarked. "Do you find having nothing to do comes easy, Jim?"

"I don't expect to be idle long. It's prudent to consider before you begin to move."

Carrie felt that Jim was getting English. He had, of course, been to McGill, but since they reached the Old Country he was dropping his Western colloquialisms. She thought it significant that he did so unconsciously.

"Perhaps I'd better tell you how things are, so far as I understand them," he went on. "To begin with, running a house like Langrigg is expensive, and I doubt if I am rich enough to loaf in proper style."

"If you want to loaf in proper style, you must be born and raised for the job," Jake observed.

"That's true, to some extent," Jim agreed. "I was brought up to work and have got the habit. Well, my farm rents amount to something, but when you have paid taxes and repaired the homesteads they don't leave very much. It seems there are people in England willing to pay for owning land; but that plan's not sound."

"Then, you have another?"

"It's not worked out. The leases of two good farms soon fall in and I may manage them myself. Then I own the marsh, which feeds some sheep and cattle in summer. The soil's good alluvial, like the gumbo on the Manitoba plains, and would grow heavy crops if one could keep out the water. Well, we have seen small homesteaders draining Canadian muskegs, a long haul from a railroad, while we have a good market for all farming truck in two hours' ride. The proposition, however, needs some thought. It might cost me all I've got."

Jake's eyes twinkled. "I reckon that wouldn't stop you if you resolved to dyke the marsh. You didn't get much money when you got the estate?"

"I did not. I understand Joseph Dearham was not rich, and when he found his health was breaking down he gave some money to his relations. People here try to get out of the inheritance duties like that; besides, he had not meant to give my father much. However, I have a rich relation, from whom I want nothing, but whom the others think I ought to satisfy."

"Bernard Dearham? Dick Halliday talked about him."

Jim nodded. "Bernard is my grandfather Joseph's brother. Joseph was satisfied to live quietly at Langrigg like a small country gentleman; Bernard got rich by opening some iron mines not far off. Joseph married twice, and Mrs. Halliday and Mordaunt's mother were his second wife's daughters. She was a widow with two children when she married Joseph. So you see, Mrs. Halliday is not my aunt."

"Then, Evelyn Halliday is not your cousin," Carrie remarked.

"I suppose she's not," said Jim. "Anyhow, since I'm a Dearham, a descendant in the male line, it seems I've a stronger claim on Bernard than the others. I don't mean to urge the claim. He didn't give me Langrigg, he left my father alone, and if I keep the place, I'm going to run it as I like."

"Do you mean to keep Langrigg?" Carrie asked.

Jim looked thoughtful. "I imagine so; I don't know yet. There are drawbacks, but something pulls. I'll wait a bit before I decide." He got up and beckoned Jake. "Let's go and see the farms."

They went off and Carrie turned to Mrs. Winter. "He'll stay; we'll lose him soon. I think I knew we would lose him when you found the advertisement——"

She paused and Mrs. Winter remembered that when she had shown the girl the old newspaper Carrie had hesitated for a moment or two. She, however, said nothing and Carrie resumed:

"Well, I wanted to see the Old Country and you needed a rest. The life they live here is fuller than ours; it's something to enjoy it for a time, but we won't stay long, although Jim is kind."

Mrs. Winter gave her a keen glance, but Carrie's face was calm. Then she picked up her sewing and Carrie studied the old house. Langrigg meant much to Jim and she thought would presently mean more. She vaguely understood his feelings and tried to sympathize, although the effort cost her something.

In the meantime, Jim went to see his tenants. He dined with one at noon in an old farm

kitchen and afterwards occupied himself by examining horses, buildings, and agricultural machines. On the whole, he puzzled the small farmers, to whom a landlord of his type was new, although they liked his frankness and answered his direct questions, since it was obvious that this was a man who knew how things were done. Some of the tenants who had known his grandfather talked about Jim afterwards and agreed that he had not much in common with the country gentleman; he was like Bernard Dearham, who opened the famous iron mines.

When they returned in the afternoon across the small turnip and stubble fields, Jim said to Jake, "I've seen enough of the plow land. Let's go across the marsh."

Jake agreed, and by and by Jim, leaning against a gate, indicated the long rows of hedges that ran down the slope and melted into an indistinct mass on the level plain.

"There's nothing much to be done here in the meantime. These folks are wasting labor and money plowing their little fields, but I reckon they're slow and stubborn. It wouldn't pay to hustle them yet."

"No," said Jake, with a twinkle. "I expect it hurts to feel you must keep your hands off, but you seem to know when you've got to allow for the idiosyncrasies of human nature. It's harder to use men properly than horses and machines."

"Some day, perhaps, I'll grub out these hedges and make room for the tractors to rip a furrow right across the farms. I've no use for wasting land on weeds and thorns."

"You think so now," Jake rejoined. "You haven't been here very long and there's something insidious about the country; its old-time customs get hold of one. Then I don't know if the tractor's picturesque, and cutting down trees and hedges might spoil the landscape. It wouldn't be quite so English after you had done."

Jim looked at him rather hard. "Sometimes you're pretty smart. Anyhow, I can't spoil the marsh by covering it with good grass and corn, and if the thing could be done economically, it ought to pay."

"It's possible. Are you keen about the profit? Or do you want a new big job?"

"I'm not going to philosophize; that's your proper line," Jim answered with a laugh. "Let's see if the creeks could be dyked."

They went down the hill and plunged into a belt of tall dry grass, crossed a broad tract of smooth green turf, dotted by thrift and silver weed, and pushed on to the lower flats where the sea-lavender and samphire grew. Then they skirted miry creeks that gradually filled with weeds as they neared dry ground, and went home to Langrigg by the causeway road. Jim was muddy, but happy; although he told himself he had not decided yet, half-formed plans floated through his brain.

A day or two afterwards, Dick Halliday and Mordaunt came over to Langrigg and were shown into the hall. Jim was not there, but his pipe and some books lay about and the others sat down. Presently Dick picked up a book and saw it was the old French romance from which Mordaunt had read a passage at the telegraph shack. He opened it carelessly and then started when he saw, *Franklin Dearham*, written in faded ink, on the first blank page. He looked across at Mordaunt and hesitated, with a vague suspicion in his mind. It was possible the latter had seen the writing when he opened the book at the shack, and if he had—

"You look as if you have found something interesting," Mordaunt remarked.

"It is interesting," said Dick, and felt relieved when he heard a step in the passage. He did not think Mordaunt, sitting some distance off, knew the book.

Next moment Jim came in and stated that he was alone. Mordaunt lighted a cigarette Jim gave him and asked if his friends were staying long.

"I don't know," said Jim. "We have made no plans yet, but I imagine I shall keep Langrigg."

"Do you mean you had thought about selling the estate?" Mordaunt asked, rather sharply.

"I did think about it, but don't know if I went much farther. The matter's complicated."

"Langrigg is rather an expensive house to manage and the farm rents are low," Mordaunt answered in a thoughtful voice. "Have you any money? Perhaps I'm blunt, but I'm a relative."

"I have some. Not enough to help me do all I want."

"You mean to do something, then?"

"If I stay, I'm going to put up the farm rents, though I mean to help my tenants pay. I'm going to enlarge the small fields, alter boundaries, and fix things so the land can be worked on the economical Canadian plan. The drawback is it may cost me much and I must wait for the return."

Dick laughed. "There are other drawbacks and it may cost you more than you know. In this country you can't do what you like, and we resent experiments. If you meddle with old-fashioned customs, you'll raise the neighborhood against you. In a sense, the trees and hedgerows you'd cut down are your neighbors."

"I believe they're mine," Jim rejoined dryly. "However, I don't suppose I'd bother anybody if I dyked and drained the marsh."

"Drain the marsh!" Mordaunt exclaimed. "That's frankly ridiculous! It's a favorite haunt of the Lag geese and, in a dry autumn, I don't know a better spot for snipe."

"There you are, you see!" Dick interposed, with a twinkle. "Perhaps you don't understand that it's a serious matter to disturb a few sportsmen."

"Looks as if I might disturb a number of people before I'm through," Jim replied. "Anyhow, I haven't made my calculations yet and don't know if my money will go round."

"I wonder whether you understand that you are Bernard Dearham's nearest relation and his approval is important?" Mordaunt remarked.

Jim pondered. He liked Dick and thought he trusted him, but he was not certain if he trusted Mordaunt. On the whole, he thought the fellow meant to give him good advice, but he was a type Jim did not know much about. Although he was highly cultivated, Jim thought he had conservative prejudices and an exaggerated pride. The pride was, of course, not obtrusive, but it was there.

"The lawyers hinted something like that and Mrs. Halliday made it plainer," he answered cautiously.

Mordaunt saw he would say nothing more and they were silent for a few moments until Dick got up and said he would ask the gardener for some plants the man had promised his mother. He wanted the plants, but he wanted to think, for he was curious about the French romance. If Lance had seen Franklin Dearham's name, he must have known Jim was his son, and had meant to let him stay in Canada. Lance's manner when they talked about Jim at the shack to some extent justified the supposition. Moreover, while Lance had gone to Langrigg with the object of giving Jim good advice there was something curious about his tone. He was urbane, but one noted a hint of superiority, or perhaps patronage, that the other might resent. All the same, it was not Dick's business and he went to look for the gardener.

In the meantime, Mordaunt said to Jim: "You suggested that your Canadian friends might make a long visit."

"I did; I'd like them to stay for good."

"Do you think it's prudent?" Mordaunt asked quietly.

Jim looked hard at him, with a touch of haughty surprise, and Mordaunt resumed in a conciliatory voice: "Perhaps I'm getting on dangerous ground, but I mean well and if you don't see—. To begin with, have you thought about marrying Miss Winter?"

"I have not. I'm certain she has not thought about marrying me!"

"No doubt, you know," Mordaunt agreed with some dryness. "For all that, my inquiry was perhaps justified. The girl is unformed, but she's beautiful and I think she's clever."

"You can leave Miss Winter out. Now I suppose you have cleared the ground and there's something else?"

Mordaunt made a deprecatory gesture. "I'll be frank, because I don't want you to make mistakes. If you are going to stay at Langrigg, you owe something to the family and yourself. A country gentleman has social duties and much depends on what your neighbors think about you at first. Very well. Your Canadian friends wear the stamp of the rank to which they belong; it was hardly necessary for Mrs. Winter to state that she had kept a small store. These are not the kind of people your neighbors would like to receive. Then Bernard Dearham's family pride is known: I imagine he largely persuaded your grandfather to alter his will."

Jim got up and his face was quietly stern.

"Langrigg is mine; my grandfather gave it to me without my asking for the gift," he said. "I owe my relations nothing and don't acknowledge Bernard Dearham's rule. None of you bothered about my father; you were glad to leave him and me alone. I had no claim on my Canadian friends and they had nothing to gain; but they nursed me when I was ill and my partner stood by me in the blizzards and cold of the North. Now you ask me to turn them down, because they're not the people neighbors I don't know would like to meet! Do you think I will agree?"

Mordaunt shrugged and forced a smile. "Oh, well, in a sense I suppose your attitude is correct. There is obviously nothing more to be said."

Dick came in soon afterwards and Mordaunt went off with him, but he had given Jim a jar and

the latter walked about the terrace until Mrs. Winter and the others returned from a drive. Carrie gave Jim a quick glance as she advanced. She knew his moods and saw he was disturbed. The drive had brought the color to her skin; she looked very fresh and her step was light. Jim felt savage as he remembered Mordaunt's patronizing remark. Carrie *was* beautiful.

"Has something been bothering you, Jim?" she asked.

"It is not important," he replied. "If you own land in this country, it seems you must submit to a number of ridiculous rules and folks won't leave you alone. However, did you like the town?"

"We were charmed. It's a quaint old place and the country round is so green and quiet. Everything's smooth and well-kept; the trees look as if somebody had taught them how they ought to grow. You feel as if all the rough work had been done long since and folks have only to take care of things. I like it all."

"Then, you will be satisfied to stay at Langrigg?"

"For a time. If you want us."

"I'd be happy if you'd stay for good!"

Carrie said nothing for a moment and then smiled.

"That's impossible, though you're very nice. We'll make the most of our holiday; but it's only a holiday."

She turned, rather quickly, and joined Mrs. Winter, who was going into the house.

CHAPTER III

MORDAUNT PONDERES

It was raining and Mordaunt stood by an open window in Mrs. Halliday's drawing-room at Whitelees. A smell of stocks came in, and across the lawn, rows of dahlias, phlox, and autumn lilies made a belt of glowing color against a dark yew hedge. The hedge was neatly clipped and the turf was very smooth. By and by Mordaunt turned and glanced about the room, which he knew well. Whitelees was modern, and although Mrs. Halliday sometimes grumbled about her poverty, its furniture and decoration indicated extravagance. Mordaunt, however, thought there was too much ornament and doubted if some of the pottery was genuine. The room was pretty, but he was a connoisseur and was not satisfied with prettiness. He liked Langrigg better than Whitelees. Langrigg was austere and dignified.

Mordaunt was not at all austere, although he was not effeminate or luxurious. He was a good sportsman, something of an artist, and a traveler. He had talent, and might perhaps have made his mark, if he had not had just enough money to meet his needs and exaggerated dislike for competitive struggle. It had been a bitter disappointment that he had inherited very little of Joseph Dearham's property, although none of his relations suspected this, for Mordaunt knew how to hide his feelings. He was stubbornly conservative and held tenaciously the traditions of his class.

Presently Mrs. Halliday came in. Mordaunt, who knew his aunt well, thought she harmonized with her room. She was a handsome, gracious woman, but one felt now and then that her charm was forced and artificial. After telling Mordaunt to sit down, she remarked:

"I understand you went to Langrigg."

"I did go," said Mordaunt. "My visit was not a success."

"Perhaps it's curious, but Evelyn's judgment was better than ours. She doubted if you would succeed."

"I believe she said you ought to go, because the thing needed a lighter touch than mine."

Mrs. Halliday smiled. "Your touch is not often clumsy, Lance. But what line did Jim take? I suppose we must call him Jim."

"A significant concession, but he certainly shows the Dearham vein! He used some warmth and indulged a little raw sentiment. Expediency doesn't count for much with him."

"You mean his Canadian friends are going to remain?"

"Yes," said Mordaunt. "As long as they like! I imagine they will stay some time."

Mrs. Halliday waited for a moment. She thought Lance understood there was something else she wanted to know, but he was silent and she remarked:

"After all, they might be left in the background. Besides, the girl's mother is there."

"It is hard to keep a Canadian in the background and Jim won't try. Still he made an interesting statement; he has not thought about marrying the daughter!"

"That is some relief. Well, something depends on Bernard."

Mordaunt agreed. Much depended on Bernard. The old man was rich and Mordaunt had much less money than he would like; indeed he had long reckoned on an improvement in his fortune when Bernard died. His claim, however, was not as strong as Jim's, and Bernard was eccentric. But Mrs. Halliday resumed:

"Is Jim able to keep up Langrigg properly?"

"He was not remarkably frank about this. He stated he might not be able to do all he would like."

"Well, I have no doubt you gave him good advice, and your trying to persuade him was generous."

Mordaunt thought he had been generous, because if he had persuaded Jim to rule in a way Bernard approved and the latter made him his heir, all that Jim got would be taken from the others. To some extent, he had been sincere, but he could not claim that he had done his best. A feeling of antagonism had sprung up and perhaps he had let this influence him.

"It's unfortunate Jim was obstinate," Mrs. Halliday went on. "His keeping these people is awkward, but after all it will cost him most, and he is one of us—."

"Jim has Langrigg," said Mordaunt, smiling. "Our duty is to acknowledge and, if needful, indulge him."

"I don't like you when you're ironical," Mrs. Halliday rejoined, and looking up saw that Evelyn had come in. She wondered how long the girl had been there.

"You don't look as if you were satisfied with your visit to Langrigg, Lance," Evelyn said as she sat down.

"I'm resigned."

"That's different from being satisfied. But you were plucky. The matter must have needed tactful management; Miss Winter is attractive."

"Jim is not going to marry her, if that is what you mean; he stated he had not thought about it," Mordaunt said bluntly.

Evelyn laughed. "Then, it's probably true. If he had meant to marry Miss Winter, he would have said so, even if he thought you disapproved. Jim is very much of a Dearham."

"Is this an advantage or a drawback?"

"I don't know," said Evelyn. "It marks the difference between him and us. We're fastidious and complex; the Dearhams are simple and firm."

"A cruder type?"

"Not altogether. Strength and simplicity are dignified. You're an artist and know the value of bold, austere line."

"My notion is, Jim is not as simple as he looks."

"That's rather cheap," Evelyn remarked. "I meant the simplicity of the old Greeks."

"Theirs was cultivated; Jim's is not."

"There are things one does better by instinct than study," said Evelyn, smiling. "But I'm getting bored. Let's talk about something else."

Soon afterwards, Mordaunt drove back to Dryholm, where Bernard had built his ambitious house. Mordaunt had no occupation and generally stopped at Dryholm. There was plenty of room and although the old man was often ironical Mordaunt imagined he liked to have him about. The rain had stopped, the wet road was smooth, and as the car ran past the yellow stubble fields he gave himself to thought.

It was plain that Mrs. Halliday meant to make a friend of Jim and her object was not hard to see since Langrigg gave its owner some importance. Evelyn was curious about Jim; Mordaunt did not know if he attracted her, but the possibility of ruling at Langrigg had no doubt some charm.

She would toy with the idea.

Mordaunt was not in love with Evelyn, but they agreed in many ways, and he had for some time weighed the advantages his marrying her would bring. She was his cousin, but cousins did marry now and then, and since the marriage would consolidate family interests, he imagined their relations would approve. In fact, he had imagined Mrs. Halliday knew his views and he could count on her support. Now, however, he suspected she had gone over to Jim.

For all that, Mordaunt's dissatisfaction was not quite selfish. Jim was something of a savage and meant to manage the estate on business lines. The fellow was going to farm and make his farming pay. If he had been a sportsman and made experiments in agriculture when he had nothing else to do, it would have been different; but this was not Jim's plan. The strange thing was, Jim's notion of dyking the marsh annoyed him more than all; the annoyance was perhaps illogical, but he could not conquer it. Mordaunt was a naturalist and a wildfowler, and did not think there was in England such a haunt of the Lag and black geese as Langrigg marsh. Now Jim, with rude utilitarian ideas, was going to drive the geese away.

The car lurched on the grass by the roadside as it took a corner and Mordaunt, roused by the jolt, concentrated on his driving. When he reached Dryholm he crossed the lawn and stopped by a wheeled chair, in which Bernard Dearham sat with his foot propped up. The old man was tall and strongly made, but had got thin, and his pinched face was marked by deep lines. He had worked with consuming energy and sometimes indulged, for Bernard had nothing of the fastidiousness that marked his relatives. Now his strength was broken and he was bothered by gout.

He dismissed the man who had pushed the chair and gave Mordaunt a quick glance. Bernard's brows were white, but his eyes were keen.

"Take me to the bench out of the wind," he said, and looked down when Mordaunt began to move the chair. "It will give Creighton a job to roll out these marks. The fellow grows fat and lazy and I hate the crunching gravel."

Mordaunt thought the remark was characteristic. The wheel-tracks could hardly be seen on the fine turf, but Bernard disliked untidiness. When they reached the sheltered bench and Mordaunt sat down Bernard looked up and asked: "Where have you been?"

"I was at Whitelees."

"I expect you had something to talk about just now. You and Janet Halliday understand each other well. I don't know if you are confidants or accomplices."

"Perhaps we have made a few innocent plots," Mordaunt admitted with a smile. "However, I imagine it has generally been for the advantage of the family."

Bernard nodded. "Well, I suppose your objects are sometimes good, as far as you see, though I doubt if you always see far enough. But I wondered whether you had gone to Langrigg. It's possible Janet has made some plot for Jim's advantage."

"I hardly imagine him a promising subject for experiments."

"You mean he's not compliant? What else?"

"I haven't known him very long and would sooner reserve my judgment."

Bernard gave him an ironical smile. "You don't want to prejudice me against him? Well, you're always tactful and it's comforting to feel you're sometimes just. However, I want to form an opinion. Write and ask him to come."

"He has friends at Langrigg. Perhaps you know?"

"I do know. Ask his friends. You may state that I'm an old man and am unable to go to him. I can leave you to strike the right note; you have some talent for that kind of thing."

Mordaunt said he would write. He was used to Bernard's bitter humor and on the whole thought it advisable that he should see Jim's friends. It was possible he would get a jar, but one could not tell. The old man was capricious and hard to understand.

"Didn't Evelyn join the party that went to welcome Jim?" Bernard resumed. "Rather a happy thought of Janet's! Do you know how he impressed Evelyn?"

"I do not. She did not give me her confidence," said Mordaunt, as shortly as he durst.

Bernard's eyes twinkled. "Was it necessary? With your talent, one ought not to find it difficult to read a girl's mind."

"I haven't always found it easy," Mordaunt rejoined.

"Well, I suppose Evelyn is really a woman now; when one gets old one forgets that the young

grow up," Bernard remarked. "Besides, she has an admirable model in Janet. But take me in; I soon get cramped in this confounded chair."

Mordaunt set off and on his way to the house carefully skirted a spot where a tree had been uprooted and the turf relaid. To his surprise Bernard made an impatient sign.

"Go straight across!"

They crossed the freshly-sodded belt and when Mordaunt stopped on the terrace Bernard said: "It will not be your job to roll out our tracks."

"I thought it would bother you if I went across," Mordaunt replied.

Bernard gave him a sour smile. "I well know my relations' views about my character and in the main they're just; but they sometimes go wrong when they imagine their rules are mine. Probably you have not felt it would be a relief to plow through things, without bothering about the marks you left."

"No," said Mordaunt, "I don't think I have felt this."

"You're a logical fellow," Bernard rejoined. "Well, for the most part, I have been a slave to my notions of efficiency and order since I was a boy; but at times other feelings rebelled. Then I, so to speak, ran loose and broke things, like the rest of mankind. Moreover, I'm not repentant when I look back on the short-lived outbreaks. They gave me some satisfaction; after all, the Dearham blood is what Canadian Jim would probably call red. I don't know what color yours is, unless you like to think it blue."

Mordaunt said nothing. Bernard was often bitter, particularly when he had gout. When a servant came to help the old man in, Mordaunt went to the library where he wrote a note to Jim. He paused once or twice during its composition. Now he had time to ponder, he began to doubt if it was advisable to let Jim visit Dryholm and imagined he could so turn a polished phrase that it would keep him away. Mordaunt was clever at delicate implication and Jim's blood was red. Perhaps, however, it was not prudent to use his talent, since Bernard might want to see the note.

CHAPTER IV

AN OLD MAN'S CAPRICE

Jim went to Dryholm, although when he opened Mordaunt's note he meant to refuse. A line added in a shaky hand persuaded him, for Bernard had written, "I am lame and cannot come to you." Besides, the invitation was extended to his party and Jim wanted Bernard to see the Winters. They were his friends and he rather hoped Mrs. Winter would talk about the store.

The evening was calm and the sun setting when the car rolled past a lodge half hidden by tall evergreens. A screen of ironwork cut in fine black tracery against the light, and Jake remarked: "That's a noble gate."

"Hand-forged in Belgium, I believe," Jim replied, and they rolled on down an avenue where sunshine and shadow checkered the smooth grass.

The avenue had been planted before the new house at Dryholm was built. The spreading oaks were darkly green, but the beeches had begun to turn and their pale trunks glimmered among splashes of orange and red. On the hillside above the hollow, the birches hung sprays of shining yellow against a background of somber firs. All was very quiet and Carrie sensed a calm she had not remarked in the forests of Canada. There one heard the Chinook in the pine-tops and the rapids brawl.

They sped past a tarn where swans floated among the colored reflections of ancient trees, and then Dryholm broke upon their view across its wide lawn. For a moment, Carrie was vaguely disturbed. She had seen Montreal and London, but the buildings there were crowded with occupants and this was one man's home. Jim, whose clothes she had mended, belonged to people who built such houses. She glanced at him, but his face was inscrutable until he seemed to feel her gaze and gave her a smile. Carrie felt braced. In some ways, Jim had got strangely English, but he was, for all that, the Jim she knew; and she studied the house with a pleasant thrill, as if she were embarking on a new adventure.

Dryholm was very large and modern, but it had dignity and glimmered in the sunset between shadowy woods. The stone was creamy white, with touches of soft pink and gray. Cornices and pillars broke the long, straight front, and there were towers at the ends. Carrie knew nothing about architecture, but she got a hint of strength and solidity. Somehow, she felt relieved; Mordaunt and Mrs. Halliday would not have built such a house. On the whole, she distrusted

them, but it looked as if the head of the family was different.

"It's very fine, Jim," she said. "There's something of Langrigg about it; something you don't feel at Whitelees. The stone is curious."

"I believe it was brought from a distance, but, in a sense, Bernard Dearham built Dryholm of iron."

"Somehow it looks like that," Carrie remarked.

The car stopped in front of a plain arch and Bernard received the party in the hall, where they found Mrs. Halliday, Evelyn, Mordaunt, and some others. Bernard gave Jim his hand and for a minute or two kept Mrs. Winter and Carrie by him. When they went to dinner Mrs. Winter was put next to Bernard, and Carrie, sitting near, looked about with frank curiosity. The room was lofty and spacious. She had not seen such a room except when she dined at a big Montreal hotel, but it had not the lavish decoration she had noted there. At Dryholm, one got a sense of space and calm; nothing glittered and forced itself on one's glance. Carrie thought it was somehow like a church, but rather the big quiet cathedral than the ornate Notre Dame. She had only seen big churches in Montreal.

The west window commanded distant hills that rose, colored dark-blue, against the yellow sky. Shining water touched their feet and one could hear the sea. It was getting dark, however, and soon electric lights began to glow on the paneled ceiling and along the deep cornice. The lamps were placed among the moldings and one scarcely noticed them until the soft light they threw on the table got stronger.

Then Carrie remarked that Mrs. Winter was talking, and Bernard laughed. She had wondered whether she ought to give her mother a hint, and might have done so, for Jim's sake, although it would have hurt her pride; but she was glad she had not. Bernard Dearham did not smile politely, as Mrs. Mordaunt smiled; he laughed because he was amused. Carrie did not know much about English people, but the dinner was obviously a formal acknowledgment of the new owner of Langrigg; and she studied her host. She had at first remarked a puzzling likeness to somebody she knew, and now she saw it was Jim. The likeness was rather in Bernard's voice and manner than his face, although she found it there. Then he looked up and asked:

"Do you like Dryholm?"

"Oh, yes," said Carrie. "Almost as much as I like Langrigg."

Bernard smiled and nodded. "Langrigg has a touch that only time can give. A house matures slowly."

"I think that is so," Carrie agreed. "One feels it in England. A house matures by being used; the people who live there give it a stamp, and perhaps when they go they leave an influence. It's different in Canada. When our houses get out of date, we pull them down."

Bernard looked at her rather keenly. He was a shrewd judge of men and women and saw that she could think.

"You are something of a sentimentalist; I don't know if you are right or not. When I built Dryholm we tried to get the feeling Langrigg gives one, as far as it could be expressed by line. But do you like Whitelees?"

"Whitelees is pretty," Carrie replied with caution.

Bernard's eyes twinkled. "Very pretty. Something new, in fact, after Canada?"

"Yes," said Carrie, who saw he wanted her to talk. She knew he was studying her, but he was not antagonistic like Mordaunt and Mrs. Halliday. "This is why I'd sooner have Langrigg, because I don't find Langrigg new in the way you mean," she resumed. "One gets the feeling you talk about in Canada; not in our houses but in the woods. They're different from the woods you have planted and trimmed. The big black pines grow as they want; sometimes they're charred by fire and smashed by gales. When it's quiet you hear the rivers and now and then a snowslide rolling down the hills."

"Rugged and stern? Well, I imagine the men who built Langrigg long since were rather like your pioneers."

Carrie thought Bernard had something of the spirit of the pioneers; this was why he was like Jim. She felt his strength and tenacity, but he did not daunt her.

"Why did you make Dryholm so big?" she asked.

"You don't think an old man needs so large a house?" he said. "Well, I built for others whom I thought might come after me, but that is done with." He paused and looked down the table at Mordaunt and Evelyn; and then Carrie imagined his eyes rested on Jim, as he added: "Sometimes I am lonely."

He began to talk to Mrs. Winter, who presently remarked: "Oh, yes, I like it in England. I knew it would be fierce in the jolting cars and on the steamer, but Jim insisted, and now I'm glad I let him persuade me."

"Then Jim insisted on your coming?"

"Why, yes. I meant to stay at home."

"Ah," said Bernard, "I think Jim took the proper line."

"Anyhow, I needed a holiday," Mrs. Winter resumed. "It's quiet and calm at Langrigg and I've worked hard. You folks don't get busy all the time, like us in Canada."

Bernard laughed. "There are a large number of busy people in this country, and for a long time I, myself, worked rather hard." He paused and looked down the table with ironical humor. "I was thought eccentric and my relations did not altogether forgive me until I got my reward. All approved then."

Mordaunt's face was inscrutable, but Mrs. Halliday smiled and Evelyn looked at Jim with faint amusement.

"I imagine he meant mother; they sometimes clash," she said. "You don't know Bernard yet. When you do, you will try to make allowances, like the rest of us."

"In the meantime, it does not seem needful. He is kind——"

"Remarkably kind," Evelyn agreed. "In fact, his kindness is puzzling. How far would you go to keep his favor?"

"It would depend," said Jim. "Upon how much I liked him, for one thing. Of course, I would go no distance if he tried to drive."

Evelyn smiled. "Well, I suppose you can take a bold line. If one has pluck, it sometimes pays. At all events, it's flattering to feel one can be oneself. No doubt, you all develop your individuality in Canada."

"We are rather an independent, obstinate lot," Jim owned. "I expect this comes from living in a new country. When you leave the cities, you have nobody to fall back on. You have got to make good by your own powers and trust yourself."

"Ah," said Evelyn, "one would like to trust oneself! To follow one's bent, or perhaps, one's heart, and not bother about the consequences." She was silent a moment and then resumed with a soft laugh: "But unless one is very brave, it's not often possible; there are so many rules."

Jim felt sympathetic. She had laughed, but he thought the laugh hid some feeling. She was generous and strangely refined; Mrs. Halliday was conventional and calculating, and the girl rebelled.

"I expect our host broke a number of the rules," he remarked.

"He did and he paid. Bernard was not rich and when he opened the Brunstock mines nobody would help him. When he sold his farms to buy pumps and engines there was a quarrel with your grandfather and perhaps Bernard has some grounds for bitterness. I don't know if it's strange, but while Joseph Dearham was a plain country gentleman, Bernard, after getting rich in business, wears the stamp of the old school."

Jim agreed. Bernard was obviously not fastidious, like his relatives, but he had the grand manner. This was not altogether what Jim meant, but perhaps it got nearest.

"I think it's because he's fearless—one sees that," he said. "Shabbiness and awkwardness come when one's afraid."

"It's possible," Evelyn answered, with a curious smile. "One hates to be shabby but sometimes one is forced. Pluck costs much."

Then Mrs. Halliday got up, and some of the party went to the drawing-room and some to the terrace. Jim stayed in the hall and mused while he smoked a cigarette. Evelyn had stirred his imagination by a hint that she was dissatisfied and struggled for free development. Well, he had seen Whitelees and was getting to know Mrs. Halliday. To some extent, he liked her, but he could understand the girl's rebellion. However, it was strange she had given him a hint, unless, of course, she had done so unconsciously. When the cigarette was finished he went to the terrace.

The evening was warm and a faint glow lingered in the west. All was very quiet except when a herd of cattle moved about a pasture across the lawn. The party had broken up into small groups and Jim joined Evelyn. Bernard got up stiffly when Carrie came near his bench.

"Tell me about wild Canada. I understand you were in the woods," he said.

"Yes," said Carrie, sitting down. "I went North with Jim and my brother and the boys, when the ice broke up."

"The boys?"

"The rock-cutters and choppers," Carrie explained.

"I see," said Bernard. "Was there no other woman? What did you do?"

"The nearest woman was a hundred miles off. I cooked and looked after the stores. Sometimes I mended the clothes."

"And how were the others occupied?"

Carrie hesitated. Although Bernard had asked her to tell him about Canada, she imagined he wanted to hear about Jim, but after a few moments she began to relate the story of their cutting the telegraph line. She could not have told it to Mrs. Halliday, but she felt Bernard would understand, and he helped her by tactful questions. She wanted him to know what kind of man Jim was and she made something of an epic of the simple tale; man's struggle against Nature and his victory. Indeed, for Bernard was very shrewd, she told him more than she thought.

"But, when you were nearly beaten, you could have sold the copper vein you talked about and used the money," he remarked.

"In a way, we couldn't sell. Baumstein was putting the screw to us; he meant to buy for very much less than the claim was worth. We would have starved before we let him, and for a time we hadn't as much food as we liked."

"After all, you might have been beaten but for the contractor. Why did he help? No doubt, he knew it was a rash speculation."

"Oh, well," said Carrie, "I think he liked Jim. But we wouldn't have been beaten. We'd have made good somehow."

"Still it looks as if the contractor was a useful friend. Did he stop at Vancouver? Does he write to you?"

Carrie hesitated, because she imagined she saw where Bernard's questions led.

"We won't forget him, but he doesn't write and I don't know where he is," she said; and added with a touch of dignity: "I don't see what this has to do with the rest."

"Perhaps it has nothing to do with it," Bernard replied. "Thank you for telling me a rather moving tale."

He let her go and when she passed a bench where Mrs. Halliday and Mordaunt sat the former looked at her companion.

"I suppose you have remarked that Bernard has been unusually gracious to the girl and her mother. Is it his notion of a host's duty? Or is it something else?"

"I imagine it's something else," Mordaunt replied.

"But what? Does he want to annoy us?"

"It's possible he thought he might do so. Are you annoyed?"

"I am certainly surprised."

"Oh, well," said Mordaunt; "perhaps he had another object. I don't know. He's rather inscrutable."

Mrs. Halliday got up. "I thought we could be frank, Lance. After all, our habit is to take Bernard's cleverness for granted. He has a bitter humor and the thing may only be an old man's caprice."

She went off and when soon afterwards the party began to break up Bernard gave Jim a cigar in the hall.

"I note that you and your young relations are already friends," he said. "Dick's a fine lad; he's generous and honest, although I doubt if he will go far. Evelyn, of course, has no rival in this neighborhood."

"That hardly needs stating," Jim replied.

Bernard twinkled and his glance rested on a beautiful painted vase. "Your taste is artistic; it looks as if you had an eye for color and line. In a sense, Evelyn is like this ornament. She's made of choice stuff; costly but fragile. Common clay stands rude jars best."

Jim was puzzled and half-annoyed, because he could not tell what Bernard meant; but the latter began to talk about something else.

"You were a miner for a time, I think," he presently remarked. "One would expect you to know gold when you see it."

"It's sometimes difficult," said Jim. "As a rule, gold is pure. It doesn't form chemical alloys, but it's often *mixed* with other substances."

"So that the uninstructed pass it by!" Bernard rejoined. "One might make an epigram of that, but perhaps it would be cheap. Well, I must wish the others good night. I hope you'll come back soon and bring your friends."

Jim put his party in the car and drove off, feeling strangely satisfied. Evelyn had been gracious and although he did not altogether understand Bernard he liked him better than he had thought.

CHAPTER V

SHANKS' DABBIN

Shortly after his visit to Dryholm, Jim returned, one morning, from the market town, where he had gone to see his lawyer and banker. When he reached Langrigg he found Jake on the terrace.

"Doing nothing makes me tired," the latter remarked. "I know you want to keep us, and mother and Carrie like it here, but we can't stay for good."

"Your mother and sister can stay until they have had enough, and I hope that won't be soon; but I know you, Jake, and think you're mean. Anyhow, you can get rid of your scruples, because I'm going to give you a job. I've decided to drain the marsh."

"Labor's cheap in this country, but I reckon it's some job. However, now there's something doing——"

"You'll stay and see me out?" Jim suggested. "Thank you, partner! Doesn't seem much use in stating that what is mine is yours, but I wish you'd get it. Another thing; this draining is a business proposition and we're partners in that sense, too. Now we'll tell your mother."

They told Mrs. Winter at lunch, and Jim saw that she hesitated and looked at Carrie. The girl's face was, however, inscrutable, and she gave no sign. Jim felt puzzled. He thought Mrs. Winter liked Langrigg and she had developed since she came. She was not so thin, she had lost her careworn look and gained a certain ease of manner. At the store, she had been highly-strung and restless; now she was happily calm. Moreover, she was making her influence felt and quietly taking control. Jim had noted that things were done better and cost him less. He wanted her to stay, because he thought she needed a rest and he would miss her if she went.

"Well," she said, doubtfully, "if you are all satisfied——"

"I am satisfied," Jim declared. "I imagine Jake is, but Carrie hasn't told us yet."

Carrie gave him a quick glance and he thought her color was rather high.

"You are kind," she said. "Mother looks younger than she has looked for long and perhaps we had better accept. But it is a big undertaking to drain the marsh. When do you begin?"

"I thought we might begin this afternoon. However, I don't expect to drain it all right off. There's a pretty dry piece where I mean to start. I reckon I've money enough for the experiment, and can develop my plans afterwards when I see what the first lot costs."

Carrie laughed and the hint of strain all had felt vanished. "You are certainly the hustling Jim we knew," she said. "I feel as if we were back in the woods."

After lunch Jim crossed the marsh with Jake and stopped where a ridge of higher ground broke off at the edge of a muddy creek. In the corner, partly sheltered by a bank of gorse, stood a small white house with a roof of rusty iron where the thatch had been. The whitewash had fallen off in places, exposing a rough, granulated wall, for the house was a dabbin, built of puddled clay. A window was broken and the door hung crookedly. Except for a few rows of withered potatoes, the garden was occupied by weeds. Three or four shellducks, hatched from wild birds' eggs, paddled about the creek.

"Shanks' dabbin; his father squatted here," Jim remarked. "I reckon I'm going to have trouble with the fellow."

He opened the broken gate and two men came out. One was bent and moved awkwardly, but Jake imagined that rheumatism rather than age had stiffened his joints. He looked at Jim with sullen suspicion. The other was young and strongly made.

"I've come to give you an offer, Shanks," Jim began. "This house is not fit to live in; I want you to use the cottage at Bank-end instead. There's a good piece of garden and a row of fruit trees."

"Dabbin's bad, but it's mine," said Shanks. "You canna put me oot."

"I don't want to put you out; I want you to go. Anyhow, the dabbin isn't yours. You have no title to the ground and I understand have been warned off, but we won't bother about that. Bank-end cottage is dry and comfortable and you can have it for your lifetime."

"I willun't gan."

Jim turned to the younger man. "This place is damp and falling down. Can't you persuade your father?"

"I'm none for trying. He has t' right o' it."

There was silence for a few moments and then Shanks asked: "What for do you want the bit hoose?"

"I want to pull it down. The dyke I'm going to build starts here and the new cut for the creek must go through your garden."

Shanks looked at his son and remarked with dull surprise: "He's gan t' dyke marsh!"

The other said nothing and Shanks turned to Jim. "If you were letten dry out marsh, t' wild geese and ducks wad gan."

"It's possible. We'll raise good grass and corn instead. Dairy cows are worth more than shellducks."

"But you'll niver be letten," Shanks replied doggedly.

"Shucks!" said Jim. "The marsh is mine. Although you have no claim to this place, I'll give you Bank-end, the garden, and if needful the small field. You and your son can make pretty good pay there if you like to work. If you'd sooner loaf and shoot, there's the creek and sands."

"T' lag geese follow marsh," Shanks insisted.

Jim pondered and Jake studied the others. He had not seen men like these in Canada, where some of the Indians owned good farms and those who hunted had first-rate guns and canoes. Shanks and his son were ragged and dirty. They slouched and looked slack and dull, although now and then the younger man's eyes gleamed cunningly. Then Jim said:

"We won't argue about it. The dabbin must come down and when you're ready to move to Bank-end you can tell my teamster to take your household fixings along. If this doesn't meet the bill, I'll give you a hundred pounds and you can go where you like."

Shanks said nothing and Jim went off. When they were out of hearing Jake remarked: "I allow you had to be firm, but I don't like it, Jim. Those fellows are what we call bad men."

"I imagine we have been up against worse."

"That's so. All the same, I wish you had been able to leave them alone."

"I can't leave them alone, because the dyke must cross that corner of the creek. They're about the meanest whites I've met, and I certainly don't want them at Bank-end. I'd sooner they took the hundred pounds and quit."

"How do they live?"

"By wildfowling and fishing, though I'm told they snare rabbits and poach pheasants."

"Well, I suppose you're giving Shanks his chance of making good. The trouble is, he's forced to take the chance, whether he wants or not. Some folks would sooner live like dogs than decent citizens."

"Do you think one ought to indulge their prejudice?"

"I don't," Jake admitted. "It would be bad economy. For all that I'd watch the fellows."

They let it go and talked about Jim's plans as they crossed the short grass where the silverweed spread its carpet of yellow flowers. They trampled through belts of withered thrift and

skirted winding creeks where tall reeds shook their bent leaves in the searching wind. Light and shadow sped across the marsh, and a flock of plover, shining white and black, circled above the sands. Jake got a sense of space and loneliness he had not expected to feel in England, but he smiled as he noted Jim's brisk step and the sparkle in his eyes. He knew his comrade and saw he was happy. The marsh was something to conquer and the struggle would absorb his energies.

Next day Jim returned to the market town. He was occupied for some time ordering tools, and driving back in the afternoon, hesitated as he got near the cross road that led to Whitelees. He wanted to see Evelyn, and Mrs. Halliday had told him to come when he liked, but it was perhaps significant that he wanted also to get on with his draining plans. Seeing Evelyn was a satisfaction he unconsciously reserved for his leisure; she was not, like Carrie, to some extent his working partner and critic. He took the road to Whitelees and smiled. Perhaps Carrie was patient when he thought her keen: it was possible that she was sometimes bored.

Mrs. Halliday received him in a room that looked full of ornaments and flowers, and gave him tea in beautiful china. He was half-afraid to handle the fragile cup and plate and hesitated about eating his slice of dainty cake. He had been examining machines and thought his clothes smelt of oil; somehow he felt big and awkward. By and by Mrs. Halliday asked what had occupied him in town, and he told her about his plans. Evelyn looked interested.

"If you begin your dyke where you propose, won't Shanks' dabbin be in the way?"

"The dabbin must come down," Jim replied.

A question from Mrs. Halliday led to his relating his interview with Shanks, and Evelyn said, "Could you not have left the old man his cottage? After all, it is picturesque."

"It isn't picturesque when you are near. Does beauty go with dirt and neglect?"

"Perhaps it does not. I suppose the old Greeks gave us our standard of beauty and they attained it by careful cultivation. For all that, they rather conventionalized their type and one likes people with pluck enough to strike an independent note. To some extent, one can sympathize with Shanks, because he won't be clean by rule."

Jim unconsciously looked about the room, and Evelyn laughed. "Oh," she said, "we don't copy the Greeks! Their model was austere simplicity, the bold, flowing line: but we are luxuriously modern. However, it would have been a graceful plan to leave Shanks alone."

"It wouldn't have been sound. You can't neglect a job that ought to be put over, because you'd like to be graceful."

"You're not Greek," said Evelyn. "You're Roman."

"Then, if I get your meaning, Shanks is a barbarian, and the barbarians who stood up against Roman order and efficiency were crushed. It's probably lucky for Europe the legions marched over them."

"I suppose one must agree. It looks as if I must try again. What about the king who coveted the vineyard?"

"To begin with, the other man owned the vineyard, but the ground Shanks occupies is mine. Then it was a vineyard, while the Shanks homestead is a hovel in a weed-choked garden lot. Anyhow, if you'd like it, I'll see if it is possible to leave his place alone."

Evelyn was flattered. She enjoyed the sense of power, but she hesitated. Jim was easy to understand and had gone farther than she had thought. To let him make a concession that might cost him extra work would give him a claim, and she did not want him for a creditor yet.

"Oh, no," she said carelessly, "you mustn't change your plans! I was indulging a romantic sentiment and expect you know what you ought to do. But you were nice when you were willing to think about the thing."

Then Mrs. Halliday began to talk and presently Jim got up.

"I must go," he said. "I didn't know I had stayed so long."

Evelyn gave him her hand and smiled. "I expect you will be occupied, but if you have time to come back you will find us at home."

"Thank you," said Jim. "I was half-afraid I'd bored you. I'll certainly have time."

He went out and Mrs. Halliday looked at Evelyn thoughtfully. "On the whole, I imagine you were tactful. I expect you saw Jim's offer to leave Shanks alone was not made without an effort."

"I did see," Evelyn admitted. "I don't know if it was flattering or not." She paused and resumed with a touch of color: "For all that, I did not refuse because I was tactful; one sometimes gets tired of acting. Besides, it would be thrown away on Jim. He's not accomplished and critical like Lance; he's frank and strong."

"He is worth cultivating," Mrs. Halliday remarked, picking up a book. She knew when to stop and Evelyn now and then developed a rebellious mood.

For a week Jim was occupied bringing tools and materials from the town and clearing the ground. Shanks gave no sign that he meant to move, until one morning Jim's teamster asked: "Am I to gan t' dabbin and tak' a load to Bank-end?"

Jim told him to go and turned to Jake. "That's fixed! I've been holding back for a day or two and now we can push ahead. The dabbin must come down before we stop to-night."

In the evening, Jake and Carrie went with him across the marsh. The workmen had gone but wheelbarrows, spades, and planks lay about, and a bank of fresh soil touched the edge of the neglected garden. Gray clouds drifted across the gloomy sky, a cold wind tossed the reeds, and the dabbin looked strangely forlorn in the fading light. Carrie shivered as she entered with Jim, who carried a coil of fuse and a tin box. The clay walls were stained by damp and the broken window was grimed by dirt. A few peats occupied a corner, and a pile of ashes, on which tea-leaves and scraps of food had been thrown, stretched across the floor from the rusty grate. Jim went to the window and began to cut the fuse.

"I've got things ready and might have waited until to-morrow but the job's been bothering me and I want to put it over," he said. "Do you think I'm harsh?"

"No," said Carrie, firmly. "Shanks is white trash and lives like a hog. They wouldn't have stood for him a month at our settlements. But how do you think he'll use Bank-end?"

Jim smiled. "I expect I'll have to burn down the cottage when he has done with it; his son is certainly not going to stop there afterwards. I don't know if a rich man is justified in loafing or not. We'll leave that to the economists, but I've frankly no use for the fellow who wants to loaf at other folk's expense. However, I'll fix the powder and we'll pull out. I don't like the job."

Carrie nodded. "You are a builder, Jim, but before one builds one must clear the ground. Things must be pulled down."

"You're a staunch friend," said Jim. "You always understand and generally approve."

"Perhaps it's because we often agree; but if I were really staunch, I'd tell you when I thought you wrong. This needs some pluck."

"I'd weigh what you told me."

Carrie was silent for a moment, thinking about Evelyn. The girl had, so to speak, dazzled Jim. Carrie did not approve, but could not meddle.

"I wonder!" she remarked. "Anyhow you must hustle. It's getting dark."

After a few minutes Jim lighted the fuse and they went out and stood some distance off. The light had nearly gone, and the dabbin loomed dark and desolate against a belt of tossing reeds. Jim thought an indistinct figure stole through the gloom of the hedge, and he shouted a warning.

The figure vanished. There was a flash behind the broken window and the shock of an explosion. For a moment the hovel was filled with light; then it tottered and a cloud of smoke rolled about the falling walls. Blocks of hard clay splashed in the creek and fell about the marsh. The smoke cleared and Carrie saw the dabbin had gone. A pile of rubbish, round which thin vapor drifted, marked the spot it had occupied. A man stood on the end of the ridge of high ground, his bent figure outlined against the sky, holding up his arms as if in protest. Then he vanished, and Jim and the others started silently for Langrigg.

CHAPTER VI

THE THORN HEDGE

Mist drifted about the hollows and the new moon shone between the motionless light clouds. The air was damp and Jim buttoned his driving-coat as he talked to Bernard on the steps at Dryholm. His small car stood near the arch, with its lights glistening on the dewy lawn.

"Your lamps are dim," said Bernard. "If you will wait a minute, I'll send them to the garage."

Jim said he knew the road and the lamps would burn until he got home; and Bernard resumed: "I expect you know that what you are doing at the marsh won't make you popular."

"Lance Mordaunt hinted something like that, but I don't see why people should grumble," Jim

replied. "The marsh is mine."

"Your title's good," Bernard agreed. "Since the ground is not enclosed, Joseph didn't bother about sporting rights and your neighbors took it for granted they could shoot a few ducks and snipe when they liked. The sport's rough for men who shoot hand-reared pheasants, but there's some satisfaction in killing birds that are really wild."

"There is some satisfaction. The game I've shot was certainly wild; in fact, I sometimes took steep chances when I missed. When you get after a bull moose or a cinnamon bear it's prudent to hold straight. Well, I'd sooner my neighbors liked me, but don't mean to keep my land waste for them to play on."

Bernard nodded. "You are not afraid of unpopularity? However, I think I'd have got rid of Shanks, instead of sending him to Bank-end. The fellow's cunning and there's some ground for believing him revengeful."

"It doesn't look as if he could injure me."

"It might pay to watch him," Bernard rejoined. "Some time since, Jones, my gamekeeper, caught Tom Shanks and another netting partridges. It was obvious that old Shanks had helped, but there was some difficulty about the evidence." Bernard paused, and smiled as he resumed: "I imagine my friends on the Bench used their best efforts to convict, but folk seemed to think it prudent not to tell all they knew, and while Tom Shanks went to jail his father got off. Afterwards Jones had a remarkable run of bad luck. The young pheasants died about the coops, his own ferret killed his hens, and he lost a fine setter he was training. Then he had an adventure one night in a shooting-punt that ought not to have leaked."

"I'll watch out," said Jim, as he started his car.

He did not think about Shanks as he drove up the avenue, where the leaves were falling, and down a long hill. In the distance he saw the Whitelees lights and now and then, farther off, the faint shining of the sea. Mist that melted and gathered again drifted about the low ground. Jim's thoughts sometimes dwelt on Evelyn and sometimes on the marsh. Evelyn was friendly and he had undertaken a big job that he liked. He was carrying out a duty, honoring a claim his inheritance made on him; he wanted to leave Langrigg better than he found it. Jim sprang from a land-owning stock, and felt that since he had got the estate for nothing he must justify his ownership and prove he was worthy of the gift and the woman he hoped to marry.

When he ran out upon the low ground the mist got thicker and rolled in low belts across the fields. The carbide in his lamps was exhausted and the feeble beam that leaped up with the jolts flickered puzzlingly. He knew where he was, however, when he reached the marsh road that ran like a causeway across the boggy ground. Tall, stiff reeds bordered the straight track. The lights were sinking fast and since he must reach Langrigg before they went out he let the engine go.

The fog streamed past him, the wind whipped his face, and he clenched the wheel as he rocked with the jolts. He was not far from home now and looked for the curve where his road branched off. The curve was sharp and ran between two rows of old thorn trees; Jim remembered that he had meant to cut them down. There was a deep ditch between the trees and a belt of rough grass, then the narrow road, and a ditch on the other side. After a few minutes a dark mass loomed in the haze and Jim knew it would be prudent to slacken speed, but his lamps were nearly out, and a little farther on he must avoid an awkward gatepost.

A shadowy tree came out of the fog and he felt the wheels sink in boggy soil. He was obviously taking too wide a sweep, and he turned inwards. The damp road was indistinct, but he could see the white reeds that grew along its edge, and the trunks of the thorns across the ditch. He was going round the corner, looking for a triangular patch of grass, when he felt a violent jolt and fell forward on the wheel. The car swerved and the front wheels plunged into the soft ground between the road and ditch.

Jim was badly shaken, but he got the car straight while she plowed up the grass. Then the wheel was torn from his grasp, the car swerved the other way, and he jammed [Transcriber's note: jammed?] on the brakes, knowing it was too late. He felt her run across the road; she rocked as she took the grass, and then he was thrown out and knew nothing more.

In the meantime, Jake and Carrie stood on the steps at Langrigg, talking to Halliday and Mordaunt. The latter had brought a car from Dryholm and it stood close by with its lamps burning. The night was calm, the noise of the sea came out of the distance, and presently they heard the throb of a car running across the marsh.

"That's Jim," Carrie said to Dick. "Since you wanted to see him, you had better come in again."

Dick hesitated. He had not come to see Jim, and Carrie noted his irresolution with some amusement.

"After all, it's not important and I want to get home for dinner," he said, and turned to Mordaunt. "Start your engine, Lance."

As Mordaunt went down the steps the throb of the other car stopped suddenly and they heard a faint crash.

"Hallo!" Dick exclaimed. "What was that?"

"I imagine Jim has cut the corner too fine," said Mordaunt. "Come on!"

He ran down the steps and as he started the car the others jumped up. Mordaunt had not meant to take Carrie, but he did not stop and the car sped away. He let her go full-speed down the hill, dashed through the awkward gateway, touching the post, and drove furiously to the bend where the road ran on to the marsh. Then there was a violent jerk as he put on the brakes, and the beam of the head-lamps touched and stopped upon a tilted car that lay with the wheels on one side in the ditch.

"Bring a lamp," said Mordaunt coolly, and next moment they were all out of the car and running across the grass.

A soft hat lay in the road, and broken glass was scattered about, but for a minute or two they could not see Jim. He was not in the car and the grass and rushes were long. Then Jake stooped down, holding out the lamp.

"This way!" he shouted. "He's in the ditch!"

The others gathered round him as the light searched the ditch. Jim lay with his legs in the water and the upper part of his body pressed against the bank by the front wheel of the car. His eyes were shut, his face was white and stained by blood. Jake's hand shook so that he could hardly hold the lamp.

"We must get him out right now," he said hoarsely. "The wheel's on his chest. If she slips down, she'll break his ribs."

For a few moments they hesitated, standing in the strong illumination of the lamp on Mordaunt's car that picked out their faces against the dark. Jake wore an American dinner-jacket, Carrie a thin evening dress, and she had no hat. Dick noted that her hands were clenched and her mouth worked. She had, of course, got a shock; Winter ought not to have let her see Jim, but the keenness of her distress was significant. Dick, however, could not dwell on this just then. They must get Jim out and it was going to be difficult. The car rested insecurely on the edge of the bank and the broken branches of the thorns. If they disturbed it rashly, it might slip down and crush the unconscious man. Mordaunt was the first to see a way and jumped into the ditch.

"Come down and get your backs under the axle," he said.

They obeyed and, standing in the water, tried to lift the car. For a few moments it looked impossible, because the weight above forced their feet into the mud; then, while they gasped and strained, the wheel rose an inch or two from Jim's chest.

"Lift him, Carrie! Lift him now!" Jake shouted in a breathless voice.

Carrie seized Jim's coat and tried to drag him up. He was heavy; she choked with the tense effort and did not know afterwards how it was made. For all that, she dragged him up a foot and then to one side. The strain was horrible, but she held on and thought she saw the car tilt and the back wheel tear the peaty soil from the top of the bank.

Jake shouted something, Dick fell back, and she saw that Jim was clear of the wheel. For a moment, Mordaunt's face stood out against the gloom. It was dark with blood, his teeth shone between his drawn-back lips, and the veins on his forehead were horribly swollen. Then there was a crash among the thorns, and the car seemed to go right over. Mordaunt staggered and fell, and somebody helped her to drag Jim up; Carrie did not know if it was Dick or Jake. Next moment Mordaunt crawled out of the ditch and joined them. He gasped and the water ran from his clothes.

"Are you hurt?" Carrie asked. "You got all the weight at the last."

Mordaunt smiled. It looked as if he could not speak, and while Carrie wiped Jim's face Jake beckoned Dick.

"Bring your car. We must get him home."

Dick turned the car and they put Jim on the floor with his head against Carrie's knee. When they started she bent and held his shoulders, and in a few minutes they rolled up the drive. Then Carrie pulled herself together, gave orders, and took control; and when they had carried Jim to his room gave Mordaunt her hand.

"You saved him," she said. "We won't forget!"

"I happened to see a plan before the others; that's all," Mordaunt replied. "I'll get off now and send a doctor."

He ran downstairs and Carrie heard his car start while she stood with her mother by Jim's bed. Her face was white, but it flushed when Jim opened his eyes.

"What's the matter? Where am I?" he asked.

"You're at home," said Carrie. "You mustn't talk."

"I don't want to talk. Things are all going round," Jim rejoined and shut his eyes.

After a time he began to breathe regularly and Mrs. Winter bent over him.

"He's stunned; something hit his head. I don't think it's worse than that," she remarked. "I guess we can't do much until the doctor comes."

Mordaunt sent a doctor from the town and when he had seen him start went with Dick into the smoking-room at a quiet hotel. There was nobody else about until a waiter came, and Mordaunt sat down by the fire.

"I feel we need a drink," he said. "It was a near thing when the car went over. I can hardly bend my back, and it will, no doubt, be worse in the morning."

"You held her long enough for Miss Winter to pull Jim out," Dick replied. "It's lucky you were able. My feet slipped, and although Winter is pretty strong I imagine he was beaten. All the weight came on you; I don't understand how you held on."

"One can sometimes borrow a little extra strength from keen excitement and I remembered that if I let go the wheel would come down again on Jim's chest. He might not have stood another shock."

"He was badly knocked out," Dick agreed. "I expect you saved his life."

Mordaunt smiled. "Now I'm cool, I begin to think I was rash."

"Rot!" Dick exclaimed. "You don't mean this and it's a bad joke!"

"We don't owe Jim much; if he had stopped in Canada, Langrigg would have been yours and mine. Then it begins to look as if Bernard approved the fellow, and I'm willing to admit I had rather counted on getting a good share of his money. You and Evelyn would have got the rest."

"After all, Bernard's money is his. He's just, and I don't imagine he'll leave us out. We're not rich, but if he does give Jim some of my share, I won't miss it very much."

"I shall miss mine," Mordaunt rejoined.

Dick was quiet for a minute or two, and then looked up. "You remember reading the French romance the night we reached the telegraph shack! Did you see Franklin Dearham's name in the book?"

"Yes," said Mordaunt very coolly, "I did see it." He paused, looking hard at Dick, and went on: "Of course, I know what this implies. There was some doubt, but the probability was the telegraph linesman was our relation and the owner of Langrigg. Well, I thought he was not the man to have the estate, and might be happier if we left him in the woods. It was not altogether because I wanted my share of what was his."

Dick did not doubt Lance's sincerity, but he had got a jar. In a way, Lance had tried to rob Jim.

"What do you think about him now?" he asked with some awkwardness.

"What I thought then; he is not the man to own Langrigg and ought to have stayed in Canada. I'd have been resigned, had you got the estate, but this fellow will make us a joke. He has the utilitarian ideals of a Western lumberman."

"Bernard is the head of the house and I doubt if he'd agree. You admitted he approved Jim."

"I did; I don't like his approving."

"Oh, well," said Dick. "Since you held up the car, I suppose you're entitled to criticize Jim. If you hadn't made an effort, he would probably have been killed. You can grumble about him as much as you like; we'll remember what you did!"

Mordaunt smiled rather curiously and drained his glass.

"We are late for dinner and my clothes are wet," he remarked.

They went out; and both were quiet as they drove to Whitelees.

CHAPTER VII

THE FENCING WIRE

Next morning Carrie, getting up early because she had not slept much, heard Jim's step in the passage outside her room. He went rather unsteadily downstairs and a few minutes afterwards she found him sitting on the terrace wall. He was pale and his face was cut; but he had taken off the bandage.

"You oughtn't to be out," she said.

"Why not?" he asked.

"You were badly shaken. The doctor said we must keep you quiet."

"He probably didn't state how long, and I've been quiet all night. I certainly got a knock; imagine my head went through the glass, but I feel my proper self again, and don't see any reason for staying in bed."

Carrie gave it up. She knew Jim pretty well and asked where he was going.

"I want to look at the car," he said. "I don't know why she left the road. But how did you find me and bring me home?"

Carrie told him, and he looked thoughtful.

"I was in the ditch with the wheel on me? This accounts for my side's feeling sore. How did you lift the car?"

"The others got into the ditch. A wheel began to slip and I thought the weight would overpower them; but Lance Mordaunt made a tremendous effort and held up the axle until we pulled you out."

Jim knitted his brows and looked across the lawn while he mechanically felt for his pipe. The morning was clear with scattered clouds and the grass was silvered by dew. The hills were sharp and belts of light and shadow checkered the marsh. In the distance, the sea sparkled.

"If Jake or Dick had held her up, I could have understood," he said.

"It was Lance," Carrie insisted. "Why are you puzzled?"

"For one thing, I imagine he doesn't like me," Jim replied and indicated by a gesture the old house, and the sweep of smooth pasture and yellow stubble that rolled down the hill. "Perhaps it's not strange. I have taken all this from him!"

"But you took it as much from Dick."

"That is so," Jim agreed. "Dick's different. He's careless; I don't think he feels things. However, I must thank Lance." He paused and resumed: "The boys were in the ditch and I was under the car. Who pulled me out?"

"I did," said Carrie, blushing. "There was nobody else."

Jim took her hand. "My dear! When I needed help before, you were about. But that ditch is four feet deep and I'm heavy."

Carrie pulled her hand from his and smiled. "You are heavy, Jim, and it was something of a strain. However, I'll come with you, if you are going down the hill."

"To take care of me?" said Jim, with a twinkle. "If you don't mind, I'd sooner go alone."

He got up, and seeing that his step was firm, she let him go. It was not a caprice that he would not take her, but when she returned to the house she sent Jake after him.

As he went down the hill Jim thought about Mordaunt. The man was something of a puzzle, and Jim admitted that he had, perhaps, not been just when he accounted for his antagonism. Lance, no doubt, felt that he ought to have got Langrigg, but he was not altogether moved by disappointed greed. Their antagonism went deeper than that. Lance was a conventionalist; he clung instinctively to traditions that were getting out of date. In fact, Jim thought he would have been a very fine country gentleman had he inherited Langrigg sixty years since. Lance was what horse-ranchers called a throw-back; in a sense, he belonged to an older generation.

There was another thing. Jim imagined Lance felt Evelyn's charm, and although they were cousins, he understood cousins sometimes married, with their relatives' approval, when the

marriage would advance the interests of the family. It was possible that he might hurt Lance worse than by robbing him of Langrigg.

Yet Lance had held up the car for him and run some risk of being killed. After all, this did not clash with Jim's notion of his character. Lance might dislike the man he rescued, but he had the instincts of an English gentleman. Then Jim stopped and looked about, for he had reached the thorn hedge.

A belt of peat, checkered by white tufts of wild cotton, ran back from the road, and a wire fence joined the hedge at a right angle. Some of the posts had fallen and lengths of wire lay about. Jim looked at the wire thoughtfully, and then went on to the spot where broken glass and torn up soil marked the scene of the accident. Then he stopped again and lighted his pipe. In the Canadian woods he had now and then trusted to his rifle to supply his food, and tracking large game trains one's observation. One must guess an animal's movements by very small signs. A broken twig or a disturbed stone tells one much. Jim looked for some such clew that might help him, so to speak, to reconstruct the accident.

He remembered a sudden jolt and the front wheels skidding. They had obviously struck something, and when he got the car straight had skidded again the other way. The marks the tires had made indicated this, and he examined the neighboring ground. The silverweed that covered the peaty soil between the road and ditch was not much crushed. He had, as he remembered, not gone far on that side before he, for a moment, recovered control of the car. The real trouble began when it swerved again and ran across the road. Something had caught the wheels and interfered with the steering.

Jim looked for a big stone, but could find none; besides, it was improbable that he had hit the stone twice, and sitting down by the overturned car he thoughtfully finished his pipe. The car must be got out of the ditch, but this was not important, and he dwelt upon the fencing wire; he had a hazy notion that the obstacle he had struck was flexible. By and by he heard a step, and Jake came up.

"I don't know if you ought to be about," the latter said. "It will be an awkward job to get the car into the road."

"I'm not bothering about the car," Jim replied. "I want to find out why she ran into the ditch."

"You don't know, then?"

Jim indicated the wheel-marks and told Jake about the skidding. "She went off at an angle and I couldn't pull her round," he concluded.

"Do you expect to find the steering-gear broken?"

"Not unless it broke after she skidded."

Jake gave him a keen glance. "I begin to see! Well, people sometimes find trouble coming to them when they won't leave things alone. But what kind of a clew do you expect to get?"

"A mark on a thorn trunk; we'll look for one," said Jim. "Suppose you take the other side!"

He walked a few yards along the ditch, examining the bottom of the trunks, and presently stopped and put his foot on the other bank. Then he beckoned Jake and indicated a few scratches on the bark of a thorn. The rough stem was tufted with dry moss and for an inch or two this was crushed.

"I reckon something has been fastened to this tree," he said. "If we can find another mark on the opposite row, I'll be satisfied."

They went across and after a few moments Jake said, "Here it is!"

Jim studied the mark and nodded. "Very well! I think we'll get into the field and look at the old fence wire. I want a piece seven or eight yards long."

After pulling about the wire that lay in the grass, they found a piece. One end was bent into a rough hook, and although the other was nearly straight Jim noted a spot where the galvanizing was cracked.

"It has been bent here twice," he said. "Pulled over into a hook and then pulled back. You can see how the zinc has flaked."

They sat down on a bank and Jake remarked: "I think you ought to be satisfied. But what are you going to do about it?"

"Lie low and watch out. That's all in the meantime. I want the man who fixed the wire across the road to give himself away."

"Don't you know who he is?"

"I think I know. It's not quite enough."

"Perhaps it's not," Jake agreed. "You want to be able to show other folks he did the thing? The trouble is, he may try again!"

"Then it will be my fault if he gets me. I've had fair warning."

"Your nerve is pretty good; I knew this before," Jake remarked. "Well, I suppose nothing's to be said about it until you have some proof? Now we'll go back to breakfast."

They returned to Langrigg, and after breakfast Jim went to the marsh, where the men he had engaged were at work. Soon after he had gone, a car from Dryholm came up the drive and Carrie met Bernard Dearham on the steps.

"I came to ask how Jim is. Lance told me about the accident," he said. "I expect you won't let me see him yet?"

"You might see him if you crossed the marsh. He is getting busy there," Carrie replied.

"But he was unconscious when Lance left."

Carrie smiled. "Yes. He got up at seven o'clock this morning and went out. That's the kind of man he is!"

"Then we needn't be disturbed about him," Bernard replied and indicated a stone bench in the sun. "I cannot walk far and there is no road across the marsh. Can you spare a few minutes to talk to me?"

"Why, of course," said Carrie, and Bernard waited until she sat down. Although he thought she knew his importance, she was not anxious to please him; but she did not assert her independence. The girl had an ease of manner he approved and, if she remained at Langrigg, would soon acquire the touch of polish she needed. But he pulled himself up. In the meantime, he was going too fast.

"I understand you nursed Jim once before," he said. "Did you not use your authority to keep him in the house this morning?"

"I did not," Carrie replied, with a twinkle. "Looks as if you didn't know Jim yet! Besides, if you have some authority, you don't want to strain it."

"That is no doubt true," Bernard agreed. None of his relations had so far disputed his firm rule, but he knew when it was prudent not to exercise his power. "You are a philosopher," he went on. "It is sometimes an advantage to use a light hand."

"Jim can be led."

Bernard bowed. "I imagine you have led him where he ought to go."

"I wonder!" said Carrie, with thoughtful frankness. "The trouble is, I don't know much and only understand simple things. Still, perhaps, I did lead him in the woods. The right way was generally plain there. But at Langrigg——"

"You're sometimes puzzled?" Bernard suggested. "Well, we are all puzzled now and then, and perhaps to trust your instincts is a good plan. This, however, is not advice I would give to everybody."

Carrie said nothing. She liked Bernard and was not afraid of him. He talked to her with the politeness of the old school and when he looked amused she thought his amusement was good-humored.

"Jim was under the car when you got to the spot, I think," he resumed. "You had some trouble to lift it."

"Lance really lifted the car at the dangerous moment, though the others helped. He saw the wheel was slipping; they were all in the ditch."

"Then who pulled Jim out?"

"I did," said Carrie, with a touch of embarrassment.

Bernard pondered. Lance had not told him about this and it was possible he had an object for not doing so.

"Well," he said, "I expect Jim has had other accidents; as you remarked, he is that kind of man. Did he get hurt when you were with him in the woods?"

"He took some chances now and then, but he did not get hurt much."

"Although he came near it? I heard something about your going to his rescue one night with a

gun."

Carrie blushed and Bernard fixed his eyes on her face as he went on: "Did you mean to use the gun?"

She lifted her head, her mouth went hard, and her glance got steady. "Yes. If I'd thought the other fellow could reach Jim with his ax, I would have shot him!"

Bernard nodded. "Sometimes the primitive plan is the only plan. One can see that you have pluck enough to meet a crisis. But I have kept you and have some other calls."

He got up and when she went with him down the steps gave her his hand. "May I come back another day?"

"Of course, but unless he knows you're coming, Jim will be occupied at the marsh."

"I won't mind if Jim is occupied."

"Then come when you like," said Carrie, smiling. "I think you mean to be nice."

In the meantime, Jim had got to work and under his superintendence a gang of men piled barrowsful of peat soil on the wreck of the dabbin. By noon a bank had advanced across the piles of broken clay and a cut that was to make a new channel for the creek began to open. Once or twice Jake imagined an indistinct figure lurked among some clumps of gorse, as if watching the work, but he was not certain and said nothing.

Jim and he did not go home for lunch and when the men stopped at noon found a sheltered hollow and opened a basket of food Jim had sent for. The day was bright, but a cold wind flecked the advancing tide with foam and swept the empty flats. Dry reeds rustled in the creek and a flock of circling plover gleamed against a cloud that trailed its shadow across the marsh. For all that, the sun was warm in the corner where they ate their lunch.

"Did Shanks send you notice that he had gone to the cottage?" Jake asked presently.

"He told the teamster to come for his truck. I expect he thought this enough."

"Wouldn't own up that he'd given in!" Jake remarked. "The fellow's a blamed obstinate old tough. I wonder whether he felt curious if you were hurt."

"I reckon he knew," said Jim. "However, I thought this morning there was somebody about ___"

He stopped abruptly, and Jake heard a step. They were quiet for a few moments, and then Tom Shanks came round a corner of the bank and stood looking at them. Jim's face was cut and rather white, but the stains on his clothes indicated that he had been working among wet soil. Jake gave Shanks a keen glance and thought he looked surprised, as if he had not expected to see Jim there.

"Do you want a job?" the latter asked.

"I want nowt fra you. You can give your job to them as will ca' you maister," Shanks rejoined and went off.

"A sullen hog!" Jake remarked. "I'd like to know when he or the old man moved the wire."

"So would I. It's rather important," said Jim. "If he was hanging about and came for the thing as soon as the car took the ditch, he probably saw me under the wheel and meant to leave me there. How long were you in making the spot after you heard the smash?"

"Perhaps five minutes. Mordaunt's car was at the steps and we jumped on board while he started her."

"If you had lost much time, I imagine you'd have found me dead."

"Then why did you offer Shanks a job?"

Jim smiled. "In order to have him where he could be watched. A fellow like that is dangerous when he's out of sight."

"Shanks and his son are bad men," Jake agreed. "We have sand-baggers and gun-men in Canada, but they get after you for money and their methods are up to date. Shanks' savageness is half-instinctive, like the Indian's. I can't, so to speak, locate him; he goes too far back."

Jim got up. "It's not important just now. Tell the teamster to bring his horses and we'll get busy."

CHAPTER VIII

JIM'S RELAPSE

Jim made progress at the dyke until it began to rain. For some weeks a strong west wind drove dark clouds across the sea, the hills were wrapped in mist, the creeks swelled and the tides rose high. Floods spread about the marsh and the floundering teams could hardly drag their loads through the bog. Sometimes Jim felt anxious, for the undertaking threatened to cost much more than he had thought.

Then came two fine days when, although the sun shone, heavy clouds rolled about the hills. Jim, knowing the fine weather would not last, drove his men hard, since there was work he must push forward before the next flood. The new bank had reached a creek where he must build a strong sluice-gate and hold back the water by a rude coffer-dam while he dug for the foundation.

He came up from the dam one afternoon and stood on the slope of the bank, looking down into the hole. His long boots, shirt, and trousers were stained by mud that had also splashed his face and hands; for since the work was risky he had helped the men. Now he was rather highly-strung. Below him, the water spirited [Transcriber's note: spurted?] through the joints in a wall of thick planks and ran into the excavation, where a few men, sunk nearly to the knees in mud, were working. A forge stood on the top of the bank and the smith leaned on the crank of the blower. He was a short, strongly-built man, and looked sulky.

"There's too much water blowing through; pressure's heavier than I reckoned and I don't like the way that brace sags," Jim remarked, as a shower of mud and water fell into the hole. Then he shouted to the men: "Get a thick plank across and wedge her up."

"Looks as if the fastenings of the brace had slipped," said Jake.

"They oughtn't to slip. The plate and nut on the iron were meant to keep the beam in place."

"I don't think I saw a nut when the boys fixed the thing."

Jim beckoned the smith. Although the fellow was a good workman, he was obstinate and Jim had not bothered him much until he needed some irons for the dam, when he made careful sketches and insisted on the other's working to his plans. This had caused some trouble and Jim now meant to be firm.

"I reckon I told you to screw the ends of the bar and make nuts to turn back against the plates," he said. "Did you screw the ends?"

"I did not," said the other. "There was nae use for nuts. I punched hole for pin that wad stop her pulling oot."

"Pulling out!" Jim exclaimed. "Did you imagine I wanted to hold the frames together?"

"If yon wasn't what you wanted, you should have said."

Jim had meant to be calm, but the men had run some risk from the fellow's obstinacy, and he lost his control.

"I told you to screw the ends. Confound you! The dam's in compression; there's no pull at all. Put a new bar in the vise and I'll stand by while you cut the thread."

"Stan', if you like. I'll not touch bar while you're about. Are you gan t' teach me my job?"

"It's plain you don't know your job. Get out of my way and I'll cut the thread myself."

The smith stood square in front with a frown on his face. "You'll not touch my tools. Vise and forge is yours; screwing stocks is mine."

"Oh, shucks!" said Jim. "Get out of the way. We want the bar right now."

The smith did not move, and although nobody afterwards remembered how the struggle began, Jake, interfering a moment too late, imagined Jim tried to get past the smith and jostled him. They grappled, and while they rocked to and fro the men in the pit stopped work. At first, Jim would have been satisfied to throw his antagonist back, but after a moment or two he doubted if this would be enough. The fellow had defied him, they had begun to fight, and in Canada a boss who could not enforce his authority lost his right to rule. Jim imagined it was so in England and did not mean to stop until the smith was ready to submit. Yet the fellow was powerful and fought with dogged pluck.

While they floundered about, striking, and trying for a throwing hold, Jake heard steps and looked up. He was half-embarrassed and half-amused, for it was obvious Jim did not know Mrs. Halliday, Evelyn, and Bernard Dearham stood on the top of the bank. He could not separate the

men and did not think Jim would hear if he shouted; besides, to shout a warning would make the thing ridiculous.

There was nothing to do but wait, and after a few moments Jim lifted his antagonist and threw him down the bank. It looked as if the sulky smith was not a favorite, for some of the men laughed and some growled hoarse applause. Jim's muddy shirt was torn and his face was bruised; he was looking down into the hole and did not see Bernard's party until he turned to go to the forge. Then he stopped and stood with his head held back, while Jake studied the others. He thought Bernard was quietly amused, but Mrs. Halliday looked pained, and Evelyn's delicate face was flushed.

"We thought we would come to see how you were getting on," said Mrs. Halliday. "It was an adventure; your new road is very bad and the car nearly upset."

"There is not much to see and I did not expect you," Jim replied.

"That is obvious," Bernard remarked with a twinkle. "I imagine you don't know much about Cumberland wrestling, but you are very quick. When you threw him, the other fellow was getting a hold that would have put you in his power."

"You gave him a bad fall, anyhow. I suppose you are used to this sort of thing in Canada," said Mordaunt, who came from behind the others and glanced at Evelyn.

Jake was interested; he sensed something of a drama, of which he thought his comrade was unconscious. There was a hint of a sneer in Mordaunt's voice and Jake thought his remark was meant for the girl. Her eyes were fixed on Jim, and she looked disturbed. It was plain that Mordaunt noted this. Mrs. Halliday was rather ostentatiously careless, Bernard quietly looked on, but Jim gave no sign of embarrassment.

"Why, no," he answered Mordaunt. "On the whole, I didn't have much trouble with the boys in Canada. This fellow wouldn't do his job as I wanted, and through his stupidity we ran some risk of the dam's caving in. I'll show you——"

They went with him, glad of something to banish the strain, and he indicated the men working in the mud behind the wall of planks.

"If the timbering gave way, the water would break through and perhaps drown the gang. I'm boss and accountable. I take no chances about the safety of my men."

Mordaunt smiled as he glanced at Evelyn and Jake imagined he knew what the smile implied. Jim was breaking conventions, his bold statement had a theatrical touch that no doubt jarred; reserved Englishmen did not talk like that. Moreover, he was wet and muddy, and his tense pose had not relaxed. Standing with head held back and body highly-strung, he looked a stranger. Jim did not belong to the others' circle, he came from outside.

"Yours is a good rule and force is useful now and then," Bernard observed. "However, we came to take you to Dryholm. I was feeling dull, and the others have promised to help me through the evening. If you can come, we will go on to Langrigg for Mrs. Winter."

Jim wanted to go, because Evelyn was going, but he gave her an apologetic glance as he answered Bernard: "I'm sorry; I can't leave my job."

Evelyn said nothing, although her color was rather high, and Mrs. Halliday interposed: "After all, you would not lose much time. It will soon be dark."

"Dark generally comes before one's ready, but I have some plans to make for the morning when I get home," said Jim, who turned to Bernard. "We must push on before the water gets too high. If you wouldn't mind taking Mrs. Winter and Carrie, I think they'd like it."

Mrs. Halliday's look hinted that she was trying to hide her annoyance and Evelyn turned her head.

"Very well," said Bernard and beckoned the others.

When they had gone Jake laughed. "I imagine you have given your relations a jolt."

"I felt something like that. I didn't mean to jolt them," Jim said with a frown. "Why didn't they come a few minutes earlier, or later?"

"I wasn't altogether thinking of your throwing the smith down the bank. You have got rather English, but sometimes you break away; I think I mean break back."

"Perhaps that is so; I forget," Jim agreed. "I was a miner and linesman before I was a landlord."

"Confusing for your friends, isn't it? They don't know which they have to reckon on—the Canadian sourdough or the country gentleman. Anyhow, I expect your suggestion that they should take mother and Carrie didn't help much. Were you talking like a sourdough or an English

landlord then?"

"You have a confoundedly mischievous humor," Jim rejoined, with a twinkle. "Do you want me to state that it's a country gentleman's duty to insist on the proper acknowledgment of his guests? Bernard likes your people and I don't know if Mrs. Halliday and Lance Mordaunt count."

"I was not thinking about Mrs. Halliday——" Jake began, but stopped when his comrade looked hard at him, and a few moments afterwards the smith came up the bank.

"Well?" said Jim, sharply. "What do you want?"

"Noo I see how bar's meant to gan, mayhappen it wad be better screwed. If you'll wait while I gan for dies, I'll do't for you."

"All right. You can get busy," said Jim.

When the smith went off he smiled and remarked: "I don't know if I expected this, but the man will make no more trouble. However, we have lost some time and must push ahead."

They got to work, and in the meantime Bernard drove to Langrigg and picked up Mrs. Winter and Carrie. The party at Dryholm broke up soon, but when Evelyn returned to Whitelees she felt that the evening had been too long. For one thing, she had been kept occupied and she wanted to think. Now she sat, rather languidly, in an easy-chair and knitted her brows. She had got a jar in the afternoon and she tried to recapture the scene on the bank—the smith scowling at the bottom, and Jim's bruised face, savage frown, and muddy clothes.

Jim was a new type, and she admitted that he attracted her, but his attraction was largely physical and sometimes she felt repelled. He was handsome and forceful; she liked his steady look, his athletic figure, and his clean brown skin. Then she liked the respect he showed her and his obvious wish to please. This was flattering and his strength and candor made an appeal, but she was highly cultivated and he was not rude. Indeed, when he stood on the bank, hot and triumphant after the fight, there was something barbarous about him. His virility moved her, but to live with him would demand some pluck; Evelyn knew he could not, so to speak, be tamed. His refusal to come to Dryholm, when he knew she was going, was a proof. It was significant that the dam he was building made a stronger claim. Evelyn was drawn in different ways and, on the whole, it was a relief when Mrs. Halliday came in.

"Jim was not his best this afternoon," the latter said. "However, he has not been long in England and no doubt the risk of such outbreaks will presently vanish. In the meantime one must make some allowances."

"For the owner of Langrigg?"

"Oh, well," said Mrs. Halliday, "I suppose I did mean this, but perhaps not altogether in the way you think. There is a rude vein in the Dearhams that comes to the surface now and then. One hardly noted it in Joseph, but in Bernard it's rather marked. I imagine he has some sympathy for Jim's extravagances. This may have its influence."

"Bernard is inscrutable," Evelyn rejoined. "One cannot foretell what he will do."

Mrs. Halliday saw that Evelyn understood; she had, in fact, expected her to understand, and her voice was thoughtful as she resumed: "After all, his approval is not essential. You have some money; I do not know about Jim, but he is spending much."

"It may be all he has; he is not afraid of a risk," said Evelyn, with a touch of color, for she was fastidious and her mother was blunt.

Then for a moment or two she mused. She was afraid of a risk; this was the trouble. Adventure, romance, and to some extent passion urged, but caution deterred. The romance would vanish and Jim might jar.

"Langrigg gives its owner a firm position," Mrs. Halliday resumed. "Even if he were poor, his wife would take a leading place in the Holm country. People pretend to scoff at such things, but they count."

"Much would depend on the owner. If he broke the family traditions, defied our conventions, and made himself a joke——"

"Much would be forgiven him because he is a Dearham," Mrs. Halliday rejoined. "Still, of course, there is a limit and I see a risk. Jim needs guidance for a time and it's possible his Canadian friends encourage his un-English idiosyncrasies. The girl has some beauty; I would sooner she did not stay long. If Jim could be advised——"

Evelyn smiled. "I cannot advise him. Besides, he's very staunch and owes these people much."

"Oh, well," said Mrs. Halliday. "In such a matter, one cannot meddle unless it is certain one's advice would be well received. We must let it go. Perhaps the Winters do not mean to remain very long."

"I think Jake means to stay until the marsh is drained, and I don't suppose the others will go until he is ready."

Mrs. Halliday frowned. "Jim is rather annoying. Sometimes he vexes me, but in a sense it is our duty to protect him. It has been a disturbing day; I think I'll go to bed."

CHAPTER IX

JIM IS LEFT OUT

The sun shone on the terrace at Dryholm, the house kept off the wind, and a creeper made a glowing background for the group about the tea-table. A row of dahlias close by hung their heads after a night's frost, a gardener was sweeping dead leaves from the grass, and the beeches round the tarn were nearly bare.

Bernard took a cup from Mrs. Halliday and glancing at the long shadows that stretched across the lawn, indicated a sundial on a pillar.

"In another few minutes its usefulness will be gone and it warns me that mine is going," he said, and quoted a tag of Latin.

"I wonder why they carve such melancholy lines on sundials," somebody remarked.

"Perhaps there is a certain futility about the custom. You, for whom the sun is rising, don't heed the warning, and we others in the shadow know our day is done. I do not think I am a sentimentalist, but the news we got this morning proves the Latin motto true. Then it is hardly possible we shall have tea outside again, and we cannot tell if all will gather round the table when summer comes back."

Mrs. Halliday began to talk about a neighbor who had died the day before. "Alan Raine will be missed; he was a good and useful English type," she said. "Conscientious and public-spirited. One could depend on him for a subscription and a graceful speech. I have not known his equal for opening a village club or a flower show. Then the hunt ball was always a success since he managed it, and we have not had so good a master of otter-hounds."

"It is something to be remembered for these things. Alan will be missed," Bernard agreed and turned to Carrie. "You have heard our notion of an English gentleman's duty. What do you think about it?"

"It is not my notion. If I were a man, and rich, I should like to leave a deeper mark."

"Ah," said Bernard, "you come from a strenuous country that breeds another type. Your men fight with blizzards on the snowy trail and drive their shafts through ground the sun never melts. Sometimes they come to England and teach us to hustle by altering the landscape and destroying our old landmarks. Perhaps there is something to be said for the others who carry out quiet duties conscientiously."

"Oh, yes," said Carrie, with a sparkle in her eyes. "But I'd sooner have cornfields running across a drained marsh than a hunt ball for my monument."

"You have a good apologist," Bernard said to Jim.

The others laughed, and Mrs. Halliday, not liking the turn Bernard had given the talk, asked: "Who will take the otter-hounds?"

"The matter's important and cannot be decided rashly," Bernard replied with some dryness, and addressed Mordaunt. "I imagine Jim might fill the post. What do you think, Lance?"

"The choice lies between Langrigg and Dryholm, sir. The Dearhams have a kind of traditional right to keep the hounds. Joseph did so."

"I am too old."

"Then Jim ought to make a good master. That is, if he doesn't think otter-hunting an idle man's game."

Bernard turned to Jim, who laughed. "Lance's shot was fair. When I first came over I had some prejudices, but they are going and I don't see why I shouldn't play now and then." He paused and his look was serious when he resumed: "In a way, it's strange, but your English customs have a grip; they get hold of one. In fact, I'm getting English fast, but perhaps that is not quite right. I begin to feel I am English."

Mrs. Halliday gave him an approving smile. "You inherited more than Langrigg from the Dearhams, Jim. I like to see you realize you got some duties when you got the estate."

"I don't know if keeping the hounds is a duty," Jim rejoined. "Perhaps Lance was nearest when he called it a game. All the same, I think I'd like the job."

They began to talk about the advisability of moving the kennels and Carrie, sitting quiet, studied the others. She saw Mrs. Halliday was pleased and thought she understood this. Mordaunt puzzled her. His rather dark face was hard to read, but she had got a hint of disappointment when he said the choice lay between Langrigg and Dryholm and Bernard declared he was too old. Then she suspected a touch of bitterness in his next remark. The others had noted nothing, except perhaps Bernard, who had looked at Mordaunt hard. Carrie did not like Mordaunt; he sometimes sneered politely at Jim.

"It is something to know Jim is willing, but the post is not my gift," Bernard resumed. "A meeting will no doubt be held to weigh the matter and if Jim is chosen, I should not be surprised."

Then he got up and shivered as the creeping shadow touched the bench he occupied. Some of the others went off along the terrace and Jim and Evelyn crossed the lawn. They were talking animatedly and Carrie felt a pang when Jim's laugh came back to her. In the woods she had cheered him and he laughed at her jokes. Now he was always kind but he forgot her when Evelyn was about. She turned rather moodily towards the arch and saw Bernard standing in the gloom. His eyes were fixed on the figures on the lawn and Carrie thought he looked annoyed, but he smiled when he heard her step.

"They have left you alone?" he said. "Well, we must amuse each other, and there are some flowers in the hot-house that I don't think you have seen."

Carrie went with him thoughtfully. Bernard's remarks were often oracular; he left one to guess what he meant, but she imagined his glance was sympathetic. Although this was to some extent embarrassing, she began to talk; and when they reached the hot-house he answered her questions about the flowers with old-fashioned politeness. By and by he glanced at a thermometer and pulling down a skylight turned to Carrie, who was looking at the patches of glowing color that broke the long banks of green.

"Beautiful things but fragile, and they have no smell," he said. "I suppose we grow them because they cost us much. The flowers of the bleak North are sweet."

By and by Jim came in and after a glance about exclaimed: "These are very fine!"

"You have an eye for color," Bernard remarked. "Their beauty's almost insolent; I don't know if it's strange that they are foul-feeders and thrive on rottenness. Sometimes I think I'd give them all for the cloudberry bloom I trampled on the moors when I was young. It feeds on the melting snow and opens its chaste white cup nearest the sky."

"You declared you were not a sentimentalist," said Jim.

"Oh, well," said Bernard, "you must make allowances for an old man's inconsistency." He turned as a car began to throb, and smiled at Carrie. "One mustn't keep the engine running and I expect the others are waiting. Come back soon and cheer me up."

He went with them to the steps, and when they drove off Jim was thoughtful for a few minutes. He was glad Bernard liked Carrie, but perhaps it was strange he had not urged Evelyn to come back. Bernard, however, was puzzling; one could not understand his moods. Then Jim forgot about it as Mrs. Winter began to talk.

A week later, four gentlemen sat one evening in the smoking-room at a house on the rolling ground where the hills dip to the seaboard plain. Three were rather fat, gray-haired, and solemn, and one was young. The latter indicated a siphon and decanter on the table when Mordaunt came in.

"Help yourself," he said. "Where's Dick?"

"I arranged to pick him up at the cross-roads, but he wasn't there," Mordaunt replied. "Dick's a careless fellow and I didn't want to be late."

He filled a glass and when he sat down one of the others remarked: "Alan Raine has gone and it is our melancholy duty to fill his post. This will not be easy; Alan was a keen sportsman and a man of tact. He commanded the farmers' respect and had the interest of the hunt at heart. For all that, the hunt is a useful institution and must be kept up. Fish are getting scarce; modern field drainage sends down the water in sudden floods and when, between times, the rivers run low the trout and salmon are the otter's easy prey. It is our duty to preserve the fisheries, and help, as far as we are able, a bracing English sport."

He drained his glass while the others signed approval. Hodson had cleared the ground neatly and the business could begin.

"Our choice is somewhat limited," said another. "I think we have all found it a drawback to keep the hounds near the hills, since the meets are generally held by the deep water in the flat holms. In fact, one feels the hounds ought to go to Dryholm or Langrigg."

Mordaunt quietly lighted a cigarette and then replied: "I'm afraid you must rule out Dryholm. Bernard declares he is too old to take the hounds."

"But what about yourself?"

"I am too poor," said Mordaunt, smiling.

The others hesitated. They were cautious and did not want to venture on dangerous ground, but there was something to be said, and Herries, the youngest man, remarked: "After all, an offer of the hounds is a compliment and its acceptance, to some extent, a public duty. If this view were put before Bernard Dearham, some arrangement could perhaps be made."

"You mean I might fill the post and Bernard provide the money?" Mordaunt suggested. "Bernard, however, does not seem to see the advantage of the plan."

Herries gave him a keen glance. Mordaunt's face was calm; but the other imagined he had felt some disappointment.

"Then we must fall back on Langrigg. The new owner is your relation. What do you think about our asking him?"

"I imagine you couldn't find a better site for the kennels," Mordaunt replied. "Langrigg is near the deep water where the big fish lie and you can generally find an otter——"

He stopped, and Herries said, "Yes, of course! But this is not altogether what we mean. Do you think Dearham would take the post?"

"It's possible," said Mordaunt, very dryly. "Have you decided to ask him?"

The others were quiet for a moment or two. They felt they had got a hint, but the hint was vague. Somebody must take the hounds and they could not. They resolved to leave the thing to Herries; he was young and his remarks would not carry so much weight. Besides, he knew Mordaunt well.

"Let's be frank," he said, hiding some embarrassment by a twinkle meant for Mordaunt alone. "Choosing a master of hounds is an important job. Would Dearham fill the post properly?"

"I think not," Mordaunt answered in a quiet voice.

"Oh, well," remarked another. "I suppose there is no more to be said."

Mordaunt lighted a fresh cigarette. "I want you to understand. Jim Dearham is my relation, but I feel my responsibility. He is a good sort and I am not stating much to his disadvantage when I admit that he is not the proper man to take the hounds. He has not yet cultivated our sense of sport and his notions are utilitarian. I'm afraid he'd grumble about broken fences and trampled crops. Then, for example, he's dyking the marsh."

"Exactly!" said one. "I imagine we do understand. Well, we must ask Watson of Red Bank. He's rich enough and ambitious, although he's not altogether the man I'd like."

They agreed, and soon afterwards Dick came in and asked Mordaunt: "Why didn't you stop for me, as you promised?"

"I did stop. I waited some minutes."

"Then you must have come before the time."

"Look at your watch," said Mordaunt, who took out his. "I got the time at the station this afternoon."

Dick said it did not matter much and asked whom they meant to make the master of hounds.

"Watson, of Red Bank," one replied, and began to talk about something else when he had filled a glass for Dick. The latter was young and sometimes indiscreet; it was better he should not know what Mordaunt had said.

By and by two or three went off to the billiard-room and Herries said to Mordaunt: "Sorry I had to urge you; but I knew the others hadn't pluck enough and meant to leave the thing to me. Their notion was I didn't count and you wouldn't resent my remarks. Rather an awkward job, but we felt we could trust you. All the same, I like Jim, and expect he'll be popular when we get to know him. In fact, I imagine I'd have let him take the hounds."

"He'd have jolted the others badly," Mordaunt rejoined. "They belong to the old school; he belongs to the new."

"One or two rather need a jolt, but we'll let it go. I want to watch Dick's game; he's been playing well and using a new stroke."

They went to the billiard-room and stayed until the party broke up. Then, as the Dryholm car rolled up to the steps, Dick said to Mordaunt: "You got the wrong time, after all. I compared my watch with Hodson's. His was a presentation from the farmers' club, you know; the latest thing in watches, and he declares it's accurate."

"It's not very important."

"In a way, it is important," Dick objected. "If I'd been here soon enough, I'd have urged their choosing Jim." He paused and looked at Mordaunt hard. "It's curious, but I imagined Hodson was embarrassed when he said they meant to ask Watson. Why should they ask the fellow? He's not our sort."

"After all, Jim is not our sort."

"Rot!" exclaimed Dick. "Bernard is satisfied and I'd sooner trust him than Hodson. In fact, Bernard's a better judge than anybody in Hodson's stodgy lot."

Mordaunt shrugged, but was glad the rattle of the engine covered his silence and the driver looked up as if to see if he were coming. He got into the car and pondered as he drove back to Dryholm. Dick's manner was curious and his annoyance was plain Mordaunt wondered whether he suspected something. Still, except perhaps for Herries, the hunt committee were tactful; he did not think they would enlighten Dick.

CHAPTER X

BERNARD PONTERS

It was getting dark in the hall at Langrigg and Jim, who had just returned from the marsh, sat in the hollow of the big fireplace. Rain beat upon the windows, outside which the trees tossed their naked branches against the lowering sky, and a cold wind wailed about the ancient walls. Oak logs snapped in the grate and Carrie sat on the rug in the flickering light. She was toasting muffins, and a silver teapot and some cups stood on the low table in front of Mrs. Winter. Now the days were getting cold and short, tea by the hearth was a popular function. Carrie buttered a muffin and gave it Jim on the end of the fork.

"Jake must wait for the next. I can't toast the things fast enough for him," she said. "They're quite nice if you eat them hot, but they're not like the flapjacks I made in the woods. After all, we had some pretty good times on the new line; hadn't we, Jim? Mother doesn't know; she wasn't there."

"I was not," said Mrs. Winter. "If you had taken me along, I wouldn't be with you now. A roof that keeps out the rain, a warm room, and a comfortable chair are good enough for me."

"You'd have said *for mine*, not long since. Looks as if we were all getting English," Carrie replied. "Jim was very nice when he got you the chair. It's up against all the other things. If I was Jim, I'd hate to have it around."

Jim laughed. He had sent to London for the American spring rocking-chair that clashed with the old oak in the hall, but it was a pattern Mrs. Winter liked and he was satisfied. He ate his muffin silently, for he was tired, and Carrie's remarks had wakened memories of other fires that burned among the tall straight trunks in the Canadian wilds; he thought he could hear the snow-fed river brawl, and smell the smoke that drifted in blue wreaths about the lonely camp. Carrie had laughed and bantered him then and he had been happy. He was happy now and hoped to be happier yet, but Carrie was often quiet and he had a puzzling feeling that he had lost something he could not recapture.

Presently she picked up a local newspaper and lighted a candle with a shade. The light only spread a yard or two, but it touched the page she folded back and sparkled in her hair.

"They have got a master for the otter-hounds!" she exclaimed, and then her color rose and her eyes went hard. "I don't know the committee, but if the others are like Hodson, they're solemn old fools."

"I'd rather have liked the post, but it doesn't matter much," said Jim, and added, with a smile: "Now you're like the Carrie who went North with us."

"Bernard meant you to have the hounds; he's a dear, although some stupid people are afraid of him," Carrie went on. "He'd certainly have fixed it if he hadn't got lame again. But I remember

—Dick went to their old meeting and was mad about something afterwards. I think it was something about Lance Mordaunt—now I begin to see!"

"I don't think it's worth while your bothering about the thing."

"Don't interrupt!" said Carrie. "I'm going to talk. Lance doesn't like you, and I imagine Dick doesn't trust him. Dick is smart sometimes and knows Lance is mean. He is mean; he has a yellow streak——"

She stopped, for she saw Jim's frown. He was not vexed with her, but her statement chimed with some vague doubts of his. She got up and made him a formal curtsy.

"I'm sorry, Jim. That was the Carrie you knew in the woods. If you don't want her, you oughtn't to burn logs and sit by the fire when it's getting dark, as we used to do. But she has gone back to the shadows that creep among the pines, and I don't think she will come out again."

She pulled up an easy-chair, and when she sat down and shielded her face from the fire with her hand Jake's eyes twinkled. He wondered whether Jim saw she was cleverly imitating Evelyn's graceful languidness. After a few moments she indicated the dark oak paneling and old furniture.

"That's your proper background, Jim, when you frown. It's plain that you belong to Langrigg. When you fought the Scots and hunted wolves I expect you often looked like you looked just now."

"But I didn't fight the Scots," Jim objected.

"Your people did," said Carrie. "Sometimes you're very dull."

Jim laughed and glanced at her. Flames leaped up round the logs and the red light played about her face. Her color was rather marked, she looked strangely alert and forceful, and something about her dress gave her a touch of stateliness, for Carrie had well chosen her English clothes. Jim knew her to be staunch and fearless, and although her humor was sometimes puzzling he felt her charm.

"By George!" he said impulsively, "I think you belong to the old days as much as I belong. One could have trusted you to hold the tower against all comers when your man went off to hunt."

Carrie held her hand to her face a moment, as if the fire were hot, and then smiled as she looked up.

"If my man had gone off often, I would have taken the wolf-spear and gone with him."

Mrs. Winter, who had quietly studied both, began to talk about something else, and presently a servant brought in some letters. Jim moved the shaded candle and opened his, but after a time put one down and looked straight in front, knitting his brows.

"What is it, partner?" Jake asked.

"I have got a knock. I told my Vancouver agent to sell some shares and send along a check. He says I'd better wait; the market's very flat."

"Then you bought the Bench-lands Irrigation stock?"

"I did. I have invested most of the money I got for the Bluebird mine."

"All ours is at the Merchants' Bank," Carrie remarked. "Jake wanted to buy Irrigation stock, but I wouldn't let him. However, the company ought to make good."

"I hope so. Jeffreys is doubtful. I bought because I know the Bench country and Martin was interested in the scheme. It seems they are having trouble about their water rights and an order has been granted to stop the ditches. Jeffreys says nobody wants the stock just now and imagines the lawsuit may go against them."

"Will this make things awkward for you?"

"To some extent. Langrigg costs much to run and the dykes are expensive. I'll get my farm rents soon, but they won't go very far. For all that, the dykes must be finished; it's the only way to get back the money I have spent."

"Besides, you want to finish them," Carrie suggested.

"That is so," Jim agreed. "You can't leave a job half done."

He began to ponder and struggle with a disturbing doubt. If the Irrigation Company failed, he must use economy, because the farm rents would not enable him to live at Langrigg like a country gentleman. For himself, this did not matter much; he did not want a number of servants and gardeners. But Evelyn was used to the extravagance at Whitelees, and he knew Mrs. Halliday's views.

"Well," said Carrie, "to begin with, the dykes must be finished. When your money runs out you will use ours."

"Carrie speaks for the rest of us," Jake declared. "What she says goes."

Jim hardly understood the emotion by which he was moved and said awkwardly: "Thanks! You're generous, but I can't let you pay for my mistakes."

"We are partners, Jim," said Carrie. "Until you break the partnership, all that's ours is yours. Go on with the dykes and when you need money, ask Jake for a check."

"Give him the book," said Mrs. Winter. "Jake can sign some forms."

Jim hesitated and smiled to hide his embarrassment. "We'll wait. I'm not broken yet, and since Martin is backing the scheme things can't go very wrong. However, it's lucky they didn't make me master of hounds."

In the evening he went to Dryholm and dined with Bernard at a small table in the spacious room. Afterwards they sat by the fire talking quietly. Flickering reflections played about the carved marble and bright steel; electric lights, half-hidden by the cornice, threw down a soft light, and Bernard looked old and worn as he leaned back languidly in his big chair.

"Since you have begun to drain the marsh, we may take it for granted you are going to stay at Langrigg," he said.

"Yes, I mean to stay."

"Then it's obvious that you ought to marry."

"I don't know if it's obvious or not," Jim rejoined. "However, since you are the head of the house, I dare say you are entitled to feel some curiosity."

Bernard smiled. "Suppose you think about me as an old man who would like to be your friend."

"I'm sorry, sir," said Jim. "We're an independent lot in Canada and I've fought for my own hand since I was a boy. Anyhow, I mean to marry Evelyn, if she is willing."

"It looks as if you had not asked her yet."

"I have not; I'm half-afraid. In one way, it would be a rash plunge for a girl like Evelyn. Though I've inherited Langrigg, I'm a Western adventurer; I've lived with rough men in the wilds. She's refined and cultivated. Well, I've gone slow, trying to persuade myself I was justified before I persuaded her. Then I wanted her, so to speak, to get used to me."

"You are modest," Bernard remarked. "You imply that Evelyn does not know."

"I don't think she knows. I have been cautious. If I hinted at my hopes too soon, she might get disturbed and alarmed."

Bernard smiled. "Well, perhaps you have taken a prudent line. But do you imagine your reserve has deceived Janet Halliday?"

"Perhaps it has not; Mrs. Halliday is clever. I think she is my friend."

"It's possible," Bernard agreed, with a touch of ironical humor. "How long do you think you must give Evelyn, in order to avoid the jar she might get if you prematurely revealed your hopes?"

Jim knitted his brows. He was used to Bernard's cynical dryness and trusted him. "It will be longer than I thought," he answered, grimly. "I have had a bad set-back."

He told Bernard about the risk of his losing his money, and the latter was silent for a minute or two. Then he remarked: "I suppose you see that if I thought it a good plan I could help you out."

"That is not why I told you," said Jim. "I could not take your help."

"I imagined you would not. Well, perhaps your frankness accounts for our friendship. You are unembarrassed because you have no grounds for indulging my caprices and expect nothing from me."

Jim made a little abrupt movement. He had once said something like that; to Mordaunt, he thought.

"Very well," Bernard resumed. "If you think I can help, I am willing; but I will not insist."

"Thank you," said Jim, "I must trust my own efforts."

Bernard lighted a cigar and pondered. He was satisfied and somewhat amused. It would not have cost him much to banish Jim's difficulties and he would have liked to earn his gratitude, but was glad the other had refused. It was better that Jim's troubles about money should not be banished yet. He was something of a romantic fool; but Bernard knew Evelyn was not. By and by he led Jim into confidential talk about his investments in Canada and his plans for developing his new estate, and then let him go.

When Jim had gone, he sat by the fire, thinking hard, and after a time sent a servant to the library for a bundle of architect's drawings. The drawings gave the plans and elevation of a new hospital and Bernard thought the plain, straight front, looked mean. Knowing something about building, he saw how it could be altered and ornamented, and the hospital enlarged, if funds permitted. He was one of the founders and thought it might be advisable to augment his gift.

Next day he went to Whitelees and was received by Mrs. Halliday in her drawing-room, which always annoyed him. He felt he wanted to clear out Janet's room and furnish it on another plan. Bernard hated sensual prettiness and liked bold, clean lines and subdued color. Besides, his gout was rather bad, the fragile chair was uncomfortable, and he could not rest his foot. When the pain gripped him he frowned, and Mrs. Halliday remarked that he was not looking well.

"I am getting old and have recently felt my age," he replied. "One must pay for a strenuous youth, and it's becoming plain that I ought to straighten my affairs while the opportunity is mine."

Mrs. Halliday looked sympathetic and felt curious. She had wondered when Bernard would give her his confidence. "Well," she said, "I suppose this is one's duty, although I hope you have no particular grounds for imagining it needful just now."

"One cannot tell," Bernard remarked. "Anyhow, I have responsibilities that must not be shirked. Well, Evelyn and Lance will get a share of my property; in fact, I have made some provision for them."

"I expect you have been generous," said Mrs. Halliday, who wondered how far she durst go. "But what about Jim?"

"His claim will need some thought. For that matter, he has hinted that he is satisfied with Langrigg. Independence like his is not common and perhaps ought to be indulged."

Mrs. Halliday was disturbed, but Bernard did not seem to be curious about her feelings and resumed: "In the meantime, I've been thinking about the new Brunstock hospital and am going to see the committee. Since you promised us a donation, I have brought the plans." He unrolled the elevation and gave it her. "This is not the kind of building we want and I mean to propose some alterations."

He indicated the alterations, and Mrs. Halliday said: "But it will cost a very large sum."

"I expect so. My money came from the iron mines; the Brunstock pitmen and furnace men earned the most part for me. A number get hurt and it is just that I should give them something back. Then if we called it the Dearham hospital, as the committee suggest, the building would keep my memory green, and I am vain enough to prefer a handsome monument."

"In some ways it is a good ambition," Mrs. Halliday agreed, although she was puzzled, for she thought Bernard had an object he had not stated. He certainly was not vain.

"Of course," he went on, "one must be just to one's relations, and it would be harsh to leave out Jim altogether. Still, you see, he's rash; we have an example in his dyking plan, and I would not like my money squandered. I expect you know he has lost much of his in a Canadian speculation?"

Mrs. Halliday did not know and got something of a jar. She gave Bernard a quick and rather anxious glance.

"But if he has lost his, your gift would be more needful."

Bernard made a sign of disagreement. "The drawback is, Jim might use it as rashly as he has used the rest."

"They sometimes waste money at hospitals."

"That is so, but if I carry out my plans, there will not be much waste at Brunstock. I have been pondering some stipulations, and if I give them a proper endowment, the trustees must consent."

"Do you mean to endow the new wards? We understood you would be satisfied with giving part of what they needed for the original building."

"Of course," said Bernard. "Since I'm going to urge the extension, I must find the money. The hospital is getting a hobby of mine and I may make the endowment much larger than I meant." He got up. "It's a long drive and I must not keep the committee."

He went off and Mrs. Halliday tried to brace herself. She had grounds for disturbance, but she must think. If Bernard carried out his plans, it was obvious that she must change hers.

CHAPTER XI

EVELYN'S ADVENTURE

After Bernard had gone, Mrs. Halliday talked to Evelyn. At first she was cautious and rather implied than stated her meaning, but by degrees she threw off her reserve. Although Evelyn and her mother generally agreed, Mrs. Halliday felt she was antagonistic, and this disturbed her. Evelyn was not romantic; as a rule, her judgment was cool and sound, but she was human, and it began to look as if she were strongly attracted by Jim Dearham.

"On the whole, it would be better if you did not go to Langrigg to-morrow," Mrs. Halliday concluded. "You can make an excuse."

"I think not," said Evelyn. "You urged me not to disappoint Jim the last time we went, but we will let this go. Now he has had bad luck, it would look significant if you suddenly withdrew your approval. He knew it was his not long since."

"In a way, I am forced to withdraw it. I like Jim——"

"But you do not like him to be poor," Evelyn interrupted with a smile. "Well, it seems to me a proper and tactful line for his friends to rally round him when he is in trouble."

"One can, of course, be sympathetic if one meets him."

Evelyn laughed. "But one need not go too far?" She paused and gave her mother a steady look. "Langrigg is a fine old house, I don't suppose Jim is ruined, and I have some money. Then you have taught me to expect that I may get some more."

"Bernard is capricious. He has a bitter humor and may disappoint us all. You have come to think refinement needful; you are extravagant and could not live with an impoverished husband. Let me beg you not to be obstinate and rash."

"Ah," said Evelyn, "I sometimes felt I would like to be rash, but was not brave enough. I do not know if I have much courage now."

Mrs. Halliday got up. Perhaps she had said enough and after all one could trust Evelyn when she was cool. It looked as if the girl's disappointment had been sharp, and the wise plan was to leave her alone. Yet she was puzzled; Evelyn had given signs of a recklessness her mother thought new.

When Mrs. Halliday went out Evelyn tried to formulate her thoughts. To begin with, her mother's calculating caution repelled her; it had made her feel shabby. Then she had, no doubt, taken much for granted. Jim had, perhaps, had bad luck, but this did not mean that he was impoverished, and after all there were many expensive things one could go without. She was not as greedy as some people thought. Indeed, it would be rather fine to make a plunge; to let cold caution go and play a romantic part.

She mused about Jim. He was marked by a certain roughness, but he had dignity. He gave one pleasant thrills—there was the scene on the dyke when she was half-shocked and yet strangely moved. His physical fineness appealed; his figure was like an old Greek athlete's, his face was sharply cut and somehow ascetic. He was hot-blooded, but one knew he was not gross. His was a clean virility.

Evelyn thought she loved him, as much as she could love anybody, for she had not been touched by passion, and it counted for something that he loved her. The reserve he thought he used was, of course, ridiculous. Evelyn resolved she would go to Langrigg and sympathize with Jim. Then she would wait and by and by her feelings might get stronger and she would see her way. She would not admit that the possibility of learning whether Jim would get over his difficulties had some influence.

Next evening she went to Langrigg, without Mrs. Halliday, who made an excuse. Jim called for her with his car, and, for the most part, she was quiet and he did not talk much. There were steep hills and awkward corners as they ran down from the rolling country to the plain. The evening was calm and the noise of the sea came softly out of the distance. Now and then plover and curlew cried, a half-moon hung in the west, and the black hills rose out of fleecy mist. Evelyn was imaginative and liked the drive across the flat holms in the dark. It was romantic ground, rich with traditions of the old Border raids, and now as she watched Jim, sitting, absorbed, with his hands on the wheel, she felt he, so to speak, dated back. He drove the powerful modern car

with ease and skill, but somehow she imagined him wearing steel cap and leather jack and guiding a shaggy pony. Perhaps it was the picture in a hall she knew that haunted her. One saw the shadowy horsemen and glitter of spears in the moonlight.

Meanwhile, she gave herself to irresolute thought. Jim had some advantages and some drawbacks; Evelyn saw the drawbacks plainly. He attracted her; it would be exciting to let him carry her away and embark with him on a romantic adventure. She knew he had recently used a stern control, but he was hot-blooded and his reserve might be undermined. Yet there was a risk; she must give up much. She was drawn in different ways by romance and worldly caution and it looked as if caution would win.

Soon after she reached Langrigg Mordaunt arrived with Dick. The latter declared that Jim was a very good sort, and Evelyn knew his feeling was sincere, but she imagined Dick liked Carrie and was sometimes disturbed. For all that, she had been relieved to note that Carrie liked Dick.

Dinner was a cheerful function, but when they went back to the hall Evelyn was quiet. Joseph Dearham and others had made some renovations in the hall, but they harmonized with the crooked roof-beams and dark oak. There were one or two tall lamps and another that hung by iron chains, but Jim generally used candles in old silver stands. Evelyn wondered how Jim knew that candles were right. It was strange that he often, unconsciously, she thought, struck the proper note.

She studied him and Jake while she talked to Mrs. Winter. Jim seldom wore conventional evening clothes, but he had put on an American dinner-jacket. He and his comrade were strangely agile; their movements were quick, their step was light, like a cat's, and she noted how they lifted their feet. She did not know the prospector gets the habit by walking through tangled bush and across rough stones. They had a suppleness that came from using the long ax, and toil in the wilds had given them a fine-drawn look. In some ways both were modern, but in some they belonged to the past, when the fortress peels were built and the marsh-men fought the Scots.

Jim crossed the floor, and when he began to talk to Carrie, Evelyn felt a jealous pang. The girl had been in the woods with Jim; she had beauty and a curious primitive strength. Jim leaned forward, smiling as he talked to her; they talked confidentially, like tried comrades. Evelyn was moved to something near anger and went to the old grand piano Jim had brought from the drawing-room when he found that Carrie could play ragtime airs. Evelyn had a talent for music and meant to make an experiment. If Jim was what she thought, he would respond.

"If somebody will light the candles, I will sing," she said.

The candles had pale-yellow shades and when Jim struck a match the colored light touched her face and dress. Except for this, the corner was somewhat dark. Amber was Evelyn's color. She struck a few chords that seemed to echo in the distance and then, glancing at Jim, began a prelude with a measured beat. His face was intent; he seemed to search for something in the music that sounded as if it were getting nearer. She wondered whether he heard the call of trumpets and horses' feet drumming in the dark. Somehow she thought he did.

Perhaps she was debasing her talent; this kind of thing was rather a theatrical trick than music. For all that, it needed feeling, and she knew the old Border ballads and their almost forgotten airs. Jim was very still when she began to sing, for her voice and the music moved him strongly. The air was wild, the rude words rang with something one felt when one battled with floods and snowslides. They told how the moss-troopers rode down Ettrick water long ago; but human nature did not change and hard-bitten men now went out on the snowy trail, carrying shovels and axes instead of spears. But how did Evelyn, surrounded by luxurious refinements, understand?

"It's fine!" he exclaimed when she stopped. "You have got it just right; horses' feet, and harness jingling. But you go back of that to the feeling one has when one braces up and sets one's mouth tight."

Evelyn laughed and looked at Mordaunt, who frowned. "Perhaps you are easily satisfied, Jim, but music, critical folks contemptuously call descriptive, needs some talent." She paused and beat out a few bars imitating a horse's gallop. "It really does go back of this."

"Never mind critical folks," said Jim. "Sing another—the song of Flodden."

"I'm not sure the song you mean has really much to do with Flodden, but I know one that has. It's old and rude, like the Borderers. You know a band would not fight, but were too proud to run away. They stood fast, by themselves, and were shot down by the archers while the loyal Scots fell round their wounded king. This, however, is shocking art; it's like writing what you are meant to see at the top of a picture. I know it annoys Lance."

"I can endure much from you," Mordaunt rejoined.

Evelyn struck the keys and began to sing. Words and air had a strange barbaric force, and Jim pictured the stern Scots spearmen closing round their fallen monarch and their hate for the stubborn mutineers. The blood came to his skin when the music stopped and the girl's voice flung

out a dying soldier's curse. The curse was strangely modern; one heard it often in the West.

"Thank you! You have not sung like this before," he said, and turned to Jake. "How does it strike you, partner?"

"It hits me where I feel it, and hits me hard. I reckon the men who fought that old battle meant to make good. I don't know how Miss Halliday knows what a man with red blood feels when he's got to put over a big hard job, but she does know."

"I'm afraid you would make me vain," said Evelyn.

She turned as she left the piano and gave Carrie a quick glance. A sharp jealousy seized her, for while she could imagine what a strong man felt, Carrie really knew. She had fronted danger with Jim; she had watched and helped his struggle in the lonely North. Evelyn was suddenly afraid of Carrie. She was a powerful rival.

The party went to the billiard-room, but Evelyn would not play and sat in a corner, thinking hard. She was highly-strung, and her hesitation had vanished. Jim loved her and nobody else should claim him. Perhaps she was rash, but she had begun to feel passion, and saw she must embark upon her great adventure now, when Jim had had reverses and was smarting from the blow. He must see that she had pluck and was willing to bear his troubles. After all, to have done with caution was exhilarating. Yet she knew her lover. He would not ask her to make a sacrifice for him; unless his luck changed he would keep up his reserve. Well, she must break it down, and she knew her power. Then she turned as Mordaunt stopped by the bench she occupied.

"I think you did not like my song," she said.

"You know I did not," Mordaunt rejoined. "Anyhow, I didn't like your exaggerated rendering of a ballad that is probably genuine, though one authority states it was written about an ancient football match. They played football before the Scottish wars in the Border towns."

"Is this important?"

"It is not. I thought you were putting your talent to a shabby use."

"Art is imitation," Evelyn remarked with a mocking smile. "Why should one not imitate the drumming of horses' feet? or, for example, a storm at sea? I believe that kind of thing is popular at cheap concerts."

Mordaunt frowned. "You well know what your gift is worth. It's too fine to be used in order to rouse crude emotions in a handsome savage like Jim."

"Ah," said Evelyn, with a sparkle in her eyes, "are the great emotions crude? Courage and loyalty that led to deeds that live four hundred years? I don't know if our refinements would stand comparison with the big primitive things."

"Jim is certainly primitive," Mordaunt sneered.

"And he's big! So big that he makes other men look small! I was disturbed when I saw him, bruised and muddy, that day at the marsh; but I begin to understand I was ridiculous. He fought the smith because he was accountable for his men."

"Oh, well; I expect he would value your approval," said Mordaunt, who saw Jim go out. "It looks as if he were getting bored."

Evelyn smiled. "He keeps some dyking plans in the hall. I don't think he will be bored if I join him." She got up languidly. "Since you are not very amusing, I will go."

She went off and found Jim opening a drawer. "You can study your plans; I won't disturb you," she said, sitting down by the fire. "I really don't care for billiards."

He shut the drawer and leaned against a table opposite. "You were not playing billiards; you were talking to Lance. That was why I went away."

"You flatter me," said Evelyn. "But don't leave the plans. I expect they are important."

"They are important. The rain is giving us trouble, and although I began the job to occupy my leisure, I'm going to finish it because I must."

"I think I understand. I am sorry you have had bad luck in Canada."

"Thank you. How did you know?"

"Bernard told us."

"I wonder why," Jim remarked, thoughtfully. "Although it doesn't matter much, I didn't expect him to tell."

Evelyn pondered. Bernard had, no doubt, had an object, but she could solve the puzzle

afterwards. She was alone with Jim, and in a few minutes the others might return.

"I was rather hurt when I found you had given Bernard your confidence and left me out," she said. "But does this reverse in Canada hit you hard?"

"It was a nasty knock. I expect to get over it, but it will be some time before I recover the ground I've lost. Things will be better when we plow the land I'm reclaiming from the marsh."

"In the meantime, you will have to struggle?"

"Yes," said Jim, rather grimly, "it will be a struggle. But that is not all——"

He pulled himself up. There was a risk that he might say too much, and while he hesitated Evelyn listened. The door was open and the house was quiet, but she could not hear the click of the billiard balls. It looked as if Dick and Carrie had finished their game, there was no time for clever maneuvering; she must be frank. She gave Jim a quick glance and then looked away.

"Jim," she said, "I am not poor."

He started, and his face got red. Evelyn's meaning was obvious, but he could hardly persuade himself that he had grasped it.

"Much of my money has gone and I may not get it back," he said, with forced quietness. "In one way, this does not matter; I'm not greedy, but I'm proud. I must farm the reclaimed land and make my farming profitable; I can't keep up Langrigg as my friends expect. I've got to live and work as I lived and worked in Canada."

"People do live in the woods and on the plains. Do you think your countrywomen have less pluck than these others? Are we dull and weak, afraid of hardship and only willing to be amused?"

Jim lifted his head and laughed. "All this is ridiculous! I haven't met many English girls, but you are the finest thing in a woman's shape I have known. I've thought about you always since that day at Montreal. When they told me Langrigg was mine I would have sold it had I not thought I might find you in the Old Country."

"Then you didn't know I was here?"

"I did not," said Jim, who forgot his reserve and let himself go. "When I saw you on the terrace, I got a thrill and a sense of triumph I'd never known before. But to find you was not enough; I had got to claim, and keep you. I'd got to have something to offer; I had to justify myself. Well, that's why I began to drain the marsh——"

Evelyn stopped him. "I wasn't worth it, Jim," she said, with half-ashamed sincerity. "But I understand; you are too proud to take, you want to give. Although you're foolish, I like your pride."

For a moment Jim was silent and his face got hard. "It's done with," he said, rather hoarsely. "I meant to make good before I claimed you, and this loss has set me back. I'm not beaten, but I must wait until I can give you all you ought to have. You're so fine and highly-tempered that you're fragile; rough jolts and jars are not for such as you. I've got to work——"

She got up and looked at him shyly, with color in her face and her eyes shining.

"And until you make good, you mean to leave me out? Will it cost you nothing, Jim?"

"It will cost me much," he said, grimly. "More than I durst reckon, but I must brace up and pay."

"But suppose I will not let you leave me out? Am I to give nothing?" Evelyn asked. "Besides, it's my right to choose, and you meant to rob me of my right. If I didn't know you well, I should be angry. Langrigg is yours; but if you had nothing, do you think I'd keep our extravagance at Whitelees and let you go?" She turned her head and then looked up, stretching out her hands. "I can't let you go! I want to help."

Jim took her hands and next moment she was in his arms. Then there were steps in the passage and she gently pushed him back.

"You must tell nobody just yet," she said.

The others came in and Mordaunt looked at Evelyn rather hard, but she went to the piano and opening a music-book, beckoned Dick.

"You know this," she said. "I'll play it for you."

CHAPTER XII

THE SHOOTING PUNT

On the morning after her interview with Jim, Evelyn sat in front of a writing-table by a window at Whitelees. She had meant to tell a friend about her lover, but now did not know if she would or not. For one thing, the morning was cold and dreary and she felt dull. Composition was difficult; the glowing phrases she had thought to use would not come. It was raining outside, the lawn was strewn with wet dead leaves, and the bare trees tossed their branches in the wind. Shallow pools spread about the terrace and the hills were blurred by mist. Winter had begun and Evelyn did not like winter in the country.

She put down her pen. Last night's thrill had gone and she was languid. When she had broken his reserve, Jim was the ardent and romantic lover she had thought; but she had been forced to break down his reserve and this carried a sting. For some hours she had been dazzled by the glamor of romance and had rejoiced in her rashness, but the light was getting dim. Things looked different in the morning.

Jim loved her and she was flattered by his exaggerated notion of her worth. She had meant to justify his confidence, but she knew this would be hard, because she knew herself. In a sense, Jim was not her kind, and by and by they might jar. She had self-control, but she was not patient. Moreover, it looked as if Jim were poor, and although she had some money she was not rich. Thrilled by keen excitement and half-consciously acting, she had told him that poverty did not daunt her, but when she came to think, it would be hard to go without the expensive refinements she enjoyed.

With something of an effort, she banished her disturbing thoughts. She was going to marry Jim. Perhaps she could mold him a little. Yet she did not know; she did not want to conventionalize him; there was something rather fine about his ruggedness. Then she began to wonder why she had asked him to tell nobody yet. Girls she knew had found an obvious satisfaction in exhibiting their lovers, but she had felt a need for concealment. This was not because she feared her mother's disapproval; it looked as if she had unconsciously tried to leave open a way of escape. By and by a car rolled up the drive and Mordaunt came in.

"I am going to the town and wondered whether you wanted anything I could get for you," he said.

Evelyn said he might call for some goods her mother had ordered, and he was silent for a moment or two. Then he asked: "Were you and Jim quarreling in the hall last evening?"

"No," she said, smiling. "Why do you imagine this?"

"Jim was preoccupied. I asked him for matches and he gave me his cigarette case."

"He is often preoccupied," Evelyn rejoined, with a careless laugh. "I expect he was thinking about his dykes; he talked about the marsh."

Mordaunt studied her. She was calm and looked amused by his curiosity. Moreover, her suggestion was plausible.

"Jim is not always happy in his choice of subjects, but I won't sympathize with you," he said. "You could have stopped him if you had liked. You often stop me."

"I suppose that is so," Evelyn agreed. "For one thing, it is not much trouble. You know when one is bored."

"Your tastes are mine; we belong to the same school. It makes for understanding."

"After all," said Evelyn, "one likes something new."

Mordaunt laughed and said he must go, and when his car rolled away Evelyn mused. Lance's remark was justified; they did belong to the same school, and in the main their views agreed. This had some drawbacks, but it had advantages. Novelty was stimulating for a time, but soon lost its charm; one was safe if one held fast by the things one knew and valued, even if one's standard of value was not altogether just. Evelyn admitted her cynically philosophic mood was strange, but the dreary day accounted for something, and perhaps a reaction from last night's thrill had begun. A few minutes afterwards Mrs. Halliday came in and they talked about household matters.

In the meantime, Mordaunt drove to the town and stopped at a lawyer's office. There were three partners in the firm which managed Bernard Dearham's business; two sober, white-haired gentlemen, and one who was young. The others gave the house weight and respectability, but Holbrook supplied the driving force and Mordaunt imagined his partners did not know where he was leading them. Holbrook's room, in a tall old house that looked across a quiet square, was handsomely furnished, and Mordaunt sat down in a comfortable chair.

"I want to borrow some money for about six months," he said.

"How much do you want?" Holbrook asked, and when Mordaunt told him, looked thoughtful. Mordaunt had borrowed before and had punctually repaid principal and interest.

"We are not money-lenders, you know," he said. "I negotiated the last loan rather as a favor than a matter of business."

Mordaunt smiled indulgently. "For all that, you lend money; your clients', I suppose. I don't know if your legal business would keep you going long."

"If we invest in anything outside the regular high-class securities, we run some risk."

"I don't think the risk is great," Mordaunt replied. "I sometimes speculate, and you have grounds for knowing I'm generally lucky. Well, some friends floated a small private company to develop a West Indian estate and we have spent much of our capital on new plantations. The value of our produce is rising, but we need funds to carry us on until the crop is shipped and have agreed to a fresh levy. I must pay my share."

"The sum is large."

"You lent me nearly as much before."

"I did," said Holbrook. "Things were different then——"

He stopped, and Mordaunt gave him a keen glance. Holbrook's hesitation was curious.

"How are things different?" Mordaunt asked.

"You bought shares that seldom fluctuate much. You risked losing a small margin; now you may lose the principal."

"The loss would be mine. I have always paid."

"That is so. The trouble is, if this venture went wrong you might not be able to pay."

Mordaunt was silent for a few moments. Holbrook had been willing to negotiate the other loans; it looked as if the fellow had now less grounds for trusting him, although it was not his honesty but his power to pay he doubted. Why did Holbrook think his power had got less?

"Am I to understand you refuse to lend?" he asked.

"I would sooner not. However, if a smaller sum——"

"A smaller sum would not help," Mordaunt replied with a touch of haughtiness. "Well, I will not urge you and dare say you are occupied."

The lawyer let him go and Mordaunt thought hard as he drove home. Holbrook had formerly been accommodating, as if he wanted to satisfy a client whose business might by and by be valuable, but his attitude was now different. There was no traffic on the road that went up a long hill, and Mordaunt could concentrate on the puzzle. When he was half-way up he began to see a light. Bernard had gone to town and had stayed some time; he had probably called on the lawyers who had made his will. The light got clearer and when Mordaunt reached the top he thought he understood.

Bernard had altered his will and Mordaunt would not get as much as he, and no doubt Holbrook, had thought possible. The hospital would cost a large sum, but this did not account for everything. Although Bernard often used the formal manners of the old school, he had a rude vein; he had broken down stubborn opposition and beaten determined strikers while he developed the famous iron mines. No doubt, he saw in Jim qualities like his and now meant to leave him the most part of his estate. All Jim got would be taken from the others, and Mordaunt thought Holbrook's caution indicated that his share had been severely cut down. Jim was going to get money Mordaunt had imagined was his.

He let the engine go, the car leaped forward, and he drove furiously until he reached the Dryholm lodge, for he wanted to find out if his supposition was correct. When he put the car into the garage a man was cleaning a limousine.

"I'm afraid I have given you another job," Mordaunt said. "You haven't got the big car properly polished yet."

"She got very wet when I took Mr. Dearham to town."

"It was a bad day. Did he keep you waiting in the rain?"

"I was outside the lawyers' office for an hour," the man replied.

Mordaunt frowned as he went to the house. The reason for Holbrook's caution was plain, and if Janet Halliday imagined Bernard meant to leave Jim nothing, she was much deceived. Bernard

had probably meant to deceive her, but Mordaunt thought he would not meddle. He went to his room and stopped for some time, smoking and pondering.

A few days afterwards, Jim and Jake, wearing long waders and yellow oilskins, crept up a hollow in the sands. It was about nine o'clock in the evening, they were a mile from land, and light mist drifted about the bay, but the moon shone through. The tide was flowing, the water rippled noisily in the channel, and flakes of muddy foam and trailing weed floated past. The harsh cry of a black-backed gull rang across the flats and small wading birds whistled about the water's edge. Farther off, the clanging call of black geese came out of the mist.

Jim carried a heavy ten-bore gun and his feet sank in the mud as he crept quietly up the hollow. He liked this rough shooting, and now and then Jake and he went out at nights. When one had hunted fierce game in Canada, shooting driven pheasants was tame sport, and the beaters found the birds; but on the sands one must match one's intelligence against the instinctive cunning of the ducks and geese. Besides, there was some risk that gave the thing a spice. Belts of sand were dangerously soft and the tides were treacherous. Sometimes they rose faster than one reckoned.

"The brant-geese can't be far off," he remarked presently. "It's a pretty big gaggle and I expect some of the fat gray-lag are feeding with them."

Jake looked at the water. "If you want a shot, I guess you'll go on; but if I'd been alone, I'd have started home some time since. The tide's rising fast."

"We have a quarter of an hour yet," said Jim. "Anyhow, we'll shove on for the next bend."

They went on. Their waders and oilskins scarcely showed against the sand, and the murmur of the current drowned the noise they made. As they came near the bend the calling of the geese got louder, there was a creaking beat of wings and some of the harsh cries had a different note.

"Grey-lag," said Jim. "Another lot is coming up. They'll fly across to the marsh when the tide moves them."

"It will move us soon," Jake rejoined.

When they reached the corner Jim was a short distance in front. The geese were obviously restless and he crouched as low as he could get. Jake found a hollow in the bank where the sand, undermined by the current, had fallen down, and stood with the water creeping to his feet. He imagined it would nearly reach his waist in mid-channel, and they must soon get across. The beat of wings began again and harsh cries echoed in the mist. The geese were moving and Jake balanced his gun when Jim rose half-upright. The bank behind Jim was low and his bent figure was outlined against the glimmering reflection of the tide.

Then, although he did not know if he had heard a noise or not, Jake looked round and saw a long gray object slide out of the mist. It was indistinct and very low in the water, but he knew it was a shooting punt. It drifted up the channel towards him; a faint ripple indicating that somebody was steering it with a short paddle. A blurred figure lay in the well behind a bunch of reeds, and the only bold line was the barrel of the big punt-gun that would throw a pound of shot. Jim could not see the punt, because he was looking the other way, but it was obvious that the gunner could see him, although Jake thought he himself was invisible against the bank.

As a rule, one cannot aim a punt-gun; one must turn the punt, and Jake noted that the craft swerved. The long barrel was now in line with Jim, and although the man on board was probably steering towards the bank for concealment, Jake thought there was something sinister about his quiet approach. He remembered that Shanks owned the only punt on the lower bay. He waited a few moments, unwilling to call out, lest he should spoil his comrade's shot, but feeling disturbed. The punt was about fifty yards from Jim and the heavy shot would not spread much; Jake admitted that his disturbance was perhaps illogical, but he did not like the way the big gun pointed.

When the punt was level with him he stepped out from the bank. The indistinct figure on board did not move, but the craft swerved again and the gun pointed straight up the channel. Jake did not know if this was significant or not, because the current eddied, but he imagined the fellow had seen him. Then Jim threw his gun to his shoulder and a red flash leaped from the muzzle. There was a splash, but next moment Jake saw a dark object overhead and pulled the trigger. The goose came down, whirling over with long neck hanging limp, until it struck the other bank, and Jake plunged into the channel.

"Pick up your bird and get across," he shouted, while the current rippled about his legs.

For the next minute or two they were occupied. The tide ran fast, the bottom was soft, and Jim's goose drifted away. He reached it, however, and they came out on the other bank. Jake could see nothing but the glimmering water and a narrow belt of wet sand. The geese had flown off and the punt had vanished in the fog.

"We stopped long enough, but we've got a brant and a gray-lag. You ought to be satisfied," he said.

"I'd have got another if you hadn't been so anxious to get across," Jim rejoined. "Wasn't there a punt about? I thought I saw something as I threw up my gun."

"Yes," said Jake, dryly, "Shanks' punt!"

"Of course! Nobody else keeps a punt on the low marsh. Well, we spoiled his shot and I expect he'll feel he has a fresh grievance. That is, if he knew who I was."

"I reckon he knew all right," Jake remarked. "Nobody else has been on the sands for some weeks."

Jim looked at him rather hard. "Anyhow, it doesn't matter. Let's get home. There's a hole in my wader and the water has leaked through. This sport is pretty good, but you need a punt. I'll order one from the fellow across the bay."

They set off and Jake could not tell if he had excited his comrade's suspicions. Jim was sometimes reserved. Jake admitted that his own suspicions might not be justified, but he wondered what would have happened had he not moved out from the bank.

CHAPTER XIII

MORDAUNT'S REPULSE

Shortly after his visit to the lawyer, Mordaunt walked over to Whitelees. It was about four o'clock in the afternoon, and it would soon be dark, but although he had some distance to go he did not walk fast. Tea was served early at Whitelees and, as a rule, Mrs. Halliday afterwards went to sleep. Mordaunt wanted to arrive when she had done so, and his leisurely progress gave him time to think.

He meant to ask Evelyn to marry him. He liked her and they generally agreed, but he was not sure he would have thought about marriage had he been rich. For all that, he knew no other girl who would suit him so well, and it would be an advantage to consolidate the family property, since both would inherit some part of Bernard's estate. Mordaunt knew Mrs. Halliday saw this, for she had been his friend until Jim came on the scene. It now looked as if she thought Jim would get little or nothing, and Mordaunt did not mean to enlighten her.

The loss of his West Indian investment forced him to make a prudent marriage, but he did not feel that he was doing a shabby thing. Evelyn understood him and was rather calculating than romantic. It was disturbing that she had obviously been attracted by Jim, but Mordaunt thought the attraction was not very strong. He did not mean to let Jim rob him of his inheritance and the girl he hoped would be his wife.

It was getting dark when he reached Whitelees and found Evelyn sitting by the fire in the drawing-room. The lamps were not lighted and the room was shadowy except for the reflection from the grate. Evelyn did not get up and he stood opposite, talking quietly while she rested her chin in her hollowed hand and listened. He did not pretend passion, but she thought he struck the right note. He was sincere, as far as he went, and she admitted that he made the best of a not very strong appeal. One could trust Lance to be graceful.

"If you had asked me before, I might have married you. It is now too late," she said.

Mordaunt moved abruptly, but used some control. "Ah," he said, in a rather strained voice, "I suppose this means Jim has claimed you first?"

"Yes," she said, calmly, "I have promised to marry Jim. So far, nobody else knows."

He was silent for a moment or two, knitting his brows, and then looked up.

"I'm sorry, and although your refusal hurts, don't think I'm altogether selfish. Jim is a good sort, but he's not the man for you."

Evelyn colored and her eyes sparkled, and then the firelight left her face.

"To some extent that is so, Lance. I expect Jim has drawbacks, but he's flesh and blood; red blood, I think they say in Canada. You know what you and I are; we have cultivated out our vulgar passions. At least, I thought I had!"

"Has Jim persuaded you that you were mistaken?"

"He may persuade me. After all, there is some satisfaction in being human."

Mordaunt made a sign of vague agreement. "I thought I was a philosopher, but I'm frankly savage now. However, I don't imagine you will let passion guide you very long." He paused, and after a few moments resumed: "If you find you were deceived and romance gets stale, you will find me waiting. I think you know this, and there is no more to be said."

"There is no use in waiting, Lance," Evelyn replied. "I have made the plunge. It cost me an effort, but I feel braced. Jim is bracing; like cold water or a boisterous wind. You would have kept me in an enervating calm. Well, I'm tired of artificial tranquillity; I'm going to try my luck in the struggle of life with Jim."

She let him go and he started for Dryholm in a thoughtful mood. Her refusal had hurt him, but he would not dwell on this. He was half-afraid to do so and wanted to think about her. She was pluckier than he had imagined and was obviously sincere, since she did not know Jim would be rich, but he doubted if she could keep it up. Jim was rude and tempestuous, and she would not be satisfied with him long. The trouble was the romantic impulse might sustain her until it was too late, for Jim would, no doubt, urge an early marriage.

Mordaunt's face got hard as he thought about this, and he was rather surprised by the anger that fired his blood. He had cultivated a philosophic selfishness, but it no longer supported him. He hated Jim, and felt troubled about Evelyn. Luck was with the headstrong fool; he had swept her off her feet, but she would recover her balance and then she would pay. Mordaunt clenched his fist and raged with helpless savageness. It was long since he had indulged his passions, and now his control had gone the reaction was sharp.

He got cooler and began to look about. There was a moon, the evening was calm, and the dew sparkled on the grass by the hedgerows. A thick wood bordered one side of the road, which went up a long hill, and pale birch trunks that caught the light stood out against dusky firs. Now and then a rabbit ran across the road and plunged into the grass, and presently there was a sharp rattle of wings. A flock of wood-pigeons circled round in the moonlight and flew back into the firs. Then a cock-pheasant crowed.

Mordaunt stopped in the gloom where a nut-bush hung over the gate of a ride. Somebody had disturbed the birds; one could trust the pigeons to give the alarm when an enemy was about. Mordaunt was a sportsman and a good shot, but he waited because he wanted to find some relief from his tormenting thoughts. He was just inside the Langrigg boundary and imagined the gamekeeper began his round at the other end of the estate. By and by dry underbrush rustled and there was a noise like a briar dragging across somebody's clothes. Afterwards all was quiet for a few moments, until a dark figure came out of the gloom close to the gate.

Mordaunt let the man get over and then touched his arm. The other started, and stepping back, struck the gate. The blow was soft as if something had eased the shock and the fellow's shape was bulky about his hips. Mordaunt knew a poacher has generally a large pocket in the lower lining of his coat. As the fellow lifted a short, knotted stick, he turned his face to the light and Mordaunt saw it was Tom Shanks, the old marshman's son.

"You can put down the stick," he said, coolly. "I expect you have been smoking pheasants, but they're Langrigg bird's, not ours."

Shanks leaned against the gate and looked at him with dull suspicion. Although his face was coarse and heavy, his eyes were cunning; he slouched, but when he moved his step was light.

"There's nowt that's not Langrigg's," he growled, grasping his stick. "Gentry stands by yan anodder. Are you gan t' tell?"

Mordaunt pondered. They were alone and he knew Shanks's sullen ferocity. On the whole, he thought he was in some danger unless he could satisfy the fellow. Shanks did not mean to let him seize the heavy stick.

"I've not much ground for standing by Mr. Dearham and it's not my business to protect his game," he said.

"If I thowt you'd send keeper after me——"

"Put down your stick," said Mordaunt, with haughty impatience. "If I wanted to send the keeper, I'd certainly do so. But how many pheasants did you get?"

"Nobbut two. T' birds is varra scarce."

"Then I don't see why you ran the risk of stealing Langrigg pheasants when there are plenty in Red Bank woods."

Shanks was silent for a moment or two, and then replied, as if Mordaunt's carelessness had banished his doubts: "Mr. Dearham put us oot o' dabbin and blew 't up."

"It's possible he'll put you out of Bank-end cottage soon."

"Do you ken that?" Shanks asked with a start.

"I heard something of the kind. Dearham meant to let your father have the cottage, but said nothing about your getting it, and he's tired of you both. You are letting Bank-end go to ruin and people complain about your poaching."

Shanks's sullen look changed to a savage frown.

"If he puts us out, there's nea place we'll can gan."

Mordaunt hesitated. He imagined Shanks had had something to do with the accident to Jim's car, and it was obvious that the fellow was bitterly revengeful. At the beginning, Mordaunt had not meant to work upon his vindictive feelings; he had done so half-consciously, but now he meant to go on.

"Nobody in the neighborhood would let you have a cottage. You might get a laborer's job in the town, but you would have to work hard, and I don't know about your father. He's rheumatic and old. None of the farmers would engage you."

"T'oad man wouldn't could live away from marsh, and I'm none for takin' a job in town; I'd sicken among t'hooses," Shanks replied.

Mordaunt thought the fellow did not exaggerate. Shanks and his father would find no place in organized industry. They belonged to the open spaces, the wide marsh and the wet sands.

"Then it's lucky I and not the gamekeeper caught you to-night," he said. "Mr. Dearham is waiting for an excuse to turn you out. I Imagine you will soon give him one."

Shanks did not reply. Seizing the top of the gate, he jumped over and vanished in the wood. For a few moments all was quiet, and then Mordaunt heard steps in the road. He left the gate and when he had gone a few yards met Dick Halliday, who stopped and looked at him with surprise.

"I thought I saw two people," Dick remarked.

"You did see two," Mordaunt agreed. "It's curious the other fellow didn't hear you farther off, because I imagine his ears are very good. Were you trying to get near us?"

"Not at first. They're mending the road up the hill and I walked on the grass. When I saw you at the gate I suspected poachers and came on quietly. Who was the other fellow?"

"Tom Shanks. I caught him coming out of the wood with some pheasants and warned him he'd have to leave Bank-end if Jim knew."

"Do you mean you promised not to tell Jim?"

"I imagined he understood something like that. He is a powerful fellow, and carried a heavy stick. Still, my satisfying him doesn't bind you."

"I don't know; perhaps it does bind me, in a way," Dick replied. "All the same, Shanks is a loafing thief; I'd have turned him out of the neighborhood."

Mordaunt hesitated. He would have liked Dick to tell Jim, since this might lead the latter to take the cottage from Shanks. For all that, he did not see how he could persuade Dick to do so, because he did not want him to think he had an object.

"Well, I must get on," he said. "Bernard grumbles when I'm late for dinner."

He felt rather angry with himself when he went off. Luck had given him an opportunity and he had used it in a manner of which he was half-ashamed. The thing was done, however, and he was not sure he was sorry. Shanks was a savage brute and had already borne Jim a grudge. One or two of the farmers and country gentlemen had had grounds to regret they had not left him alone. He would not hesitate much if he saw a way to prevent Jim's turning him out, but Mordaunt shrank from wondering how far he would go. After all, he had merely warned Shanks about the consequence of his poaching.

When dinner was over he told Bernard he had been to Whitelees, and added: "I imagine Evelyn would not like it publicly announced just yet, but she has promised to marry Jim."

Bernard was silent for a few moments, and his face was inscrutable. "Then, she is pluckier than I thought," he said, dryly. "But why does she not want people to know?"

"It's something of a puzzle. Perhaps she felt telling people would bind her to her promise."

"Jim is a handsome fellow; I suppose the flesh is willing but the calculating brain weighs the drawbacks that may after all tip the beam," Bernard remarked, and added with a sneer: "You ought to have married Evelyn; you would have got on with her. In fact, if she had been willing, I'd have seen that her prudence was properly rewarded. The curious thing is, I imagine you both knew this."

"I don't think either of us deserves the taunt, sir," Mordaunt rejoined. "Anyhow, I doubt if your generous plan altogether sprang from good will to us."

"You're clever," said Bernard, with dry humor. "Much cleverer than Jim; but he'll go far while you stand still. Hustling is new to Evelyn and at first she may find it exciting, but I doubt if she'll enjoy the effort to keep up with her husband when the novelty wears off."

He mused when Mordaunt went away. For a time at least, his plot had failed and he was keenly disappointed. Evelyn was not the wife for Jim; he ought to have married the girl from Canada. Carrie was frankly flesh and blood, and although she had not much polish yet, this would come; she had a natural dignity and was staunch and fearless. She would keep pace with Jim, fronting troubles with her steady glance; Bernard smiled as he pictured Evelyn's stumbling gait when Jim, so to speak, took a rough, steep hill. The thought, however, did not amuse him much, and he resigned himself moodily to wait.

CHAPTER XIV

FOOTSTEPS IN THE SAND

Jim had a shooting-punt built, and now and then when the tide served at night, paddled up the creeks and shot a goose or duck, although he did not use a big punt-gun. He liked to pick out his birds and not throw a pound of shot into a flock. In the meantime, he pushed on the draining of the marsh, and although he spent anxious hours counting the cost, resolved to hold out until the job was done. As a rule, he was preoccupied and quiet, and Evelyn often found him dull. His talk about dykes and sluices did not amuse her.

By and by he found it needful to engage some drain-cutters, and one afternoon Jake, taking Carrie with him, started for a village on the other side of the bay. It was a long way round the sands and when they were near the village the car stopped and Jake found a valve had broken. He engaged the men he wanted and afterwards resolved to leave the car and walk back across the sands. The few cottages were very small and their occupants had no room for strangers, but the bay got narrow near its mouth and the distance across the sands was scarcely three miles. Jake did not expect to find much water in the channels, and when he had borrowed a pair of fishermen's waders for Carrie, and they had got a meal at a cottage, they set off.

It was dark and fog drifted in from sea, but the moon shone between slowly-moving clouds. The throb of the surf was unusually loud and a fisherman told Jake to get across as soon as he could. He said there was wind outside and the tide often turned before its proper time when a fresh breeze was coming.

When dusk fell Jim returned from the marsh and found Mrs. Winter in the hall. There was nobody else about, and he thought the hall looked lonely. He was tired after a day's hard work and sat down in an easy-chair when Mrs. Winter asked if he would like some tea.

"I'll wait until Carrie comes," he said. "Jake ought to have brought her back by now. The house feels empty when they're not here."

Mrs. Winter mused. Although Jim had rather unwillingly agreed when Evelyn insisted that nobody should be told about their engagement, he took much for granted when he imagined that nobody knew. Mrs. Winter was not deceived by his silence and knew that Carrie understood.

"When do you reckon you'll finish the dykes, Jim?" she asked presently.

"I don't know," he said. "It looks like a long job and money's getting short. Anyhow, I have got to put it over, because I can't stand for losing the sum I've already spent. But why do you ask?"

"Because we must go back when you have no more use for Jake."

"Oh," said Jim, smiling, "I'll always have some use for Jake, and Langrigg wouldn't be the same if he took you away. You and Carrie make the old house feel like home."

Mrs. Winter felt troubled. Jim was obviously sincere, and she had liked him from the beginning. She had been happy at Langrigg; after the strain of hard work and poverty, it was nice to rest and control the well-ordered English household. Carrie, too, had been happy, but Mrs. Winter imagined she was not happy now. Although the girl had grit and would play her part well, Mrs. Winter did not mean to let her wait for Jim's wedding.

"You know we can't stay very long," she said.

"I don't see why it's impossible."

"You may get married."

"Well?" said Jim. "Suppose I do? There's plenty of room at Langrigg and my wife would be kind to my friends when she knew how much I owe them."

"The plan wouldn't work. When you marry, your wife will have first claim on you. I reckon she'll have all the claim there is and won't want to share it with anybody else."

Jim frowned. Perhaps Mrs. Winter was justified. Now he came to think of it, he had once or twice got a hint that Evelyn did not altogether understand his friendship for Carrie.

"I hate to think of your going," he declared. "Anyhow, you must stay for some time yet. Jake promised to help me finish the draining scheme, and I may go broke. Then I'd need him more."

He got up and was silent for a few moments. If he lost his money, his engagement to Evelyn must be broken off. This was obvious, but if he had, for example, meant to marry Carrie, his embarrassments would not, in one sense, matter much. Carrie would meet their troubles with a smile and help him to make good. Still he must not indulge thoughts like this.

"I think I'll take the punt and paddle up the big creek," he said. "You can tell Carrie she ought to have come back to give me tea. Since she hasn't come, I'll wait for dinner."

He went off and Mrs. Winter mused. Jim generally knew what he wanted, but his attitude was puzzling now. Although he meant to marry Evelyn and imagined he loved her, Mrs. Winter doubted. She wondered whether Evelyn had, so to speak, dazzled him by her grace and beauty. Jim was resolute and practical, but not clever. Mrs. Winter sighed and imagined she had been foolish to let Carrie stay so long, but she could not see her way. Jim would not be married until he had drained the marsh and Jake would not go before the work was finished. Mrs. Winter admitted that he could not go.

In the meantime, Jim launched his shooting-punt in a muddy creek. The punt would carry two people and measured about eighteen feet long and nearly three feet wide. She was decked, except for a short well, and when loaded floated a few inches above the water. A bundle of reeds was fastened across the head-ledge of the well to hide the occupant when he lay down and used the short paddle.

Jim stood on the after-deck and drove the punt down the creek with a pole. He could see across the bank, and the wet marsh, glistening faintly in the moonlight, ran back into thin mist. In front, the creek got wider until it melted into the expanse of sands. Here and there a belt of smooth mud caught a silvery reflection, but for the most part the sands were dark. The night was calm and the advancing surf rumbled in the distance like a heavy train. It was a good night for shooting and Jim wondered whether anybody else was about. Mordaunt and Dick now and then went after the geese, and Shanks, in his shooting punt, generally haunted the channels when the gaggles came down to feed.

It was some time after low-water when Jim reached the main channel and stopped to listen. He thought the surf was unusually loud, but he could not hear the geese. The wild cry of a curlew came out of the dark and red-shanks were whistling in the distance. The water, so far as he could see, was still, and this meant the tide had not yet entered the channel. He thought he ought to have an hour before it did so, but the current would run fast then. Tides rise high when high-water comes at twelve o'clock with a full moon.

After a few minutes he set off again. There was no need for him to lie down and he stood on deck, using the pole. It sank about a foot, but presently the water shoaled and when the punt touched bottom he got over and dragged her by a line. He wore a yellow oilskin, long waders, and thin canvas shoes. At length, the punt would float no farther, and putting her on rollers, he pulled her a short distance up the bank and afterwards carried a small anchor as far as the line would allow. He was a mile and a half from land, the tide would soon flow, and if the geese were about, he might be away some time. Then, picking up his gun, he set off up the nearly dry channel. There was a salt-water lake, bordered by a weedy scar, not far off, and he might find some brant geese or ducks.

In the meantime, Dick Halliday called at Langrigg, and was received by Mrs. Winter.

"Are you all alone?" he asked.

Mrs. Winter told him where Jake and Carrie had gone, and that Jim was shooting. Dick inquired when Jake had started and looked thoughtful when Mrs. Winter replied.

"They ought to have been back some time since," he remarked. "The road is very bad where it runs across the head of the bay and high tides cover the causeway for an hour or two. I don't think Jake would wait until dark; the car has probably broken down."

"Then they would have to stop all night?"

"I doubt if anybody could take them in. There are only a few cottages and the mussel-gatherers and farm-hands have swarms of children. I rather imagine Jake would walk across the

sands——"

He stopped and looked at the tall clock, and then crossing the floor, pulled back the window-curtains and opened a light. Mrs. Winter noted that his movements were quick and thought him anxious. Dick came rather often to Langrigg and she imagined Carrie attracted him, although she knew the girl had not meant to use her charm.

"It's nearly full-moon," he remarked when he came back. "I don't think Jim will mind if I borrow one of his guns. I know where they are. Don't bother to ring."

"Are you going to shoot?" Mrs. Winter asked.

"I might get a shot," Dick replied carelessly. "Anyhow, I'll walk across the sands. I may find Jim, or perhaps meet Jake and Carrie coming back."

He went to the gun-room and took down a heavy ten-bore, that would make a loud report, for the fog he had seen from the window was getting thick. Then he put some cartridges in his pocket, and finding a pair of waders, went back and smiled when he met Mrs. Winter's curious glance.

"Carrie may be glad of the waders," he said. "There's sometimes a little water in the hollows, and I don't expect Jake knows the driest way. Now I'll get off."

Mrs. Winter let him go. She was beginning to feel alarmed, but Dick's quick, resolute movements comforted her. He had been careful not to hint there was a risk, but if there was, he would know the best way of meeting it. Dick did not hurry when he went down the freshly-raked gravel drive, but when he reached the road he walked as fast as the heavy gun would let him. Carrie was on the sands, it was past low-water, and Jake did not know much about the gutters through which the tide ran up the bay. Dick did know, and had sometimes seen a white-topped bore roll like a wall of foam across the flats when the moon was full. To-night, when wind was coming, the tide would rise fast.

It was rough walking across the marsh, where he was forced to jump ditches and wind about among deep holes, and he was glad to reach the sands. Stopping for a few moments, he took off his boots. The sand was cold, but he meant to strike the shortest line across the bay and in places the mud was soft. He knew one can pull one's naked foot loose where one's boots would stick; moreover, Carrie would like the waders dry.

Dick began to think about Carrie as he set out across the flats. He liked her much, and admitted that it cost him an effort not to fall in love with her; Carrie had made him feel that this could not be allowed. Sometimes he wondered why, and sometimes he thought he knew; but then he suspected that Jim would marry Evelyn. Dick approved Jim, but doubted if he was altogether the man for Evelyn. Perhaps, however, when he came to think about it, he really meant that Evelyn was not the girl for Jim. There was a difference——.

He pulled himself up. He was fond of Evelyn, although he knew her faults; besides, the fog was thick and he must keep his proper course. He ought to strike the big gutter soon and was anxious about the tide: it would soon run up the hollows in the flats. He wondered where Mordaunt was, because Lance had told him he was going out on the sands and he had not heard his gun.

Shortly afterwards, Dick went down the bank of the gutter and began to wade across. The water did not come much above his ankles; but it was moving; slowly yet, although it would soon run fast. He got across and saw Jim's punt on the muddy sand. The fog was low and drifted about in belts, clearing now and then, and when he stopped by the punt the moon shone through.

Dick was puzzled. The punt had been moved since Jim pulled her up the bank. It was prudent to leave her where one could get on board when the tide rose, but Dick could not see why Jim had afterwards moved her down. He had, however, done so, because the rollers he used had made a rut in the sand in advance of her present position. Then the anchor had been carried up to higher ground, for one could see where the line had dragged, although it now lay close to the punt. Dick began to examine the footsteps about the spot. He was something of a naturalist and a good wildfowler and had studied the tracks of animals and birds.

Jim had obviously come up the gutter and another man had joined him. The other was barefooted and the marks seemed to indicate that he had helped Jim to run down the punt. Then a third man had arrived and Dick thought this was Lance, because he wore nailed fishing brogues. Lance often used brogues; he was cautious and did not like soft mud. Dick imagined Lance had reached the spot after the others and was somewhere about; he would not go far from the gutter when the tide was rising. The thing was strange, but since Jim had moved the punt back, there was no reason why Dick should meddle. Jim had probably gone to the scar and no doubt knew how long he could stay. Moreover, Dick's business was to find Carrie, and he set off again.

He followed a small creek that joined the big gutter. Its channel was narrow and cut rather deep into the sand. Although a belt of fog rolled up he could see fifty or sixty yards, and presently distinguished a hazy figure near a bend of the creek. He thought it was about Lance's height, and

shouted; but the fellow did not answer and vanished next moment. It looked as if the fog had rolled nearer and hidden him, although he might have gone down into the creek. Dick went to the edge, but saw nobody, although he crossed a row of steps. This was puzzling. He imagined the other had heard his shout and was in the hollow, where his shooting-clothes would melt into the background. The sand, however, was soft and the marks had begun to fill up. Dick did not see why he should follow them, since the man might have meant to hide until the geese flew over. He gave it up and pushed on.

The fog crept towards him and did not look as if it would soon roll away. For all that, he knew the sands and had the noise of the advancing surf for a guide, which was lucky because speed was important. A stream ran through the flats near the other shore, and if Carrie and Jake had started they would have crossed its channel and now be on the long peninsula of sand that went up the middle of the bay. When the water rose they could not get across the main gutter, and it would be hard to reach the land from the end of the peninsula because it was traversed by a number of little creeks, up which the tide forced its way.

After a time, Dick stopped and fired the gun. He heard nothing but the echoes that rolled across the waste and the roar of the sea. The latter was ominously loud and he began to run. When he had gone some distance, he tried another shot and disturbed two black-backed gulls that made a noise like hoarse laughter as they flew overhead. This was all, and he felt that the gulls were mocking him. He was getting anxious, and ran on until he was forced to stop for breath, as the fog began to lift. It rolled back before a little puff of wind, the moon shone through, and he saw glittering water in front.

Dick began to run the other way. He could do no more, and it looked as if Jake and Carrie were not on the middle sand. After all, he had not much ground for imagining they had meant to cross the bay; if there was no room at the village, they might have walked to a station four or five miles off and gone to the market town. He must save himself, and since he hardly thought he could reach Jim's punt before she floated, he headed up the middle sand. One could cross the gutter farther on, if one knew the right spot, but it would mean wading some distance and he must be quick. He got through, and then ran back along the edge of the channel. He wanted to see if Jim had returned to the punt.

CHAPTER XV

JIM'S ENLIGHTENMENT

Jim waited for some time behind a boulder by the salt-water pond, and then shot a duck. The report echoed among the belts of fog and after the noise died away the roar of the advancing tide was ominously loud, but Jim thought he heard something else. He listened, and in a few moments a cry came faintly across the sands. Somebody was calling for help, and Jim began to run. He might have to go some distance and his punt would soon float.

After a few minutes he plunged into a belt of mist. The sand was soft and his waders and heavy gun embarrassed him, but he heard the call again and thought he knew the voice. He labored on, breathing hard, until by and by the fog melted and he saw two figures not far off.

"Jake!" he shouted. "Is it you and Carrie?"

Jake answered, and Jim was conscious of a relief that shook him when the others came up. Carrie was splashed by mud and breathless with haste.

"What are you doing on the sands?" he asked.

"Car broke down; we tried to get across," Jake replied. "Saw the Langrigg hill when we started and then the fog came on. They told us to head for some stake-nets, but we couldn't find them. Then we met the water and reckoned we were lost. Is your punt about?"

"She is not far off," said Jim, who turned to Carrie. "We must hustle. Can you run?"

Carrie said she would try and they set off, but when they had gone a few hundred yards a wave of thick fog rolled up, blotting out the moonlight.

"This is awkward," Jim gasped, taking Carrie's arm and helping her on. "Still, if we keep going, we'll soon strike the gutter."

The roar of the surf gave him some guidance, but sound is puzzling in a fog; there was very little wind, and he could not see the moon. He knew the tide was now running up the channel and hoped he was heading the right way. Shortly afterwards a dull report rolled across the sands.

"A ten-bore!" he exclaimed. "Mordaunt uses a twelve. I expect Dick's shooting, and since the

water's rising, he's on the shore flat. Where do you locate the shot?"

"A little to the left," said Jake.

They swerved and presently heard the gun again.

"That's for us," gasped Jim. "Dick has found the punt; I reckon she's afloat."

"Let me go, Jim," said Carrie. "Hurry on and get the punt."

Jim pressed her arm and urged her forward. "I'm going to stick to you until you're safe on board."

"Water!" shouted Jake, from a few yards in front; and something glimmered in the fog, which was getting thin again.

They could see for a short distance, but when they stopped at the edge of the channel the punt was not about. She was, however, painted an inconspicuous gray, and Jim thought she was not far off. While he hesitated, wondering which way to turn, a heavy report came out of the melting fog.

"Hallo!" Jake shouted. "Where's our punt?"

"On your side," somebody answered. "Saw her five minutes since and then the water drove me back."

The voice came from their left and after running a short distance they stopped. A low, indistinct object floated about thirty yards off, and Jim, dropping Carrie's arm, stood for a moment with his hands clenched. The wave-lined sand was level, and this meant much, because the bank of the gutter was steep. The tide had filled the hollow and he could not see across. He was not disturbed about the depth, but the current rippled across the sand, carrying along clumps of weed and flakes of foam that showed how fast it went.

"Give me your knife," he said to Jake, as he pulled off his oilskin. "I've got to swim. You must stay with Carrie; I swim better."

He slit the waders and tore them off with his canvas shoes; then he ran along the sand, heading up stream, and when he judged he had gone far enough plunged in. After he had taken a few steps the water frothed about his waist, and next moment swept him off his feet. He swam savagely, swinging his left arm out and steering obliquely against the current that carried him along. The water was horribly cold and cut his breathing and cramped his muscles, but if he missed the punt he might be swept some distance up the channel before he could land. He must not miss the punt, because he would be too exhausted to try again and did not think Jake could reach her.

After a minute or two he saw the punt; she was swinging about in the rush of tide and seemed to forge towards him. A rippling line marked her painter. He stopped swimming and let himself drift. He must not be carried past; and presently he made a quick stroke and felt a triumphant thrill when his numbed fingers clutched the craft's low side. For all that, he had not conquered yet. He was tired, and it is hard to get on board a floating punt.

The current swept his legs under the boat, and when he tried to lift himself she rolled down with his weight and threatened to capsize. But he must not be beaten. He was fighting for Carrie's life, and remembering this gave him extra strength. Sliding his hands along the side of the punt, he let the current take him aft, and then with a desperate effort lifted the upper of his body above the pointed stern. Next moment, he fell forward on the deck and crawled to the well. He had won. He tried to shout, but could not. His heart beat like a hammer and he choked.

Pulling himself together, he seized the line at the bow, and in a few moments the anchor was on board and he picked up the pole. The punt drifted fast up channel while he headed for the bank, but he saw Jake running along the sand and presently threw the light anchor as far as he could. Jake caught the line and Jim, springing overboard, ran through the water and picked up Carrie.

He felt her tremble and kissed her as she put her arms round his neck. It did not matter it Jake saw or not. After putting her on board he jumped in and grasped the pole.

"Shove us off," he said to Jake. "I'll come back for you."

They lost the bank in the fog, and soon the pole did not touch bottom and Jim used the paddle. After a few minutes, he saw an indistinct figure, apparently in the water; and then his paddle struck sand. Jumping over, he held out his arms and did not put Carrie down until he had carried her some distance from the channel. He had afterwards a hazy notion that he kissed her again. When he turned back Dick was pushing off the punt.

"I'll bring Jake; you have had enough," he said.

Jim shoved him back. "It's my job; he's my partner. Look after Carrie. Start for the marsh."

He got on board and when the punt vanished in the fog Dick turned to Carrie. "They may be ten minutes; the tide's running fast. You are wet and perhaps we had better get off."

"No," said Carrie. "I won't move until they're safe across."

Dick gave her a quick glance. She looked resolute; her voice had a strange exultant note. He was anxious to start, since he thought they might find some water in a gutter between them and land, but it was obvious that Carrie could not be persuaded. Presently the punt came across and the others got out.

"Have you been here long?" Jim asked when he had driven the anchor into the sand.

"No," said Dick. "I fired the gun as soon as I arrived. The punt was on your side, I imagined you were about, and I can't swim much. I'd seen the punt before. I went to meet Jake and Carrie, but met the water. No doubt, they crossed the channel that stopped me, farther up."

Jim nodded. "Looks like that. It was a big relief when we heard you shoot. But I'm puzzled: the punt was some distance from the bank and the anchor was covered. I thought I'd carried it far enough back."

"Then you didn't move her after you pulled her up?"

"Certainly not," Jim rejoined, with some surprise. "If I'd wanted her to float, I wouldn't have bothered to drag her up over the steep mud."

"Oh, well, we must get off," said Dick, who did not want to talk about the punt. "The tide's running fast across the flats; I think we'll make for the shell ridge."

Although the fog was thick, they reached the marsh, where Dick left them. He was wet and it was some distance to Whitelees, but he would not go to Langrigg and put on dry clothes. When Jim got calm he might feel curious about the punt. Dick was not ready to satisfy his curiosity yet. He was disturbed and wanted to get away.

The others went on, and when they came down to dinner nobody looked much the worse. Jim, however, was quiet and although Carrie talked and sometimes laughed, he imagined her cheerfulness was forced. Jake alone seemed to have a good appetite and Jim was annoyed when Mrs. Winter remarked that he did not eat much. She declared the dinner was pretty good, although it had been served an hour or two late. When it was over, Jim looked at the clock and proposed that they should play cards. He would sooner have gone off to the library by himself, but Jake might speculate about this and so long as they were occupied he need not talk. The others would go to bed soon, and then he could grapple with an awkward situation.

At length, Jake put down his cards. "I can't make it; you have beaten us," he said, and pushed back his chair. "If you want to see the men start to-morrow we had better go to bed."

He brought Mrs. Winter a candle and they left the hall; but Carrie stopped to pick up the cards, and Jim waited. He heard Jake say good night to his mother on the landing, and their steps died away. It was very quiet in the hall, except for the snapping of the fire; and Jim's hand trembled as he struck a match and lighted Carrie's candle. She heard him move and looked up. There was some color in her face, which cut sharply against the dark oak. Jim put the candle on the carved newel-post at the bottom of the stairs.

"I was badly scared when we found the water was round the punt," he said. "In fact, I rather lost my control."

"You were not scared for yourself and were very cool and quick," Carrie replied and forced a smile. "Perhaps some people do lose control when they are strongly moved, but you are not that kind."

Jim gave her a keen glance. It looked as if she meant to persuade him that he had acted normally, but this was ridiculous. Perhaps she meant to hint that his rashness must not be talked about. Coolness was hard, but he was honest and there was something to be said.

"I wonder whether you know I am going to marry Evelyn?" he remarked.

She met his glance. "Yes, Jim; I knew some time since. It doesn't matter that you told nobody. Well, she's beautiful and very charming." She moved, and taking the candle from the post, calmly looked back at him. "Of course, you're going to marry Evelyn! But the others have gone, and I'm tired. Good night."

He let her go, and when she went up the shallow stairs, crossed the floor to the hearth. There was a looking-glass close by and he started as he saw his face. His brows were knitted and his mouth was set. Carrie was clever and while he talked to her he had looked like that! He began to see what she had meant when she said he was, of course, going to marry Evelyn.

He sat down and gazed savagely at the sinking fire. What a fool he had been! Evelyn had moved him to romantic admiration. Her beauty, her high cultivation and refinement had made a strong appeal, but he had not known that they appealed mainly to his intellect, and it counted for

much that she was the first Englishwoman of her type he had met. He knew now, and saw he had deceived himself. Enlightenment had come when Carrie ran some risk of being drowned and he had taken her in his arms.

Evelyn was, so to speak, a model of perfection, worthy to be admired, but really out of his reach. In a sense, she left him cold; but Carrie was warm and loving flesh and blood. She had worked with him and cheered him in the lonely North; her small failings had a curious charm. She appealed to all that was human in him; it was ridiculous that he had imagined his love for her was brotherly.

He began to think about their last interview, when he had lighted the candle. She had said little, but she had meant much. His kissing her must be forgotten and he must marry Evelyn. Carrie wanted him to understand that she saw this and was jealous for his honor. If he drew back and broke his faith with Evelyn, she would have nothing to do with him. Moreover, it was unthinkable that he should draw back. He sat still for some time with his hands clenched and then got up abruptly and went out.

The wind the surf had threatened had come and blown back the fog. Its rude buffet braced him, the roar of the sea and wail of the trees that rolled down the slope were soothing. The moon was bright and when he saw the foam glitter in the bay his sense of rebellion began to melt. Carrie was safe; he had saved her and she had shown him his duty. Well, he was going to carry it out, and after all Evelyn's charm was strong. He had been a fool, but only Carrie knew, and Evelyn must not pay. By and by he went back to the house, calmed but not much comforted.

In the meantime, Dick reached Whitelees and did not say much about his adventure. When he had got some food he went to the smoking-room and looked for paper and a pencil. He wanted to refresh his memory of the footsteps about the punt and the marks left by the anchor line. It was important that he should do so, but although he sat for an hour, drawing rough plans of the spot, he was not satisfied. Unluckily, he could not go back to the sands in the morning and study the ground, because he had promised to join some friends in town for a week. All the same, it was some relief to put off the matter and go to bed, but he did not sleep much and felt moody when he got an early breakfast and started for the station.

CHAPTER XVI

EVELYN'S RESOLUTION FAILS

Disturbing thoughts spoiled Dick's visit to town and one morning soon after his return he went out on the sands when the tide was low. He took a note-book and a compass, and before he went walked up and down a measured distance on the lawn until he thought he knew the length of his stride. Since he was going to make some investigations that he tried to hope would banish his doubts, it was necessary to be accurate. He found the spot where Jim had left his punt; there was a little runlet of water down the bank that fixed it, and he stepped off the distance to the level sand above. Then he smoked a pipe while he tried to recapture the footsteps as he had seen them in the moonlight, and when he was roughly satisfied, went across to the creek that ran into the main channel.

He counted his steps until he reached the spot where the shadowy figure had vanished in the fog. The creek bent just there; he remembered the bend, which he had cut across, and the bank was steep. If Lance, wearing light-colored shooting clothes, had gone into the hollow, nobody could have seen him a few yards off. Dick made some notes and marked the distances, and then went back to Whitelees, feeling strangely troubled. His doubts had not vanished; they had changed to certainties.

Dick was young and often careless, but now a sense of responsibility weighed upon him. He had a liking for Jim and an affection for Carrie that might have ripened to a stronger feeling had she allowed it, and both had run some risk of being drowned. For all that, Dick could not see his way. The honor of the house must be guarded, and although he knew himself a coward he hesitated for a miserable week.

Then Jim came to Whitelees one evening when Mrs. Halliday and Dick were dining somewhere else. He stopped for two or three hours, and unluckily Evelyn was bored when he arrived and Jim was dull. He had had a disappointing day, for a sluice-gate had fallen down, a workman had got hurt, and a valuable horse had broken its leg. Jim talked about his troubles at some length while Evelyn tried to look sympathetic, and afterwards stated, with numerous particulars, his projects for improving the estate, although he carefully explained that his losing his money might prevent their being carried out. While he sketched his plans he unconsciously delineated his character, and when he went away Evelyn felt daunted.

Pulling a chair to the fire, she sat for a time trying to face a crisis she had begun to fear must

come. She had thought she understood Jim and had known that when she married him she must give up much; but now she saw him as he really was. He cared nothing for amusements and not much for music and art; in fact, he had no use for the refinements and amenities that smoothed the life she enjoyed. Langrigg could not be made a center of pleasant social intercourse and perhaps political influence; Jim's wife must study economy and help to manage his farms. It was not that he was selfish. All his habits were utilitarian and he would not change. Well, she could not marry a farmer and devote herself to strenuous work. She must be amused; the life Jim had planned for her was frankly impossible. Getting up before Mrs. Halliday returned, she left word that she had a headache and went to bed.

Next morning Mordaunt came to Whitelees and found Evelyn alone. He sat down opposite with a careless smile and she noted his smooth urbanity and easy pose. Jim as a rule was restless, and highly-strung.

"Seeing Dick and your mother in the car encouraged me to call," he said. "Dick and I were staunch friends, but I didn't want to meet him. He has recently been strange."

"He has been moody since he came from town, although he was not in very good spirits the morning he left," Evelyn agreed in a thoughtful voice. "I imagine something that might account for it happened the night Jim's friends were lost on the sands."

Mordaunt felt disturbed, but Evelyn's remark stiffened his resolution. She had noted Dick's moodiness, and since the lad was suspicious he must act quickly. He might have trouble afterwards, but he would meet it when it came.

"It's possible," he said, "Dick's temperament is nervous and perhaps he had some grounds for feeling a strain. I expect you have noted that he is attracted by Miss Winter?"

"I have noted it," Evelyn admitted with an unconscious frown. "It will lead to nothing. Dick's romantic, but he is not a fool."

"He is headstrong and his own master. Miss Winter has beauty."

"For all that, it's ridiculous to imagine Dick would marry her."

"I don't know," said Mordaunt, coolly. "You are going to marry Jim."

Evelyn colored, because she knew what he meant. For the most part, the objections that could be urged against Carrie applied to Jim.

"I don't know if I'm going to marry Jim or not," she said.

Mordaunt looked hard at her and his eyes sparkled. "Ah," he said, "I imagined something like this would happen; in fact, I have waited for it. It was plain that Jim would pall. He has his virtues, but he is not the man for you."

"He has many virtues; he's big and strong and honest. It would be easier if he had some of our shabby faults. Jim's code is as rude as himself, but it's stern and he lives up to it. I don't know if I can."

"I know," said Mordaunt, smiling; "you could not! Jim is something of a savage, but all the same, he belongs to the old school and his rudeness is austere. We are modern and live on another plane. But how did you come to see the truth I've seen all along?"

"Jim showed me," Evelyn replied with some feeling. "Unconsciously, of course. He was here last evening and talked about his plans. They are good plans. Had I been different, I might have helped, but they left me out. I don't like to be left out. Am I the girl to satisfy a man who lives to farm and dig marsh drains? You know me, Lance."

"The thing is ridiculous," Mordaunt declared, and was silent for a moment or two. He did know Evelyn, and her frankness meant much. It was plain that she meant to break with Jim but felt she needed help.

"What are you going to do about it?" he asked.

"I don't know," she said drearily. "I can't go on."

Mordaunt made a sign of sympathetic agreement. "You cannot; but there is a way out. I think you see the way. Durst I hope you'll take it with me?"

Evelyn said nothing and turned her head, and he went on: "I'm not utilitarian, and my rule is yours. We understand each other. My talents will be used to amuse you and not to dig drains." He got up and stood by her chair. "You have pluck, Evelyn. Tell Jim you have found you cheated yourself and let him go."

"I haven't much pluck," she said, quietly. "Jim rather carried me away. He stood for romance, struggle, and adventure; things I haven't known. He's a man, a plain, hot-blooded fighting man, and I was tired of conventional languidness. But I began to doubt and see I wasn't strong enough

to live his life. I had wrapped myself up in flimsy artificialities until they got needful and I couldn't break loose." She paused and looked up. "Well, you are my kind, Lance, and if you want me, I am willing. I'll tell Jim, but I shrink. He may not understand, and it will hurt us both."

Mordaunt thought for a moment. It might be better if Evelyn did not tell Jim, and he was afraid Dick would meddle. He took and kissed her hand.

"My dear!" he said. "But you must not get hurt, and I have a plan. Hasn't Florence urged you to stop with her in town? Well, suppose you go and I join you there? We can be married by license and go to France or Italy. Before we come back Jim's disappointment will have cooled and our friends have got over their surprise."

Evelyn saw the plan had advantages. It would obviate the need for awkward apologies, and when she and Lance came back it would be too late for people to disapprove. She agreed and submitted without emotion when Mordaunt put his arm round her, but in spite of some regrets she was firm. Romance had been a treacherous guide; she had found this out and was logical again. When Mordaunt went away all had been arranged, and when she sat down to write to Florence in London her hand was steady and composition easy. After the note was written she hesitated for a moment, and then resolutely fastened the envelope.

A few days after Evelyn went to town, Dick, coming back from shooting one afternoon, met Tom Shanks on the marsh. When he saw the fellow his anger flared up, for he had felt his responsibility and wondered with keen disturbance what he ought to do. Although Lance was on the sands the night Carrie was nearly drowned and knew much about the matter, Dick had grounds for believing Shanks moved the punt. He had meant to be cautious and wait until he saw his way, but something in the fellow's furtive, sullen look, banished his control.

He stopped Shanks and found it a relief to let himself go. The other was cool and hinted darkly that Dick had better leave things alone. He said Dick had nothing to go upon; he had not seen Shanks near the punt, and if he went to the police about it, might get somebody else into trouble. Shanks knew what he knew, and if he were forced would tell. Dick then used tact, scoffing at the other's hints until Shanks abandoned some of his reserve, and when the stormy interview was over Dick went home moodily. The plan he had made of the marks by the punt was accurate, but the line he ought to take not yet plain. Lance was his relation.

In the evening he drove Mrs. Halliday to Dryholm, where Jim and his friends had been asked to dine. They had not arrived, and while Bernard talked to Mrs. Halliday, Dick went to the library to look at a book about sport. When he opened the door Mordaunt was writing and there was a letter, to which he seemed to be replying, on the table. He nodded and went on writing, and Dick was glad he did not want to talk. After a few minutes a car rolled up the drive and when Mordaunt fastened the envelope they heard Jim's party in the hall.

Mordaunt went down stairs and Dick, coming after, saw an envelope on the floor. Imagining Mordaunt had dropped it, he picked it up and frowned as he recognized Evelyn's hand. Mordaunt was talking to Mrs. Winter and Dick did not want to disturb them; besides, he would sooner give Lance the letter when they were alone. Then Bernard beckoned him and before long dinner was served.

Dick did not enjoy the meal. He could hardly rouse himself to talk to Carrie and when she turned to Mordaunt, the latter's careless smile as he began to joke moved him to almost uncontrollable rage. Dick was in a black mood, for the secret he carried had worn his nerves, and he did not like Evelyn's writing to Lance. He was resolved that his sister should have nothing to do with the fellow. When dinner was over he said to Mordaunt, "I'd like to see the gun you bought."

"Very well," said Mordaunt and they went to the gun-room.

The room was small. A glass case, holding guns and fishing rods, ran along one wall; a bench occupied the other. There was a plain table, stained by oil, and a fire burned in a stove with an open front, for the night was damp. A flickering glow played about the walls and shone on the greasy guns. Dick stopped Mordaunt, who put his hand on the electric-light switch.

"Never mind the light," he said, throwing a letter on the table. "You dropped this."

"I did," said Mordaunt, turning to Dick, who leaned against the table. "Imagined I'd put it in my pocket. Thank you for picking it up."

Dick thought it significant that he had not opened the case to get the new gun. Lance's voice was calm but his glance was quick. He seemed to be waiting.

"What was Evelyn writing to you about?" Dick asked.

The light from the stove touched Mordaunt's face, which hardened.

"Then, you have not read the letter?"

"You know I have not," Dick rejoined, for his control gave way at the other's taunt. Lance

wanted to make him angry and find out how much he knew. Well, he should find out and Dick thought he would get a jar. "Anyhow, you must stop writing to Evelyn," he resumed. "I'd sooner you kept away from Whitelees when she comes home."

"You bore with my visits not long since. Are you afraid to state why you want them to stop?"

"Not at all," said Dick, seeing the other meant to force him to be frank; he knew Lance had pluck. "You are a clever philanderer, but Evelyn's going to marry Jim."

Mordaunt smiled, imprudently, since his smile infuriated Dick.

"Looks as if you wanted to quarrel! I imagine I shall not write to Evelyn again for some time. This ought to satisfy you. Perhaps I'm dull, but I don't know why our friendship should break off."

"You well know!" Dick exclaimed. "You meant to let Jim drown not long since!"

"You're a theatrical fool," Mordaunt remarked, coolly, although his voice was rather hoarse. "Anyhow, I think you're sober and you have made a statement that must be justified."

"I'm willing to justify it, if you force me," Dick declared. "But I'd sooner you admitted the thing and left the neighborhood, without an awkward explanation. If you go at once and don't come back, it's perhaps not needful the others should know why you went. You can live in town; I don't care where you live, so long as you don't see Evelyn again."

He stopped and his face got very red, for the door opened and Mrs. Halliday and Bernard came in.

"I imagined we would find you here, but it looks as if you were quarreling," Bernard remarked.

"We were quarreling," Dick admitted with strange calm, for he was relieved that a chance to get rid of his load had come. It was his duty to tell Jim and Bernard and he had been afraid. Now he could leave matters to the head of the house.

"You are hot-blooded, Dick, but I don't imagine you would get angry about nothing. May I inquire the grounds for the dispute?"

"I'll tell you if you will send for Jim. The thing touches him."

Bernard pressed an electric bell and Mordaunt said: "You will be very sorry for this, Dick."

The bell rang and when a servant came Bernard said, "Tell Mr. Dearham we would like to see him here."

CHAPTER XVII

DICK'S ACCUSATION

The party in the gun-room were silent while they waited for Jim. Mrs. Halliday glanced at the others curiously and got a sense of strain. Dick, looking disturbed but resolute, leaned against the table opposite Mordaunt, whose face was rather white; Bernard occupied the bench by the wall and his look was inscrutable. All was very quiet except for the snapping of the stove and the occasional rattle of a cinder falling through the bars. It was something of a relief when Jim came in and Bernard turned on the light.

"Sit down, Jim," he said. "Dick has something to tell us that he thinks you ought to hear. He hints that it is important."

"It is important," Dick replied. "The thing has weighed on me for some time. In fact, the load is too heavy and I feel I must get rid of it. I want to hand over my responsibility, and you are the head of the house, sir."

"Very well," said Bernard. "The post has drawbacks. You had better go on."

"Then I'll begin some time since; the night Lance and I met Jim at the telegraph shack. We talked about England and Jim asked if we knew Langrigg. There was an old French romance on a shelf and Lance read a passage. He studied the book when Jim left the shack, and I found out afterwards that Franklin Dearham's name was written across the front page. You see what this implies, sir?"

"You mean Lance knew who Jim was, although you did not. When did you find out?"

"I picked up the book one day at Langrigg. Lance was there. He admitted that he had seen the writing at the telegraph shack."

Jim turned to Mordaunt sharply. "Then, you meant to let me stay in Canada!"

"I did," said Mordaunt, who addressed Bernard. "I thought it would be better for Jim and us if he did not know Langrigg was his. I have not changed my views about it since."

"That has been rather obvious," Bernard remarked and asked Dick: "Why did you keep the thing dark?"

"I was afraid to meddle; the matter was awkward. Besides, until recently, I trusted Lance. I thought his antagonism sprang from an honest prejudice."

"Perhaps it was honest! Are you willing to state the grounds you had for trying to keep Jim out of the country, Lance?"

"No grounds would justify his robbing Jim of his inheritance," Mrs. Halliday interposed.

Mordaunt smiled. "I was not scrupulous but imagine my plot is condemned mainly because it failed. I did not think Jim was the man to own Langrigg. His education, character, and the life he had led, did not fit him for the position; it was plain that he would rule Langrigg like a Canadian industrialist and break all our traditions. Right or wrong, I took some thought for the honor of the house."

"I am the head of the house and was an industrialist," said Bernard dryly. "You talk as if you belonged to the old school, but you do not go far enough back. The men who built Langrigg were plain fighting farmers." He signed to Dick. "Go on!"

"When Jim's car was upset I suspected Shanks was somehow accountable for the accident."

"He was accountable," Jim said grimly; "I didn't know you knew this. But one must be just. Lance lifted the wheel off my body at some risk to himself."

"That is so," Dick agreed. "I think he took advantage of it afterwards; I mean he knew we would remember he had saved your life. It was a generous impulse, but that was all."

"I imagine Lance's character is too complex for your study," Bernard remarked. "Tell us about his deeds."

"Not long since, I was coming home in the dark when I found Lance talking to Tom Shanks in the wood. Lance said he had caught the fellow poaching, and I thought it strange they should talk quietly. I suspected he wanted me to tell Jim, but I did not. His grudge against Jim had been getting worse."

"When did you find Lance talking to Shanks?" Bernard asked, and smiled rather curiously when Dick replied, for he remembered his visit to the lawyer. Lance had known about the visit.

"Ah," he said, "I begin to see a light! But go on, Dick; I expect you have now cleared the ground."

"Dick has missed his vocation; he ought to have been a barrister," Mordaunt remarked.

"I'm trying to be just to you and Jim," Dick resumed. "I have shirked my duty; I trusted you, Lance, and when I found you out it hurt."

"You trusted me until you found Jim was the better man! Well, it looks as if others had copied your example," Mordaunt rejoined.

Bernard made an impatient sign and Dick resumed: "I've been leading to the night Jim and Carrie were nearly drowned. You all know I was on the sands. Well, I came to Jim's punt when he had left her and gone to look for the geese." Dick paused and taking out a plan that he put on the table, addressed Jim: "You dragged the punt up the bank and carried out the anchor. Is this sketch of the spot accurate?"

Mordaunt moved abruptly, but controlled himself and stood very quiet; Jim picked up the paper and his face got dark.

"So far as I remember, it is accurate."

"Did you pull the punt down again, or move the anchor?"

"I did not. I was puzzled when I found her floating and the anchor covered."

Dick gave Bernard the plan. "The punt ought not to have floated before Jim got back. You will note the rows of dots. They stand for footsteps. The first was Jim's; then Shanks came and pulled the punt back into the channel—I saw the mark of the rollers, leading up and down. It is plain he wanted to leave Jim on the middle sand when the tide rose."

"How did you know the steps were Shanks'?" Bernard asked.

"The night was very cold, sir, but he was bare-footed."

"Your surmise is, no doubt, right. Anybody else would have worn boots or waders. But there are three rows of tracks."

Dick hesitated, then answered quietly: "The last were Lance's. He passed the punt close; I don't know if he touched her, but it was plain that she would soon float and Jim was not about."

"This is frankly unthinkable, Dick!" Mrs. Halliday exclaimed.

For a moment or two the others were silent and their attitudes indicated that the strain was heavy. Mrs. Halliday's face was flushed, Jim's was very stern, and Bernard knitted his brows. Dick and Mordaunt stood motionless but tense at opposite ends of the table.

"Your statement is very grave, Dick," Bernard remarked. "Are you persuaded the steps were Lance's?"

"I knew the marks of his fishing brogues, and saw him a short distance off. I think he saw me, because he vanished; he went down into the hollow of the creek, where I have drawn a ring. I went afterwards and carefully examined the ground. I think that is all, sir."

"It is enough," said Bernard, very dryly. "You imply that Lance knew Jim might be cut off by the tide and refused to meddle? But you take something for granted. Why do you imagine Jim's danger was plain to Lance, if it was not then plain to you? You went away."

"I knew Carrie and Jake were farther out on the sands, and came back as soon as possible. I fired my gun to warn Jim. Lance did nothing but went off; he tried to hide from me."

Bernard made a sign of agreement and then inquired: "Why have you been frank about it now, after saying nothing for some time?"

"I'd sooner not reply, sir. The thing mainly touches Lance and me."

"His horrible treachery touches us all," Mrs. Halliday declared. "If it were known, we should be forced to leave the neighborhood. We could not face a scandal like this."

"I imagine it will not be known," Bernard remarked with an ironical smile, and turned to Mordaunt. "Have you anything to state?"

"I might urge that I risked getting badly hurt when I lifted the car off Jim, and that I did not move his punt."

"You consented to its being moved," Dick broke in.

Bernard stopped him and Mordaunt resumed: "It is plain that you have judged me. Dick brings no proof of his statements; but we will let this go. There is obviously no use in my denying his tale. Suppose I admit that it's correct?"

"Jim is the injured party. He must choose our line."

"There is only one line," Jim replied. "This thing cannot be talked about. Lance knows we know I cannot punish him in any lawful way; but if he stops at Dryholm, I'll use the backwoods plan. Well, I give him a week to go."

Bernard nodded and looked at his watch. "A week is too long! If you pack quickly, Lance, you can get the express to town. Anyhow, you will leave Dryholm as soon as the car is ready. But I must be just, and since you might have made your mark in a useful profession had I not allowed you to think you would inherit part of my estate, I will tell my lawyers to pay you a sum quarterly. If you come back to Cumberland, the payments will stop."

Mordaunt made a sign of agreement, and glanced at Dick.

"You have won, but I doubt if you have much ground for satisfaction," he said and went out.

Dick was vaguely puzzled, but when the door shut the others were conscious of keen relief. They waited until Mordaunt's steps died away and then Bernard got up.

"What has happened to-night is done with; I think you understand," he said, and turned to Mrs. Halliday. "We will join our friends, and if they wonder why we have been absent so long, we will leave you to satisfy their curiosity."

They found the others in the drawing-room, but although Mrs. Halliday began to talk and Bernard was now and then ironically humorous, Dick was quiet and Jim rather stern. All were ready to go when Mrs. Halliday got up, but Bernard kept Carrie a moment when the Langrigg car throbbed at the steps.

"This house is big and empty, my dear," he said. "If Jim is not very much occupied, you will

bring him now and then."

Carrie wondered when the car rolled off. Bernard had pressed her hand and his voice was gentle. She blushed, for his imagining she could persuade Jim was significant, but it was puzzling. He knew Jim was going to marry Evelyn.

Presently Jim stopped the car, and getting down beckoned Jake.

"You can drive home, Carrie," he said. "There's something we must look after but we won't be long."

Carrie started the car and when it rolled away Jake looked at his comrade. Jim wore thin shoes and a light coat over his dinner jacket; the road was wet and the low ground dotted by shining pools. It was some time after high-water and a gentle breeze blew across the marsh. A half-moon shone between slowly-drifting clouds.

"I suppose you mean to see Shanks," Jake remarked. "On the whole, it might be wiser to send him notice to quit. You can't put the police on his track."

"I'm going to see him. If I hadn't been able to swim well, Carrie would have been drowned."

"For that matter, we would all have been drowned," Jake said dryly.

"It's a curious argument for leaving Shanks alone. I suspected we took some chances when we blew up the dabbin."

"You blew up the dabbin," Jake rejoined.

"Anyhow, Carrie had nothing to do with the thing, and she ran the worst risk when we were on the sands. It was hard to hold myself when I thought about it. I was forced to let Mordaunt go, but my grounds for sparing him don't apply to Shanks."

"You haven't even a stick and the fellow has a gun."

"I've got my hands," said Jim. "If I can get hold of Tom Shanks, I won't need a gun. But I've no use for talking. Come along!"

They made for a ridge of high ground that dropped to the marsh, and presently stopped outside the Bank-end Cottage. All was dark and nobody moved when Jim beat on the door.

"Shanks is sleeping pretty sound if that doesn't waken him," he said. "Bring the net-beam. We'll break in."

Jake picked up a thick wooden bar, and when the door gave way they plunged into the kitchen and Jim struck a match. The house was horribly dirty, and old clothes, empty cartridges, brass snares, and fishing lines lay about, as if Shanks had hurriedly sorted his belongings and left those he did not want. They found nobody when they went upstairs.

"Lance has been here before us," Jim remarked. "The curious thing is, Shanks had two big duck-guns and has moved some truck although he couldn't get a cart."

"He had his shooting punt and the tide hasn't left the creek yet," said Jake, and they ran across the marsh.

When they stopped at a muddy pool the punt had gone, but there were fresh footmarks on the bank; and Jim set off again.

"The creek winds and he must shove her across the mud in places," he said. "My punt's on the sands. If we are quick, we might head him off."

They stumbled among reeds and rushes, and fell into pools, and were wet when they reached a hollow at the edge of the sands. The bank was steep, but the tide had not left the channel, and Jim, plunging in, pulled up the punt's anchor. Then he stood on deck, using the pole, while Jake paddled. The tide was running out and they drove the punt furiously past belts of mud and sandy shoals, but the bank was high and they could not see across. Shanks, however, was not in front; Jim imagined he had come down another gutter that joined the channel farther on. They must try to get there first.

"Keep it up!" he shouted, as he bent over the pole. "In five minutes we'll be round the bend and can see the bay."

Jake braced himself for an effort and the water foamed about the punt's low bow. Floating weed and scum sped past; the bank was dropping to the level of the flats and its wet slope sparkled in the moonlight. Jake saw the sandy point that marked the bend and resolved to hold out until they reached the spot.

They shot round the bend, and Jim threw down his pole. In front lay a broad expanse of sand, broken by belts of shining water. A flock of oyster-catchers, screaming noisily, circled about the

foreground; but this was all.

"Shove her in!" Jim shouted. "I reckon Shanks hasn't made the meeting of the channels. We'll strike across the flat."

The sand was soft and they labored hard. When they were half-way across, a low, dark object rose above the edge of the bank. It was roughly triangular and moving fast.

"Shanks's punt!" said Jake. "He has set the little black lugsail and the wind's fair. You can't head him off."

"I'm going to try," said Jim, who was now some yards in front; and they pushed on.

They were exhausted when they stopped beside a belt of sparkling water, and Jim cried out hoarsely and clenched his fist. The channel was wider than he had thought, and near the other bank a punt was running down with the tide. One could hardly see her low, gray hull, but the tanned lugsail cut sharply against the bank, and its slant and the splash of foam at the bows indicated speed. Shooting punts are not built to carry canvas, but they sail fast in smooth water when the wind is fair.

"We're too late; I don't know if I'm sorry," Jake remarked with labored breath. "My notion is, Shanks has pulled out for good, and nobody is going to miss him much. Wind's off the land, water's smooth, and the tide will run west for three or four hours. He'll be a long way down the coast before it turns. In the meantime, we're some distance from Langrigg and it looks as if you had lost your shoe."

"So I have!" said Jim. "Guess it came off when I was plowing through the mud. Well, let's get home. Shanks has gone and he'll find trouble waiting if he comes back."

They set off. Both were wet and dirty, and when they reached Langrigg Jim's foot was sore.

CHAPTER XVIII

JIM'S RELEASE

On the morning after his pursuit of Shanks, Jim was conscious of a flat reaction. Dick's story and the excitement of the chase had helped him to forget his troubles, but now he was cool they returned. He had promised to marry Evelyn and found out, too late, that he loved another. There was no use in railing at his folly, although this was great, and it was futile to wonder how he had so grossly misunderstood his feelings. Evelyn was all he thought her, but romantic admiration and respect for her fine qualities were not love. The important thing was that she held his promise and he must make it good.

There was no other way. Carrie knew he loved her, but she had shown him his duty. If he drew back and broke with Evelyn, he would earn her contempt; Carrie was very staunch and put honor first. Anyhow, he was going to draw back; he had been a fool, but he could pay. The trouble was, Evelyn was clever and might find him out. His face went grim as he thought about it; the strain of pretending, the effort to be kind. For all that, the effort must be made, and perhaps by and by things would be easier.

For a week he was quiet and moody and tried to occupy himself at the dyke. The evenings were the worst, because it soon got dark and he must talk to Jake and Carrie and try to look calm. Then he was puzzled about other things. Evelyn had gone to London and had not written to him. A few days afterwards, Dick, too, went to town, and Mrs. Halliday did not know why he had gone. Jim thought this strange, but it was not important.

Coming home one evening from the marsh, he found Dick with the others in the hall. It was nearly dark, but there was a bright fire and Carrie was making tea. Dick knelt on the rug, toasting muffins on a long fork, and laughed when Carrie bantered him about being afraid to scorch his hands. Jim envied Dick, and remembered with poignant regret the days when he had helped Carrie by the camp-fire in the woods. Then Dick looked up and Jim thought him embarrassed.

"Hallo, Dick!" he said. "When did you get back?"

Dick said he arrived in the morning, and Jim asked if he had met Evelyn in town.

"I did," Dick replied. "She was pretty well, but it's two or three days since. She said she'd write to you."

Jim nodded. Dick's voice was careless, but Jim thought his carelessness was forced. Then he

turned to Carrie. "Did the postman call?"

"Yes," said Carrie. "Your mail is on the table."

Jim got the letters and lighting a lamp sat down in an easy-chair. The envelope with the London postmark was from Evelyn, but he would sooner read her note when he was alone. He opened another and presently looked up.

"Martin has written to me from Vancouver. The Irrigation Company has won the lawsuit and proved its claim to the water-rights. The shares are going up again, and Martin's hopeful about the future. I can sell out for face value, but he urges me to hold."

"Ah," said Carrie, "that's good news! You can trust Martin. I expect the company has straightened up because they made him a director."

"It's very possible. He sends your mother and you greetings and hopes you haven't forgotten him."

"One doesn't forget men like that," Carrie replied. "Martin's all white; clever and strong and straight. But doesn't this mean you have got over your troubles?"

"I suppose I can go ahead with the dykes," said Jim.

He was quiet afterwards and let the others talk, until Carrie got up and went away with Mrs. Winter and Jake. When the door shut Dick looked up.

"Has Evelyn written to you?"

"Yes," said Jim. "I haven't read her note yet."

"I don't know if that is strange or not, but perhaps you had better read it. I expect it will clear the ground for me and I have something to say."

Jim opened the envelope and braced himself, for he was half-ashamed of the satisfaction he got from the first few lines; moreover, he did not want Dick to know what he felt. Evelyn was apologetic, but she set him free.

"I thought I loved you, Jim," she said. "I wanted to be brave and simple, but found it would cost too much. Now I hope you won't be hurt, and by and by perhaps you will be glad I let you go. You will go far, Jim, with your large stride, fronting the storms you love; but I could not have taken your path. Mine must be sheltered and smooth——"

There was more, for Evelyn wrote with some feeling in a romantic strain, but Jim had read enough. His look was puzzled as he turned to Dick.

"Your sister has turned me down," he said. "The grounds she gives are good enough. I imagine you knew?"

"I did know. I suspected for some time that she would do so, but she did not tell me until I was in town."

"Then I don't understand——"

Dick hesitated before he replied: "Lance said something at Dryholm that I thought ominous. He declared I'd be sorry, and I bothered about it for a day or two. Then I saw a light and got the next train to town. He meant that he was going to marry Evelyn."

"That's unthinkable! Besides, Evelyn was then pledged to marry me."

"It looks as if you didn't know Lance yet; I'm not sure you altogether know Evelyn. Anyhow, I saw her and stopped the thing. I think she got a bad jolt when I told her about the punt."

Jim looked at the date on the note. "When did you see her?"

Dick told him and he pondered. Then he said, "She wrote to me after she knew about the punt, although you imply that she agreed to marry Lance before. It's puzzling."

"I've got to be frank," Dick replied. "Evelyn is not like Carrie; she takes the easiest line. I imagine she meant to say nothing until she had quietly married Lance. Then we'd have been forced to accept the situation." He paused and his face got red as he resumed: "I'm thankful I was not too late, but I'm sorry I could not find Lance."

Jim was silent for a time. He had believed in Evelyn after illumination had come on the sands. Although he knew his imagination had cheated him, he owned her charm and his respect for her was strong. Now he had got a jar. Evelyn was not the girl he had thought; it looked as if she were calculating, unscrupulous, and weak. If she had let him go before she had agreed to marry Lance, he could have forgiven her much. He was savage with himself. It was for Evelyn's sake he had lost Carrie, who was tender, brave, and staunch.

By and by he roused himself and asked: "Have you told your mother?"

"I have not. I felt I was forced to tell you, but it would be better that nobody else should know. Florence, with whom Evelyn stayed, will not talk."

Jim nodded. "You can trust me, Dick. The statements in this letter are enough; Evelyn imagined she could not be happy with me, and she was, no doubt, right!"

"You're a good sort, Jim," said Dick with some embarrassment. "It's not strange you feel sore. It cost me something to be frank; apologizing for one's sister is hard."

"It's done with," Jim said quietly, and as Dick got up a servant came in with a pink envelope.

"A telegram for Mr. Halliday," she said. "As Mrs. Halliday was not at home, the gardener brought it on."

The servant went out and Dick laughed harshly when he read the telegram.

"Evelyn was married this morning, but not to Lance," he said. "Well, I expect mother will be satisfied. From one point of view, the marriage is good."

"Then, you know the man?" said Jim, who sympathized with Dick's bitterness.

"I do," said Dick, very dryly. "He's rich and getting fat, but on the whole, I imagine he's as good a husband as Evelyn deserves. I sometimes thought he wanted her and she quietly held him off; it looks as if she had lost no time now." He paused and the blood came to his skin as he resumed: "I'm breaking rules, this is rotten bad form, but you ought to be thankful you hadn't the misfortune to marry into our family."

Jim put his hand on the other's arm. "Stop it, Dick! You have been honest and we are friends. But I think you have said enough."

"Then give me a drink and let me go. I need bracing; the thing has knocked me off my balance."

"Here you are," said Jim, who went to a cupboard, and Dick lifted his glass.

"Good luck, Jim! You are lucky, you know. But if you're not a fool, you'll marry Carrie Winter."

He went out and Jim sat down again, looking straight in front, with knitted brows. He did not know how long he mused, but he got up abruptly when Carrie came in. She glanced at him curiously when he indicated a chair, and for a few moments he stood opposite, irresolute and frowning. Then he gave her Evelyn's note.

"After all, there is no reason you shouldn't read this," he said.

Carrie took the note and Jim thought her hand trembled when she returned it.

"I'm sorry, Jim!"

"I don't want you to be sorry; I want you to understand. Evelyn married somebody else this morning. Dick got a telegram."

"Ah," said Carrie, "I suppose it hurt?"

"Let's be frank! It couldn't hurt my vanity, because I had none left. For all that, I got a knock. You see, I trusted Evelyn, and after the night on the sands felt myself a shabby cur; but I meant to keep my promise."

Carrie's face flushed delicately, although her voice was calm as she said, "I did not trust Evelyn. The trouble was, I couldn't warn you."

"Yet you wanted to warn me? Oh, I know! You have stood between me and trouble before, but this job was too big. It was not your pluck that failed; you knew my obstinacy——"

He stopped and Carrie was silent. He moved a few paces and came back.

"Can't you speak?" he asked.

"What am I to say, Jim?"

"Well," he said hoarsely, "if you won't talk, you can listen. You have borne with my moods and I've got to let myself go now or be quiet for good; I'm something of a savage, but I've had to fight for all I wanted and winning made me proud. It gave me a ridiculous confidence. Well, I expect I reached the top of my folly when I got Evelyn. Then our adventure on the sands knocked me flat; I knew myself a despicable fool. I'd taken the best you had to give; let you nurse me when I was sick, and cook for me in the woods. I knew your worth and chose Evelyn! Then, when I'd promised to marry her, I took you in my arms and kissed you!"

"Yet you meant to marry her; that was rather fine, Jim," said Carrie quietly.

"I don't know if it was fine or not; it might have made bad worse. Besides, you showed me you would be firm, although you knew I loved you."

"Yes; I did know. You made good in Canada; I wanted you to make good at Langrigg."

Jim thrilled with strong emotion. "Oh, my dear! My staunch and generous dear! But I'm going to put your generosity to another test. I ought to have gone away and made things easier for you; I ought to have waited, to save your pride, but it would have been too hard. Well, I'm taking a horribly wrong line, but I want you, and you know me for what I am. If you think I'm too mean, I'll sell Langrigg and go away for good."

Carrie got up and looked at him with steady eyes. Then her face softened and she gave him a tender smile.

"You are rather foolish, Jim, but you mean well and I am satisfied."

He stood still for a moment, as if he doubted what he had heard, and she said quietly, "If my pride needed saving, it would be very small."

"My dear!" he said, and took her in his arms.

A few minutes afterwards, Jake and Mrs. Winter came in and Jim remarked: "You have owned you like the Old Country and I've urged you to stay."

"When the dykes are finished we must go," Mrs. Winter replied. "You are kind, but we know where we belong——"

She stopped and looked sharply at Carrie, who stood by Jim and smiled. Her color was high and her face and pale-green dress cut against the background of somber oak. Her pose was graceful but proud. Jim remembered her coming down the stairs on her first evening in the house; she had looked like that then. Somehow one felt she was there by right.

"If you go, you must leave me," she said. "I belong to Langrigg and Jim."

Mrs. Winter advanced and kissed her and Jake gave Jim his hand. "For a time, it looked as if we were going to lose you, partner. Still I felt you would come back to us."

"I don't know if I've come back or gone forward," Jim rejoined. "All that's important is, Carrie and I go on together."

For half an hour they engaged in happy talk and when, after dinner, Carrie and Jim were again alone, she said, "You have forgotten something. Oughtn't we to tell Bernard?"

"Of course," Jim agreed. "Somehow I think he'd like it if you wrote the note."

Carrie sent him for a pen and soon after he came back fastened and gave him the envelope.

"I suppose I ought to feel nervous, but I don't," she said. "I was never afraid of Bernard."

Next evening Bernard came to dinner. Jim and his party met him in the hall, but he signed the others back when Carrie gave him her hand.

"I am the head of the house and claim my right," he said and kissed her. "Some day Jim will take my place and I think he will fill it well."

Carrie blushed, but Jim noted with a thrill of pride that she carried herself finely. He thought she understood that Bernard had formally acknowledged her. It was strange to know this was the girl who had made his bread and mended his clothes in the woods, but after all, the difference was only in her surroundings. Carrie had not changed.

"I don't mind confessing I plotted for this," Bernard resumed with a twinkle, and took a leather box from his pocket. He opened the box and a row of green jewels set in rough gold sparkled in the light.

"My wife last wore them; they were my grandmother's, and date farther back," he said. "Now they are yours, and I would like you to put them on."

Carrie stood quiet for a moment, with the jewels in her hand, while her color came and went. For all that, she looked calm and rather proud. She remembered that Bernard had not given the necklace to Evelyn.

"I have not worn such things, and I am the first of my kind to put on these stones," she said.

Bernard bowed. "Brave and good women have worn them. I have studied human nature and give them to you. This is not altogether because you are going to marry Jim."

Carrie drew the stones round her neck and fastened the clasp. The blood came to her skin

and she looked strangely vivid, but in a moment or two her glance became soft.

"You are kind and your trust means much," she said. "For one thing, it means I must make good. Jim's inheritance must be managed well. We will try to rule at Langrigg as his people ruled."

THE END

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