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Author: Richard Aumerle Maher

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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE SHEPHERD OF THE NORTH ***

THE SHEPHERD OF THE NORTH

BY
RICHARD AUMERLE MAHER

Author of
"The Heart of a Man," etc.

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CONTENTS

CHAPTER		PAGE
I	THE WHITE HORSE CHAPLAIN	3
II	THE CHOIR UNSEEN	35
III	GLOW OF DAWN	64
IV	THE ANSWER	103
V	MON PERE JE ME 'CUSE	137
VI	THE BUSINESS OF THE SHEPHERD	174
VII	THE INNER CITADEL	210
VIII	SEIGNEUR DIEU, WHITHER GO I?	243
IX	THE COMING OF THE SHEPHERD	277
X	THAT THEY BE NOT AFRAID	311

THE SHEPHERD OF THE NORTH

THE SHEPHERD OF THE NORTH

I

THE WHITE HORSE CHAPLAIN

The Bishop of Alden was practising his French upon Arsene LaComb. It was undoubtedly good French, this of M'sieur the Bishop, Arsene assured himself. It must be. But it certainly was not any kind of French that had ever been spoken by the folks back in Three Rivers.

Still, what did it matter? If Arsene could not understand all that the Bishop said, it was equally certain that the Bishop could not understand all that Arsene said. And truly the Bishop was a cheery companion for the long road. He took his upsets into six feet of Adirondack snow, as man and Bishop must when the drifts are soft and the road is uncertain.

In the purple dawn they had left Lowville and the railroad behind and had headed into the hills. For thirty miles, with only one stop for a bite of lunch and a change of ponies, they had pounded along up the half-broken, logging roads. Now they were in the high country and there were no roads.

Arsene had come this way yesterday. But a drifting storm had followed him down from Little Tupper, covering the road that he had made and leaving no trace of the way. He had stopped driving and held only a steady, even rein to keep his ponies from stumbling, while he let the tough, willing little Canadian blacks pick their own road.

Twice in the last hour the Bishop and Arsene had been tossed off the single bobsled out into the drifts. It was back-breaking work, sitting all day long on the swaying bumper, with no back rest, feet braced stiffly against the draw bar in front to keep the dizzy balance. But it was the only way that this trip could be made.

The Bishop knew that he should not have let the confirmation in French Village on Little Tupper go to this late date in the season. He had arranged to come a month before. But Father Ponfret's illness had put him back at that time.

Now he was worried. The early December dark was upon them. There was no road. The ponies were tiring. And there were yet twelve bad miles to go.

Still, things might be worse. The cold was not bad. He had the bulkier of his vestments and regalia in his stout leather bag lashed firmly to the sled. They could take no harm. The holy oils and the other sacred essentials were slung securely about his body. And a tumble more or less in the snow was a part of the day's work. They would break their way through somehow.

So, with the occasional interruptions, he was practising his amazing French upon Arsene.

Bishop Joseph Winthrop of Alden was of old Massachusetts stock. He had learned the French that was taught at Harvard in the fifties. Afterwards, after his conversion to the Catholic Church, he had gone to Louvain for his seminary studies. There he had heard French of another kind. But to the day he died he spoke his French just as it was written in the book, and with an aggressive New England accent.

He must speak French to the children in French Village to-morrow, not because the children would understand, but because it would please Father Ponfret and the parents.

They were struggling around the shoulder of Lansing Mountain and the Bishop was rounding out an elegant period to the bewildered admiration of Arsene, when the latter broke in with a sharp:

"Jomp, M'sieur l'Eveque, *jomp!*"

The Bishop jumped--or was thrown--ten feet into a snow-bank.

While he gathered himself out of the snow and felt carefully his bulging breast pockets to make sure that everything was safe, he saw what had happened.

The star-faced pony on the near side had slipped off the trail and rolled down a little bank, dragging the other pony and Arsene and the sled with him. It looked like a bad jumble of ponies, man and sled at the bottom of a little gully, and as the Bishop floundered through the snow to help he feared that it was serious.

Arsene, his body pinned deep in the snow under the sled, his head just clear of the ponies' heels, was talking wisely and craftily to them in the *patois* that they understood. He was within inches of having his brains beaten out by the quivering hoofs; he could not, literally, move his head to save his life, and he talked and reasoned with them as quietly as if he stood at their heads.

They kicked and fought each other and the sled, until the influence of the calm voice behind them began to work upon them. Then their own craft came back to them and they remembered the many bitter lessons they had gotten from kicking and fighting in deep snow. They lay still and waited for the voice to come and get them out of this.

As the Bishop tugged sturdily at the sled to release Arsene, he remembered that he had seen men under fire. And he said to himself that he had never seen a cooler or a braver man than this little French-Canadian storekeeper.

The little man rolled out unhurt, the snow had been soft under him, and lunged for the ponies' heads.

"Up, Maje! Easee, Lisette, easee! Now! Ah-a! Bien!"

He had them both by their bridles and dragged them skilfully to their feet and up the bank. With a lurch or two and a scramble they were all safe back on the hard under-footing of the trail.

Arsene now looked around for the Bishop.

"Ba Golly! M'sieur l'Eveque, dat's one fine jomp. You got hurt, you?"

The Bishop declared that he was not in any way the worse from the tumble, and Arsene turned to his team. As the Bishop struggled back up the bank, the little man looked up from his inspection of his harness and said ruefully:

"Dat's bad, M'sieur l'Eveque. She's gone bust."

He held the frayed end of a broken trace in his hand. The trouble was quite evident.

"What can we do?" asked the Bishop. "Have you any rope?"

"No. Dat's how I been one big fool, me. I lef' new rope on de sled las' night on Lowville. Dis morning she's gone. Some t'ief."

"We must get on somehow," said the Bishop, as he unbuckled part of the lashing from his bag and handed the strap to Arsene. "That will hold until we get to the first house where we can get the loan of a trace. We can walk behind. We're both stiff and cold. It will do us good. Is it far?"

"Dat's Long Tom Lansing in de hemlocks, 'bout quarter mile, maybe." The little man looked up from his work long enough to point out a clump of hemlocks that stood out black and sharp against the white world around them. As the Bishop looked, a light peeped out from among the trees, showing where life and a home fought their battle against the desolation of the hills.

"I donno," said Arsene speculatively, as he and the Bishop took up their tramp behind the sled; "Dat Long Tom Lansing; he don' like Canuck. Maybe he don' lend no harness, I donno."

"Oh, yes; he will surely," answered the Bishop easily. "Nobody would refuse a bit of harness in a case like this."

It was full dark when they came to where Tom Lansing's cabin hid itself among the hemlocks. Arsene did not dare trust his team off the road where they had footing, so the Bishop floundered his way through the heavy snow to find the cabin door.

It was a rude, heavy cabin, roughly hewn out of the hemlocks that had stood around it and belonged to a generation already past. But it was still serviceable and tight, and it was a home.

The Bishop halloed and knocked, but there was no response from within. It was strange. For there was every sign of life about the place. After knocking a second time without result, he lifted the heavy wooden latch and pushed quietly into the cabin.

A great fire blazed in the fireplace directly opposite the door. On the hearth stood a big black and white shepherd dog. The dog gave not the slightest heed to the intruder. He stood rigid, his four legs planted squarely under him, his whole body quivering with fear. His nose was pointed upward as though ready for the howl to which he dared not give voice. His great brown eyes rolled in an ecstasy of fright but seemed unable to tear themselves from the side of the room where he was looking.

Along the side of the room ran a long, low couch covered with soft, well worn hides. On it lay a very long man, his limbs stretched out awkwardly and unnaturally, showing that he had been dragged unconscious to where he was. A candle stood on the low window ledge and shone down full into the man's face.

At the head of the couch knelt a young girl, her arm supporting the man's head and shoulder, her wildly tossed hair falling down across his chest.

She was speaking to the man in a voice low and even, but so tense that her whole slim body seemed to vibrate with every word. It was as though her very soul came to the portals of her lips and shouted its message to the man. The power of her voice, the breathless, compelling strength of her soul need seemed to hold everything between heaven and earth, as she pleaded to the man. The Bishop stood spellbound.

"Come back, Daddy Tom! Come back, My Father!" she was saying over and over. "Come back, come back, Daddy Tom! It's not true! God doesn't want you! He doesn't want to take you from Ruth! How could He! It's not never true! A tree couldn't kill my Daddy Tom! Never, never! Why, he's felled whole slopes of trees! Come back, Daddy Tom! Come back!"

For a time which he could not measure the Bishop stood listening to the pleading of the girl's voice. But in reality he was not listening to the sound. The girl was not merely speaking. She was fighting bitterly with death. She was calling all the forces of love and life to aid her in her struggle. She was following the soul of her loved one down to the very door of death. She would pull him back out of the very clutches of the unknown.

And the Bishop found that he was not merely listening to what the girl said. He was going down with her into the dark lane. He was echoing every word of her pleading. The force of her will and her prayer swept him along so that with all the power of his heart and soul he prayed for the man to open his eyes.

Suddenly the girl stopped. A great, terrible fear seemed to grip and crush her, so that she cowered and hid her face against the big, grizzled white head of the man, and cried out and sobbed in terror.

The Bishop crossed the room softly and touched the girl on the head, saying:

"Do not give up yet, child. I once had some skill. Let me try."

The girl turned and looked up blankly at him. She did not question who he was or whence he had come. She turned again and wrapped her arms jealously about the head and shoulders of her father. Plainly she was afraid and resentful of any interference. But the Bishop insisted gently and in the end she gave him place beside her.

He had taken off his cap and overcoat and he knelt quickly to listen at the man's breast.

Life ran very low in the long, bony frame; but there was life, certainly. While the Bishop fumbled through the man's pockets for the knife that he was sure he would find, he questioned the girl quietly.

"It was just a little while ago," she answered, in short, frightened sentences. "My dog came yelping down from the mountain where Father had been all day. He was cutting timber. I ran up there. He was pinned down under a limb. I thought he was dead, but he spoke to me and told me where to cut the limb. I chopped it away with his axe. But it must be I hurt him; he fainted. I can't make him speak. I cut boughs and made a sledge and dragged him down here. But I can't make him speak. Is he?-- Is he?-- Tell me," she appealed.

The Bishop was cutting skilfully at the arm and shoulder of the man's jacket and shirt.

"You were all alone, child?" he said. "Where could you get the strength for all this? My driver is out on the road," he continued, as he worked on. "Call him and send him for the nearest help."

The girl rose and with a lingering, heart-breaking look back at the man on the couch, went out into the snow.

The Bishop worked away deftly and steadily.

The man's shoulder was crushed hopelessly, but there was nothing there to constitute a fatal injury. It was only when he came to the upper ribs that he saw the real extent of the damage. Several of them were caved in frightfully, and it seemed certain that one or two of them must have been shattered and the splinters driven into the lung on that side.

The cold had driven back the blood, so that the wounds had bled outwardly very little. The Bishop moved the crushed shoulder a little, and something black showed out of a torn muscle under the scapula.

He probed tenderly, and the thing came out in his hand. It was a little black ball of steel.

While the Bishop stood there wondering at the thing in his hand, a long tremor ran through the body on the couch. The man stirred ever so slightly. A gasping moan of pain escaped from his lips. His eyes opened and fixed themselves searchingly upon the Bishop. The Bishop thought it best not to speak, but to give the man time to come back naturally to a realisation of things.

While the man stared eagerly, disbelievingly, and the Bishop stood holding the little black ball between thumb and fore-finger, Ruth Lansing came back into the room.

Seeing her father's eyes open, the girl rushed across the room and was about to throw herself down by the side of the couch when her father's voice, scarcely more than a whisper, but audible and clear, stopped her.

"The White Horse Chaplain!" he said in a voice of slow wonder. "But I always knew he'd come for me sometime. And I suppose it's time."

The Bishop started. He had not heard the name for twenty-five years.

The girl stopped by the table, trembling and frightened. She had heard the tale of the White Horse Chaplain many times. Her sense told her that her father was delirious and raving. But he spoke so calmly and so certainly. He seemed so certain that the man he saw was an apparition that she could not think or reason herself out of her fright.

The Bishop answered easily and quietly:

"Yes, Lansing, I am the Chaplain. But I did not think anybody remembered now."

Tom Lansing's eyes leaped wide with doubt and question. They stared full at the Bishop. Then they turned and saw the table standing in its right place; saw Ruth Lansing standing by the table; saw the dog at the fireplace. The man there was real!

Tom Lansing made a little convulsive struggle to rise, then fell back gasping.

The Bishop put his hand gently under the man's head and eased him to a better position, saying:

"It was just a chance, Lansing. I was driving past and had broken a trace, and came in to borrow one from you. You got a bad blow. But your girl has just sent my driver for help. They will get a doctor somewhere. We cannot tell anything until he comes. It perhaps is not so bad as it looks." But, even as he spoke, the Bishop saw a drop of blood appear at the corner of the man's white mouth; and he knew that it was as bad as the worst.

The man lay quiet for a moment, while his eyes moved again from the Bishop to the girl and the everyday things of the room.

It was evident that his mind was clearing sharply. He had rallied quickly. But the Bishop knew instinctively that it was the last, flashing rally of the forces of life--in the face of the on-crowding darkness. The shock and the internal hemorrhage were doing their work fast. The time was short.

Evidently Tom Lansing realised this, for, with a look, he called the girl to him.

Through the seventeen years of her life, since the night when her mother had laid her in her father's arms and died, Ruth Lansing had hardly ever been beyond the reach of her father's voice. They had grown very close together, these two. They had little need of clumsy words between them.

As the girl dropped to her knees, her eyes, wild, eager, rebellious, seared her father with their terror-stricken, unbelieving question.

But she quickly saw the stab of pain that her wild questioning had given him. She crushed back a great, choking sob, and fought bravely with herself until she was able to force into her eyes a look of understanding and great mothering tenderness.

Her father saw the struggle and the look, and blessed her for it with his eyes. Then he said:

"You'll never blame me, Ruth, girl, will you? I know I'm desertin' you, little comrade, right in the mornin' of your battle with life. But you won't be afraid. I know you won't."

The girl shook her head bravely, but it was clear that she dared not trust herself to speak.

"I'm goin' to ask this man here to look to you. He came here for a sign to me. I see it. I see it plain. I will trust him with your life. And so will you, little comrade. I--I'm droppin' out. He'll take you on.

"He saved my life once. So he gave you your life. It's a sign, my Ruth."

The girl slipped her hands gently under his head and looked deep and long into the glazing eyes.

Her heart quailed, for she knew that she was facing death--and life alone.

Obedient to her father's look, she rose and walked across the room. She saw that he had something to say to this strange man and that the time was short.

In the doorway of the inner room of the cabin she stood, and throwing one arm up against the frame of the door she buried her face in it. She did not cry or sob. Later, there would be plenty of time for that.

The Bishop, reading swiftly, saw that in an instant an irrevocable change had come over her. She had knelt a frightened, wondering, protesting child. A woman, grown, with knowledge of death and its infinite certainty, of life and its infinite chance, had risen from her knees.

As the Bishop leaned over him, Lansing spoke hurriedly:

"I never knew your name, Chaplain; or if I did I forgot it, and it don't matter.

"I'm dying. I don't need any doctor to tell me. I'll be gone before he gets here.

"You remember that day at Fort Fisher, when Curtis' men were cut to pieces in the second charge on the trenches. They left me there, because it was every man for himself.

"A ball in my shoulder and another in my leg. And you came drivin' mad across the field on a big, crazy white horse and slid down beside me where I lay. You threw me across your saddle and walked that wild horse back into our lines.

"Do you remember? Dying men got up on their elbows and cheered you. I lay six weeks in fever, and I never saw you since. Do you remember?"

"I do, now," said the Bishop. "Our troop came back to the Shenandoah, and I never knew what--"

That terrible, unforgettable day rolled back upon him. He was just a few months ordained. He had just been appointed chaplain in the Union army. All unseasoned and unschooled in the ways and business of a battlefield, he had found himself that day in the sand dunes before Fort Fisher. Red, reeking carnage rioted all about him. Hail, fumes, lightning and thunder of battle rolled over him and sickened him. He saw his own Massachusetts troop hurl itself up against the Confederate breastworks, crumple up on itself, and fade away back into the smoke. He lost it, and lost himself in the smoke. He wandered blindly over the field, now stumbling over a dead man, now speaking to a living stricken one: Here straightening a torn body and giving water; there hearing the confession of a Catholic.

Now the smoke cleared, and Curtis' troops came yelling across the flat land. Once, twice they tried the trenches and were driven back into the marshes. A captain was shot off the back of a big white horse. The animal, mad with fright and blood scent, charged down upon him as he bent over a dying man. He grabbed the bridle and fought the horse. Before he realised what he was doing, he was in the saddle riding back and forth across the field. Right up to the trenches the horse carried him.

Within twenty paces of their guns lay a boy, a thin, long-legged boy with a long beardless face. He lay there marking the high tide of the last charge--the farthest of the fallen. The chaplain, tumbling down somehow from his mount, picked up the writhing boy and bundled him across the saddle. Then he started walking back looking for his own lines.

Now here was the boy talking to him across the mists of twenty-five years. And the boy, the

man, was dying. He had picked the boy, Tom Lansing, up out of the sand where he would have died from fever bloat or been trampled to death in the succeeding charges. He had given him life. And, as Tom Lansing had said to his daughter, he had given that daughter life. Now he knew what Lansing was going to say.

"I didn't know you then," said Lansing. "I don't know who you are now, Chaplain, or what you are.

"But," he went on slowly, "if I'd agiven you a message that day you'd have taken it on for me, wouldn't you?"

"Of course I would."

"Suppose it had been to my mother, say: You'da risked your life to get it on to her?"

"I hope I would," said the Bishop evenly.

"I believe you would. That's what I think of you," said Tom Lansing.

"I went back South after the war," he began again. "I stole my girl's mother from her grandfather, an old, broken-down Confederate colonel that would have shot me if he ever laid eyes on me. I brought her up here into the hills and she died when the baby was just a few weeks old.

"There ain't a relation in the world that my little girl could go to. I'm goin' to die in half an hour. But what better would she be if I lived? What would I do with her? Keep her here and let her marry some fightin' lumber jack that'd beat her? Or see her break her heart tryin' to make a livin' on one of these rock hills? She'd fret herself to death. She knows more now than I do and she'd soon be wantin' to know more. She's that kind.

"She'd ought to have her chance the way I've seen girls in towns havin' a chance. A chance to study and learn and grow the way she wants to. And now I'm desertin'; goin' out like a smoky lamp.

"It was a crime, a crime!" he groaned, "ever to bring her mother up into this place!"

"You could not think of all that then. No man ever does," said the Bishop calmly. "And I will do my best to see that she gets her chance. I think that's what you want to ask me, isn't it, Lansing?"

"Do you swear it?" gasped Lansing, struggling and choking in an effort to raise his head. "Do you swear to try and see that she gets a chance?"

"God will help me to do the best for her," said the Bishop quietly. "I am the Bishop of Alden. I can do something."

With the definiteness of a man who has heard a final word, Tom Lansing's eyes turned to his daughter.

Obediently she came again and knelt at his side, holding his head.

To the very last, as long as his eyes could see, they saw her smiling bravely and sweetly down into them; giving her sacrament and holding her light of cheering love for the soul out-bound.

When the last twinging tremour had run through the racked body, she leaned over and kissed her father full on the lips.

Then her heart broke. She ran blindly out into the night.

While the Bishop was straightening the body on the couch, a young man and two women came into the room.

They were Jeffrey Whiting and his mother and her sister, neighbours whom Arsene had brought.

The Bishop was much relieved with their coming. He could do nothing more now, and the long night ride was still ahead of him.

He told the young man that the girl, Ruth, had gone out into the cold, and asked him to find her.

Jeffrey Whiting went out quickly. He had played with Ruth Lansing since she was a baby, for they were the only children on Lansing Mountain. He knew where he would find her.

Mrs. Whiting, a keen-faced, capable woman of the hills, where people had to meet their problems and burdens alone, took command at once.

"No, sir," she replied to the Bishop's question, "there's nobody to send for. The Lansings didn't have a relation living that anybody ever heard of, and I knew the old folks, too, Tom Lansing's father and mother. They're buried out there on the hill where he'll be buried.

"There's some old soldiers down the West Slope towards Beaver River. They'll want to take charge, I suppose. The funeral must be on Monday," she went on rapidly, sketching in the programme. "We have a preacher if we can get one. But when we can't my sister Letty here sings something."

"Tom Lansing was a comrade of mine, in a way," said the Bishop slowly. "At least, I was at Fort Fisher with him. I think I should like to--"

"Were you at Fort Fisher?" broke in the sister Letty, speaking for the first time. "And did you see Curtis' colour bearer? He was killed in the first charge. A tall, dark boy, Jay Hamilton, with long, black hair?"

"He had an old scar over his eye-brow." The Bishop supplemented the description out of the memory of that day.

"He got it skating on Beaver Run, thirty-five years ago to-morrow," said the woman trembling. "You saw him die?"

"He was dead when I came to him," said the Bishop quietly, "with the stock of the colour standard still clenched in his hand."

"He was my--my--" Sweetheart, she wanted to say. But the hill women do not say things easily.

"Yes?" said the Bishop gently. "I understand." She was a woman of his people. Clearly as if she had taken an hour to tell it, he could read the years of her faithfulness to the memory of that lean, dark face which he had once seen, with the purple scar above the eye-brow.

Mrs. Whiting put her arm protectingly about her sister.

"Are you--?" she questioned, hesitating strangely. "Are you the White Horse Chaplain?"

"The boys called me that," said the Bishop. "Though it was only a name for a day," he added.

"It was true, then?" she said slowly, as if still unready to believe. "We never half believed our boys when they came home from the war--the ones that did come home--and told about the white horse and the priest riding the field. We thought it was one of the things men see when they're fighting and dying."

Then Jeffrey Whiting came back into the room leading Ruth Lansing by the hand.

The girl was shaking with cold and grief. The Bishop drew her over to the fire.

"I must go now, child," he said. "To-morrow I must be in French Village. Monday I will be here again."

"Our comrade is gone. Did you hear what he said to me, about you?"

The girl looked up slowly, searchingly into the Bishop's face, then nodded her head.

"Then, we must think and pray, child, that we may know how to do what he wanted us to do. God will show us what is the best. That is what he wanted."

"God keep you brave now. Your friends here will see to everything for you. I have to go now."

He crossed the room and laid his hand for a moment on the brow of the dead man, renewing in his heart the promise he had made.

Then, with a hurried word to Mrs. Whiting that he would be back before noon Monday, he went out to where Arsene and his horses were stamping in the snow.

The little man had replaced the broken trace, and the ponies, fretting with the cold and eager to get home, took hungrily to the trail.

But the Bishop forgot to practise his French further upon Arsene. He told him briefly what had happened, then lapsed into silence.

Now the Bishop remembered what Tom Lansing had said about the girl. She knew more now than he did. Not more than Tom Lansing knew now. But more than Tom Lansing had known half an hour ago.

She would want to see the world. She would want to know life and ask her own questions from life and the world. In the broad open space between her eye-brows it was written that she would never take anybody's word for the puzzles of the world. She was marked a seeker; one of those who look unafraid into the face of life, and demand to know what it means. They never find out. But, heart break or sparrow fall, they must go on ever and ever seeking truth in their own way. The world is infinitely the better through them. But their own way is hard and lonely.

She must go out. She must have education. She must have a chance to face life and wrest its lessons from it in her own way. It did not promise happiness for her. But she could go no other way. For hers was the high, stony way of those who demand more than jealous life is ready to give.

The Bishop only knew that he had this night given a promise which had sent a man contentedly on his way. Somehow, God would show him how best to keep that promise.

And when they halloed at Father Ponfret's house in French Village he had gotten no farther than that.

Tom Lansing lay in dignified state upon his couch. Clean white sheets had been draped over the skins of the couch. The afternoon sun looking in through the west window picked out every bare thread of his service coat and glinted on the polished brass buttons. His bayonet was slung into the belt at his side.

Ruth Lansing sat mute in her grief at the head of the couch, listening to the comments and stumbling condolences of neighbours from the high hills and the lower valleys. They were good, kindly people, she knew. But why, why, must every one of them repeat that clumsy, monotonous lie-- How natural he looked!

He did not. He did not. He did *not* look natural. How could her Daddy Tom look natural, when he lay there all still and cold, and would not speak to his Ruth!

He was dead. And what was death-- And why? *Why?*

Who had ordered this? And *why*?

And still they came with that set, borrowed phrase--the only thing they could think to say--upon their lips.

Out in Tom Lansing's workshop on the horse-barn floor, Jacque Lafitte, the wright, was nailing soft pine boards together.

Ruth could not stand it. Why could they not leave Daddy Tom to her? She wanted to ask him things. She knew that she could make him understand and answer.

She slipped away from the couch and out of the house. At the corner of the house her dog joined her and together they circled away from the horse-barn and up the slope of the hill to where her father had been working yesterday.

She found her father's cap where it had been left in her fright of yesterday, and sat down fondling it in her hands. The dog came and slid his nose along her dress until he managed to snuggle into the cap between her hands.

So Jeffrey Whiting found her when he came following her with her coat and hood.

"You better put these on, Ruth," he said, as he dropped the coat across her shoulder. "It's too cold here."

The girl drew the coat around her obediently, but did not look up at him. She was grateful for his thought of her, but she was not ready to speak to any one.

He sat down quietly beside her on the stump and drew the dog over to him.

After a little he asked timidly:

"What are you going to do, Ruth? You can't stay here. I'll tend your stock and look after the place for you. But you just can't stay here."

"You?" she questioned finally. "You're going to that Albany school next week. You said you were all ready."

"I was all ready. But I ain't going. I'll stay here and work the two farms for you."

"For me?" she said. "And not be a lawyer at all?"

"I--I don't care anything about it any more," he lied. "I told mother this morning that I wasn't going. She said she'd have you come and stay with her till Spring."

"And then?" the girl faced the matter, looking straight and unafraid into his eyes. "And then?"

"Well, then," he hesitated. "You see, then I'll be twenty. And you'll be old enough to marry me," he hurried. "Your father, you know, he always wanted me to take care of you, didn't he?" he pleaded, awkwardly but subtly.

"I know you don't want to talk about it now," he went on hastily. "But you'll come home with mother to-morrow, won't you? You know she wants you, and I--I never had to tell you that I love you. You knew it when you wasn't any higher than Prince here."

"Yes. I always knew it, and I'm glad," the girl answered levelly. "I'm glad now, Jeff. But I can't let you do it. Some day you'd hate me for it."

"Ruth! You know better than that!"

"Oh, you'd never tell me; I know that. You'd do your best to hide it from me. But some day when your chance was gone you'd look back and see what you might have been, 'stead of a humpbacked farmer in the hills. Oh, I know. You've told me all your dreams and plans, how you're going down to the law school, and going to be a great lawyer and go to Albany and maybe to Washington."

"What's it all good for?" said the boy sturdily. "I'd rather stay here with you."

The girl did not answer. In the strain of the night and the day, she had almost forgotten the things that she had heard her father say to the White Horse Chaplain, as she continued to call the Bishop.

Now she remembered those things and tried to tell them.

"That strange man that said he was the Bishop of Alden told my father that he would see that I got a chance. My father called him the White Horse Chaplain and said that he had been sent here just on purpose to look after me. I didn't know there were bishops in this country. I thought it was only in books about Europe."

"What did they say?"

"My father said that I would want to go out and see things and know things; that I mustn't be married to a--a lumber jack. He said it was no place for me in the hills."

"And this man, this bishop, is going to send you away somewhere, to school?" he guessed shrewdly.

"I don't know, I suppose that was it," said the girl slowly. "Yesterday I wanted to go so much. It was just as father said. He had taught me all he knew. And I thought the world outside the hills was full of just the most wonderful things, all ready for me to go and see and pick up. And to-day I don't care."

She looked down at the cap in her hands, at the dog at her feet, and down the hillside to the

little cabin in the hemlocks. They were all she had in the world.

The boy, watching her eagerly, saw the look and read it rightly.

He got up and stood before her, saying pleadingly:

"Don't forget to count me, Ruth. You've got me, you know."

Perhaps it was because he had so answered her unspoken thought. Perhaps it was because she was afraid of the bare world. Perhaps it was just the eternal surrender of woman.

When she looked up at him her eyes were full of great, shining tears, the first that they had known since she had kissed Daddy Tom and run out into the night.

He lifted her into his arms, and, together, they faced the white, desolate world all below them and plighted to each other their untried troth.

When Tom Lansing had been laid in the white bosom of the hillside, and the people were dispersing from the house, young Jeffrey Whiting came and stood before the Bishop. The Bishop's sharp old eyes had told him to expect something of what was coming. He liked the look of the boy's clean, stubborn jaw and the steady, level glance of his eyes. They told of dependableness and plenty of undeveloped strength. Here was not a boy, but a man ready to fight for what should be his.

"Ruth told me that you were going to take her away from the hills," he began. "To a school, I suppose."

"I made a promise to her father," said the Bishop, "that I would try to see that she got the chance that she will want in the world."

"But I love her. She's going to marry me in the Spring."

The Bishop was surprised. He had not thought matters had gone so far.

"How old are you?" he asked thoughtfully.

"Twenty in April."

"You have some education?" the Bishop suggested. "You have been at school?"

"Just what Tom Lansing taught me and Ruth. And last Winter at the Academy in Lowville. I was going to Albany to law school next week."

"And you are giving it all up for Ruth," said the Bishop incisively. "Does it hurt?"

The boy winced, but caught himself at once.

"It don't make any difference about that. I want Ruth."

"And Ruth? What does she want?" the Bishop asked. "You are offering to make a sacrifice for her. You are willing to give up your hopes and work yourself to the bone here on these hills for her. And you would be man enough never to let her see that you regretted it. I believe that. But what of her? You find it hard enough to give up your chance, for her, for love."

"Do you know that you are asking her to give up her chance, for nothing, for less than nothing; because in giving up her chance she would know that she had taken away yours, too. She would be a good and loving companion to you through all of a hard life. But, for both your sakes, she would never forgive you. Never."

"You're asking me to give her up. If she went out and got a start, she'd go faster than I could. I know it," said the boy bitterly. "She'd go away above me. I'd lose her."

"I am not asking you to give her up," the Bishop returned steadily. "If you are the man I think you are, you will never give her up. But are you afraid to let her have her chance in the sun? Are you afraid to let her have what you want for yourself? Are you afraid?"

The boy looked steadily into the Bishop's eyes for a moment. Then he turned quickly and walked across the room to where Ruth sat.

"I can't give it up, Ruth," he said gruffly. "I'm going to Albany to school. I can't give it up."

The girl looked up at him, and said quietly:

"You needn't have tried to lie, Jeff; though it's just like you to put the blame on yourself. I know what he said. I must think."

The boy stood watching her eyes closely. He saw them suddenly light up. He knew what that meant. She was seeing the great world with all its wonderful mysteries beckoning her. So he himself had seen it. Now he knew that he had lost.

The Bishop had put on his coat and was ready to go. The day was slipping away and before him there were thirty miles and a train to be caught.

"We must not be hurried, my children," he said, standing by the boy and girl. "The Sacred Heart Academy at Athens is the best school this side of Albany. The Mother Superior will write you in a few days, telling you when and how to come. If you are ready to go, you will go as she directs."

"You have been a good, brave little girl. A soldier's daughter could be no more, nor less. God bless you now, and you, too, my boy," he added.

When he was settled on the sled with Arsene and they were rounding the shoulder of Lansing Mountain, where the pony had broken the trace, he turned to look back at the cabin in the hemlocks.

"To-day," he said to himself, "I have set two ambitious, eager souls upon the high and stony paths of the great world. Should I have left them where they were?"

"I shall never know whether I did right or not. Even time will mix things up so that I'll never be able to tell. Maybe some day God will let me see. But why should he? One can only aim right, and trust in Him."

II

THE CHOIR UNSEEN

Ruth Lansing sat in one of the music rooms of the Sacred Heart convent in Athens thrumming out a finger exercise that a child of six would have been able to do as well as she.

It was a strange, little, closely-crowded world, this, into which she had been suddenly transplanted. It was as different from the great world that she had come out to see as it was from the wild, sweet life of the hills where she had ruled and managed everything within reach. Mainly it was full of girls of her own age whose talk and thoughts were of a range entirely new to her.

She compared herself with them and knew that they were really children in the comparison. Their talk was of dress and manners and society and the thousand little and big things that growing girls look forward to. She knew that in any real test, anything that demanded common sense and action, she was years older than they. But they had things that she did not have.

They talked of things that she knew nothing about. They could walk across waxed floors as though waxed floors were meant to be walked on. They could rise to recite lessons without stammering or choking as she did. They could take reproof jauntily, where she, who had never in her life received a scolding, would have been driven into hysterics. They could wear new dresses just as though all dresses were supposed to be new. She knew that these were not things that they had learned by studying. They just grew up to them, just as she knew how to throw a fishing line and hold a rifle.

But she wanted all those things that they had; wanted them all passionately. She had the sense to know that those were not great things. But they were the things that would make her like these other girls. And she wanted to be like them.

Because she had not grown up with other girls, because she had never even had a girl playmate, she wanted not to miss any of the things that they had and were.

They baffled her, these girls. Her own quick, eager mind sprang at books and fairly tore the lessons from them. She ran away from the girls in anything that could be learned in that way. But when she found herself with two or three of them they talked a language that she did not know. She could not keep up with them. And she was stupid and awkward, and felt it. It was not easy to break into their world and be one of them.

Then there was that other world, touching the world of the girls but infinitely removed from it--the world of the sisters.

That mysterious cloister from which the sisters came and gave their hours of teaching or duty and to which they retreated back again was a world all by itself.

What was there in there behind those doors that never banged? What was there in there that made the sisters all so very much alike? They must once have been as different as every girl is different from every other girl.

How was it that they could carry with them all day long that air of never being tired or fretted or worried? What wonderful presence was there behind the doors of that cloistered house that seemed to come out with them and stay with them all the time? What was the light that shone in their faces?

Was it just because they were always contented and happy? What did they have to be happy about?

Ruth had tried to question the other girls about this. They were Catholics. They ought to know. But Bessie Donnelly had brushed her question aside with a stare:

"Sisters always look like that."

So Ruth did not ask any more. But her mind kept prying at that world of the sisters behind those walls. What did they do in there? Did they laugh and talk and scold each other, like people? Or did they just pray all the time? Or did they see wonderful, starry visions of God and Heaven that they were always talking about? They seemed so familiar with God. They knew just when He was pleased and especially when He was displeased.

She had come down out of her hills where everything was so open, where there were no

mysteries, where everything from the bark on the trees to the snow clouds on Marcy, fifty miles away, was as clear as a printed book. Everything up there told its plain lesson. She could read the storm signs and the squirrel tracks. Nothing had been hidden. Nothing in nature or life up there had ever shut itself away from her.

Here were worlds inside of worlds, every one of them closing its door in the face of her sharp, hungry mind.

And there was that other world, enveloping all the other lesser worlds about her--the world of the Catholic Church.

Three weeks ago those two words had meant to her a little green building in French Village where the "Canucks" went to church.

Now her day began and ended with it. It was on all sides of her. The pictures and the images on every wall, the signs on every classroom door. The books she read, the talk she heard was all filled with it. It came and went through every door of life.

All the inherited prejudices of her line of New England fathers were alive and stirring in her against this religion that demanded so much. The untrammelled spirit that the hills had given her fought against it. It was so absolute. It was so sure of everything. She wanted to argue with it, to quarrel with it. She was sure that it must be wrong sometimes.

But just when she was sure that she had found something false, something that she knew was not right in the things they taught her, she was always told that she had not understood. Some one was always ready to tell her, in an easy, patient, amused way, that she had gotten the thing wrong. How could they always be so sure? And what was wrong with her that she could not understand? She could learn everything else faster and more easily than the other girls could.

Suddenly her fingers slipped off the keys and her hands fell nervelessly to her sides. Her eyes were blinded with great, burning tears. A wave of intolerable longing and loneliness swept over her.

The wonderful, enchanting world that she had come out of her hills to conquer was cut down to the four little grey walls that enclosed her. Everything was shut away from her. She did not understand these strange women about her. Would never understand them.

Why? Why had she ever left her hills, where Daddy Tom was near her, where there was love for her, where the people and even the snow and the wild winds were her friends?

She threw herself forward on her arms and gave way utterly, crying in great, heart-breaking, breathless sobs for her Daddy Tom, for her home, for her hills.

At five o'clock Sister Rose, coming to see that the music rooms were aired for the evening use, found Ruth an inert, shapeless little bundle of broken nerves lying across the piano.

She took the girl to her room and sent for the sister infirmarian.

But Ruth was not sick. She begged them only to leave her alone.

The sisters, thinking that it was the fit of homesickness that every new pupil in a boarding school is liable to, sent some of the other girls in during the evening, to cheer Ruth out of it. But she drove them away. She was not cross nor pettish. But her soul was sick for the sweeping freedom of her hills and for people who could understand her.

She rose and dragged her little couch over to the window, where she could look out and up to the friendly stars, the same ones that peeped down upon her in the hills.

She did not know the names that they had in books, but she had framed little pet names for them all out of her baby fancies and the names had clung to them all the years.

She recognised them, although they did not stand in the places where they belonged when she looked at them from the hills.

Out among them somewhere was Heaven. Daddy Tom was there, and her mother whom she had never seen.

Suddenly, out of the night, from Heaven it seemed, there came stealing into her sense a sound. Or was it a sound? It was so delicate, so illusive. It did not stop knocking at the portals of the ear as other sounds must do. It seemed, rather, to steal past the clumsy senses directly into the spirit and the heart.

It was music. Yes. But it was as though the Soul of Music had freed itself of the bondage and the body of sound and notes and came carrying its unutterable message straight to the soul of the world.

It was only the sisters in their chapel gently hymning the *Salve* of the Compline to their Queen in Heaven.

Ruth Lansing might have heard the same subdued, sweetly poignant evensong on every other night. Other nights, her mind filled with books and its other business, the music had scarcely reached her. To-night her soul was alive. Her every sense was like a nerve laid bare, ready to be thrilled and hurt by the most delicate pressures.

She did not think of the sisters. She saw the deep rose flush of the windows in the dimly lighted chapel across the court, and knew vaguely, perhaps, that the music came from there. But it carried her beyond all thought.

She did not hear the words of the hymn. Would not have understood them if she had heard. But the lifting of hearts to *Our Life, our Sweetness and our Hope* caught her heart up into a world where words were never needed.

She heard the cry of the *Banished children of Eve*. The *Mourning and weeping in this vale of tears* swept into her soul like the flood-tide of all the sorrow of all the world.

On and upwards the music carried her, until she could hear the triumph, until her soul rang with the glory and the victory of *The Promises of Christ*.

The music ceased. She saw the light fade from the chapel windows, leaving only the one little blood-red spot of light before the altar. She lay there trembling, not daring to move, while the echo of that unseen choir caught her heartstrings and set them ringing to the measure of the heart of the world.

It was not the unembodied cry of the pain and helplessness but the undying hope of the world that she had heard. It was the cry of the little blind ones of all the earth. It was the cry of martyrs on their pyres. It was the cry of strong men and valiant women crushed under the forces of life. And it was the voice of the Catholic Church, which knows what the soul of the world is saying. Ruth Lansing knew this. She realised it as she lay there trembling.

Always, as long as life was in her; always, whether she worked or laughed, cried or played; always that voice would grip her heart and play upon it and lead her whether she would or no.

It would lead her. It would carry her. It would send her.

Through all the long night she fought it. She would not! She would not give up her life, her will, her spirit! Why? Why? Why must she?

It would take her spirit out of the freedom of the hills and make it follow a trodden way. It would take her life out of her hands and maybe ask her to shut herself up, away from the sun and the wind, in a darkened convent. It would take her will, the will of a soldier's daughter, and break it into little pieces to make a path for her to walk upon!

No! No! No! Through all the endless night she moaned her protest. She would not! She would not give in to it.

It would never let her rest. Through all her life that voice of the Choir Unseen would strike the strings of her heart. She knew it.

But she would not. Never would she give in to it.

In the morning, even before the coming of the dawn, the music came again; and it beat upon her worn, ragged nerves, and tore and wrenched at her heart until she could stand it no longer.

The sisters were taking up again the burden and the way of the day.

She could not stand it! She could not stay here! She must go back to her hills, where there was peace for her.

She heard the sister going down to unlock the street door so that Father Tenney could walk in when it was time and go up to the chapel for the sisters' early mass.

That was her chance! The sisters would be in chapel. The girls would be still in their rooms.

She dressed hastily and threw her books into a bag. She would take only these and her money. She had enough to get home on. The rest did not matter.

When she heard the priest's step pass in the hall, she slipped out and down the dim, broad stairs.

The great, heavy door of the convent stood like the gate of the world. It swung slowly, deliberately, on its well-oiled, silent hinges.

She stood in the portal a moment, drinking hungrily the fresh, free air of the morning that had come down from her hills. Then she fled away into the dawn.

The sun was just showing over Lansing mountain as Jeffrey Whiting came out of his mother's house dragging a hair trunk by the handle. His uncle, Cassius Bascom, drove up from the barn with the team and sled. Jeffrey threw his trunk upon the sled and bent to lash it down safe. It was twenty-five miles of half broken road and snowdrifts to Lowville and the railroad.

Jeffrey Whiting was doing what the typical American farm boy has been doing for the last hundred years and what he will probably continue to do as long as we Americans are what we are. He is not always a dreamer, your farm boy, when he starts down from his hills or his cross-roads farm to see the big world and conquer it. More often than you would think, he knows that he is not going to conquer it at all. And he is not, on the other hand, merely running away from the drudgery of the farm. He knows that he will probably have to work harder than he would ever have worked on the farm. But he knows that he has things to sell. And he is going down into the markets of men. He has a good head and a strong body. He has a power of work in him. He has grit and energy.

He is going down into the markets where men pay the price for these things that he has. He is going to fight men for that price which he knows his things are worth.

Jeffrey's mother came out carrying a canvas satchel which she put on the sled under Cassius Bascom's feet.

"Don't kick that, Catty," she warned, "Jeff's lunch is in it. And, Jeff, don't you go and check it

with the trunk." There was just a little catch in the laugh with which she said this. She was remembering a day more than twenty years before when she had started, a bride, with big, lumbering, slow-witted, adoring Dan Whiting, Jeffrey's father, on her wedding trip to Niagara Falls, with their lunch in that same satchel. Dan Whiting checked the satchel through from Lowville to Buffalo, and they had nearly starved on the way. It was easy to forgive Dan Whiting his stupidity. But she never quite forgave him for telling it on himself when they got back. It had been a standing joke in the hills all these years.

She was just a typical mother of the hills. She loved her boy. She needed him. She knew that she would never have him again. The boys do not come back from the market place. She knew that she would cry for him through many a lonely night, as she had cried all last night. But she was not crying now.

Her deep grey eyes smiled steadily up into his as she stretched her arms up around the neck of her tall boy and drew his head down to kiss her.

He was not a dull boy. He was quick of heart. He knew his mother very well. So he began with the old, old lie; the lie that we all tried to tell when we were leaving.

"It'll only be a little while, Mother. You won't find the time slipping by, and I'll be back."

She knew it was a lie. All the mothers of boys always knew it was a lie. But she backed him up sturdily:

"Why, of course, Jeff. Don't worry about me. You'll be back in no time."

Miss Letitia Bascom came hurrying out of the house with a dark, oblong object in her hands.

"There now, Jeff Whiting, I know you just tried to forget this on purpose. It's too late to put it in the trunk now; so you'll just have to put it in your overcoat pocket."

Jeffrey groaned in spirit. It was a full-grown brick covered with felt, a foot warmer. Aunt Letty had made him take one with him when he went down to the Academy at Lowville last winter, and he and his brick had furnished much of the winter's amusement there. The memory of his humiliations on account of that brick would last a lifetime. He wondered why maiden aunts could not understand. His mother, now, would have known better. But he dutifully put the thing into the pocket of his big coat--he could drop it into the first snowback--and turned to kiss his aunt.

"I know all about them hall bedrooms in Albany," she lectured. "Make your landlady heat it for you every night."

A noise in the road made them all turn.

Two men in a high-backed, low-set cutter were driving into the yard.

It was evident from the signs that the men had been having a hard time on the road. They must have been out all night, for they could not have started from anywhere early enough to be here now at sunrise.

Their harness had been broken and mended in several places. The cutter had a runner broken. The horses were cut and bloody, where they had kicked themselves and each other in the drifts.

As they drove up beside the group in the yard, one of the men shouted:

"Say, is there any place we can put in here? We've been on that road all night."

"Drive in onto the barn floor, and come in and warm yourselves," said Mrs. Whiting.

"Rogers," said the man who had spoken, addressing the other, "if I ever get into a place that's warm, I'll stay there till spring."

Rogers laid the lines down on the dashboard of the cutter and stepped stiffly out into the snow. He swept the group with a sharp, a praising eye, and asked:

"Who's the one to talk to here?"

Jeffrey Whiting stepped forward naturally and replied with another question.

"What do you want?"

Rogers, a large, square-faced man, with a stubby grey moustache and cold grey eyes, looked the youth over carefully as he spoke.

"I want a man that knows this country and can get around in it in this season. I was brought up in the country, but I never saw anything like this. I wouldn't take a trip like this again for any money. I can't do this sort of thing. I want a man that knows the country and the people and can do it."

"Well, I'm going away now," said Jeffrey slowly, "but Uncle Catty here knows the people and the country better than most and he can go anywhere."

The big man looked doubtfully at the little, oldish man on the sled. Then he turned away decisively. Uncle Cassius, his kindly, ugly old face all withered and puckered to one side, where a splinter of shell from Fort Fisher had taken away his right eye, was evidently not the kind of man that the big man wanted.

"Where are you going?" he asked Jeffrey sharply.

"Albany Law School," said Jeffrey promptly.

"Unstrap the trunk, young man. You're not going. I've got something for you right here at home that'll teach you more than ten law schools. Put both teams into the barn," the big man commanded loudly.

Jeffrey stood still a moment, as though he would oppose the will of this brusque stranger. But he knew that he would not do so. In that moment something told him that he would not go to law school; would never go there; that his life was about to take a twist away from everything that he had ever intended.

Mrs. Whiting broke the pause, saying simply:

"Come into the house."

In the broad, low kitchen, while Letitia Bascom poured boiling tea for the two men, Rogers, cup in hand, stood squarely on the hearth and explained himself. The other man, whose name does not matter, sank into a great wooden chair at the side of the fire and seemed to be ready to make good his threat of staying until spring.

"I represent the U. & M. railroad. We are coming up through here in the spring. All these farms have to be given up. We have eminent domain for this whole section," said Rogers.

"What do you mean?" asked Jeffrey. "The railroad can't run *all over* the country."

"No. But the road will need the whole strip of hills for timber. They'll cut off what is standing and then they'll stock the whole country with cedar, for ties. That's all the land's good for, anyway."

Jeffrey Whiting's mouth opened for an answer to this, but his mother's sharp, warning glance stopped him. He understood that it was his place to listen and learn. There would be time enough for questions and arguments afterward.

"Now these people here won't understand what eminent domain means," the big man went on. "I'm going to make it clear to you, young man. I know who you are and I know more about you than you think. I'm going to make it clear to you and then I'm going to send you out among them to make them see it. They wouldn't understand me and they wouldn't believe me. You can make them see it."

"How do you know that I'll believe you?" asked Jeffrey.

"You've got brains. You don't have to *believe*. I can *show* it to you."

Jeffrey Whiting was a big, strong boy, well accustomed to taking responsibilities upon himself. He had never been afraid of anything and this perhaps had given him more than the average boy's good opinion of himself. Nothing could have appealed to him more subtly than this man's bluff, curt flattery. He was being met man to man by a man of the world. No boy is proof against the compliment that he is a man, to be dealt with as a man and equal of older, more experienced men. Jeffrey was ready to listen.

"Do you know what an option is?" the man began again.

"Of course I do."

"I thought so," said Rogers, in a manner that seemed to confirm his previous judgment of Jeffrey's brains. "Now then, the railroad has got to have all these farms from Beaver River right up to the head of Little Tupper Lake. I say these people won't know what eminent domain means. You're going to tell them. It means that they can sell at the railroad's price or they can hold off and a referee will be appointed to name a price. The railroad will have a big say in appointing those referees. Do you understand me?"

"Yes. I see," said Jeffrey. "But--"

"No buts at all about it, young man," said Rogers, waving his hand. "The people have got to sell. If they give options at once--within thirty days--they'll get more than a fair price for their land. If they don't--if they hold off--their farms will be condemned as forest land. And you know how much that brings.

"You people will be the first. You can ask almost anything for your land. You'll get it. And, what is more, I am able to offer you, Whiting, a very liberal commission on every option you can get me within the time I have said. This is the thing that I can't do. It's the thing that I want you to do.

"You'll do it. I know you will, when you get time to think it over. Here are the options," said the big man, pulling a packet of folded papers out of his pocket. "They cover every farm in the section. All you have to do is to get the people to write their names once. Then your work is done. We'll do the rest and your commissions will be waiting for you. Some better than law school, eh?"

"But say," Jeffrey stammered, "say, that means, why, that means my mother and the folks here, why, they'd have to get out; they'd have to leave their home!"

"Of course," said Rogers easily. "A man like you isn't going to keep his family up on top of this rock very long. Why, young fellow, you'll have the best home in Lowville for them, where they can live in style, in less than six months. Do you think your mother wants to stay here after you're gone. You were going away. Did you think," he said shrewdly, "what life up here would be worth to your mother while you were away. No, you're just like all boys. You wanted to get away yourself. But you never thought what a life this is for her.

"Why, boy, she's a young woman yet. You can take her out and give her a chance to live. Do you hear, a chance to live.

"Think it over."

Jeffrey Whiting thought, harder and faster than he had ever tried to think in his life. But he could make nothing of it.

He thought of the people, old and young, on the hills, suddenly set adrift from their homes. He thought of his mother and Uncle Cassius and Aunt Letitia without their real home to come back to. And he thought of money--illimitable money: money that could do everything.

He did not want to look at his mother for counsel. The man's talk had gone to his head. But, slowly, unwillingly his eyes came to his mother's, and he saw in hers that steady, steadfast look which told him to wait, wait. He caught the meaning and spoke it brusquely:

"All right. Leave the options here. I'll see what we'll do. And I'll write to you next week."

No. That would not do. The big man must have his answer at once. He stormed at Jeffrey. He appealed to Mrs. Whiting. He blandished Miss Letitia. He even attacked Uncle Cassius, but that guileless man led him off into such a discussion of cross grafting and reforestation that he was glad to drop him.

In the end, he saw that, having committed himself, he could do no better than leave the matter to Jeffrey, trusting that, with time for thought, the boy could not refuse his offer.

So the two men, having breakfasted and rested their horses, set out on the down trip to Lowville.

Late that night Jeffrey Whiting and his mother came to a decision.

"It is too big for us, Jeff," she said. "We do not know what it means. Nobody up here can tell us. The man was lying. But we do not know why, or what about.

"There is one man that could tell us. The White Horse Chaplain, do you remember him, Jeffrey?"

"I guess I do. He sent Ruth away from me."

"Only to give her her chance, my son. Do not forget that. He could tell us what this means. I don't care anything about his religion. Your Uncle Catty thinks he was a ghost even that day at Fort Fisher. I don't. He is the Catholic Bishop of Alden. You'll go to him to-morrow. He'll tell you what it means."

Bishop Joseph Winthrop of Alden was very much worried. For the third time he picked up and read a telegram from the Mother Superior of the Sacred Heart Convent at Athens, telling him that Ruth Lansing had left the convent that morning. But the third perusal of the message did not give him any more light on the matter than the two previous readings had done.

Why should the girl have gone away? What could have happened? Only the other day he had received a letter from her telling of her studies and her progress and of every new thing that was interesting her.

The Bishop thought of the lonely hill home where he had found her "Daddy Tom" dying, and where he had buried him on the hillside. Probably the girl would go back and try to live there. And he thought of the boy who had told him of his love and that he wanted to keep Ruth there in the hills.

As he laid down the telegraph form, his secretary came to the door to tell him that the boy, Jeffrey Whiting, was in the waiting room asking to see him and refusing even to indicate the nature of his business to any one but the Bishop himself.

The Bishop was startled. He had understood that the young man was in Albany at school. Now he thought that he would get a very clear light upon Ruth Lansing's disappearance.

"I came to you, sir," said Jeffrey when the Bishop had given him a chair, "because you could tell us what to do."

"You mean you and your--neighbour, Ruth Lansing?"

"Why, no, sir. What about her?" said Jeffrey quickly.

The Bishop gave the boy one keen, searching look, and saw his mistake. The boy knew nothing.

"This," the Bishop answered, as he handed Jeffrey the open telegram.

"But where's she gone? Why did she go?" Jeffrey broke out, as he read the message.

"I thought you were coming to tell me that."

"No," said Jeffrey, reading the Bishop's meaning quickly. "She didn't write to me, not at all. I suppose the sisters wouldn't have it. But she wrote to my mother and she didn't say anything about leaving there."

"I suppose not," said the Bishop. "She seems to have gone away suddenly. But, I am forgetting. You came to talk to me."

"Yes." And Jeffrey went on to tell, clearly and shortly, of the coming of Rogers and his proposition. Though it hurt, he did not fail to tell how he had been carried away by the man's offer and his flattery. He made it plain that it was only his mother's insight and caution that had held him back from accepting the offer on the instant.

The Bishop, listening, was proud of the down-rightness of the young fellow. It was good to hear. When he had heard all he bowed in his old-fashioned, stiff way and said:

"Your mother, young man, is a rare and wise woman. You will convey to her my deepest respect.

"I do not know what it all means," he went on, in another tone. "But I can soon find out."

He rang a bell, and as his secretary opened the door the Bishop said:

"Will you see, please, if General Chandler is in his office across the street. If he is, give him my respects and ask him to step over here a moment."

The secretary bowed, but hesitated a little in the doorway.

"What is it?" asked the Bishop.

"There is a young girl out there, Bishop. She says she must see you, but she will not give a name. She seems to be in trouble, or frightened."

Jeffrey Whiting was on his feet and making for the door.

"Sit down where you were, young man," said the Bishop sharply. If Ruth Lansing were out there--and the Bishop half believed that she was--well, it *might* be coincidence. But it was too much for the Bishop's credulity.

"Send the girl in here," he said shortly.

Ruth Lansing walked into the room and went straight to the Bishop. She did not see Jeffrey.

"I came straight here all the way," she said, "to tell you, Bishop, that I couldn't stay in the convent any longer. I am going home. I could not stay there."

"I am very glad to see you, Ruth," said the Bishop easily, "and if you'll just turn around, I think you'll see some one who is even more pleased."

Her startled cry of surprise and pleasure at sight of Jeffrey was abundant proof to the Bishop that the coming of these two to his door was indeed a coincidence.

"Now," said the Bishop quickly, "you will both sit down and listen. It concerns both of you deeply. A man is coming here in a moment, General Chandler. You have both heard of him. He is the political power of this part of the State. He can, if he will, tell us just how serious your situation is up there, Jeffrey. Say nothing. Just listen."

Ruth looked from one to the other with surprise and perhaps a little resentment. For hours she had been bracing her courage for this ordeal of meeting the Bishop, and here she was merely told to sit down and listen to something, she did not know what.

The Bishop rose as General Oliver Chandler was ushered into the room and the two veterans saluted each other with the stiffest of military precision.

"These are two young friends of mine from the hills, General," said the Bishop, as he seated his old friend. "They both own farms in the Beaver Run country. They have come to me to find out what the U. & M. Railroad wants with options on all that country. Can you, will you tell them?"

The General plucked for a moment at the empty left sleeve of his coat.

"No, Bishop," he said finally, "I cannot give out what I know of that matter. The interests behind it are too large for me. I would not dare. I do not often have to say that."

"No," said the Bishop slowly, "I never heard you say that before."

"But I can do this, Bishop," said the General, rising. "If you will come over here to the end of the room, I can tell you, privately, what I know. You can then use your own prudence to judge how much you can tell these young people."

The Bishop followed to the window at the other end of the room, where the two men stood and talked in undertones.

"Jeffrey," said Ruth through teeth that gritted with impatience, "if you don't tell me this instant what it's all about, I'll--I'll *bite* you!"

Jeffrey laughed softly. It took just that little wild outbreak of hers to convince him that the young lady who had swept into the room and faced the Bishop was really his little playmate, his Ruth, after all.

In quick whispers, he told her all he knew.

The Bishop walked to the door with the General, thanking him. From the door the General saluted gravely and stalked away.

"The answer," said the Bishop quietly, as he came back to them, "is one word--Iron."

To Ruth, it seemed that these men were making a mysterious fuss about nothing. But Jeffrey saw the whole matter instantly.

"No one knows how much there is, or how little there is," said the Bishop. "The man lied to you, Jeffrey. The road has no eminent domain. But they can get it if they get the options on a large part of the farms. Then, when they have the right of eminent domain, they will let the options lapse and buy the properties at their own prices."

"I'll start back to warn the people to-night," said Jeffrey, jumping up. "Maybe they made that offer to other people besides me!"

"Wait," said the Bishop, "there is more to think of. The railroad, if you serve it well, will, no doubt, buy your farm for much more than it is worth to you. There is your mother to be considered first. And they will, very likely, give you a chance to make a small fortune in your commissions, if you are faithful to them. If you go to fight them, they will probably crush you all in the end, and you will be left with little or nothing. Better go slowly, young man."

"What?" cried Jeffrey. "Take their bribe! Take their money, for fooling and cheating the other people out of their homes! Why, before I'd do that, I'd leave that farm and everything that's there and go up into the big woods with only my axe, as my grandfather did. And my mother would follow me! You know that! My mother would be glad to go with me, with nothing, nothing in her hands!"

"And so would I!" said Ruth, springing to her feet. "*I would! I would!*" she chanted defiantly.

"Well, well, well!" said the Bishop, smiling.

"But you are not going up into the big woods, Jeffrey," Ruth said demurely. "You are going back home to fight them. If I could help you I would go back with you. I would not be of any use. So, I'm going back, to the convent, to face my fight."

"But, but," said Jeffrey, "I thought you were running away."

"I did. I was," said Ruth. "Last night I heard the voice of something calling to me. It was such a big thing," she went on, turning to the Bishop; "it seemed such a pitiless, strong thing that I thought it would crush me. It would take my life and make me do what *it* wanted, not what I wanted. I was afraid of it. I ran away. It was like a Choir Unseen singing to me to follow, and I didn't dare follow.

"But I heard it again, just now when Jeffrey spoke that way. Now I know what it was. It was the call of life to everybody to face life, to take our souls in our hands and go forward. I thought I could turn back. I can't. God, or life won't let us turn back."

"I know what you mean, child. Fear nothing," said the Bishop. "I'm glad you came away, to have it out with yourself. And you will be very glad now to go back."

"As for you, young man," he turned to Jeffrey, "I should say that your mother *would* be proud to go anywhere, empty-handed with you. Remember that, when you are in the worst of this fight that is before you. When you are tempted, as you will be tempted, remember it. When you are hard pressed, as you will be hard pressed, *remember it.*"

III

GLOW OF DAWN

Twinkle-tail was gliding up Beaver Run to his breakfast. It was past the middle of June, or, as Twinkle-tail understood the matter, it was the time when the snow water and the water from the spring rains had already gone down to the Big River: Beaver Run was still a fresh, rushing stream of water, but it was falling fast. Soon there would not be enough water in it to make it safe for a trout as large as he. Then he would have to stay down in the low, deep pond of Beaver River, where the saw-dust came to bother him.

He was going up to lie all the morning in the shallow little pond at the very head of Beaver Run, where the hot, sweet sun beat down and drew the flies to the surface of the pond. He was very fond of flies and the pond was his own. He had made it his own now through four seasons, by his speed and his strong teeth. Even the big, greedy, quarrelsome pike that bullied the river down below did not dispute with him this sweet upper stretch of his own stream. No large fish ever came up this way now, and he did not bother with the little ones. He liked flies better.

His pond lay all clean and silvery and a little cool yet, for the sun was not high enough to have heated it through: a beautiful breakfast room at the bottom of the great bowl of green banks that ran away up on every side to the rim of the high hills.

Twinkle-tail was rather early for breakfast. The sun had not yet begun to draw the flies from their hiding places to buzz over the surface of the water. As he shot into the centre of the pool only one fly was in sight. A rather decrepit looking black fly was doddering about a cat-tail stalk at the edge of the pond. One quick flirt of his body, and Twinkle-tail slid out of the water and took the fly in his leap. But that was no breakfast. He would have to settle down by the cat-tails, in the shadows, and wait for the flies to come.

Twinkle-tail missed something from his pond this season. Always, in other years, two people, a boy and a girl, had come and watched him as he ate his breakfast. The girl had called him Twinkle-tail the very first time they had seen him. But Twinkle-tail had no illusions. They were not friends to him. He loved to lie in the shadow of the cat-tails and watch them as they crept along the edge of the bank. But he knew they came to catch him. When they were there the most tempting flies seemed to appear. Some of those flies fell into the water, others just

skimmed the surface in the most aggravating and challenging manner. But Twinkle-tail had always stayed in the cat-tails and watched, and if the boy and girl came to his side of the pond, then a lightning twinkle of his tail was all that told them that he had scooted out of the pool and down into the stream. Once the girl had trailed a piece of flashing red flannel across the water, and Twinkle-tail could not resist. He leaped for it. A terrible hook caught him in the side of the mouth! In his fury and terror he dove and fought until he broke the hook. He had never forgotten that lesson.

But he was forgetting a little this season. No one came to his pool. He was growing big and fat, and a little careless.

As he lay there in the warming sand by the cat-tails, the biggest, juiciest green bottle fly that Twinkle-tail had ever seen came skimming down to the very line of the water. It circled once. Twinkle-tail did not move. It circled twice, not an inch from the water!

A single, sinuous flash of his whole body, and Twinkle-tail was out of the water! He had the fly in his mouth.

Then the struggle began.

Ruth Lansing sprang up, pole in hand, from the shoulder of the bank behind which she had been hiding.

The trout dove and started for the stream, the line ripping through the water like a shot.

The girl ran, leaping from rock to rock, her strong, slender, boy-like body giving and swaying cunningly to every tug of the fish.

He turned and shot swiftly back into the pool, throwing her off her balance and down into the water. She rose wet and angry, clinging grimly to the pole, and splashed her way to the other side of the pond. She did not dare to stand and pull against him, for fear of breaking the hook. She could only race around, giving him all the line she could until he should tire a little.

Three times they fought around the circle of the pool, the taut line singing like a wire in the wind. Ruth's hand was cut where she had fallen on the rocks. She was splashed and muddy from head to foot. Her breath came in great, gulping sobs. But she fought on.

Twice he dragged her a hundred yards down the Run, but she headed him back each time to the pond where she could handle him better. She had never before fought so big a fish all alone. Jeffrey or Daddy Tom had always been with her. Now she found herself calling desperately under her breath to Jeffrey to come to help her. She bit back the words and took a new hold on the pole.

The trout was running blindly now from side to side of the pond. He had lost his cunning. He would soon weaken. But Ruth knew that her strength was nearly gone too. She must use her head quickly.

She gathered herself on the bank for one desperate effort. She must catch him as he ran toward her and try to flick him out of the water. It was her only chance. She might break the line or the pole and lose him entirely, but she would try it.

Twinkle-tail came shooting through the water, directly at her. She suddenly threw her strength on the pole. It bent nearly double but it held. And the fish, adding his own blind rush to her strength, was whipped clear out on to the grass. Dropping the pole, she dove desperately at him where he fought on the very edge of the bank. Finally she caught the line a few inches above his mouth, and her prize was secure.

"It's you, Twinkle-tail," she panted, as she held him up for a good look, "sure enough!"

She carried him back to a large stone and despatched him painlessly with a blunt stick. Then she sat down to rest, for she was weak and dizzy from her struggle.

Looking down at Twinkle-tail where he lay, she said aloud:

"I wish Jeffrey was here. He'll never believe it was you unless he sees you."

"Yes, that's him all right," said a voice behind her. "I'd know him in a thousand."

She sprang up and faced Jeffrey Whiting.

"Why, where did you come from? Your mother told me you wouldn't be back till to-morrow."

"Well, I can go back again and stay till to-morrow if you want me to," said Jeffrey, smiling.

"Oh, Jeff, you know I'm glad to see you. I was awfully disappointed when I got home and found that you were away up in the hills. How is your fight going on? And look at Twinkle-tail," she hurried on a little nervously, for Jeffrey had her hand and was drawing her determinedly to him. She reached for the trout and held him up strategically between them.

"Oh, *Fish!*" said Jeffrey discontentedly as he saw himself beaten by her ruse.

The girl laughed provokingly up into his sullenly handsome face. Then she seemed to relent, and with a friendly little tug at his arm led him over to the edge of the pool and made him sit down.

"Now tell me," she commanded, "all about your battle with the railroad people. Your mother told me some things, but I want it all, from yourself."

But Jeffrey was still unappeased. He looked at her dress and shoes and said with a show of meanness:

"Ruth, you didn't catch Twinkle-tail fair, on your line. You just walked into the pond and got him in a corner and kicked him to death brutally. I know you did. You're always cruel."

Ruth laughed, and showed him the jagged cut in her hand where she had fallen on the rocks.

Instantly he was all interest and contrition. He must wash the hand and dress it! But she made him sit where he was, while she knelt down by the water and bathed the smarting hand and bound it with her handkerchief.

"Now," she said, "tell me."

"Well," he began, when he saw that there was nothing to be gained by delay, "the very night that the Bishop of Alden told me that they had found iron in the hills here and that they were going to try to push us all out of our homes, I started out to warn the people. I found I wasn't the only man that the railroad had tried to buy. They had Rafe Gadbeau, you know he's a kind of a political boss of the French around French Village; and a man named Sayres over on Forked Lake.

"Gadbeau had no farm of his own to sell, but he'd been spending money around free, and I knew the railroad must have given it to him outright. I told him what I had found out, about the iron and what the land would be worth if the farmers held on to it. But I might as well have held my breath. He didn't care anything about the interests of the people that had land. He was getting paid well for every option that he could get. And he was going to get all he could. I will have trouble with that man yet.

"The other man, Sayres, is a big land-owner, and a good man. They had fooled him, just as that man Rogers I told you about fooled me. He had started out in good faith to help the railroad get the properties over on that side of the mountains, thinking it was the best thing for the people to do to sell out at once. When I told him about their finding iron, he saw that they had made a catspaw of him; and he was the maddest man you ever saw.

"He is a big man over that way, and his word was worth ten of mine. He went right out with me to warn every man who had a piece of land not to sign anything.

"Three weeks ago Rogers, who is handling the whole business for the railroad, came up here and had me arrested on charges of extortion and conspiring to intimidate the land-owners. They took me down to Lowville, but Judge Clemmons couldn't find anything in the charges. So I was let go. But they are not through. They will find some way to get me away from here yet."

"How does it stand now?" said Ruth thoughtfully. "Have they actually started to build the railroad?"

"Oh, yes. You know they have the right of way to run the road through. But they wouldn't build it, at least not for years yet, only that they want to get this iron property opened up. Why, the road is to run from Welden to French Village and there is not a single town on the whole line! The road wouldn't have business enough to keep the rust off. They're building the road just the same, so that shows that they intend to get our property some way, no matter what we do. And I suppose they will, somehow," he added sullenly. "They always do, I guess."

"But the people," said Ruth, "can't you get them all to join and agree to sell at a fair price? Wouldn't that be all right?"

"They don't want to buy. They won't buy at any fair price. They only want to get options enough to show the Legislature and the Governor, and then they will be granted eminent domain and they can have the land condemned and can buy it at the price of wild land."

"Oh, yes; I remember now. That's what the Bishop said. Isn't it strange," she went on slowly, "how he seems to come into everything we do. How he saved my Daddy Tom's life that time at Fort Fisher. And how he came here that night when Daddy was hurt. And how he picked us up and turned us around and sent me off to convent. And now how he seems to come into all this.

"Everybody calls him the Shepherd of the North," she went on. "I wonder if he comes into the lives of *all* the people that way. At the convent everybody seems to think of him as belonging to them personally. I resented it at first, because I thought I had more reason to know him than anybody. But I found that everybody felt the same way."

"He's just like the Catholic Church," said Jeffrey suddenly, and a little sharply; "he comes into everything."

"Why, Jeffrey," said Ruth in surprise, "what do you know about the Church?"

"I know," he answered. "I've read some. And I've had to deal a lot with the French people up toward French Village. And I've talked with their priest up there. You know you have to talk to the priest before it's any use talking to them. That's the way with the Catholic Church. It comes into everything. I don't like it."

He sat looking across the pool for a moment, while Ruth quietly studied the stubborn, settling lines of his face. She saw that a few months had made a big change in the boy and playmate that she had known. He was no longer the bright-faced, clear-eyed boy. His face was turning into a man's face. Sharp, jagged lines of temper and of harshness were coming into it. It showed strength and doggedness and will, along with some of the dour grimness of his fathers. She did not dislike the change altogether. But it began to make her a little timid. She was quick to see from it that there would be certain limits beyond which she could not play with this new man that she found.

"It's all right to be religious," he went on argumentatively. "Mother's religious. And Aunt Letty's

just full of it. But it don't interfere with their lives. It's all right to have a preacher for marrying or dying or something like that; and to go to hear him if you want to. But the Catholic Church comes right in to where those people live. It tells them what to do and what to think about everything. They don't dare speak without looking back to it to find out what they must say. I don't like it."

"Why, Jeffrey, I'm a Catholic!"

"I *knew* it!" he said stubbornly. "I knew it! I knew there was something that had changed you. And I might have known it was that."

"That's funny!" said the girl, breaking in quickly. "When you came I was just wondering to myself why it had not seemed to change me at all. I think I was half disappointed with myself, to think that I had gone through a wonderful experience and it had left me just the same as I was before."

"But it has changed you," he persisted. "And it's going to change you a lot more. I can see it. Please, Ruth," he said, suddenly softening, "you won't let it change you? You won't let it make any difference, with us, I mean?"

The girl looked soberly and steadily up into his face, and said:

"No, Jeffrey. It won't make any difference with us, in the way you mean."

"So long as we are what we are," she said again after a pause, "we will be just the same to each other. If it should make something different out of me than what I am, then, of course, I would not be the same to you. Or if you should change into something else, then you would not be the same to me."

"It's too soon," she continued decisively. "Nothing is clear to me, yet. I've just entered into a great, wonderful world of thought and feeling that I never knew existed. Where it leads to, I do not know. When I do know, Jeffrey dear, I'll tell you."

He looked up sharply at her as she rose to her feet, and he understood that she had said the last word that was to be said. He saw something in her face with which he did not dare to argue.

He got up saying:

"I have to be gone. I'm glad I found you here at the old place. I'll be back to-night to help you eat the trout."

"Where are you going?"

"Over to Wilbur's Fork. There's a couple of men over there that are shaky. I've had to keep after them or they'd be listening to Rafe Gadbeau and letting their land go."

"But," Ruth exclaimed, "now when they know, can't they see what is to their own interest! Are they blind?"

"I know," said Jeffrey dully. "But you know how it is with those people. Their land is hard to work. It is poor land. They have to scratch and scrape for a little money. They don't see many dollars together from one year's end to the other. Even a little money, ready, green money, shaken in their faces looks awful big to them."

"Good luck, then, Jeff," she said cheerily; "and get back early if you can."

"Sure," he said easily as he picked up his hat.

"And, say, Ruth." He turned back quietly to her. "If--if I shouldn't be back to-night, or to-morrow; why, watch Rafe Gadbeau. Will you? I wouldn't say anything to mother. And Uncle Catty, well, he's not very sharp sometimes. Will you?"

"Of course I will. But be careful, Jeff, please."

"Oh, sure," he sang back, as he walked quickly around the edge of the pond and slipped into the alder bushes through which ran the trail that went up over the ridge to the Wilbur Fork country on the other side.

Ruth stood watching him as he pushed sturdily up the opposite slope, his grey felt hat and wide shoulders showing above the undergrowth.

This boy was a different being from the Jeffrey that she had left when she went down to the convent five months before. She could see it in his walk, in the way he shouldered the bushes aside just as she had seen it in his face and his talk. He was fighting with a power that he had found to be stronger and bigger than himself. He was not discouraged. He had no thought of giving up. But the airy edge of his boyish confidence in himself was gone. He had become grim and thoughtful and determined. He had settled down to a long, dogged struggle.

He had asked her to watch Rafe Gadbeau. How much did he mean? Why should he have said this to her? Would it not have been better to have warned some of the men that were associated with him in his fight? And what was there to be feared? She laughed at the idea of physical fear in connection with Jeffrey. Why, nothing ever happened in the hills, anyway. Crimes of violence were never heard of. It was true, the lumber jacks were rough when they came down with the log drives in the spring. But they only fought among themselves. And they did not stop in the hills. They hurried on down to the towns where they could spend their money.

What had Jeffrey to fear?

Yet, he must have meant a good deal. He would not have spoken to her unless he had good

reason to think that something might happen to him.

Withal, Ruth was not deceived. She knew the temper of the hills. The men were easy-going. They were slow of speech. They were generally ruled by their more energetic women. But they or their fathers had all been fighting men, like her own father. And they were rooted in the soil of the hills. Any man or any power that attempted to drive them from the land which their hands had cleared and made into homes, where the bones of their fathers and mothers lay, would have to reckon with them as bitter, stubborn fighting men.

Jeffrey Whiting was just coming to the bare top of the ridge. In another moment he would drop down the other side out of sight. She wondered whether he would turn and wave to her; or had he forgotten that she would surely be standing where he had left her?

He had not forgotten. He turned and waved briskly to her. Then he stepped down quickly out of sight. His act was brusque and businesslike. It showed that he remembered. He could hardly have seen her standing there in all the green by the pond. He had just known that she was there. But it showed something else, too. He had plunged down over the edge of the hill upon a business with which his mind was filled, to the exclusion, almost, of her and of everything else.

The girl did not feel any of the little pique or resentment that might have been very natural. It was so that she would wish him to go about the business that was going to be so serious for all of them. But it gave her a new and startling flash of insight into what was coming.

She had always thought of her hills as the place where peace lived. Out in the great crowded market places of the world she knew men fought each other for money. But why do that in the hills? There was a little for all. And a man could only get as much as his own labour and good judgment would make for him out of the land.

Now she saw that it was not a matter of hills or of cities. Wherever, in the hills or the city or in the farthest desert, there was wealth or the hope of wealth, there greedy men with power would surely come to look for it and take it. That was why men fought. Wealth, even the scent of wealth whetted their appetites and drew them on to battle.

A cloud passed between her and the morning sun. She felt the premonition of tragedy and suffering lowering down like a storm on her hills. How foolishly she had thought that all life and all the great, seething business of life was to be done down in the towns and the cities. Here was life now, with its pressure and its ugly passions, pushing right into the very hills.

She shivered as she picked up her prize of the morning and her fishing tackle and started slowly up the hill toward her home.

Her farm had been rented to Norman Apgarth with the understanding that Ruth was to spend the summer there in her own home. The rent was enough to give Ruth what little money she needed for clothes and to pay her modest expenses at the convent at Athens. So her life was arranged for her at least up to the time when she should have finished school.

It seemed very strange to come home and find her home in the hands of strangers. It was odd to be a sort of guest in the house that she had ruled and managed from almost the time that she was a baby. It would be very hard to keep from telling Mrs. Apgarth where things belonged and how other things should be done. It would be hard to stand by and see others driving the horses that had never known a hand but hers and Daddy Tom's. Still she had been very glad to come home. It was her place. It held all the memories and all the things that connected her with her own people. She wanted to be able always to come back to it and call it her own. Looking down over it from the crest of the hill, at the little clump of trees under which lay her Daddy Tom and her mother, at the little house that had seen their love and in which she had been born, she could understand the fierceness with which men would fight to hold the farms and homes which were threatened.

Until now she had hardly realised that those men whom people vaguely called "the railroad" would want to take *her* home and farm away from her. Now it came suddenly home to her and she felt a swelling rage of indignation rising in her throat. She hurried down the hill to the house, as though she saw it already threatened.

She deftly threw her fishpole up on to the roof of the wood shed and went around to the front of the house. There she found Mrs. Apgarth weeding in what had been Ruth's own flower beds.

"Why, what a how-dye-do you did give us, Miss Ruth!" the woman exclaimed at sight of her. "I called you *three* times, and when you didn't answer I went to your door; and there you were gone! I told Norman Apgarth somebody must have took you off in the night."

"Oh, no," said Ruth. "No danger. I'm used to getting up early, you see. So I just took some cakes--Didn't you miss them?--and some milk and slipped out without waking any one. I wanted to catch this fish. Jeffrey Whiting and I tried to catch him for four years. And I had to do it myself this morning."

"So young Whiting's gone away, eh?"

"Why, no," said Ruth quickly. "He went over to Wilbur's Fork about half an hour ago. Who said he'd gone away?"

"Oh, nobody," said the woman hastily; "it's only what they was sayin' up at French Village yesterday."

"What were they saying?" Ruth demanded.

"Oh, just talk, I suppose," Mrs. Apgarth evaded. "Still, I dunno's I blame him. I guess if I got as

much money as they say he's got out of it, I'd skeddaddle, too."

Ruth stepped over and caught the woman sharply by the arm.

"What did they say? Tell me, please. Mrs. Apgarth saw that the girl was trembling with excitement and anxiety. She saw that she herself had said too much, or too little. She could not stop at that. She must tell everything now.

"Well," she began, "they say he's just fooled the people up over their eyes."

"How?" said Ruth impatiently. "Tell me."

"He's been agoin' round holdin' the people back and gettin' them to swear that they won't sign a paper or sell a bit of land to the railroad. Now it turns out he was just keepin' the rest of the people back till he could get a good big lot of money from the railroad for his own farm and for this one of yours. Oh, yes, they say he's sold this farm and his own and five other ones that he'd got hold of, for four times what they're worth. And that gives the railroad enough to work on, so the rest of the people'll just have to sell for what they can get. He's gone now; skipped out."

"But he has *not* gone!" Ruth snapped out indignantly. "I saw him only half an hour ago."

"Oh, well, of course," said the woman knowingly, "you'd know more about it than anybody else. It's all talk, I suppose."

Ruth blushed and dropped the fish forgotten on the grass. She said shortly:

"I'm going to spend the day with Mrs. Whiting."

"Oh, then, don't say a word to her about this. She's an awful good neighbour. I wouldn't for the world have her think that I--"

"Why, it doesn't matter at all," said Ruth, as she turned toward the road. "You only said what people were saying."

"But I wouldn't for anything," the woman called nervously after her, "have her think that-- And what'll I do with this?"

"Eat it," said Ruth over her shoulder. The prize for which she had fought so desperately in the early morning meant nothing to her now.

Jeffrey Whiting did not come home that night. Through the long twilight of one of the longest days of the year, Ruth sat reading in the old place on the hill, where Jeffrey would be sure to find her. Suddenly, when it was full dark, she knew that he would not come.

She did not try to argue with herself. She did not fight back the nervous feeling that something had happened. She was sure that she had been all day expecting it. When the moon came up over the hill and the long purple shadows of the elm trees on the crest came stalking down in the white light, she went miserably into the house and up to the little room they had fitted up for her in the loft of her own home.

She cried herself into a wearied, troubled sleep. But with the elasticity of youth and health she was awake at the first hint of morning, and the cloud of the night had passed.

She dressed and hurried down into the yard where Norman Apgarth was just stirring about with his milk pails. She was glad to face daylight and action. A man had put his trust in her before all others. She was eager to answer to his faith.

"Where is Brom Bones?" she demanded of the still drowsy Apgarth as she caught him crossing the yard from the milk house.

"The colt? He's up in the back pasture, just around the knob of the mountain. What was you calc'latin' to do with him, Miss?"

"I want to use him," said Ruth. "May I?"

"Use him? Certainly, if you want to. But, say, Miss, that colt ain't been driv' since the Spring's work. An' he's so fat an' silky he's liable to act foolish."

"I'm going to *ride* him," said Ruth briefly, as she stepped to the horse barn door for a bridle.

"Now, say, Miss," the man opposed feebly, "you could take the brown pony just as well; I don't need her a bit. And I tell you that colt is just a lun-*at*-ic, when he's been idle so long."

"Thank you," said Ruth, as she started up the hill. "But I think I'll find work enough to satisfy even Brom Bones to-day."

The big black colt followed her peaceably down the mountain, and stood champing at the door while she went in to get something to eat. When she brought out a shining new side saddle he looked suspiciously at the strange thing, but he made no serious objection as she fastened it on. Ruth herself, when she had buckled it tight, stood looking doubtfully at it. A side saddle was as new to her as it was to the horse. She had bought it on her way home the other day, as a concession to the fact that she was now a young lady who could no longer go stampeding over the hills on a bare-backed horse.

She mounted easily, but Brom Bones, seeming to know in the way of his kind that she was uneasy and uncomfortable, began at once to act badly. His intention seemed to be to walk into the open well on his hind feet. The girl caught a short hold on her lines and cut him sharply across the ear. He wheeled on two feet and bolted for the hill, clearing the woodshed by mere inches.

The path led straight up to the top of the slope. Ruth did not try to hold him. The sooner he ran the conceit out of himself, she thought, the better.

He hurled himself down the other slope, past the pool, and into the trail which Jeffrey had taken yesterday. It was break-neck riding, in a strange saddle. But the girl's anxiety rose with the excitement of the horse's wild rush, so that when they reached the top of the divide where she had last seen Jeffrey it was the horse and not the girl that was ready to settle down to a sober and safer pace.

Her common sense told her that she was probably foolish; that Jeffrey had merely stayed over night somewhere and that she would meet him on the way. But another and a subtler sense kept whispering to her to hurry on, that she was needed, that the good name, if not the life, of the boy she loved was in danger!

She had found out from Mrs. Whiting just who were the men whom Jeffrey had gone to see. But she did not know how she could dash up to their doors and demand to know where he was. It was eleven miles up the stony trail that followed Wilbur's Fork, and the girl's nerves now keyed up to expect she knew not what jangled at every turn of the road. Jeffrey had meant to come straight back this way to her. That he had not done so meant that *something* had stopped him on the way. What was it?

On one side the trail was flanked by giant hemlocks and the underbrush was grown into an impenetrable wall. On the other it ran sheer along the edge of Wilbur's Fork, a rock-bottomed, rushing stream that tumbled and brawled its way down the long slope of the country.

Time after time the girl shuddered and gripped her saddle as she pushed on past a place where the undergrowth came right down to the trail, and six feet away the path dropped off thirty feet to the rock bed of the stream. She caught herself leaning across the saddle to look down. A man might have stood in the brush as Jeffrey came carelessly along. And that man might have swung a cant-stick once--a single blow at the back of the head--and Jeffrey would have gone stumbling and falling over the edge of the path. There would not be even the sign of a struggle.

Once she stopped and took hold of her nerves.

"Ruth Lansing," she scolded aloud, "you're making a little fool of yourself. You've been down there in that convent living among a lot of girls, and you're forgetting that these hills are your own, that there never was and never is any danger in them for us who belong here. Just keep that in your mind and hustle on about your business."

When she came out into the open country near the head of the Fork she met old Darius Wilbur turning his cattle to pasture. The old man did not know the girl, but he knew the Lansing colt and he looked sharply at the steaming withers of Brom Bones before he would give any attention to her question.

"What's the tarnation hurry, young lady?" he inquired exasperatingly. "Jeff Whiting? Yes, he was here yest'day. Why?"

"Did he start home by this trail?" asked Ruth eagerly. "Or did he go on up country?"

"He went on up country."

Ruth headed Brom Bones up the trail again without a word.

"But stay!" the old man yelled after her, when she had gone twenty yards. "He came back again."

Ruth pulled around so sharply that she nearly threw Brom Bones to his knees.

"Didn't ask me that," the old man chortled, as she came back, "but if I didn't tell you I reckon you'd run that colt to death up the hills."

"Then he *did* take the Forks trail back."

"Didn't do that, nuther."

"Then where *did* he go? Please tell me!" cried the girl, the tears of vexation rising into her voice.

"Why, what's the matter, girl? He crossed the Fork just there," said the old man, pointing, "and he took over the hill for French Village. You his wife? You're mighty young."

But Ruth did not hear. She and Brom Bones were already slipping down the rough bank in a shower of dirt and stones.

In the middle of the ford she stopped and loosened the bridle, let the colt drink a little, then drove him across, up the other bank and on up the stiff slope.

She did not know the trail, but she knew the general run of the country that way and had no doubt of finding her road.

Now she told herself that it was certainly a wild goose chase. Jeffrey had merely found that he had to see some one in French Village and had gone there and, of course, had spent the night there.

By the time she had come over the ridge of the hill and was dropping down through the heavily wooded country toward French Village, she had begun to feel just a little bit foolish. But she suddenly remembered that it was Saint John the Baptist's day. It was not a holy day of obligation but she knew it was a feast day in French Village. There would be Mass. She should have gone, anyway. And she would hear with her own ears the things they were saying about

Jeffrey Whiting.

Arsene LaComb sat on the steps of his store in French Village in the glory of a stiff white shirt and a festal red vest. The store was closed, of course, in honour of the day. In a few minutes he would put on his black coat, in his official capacity of trustee of the church, and march solemnly over to ring the bell for Mass.

The spectacle of a smartly-dressed young lady whom he seemed to know vaguely, riding down the dusty street on a shiny yellow side saddle on the back of a big, vicious-looking black colt, made the little man reach hastily for his coat of ceremony.

"M'm'selle Lansing!" he said, bowing in friendly pomp as Ruth drove up.

"How do you do, Mr. LaComb? I came down to go to Mass. Can you tell me what time it begins?"

"I shall ring the bell when I have put away your horse, M'm'selle." Now no earthly power could have made Arsene LaComb deviate a minute from the exact time for ringing that bell. But, he was a Frenchman. His manner intimated that the ringing of all bells whatsoever must await her convenience.

He stepped forward jauntily to help her down. Ruth kicked her feet loose and slid down deftly.

"I am glad to see you again, Mr. LaComb," said Ruth as she took his hand. "Did you see Jeffrey Whiting in the Village last night?"

A girl of about Ruth's own age had come quietly up the street and stood beside them, recording in one swift inspection every detail of Ruth from her little riding cap to the tips of her brown boots.

"Cynthe," said the little man briskly, "you show Miss Lansing on my pew for Mass." He took the bridle from Ruth's hand and led the horse away to the shed in the rear of the store.

The fear and uneasiness of the early morning leaped back to Ruth. The little man had certainly run away from her question. Why should he not answer?

She would have liked to linger a while among the people standing about the church door. She knew some of them. She might have asked questions of them. But her escort led her straight into the church and up to a front pew.

At the end of the Mass the people filed out quietly, but at the church door they broke into volleys of rapid-fire French chatter of which Ruth could only catch a little here and there.

"You will come by the *fête*, M'm'selle. You will not dance *non*, I s'pose. But you will eat, and you will see the fun they make, one *jolie* time! Till I ring the Vesper bell they will dance." Arsene led Ruth and the other girl, whom she now learned was Hyacinthe Cardinal, across the road to a little wood that stood opposite the church. There were tables, on which the women had already begun to spread the food that they had brought from home, and a dancing platform. On a great stump which had been carved rudely into a chair sat Soriel Brouchard, the fiddler of the hills, twiddling critically at his strings.

It seemed strange to Ruth that these people who had a moment before been so devout and concentrated in church should in an instant switch their whole thought to a day of eating and merrymaking. But she soon found their light-hearted gaiety very infectious. Before she knew it, she was sputtering away in the best French she had and entering into the fun with all her heart.

"Which is Rafe Gadbeau?" she suddenly asked Cynthe Cardinal. "I want to know him."

"Why for you want to know him?" the girl asked sharply in English.

"Oh, nothing," said Ruth carelessly, "only I've heard of him."

The other girl reached out into the crowd and plucked at the sleeve of a tall, beak-nosed man. The man was evidently flattered by Ruth's request, and wanted her to dance with him immediately.

"No," said Ruth, "I do not know how to dance your dances, and we'd only break up the sets if I tried to learn now. We've heard a lot about you, Mr. Gadbeau, so, of course, I wanted to know you. And we've heard some things about Jeffrey Whiting. I'm sure you could tell me if they are true."

"You don' dance? Well, we sit then. I tell you. One rascal, this young Whiting!"

Ruth bit back an angry protest, and schooled herself to listen quietly as he led her to a seat.

As they left the other girl standing in the middle of the platform, Ruth, looking back, caught a swift glance of what she knew was jealous anger in her eyes. Ruth was sorry. She did not want to make an enemy of this girl. But she felt that she must use every effort to get this man to tell her all he would.

"One rascal, I tell you," repeated Gadbeau. "First he stop all the people. He say don' sell nodding. Den he sell his own farm, him. He sell some more; he got big price. Now he skip the country, right out. An' he leave these poor French people in the soup."

"But I"--he sat back tapping himself on the chest--"I got hinfluence with that railroad. They buy now from us. To-morrow morning, nine o'clock, here comes that railroad lawyer on French Village. We sell out everything on the option to him."

"But," objected Ruth, trying to draw him out, "if Jeffrey Whiting should come back before then?"

"He don' come back, that fellow."

"How do you know?"

"I know, I-- He don' come back. I tell you that."

"Jeffrey Whiting will be here before nine o'clock to-morrow," she said, turning suddenly upon him.

"Eh? M'm'selle, what you mean? What you know?" he questioned excitedly.

"Never mind. I see Miss Cardinal looking at us," she smiled as she arose, "and I think you are in for a lecture."

Through all the long day, while she ate and listened to the fun and talked to Father Ponfret about her convent life, she did not let Rafe Gadbeau out of her sight or mind for an instant. She knew that she had alarmed him. She was certain that he knew what had happened to Jeffrey Whiting. And she was waiting for him to betray himself in some way.

When Arsene LaComb rang the bell for Vespers, she waited by the bell ringer to see that Gadbeau came into the church. He took his place among the men, and then Ruth dropped quietly into a pew near the door. When the people rose to sing the *Tantum Ergo*, she saw Gadbeau slip unnoticed out of the church. She waited tensely until the singing was finished, then she almost ran to the door.

Gadbeau, mounted on one of the ponies that had been standing all day in the little woods, was riding away in the direction of the trail which she had come down this morning. She fairly flew down the street to Arsene LaComb's store. There was not a pony in the hills that Brom Bones could not overtake easily, but she must see by what trail the man left the Village.

Brom Bones was very willing to make a race for home, and she let him have his head until she again caught sight of the man. She pulled up sharply and forced the colt down to a walk. The man was still on the main road, and he might turn any moment. Finally she saw him pull into the trail that led over to Wilbur's Fork. Then she knew. Jeffrey was somewhere on the trail between French Village and Wilbur's Fork. And he was alive! The man was going now to make sure that he was still there.

For an hour, the long, high twilight was enough to assure her that the man was still following the trail. Then, just when the real darkness had fallen, she heard a pony whinny in the woods at her left. The man had turned off into the woods! She had almost passed him! She threw herself out upon Brom Bones' neck and caught him by the nose. He threw up his head indignantly and tried to bolt, but she blessed him for making no noise. She drove on quietly a couple of hundred yards, slipped down, and drew Brom Bones into the bushes away from the road and tied him. She talked to him, patting his head and neck, pleading with him to be quiet. Then she left him and stole back to where she had heard the pony.

In the gloom of the woods she could see nothing. But her feet found themselves on what seemed to be a path and she followed it blindly. She almost walked into a square black thing that suddenly confronted her. Within what seemed a foot of her she heard voices. Her heart stopped beating, but the blood rang in her ears so that she could not distinguish a word. One of the voices was certainly Gadbeau's. The other-- It was!-- It was! Though it was only a mumble, she knew it was Jeffrey Whiting who tried to speak!

She took a step forward, ready to dash into the place, whatever it was. But the caution of the hills made her back away noiselessly into the brush. What could she do? Why? Oh, *why* had she not brought a rifle? Gadbeau was sure to be armed. Jeffrey was a prisoner, probably wounded and bound.

She backed farther into the bushes and started to make a circuit of the place. She understood now that it was a sugar hut, built entirely of logs, even the roof. It was as strong as a blockhouse. She knew that she was helpless. And she knew that Jeffrey would not be a prisoner there unless he were hurt.

She could only wait. Gadbeau had not come to injure Jeffrey further. He had merely come to make himself sure that his prisoner was secure. He would not stay long.

As she stole around away from the path and the pony she saw a little stream of light shoot out through a chink between the logs of the hut. Gadbeau had made a light. Probably he had brought something for Jeffrey to eat. She pulled off the white collar of her jacket, the only white thing that showed about her and settled down for a long wait.

First she had thought that she ought to steal away to her horse and ride for help. But she could not bear the thought of even getting beyond the sound of Jeffrey's voice. She knew where he was now. He might be taken away while she was gone. And, besides, Ruth Lansing had always learned to do things for herself. She had always disliked appealing for help.

Hour after hour she sat in the darkest place she could find, leaning against the bole of a great tree. The light, candles, of course, burned on; and the voices came irregularly through the living silence of the woods. She did not dare to creep nearer to hear what was being said. That did not matter. The important thing was to have Gadbeau go away without any suspicion that he had been followed. Then she would be free to release Jeffrey. She had no fear but that she would be able to get him down to French Village in the morning. She could easily have him there before nine o'clock.

When she saw by the stars that it was long past midnight she began to be worried. Just then the

light went out. Ah! The man was going away at last! She waited a long, nervous half hour. But there was no sound. She dared not move, for even when she shifted her position against the tree the oppressive silence seemed to crackle with her motion.

Would he never come out? It seemed not. Was he going to stay there all night?

Noiseless as a cat, she rose and crept to the door of the cabin. Apparently both men were asleep within. She pushed the door ever so quietly. It was firmly barred on the inside.

What could she do? Nothing, absolutely nothing! Oh, why, *why* had she not brought a rifle? She would shoot. She *would*, if she had it now, and that man opened the door! It was too late now to think of riding for help, too late!

She sank down again beside her tree and raged helplessly at herself, at her conceit in herself that would not let her go for help in the first place, at her foolishness in coming on this business without a gun. The hours dragged out their weary minutes, every minute an age to the taut, ragged nerves of the girl.

The dawn came stealing across the tree-tops, while the ground still lay in utter darkness. Ruth rose and slipped farther back into the bushes.

Suddenly she found herself upon her knees in the soft grass, and the hot, angry tears of desperation and rage at herself were softened. Her heart was lighted up with the glow of dawn and sang its prayer to God; a thrilling, lifting little prayer of confidence and wonder. The words that the night before would not form themselves for her now sprang up ready in her soul--the words of all the children of earth, to Our Father Who Art in Heaven--paused an instant to bless her lips, then sped away to God in His Heaven. Fear was gone, and doubt, and anxiety. She would save Jeffrey, and she would save the poor, befooled people from ruin. God had told her so, as He walked abroad in the *Glow of Dawn*.

Two long hours more she waited, but now with patience and a sure confidence. Then Rafe Gadbeau came out of the hut and strode down the path to his pony.

Ruth rose stiff and wet from the ground and ran to the door, and called to Jeffrey. The only answer was a moan. The door was locked with a great iron clasp and staple joined by a heavy padlock. She reached for the nearest stone and attacked the lock frantically. She beat it out of all semblance to a lock, but still it defied her. There was no window in the hut. She had to come back again to the lock. Her hands, softened by the months in the convent, left bloody marks on the tough brass of the lock. In the end it gave, and she threw herself against the door.

Jeffrey was lying trussed, face down, on a bunk beside the furnace where they boiled the sugar sap. His arms were stretched out and tied together down under the narrow bunk. She saw that his left arm was broken. For an instant the girl's heart leaped back to the rage of the night when she had almost prayed for her rifle. But pity swallowed up every other feeling as she cut the cords from his hands and loosened the rope that they had bound in between his teeth.

"Don't talk, Jeff," she commanded. "I can see just what happened. Lie easy and get your strength. I've got to take you to French Village at once."

She ran out to bring water. When she returned he was sitting dizzily on the edge of the bunk. While she bathed his head with the water and gave him a little to drink, she talked to him and crooned over him as she would over a baby for she saw that he was shaken and half delirious with pain.

Brom Bones was standing munching twigs where she had left him. He had never before been asked to carry double and he did not like it. But the girl pleaded so pitifully and so gently into his silky black ear that he finally gave in.

When they were mounted, she fastened the white collar of her jacket into a sling for the boy's broken arm, and with a prayer to the heathen Brom Bones to go tenderly they were off down the trail.

When they were half way down the trail Jeffrey spoke suddenly:

"Say, Ruth, what's the use trying to save these people? Let's sell out while we can and take mother and go away."

"Why, Jeff, dear," she said lightly, "this fight hasn't begun yet. Wait till we get to French Village. You'll say something different. You'll say just what you said to the Shepherd of the North; remember?"

Jeffrey said no more. The girl's heart was weak with the pain she knew he was bearing, but she knew that they must go through with this.

All French Village and the farmers of Little Tupper country were gathered in front of Arsene Lacombe's store. Rafe Gadbeau was standing on the steps haranguing them. He had stayed with his prisoner as he thought up to the last possible moment, so he stammered in his speech when he saw a big black horse come tearing down the street carrying a girl and a white-faced, black-headed boy behind her. Rogers, the railroad lawyer beside him, said:

"Go on, man. What's the matter with you?"

The girl drove the horse right in through the crowd until Jeffrey Whiting faced Rogers. Then Jeffrey, gritting his teeth on his pain, took up his fight again.

"Rogers," he shouted, "you did this. You got Rafe Gadbeau and the others to knock me on the head and put me out of the way, so that you could spread your lies about me. And you'd have

won out, too, if it hadn't been for this brave girl here.

"Now, Rogers, you liar," he shouted louder, "I dare you, dare you, to tell these people here that I or any of our people have sold you a foot of land. I dare you!"

Rogers would have argued, but Rafe Gadbeau pulled him away. Gadbeau knew that crowd. They were a crowd of Frenchmen, volatile and full of potential fury. They were already cheering the brave girl. In a few minutes they would be hunting the life of the man who had lied to them and nearly ruined them.

A hundred hands reached up to lift Ruth from the saddle, but she waved them away and pointed to Jeffrey's broken arm. They helped him down and half carried him into Doctor Napoleon Goodenough's little office.

Ruth saw that her business was finished. She wheeled Brom Bones toward home, and gave him his head.

For three glorious miles they fairly flew through the pearly morning air along the hard mountain road, and the girl never pulled a line. Breakfastless and weary in body, her heart sang the song that it had learned in the Glow of Dawn.

IV

THE ANSWER

The Committee on Franchises was in session in one of the committee rooms outside the chamber of the New York State Senate. It was not a routine session. A bill was before it, the purpose of which was virtually to dispossess some four or five hundred families of their homes in the counties of Hamilton, Tupper and Racquette. The bill did not say this. It cited the need of adequate transportation in that part of the State and proposed that the U. & M. Railroad should be granted the right of eminent domain over three thousand square miles of the region, in order to help the development of the country.

The committee was composed of five members, three of the majority party in the Senate and two of the minority. A political agent of the railroad who drew a salary from Racquette County as a judge had just finished presenting to the committee the reasons why the people of that part of the State were unanimous in the wish that the bill should become a law. He had drawn a pathetic picture of the condition of the farmers, so long deprived of the benefits of a railroad. He had almost wept as he told of the rich loads of produce left to rot up there in the hills because the men who toiled to produce it had no means of bringing it down to the starving thousands of the cities. The scraggy rocks and thinly soiled farms of that region became in his picture vast reservoirs of cheap food, only waiting to be tapped by the beneficent railroad for the benefit of the world's poor.

When the judge had finished, one minority member of the committee looked at his colleague, the other minority member, and winked. It was a grave and respectful wink. It meant that the committee was not often privileged to listen to quite such bare-faced effrontery. If the hearing had been a secret one they would not have listened to it. But the bill had already aroused a storm. So the leader of the majority had given orders that the hearing should be public.

So far not a word had been said as to the fact which underlay the motives of the bill. Iron had been found in workable quantities in those three thousand square miles of hill country. Not a word had been said about iron.

No one in the room had listened to the speech with any degree of interest. It was intended entirely for the consumption of the outside public. Even the reporters had sat listless and bored during its delivery. They had been furnished with advance copies of it and had already turned them in to their papers. But with the naming of the next witness a stir of interest ran sharply around the room.

Bishop Joseph Winthrop of Alden rose from his place in the rear of the room and walked briskly forward to the chair reserved. A tall, spare figure of a man coming to his sixty years, his hair as white as the snow of his hills, with a large, firm mouth and the nose of a Puritan governor, he would have attracted attention under almost any circumstances.

Nathan Gorham, the chairman of the committee, had received his orders from the leader of the majority in the Senate that the bill should be reported back favourably to that body before night. He had anticipated no difficulty. The form of a public hearing had to be gone through with. It was the most effective way of disarming the suspicions that had been aroused as to the nature of the bill. The speech of the Racquette County Judge was the usual thing at public hearings. The chairman had expected that one or two self-advertising reformers of the opposition would come before the committee with time-honoured, stock diatribes against the rapacity and greed of railroads in general and this one in particular. Then he and his two majority colleagues would vote to report the bill favourably, while the two members of the minority would vote to report

adversely. This, the chairman said, was about all a public hearing ever amounted to. He had not counted on the coming of the Bishop of Alden.

"The committee would like to hear, sir," began the chairman, as the Bishop took his place, "whom you represent in the matter of this bill."

The reporters, scenting a welcome sensation in what had been a dull session of a dull committee, sat with poised pencils while the Bishop turned a look of quiet gravity upon the chairman and said:

"I represent Joseph Winthrop, a voter of Racquette County."

"I beg pardon, sir, of course. The committee quite understands that you do not come here in the interest of any one. But the gentleman who has just been before us spoke for the farmers who would be most directly affected by the prosperity of the railroad, including those of your county. Are we to understand that there is opposition in your county to the proposed grant?"

"Your committee," said the Bishop, "cannot be ignorant that there is the most stubborn opposition to this grant in all three counties. If there had not been that opposition, there would have been no call for the bill which you are now considering. If the railroad could have gotten the options which it tried to get on those farms the grant would have been given without question. Your committee knows this better than I."

"But," returned the chairman, "we have been advised that the railroad was not able to get those options because a boy up there in the Beaver River country, who fancied that he had some grievance against the railroad people, banded the people together to oppose the options in unfair and unlawful ways."

The chairman paused an impressive moment.

"In fact," he resumed, "from what this committee has been able to gather, it looks very much as though there were conspiracy in the matter, against the U. & M. Railroad. It almost would seem that some rival of the railroad in question had used the boy and his fancied grievance to manufacture opposition. Conspiracy could not be proven, but there was every appearance."

The Bishop smiled grimly as he dropped his challenge quietly at the feet of the committee.

"The boy, Jeffrey Whiting," he said, "was guided by me. I directed his movements from the beginning."

The whole room sat up and leaned forward as one man, alive to the fact that a novel and stirring situation was being developed. Everybody had understood that the Bishop had come to plead the cause of the French-Canadian farmers of the hills.

They had supposed that he would speak only on what was a side issue of the case. No one had expected that he would attack the main question of the bill itself. And here he was openly proclaiming himself the principal in that silent, stubborn fight that had been going on up in the hills for six months!

The reporters doubled down to their work and wrote furiously. They were trying to throw this unusual man upon a screen before their readers. It was not easy. He was an unmistakable product of New England, and what was more he had been one of the leaders of that collection of striking men who made the Brook Farm "Experiment." He had endeared himself to the old generation of Americans by his war record as a chaplain. To some of the new generation he was known as the Yankee Bishop. But in the hill country, from the Mohawk Valley to the Canadian line and to Lake Champlain, he had one name, The Shepherd of the North. From Old Forge to Ausable to North Creek men knew his ways and felt the beating of the great heart of him behind the stern, ascetic set of his countenance.

As much as they could of this the reporters were trying to put into their notes while Nathan Gorham was recovering from his surprise. That well-trained statesman saw that he had let himself into a trap. He had been too zealous in announcing his impression that the opposition to the U. & M. Railroad was the work of a jealous rival. The Bishop had taken that ground from under him by a simple stroke of truth. He could neither go forward with his charge nor could he retract it.

"Would you be so kind, then, as to tell this committee," he temporised, "just why you wished to arouse this opposition to the railroad?"

"There is not and has never been any opposition whatever to the railroad," said the Bishop. "The bill before your committee has nothing to do with the right of way of the railroad. That has already been granted. Your bill proposes to confiscate, practically, from the present owners a strip of valuable land forty miles wide by nearly eighty miles long. That land is valuable because the experts of the railroad know, and the people up there know, and, I think, this committee knows that there is iron ore in these hills.

"I have said that I do not represent any one here," the Bishop went on. "But there are four hundred families up there in our hills who stand to suffer by this bill. They are a silent people. They have no voice to reach the world. I have asked to speak before your committee because only in this way can the case of my people reach the great, final trial court of publicity before the whole State.

"They are a silent people, the people of the hills. You will have heard that they are a stubborn people. They are a stubborn people, for they cling to their rocky soil and to the hillside homes that their hands have made just as do the hardy trees of the hills. You cannot uproot them by

the stroke of a pen.

"These people are my friends and my neighbours. Many of them were once my comrades. I know what they think. I know what they feel. I would beg your committee to consider very earnestly this question before bringing to bear against these people the sovereign power of the State. They love their State. Many of them have loved their country to the peril of their lives. They live on the little farms that their fathers literally hewed out of a resisting wilderness.

"Not through prejudice or ignorance are they opposing this development, which will in the end be for the good of the whole region. They are opposed to this bill before you because it would give a corporation power to drive them from the homes they love, and that without fair compensation.

"They are opposed to it because they are Americans. They know what it has meant and what it still means to be Americans. And they know that this bill is directly against everything that is American.

"They are ever ready to submit themselves to the sovereign will of the State, but you will never convince them that this bill is the real will of the State. They are fighting men and the sons of fighting men. They have fought the course of the railroad in trying to get options from them by coercion and trickery. They have been aroused. Their homes, poor and wretched as they often are, mean more to them than any law you can set on paper. They will fight this law, if you pass it. It will set a ring of fire and murder about our peaceful hills.

"In the name of high justice, in the name of common honesty, in the name--to come to lower levels--of political common sense, I tell you this bill should never go back to the Senate.

"It is wrong, it is unjust, and it can only rebound upon those who are found weak enough to let it pass here."

The Bishop paused, and the racing, jabbing pencils of the reporters could be plainly heard in the hush of the room.

Nathan Gorham broke the pause with a hesitating question which he had been wanting to put from the beginning.

"Perhaps the committee has been badly informed," he began to the Bishop; "we understood that your people, sir, were mostly Canadian immigrants and not usually owners of land."

"Is it necessary for me to repeat," said the Bishop, turning sharply, "that I am here, Joseph Winthrop, speaking of and for my neighbours and my friends? Does it matter to them or to this committee that I wear the badge of a service that they do not understand? I do not come before you as the Catholic bishop. Neither do I come as an owner of property. I come because I think the cause of my friends will be served by my coming.

"The facts I have laid before you, the warning I have given might as well have been sent out direct through the press. But I have chosen to come before you, with your permission, because these facts will get a wider hearing and a more eager reading coming from this room.

"I do not seek to create sensation here. I have no doubt that some of you are thinking that the place for a churchman to speak is in his church. But I am willing to face that criticism. I am willing to create sensation. I am willing that you should say that I have gone far beyond the privilege of a witness invited to come before your committee. I am willing, in fact, that you should put any interpretation you like upon my use of my privilege here, only so that my neighbours of the hills shall have their matter put squarely and fully before all the people of the State.

"When this matter is once thoroughly understood by the people, then I know that no branch of the lawmaking power will dare make itself responsible for the passage of this bill."

The Bishop stood a moment, waiting for further questions. When he saw that none were forthcoming, he thanked the committee and begged leave to retire.

As the Bishop passed out of the room the chairman arose and declared the public hearing closed. Witnesses, spectators and reporters crowded out of the room and scattered through the corridors of the Capitol. Four or five reporters bunched themselves about the elevator shaft waiting for a car. One of them, a tow-haired boy of twenty, summed up the matter with irreverent brevity.

"Well, it got a fine funeral, anyway," he said. "Not every bad bill has a bishop at the obsequies."

"You can't tell," said the Associated Press man slowly; "they might report it out in spite of all that."

"No use," said the youngster shortly. "The Senate wouldn't dare touch it once this stuff is in the papers." And he jammed a wad of flimsy down into his pocket.

Three weeks of a blistering August sun had withered the grasses of the hills almost to a powder. The thin soil of the north country, where the trees have been cut away, does not hold moisture; so that the heat of the short, vicious summer goes down through the roots of the vegetation to the rock beneath and heats it as a cooking stone.

Since June there had been no rain. The tumbling hill streams were reduced to a trickle among the rocks of their beds. The uplands were covered with a mat of baked, dead grass. The second growth of stunted timber, showing everywhere the scars of the wasting rapacity of man, stood

stark and wilted to the roots. All roving life, from the cattle to the woodchucks and even the field mice, had moved down to hide itself in the thicker growths near the water courses or had stolen away into the depths of the thick woods.

Ruth Lansing reined Brom Bones in under a scarred pine on the French Village road and sat looking soberly at the slopes that stretched up away from the road on either side. Every child of the hills knew the menace that a hot dry summer brought to us in those days. The first, ruthless cutting of the timber had followed the water courses. Men had cut and slashed their way up through the hills without thought of what they were leaving behind. They had taken only the prime, sound trees that stood handiest to the roll-ways. They had left dead and dying trees standing. Everywhere they had strewn loose heaps of brush and trimmings. The farmers had come pushing into the hills in the wake of the lumbermen and had cleared their pieces for corn and potatoes and hay land. But around every piece of cleared land there was an ever-encroaching ring of brush and undergrowth and fallen timber that held a constant threat for the little home within the ring.

A summer without rain meant a season of grim and unrelenting watchfulness. Men armed themselves and tramped through the woods on unbidden sentry duty, to see that no campfires were made. Strangers and outsiders who were likely to be careless were watched from the moment they came into the hills until they were seen safely out of them again. Where other children scouted for and fought imaginary Indians, the children of our hills hunted and fought imaginary fires. The forest fire was to them not a tradition or a bugaboo. It was an enemy that lurked just outside the little clearing of the farm, out there in the underbrush and fallen timber.

Ruth was waiting for Jeffrey Whiting. He had ridden up to French Village for mail. For some weeks they had known that the railroad would try to have its bill for eminent domain passed at the special session of the Legislature. And they knew that the session would probably come to a close this week.

If that bill became a law, then the resistance of the people of the hills had been in vain: Jeffrey had merely led them into a bitter and useless fight against a power with which they could not cope. They would have to leave their homes, taking whatever a corrupted board of condemnation would grant for them. It would be hard on all, but it would fall upon Jeffrey with a crushing bitterness. He would have to remember that he had had the chance to make his mother and himself independently rich. He had thrown away that chance, and now if his fight had failed he would have nothing to bring back to his mother but his own miserable failure.

Ruth remembered that day in the Bishop's house in Alden when Jeffrey had said proudly that his mother would be glad to follow him into poverty. And she smiled now at her own outburst at that time. They had both meant it, every word; but the ashes of failure are bitter. And she had seen the iron of this fight biting into Jeffrey through all the summer.

She, too, would lose a great deal if the railroad had succeeded. She would not be able to go back to school, and would probably have to go somewhere to get work of some kind, for the little that she would get for her farm now would not keep her any time. But that was a little matter, or at least it seemed little and vague beside the imminence of Jeffrey's failure and what he would consider his disgrace. She did not know how he would take it, for during the summer she had seen him in vicious moods when he seemed capable of everything.

She saw the speck which he made against the horizon as he came over Argyle Mountain three miles away and she saw that he was riding fast. He was bringing good news!

It needed only the excited, happy touch of her hand to set Brom Bones whirling up the road, for the big colt understood her ways and moods and followed them better than he would have followed whip or rein of another. Half-way, she pulled the big fellow down to a decorous canter and gradually slowed down to a walk as Jeffrey came thundering down upon them. He pulled up sharply and turned on his hind feet. The two horses fell into step, as they knew they were expected to do and their two riders gave them no more heed than if they had been wooden horses.

"How did you know it was all right, Ruth?"

"I saw you coming down Argyle Mountain," Ruth laughed. "You looked as though you were riding Victory down the top side of the earth. How did it all come out?"

"Here's the paper," he said, handing her an Albany newspaper of the day previous; "it tells the story right off. But I got a letter from the Bishop, too," he added.

"Oh, did you?" she exclaimed, looking up from the headline--U. & M. Grab Killed in Committee--which she had been feverishly trying to translate into her own language. "Please let me hear. I'm never sure what headlines mean till I go down to the fine print, and then it's generally something else. I can understand what the Bishop says, I'm sure."

"Well, it's only short," said Jeffrey, unfolding the letter. "He leaves out all the part that he did himself."

"Of course," said Ruth simply. "He always does."

"He says:

"You will see from the Albany papers, which will probably reach you before this does, that the special session of the Legislature closed to-night and that the railroad's bill was not reported to the Senate. It had passed the Assembly, as you know. The bill aroused a measure of just public anger through the newspapers and its authors evidently thought it the part of wisdom not to

risk a contest over it in the open Senate. So there can be no legislative action in favour of the railroad before December at the earliest, and I regard it as doubtful that the matter will be brought up even then.'

"You see," said Jeffrey, "from this you'd never know that he was there present at all. And it was just his speech before the committee that aroused that public anger. Then he goes on:

"But we must not make the mistake of presuming that the matter ends here. You and your people are just where you were in the beginning. Nothing has been lost, nothing gained. It is not in the nature of things that a corporation which has spent an enormous amount of money in constructing a line with the one purpose of getting to your lands should now give up the idea of getting them by reason of a mere legislative setback. They have not entered into this business in any half-hearted manner. They are bound to carry it through somehow--anyhow. We must realise that.

"We need not speculate upon the soul or the conscience of a corporation or the lack of those things. We know that this corporation will have an answer to this defeat of its bill. We must watch for that answer. What their future methods or their plans may be I think no man can tell. Perhaps those plans are not yet even formed. But there will be an answer. While rejoicing that a fear of sound public opinion has been on your side, we must never forget that there will be an answer.

"In this matter, young sir, I have gone beyond the limits which men set for the proper activities of a priest of the church. I do not apologise. I have done this, partly because your people are my own, my friends and my comrades of old, partly because you yourself came to me in a confidence which I do not forget, partly--and most, perhaps--because where my people and their rights are in question I have never greatly respected those limits which men set. I put these things before you so that when the answer comes you will remember that you engaged yourself in this business solely in defence of the right. So it is not your personal fight and you must try to keep from your mind and heart the bitterness of a quarrel. The struggle is a larger thing than that and you must keep your heart larger still and above it. I fear that you will sorely need to remember this.

"My sincerest regards to your family and to all my friends in the hills, not forgetting your friend Ruth.' That's all," said Jeffrey, folding the letter. "I wish he'd said more about how he managed the thing."

"Isn't it enough to know that he did manage it, without bothering about how? That is the way he does everything."

"I suppose I ought to be satisfied," said Jeffrey as he gathered up his reins. "But I wonder what he means by that last part of the letter. It sounds like a warning to me."

"It is a warning to you," said Ruth thoughtfully.

"Why, what does it mean? What does he think I'm likely to do?"

"Maybe he does not mean what you are likely to do exactly," said Ruth, trying to choose her words wisely; "maybe he is thinking more of what you are likely to feel. Maybe he is talking to your heart rather than to your head or about your actions."

"Now I don't know what you mean, either," said Jeffrey a little discontentedly.

"I know I oughtn't to try to tell you what the Bishop means, for I don't know myself. But I've been worried and I'm sure your mother has too," said Ruth reluctantly.

"But what is it?" said Jeffrey quickly. "What have I been doing?"

"I'm sure it isn't anything you've done, nor anything maybe that you're likely to do. I don't know just what it is, or how to say it. But, Jeffrey, you remember what you said that day in the Bishop's house at Alden?"

"Yes, and I remember what you said, too."

"We both meant it," Ruth returned gravely, not attempting to evade any of the meaning that he had thrown into his words. "And we both mean it now, I'm sure. But there's a difference, Jeffrey, a difference with you."

"I don't know it," he said a little shortly. "I'm still doing just the thing I started out to do that day."

"Yes. But that day you started out to fight for the people. Now you are fighting for yourself--Oh, not for anything selfish! Not for anything you want for yourself! I know that. But you have made the fight your own. It is your own quarrel now. You are fighting because you have come to hate the railroad people."

"Well, you wouldn't expect me to love them?"

"No. I'm not blaming you, Jeff. But--but, I'm afraid. Hate is a terrible thing. I wish you were out of it all. Hate can only hurt you. I'm afraid of a scar that it might leave on you through all the long, long years of life. Can you see? I'm afraid of something that might go deeper than all this, something that might go as deep as life. After all, that's what I'm afraid of, I guess--Life, great, big, terrible, menacing, Life!"

"My life?" Jeffrey asked gruffly.

"I have faced that," the girl answered evenly, "just as you have faced it. And I am not afraid of

that. No. It's what you might do in anger--if they hurt you again. Something that would scar your heart and your soul. Jeffrey, do you know that sometimes I've seen the worst, the worst--even *murder* in your eyes!"

"I wish," the boy returned shortly, "the Bishop would keep his religion out of all this. He's a good man and a good friend," he went on, "but I don't like this religion coming into everything."

"But how can he? He cannot keep religion apart from life and right and wrong. What good would religion be if it did not go ahead of us in life and show us the way?"

"But what's the use?" the boy said grudgingly. "What good does it do? You wouldn't have thought of any of this only for that last part of his letter. Why does that have to come into everything? It's the Catholic Church all over again, always pushing in everywhere."

"Isn't that funny," the girl said, brightening; "I have cried myself sick thinking just that same thing. I have gone almost frantic thinking that if I once gave in to the Church it would crush me and make me do everything that I didn't want to do. And now I never think of it. Life goes along really just as though being a Catholic didn't make any difference at all."

"That's because you've given in to it altogether. You don't even know that you want to resist. You're swallowed up in it."

The girl flushed angrily, but bit her lips before she answered.

"It's the queerest thing, isn't it, Jeff," she said finally in a thoughtful, friendly way, "how two people can fight about religion? Now you don't care a particle about it one way or the other. And I--I'd rather not talk about it. And yet, we were just now within an inch of quarrelling bitterly about it. Why is it?"

"I don't know. I'm sorry, Ruth," the boy apologised slowly. "It's none of my business, anyway."

They were just coming over the long hill above Ruth's home. Below them stretched the long sweep of the road down past her house and up the other slope until it lost itself around the shoulder of Lansing Mountain.

Half a mile below them a rider was pushing his big roan horse up the hill towards them at a heart-breaking pace.

"That's 'My' Stocking's roan," said Jeffrey, straightening in his saddle; "I'd know that horse three miles away."

"But what's he carrying?" cried Ruth excitedly, as she peered eagerly from under her shading hand. "Look. Across his saddle. Rifles! *Two* of them!"

Brom Bones, sensing the girl's excitement, was already pulling at his bit, eager for a wild race down the hill. But Jeffrey, after one long, sharp look at the oncoming horseman, pulled in quietly to the side of the road. And Ruth did the same. She was too well trained in the things of the hills not to know that if there was trouble, then it was no time to be weakening horses' knees in mad and useless dashes downhill.

The rider was Myron Stocking from over in the Crooked Lake country, as Jeffrey had supposed. He pulled up as he recognised the two who waited for him by the roadside, and when he had nodded to Ruth, whom he knew by sight, he drew over close to Jeffrey. Ruth, eager as she was to hear, pushed Brom Bones a few paces farther away from them. They would not talk freely in her hearing, she knew. And Jeffrey would tell her all that she needed to know.

The two men exchanged a half dozen rapid sentences and Ruth heard Stocking conclude:

"Your Uncle Catty slipped me this here gun o' yours. Your Ma didn't see."

Jeffrey nodded and took the gun. Then he came to Ruth.

"There's some strangers over in the hills that maybe ought to be watched. The country's awful dry," he added quietly. He knew that Ruth would need no further explanation.

He pulled the Bishop's letter from his pocket and handed it to Ruth, saying:

"Take this and the paper along to Mother. She'll want to see them right away. And say, Ruth," he went on, as he looked anxiously at the great sloping stretches of bone-dry underbrush that lay between them and his home on the hill three miles away, "the country's awful dry. If anything happens, get Mother and Aunt Letty down out of this country. You can make them go. Nobody else could."

The girl had not yet spoken. There was no need for her to ask questions. She knew what lay under every one of Jeffrey's pauses and silences. It was no time for many words. He was laying upon her a trust to look after the ones whom he loved.

She put out her hand to his and said simply:

"I'm glad we didn't quarrel, Jeff."

"I was a fool," said Jeffrey gruffly, as he wrung her hand. "But I'll remember. Forgive me, please, Ruth."

"There's nothing to forgive--ever--between us, Jeffrey. Go now," she said softly.

Jeffrey wheeled his horse and followed the other man back over the hill on the road which he and Ruth had come. Ruth sat still until they were out of sight. At the very last she saw Jeffrey swing his rifle across the saddle in front of him, and a shadow fell across her heart. She would have given everything in her world to have had back what she had said of seeing murder in

Jeffrey's eyes.

Jeffrey and Myron Stocking rode steadily up the French Village road for an hour or so. Then they turned off from the road and began a long winding climb up into the higher levels of the Racquette country.

"We might as well head for Bald Mountain right away," said Jeffrey, as they came about sundown to a fork in their trail. "The breeze comes straight down from the east. That's where the danger is, if there is any."

"I suppose you're right, Jeff. But it means we'll have to sleep out if we go that way."

"I guess that won't hurt us," Jeffrey returned. "If anything happens we might have to sleep out a good many nights--and a lot of other people would have to do the same."

"All right then," Stocking agreed. "We'll get a bite and give the horses a feed and a rest at Hosmer's, that's about two miles over the hills here; and then we can go on as far as you like."

At Hosmer's they got food enough for two days in the hills, and having fed and breathed the horses they rode on up into the higher woods. They were now in the region of the uncut timber where the great trees were standing from the beginning, because they had been too high up to be accessible to the lumbermen who had ravaged the lower levels. Though the long summer twilight of the North still lighted the tops of the trees, the two men rode in impenetrable darkness, leaving the horses to pick their own canny footing up the trail.

"Did anybody see Rogers in that crowd?" Jeffrey asked as they rode along. "You know, the man that was in French Village this summer."

"I don't know," Stocking answered. "You see they came up to the end of the rails, at Grafton, on a handcar. And then they scattered. Nobody's sure that he's seen any of 'em since. But they must be in the hills somewhere. And Rafe Gadbeau's with 'em. You can bet on that. That's all we've got to go on. But it may be a-plenty."

"It's enough to set us on the move, anyway," said Jeffrey. "They have no business in the hills. They're bound to be up to mischief of some sort. And there's just one big mischief that they can do. Can we make Bald Mountain before daylight?"

"Oh, certainly; that'll be easy. We'll get a little light when we're through this belt of heavy woods and then we can push along. We ought to get up there by two o'clock. It ain't light till near five. That'll give us a little sleep, if we feel like it."

True to Stocking's calculation they came out upon the rocky, thinly grassed knobs of Bald Mountain shortly before two o'clock. It was a soft, hazy night with no moon. There was rain in the air somewhere, for there was no dew; but it might be on the other side of the divide or it might be miles below on the lowlands.

Others of the men of the hills were no doubt in the vicinity of the mountain, or were heading toward here. For the word of the menace had gone through the hills that day, and men would decide, as Jeffrey had done, that the danger would come from this direction. But they had not heard anything to show the presence of others, nor did they care to give any signals of their own whereabouts.

As for those others, the possible enemy, who had left the railroad that morning and had scattered into the hills, if their purpose was the one that men feared, they, too, would be near here. But it was useless to look for them in the dark: neither was anything to be feared from them before morning. Men do not start forest fires in the night. There is little wind. A fire would probably die out of itself. And the first blaze would rouse the whole country.

The two hobbled their horses with the bridle reins and lay down in the open to wait for morning. Neither had any thought of sleep. But the softness of the night, the pungent odour of the tamarack trees floating up to them from below, and their long ride, soon began to tell on them. Jeffrey saw that they must set a watch.

"Curl up and go to sleep, 'My,'" he said, shaking himself. "You might as well. I'll wake you in an hour."

A ready snore was the only answer.

Morning coming over the higher eastern hills found them stiff and weary, but alert. The woods below them were still banked in darkness as they ate their dry food and caught their horses for the day that was before them. There was no water to be had up here, and they knew their horses must be gotten down to some water course before night.

A half circle of open country belted by heavy woods lay just below them. Eagerly, as the light crept down the hill, they scanned the area for sign of man or horse. Nothing moved. Apparently they had the world to themselves. A fresh morning breeze came down over the mountain and watching they could see the ripple of it in the tops of the distant trees. The same thought made both men grip their rifles and search more carefully the ground below them, for that innocent breeze blowing straight down towards their homes and loved ones was a potential enemy more to be feared than all the doings of men.

Down to the right, two miles or more away, a man came out of the shadow of the woods. They could only see that he was a big man and stout. There was nothing about him to tell them whether he was friend or foe, of the hills or a stranger. Without waiting to see who he was or what he did, the two dove for their saddles and started their horses pell-mell down the hill towards him.

He saw them at once against the bare brow of the hill, and ran back into the wood.

In another instant they knew what he was and what was his business.

They saw a light moving swiftly along the fringe of the woods. Behind the light rose a trail of white smoke. And behind the smoke ran a line of living fire. The man was running, dragging a flaming torch through the long dried grass and brush!

The two, riding break-neck down over the rocks, regardless of paths or horses' legs, would gladly have killed the man as he ran. But it was too far for even a random shot. They could only ride on in reckless rage, mad to be at the fire, to beat it to death with their hands, to stamp it into the earth, but more eager yet for a right distance and a fair shot at the fiend there within the wood.

Before they had stumbled half the distance down the hill, a wave of leaping flame a hundred feet long was hurling itself upon the forest. They could not stamp that fire out. But they could kill that man!

The man ran back behind the wall of fire to where he had started and began to run another line of fire in the other direction. At that moment Stocking yelled:

"There's another starting, straight in front!"

"Get him," Jeffrey shouted over his shoulder. "I'm going to kill this one."

Stocking turned slightly and made for a second light which he had seen starting. Jeffrey rode on alone, unslinging his rifle and driving madly. His horse, already unnerved by the wild dash down the hill, now saw the fire and started to bolt off at a tangent. Jeffrey fought with him a furious moment, trying to force him toward the fire and the man. Then, seeing that he could not conquer the fright of the horse and that his man was escaping, he threw his leg over the saddle, and leaping free with his gun ran towards the man.

The man was dodging in and out now among the trees, but still using his torch and moving rapidly away.

Jeffrey ran on, gradually overhauling the man in his zigzag until he was within easy distance. But the man continued weaving his way among the trees so that it was impossible to get a fair aim. Jeffrey dropped to one knee and steadied the sights of his rifle until they closed upon the running man and clung to him.

Suddenly the man turned in an open space and faced about. It was Rogers, Jeffrey saw. He was unarmed, but he must be killed.

"I am going to kill him," said Jeffrey under his breath, as he again fixed the sights of his rifle, this time full on the man's breast.

A shot rang out in front somewhere. Rogers threw up his hands, took a half step forward, and fell on his face.

Jeffrey, his finger still clinging to the trigger which he had not pulled, ran forward to where the man lay.

He was lying face down, his arms stretched out wide at either side, his fingers convulsively clutching at tufts of grass.

He was dying. No need for a second look.

His hat had fallen off to a little distance. There was a clean round hole in the back of the skull. The close-cropped, iron grey hair showed just the merest streak of red.

Just out of reach of one of his hands lay a still flaming railroad torch, with which he had done his work.

Jeffrey peered through the wood in the direction from which the shot had come. There was no smoke, no noise of any one running away, no sign of another human being anywhere.

Away back of him he heard shots, one, two, three; Stocking, probably, or some of the other men who must be in the neighbourhood, firing at other fleeing figures in the woods.

He grabbed the burning torch, pulled out the wick and stamped it into a patch of burnt ground, threw the torch back from the fire line, and started clubbing the fire out of the grass with the butt of his rifle.

He was quickly brought to his senses, when the forgotten cartridge in his gun accidentally exploded and the bullet went whizzing past his ear. He dropped the gun nervously and finding a sharp piece of sapling he began to work furiously, but systematically at the line of fire.

The line was thin here, where it had really only that moment been started, and he made some headway. But as he worked along to where it had gotten a real start he saw that it was useless. Still he clung to his work. It was the only thing that his numbed brain could think of to do for the moment.

He dug madly with the sapling, throwing the loose dirt furiously after the fire as it ran away from him. He leaped upon the line of the fire and stamped at it with his boots until the fire crept up his trousers and shirt and up even to his hair. And still the fire ran away from him, away down the hill after its real prey. He looked farther on along the line and saw that it was not now a line but a charging, rushing river of flame that ran down the hill, twenty feet at a jump. Nothing, nothing on earth, except perhaps a deluge of rain could now stop that torrent of fire.

He stepped back. There was nothing to be done here now, behind the fire. Nothing to be done but to get ahead of it and save what could be saved. He looked around for his horse.

Just then men came riding along the back of the line, Stocking and old Erskine Beasley in the lead. They came up to where Jeffrey was standing and looked on beyond moodily to where the body of Rogers lay.

Jeffrey turned and looked, too. A silence fell upon the little group of horsemen and upon the boy standing there.

Myron Stocking spoke at last:

"Mine got away, Jeff," he said slowly.

Jeffrey looked up quickly at him. Then the meaning of the words flashed upon him.

"I didn't do that!" he exclaimed hastily. "Somebody else shot him from the woods. My gun went off accidental."

Silence fell again upon the little group of men. They did not look at Jeffrey. They had heard but one shot. The shot from the woods had been too muffled for them to hear.

Again Stocking broke the silence.

"What difference does it make," he said. "Any of us would have done it if we could."

"But I didn't! I tell you I didn't," shouted Jeffrey. "The shot from the woods got ahead of me. That man was facing me. He was shot from behind!"

Old Erskine Beasley took command.

"What difference does it make, as Stocking says. We've got live men and women and children to think about to-day," he said. "Straighten him out decent. Then divide and go around the fire both ways. The alarm can't travel half fast enough for this breeze, and it's rising, too," he added.

"But I tell you--!" Jeffrey began again. Then he saw how useless it was.

He looked up the hill and saw his horse, which even in the face of this unheard-of terror had preferred to venture back toward his master.

He caught the horse, mounted, and started to ride south with the party that was to try to get around the fire from that side.

He rode with them. They were his friends. But he was not with them. There was a circle drawn around him. He was separated from them. They probably did not feel it, but he felt it. It is a circle which draws itself ever around a man who, justly or unjustly, is thought guilty of blood. Men may applaud his deed. Men may say that they themselves would wish to have done it. But the circle is there.

Then Jeffrey thought of his Mother. She would not see that circle.

Also he thought of a girl. The girl had only a few hours before said that she had sometimes seen even murder in his eyes.

V

MON PERE JE ME 'CUSE

Down the wide slope of Bald Mountain the fire raved exultingly, leaping and skipping fantastically as it ran. It was a prisoner released from the bondage of the elements that had held it. It was a spirit drunk with sudden-found freedom. It was a flood raging down a valley. It was a maniac at large.

The broad base of the mountain where it sat upon the backs of the lower hills spread out fanwise to a width of five miles. The fire spread its wings as it came down until it swept the whole apron of the mountain. A five-mile wave of solid flame rolled down upon the hills.

Sleepy cattle on the hills rising for their early browse missed the juicy dew from the grass. They looked to where the sun should be coming over the mountain and instead they saw the sun coming down the side of the mountain in a blanket of white smoke. They left their feed and began to huddle together, mooing nervously to each other about this thing and sniffing the air and pawing the earth.

Sleepy hired men coming out to drive the cattle in to milking looked blinking up at the mountain, stood a moment before their numb minds understood what their senses were telling them, then ran shouting back to the farm houses, throwing open pasture gates and knocking down lengths of fence as they ran. Some, with nothing but fear in their hearts, ran straight to the barns and mounting the best horses fled down the roads to the west. For the hireling flees because he is a hireling.

Sleepy men and women and still sleeping children came tumbling out of the houses, to look up at the death that was coming down to them. Some cried in terror. Some raged and cursed and shook foolish fists at the oncoming enemy. Some fell upon their knees and lifted hands to the God of fire and flood. Then each ran back into the house for his or her treasure; a little bag of money under a mattress, or a babe in its crib, or a little rifle, or a dolly of rags.

Frantic horses were hastily hitched to farm wagons. The treasures were quickly bundled in. Women pushed their broods up ahead of them into the wagons, ran back to kiss the men standing at the heads of the sweating horses, then climbed to their places in the wagons and took the reins. For twenty miles, down break-neck roads, behind mad horses, they would have to hold the lives of the children, the horses, and, incidentally, of themselves in their hands. But they were capable hands, brown, and strong and steady as the mother hearts that went with them.

They would have preferred to stay with the men, these women. But it was the law that they should take the brood and run to safety.

Men stood watching the wagons until they shot out of sight behind the trees of the road. Then they turned back to the hopeless, probably useless fight. They could do little or nothing. But it was the law that men must stay and make the fight. They must go out with shovels to the very edge of their own clearing and dig up a width of new earth which the running fire could not cross. Thus they might divert the fire a little. They might even divide it, if the wind died down a little, so that it would roll on to either side of their homes.

This was their business. There was little chance that they would succeed. Probably they would have to drop shovels at the last moment and run an unequal foot race for their lives. But this was the law, that every man must stay and try to make his own little clearing the point of an entering wedge to that advancing wall of fire. No man, no ten thousand men could stop the fire. But, against all probabilities, some one man might be able, by some chance of the lay of the ground, or some freak of the wind, to split off a sector of it. That sector might be fought and narrowed down by other men until it was beaten. And so something would be gained. For this men stayed, stifled and blinded, and fought on until the last possible moment, and then ran past their already smoking homes and down the wind for life.

Jeffrey Whiting rode southward in the wake of four other men down a long spiral course towards the base of the mountain. Yesterday he would have ridden at their head. He would have taken the place of leadership and command among them which he had for months been taking in the fight against the railroad. Probably he could still have had that place among them if he had tried to assert himself, for men had come to have a habit of depending upon him. But he rode at the rear, dispirited and miserable.

They were trying to get around the fire, so that they might hang upon its flank and beat it in upon itself. There was no thought now of getting ahead of it: no need to ride ahead giving alarm. That rolling curtain of smoke would have already aroused every living thing ahead of it. They could only hope to get to the end of the line of fire and fight it inch by inch to narrow the path of destruction that it was making for itself.

If the wind had held stiff and straight down the mountain it would have driven the fire ahead in a line only a little wider than its original front. But the shape of the mountain caught the light breeze as it came down and twisted it away always to the side. So that the end of the fire line was not a thin edge of scattered fire that could be fought and stamped back but was a whirling inverted funnel of flame that leaped and danced ever outward and onward.

Half way down the mountain they thought that they had outflanked it. They slid from their horses and began to beat desperately at the brush and grasses among the trees. They gained upon it. They were doing something. They shouted to each other when they had driven it back even a foot. They fought it madly for the possession of a single tree. They were gaining. They were turning the edge of it in. The hot sweat began to streak the caking grime upon their faces. There was no air to breathe, only the hot breath of fire. But it was heartsome work, for they were surely pushing the fire in upon itself.

A sudden swirl of the wind threw a dense cloud of hot white smoke about them. They stood still with the flannel of their shirt-sleeves pressed over eyes and nostrils, waiting for it to pass.

When they could look they saw a wall of fire bearing down upon them from three sides. The wind had whirled the fire backward and sidewise so that it had surrounded the meagre little space that they had cleared and had now outflanked them. Their own manoeuvre had been turned against them. There was but one way to run, straight down the hill with the fire roaring and panting after them. It was a playful, tricky monster that cackled gleefully behind them, laughing at their puny efforts.

Breathless and spent, they finally ran themselves out of the path of the flames and dropped exhausted in safety as the fire went roaring by them on its way.

Their horses were gone, of course. The fire in its side leap had caught them and they had fled shrieking down the hill, following their instinct to hunt water.

The men now began to understand the work that was theirs. They were five already weary men. All day and all night, perhaps, they must follow the fire that travelled almost as fast as they could run at their best. And they must hang upon its edge and fight every inch of the way to fold that edge back upon itself, to keep that edge from spreading out upon them. A hundred men who could have flanked the fire shoulder to shoulder for a long space might have accomplished

what these five were trying to do. For them it was impossible. But they hung on in desperation.

Three times more they made a stand and pushed the edge of the fire back a little, each time daring to hope that they had done something. And three times more the treacherous wind whirled the fire back behind and around them so that they had to race for life.

Now they were down off the straight slope of the mountain and among the broken hills. Here their work was entirely hopeless and they knew it. They knew also that they were in almost momentary danger of being cut off and completely surrounded. Here the fire did not keep any steady edge that they could follow and attack. The wind eddied and whirled about among the broken peaks of the hills in every direction and with it the fire ran apparently at will.

When they tried to hold it to one side of a hill and were just beginning to think that they had won, a sudden sweep of the wind would send a ring of fire around to the other side so that they saw themselves again and again surrounded and almost cut off.

Ahead of them now there was one hope: to hold the fire to the north side of the Chain. The Chain is a string of small lakes running nearly east and west. It divides the hill country into fairly even portions. If they could keep the fire north of the lakes they would save the southern half of the country. Their own homes all lay to the north of the lakes and they were now doomed. But that was a matter that did not enter here. What was gone was gone. Their loved ones would have had plenty of warning and would be out of the way by now. The men were fighting the enemy merely to save what could be saved. And as is the way of men in fight they began to make it a personal quarrel with the fire.

They began to grow blindly angry at their opponent. It was no longer an impersonal, natural creature of the elements, that fire. It was a cunning, a vicious, a mocking enemy. It hated them. They hated it. Its eyes were red with gloating over them. Their eyes were red and bloodshot with the fury of their battle. Its voice was hoarse with the roar of its laughing at them. Their voices were thick and their lips were cracking with the hot curses they hurled back at it.

They had forgotten the beginning of the quarrel. All but one of them had forgotten the men whom they had tracked into the hills last night and who had started the fire. All but one of them had forgotten those other men, far away and safe and cowardly, who had sent those men into the hills to do this thing.

Jeffrey Whiting had not forgotten. But as the day wore on and the fight waxed more bitter and more hopeless, even he began to lose sight of the beginning and to make it his own single feud with the fire. He fought and was beaten back and ran and went back to fight again, until there was but one thought, if it could be called a thought, in his brain: to fight on, bitterly, doggedly, without mercy, without quarter given or asked with the demon of the fire.

Now other men came from scattered, far-flung homes to the south and joined the five. Two hills stood between them and Sixth Lake, where the Chain began and stretched away to the west. If they could hold the fire to the north of these two hills then it would sweep along the north side of the lakes and the other half of the country would be safe.

The first hill was easy. They took their stand along its crest. The five weary, scarred, singed men, their voices gone, their swollen tongues protruding through their splitting lips, took new strength from the help that had come to them. They fought the enemy back down the north side of the hill, foot by foot, steadily, digging with charred sticks and throwing earth and small stones down upon it.

They were beating it at last! Only another hill like this and their work would be done. They would strike the lake and water. Water! God in Heaven! Water! A whole big lake of it! To throw themselves into it! To sink into its cool, sweet depth! And to drink, and drink and *drink!*

Between the two hills ran a deep ravine heavy with undergrowth. Here was the worst place. Here they stood and ran shoulder to shoulder, fighting waist deep in the brush and long grass, the hated breath of the fire in their nostrils. And they held their line. They pushed the fire on past the ravine and up the north slope of the last hill. They had won! It could not beat them now!

As he came around the brow of the hill and saw the shining body of the placid lake below him one of the new men, who still had voice, raised a shout. It ran back along the line, even the five who had no voice croaking out what would have been a cry of triumph.

But the wind heard them and laughed. Through the ravine which they had safely crossed with such mighty labour the playful wind sent a merry, flirting little gust, a draught. On the draught the lingering flames went dancing swiftly through the brush of the ravine and spread out around the southern side of the hill. Before the men could turn, the thing was done. The hill made itself into a chimney and the flames went roaring to the top of it.

The men fled over the ridge of the hill and down to the south, to get themselves out of that encircling death.

When they were beyond the circle of fire on that side, they saw the full extent of what had befallen them in what had been their moment of victory.

Not only would the fire come south of the lake and the Chain--but they themselves could not get near the lake.

Water! There it lay, below them, at their feet almost! And they could not reach it! The fire was marching in a swift, widening line between them and the lake. Not so much as a little finger

might they wet in the lake.

Men lay down and wept, or cursed, or gritted silent teeth, according to the nature that was in each.

Jeffrey Whiting stood up, looking towards the lake. He saw two men pushing a boat into the lake. Through the shifting curtain of smoke and waving fire he studied them out of blistered eyes. They were not men of the hills.

They were!--They were the real enemy!--They were two of those who had set the fire! They had not stopped to fight fire. They had headed straight for the lake and had gotten there. *They* were safe. And *they* had *water*!

All the hot rage of the morning, seared into him by the fighting fire fury of the day, rushed back upon him.

He had not killed a man this morning. Men said he had, but he had not.

Now he would kill. The fire should not stop him. He would kill those two there in the water. *In the water!*

He ran madly down the slope and into the flaming, fuming maw of the fire. He went blind. His foot struck a root. He fell heavily forward, his face buried in a patch of bare earth.

Men ran to the edge of the fire and dragged him out by the feet. When they had brought him back to safety and had fanned breath into him with their hate, he opened bleared eyes and looked at them. As he understood, he turned on his face moaning:

"I didn't kill Rogers. I wish I had--I wish I had."

And south and north of the Chain the fire rolled away into the west.

The Bishop of Alden looked restlessly out of the window as the intolerable, sooty train jolted its slow way northward along the canal and the Black River. He had left Albany in the very early hours of the morning. Now it was nearing noon and there were yet eighty miles, four hours, of this interminable journey before he could find a good wash and rest and some clean food. But he was not hungry, neither was he querulous. There were worse ways of travel than even by a slow and dusty train. And in his wide-flung, rock-strewn diocese the Bishop had found plenty of them. He was never one to complain. A gentle philosophy of all life, a long patience that saw and understood the faults of high and low, a slow, quiet gleam of New England humour at the back of his light blue eyes; with Christ, and these things, Joseph Winthrop contrived to be a very good man and a very good bishop.

But to-day he was not content with things. He had done one thing in Albany, or rather, he would have said, he had seen it done. He had appealed to the conscience of the people of the State. And the conscience of the people had replied in no mistakable terms that the U. & M. Railroad must not dare to drive the people of the hills from their homes for the sake of what might lie beneath their land. Then the conscience of the people of the State had gone off about its business, as the public conscience has a way of doing. The public would forget. The public always forgets. He had furnished it with a mild sensation which had aroused it for a time, a matter of a few days at most. He did not hope for even the proverbial nine days. But the railroad would not forget. It never slept. For there were men behind it who said, and kept on saying, that they must have results.

He was sure that the railroad would strike back. And it would strike in some way that would be effective, but that yet would hide the hand that struck.

Thirty miles to the right of him as he rode north lay the line of the first hills. Beyond them stood the softly etched outlines of the mountains, their white-blue tones blending gently into the deep blue of the sky behind them.

Forty miles away he could make out the break in the line where Old Forge lay and the Chain began. Beyond that lay Bald Mountain and the divide. But he could not see Bald Mountain. That was strange. The day was very clear. He had noticed that there had been no dew that morning. There might have been a little haze on the hills in the early morning. But this sun would have cleared that all away by now.

Bald Mountain was as one of the points of the compass on his journey up this side of his diocese. He had never before missed it on a fair day. It was something more to him than a mere bare rock set on the top of other rocks. It was one of his marking posts. And when you remember that his was a charge of souls scattered over twenty thousand square miles of broken country, you will see that he had need of marking posts.

Bald Mountain was the limit of the territory which he could reach from the western side of his diocese. When he had to go into the country to the east of the mountain he must go all the way south to Albany and around by North Creek or he must go all the way north and east by Malone and Rouses Point and then south and west again into the mountains. The mountain was set in almost the geographical centre of his diocese and he had travelled towards it from north, east, south and west.

He missed his mountain now and rubbed his eyes in a troubled, perplexed way. When the train stopped at the next little station he went out on the platform for a clearer, steadier view.

Again he rubbed his eyes. The clear gap between the hills where he knew Old Forge nestled was gone. The open rift of sky that he had recognised a few moments before was now filled, as

though a mountain had suddenly been moved into the gap. He went back to his seat and sat watching the line of the mountains. As he watched, the whole contour of the hills that he had known was changed under his very eyes. Peaks rose where never were peaks before, and rounded, smooth skulls of mountains showed against the sky where sharp peaks should have been.

He looked once more, and a sharp, swift suspicion shot into his mind, and stayed. Then a just and terrible anger rose up in the soul of Joseph Winthrop, Bishop of Alden, for he was a man of gentle heart whose passions ran deep below a placid surface.

At Booneville he stepped off the train before it had stopped and hurried to the operator's window to ask if any news had gone down the wire of a fire in the hills.

Jerry Hogan, the operator, sat humped up over his table "listening in" with shameless glee to a flirtatious conversation that was going over the wire, contrary to all rules and regulations of the Company, between the young lady operator at Snowden and the man in the office at Steuben.

The Bishop asked a hurried, anxious question.

Without looking up, Jerry answered sorrowfully:

"This ain't the bulletin board. We're busy."

The Bishop stood quiet a moment.

Then Jerry looked up. The face looking calmly through the window was the face of one who had once tapped him on the cheek as a reminder of certain things.

Jerry fell off his high stool, landing, miraculously, on his feet. He grabbed at his front lock of curly red hair and gasped:

"I--I'm sorry, Bishop! I--I--didn't hear what you said."

The Bishop--if one might say it--grinned. Then he said quickly:

"I thought I saw signs of fire in the hills. Have you heard anything on the wire?"

Jerry had seen the wrinkles around the Bishop's mouth. The beet red colour of his face had gone down several degrees. The freckles were coming back. He was now coherent.

No he had not heard anything. He was sure nothing had come down the wire. Just then the rapid-fire, steady clicking of the key changed abruptly to the sharp, staccato insistence of a "call."

Jerry held up his hand. "Lowville calling Utica," he said. They waited a little and then: "Call State Warden. Fire Beaver Run country. Call everything," Jerry repeated from the sounder, punctuating for the benefit of the Bishop.

"It must be big, Bishop," he said, turning, "or they wouldn't call--"

But the Bishop was already running for the steps of his departing train.

At Lowville he left the train and hurried to Father Brady's house. Finding the priest out on a call, he begged a hasty lunch from the housekeeper, and, commandeering some riding clothes and Father Brady's saddle horse, he was soon on the road to French Village and the hills.

It was before the days of the rural telephone and there was no telegraph up the hill road. A messenger had come down from the hills a half hour ago to the telegraph office. But there was no alarm among the people of Lowville, for there lay twenty miles of well cultivated country between them and the hills. If they noticed Father Brady's clothes riding furiously out toward the hill road, they gave the matter no more than a mild wonder.

For twenty-two miles the Bishop rode steadily up the hard dirt road over which he and Arsene LaComb had struggled in the beginning of the winter before. He thought of Tom Lansing, who had died that night. He thought of the many things that had in some way had their beginning on that night, all leading up, more or less, to this present moment. But more than all he thought of Jeffrey Lansing and other desperate men up there in the hills fighting for their lives and their little all.

He did not know who had started this fire. It might well have started accidentally. He did not know that the railroad people had sent men into the hills to start it. But if they had, and if those men were caught by the men of the hills, then there would be swift and bloody justice done. The Bishop thought of this and he rode Father Brady's horse as that good animal had never been ridden in the course of his well fed life.

Nearing Corben's, he saw that the horse could go but little farther. Registering a remonstrance to Father Brady, anent the matter of keeping his horse too fat, he rode up to bargain with Corben for a fresh horse. Corben looked at the horse from which the Bishop had just slid swiftly down. He demanded to know the Bishop's destination in the hills--which was vague, and his business--which was still more vague. He looked at the Bishop. He closed one eye and reviewed the whole matter critically. Finally he guessed that the Bishop could have the fresh horse if he bought and paid for it on the spot.

The Bishop explained that he did not have the money about him. Corben believed that. The Bishop explained that he was the bishop of the diocese. Corben did not believe that.

In the end the Bishop, chafing at the delay, persuaded the man to believe him and to accept his surety for the horse. And taking food in his pockets he pressed on into the high hills.

Already he had met wagons loaded with women and children on the road. But he knew that they would be of those who lived nearest the fringe of the hills. They would know little more than he did himself of the origin of the fire or of what was going on up there under and beyond that pall of smoke. So he did not stop to question them.

Now the road began to be dotted with these wagons of the fleeing ones, and some seemed to have come far. Twice he stopped long enough to ask a question or two. But their replies gave him no real knowledge of the situation. They had been called from their beds in the early morning by the fire. Their men had stayed, the women had fled with the children. That was all they could tell.

As he came to Lansing Mountain, he met Ruth Lansing on Brom Bones escorting Mrs. Whiting and Letitia Bascom. From this the Bishop knew without asking that the fire was now coming near, for these women would not have left their homes except in the nearness of danger.

In fact the two older women had only yielded to the most peremptory authority, exercised by Ruth in the name of Jeffrey Whiting. Even to the end gentle Letitia Bascom had rebelled vigorously against the idea that Cassius Bascom, who was notoriously unable to look after himself in the most ordinary things of life, should now be left behind on the mere argument that he was a man.

The Bishop's first question concerned Jeffrey Whiting. Ruth told what she knew. That a man had met herself and Jeffrey on the road yesterday; that the man had brought news of strange men being seen in the hills; that Jeffrey had ridden away with him toward Bald Mountain.

The Bishop understood. Bald Mountain would be the place to be watched. He could even conjecture the night vigil on the mountain, and the breaking of the fire in the dawn. He could see the desperate and futile struggle with the fire as it reached down to the hills. Back of that screen of fire there was the setting of a tragedy darker even than the one of the fire itself.

"He had my letter?" the Bishop asked, when he had heard all that Ruth had to tell.

"Yes. We had just read it."

"He went armed?" said the Bishop quietly.

"Myron Stocking brought Jeffrey's gun to him," the girl answered simply, with a full knowledge of all that the question and answer implied. The men had gone armed, prepared to kill.

"They will all be driven in upon French Village," said the Bishop slowly. "The wind will not hold any one direction in the high hills. Little Tupper Lake may be the only refuge for all in the end. The road from here there, is it open, do you know?"

"No one has come down from that far," said Ruth. "We have watched the people on the road all day. But probably they would not leave the lake. And if they did they would go north by the river. But the road certainly won't be open long. The fire is spreading north as it comes down."

"I must hurry, then," said the Bishop, gripping his reins.

"Oh, but you cannot, you must not!" exclaimed Ruth. "You will be trapped. You can never go through. We are the last to leave, except a few men with fast horses who know the country every step. You cannot go through on the road, and if you leave it you will be lost."

"Well, I can always come back," said the Bishop lightly, as he set his horse up the hill.

"But you cannot. Won't you listen, please, Bishop," Ruth pleaded after him. "The fire may cross behind you, and you'll be trapped on the road!"

But the Bishop was already riding swiftly up the hill. Whether he heard or not, he did not answer or look back.

Ruth sat in her saddle looking up the road after him. She did not know whether or not he realised his danger. Probably he did, for he was a quick man to weigh things. Even the knowledge of his danger would not drive him back. She knew that.

She knew the business upon which he went. No doubt it was one in which he was ready to risk his life. He had said that they would all be driven in upon Little Tupper. In that he meant hunters and hunted alike. For there were the hunters and the hunted. The men of the hills would be up there behind the wall of fire or working along down beside it. But while they fought the fire they would be hunting the brush and the smoke for the traces of other men. Those other men would maybe be trapped by the swift running of the fire. All might be driven to seek safety together. The hunted men would flee from the fire to a death just as certain but which they would prefer to face.

The Bishop was riding to save the lives of those men. Also he was riding to keep the men of the hills from murder. Jeffrey would be among them. Only yesterday she had spoken that word to him.

But he can do neither, she thought. He will be caught on the road, and before he will give in and turn back he will be trapped.

"I am going back to the top of the hill," she said suddenly to Mrs. Whiting. "I want to see what it looks like now. Go on down. I will catch you before long."

"No. We will pull in at the side of the road here and wait for you. Don't go past the hill. We'll wait. There's no danger down here yet, and won't be for some time."

Brom Bones made short work of the hill, for he was fresh and all day long he had been held in

tight when he had wanted to run away. He did not know what that thing was from which he had all day been wanting to run. But he knew that if he had been his own master he would have run very far, hunting water. So now he bolted quickly to the top of the hill.

But the Bishop, too, was riding a fresh horse and was not sparing him. When Ruth came to the top of the hill she saw the Bishop nearly a mile away, already past her own home and mounting the long hill.

She stood watching him, undecided what to do. The chances were all against him. Perhaps he did not understand how certainly those chances stood against him. And yet, he looked and rode like a man who knew the chances and was ready to measure himself against them.

"Brom Bones could catch him, I think," she said as she watched him up the long hill. "But we could not make him come back until it was too late. I wonder if I am afraid to try. No, I don't think I'm afraid. Only somehow he seems--seems different. He doesn't seem just like a man that was reckless or ignorant of his danger. No. He knows all about it. But it doesn't count. He is a man going on business--God's business. I wonder."

Now she saw him against the rim of the sky as he went over the brow of the hill, where Jeffrey and she had stopped yesterday. He was not a pretty figure of a rider. He rode stiffly, for he was very tired from the unusual ride, and he crouched forward, saving his horse all that he could, but he was a figure not easily to be forgotten as he disappeared over the crown of the hill, seeming to ride right on into the sky.

Suddenly she felt Brom Bones quiver under her. He was looking away to the right of the long, terraced hill before her. The fire was coming, sweeping diagonally down across the face of the hill straight toward her home.

All her life she had been hearing of forest fires. Hardly a summer had passed within her memory when the menace of them had not been present among the hills. She had grown up, as all hill children did, expecting to some day have to fly for her life before one. But she had never before seen a wall of breathing fire marching down a hill toward her.

For moments the sight held her enthralled in wonder and awe. It was a living thing, moving down the hillside with an intelligent, defined course for itself. She saw it chase a red deer and a silver fox down the hill. It could not catch those timid, fleet animals in the open chase. But if they halted or turned aside it might come upon them and surround them.

While she looked, one part of her brain was numbed by the sight, but the other part was thinking rapidly. This was not the real fire. This was only one great paw of fire that shot out before the body, to sweep in any foolish thing that did not at first alarm hurry down to the level lands and safety.

The body of the fire, she was sure, was coming on in a solid front beyond the hill. It would not yet have struck the road up which the Bishop was hurrying. He might think that he could skirt past it and get into French Village before it should cross the road. But she was sure he could not do so. He would go on until he found it squarely before him. Then he would have to turn back. And here was this great limb of fire already stretching out behind him. In five minutes he would be cut off. The formation of the hills had sent the wind whirling down through a gap and carrying one stream of fire away ahead of the rest. The Bishop did not know the country to the north of the road. If he left the road he could only flounder about and wander aimlessly until the fire closed in upon him.

Ruth's decision was taken on the instant. The two women did not need her. They would know enough to drive on down to safety when they saw the fire surely coming. There was a man gone unblinking into a peril from which he would not know how to escape. He had gone to save life. He had gone to prevent crime. If he stayed in the road she could find him and lead him out to the north and probably to safety. If he did not stay in the road, well, at least, she could only make the attempt.

Brom Bones went flying along the slope of the road towards his home. For the first time in his life, he felt the cut of a whip on his flanks--to make him go faster. He did not know what it meant. Nothing like that had ever been a part of Brom Bones' scheme of life, for he had always gone as fast as he was let go. But it did not need the stroke of the whip to madden him.

Down across the slope of the hill in front of him he saw a great, red terror racing towards the road which he travelled. If he could not understand the girl's words, he could feel the thrill of rising excitement in her voice as she urged him on, saying over and over:

"You can make it, Brom! I know you can! I never struck you this way before, did I? But it's for life--a good man's life! You can make it. I know you can make it. I wouldn't ask you to if I didn't know. You can make it! It won't hurt us a bit. It *can't* hurt us! Bromie, dear, I tell you it can't hurt us. It just can't!"

She crouched out over the horse's shoulder, laying her weight upon her hands to even it for the horse. She stopped striking him, for she saw that neither terror nor punishment could drive him faster than he was going. He was giving her the best of his willing heart and fleet body.

But would it be enough? Fast as she raced along the road she saw that red death whirling down the hillside, to cross the road at a point just above her home. Could she pass that point before the fire came? She did not know. And when she came to within a hundred yards of where the fire would strike the road she still did not know whether she could pass it. Already she could feel the hot breath of it panting down upon her. Already showers of burning leaves and

branches were whirling down upon her head and shoulders. If her horse should hesitate or bolt sidewise now they would both be burned to death. The girl knew it. And, crouching low, talking into his mane, she told him so. Perhaps he, too, knew it. He did not falter. Head down, he plunged straight into the blinding blast that swept across the road.

A wave of heavy, choking smoke struck him in the face. He reeled and reared a little, and a moaning whinny of fright broke from him. But he felt the steady, strong little hands in his mane and he plunged on again, through the smoke and out into the good air.

The fire laughed and leaped across the road behind them. It had missed them, but it did not care. The other way, it would not have cared, either.

Ruth eased Brom Bones up a little on the long slope of the hill, and turning looked back at her home. The farmer had long since gone away with his family. The place was not his. The flames were already leaping up from the grass to the windows and the roof was taking fire from the cinders and burning branches in the air. But, where everything was burning, where a whole countryside was being swept with the broom of destruction, her personal loss did not seem to matter much.

Only when she saw the flames sweep on past the house and across the hillside and attack the trees that stood guard over the graves of her loved ones did the bitterness of it enter her soul. She revolted at the cruel wickedness of it all. Her heart hated the fire. Hated the men who had set it. (She was sure that men *had* set it.) She wanted vengeance. The Bishop was wrong. Why should he interfere? Let men take revenge in the way of men.

But on the instant she was sorry and breathed a little prayer of and for forgiveness. You see, she was rather a downright young person. And she took her religion at its word. When she said, "Forgive us our trespasses," she meant just that. And when she said, "As we forgive those who trespass against us," she meant that, too.

The Bishop was right, of course. One horror, one sin, would not heal another.

Coming to the top of the hill, the full wonder and horror of the fire burst upon her with appalling force. What she had so far seen was but a little finger of the fire, crooked around a hill. Now in front and to the right of her, in an unbroken quarter circle of the whole horizon, there ranged a living, moving mass of flame that seemed to be coming down upon the whole world.

She knew that it was already behind her. If she had thought of herself, she would have turned Brom Bones to the left, away from the road and have fled away, by paths she knew well, to the north and out of the range of the moving terror. But only for one quaking little moment did she think of herself. Along that road ahead of her there was a man, a good man, who rode bravely, unquestioningly, to almost certain death, for others. She could save him, perhaps. So far as she could see, the fire was not yet crossing the road in front. The Bishop would still be on the road. She was sure of that. Again she asked Brom Bones for his brave best.

The Bishop was beginning to think that he might yet get through to French Village. His watch told him that it was six o'clock. Soon the sun would be going down, though in the impenetrable tenting of white smoke that had spread high over all the air there was nothing to show that a sun had ever shone upon the earth. With the going down of the sun the wind, too, would probably die away. The fire had not yet come to the road in front of him. If the wind fell the fire would advance but slowly, and would hardly spread to the north at all.

He was not discrediting the enemy in front. He had seen the mighty sweep of the fire and he knew that it would need but the slightest shift of the wind to send a wall of flame down upon him from which he would have to run for his life. He did not, of course, know that the fire had already crossed the road behind him. But even if he had, he would probably have kept on trusting to the chance of getting through somehow.

He was ascending another long slope of country where the road ran straight up to the east. The fire was already to the right of him, sweeping along in a steady march to the west. It was spreading steadily northward, toward the road; but he was hoping that the hill before him had served to hold it back, that it had not really crossed the road at any point, and that when he came to the top of this hill he would be able to see the road clear before him up to French Village. He was wearied to the point of exhaustion, and his nervous horse fought him constantly in an effort to bolt from the road and make off to the north. But, he argued, he had suffered nothing so far from the fire; and there was no real reason to be discouraged.

Then he came to the top of the hill.

He rubbed his eyes, as he had done a long, long time before on that same day. Five hundred yards before him as he looked down a slight slope, a belt of pine trees was burning high to the sky. The road ran straight through that. Behind and beyond the belt of pines he could see the whole country banked in terraces of flame. There was no road. This hill had divided the wind, and thus, temporarily, it had divided the fire. Already the fire had run away to the north, and it was still moving northward as it also advanced more slowly to the top of the hill where he stood.

Well, the road was still behind him. Nothing worse had happened than he had, in reason, anticipated. He must go back. He turned the horse and looked.

Across the ridge of the last hill that he had passed the fire was marching majestically. The daylight, such as it had been, had given its place to the great glow of the fire. Ten minutes ago he could not have distinguished anything back there. Now he could see the road clearly marked, nearly five miles away, and across it stood a solid wall of fire.

There were no moments to be lost. He was cut off on three sides. The way out lay to the north, over he knew not what sort of country. But at least it was a way out. He must not altogether run away from the fire, for in that way he might easily be caught and hemmed in entirely. He must ride along as near as he could in front of it. So, if he were fast enough, he might turn the edge of it and be safe again. He might even be able to go on his way again to French Village.

Yes, if he were quick enough. Also, if the fire played no new trick upon him.

His horse turned willingly from the road and ran along under the shelter of the ridge of the hill for a full mile as fast as the Bishop dared let him go. He could not drive. He was obliged to trust the horse to pick his own footing. It was mad riding over rough pasture land and brush, but it was better to let the horse have his own way.

Suddenly they came to the end of the ridge where the Bishop might have expected to be able to go around the edge of the fire. The horse stood stock still. The Bishop took one quiet, comprehensive look.

"I am sorry, boy," he said gently to the horse. "You have done your best. And I--have done my worst. You did not deserve this."

He was looking down toward Wilbur's Fork, a dry water course, two miles away and a thousand feet below.

The fire had come clear around the hill and had been driven down into the heavy timber along the water course. There it was raging away to the west down through the great trees, travelling faster than any horse could have been driven.

The Bishop looked again. Then he turned in his saddle, thinking mechanically. To the east the fire was coming over the ridge in an unbroken line--death. From the south it was advancing slowly but with a calm and certain steadiness of purpose--death. On the hill to the west it was burning brightly and running speedily to meet that swift line of fire coming down the northern side of the square--death. One narrowing avenue of escape was for the moment open. The lines on the north and the west had not met. For some minutes, a pitifully few minutes, there would be a gap between them. The horse, riderless and running by the instinct of his kind might make that gap in time. With a rider and stumbling under weight, it was useless to think of it.

With simple, characteristic decision, the Bishop slid a tired leg over the horse and came heavily to the ground.

"You have done well, boy, you shall have your chance," he said, as he hurried to loosen the heavy saddle and slip the bridle.

He looked again. There was no chance. The square of fire was closed.

"We stay together, then." And the Bishop mounted again.

Within the four walls of breathing death that were now closing around them there was one slender possibility of escape. It was not a hope. No. It was just a futile little tassel on the fringe of life. Still it was to be played with to the last. For that again is the law, applying equally to this bishop and to the little hunted furry things that ran through the grass by his horse's feet.

One fire was burning behind the other. There was just a possibility that a place might be found where the first fire would have burned away a breathing place before the other fire came up to it. It might be possible to live in that place until the second fire, finding nothing to eat, should die. It might be possible. Thinking of this, the Bishop started slowly down the hill toward the west.

Also, Joseph Winthrop, Bishop of Alden, thought of death. How should a bishop die? He remembered Saint Paul, on bishops. But there seemed to be nothing in those passages that bore on the matter immediately in hand.

Joseph Winthrop, a simple man, direct and unafraid, guessed that he would die very much as another man would die, with his rosary in his hand.

But was there not a certain ignominy in being trapped here as the dumb and senseless brute creatures were being trapped? For the life of him, the Bishop could no more see ignominy in the matter or the manner of the thing than he could see heroism.

He had come out on a bootless errand, to save the lives of certain men, if it might be. God had not seen wisdom in his plan. That was all. He had meant well. God meant better.

Into these quiet reflections the voice of a girl broke insistently with a shrill hail. A horse somewhere neighed to his horse, and the Bishop realised with a start of horror that a woman was here in this square of fire.

"It's you, Bishop, isn't it?" the voice cried frantically. "I thought I'd never find you. Over here to the right. Let your horse come. He'll follow mine. The Gaunt Rocks," she yelled back over her shoulder, "we can make them yet! There's nothing there to burn. We may smother. But we won't *burn!*"

Thus the Bishop found himself and his horse taken swiftly under command. It was Ruth Lansing, he recognised, but there was no time to think how she had gotten into this fortress of death. His horse followed Brom Bones through a whirl of smoke and on up a break-neck path of loose stones. Before the Bishop had time to get a fair breath or any knowledge of where he was going, he found himself on the top of what seemed to be a pile of flat, naked rocks.

They stopped, and Ruth was already down and talking soothingly to Brom Bones when the

Bishop got his feet to the rocks. Looking around he saw that they were on a plateau of rock at least several acres in extent and perhaps a hundred feet above the ground about them. Looking down he saw the sea of fire lapping now at the very foot of the rocks below. They had not been an instant too soon. As he turned to speak to the girl, his eye was caught by something that ran out of one of the lines of fire. It ran and fell headlong upon the lowest of the rocks. Then it stirred and began crawling up the rocks.

It was a man coming slowly, painfully, on hands and knees up the side of the refuge. The Bishop went down a little to help. As the two came slowly to the top of the plateau, Ruth stood there waiting. The Bishop brought the man to his feet and stood there holding him in the light. The face of the newcomer was burned and swollen beyond any knowing. But in the tall, loose-jointed figure Ruth easily recognised Rafe Gadbeau.

The man swayed drunkenly in the Bishop's arms for a moment, then crumpled down inert. The Bishop knelt, loosening the shirt at the neck and holding the head of what he was quick to fear was a dying man.

The man's eyes opened and in the strong light he evidently recognised the Bishop's grimy collar, for out of his cracked and swollen lips there came the moan:

"Mon Pere, je me 'cuse--"

With a start, Ruth recognised the words. They were the form in which the French people began the telling of their sins in confession. And she hurriedly turned away toward the horses.

She smiled wearily as she leaned against Brom Bones, thinking of Jeffrey Whiting. Here was one of the things that he did not like--the Catholic Church always turning up in everything.

She wondered where he was and what he was doing and thinking, up there behind that awful veil of red.

VI

THE BUSINESS OF THE SHEPHERD

The Bishop laid the man's head back so that he lay as easy as it was possible and spoke a word or two in that astonishing French of his which was the wonder and the peculiar pride of all the North Country.

But for a long time the man seemed unable to go farther. He saw the Bishop slip the little pocket stole around his neck and seemed to know what it was and what it was for. The swollen lips, however, only continued to mumble the words with which they had begun:

"Mon Pere, je me 'cuse--"

Rafe Gadbeau could speak English as well as or better than he could speak French. But there are times when a man reverts to the tongue of his mother. And confession, especially in the face of death, is one of these.

Again the Bishop lowered the man's head and changed the position of the body, while he fanned what air there was across the gasping mouth with his hat.

Now the man tried to gather his straying wits to him. With a sharp effort that seemed to send a tremor through his whole long body he forced his faculties back into their grooves. With a muttered word of encouragement from the Bishop, he began hoarsely that precise, recitative form of confession that the good priests of Lower Canada have been drilling into the children for the last three hundred years.

Once the memory found itself going the long-accustomed way it worked easily, mechanically. Since five years he had not confessed. At that time he had received the Sacrament. He went through the "table of sins" with the methodical care of a man who knows that if he misses a step in the sequence he will lose his way. It was the story of the young men of his people in the hills, in the lumber camps, in the sawmills, in the towns. A thousand men of his kind in the hill country would have told the same story, of hard work and anger and fighting in the camps, of drink and debauch in the towns when they went down to spend their money; and would have told it in exactly the same way. The Bishop had heard the story ten thousand times.

But now--*Mon Pere, je me 'cuse--*there was something more, something that would not fall into the catalogue of the sins of every day. It had begun a long time ago and it was just coming to an end here at the feet of the Bishop. Yes, it was undoubtedly coming to an end. For the Bishop had found blood caked on the man's shirt, in the back, just below the shoulder blade. There was a wound there, a bullet wound, a wound from which ordinarily the man would have fallen and stayed lying where he fell.

He must tell this thing in his own way, backwards, as it unrolled itself to his mind.

"I die, Mon Pere, I die," he began between gasps. "I die. Since the afternoon I have been dying.

If I could have found a spot to lie down, if I could have had two minutes free from the fire, I would have lain down to die. But shall a man lie down in hell before he is dead? No.

"All day I have run from the fire. I could not lie down to die till I had found a free place where my soul could breathe out. Here I breathe. Here I die. The rabbits and the foxes and the deer ran out from the fire, and they ran no faster than I ran. But I could not run out of its way. All day long men followed the line of the fire and fought around its edge. They fought the fire, but they hunted me. All the day long they hunted me and drove me always back into the fire when I would run out.

"They hunted me because in the early morning they had seen me with the men who set the fire. No. I did not do that. I did not set hand to the fire. Why was I with those men? Why did I go with them when they went to set the fire? Ah, that is a longer tale.

"Four years ago I was in Utica. It was in a drinking place. All were drinking. There was a fight. A man was killed. I struck no blow. *Mon Pere*, I struck no blow. But my knife--my knife was found in the man's heart. Who struck? I know not. A detective for this railroad that comes now into the hills found my knife. He traced it to me. He showed the knife to me. It was mine. I could not deny. But he said no word to the law. With the knife he could hang me. But he said no word. Only to me he said, 'Some day I may need you.'

"Last winter that man the detective came into the hills. Now he was not a detective. He was Rogers. He was the agent for the railroad. He would buy the land from the people.

"The people would not sell. You know of the matter. In June he came again. He was angry, because other men above him were angry. He must force the people to sell. He must trick the people. He saw me. 'You,' he said, 'I need you.'

"*Mon Pere*, that man owned me. On the point of my knife, like a pinch of salt, he held my life. Never a moment when I could say, I will do this, I will do that. Always I must do his bidding. For him I lied to my own people. For him I tricked my friends. For him I nearly killed the young Whiting. Always I must do as he told. He called and I came. He bade me do and I did.

"M'sieur does not know the sin of hate. It is the wild beast of all sins. And fear, too, that is the father of sin. For fear begets hate. And hate goes raging to do all sin.

"So, after fear, came hate into my heart. Before my eyes was always the face of this man, threatening with that knife of mine.

"Yesterday, in the morning came a message that I must meet him at the railroad. He would come to the end of the rail and we would go up into the high hills. I knew what was to be done. To myself, I rebelled. I would not go. I swore I would not go. A girl, a good girl that loved me, begged me not to go. To her I swore I would not go.

"I went. Fear, *Mon Pere*, fear is the father of all. I went because there was that knife before my eyes. I believe that good girl followed into the high hills, hoping, maybe, to bring me back at the last moment. I do not know.

"I went because I must go. I must be there in case any one should see. If any of us that went was to be caught, I was to be caught. I must be seen. I must be known to have been there. If any one was to be punished, I was that one. Rogers must be free, do you see. I would have to take the blame. I would not dare to speak.

"Through the night we skulked by Bald Mountain. We were seven. And of the seven I alone was to take the blame. They would swear it upon me. I knew.

"Never once did Rogers let me get beyond the reach of his tongue. And his speech was, 'You owe me this. Now you must pay.'

"In the first light the torches were got ready. We scattered along the fringe of the highest trees. Rogers kept me with him. A moment he went out into the clearing. Then he came running back. He had seen other men watching for us. I ran a little way. He came running behind with a lighted torch, setting fire as he ran. He yelled to me to light my torch. Again I ran, deeper into the wood. Again he came after me, the red flare of the fire running after him.

"*Mon Dieu!* The red flare of the fire in the wood! The red rush of fire in the air! The red flame of fire in my heart! Fear! Hate! Fire!" With a terrible convulsion the man drew himself up in the Bishop's arms, gazing wildly at the fire all about them, and screaming:

"On my knee I dropped and shot him, shot Rogers when he stopped!"

He fell back as the scream died in his throat.

The Bishop began the words of the Absolution. Some whisper of the well-remembered sound must have reached down to the soul of Rafe Gadbeau in its dark place, for, as though unconsciously, his lips began to form the words of the Act of Contrition.

As the Bishop finished, the tremor of death ran through the body in his arms. He knelt there holding the empty shell of a man.

Ruth Lansing, standing a little distance away, resting against the flank of her horse, had time to be awed and subdued by the terrific forces of this world and the other that were at work about her. This world, with the exception of this little island on which she stood, was on fire. The wind had almost entirely died out. On every side the flames rose evenly to the very heavens. Direction, distance, place, all were blotted out. There was no east, no west; no north, no south. Only an impenetrable ring of fire, no earth, no sky. Only these few bare rocks and this inverted

bowl of lurid, hot, cinder-laden air out of which she must get the breath of life.

Into this ring of fire a hunted man had burst, just as she had seen a rabbit and a belated woodchuck bursting. And that man had lain himself down to die. And here, of all places, he had found the hand of the mighty, the omnipresent Catholic Church reached out ready to him!

She was only a young girl. But since that night when the Bishop had come to her as she held her father dying in her arms she had thought much. Thought had been pressed upon her. Forces had pressed themselves in upon her mind. The things that she had been hearing and reading since her childhood, the thoughts of the people among whom she had grown up, the feeling of loyalty to her own kind, all these had fought in her against the dominion of the Catholic Church which challenged them all.

Because she had so recently come under its influence, the Catholic Church seemed ever to be unfolding new wonders to her. It seemed as though she stepped ever from one holy of holies into another more wonderful, more awesome. Yet always there seemed to be something just beyond, some deeper, more mysterious meaning to which she could not quite attain. Always a door opened, only to disclose another closed door beyond it.

Here surely she stood as near to naked truth as it was possible to get. Here were none of the forms of words, none of the explanations, none of the ready-made answers of the catechism. Here were just two men. One was a bad man, a man of evil life. He was dying. In a few moments his soul must go--somewhere. The other was a good man. To-day he had risked his life to save the lives of this man and others--for Ruth was quick to suspect that Gadbeau had been caught in the fire because other men were chasing him.

Now these two men had a question to settle between them. In a very few minutes these two men must settle whether this bad man's soul was presently going to Hell or to Heaven for all eternity. You see, she was a very direct young person. She took her religion at its word, straight in the eyes, literally.

So far she had not needed to take any precautions against hearing anything that was said. The dull roar of the fire all about them effectually silenced every other sound. Then, without warning, high above the noise of the fire, came the shrill, breaking voice of Gadbeau, screaming:

"On my knee I dropped and shot him, shot Rogers as he stopped!"

Involuntarily she turned and started towards the men. Gadbeau had fallen back in the Bishop's arms and the Bishop was leaning over, apparently talking to him. She knew that she must not go near until the Bishop gave her leave. She turned back and putting her hands up to her ears buried her face in Brom Bones' mane.

But she could not put away the words that she had heard. Never, so long as she lived, was she able to forget them. Like the flash of the shot itself, they leaped to her brain and seared themselves there. Years afterwards she could shut her eyes and fairly see those words burning in her mind.

When it was ended, the Bishop called to her and she went over timidly. She heard the Bishop say:

"He is gone. Will you say a prayer, Ruth?"

Then the Bishop began to read slowly, in the light of the flames, the Prayers for the Departed. Ruth kneeling drew forth her beads and among the Mysteries she wept gently--why, she knew not.

When the Bishop had finished, he knelt a while in silence, looking into the face of the dead. Then he arose and folded the long arms on the tattered breast and straightened the body.

Ruth rose and watched him in a troubled way. Once, twice she opened her lips to speak. But she did not know what to say or how to say it. Finally she began:

"Bishop, I--I heard--"

"No, child. You heard nothing," the Bishop interrupted quietly, "nothing."

Ruth understood. And for a little space the two stood there looking down. The dead man's secret lay between them, buried under God's awful seal.

The Bishop went to his horse and unstrapping Father Brady's storm coat which he had brought wrapped it gently over the head and body of the dead man as a protection from the showers of glowing cinders that rained down upon everything.

Then they took up the interminable vigil of the night, standing at their horses' heads, their faces buried in the manes, their arms thrown over the horses' eyes.

As the night wore on the fire, having consumed everything to the east and south, moved on deliberately into the west and north. But the sharp, acrid smoke of trees left smouldering behind still kept them in exquisite, blinded torture.

The murky, grey pall of the night turned almost to black as the fires to the east died almost out in that last, lifeless hour of the night. The light of the morning showed a faint, sickly white through the smoke banks on the high hills. When it was time for the sun to be rising over Bald Mountain, the morning breezes came down lifting the heavy clouds of smoke and carrying them overhead and away into the west. They saw the world again, a grey, ash-strewn world, with not a land-mark left but the bare knobs of the hills and here and there a great tree still standing

smoking like a burnt-out torch.

They mounted wearily, and taking a last look at the figure of the man lying there on his rocky bier, picked their way down to the sloping hillside. The Gaunt Rocks had saved their lives. Now they must reach Little Tupper and water if they would have their horses live. Intolerable, frightful thirst was already swelling their own lips and they knew that the plight of the horses was inevitably worse.

Ruth took the lead, for she knew the country. They must travel circuitously, avoiding the places that had been wooded for the fallen trees would still be burning and would block them everywhere. The road was impossible because it had largely run through wooded places and the trees would have fallen across it. Their situation was not desperate, but at any moment a horse might drop or turn mad for water.

For two hours they plodded steadily over the hills through the hot, loose-lying ashes. In all the world it seemed that not man nor beast nor bird was alive. The top of the earth was one grey ruin, draped with the little swirls of dust and ashes that the playful wind sent drifting up into their mouths and eyes.

They dared not ride faster than a walk, for the ashes had blown level over holes and traps of all sorts in which a galloping horse would surely break his leg. Nor would it have been safe to put the horses to any rapid expenditure of energy. The little that was left in them must be doled out to the very last ounce. For they did not yet know what lay between them and French Village and the lake. If the fire had not reached the lake during the night then it was always a possibility that, with this fresh morning wind, a new fire might spring up from the ashes of the old and place an impassable barrier between them and the water.

When this thought came to them, as it must, they involuntarily quickened their pace. The impulse was to make one wild dash for the lake. But they knew that it would be nothing short of madness. They must go slowly and carefully, enduring the torture with what fortitude they could.

The story which the Bishop had heard from the lips of the dying man had stirred him profoundly. He now knew definitely, what yesterday he had suspected, that men had been sent into the hills by the railroad people to set fire to the forests, thereby driving the people out of that part of the country which the railroad wished to possess. He was moved to anger by the knowledge, but he knew that he must try to drive that knowledge back into the deepest recess of his mind; must try to hide it even from himself, lest in some unguarded moment, some time of stress and mental conflict, he should by word or look, by a gesture or even by an omission, reveal even his consciousness of that knowledge. Now he knew that the situation which last night he had thought to meet in French Village would almost certainly confront him there this morning, if indeed he ever succeeded in reaching there. And he must be doubly on his guard lest the things which he might learn to-day should in his mind confuse themselves with what he had last night learned under the seal of the confessional.

Through all the night Ruth Lansing had been hearing the words of that last cry of the dying man. She did not know how near they came to her. She did not know that Jeffrey Whiting had stood with his gun levelled upon the man whom Gadbeau had killed. But, try as she would to keep back the knowledge which she knew she must never under any circumstances reveal, those words came ringing upon her ears. And she knew that the secret would haunt her and taunt her always.

As they came over the last of the ridges, the grey waste of the country sloping from all sides to the lake lay open before them. There was not a ruin, not a standing stick to show them where little French Village had once stood along the lake. The fire had gone completely around the lake to the very water edge and a back draught had drawn it up in a circle around the east slope. There it had burned itself out along the forest line of the higher hills. It had gone on toward the west, burning its way down to the settled farm lands. But there would be no more fire in this region.

"Would the people make their way down the river," the Bishop asked; "or did they escape back into the higher hills?"

"I don't think they did either," Ruth answered as she scanned the lake sharply. "There is something out there in the middle of the lake, and I wouldn't be surprised if they made rafts out of the logs and went through the fire that way. They'd be better off than we were, and that way they could save some things. If they had run away they would have had to drop everything."

The horses, sniffing the moist air from the lake, pricked up their ears and started briskly down the slope. It was soon plain that Ruth was right in her conjecture. They could now make out five or six large rafts which the people had evidently thrown together out of the logs that had been lying in the lake awaiting their turn at the sawmill. These were crowded with people, standing as they must have stood all through the night; and now the freshening wind, aided by such help as the people could give it with boards and poles, was moving all slowly toward the shore where their homes had been.

The heart of the Shepherd was very low as he rode fetlock deep through the ashes of what had been the street of a happy little village and watched his people coming sadly back to land. There was nothing for them to come back to. They might as well have gone to the other side of the lake to begin life again. But they would inevitably, with that dumb loyalty to places, which people share with birds, come back and begin their nests over again.

For nearly an hour they stood on the little beach, letting the horses drink a little now and then, and watching the approach of the rafts. When they came to the shallow water, men and boys jumped yelling from the rafts and came wading ashore. In a few moments the rafts were emptied of all except the very aged or the crippled who must be carried off.

They crowded around the grimy, unrecognisable Bishop and the girl with wonder and a little superstition, for it was plain that these two people must have come straight through the fire. But when Father Ponfret came running forward and knelt at the Bishop's feet, a great glad cry of wondering recognition went up from all the French people. It was their Bishop! He who spoke the French of the most astonishing! His coming was a sign! A deliverance! They had come through horrors. Now all was well! The good God had hidden His face through the long night. Now, in the morning He had sent His messenger to say that all was well!

Laughing and crying in the quick surcharge of spirits that makes their race what it is, they threw themselves on their knees begging his blessing. The Bishop bared his head and raised his hand slowly. He was infinitely humbled by the quick, spontaneous outburst of their faith. He had done nothing for them; could do nothing for them. They were homeless, pitiable, without a hope or a stick of shelter. Yet it had needed but the sight of his face to bring out their cheery unbounded confidence that God was good, that the world was right again.

The other people, the hill people of the Bishop's own blood and race, stood apart. They did not understand the scene. They were not a kind of people that could weep and laugh at once. But they were not unmoved. For years they had heard of the White Horse Chaplain. Some two or three old men of them saw him now through a mist of memory and battle smoke riding a mad horse across a field. They knew that this was the man. That he should appear out of the fire after the nightmare through which they had passed was not so much incredible as it was a part of the strange things that they had always half believed about him.

Then rose the swift, shrill cackle of tongues around the Bishop. Father Ponfret, a quick, eager little man of his people, would drag the Bishop's story from him by very force. Had he dropped from Heaven? How had he come to be in the hills? Had a miracle saved him from the fire?

The Bishop told the tale simply, accenting the folly of his own imprudence, and how he had been saved from the consequences of it by the quickness and wisdom of the young girl. Father Ponfret translated freely and with a fine flourish. Then the Bishop told of the coming of Rafe Gadbeau and how the man had died with the Sacrament. They nodded their heads in silence. There was nothing to be said. They knew who the man was. He had done wickedly. But the good God had stretched out the wing of His great Church over him at the last. Why say more? God was good. No?

Ruth Lansing went among her own hill people, grouped on the outskirts of the crowd that pressed around the Bishop, answering their eager questions and asking questions of her own. There was just one question that she wanted to ask, but something kept it back from her lips. There was no reason at all why she should not ask them about Jeffrey Whiting. Some of them must at least have heard news of him, must know in what direction he had gone to fight the fire. But some unnamed dread seemed to take possession of her so that she dared not put her crying question into words.

Some one at her elbow, who had heard what the French people were saying, asked:

"You're sure that was Gadbeau that crawled out of the fire and died, Miss Lansing?"

"Yes. I knew him well, of course. It was Gadbeau, certainly," Ruth answered without looking up.

Then a tall young fellow in front of her said:

"Then that's two of 'em done for. That was Gadbeau. And Jeff Whiting shot Rogers."

"He did not!" Ruth blazed up in the young man's face. "Jeffrey Whiting did *not* shoot Rogers! Rafe--!"

The horror of the thing she had been about to do rushed upon her and blinded her. The blood came rushing up into her throat and brain, choking her, stunning her, so that she gasped and staggered. The young man, Perry Waite, caught her by the arm as she seemed about to fall. She struggled a moment for control of herself, then managed to gasp:

"It's nothing-- Let me go."

Perry Waite looked sharply into her face. Then he took his hand from her arm.

Trembling and horror-stricken, Ruth slipped away and crowded herself in among the people who stood around the Bishop. Here no one would be likely to speak to her. And here, too, she felt a certain relief, a sense of security, in being surrounded by people who would understand. Even though they knew nothing of her secret, yet the mere feeling that she stood among those who could have understood gave her strength and a feeling of safety even against herself which she could not have had among her own kind.

But she was not long left with her feeling of security. A wan, grey-faced girl with burning eyes caught Ruth fiercely by the arm and drew her out of the crowd. It was Cynthe Cardinal, though Ruth found it difficult to recognise in her the red-cheeked, sprightly French girl she had met in the early summer.

"You saw Rafe Gadbeau die," the girl said roughly, as she faced Ruth sharply at a little distance from the crowd. "You were there, close? No?"

"Yes, the fire was all around," Ruth answered, quaking.

"How did he die? Tell me. How?"

"Why--why, he died quickly, in the Bishop's arms."

"I know. Yes. But how? He *confessed*?"

"He--he went to confession, you mean. Yes, I think so."

But the girl was not to be evaded in that way.

"I know that," she persisted. "I heard M'sieur the Bishop. But did he *confess*--about Rogers?"

"Why, Cynthe, you must be crazy. You know I didn't hear anything. I couldn't--"

"He didn't say nothing, except in confession?" the girl questioned swiftly.

"Nothing at all," Ruth answered, relieved.

"And you heard?" the girl returned shrewdly.

"Why, Cynthe, I heard nothing. You know that."

"I know you are lying," Cynthe said slowly. "That is right. But I do not know. Will you always be able to lie? I do not know. You are Catholic, yes. But you are new. You are not like one of us. Sometime you will forget. It is not bred in the bone of you as it is bred in us. Sometime when you are not thinking some one will ask you a question and you will start and your tongue will slip, or you will be silent--and that will be just as bad."

Ruth stood looking down at the ground. She dared not speak, did not even raise her eyes, for any assurance of silence or even a reassuring look to the girl would be an admission that she must not make.

"Swear it in your heart! Swear that you did not hear a word! You cannot speak to me. But swear it to your soul," said the girl in a low, tense whisper; "swear that you will never, sleeping or waking, laughing or crying, in joy or in sorrow, let woman or man know that you heard. Swear it. And while you swear, remember." She drew Ruth close to her and almost hissed into her ear:

"Remember-- You love Jeffrey Whiting!"

She dropped Ruth's arm and turned quickly away.

Ruth stood there trembling weakly, her mind lost in a whirl of fright and bewilderment. She did not know where to turn. She could not grapple with the racing thoughts that went hurtling through her mind.

This girl had loved Rafe Gadbeau. She was half crazed with her love and her grief. And she was determined to protect his name from the dark blot of murder. With the uncanny insight that is sometimes given to those beside themselves with some great grief or strain, the girl had seen Ruth's terrible secret bare in its hiding place and had plucked it out before Ruth's very eyes.

The awful, the unbelievable thing had happened, thought Ruth. She had broken the seal of the confessional! She had been entrusted with the most terrible secret that a man could have to tell, under the most awful bond that God could put upon a secret. And the secret had escaped her!

She had said no word at all. But, just as surely as if she had repeated the cry of the dying man in the night, Ruth knew that the other girl had taken her secret from her.

And with that same uncanny insight, too, the girl had looked into the future and had shown Ruth what a burden the secret was to be to her. Nay, what a burden it was already becoming. For already she was afraid to speak to any one, afraid to go near any person that she had ever known.

And that girl had stripped bare another of Ruth's secrets, one that had been hidden even from herself. She had said:

"Remember-- You love Jeffrey Whiting."

In ways, she had always loved him. But she now realised that she had never known what love was. Now she knew. She had seen it flame up in the eyes of the half mad French girl, ready to clutch and tear for the dead name of the man whom she had loved. Now Ruth knew what it was, and it came burning up in her heart to protect the dear name of her own beloved one, her man. Already men were putting the brand of Cain upon him! Already the word was running from mouth to mouth over the hills-- The word of blood! And with it ran the name of her love! Jeffrey, the boy she had loved since always, the man she would love forever!

He would hear it from other mouths. But, oh! the cruel, unbearable taunt was that only two days ago he had heard it first from her own lips! Why? Why? How? How had she ever said such a thing? Ever thought of such a thing?

But she could not speak as the French girl had spoken for her man. She could not swear the mouths to silence. She could not cry out the bursting, torturing truth that alone would close those mouths. No, not even to Jeffrey himself could she ever by word, or even by the faintest whisper, or even by a look, show that she knew more than his and other living mouths could tell her! Never would she be able to look into his eyes and say:

I *know* you did not do it.

Only in her most secret heart of hearts could she be glad that she knew. And even that knowledge was the sacred property of the dead man. It was not hers. She must try to keep it out of her mind. Love, horror, and the awful weight of God's seal pressed in upon her to crush her.

There was no way to turn, no step to take. She could not meet them, could not cope with them.

Stumbling blindly, she crept out of the crowd and down to where Brom Bones stood by the lake. There the kindly French women found her, her face buried in the colt's mane, crying hysterically. They bathed her hands and face and soothed her, and when she was a little quieted they gave her drink and food. And Ruth, reviving, and knowing that she would need strength above all things, took what was given and silently faced the galling weight of the burden that was hers.

The Bishop had taken quick charge of the whole situation. The first thing to be decided was whether the people should try to hold out where they were or should attempt at once to walk out to the villages on the north or west. To the west it would mean forty miles of walking over ashes with hardly any way of carrying water. To the north it would mean a longer walk, but they could follow the river and have water at hand. The danger in that direction was that they might come into the path of a new fire that would cut them off from all help.

Even if they did come out safe to the villages, what would they do there? They would be scattered, penniless, homeless. There was nothing left for them here but the places where their homes had been, but at least they would be together. The cataclysm through which they had all passed, which had brought the prosperous and the poverty-stricken alike to the common level of just a few meals away from starvation, would here bind them together and give them a common strength for a new grip on life. If there was food enough to carry them over the four or five days that would be required to get supplies up from Lowville or from the head of the new railroad, then they should stay here.

The Bishop went swiftly among them, where already mothers were drawing family groups aside and parcelling out the doles of food. Already these mothers were erecting the invisible roof-tree and drawing around them and theirs the circle of the hearth, even though it was a circle drawn only in hot, drifting ashes. The Bishop was an inquisitor kindly of eye and understanding of heart, but by no means to be evaded. Unsuspected stores of bread and beans and tinned meats came forth from nondescript bundles of clothing and were laid under his eye. It appeared that Arsene LaComb had stayed in his little provision store until the last moment portioning out what was his with even hand, to each one as much as could be carried. The Bishop saw that it was all pitifully little for those who had lived in the village and for those refugees who had been driven in from the surrounding hills. But, he thought, it would do. These were people born to frugality, inured to scanty living.

The thing now was to give them work for their hands, to put something before them that was to be accomplished. For even in the ruin of all things it is not well for men to sit down in the ashes and merely wait. They had no tools left but the axes which they had carried in their hands to the rafts, but with these they could hew some sort of shelter out of the loose logs in the lake. A rough shack of any kind would cover at least the weaker ones until lumber could be brought up or until a saw could be had for the ruined mill at the outlet of the lake. It would be slow work and hard and a makeshift at the best. But it would put heart into them to see at least something, anything, begin to rise from the hopeless level of the ashes.

Three of the hill men had managed to keep their horses by holding desperately to them all through the day before and swimming and wading them through the night in the lake. These the Bishop despatched to what, as near as he could judge, were the nearest points from which messages could be gotten to the world outside the burnt district. They bore orders to dealers in the nearest towns for all the things that were immediately necessary for the life and rebuilding of the little village. With the orders went the notes of hand of all the men gathered here who had had a standing of credit or whose names would mean anything to the dealers. And, since the world outside would well know that these men had now nothing that would make the notes worth while, each note bore the endorsement of the Bishop of Alden. For the Bishop knew that there was no time to wait for charity and its tardy relief. Credit, that intangible, indefinable thing that alone makes the life of the world go on, must be established at once. And it was characteristic of Joseph Winthrop that, in endorsing the notes of penniless, broken men, he did not feel that he was signing obligations upon himself and his diocese. He was simply writing down his gospel of his unbounded, unafraid faith in all true men. And it is a commentary upon that faith of his that he was never presented with a single one of the notes he signed that day.

All the day long men toiled with heart and will, dragging logs and driftwood from the lake and cutting, splitting, shaping planks and joists for a shanty, while the women picked burnt nails and spikes from the ruins of what had been their homes. So that when night came down over the hills there was an actual shelter over the heads of women and children. And the light spirited, sanguine people raised cheer after cheer as their imagination leaped ahead to the new French Village that would rise glorious out of the ashes of the old. Then Father Ponfret, catching their mood, raised for them the hymn to the Good Saint Anne. They were all men from below Beaupre and from far Chicothomi where the Good Saint holds the hearts of all. That hymn had never been out of their childhood hearing. They sang it now, old and young, good and bad, their eyes filling with the quick-welling tears, their hearts rising high in hope and love and confidence on the lilt of the air. Even the Bishop, whose singing voice approached a scandal and whose French has been spoken of before, joined in loud and unashamed.

Then mothers clucking softly to their offspring in the twilight brooded them in to shelter from the night damp of the lake, and men, sharing odd pieces and wisps of tobacco, lay down to talk and plan and dropped dead asleep with the hot pipes still clenched in their teeth.

Also, a bishop, a very tired, weary man, a very old man to-night, laid his head upon a saddle and

a folded blanket and considered the Mysteries of God and His world, as the beads slipped through his fingers and unfolded their story to him.

Two men were stumbling fearfully down through the ashes of the far slope to the lake. All day long they had lain on their faces in the grass just beyond the highest line of the fire. The fire had gone on past them leaving them safe. But behind them rose tier upon tier of barren rocks, and behind those lay a hundred miles nearly of unknown country. They could not go that way. They were not, in fact, fit for travel in any direction. For all the day before they had run, dodging like hunted rats, between a line of fire--of their own making--before them, and a line of armed men behind them. They had outrun the fire and gotten beyond its edge. They had outrun the men and escaped them. They were free of those two enemies. But a third enemy had run with them all through the day yesterday and had stayed with them through all the horror of last night and it had lain with them through all the blistering heat of to-day, thirst. Thirst, intolerable, scorching thirst, drying their bones, splitting their lips, bulging their eyes. And all day long, down there before their very eyes, taunting them, torturing them by its nearness, lay a lake cool and sweet and deep and wide. It was worse than the mirage of any desert, for they knew that it was real. It was not merely the illusion of the sense of sight. They could perhaps have stood the torture of one sense. But this lake came up to them through all their senses. They could feel the air from it cool upon their brows. The wind brought the smell of water up to taunt their nostrils. And, so near did it seem, they could even fancy that they heard the lapping of the little waves against the rocks. This last they knew was an illusion. But, for the matter of that, all might as well have been an illusion. Armed men, their enemies who had yesterday chased them with death in their hearts, were scattered around the shore of the lake, alert and watching for any one who might come out of the fringe of shrub and grass beyond the line of the burnt ground. No living thing could move down that bare and whitened hillside toward the lake without being marked by those armed men. And, for these two men, to be seen meant to die.

So they had lain all day on their faces and raved in their torture. Now when they saw the fires on the shore where French Village had been beginning to die down they were stumbling painfully and crazily down to the water.

They threw themselves down heavily in the burnt grass at the edge of the lake and drank greedily, feverishly until they could drink no more. Then they rolled back dizzily upon the grass and rested until they could return to drink. When they had fully slaked their thirst and rested to let the nausea of weakness pass from them they realised now that thirst was not the only thing in the world. It had taken up so much of their recent thought that they had forgotten everything else. Now a terrible and gnawing hunger came upon them and they knew that if they would live and travel--and they must travel--they would have to have food at once.

Over there at the end of the lake where the cooking fires had now died out there were men lying down to sleep with full stomachs. There was food over there, food in plenty, food to be had for the taking! Now it did not seem that thirst was so terrible, nor were armed men any great thing to be feared. Hunger was the only real enemy. Food was the one thing that they must have, before all else and in spite of all else. They would go over there and take the food in the face of all the world!

Brom Bones was hobbled down by the water side picking drowsily at a few wisps of half-burnt grass and sniffing discontentedly to himself. There was a great deal wrong with the world. He had not, it seemed, seen a spear of fresh grass for an age. And as for oats, he did not remember when he had had any. It was true that Ruth had dug up some baked potatoes out of a field for him and he had been glad to eat them, but--Fresh grass! Or oats!

Just then he felt a strange hand slipping his hobbles. It was nothing to be alarmed at, of course. But he did not like strange hands around him. He let fly a swift kick into the dark, and thought no more of the matter.

A few moments later a man went running softly toward the horse. He carried a bundle of tinned meats and preserves slung in a coat. At peril of his life he had crept up and stolen them from the common pile that was stacked up at the very door of the shanty where the women and children slept. As he came running he grabbed for Brom Bones' bridle and tried to launch himself across the colt's back. In his leap a can of meat fell and a sharp corner of it struck and cut deep into Brom Bones' hock. The colt squealed and leaped aside.

A man sprang up from the side of a fire, gripping a rifle and kicking the embers into a blaze. He saw the man struggling with the horse and fired. The colt with one unearthly scream of terror leaped and plunged head down towards the water, shot dead through his stout, faithful heart.

In a moment twenty men were running into the dark, shouting and shooting at everything that seemed to move, while the women and children screamed and wailed their fright within the little building.

The two men running with the food for which they had been willing to give their lives dropped flat on the ground unhurt. The pursuing men running wildly stumbled over them. They were quickly secured and hustled and kicked to their feet and brought back to the fire.

They must die. And they must die now. They were in the hands of men whose homes they had burned, whose dear ones they had menaced with the most terrible of deaths; men who for thirty-six hours now had been thirsting to kill them. The hour had come.

"Take them down to the gully. Build a fire and dig their graves." Old Erskine Beasley spoke the sentence.

A short, sharp cry of satisfaction was the answer. A cry that suggested the snapping of jaws let loose upon the prey.

Then Joseph Winthrop stood in the very midst of the crowd, laying hands upon the two cowering men, and spoke. A moment before he had caught his heart saying: This is justice, let it be done. But he had cried to God against the sin that had whispered at his heart, and he spoke now calmly, as one assured.

"Do we do wisely, men?" he questioned. "These men are guilty. We know that, for you saw them almost in the act. The sentence is just, for they planned what might have been death for you and yours. But shall only these two be punished? Are there not others? And if we silence these two now forever, how shall we be ever able to find the others?"

"We'll be sure of these two," said a sullen voice in the crowd.

"True," returned the Bishop, raising his voice. "But I tell you there are others greater than any of these who have come into the hills risking their lives. How shall we find and punish those other greater ones? And I tell you further there is one, for it is always one in the end. I tell you there is one man walking the world to-night without a thought of danger or disgrace from whose single mind came all this trouble upon us. That one man we must find. And I pledge you, my friends and my neighbours," he went on raising his hand, "I pledge you that that one man will be found and that he will do right by you.

"Before these men die, bring a justice--there is one of the village--and let them confess before the world and to him on paper what they know of this crime and of those who commanded it."

A grudging silence was the only answer, but the Bishop had won for the time. Old Toussaint Derossier, the village justice, was brought forward, fumbling with his beloved wallet of papers, and made to sit upon an up-turned bucket with a slab across his knee and write in his long hand of the *rue Henri* the story that the men told.

They were ready to tell. They were eager to spin out every detail of all they knew for they felt that men stood around them impatient for the ending of the story, that they might go on with their task.

The Bishop knew that the real struggle was yet to come. He must save these men, not only because it was his duty as a citizen and a Christian and a priest, but because he foresaw that his friend, Jeffrey Whiting, might one day be accused of the killing of a certain man, and that these men might in that day be able to tell something of that story which he himself could but must not tell.

The temper of the crowd was perhaps running a little lower when the story of the men was finished. But the Bishop was by no means sure that he could hold them back from their purpose. Nevertheless he spoke simply and with a determination that was not to be mistaken. At the first move of the leaders of the hill men to carry out their intention, he said:

"My men, you shall not do this thing. Shall not, I say. Shall not. I will prevent. I will put this old body of mine between. You shall not move these men from this spot. And if they are shot, then the bullets must pass through me.

"You will call this thing justice. But you know in your hearts it is just one thing--Revenge."

"What business is it of yours?" came an angry voice out of the crowd.

"It is *not* my business," said the Bishop solemnly. "It is the business of God. Of your God. Of my God. Am I a meddling priest? Have I no right to speak God's name to you, because we do not believe all the same things? My business is with the souls of men--of all men. And never in my life have I so attended to my own business as I am doing this minute, when I say to you in the name of God, of the God of my fathers and your fathers, do not put this sin of murder upon your souls this night. Have you wives? Have you mothers? Have you sweethearts? Can you go back to them with blood upon your hands and say: A man warned us, but he had no *business*!

"Bind these men, I say. Hold them. Fear not. Justice shall be done. And you will see right in the end. As you believe in your God, oh! believe me now! You shall see right!"

The Bishop stopped. He had won. He saw it in the faces of the men about him. God had spoken to their hearts, he saw, even through his feeble and unthought words. He saw it and was glad.

He saw the men bound. Saw a guard put over them.

Then he went down near to the lake where a girl kneeling beside her dead pet wept wildly. The proud-standing, stout-hearted horse had done his noble part in saving the life of Joseph Winthrop, Bishop of Alden. But that Bishop of Alden, that mover of men, that man of powerful words, had now no word that he could dare to say in comfort to this grief.

He covered his face and turned, walking away through the ashes into the dark. And as he walked, fingering his beads, he again considered the things of God and His world.

"And, gentlemen of this jury, I propose to prove to your absolute satisfaction that this defendant, Jeffrey Whiting, did wilfully and with prepared design, murder Samuel Rogers on the morning of August twentieth last. I shall not only prove to you the existence of a long-standing hatred harboured by this defendant against the murdered man, but I will show to you a direct motive for the crime. And I shall not only prove circumstantially to you that he and no other could have done the deed but I shall also convict him out of the unwilling mouths of his friends and neighbours who were, to all intents and purposes, actual eye-witnesses of the crime."

In the red sandstone courthouse of Racquette County the District Attorney of the county was opening the case for the State against Jeffrey Whiting, charged with the murder of Samuel Rogers, who had died by the hand of Rafe Gadbeau that grim morning on the side of Bald Mountain.

From early morning the streets of Danton, the little county seat of Racquette County, had been filled with the wagons and horses of the hill people who had come down for this, the second day of the trial. Yesterday the jury had been selected. They were all men of the villages and of the one little city of Racquette County, men whose lives or property had never been endangered by forest fires. Judge Leslie in questioning them and in ruling their selection had made it plain that the circumstances surrounding the killing of the man Rogers must have no weight in their minds. They must be prepared to judge the guilt or innocence of the prisoner purely on the charge of murder itself, with no regard for what rumour might say the victim had been doing at the time.

For the prisoner, it seemed unfortunate that the man had been killed just a mile or so within the line of Racquette County. Only a little of the extreme southeastern corner of that county had been burned over in the recent fire and in general it had meant very little to these people. In Tupper County where Jeffrey Whiting had lived and which had suffered terribly from the fire it should have been nearly impossible to select a jury which would have been willing to convict the slayer of Rogers under the circumstances. But to the people of the villages of Racquette County the matter did not come home. They only knew that a man had been killed up the corner of the county. A forest fire had started at about the same time and place. But few people had any clear version of the story. And there seemed to be little doubt as to the identity of the slayer.

There was another and far more potent reason why it was unfortunate for Jeffrey Whiting that Samuel Rogers had died within the lines of Racquette County. The Judge who sat upon the bench was the same man who only a few weeks before had pleaded so unctuously before the Senate committee for the rights of the downtrodden U. & M. Railroad against the lawless people of the hills. He had given the District Attorney every possible assistance toward the selection of a jury who would be at least thoughtful of the interests of the railroad. For this was not merely a murder trial. It was the case of the people of the hills against the U. & M. Railroad.

Racquette County was a "railroad" county. The life of every one of its rising villages depended absolutely upon the good will of the railroad system that had spread itself beneficently over the county and that had given it a prosperity beyond that of any other county of the North. Racquette County owed a great deal to the railroad, and it was not in the disposition or the plans of the railroad to leave the county in a position where it might forget the debt. So the railroad saw to it that only men personally known to its officials should have public office in the county. It had put this judge upon this bench. And the railroad was no niggard to its servants. It paid him well for the very timely and valuable services which he was able to render it.

The grip which the railroad corporation had upon the life of Racquette County was so complex and varied that it extended to every money-making affair in the community. It was an intangible but impenetrable mesh of interests and influences that extended in every direction and crossed and intercrossed so that no man could tell where it ended. But all men could surely tell that these lines of influence ran from all ends of the county into the hand of the attorney for the railroad in Alden and that from his hand they passed on into the hands of the single great man in New York whose money and brain dominated the whole transportation business of the State. All men knew, too, that those lines passed through the Capitol at Albany and that no man there, from the Executive down to the youngest page in the legislative corridors, was entirely immune from their influence.

Now the U. & M. Railroad had been openly charged with having procured the setting of the fire that had left five hundred hill people homeless in Tupper and Adirondack Counties. It would, of course, be impossible to bring the railroad to trial on such a charge in any county of the State. The company had really nothing to fear in the way of criminal prosecution. But the matter had touched the temper and roused the suspicions of the great, headless body called the public. The railroad felt that it must not be silent under even a muttered and vague charge of such nature. It must strike first, and in a spectacular manner. It must divert the public mind by a counter charge.

Before the rain had come down to wet the ashes of the fire, the Grand Jury of Racquette County had been prepared to find an indictment against Jeffrey Whiting for the murder of Samuel Rogers. They had found that Samuel Rogers was an agent of the railroad engaged upon a peaceable and lawful journey through the hills in the interests of his company. He had been found shot through the back of the head and the circumstances surrounding his death were of such a nature and disposition as to warrant the finding of a bill against the young man who for

months had been leading a stubborn fight against the railroad.

The case had been advanced over all others on the calendar in Judge Leslie's court, for the railroad was determined to occupy the mind of the public with this case until the people should have had time to forget the sensation of the fire. The mind at the head of the railroad's affairs argued that the mind of the public could hold only one thing at a time. Therefore it was better to put this murder case into that mind and keep it there until some new thing should arise.

The celerity with which Jeffrey Whiting had been brought to trial; the well-oiled smoothness with which the machinery of the Grand Jury had done its work, and the efficient way in which judge and prosecuting attorney had worked together for the selection of what was patently a "railroad" jury, were all evidence that a strong and confident power was moving its forces to an assured and definite end. This judge and this jury would allow no confusion of circumstances to stand in the way of a clear-cut verdict. The fact that the man had been caught in the act of setting fire to the forests, if the Judge allowed it to appear in the record at all, would not stand with the jury as justification, or even extenuation of the deed of murder charged. The fate of the accused must hang solely on the question of fact, whether or not his hand had fired the fatal shot. No other question would be allowed to enter.

And on that question it seemed that the minds of all men were already made up. The prisoner's friends and associates in the hills had been at first loud in their commendation of the act which they had no doubt was his. Now, though they talked less and less, they still did not deny their belief. It was known that they had congratulated him on the very scene of the murder. What room was there in the mind of any one for doubt as to the actual facts of the killing? And since his conviction or acquittal must hinge on that single question, what room was there to hope for his acquittal?

The hill people had come down from their ruined homes, where they had been working night and day to put a roof over their families before the cold should come. They were bitter and sullen and nervous. They had no doubt whatever that Jeffrey Whiting had killed the man, and they had been forced to come down here to tell what they knew--every word of which would count against them. They had come down determined that he should not suffer for his act, which had been done, as it were, in the name of all of them. But the rapid certainty in which the machinery of the law moved on toward its sacrifice unnerved them. There was nothing for them to do, it seemed, but to sit there, idle and glum, waiting for the end.

Jeffrey Whiting sat listening stolidly to the opening arraignment by the District Attorney. He was not surprised by any of it. The chain of circumstances which had begun to wrap itself around him that morning on Bald Mountain had never for a moment relaxed its tightening hold upon him. He had followed his friends that day and all of that night and had reached Lowville early the next day. He had found his mother there safe and his aunt and even Cassius Bascom, but had been horrified to learn that Ruth Lansing had turned back into the face of the fire in an effort to find and bring back the Bishop of Alden. No word had been had of either of them. He had told his mother exactly what had happened in the hills. He had been ready to kill the man. He had wished to do so. But another had fired before he did. He had not, in fact, used his gun at all. She had believed him implicitly, of course. Why should she not? If he had actually shot the man he would have told her that just as exactly and truthfully. But Jeffrey was aware that she was the only person who did or would believe him.

He was just on the point of mounting one of his mother's horses, to go up into the lower hills in the hope of finding Ruth wandering somewhere, when he was placed under arrest for the murder of Rogers. The two men who had escaped down the line of the chain had gotten quickly to a telegraph line and had made their report. The railroad people had taken their decision and had acted on the instant. The warrant was ready and waiting for Jeffrey before he even reached Lowville.

When he had been taken out of his own county and brought before the Grand Jury in Racquette County, he realised that any hope he might have had for a trial on the moral merits of the case was thereby lost. Unless he could find and actually produce that other man, whoever he was, who had fired the shot, his own truthful story was useless. His own friends who had been there at hand would not believe his oath.

His mother and Ruth Lansing sat in court in the front seats just to the right of him. From time to time he turned to smile reassuringly at them with a confidence that he was far from feeling. His mother smiled back through glistening grey eyes, all the while marking with a twinge at her heart the great sharp lines that were cutting deep into the big boyish face of her son. Mostly she was thinking of the morning, just a few months ago when her little boy, suddenly and unaccountably grown to the size of a tall man, had been obliged to lift up her face to kiss her. He was going down into the big world, to conquer it and bring it home for her. With that boyish forgetfulness of everything but his own plans of conquest, which is at once the pride and the heart-stab of every mother with her man child, he had kissed her and told her the old, old lie that we all have told--that he would be back in a little while, that all would be the same again. And she had smiled up into his face and had compounded the lie with him.

Then in that very moment the man Rogers had come. And the mother heart in her was not gentle at the thought of him. He had come like a trail of evil across their lives, embittering the hearts of all of them. Never since she had seen him had she slept a good night. Never had she been able to drop asleep without a hard thought of him. Even now, the thought of him lying in an unhonoured grave among the ashes of the hills could not soften her heart toward him. The gentle, kindly heart of her was very near to hating even the dead as she thought of her boy

brought to this pass because of that man.

Ruth Lansing had come twice to the county jail in Danton with his mother to see Jeffrey. They had not been left alone, but she had clung to him and kissed him boldly as though by her right before all men. The first time he had watched her sharply, looking almost savagely to see her shrink away from him in pity and fear of his guilt, as he had seen men who had been his friends shrink away from him. But there had been not a shadow of that in Ruth, and his heart leaped now as he remembered how she had walked unafraid into his arms, looking him squarely and bravely in the eyes and crying to him to forget the foolish words that she had said to him that last day in the hills. In that pulsing moment Jeffrey had looked into her eyes and had seen there not the love of the little girl that he had known but the unbounded love and confidence of the woman who would give herself to him for life or death. He had seen it; the look of all the women of earth who love, whose feet go treading in tenderness and undying pity, whose hands are fashioned for the healing of torn hearts.

It was only when she had gone, and when he in the loneliness of his cell was reliving the hour, that he remembered that she had scarcely listened to his story of the morning in the hills. Of course, she had heard his story from his mother and was probably already so familiar with it that it had lost interest for her. But no, that was not like Ruth. She was always a direct little person, who wanted to know the exact how and why of everything first hand. She would not have been satisfied with anybody's telling of the matter but his own.

Then a horrible suspicion leaped into his mind and struck at his heart. Could it be that she had over-acted it all? Could it be that she had brushed aside his story because she really did not believe it and could not listen to it without betraying her doubt? And had she blinded him with her pity? Had she acted all--!

He threw himself down on his cot and writhed in blind despair. Might not even his mother have deceived him! Might not she too have been acting! What did he care now for name or liberty, or life itself! The girl had mocked him with what he thought was love, when it was only--!

But his good sense brought him back and set him on his feet. Ruth was no actress. And if she had been the greatest actress the world had ever seen she could not have acted that flooding love light into her eyes.

He threw back his head, laughing softly, and began to pace his cell rapidly. There was some other explanation. Either she had deliberately put his story aside in order to keep the whole of their little time together entirely to themselves, or Ruth knew something that made his story unimportant.

She had been through the fire herself. Both she and the Bishop must have gone straight through it from their home in its front line to the rear of it at French Village. How, no one could tell. Jeffrey had heard wild tales of the exploit-- The French people had made many wonders of the coming of these two to them in the hour of their deliverance, the one the Bishop of their souls, the other the young girl just baptised by Holy Church and but little differing from the angels.

Who could tell, thought Jeffrey, what the fire might have revealed to one or both of these two as they went through it. Perhaps there were other men who had not been accounted for. Then he remembered Rafe Gadbeau. He had been with Rogers. He had once waylaid Jeffrey at Rogers' command. Might it not be that the bullet which killed Rogers was intended for Jeffrey himself! He must have been almost in the line of that bullet, for Rogers had been facing him squarely and the bullet had struck Rogers fairly in the back of the head.

Or again, people had said that Rogers had possessed some sort of mysterious hold over Rafe Gadbeau, and that Gadbeau did his bidding unwillingly, under a pressure of fear. What if Gadbeau there under the excitement of the fire, and certain that another man would be charged with the killing, had decided that here was the time and place to rid himself of the man who had made him his slave!

The thing fascinated him, as was natural; and, pacing his cell, stopping between mouthfuls of his food as he sat at the jail table, sitting up in his cot in the middle of the night to think, Jeffrey caught at every scrap of theory and every thread of fact that would fit into the story as it must have happened. He wandered into many blind trails of theory and explanation, but, strange as it was, he at last came upon the truth--and stuck to it.

Gadbeau had killed Rogers. Gadbeau had been caught in the fire and had almost burned to death. He had managed to reach the place where Ruth and the Bishop had found refuge. He had died there in their presence. He had confessed. The Catholics always told the truth when they were going to die. Ruth and the Bishop had heard him. Ruth *knew*. The Bishop *knew*.

When Ruth came again, he watched her closely; and saw--just what he had expected to see. Ruth *knew*. It was not only her love and her confidence in him. She had none of the little whispering, torturing doubts that must sometimes, unbidden, rise to frighten even his mother. Ruth *knew*.

That she should not tell him, or give him any outward hint of what she was hiding in her mind, did not surprise him. It was a very serious matter this with Catholics. It was a sacred matter with anybody, to carry the secret of a dead man. Ruth would not speak unnecessarily of it. When the proper time came, and there was need, she would speak. For the present--Ruth *knew*. That was enough.

When the Bishop came down from Alden to see him, Jeffrey watched him as he had watched Ruth. He had never been very observant. He had never had more than a boy's careless

indifference and disregard of details in his way of looking at men and things. But much thinking in the dark had now given him intuitions that were now sharp and sensitive as those of a woman. He was quick to know that the grip of the Bishop's hand on his, the look of the Bishop's eye into his, were not those of a man who had been obliged to fight against doubts in order to keep his faith in him. That grip and that look were not those of a man who wished to believe, who tried to believe, who told himself and was obliged to keep on telling himself that he believed in spite of all. No. Those were the grip and the look of a man who *knew*. The Bishop *knew*.

It was even easier to understand the Bishop's silence than it had been to see why Ruth might not speak of what she knew. The Bishop was an official in a high place, entrusted with a dark secret. He must not speak of such things without a very serious cause. But, of course, there was nothing in this world so sacred as the life of an innocent man. Of course, when the time and the need came, the Bishop would speak.

So Jeffrey had pieced together his fragments of fact and deduction. So he had watched and discovered and reasoned and debated with himself. He had not, of course, said a word of these things to any one. The result was that, while he listened to the plans which his lawyer, young Emmet Dardis, laid for his defence--plans which, in the face of the incontestable facts which would be brought against them, would certainly amount to little or nothing--he really paid little attention to them. For, out of his reasoning and out of the things his heart felt, he had built up around himself an inner citadel, as it were, of defence which no attack could shake. He had come to feel, had made himself feel, that his life and his name were absolutely safe in the keeping of these two people--the one a girl who loved him and who would give her life for him, and the other a true friend, a man of God, a true man. He had nothing to fear. When the time came these two would speak. It was true that he was outwardly depressed by the concise and bitter conviction in the words of the prosecuting attorney. For Lemuel Squires was of the character that makes the most terrible of criminal prosecutors--an honest, narrow man who was always absolutely convinced of the guilt of the accused from the moment that a charge had been made. But inwardly he had no fear.

The weight of evidence that would be brought against him, the fact that his own best friends would be obliged to give their oaths against him, the very feeling of being accused and of having to scheme and plan to prove his innocence to a world that--except here and there--cared not a whit whether he was innocent or guilty, all these things bowed his head and brought his eyes down to the floor. But they could not touch that inner wall that he had built around himself. Ruth *knew*; the Bishop *knew*.

The rasping speech of the prosecutor was finished at last.

Old Erskine Beasley was the first witness called.

The prosecuting attorney took him sharply in hand at once for though he had been called as a witness for the prosecution it was well known that he was unwilling to testify at all. So the attorney had made no attempt to school him beforehand, and he was determined now to allow him to give only direct answers to the questions put to him.

Two or three times the old man attempted to explain, at the end of an answer, just why he had gone up into the high hills the night before the twentieth of August--that he had heard that Rogers and a band of men had gone into the woods to start fires. But he was ordered to stop, and these parts of his answers were kept out of the record. Finally he was rebuked savagely by the Judge and ordered to confine himself to answering the lawyer's questions, on pain of being arrested for contempt. It was a high-handed proceeding that showed the temper and the intention of the Judge and a stir of protest ran around the courtroom. But old Erskine Beasley was quelled. He gave only the answers that the prosecutor forced from him.

"Did you hear a shot fired?" he was asked.

"Yes."

"Did you hear two shots fired?"

"No."

"Did you see Jeffrey Whiting's gun?"

"Yes."

"Did you examine it?"

"Yes."

"Had it been fired off?"

"Yes."

"Excused," snapped the prosecutor. And the old man, almost in tears, came down from the stand. He knew that his simple yes and no answers had made the most damaging sort of evidence.

Then the prosecutor went back in the story to establish a motive. He called several witnesses who had been agents of the railroad and associated in one way or another with the murdered man in his efforts to get options on the farm lands in the hills. Even these witnesses, though they were ready to give details and opinions which might have been favorable to his side of the case, he held down strictly to answering with a word his own carefully thought out questions.

With these answers the prosecutor built up a solid continuity of cause and effect from the day when Rogers had first come into the hills to offer Jeffrey Whiting a part in the work with himself right up to the moment when the two had faced each other that morning on Bald Mountain.

He showed that Jeffrey Whiting had begun to undermine and oppose Rogers' work from the first. He showed why. Jeffrey Whiting came of a family well known and trusted in the hills. The young man had been quick to grasp the situation and to believe that he could keep the people from dealing at all with Rogers. Rogers' work would then be a failure. Jeffrey Whiting would then be pointed to as the only man who could get the options from the people. They would sell or hold out at his word. The railroad would have to deal with him direct, and at his terms.

Jeffrey Whiting had gotten promises from many of the owners that they would not sell or even sign any paper until such time as he gave them the word. Did those promises bind the people to him? They did. Did they have the same effect as if Jeffrey Whiting had obtained actual options on the property? Yes. Would the people stand by their promises? Yes. Then Whiting had actually been obtaining what were really options to himself, while pretending to hold the people back in their own interest? Yes.

The prosecutor went on to draw out answer after answer tending to show that it was not really a conflict between the people and the railroad that had been making trouble in the hills all summer; that it was, in fact, merely a personal struggle for influence and gain between Jeffrey Whiting and the man who had been killed. It was skilfully done and drawn out with all the exaggerated effect of truth which bald negative and affirmative answers invariably carry.

He went on to show that a bitter hatred had grown up between the two men. Rogers had been accused of hiring men to get Whiting out of the way at a time in the early summer when many of the people about French Village had been prepared to sign Rogers' options. Rogers had been obliged to fly from the neighbourhood on account of Whiting's anger. He had not returned to the hills until the day before he was killed.

The people in the hills had talked freely of what had happened on Bald Mountain on the morning of August twentieth and in the hills during the afternoon and night preceding. The prosecutor knew the incidents and knew what men had said to each other. He now called Myron Stocking.

"Did you meet Jeffrey Whiting on the afternoon of August nineteenth?" was the question.

"I went lookin' for him, to tell--"

"Answer, yes or no?" shouted the attorney.

"Yes," the witness admitted sullenly.

"Did you tell him that Rogers was in the hills?"

"Yes."

"Did he take his gun from you and start immediately?"

"He followed me," the witness began. But the Judge rapped warningly and the attorney yelled:

"Yes or no?"

"Yes."

"Did you see Rogers in the morning?"

"Yes, he was settin' fire to--" The Judge hammering furiously with his gavel drowned his words. The attorney went on:

"Did you hear a shot?"

"Yes."

"Did you hear two shots?"

"The fire"--was making a lot of noise, he tried to say. But his voice was smothered by eruptions from the court and the attorney. He was finally obliged to say that he had heard but one shot. Then he was asked:

"What did you say when you came up and saw the dead man?"

"I said, 'Mine got away, Jeff.'"

"What else did you say?"

"I said, 'What's the difference, any of us would've done it if we had the chance.'"

"Whiting's gun had been fired?" asked the attorney, working back.

"Yes."

"One question more and I will excuse you," said the attorney, with a show of friendliness--"I see it is hard for you to testify against your friend. Did you, standing there with the facts fresh before you, conclude that Jeffrey Whiting had fired the shot which killed Rogers?"

To this Emmet Dardis vigorously objected that it was not proper, that the answer would not be evidence. But the Judge overruled him sharply, reminding him that this witness had been called by the prosecution, that it was not the business of opposing counsel to protect him. The witness found himself forced to answer a simple yes.

One by one the other men who had been present that fatal morning were called. Their answers

were identical, and as each one was forced to give his yes to that last fateful question, condemning Jeffrey Whiting out of the mouths of his friends who had stood on the very ground of the murder, it seemed that every avenue of hope for him was closing.

On cross-examination, Emmet Dardis could do little with the witnesses. He was gruffly reminded by the Judge that the witnesses were not his, that he must not attempt to draw any fresh stories from them, that he might only examine them on the facts which they had stated to the District Attorney. And as the prosecutor had pinned his witnesses down absolutely to answers of known fact, there was really nothing in their testimony that could be attacked.

With a feeling of uselessness and defeat, Emmet Dardis let the last witness go. The State promptly rested its case.

Dardis began calling his witnesses. He realised how pitifully inadequate their testimony would be when placed beside the chain of facts which the District Attorney had pieced together. They were in the main character witnesses, hardly more. They could tell only of their long acquaintance with Jeffrey Whiting, of their belief in him, of their firm faith that in holding the people back from giving the options to Rogers and the railroad he had been acting in absolute good faith and purely in the interests of the people. Not one of these men had been near the scene of the murder, for the railroad had planned its campaign comprehensively and had subpoenaed for its side every man who could have had any direct knowledge of the events leading up to the tragedy. As line after line of their testimony was stricken from the record, as being irrelevant, it was seen that the defence had little or no case. Finally the Judge, tiring of ruling on the single objections, made a general ruling that no testimony which did not tend to reveal the identity of the man who had shot Rogers could go into the record.

Bishop Joseph Winthrop of Alden sat anxiously watching the course of the trial. Beside him sat little Father Ponfret from French Village. The little French priest looked up from time to time and guardedly studied the long angular white head of his bishop as it towered above him. He did not know, but he could guess some of the struggle that was going on in the mind and the heart of the Bishop.

The Bishop had come down to the trial to give what aid he could, in the way of showing his confidence and faith, to the case of the boy who stood in peril of his life. In the beginning, when he had first heard of Jeffrey's arrest, he had not thought it possible that, even had he been guilty of actually firing the shot, Jeffrey could be convicted under such circumstances. Men must see that the act was in defence of life and property. But as he listened to the progress of the trial he realised sadly that he had very much underestimated the seriousness of the railroad people in the matter and the hold which they had upon the machinery of justice in Racquette County.

He had gladly offered to go upon the stand and tell the reason why Jeffrey Whiting had entered into this fight against the railroad. He would associate himself and his own good name with the things that Jeffrey Whiting had done, so that the two might stand before men together. But he now saw that it would be of no avail. His words would be swept aside as irrelevant.

One thing and only one thing would now avail Jeffrey Whiting. This morning on his arrival in Danton, the Bishop had been angered at learning that the two men whose lives he had saved that night by the lake at French Village had escaped from the train as they were being brought from Lowville to Danton to testify at this trial.

Whether they could have told anything of value to Jeffrey Whiting was not known. Certainly they were now gone, and, almost surely, by the connivance of the railroad people. The Bishop had their confession in his pocket at this minute, but there was nothing in it concerning the murder. He had intended to read it into the record of the trial. He saw that he would not be allowed to do so.

One thing and only one thing would now avail Jeffrey Whiting. Jeffrey Whiting would be condemned to death, unless, within the hour, a man or woman should rise up in this room and swear: Jeffrey Whiting did not kill Samuel Rogers. Rafe Gadbeau did the deed. I saw him. Or-- He told me so.

The Bishop remembered how that day last winter he had set the boy upon this course which had brought him here into this court and into the shadow of public disgrace and death. If Jeffrey Whiting had actually fired the shot that had cut off a human life, would not he, Joseph, Bishop of Alden, have shared a measure of the responsibility? He would.

And if Jeffrey Whiting, through no fault of his own, but through a chain of circumstances, stood now in danger of death, was not he, Joseph Winthrop, who had started the boy into the midst of these circumstances, in a way responsible? He was.

Could Joseph Winthrop by rising up in this court and saying: "Rafe Gadbeau killed Samuel Rogers--He told me so"--could he thus save Jeffrey Whiting from a felon's fate? He could. Nine words, no more, would do.

And if he could so save Jeffrey Whiting and did not do what was necessary--did not speak those nine words--would he, Joseph Winthrop, be responsible for the death or at least the imprisonment and ruin of Jeffrey Whiting? He would.

Then what would Joseph Winthrop do? Would he speak those nine words? He would not.

There was no claim of life or death that had the force to break the seal and let those nine words escape his lips.

There was no conflict, no battle, no indecision in the Bishop's mind as he sat there waiting for

his name to be called. He loved the boy who sat there in the prisoner's stand before him. He felt responsible for him and the situation in which he was. He cared nothing for the dead man or the dead man's secret, as such. Yet he would go up there and defy the law of humanity and the law of men, because he was bound by the law that is beyond all other law; the law of the eternal salvation of men's souls.

But there was no reasoning, no weighing of the issue in his mind. His course was fixed by the eternal Institution of God. There was nothing to be determined, nothing to be argued. He was caught between the greater and the lesser law and he could only stand and be ground between the working of the two.

If he had reasoned he would have said that Almighty God had ordained the salvation of men through the confession of sin. Therefore the salvation of men depended on the inviolability of the seal of the confessional. But he did not reason. He merely sat through his torture, waiting.

When his name was called, he walked heavily forward and took his place standing beside the chair that was set for him.

At Dardis' question, the Bishop began to speak freely and rapidly. He told of the coming of Jeffrey Whiting to him for advice. He repeated what he had said to the boy, and from that point went on to sketch the things that had been happening in the hills. He wanted to get clearly before the minds of the jurymen the fact that he had advised and directed Jeffrey Whiting in everything that the boy had done.

The Judge was loath to show any open discourtesy to the Bishop. But he saw that he must stop him. His story could not but have a powerful effect upon even this jury. Looking past the Bishop and addressing Dardis, he said:

"Is this testimony pertinent?"

"It is, if Your Honor pardon me," said the Bishop, turning quickly. "It goes to prove that Jeffrey Whiting could not have committed the crime charged, any more than I could have done so."

The Bishop did not stop to consider carefully the logic or the legal phraseology of his answer. He hurried on with his story to the jury. He related his message from Albany to Jeffrey Whiting. He told of his ride into the hills. He told of the capture of the two men in the night at French Village. They should be here now as witnesses. They had escaped. But he held in his hand a written confession, written and sealed by a justice of the peace, made by the two men. He would read this to the jury.

He began reading rapidly. But before he had gotten much past the opening sentences, the Judge saw that this would not do. It was the story of the plan to set the fire, and it must not be read in court.

He rapped sharply with his gavel, and when the Bishop stopped, he asked:

"Is the murder of Samuel Rogers mentioned in that paper?"

"No, Your Honor. But there are--"

"It is irrelevant," interrupted the Judge shortly. "It cannot go before the jury."

The Bishop was beaten; he knew he could do no more.

Emmet Dardis was desperate. There was not the slightest hope for his client--unless--unless. He knew that Rafe Gadbeau had made confession to the Bishop. He had wanted to ask the Bishop this morning, if there was not some way. He had not dared. Now he dared. The Bishop stood waiting for his further questions. There might be some way or some help, thought Dardis; maybe some word had dropped which was not a part of the real confession. He said quickly:

"You were with Rafe Gadbeau at his death?"

"I was."

"What did he say to you?"

Jeffrey Whiting leaned forward in his chair, his eyes eager and confident. His heart shouting that here was his deliverance. Here was the hour and the need! The Bishop would speak!

The Bishop's eyes fell upon the prisoner for an instant. Then he looked full into the eyes of his questioner and he answered:

"Nothing."

"That will do. Thank you, Bishop," said Dardis in a low, broken voice.

Jeffrey Whiting fell back in his chair. The light of confidence died slowly, reluctantly out of his eyes. The Bishop had spoken. The Bishop had *lied!* He *knew!* And he had *lied!*

As the Bishop walked slowly back to his seat, Ruth Lansing saw the terrible suffering of the spirit reflected in his face. If she were questioned about that night, she must do as he had done.

Mother in Heaven, she prayed in agony, must I do that? *Can* I do that?

Oh! She had never thought it would come to this. How *could* it happen like this! How could any one think that she would ever stand like this, alone in all the world, with the fate of her love in her hands, and not be able to speak the few little words that would save him to her and life!

She *would* save him! She *would* speak the words! What did she care for that wicked man who had died yelling out that he was a murderer? Why should she keep a secret of his? One night in

the early summer she had lain all through the night in the woods outside a cabin and wished for a way to kill that man. Why should she guard a secret that was no good to him or to any one now?

Who was it that said she must not speak? The Catholic Church. Then she would be a Catholic no longer. She would renounce it this minute. She had never promised anything like this. But, on the instant, she knew that that would not free her. She knew that she could throw off the outward garment of the Church, but still she would not be free to speak the words. The Church itself could not free her from the seal of the secret. What use, then, to fly from the Church, to throw off the Church, when the bands of silence would still lie mighty and unbreakable across her lips.

That awful night on the Gaunt Rocks flamed up before her, and what she saw held her.

What she saw was not merely a church giving a sacrament. It was not the dramatic falling of a penitent at the feet of a priest. It was not a poor Frenchman of the hills screaming out his crime in the agony and fear of death.

What she saw was a world, herself standing all alone in it. What she saw was the soul of the world giving up its sin into the scale of God from which--Heart break or world burn!--that sin must never be disturbed.

As she went slowly across the front of the room in answer to her name, a girl came out of one of the aisles and stood almost in her path. Ruth looked up and found herself staring dully into the fierce, piercing eyes of Cynthe Cardinal. She saw the look in those eyes which she had recognised for the first time that day at French Village--the terrible mother-hunger look of love, ready to die for its own. And though the girl said nothing, Ruth could hear the warning words: Remember! You love Jeffrey Whiting.

How well that girl knew!

Dardis had called Ruth only to contradict a point which he had not been able to correct in the testimony of Myron Stocking. But since he had dared to bring up the matter of Rafe Gadbeau to the Bishop, he had become more desperate, and bolder. Ruth might speak. And there was always a chance that the dying man had said something to her.

"You were with Jeffrey Whiting on the afternoon when word was brought to him that suspicious men had been seen in the hills?" he asked.

"Yes, sir."

"Was the name of Rogers mentioned by either Stocking or Whiting?"

"No, sir."

Then he flashed the question upon her:

"What did Rafe Gadbeau say when he was dying?"

Ruth staggered, quivering in every nerve. The impact of the sudden, startling question leaping upon her over-wrought mind was nothing to what followed. For, in answer to the question, there came a scream, a terrified, agonised scream, mingled of fright and remorse and--relief. A scream out of the fire. A scream from death. *On my knee I dropped and shot him, shot Rogers as he stood.*

Again Jeffrey Whiting leaned forward smiling. Again the inner citadel of his hope stood strong about him. Ruth was there to speak the word that would free him! Her love would set him free! It was the time. Ruth *knew*. He would rather have it this way. He was almost glad that the Bishop had lied. Ruth *knew*. Ruth would speak.

The words of that terrible scream went searing through Ruth's brain and down into the very roots of her being. Oh! for the power to shout them out to the ends of the earth!

But she looked levelly at Dardis and in a clear voice answered:

"Nothing."

Then, at his word, she stumbled down out of the stand.

Again Jeffrey Whiting fell back into his seat.

Ruth had lied!

The walls of his inner citadel had fallen in and crushed him.

VIII

SEIGNEUR DIEU, WHITHER GO I?

The Bishop walked brokenly from the courthouse and turned up the street toward the little

church. He had not been the same man since his experience of those two terrible nights in the hills. They had aged him and shaken him visibly. But those nights of suffering and superhuman effort had only attacked him physically. They had broken the spring of his step and had drawn heavily upon the vigour and the vital reserves which his years of simple living had left stored up in him. He had fought with fire. He had looked death in the face. He had roused his soul to master the passions of men. No man who has already reached almost the full allotted span of life may do these things without showing the outward effects of them. But these things had struck only at the clay of the body. They had not touched the quick spirit of the man within.

The trial through which he had passed to-day had cut deep into the spiritual fibre of his being. If Joseph Winthrop had been given the alternative of speaking his secret or giving up his life, he would have offered the few years that might be his, without question or halting. For he was a man of simple, single mind. He never quibbled or thought of taking back any of the things which he had given to Christ. Thirty years ago he had made his compact with the Master, and he had never blinked the fact that every time a priest puts on a stole to receive the secret of another's soul he puts his life in pledge for the sanctity of that secret. It was a simple business, unclouded by any perplexities or confusion.

Never had he thought of the alternative which had this day been forced upon him. Years ago he had given his own life entire to Christ. The snapping of it here at this point or a few spaces farther on would be a matter of no more moment than the length of a thread. This world had nothing to give him, nothing to withhold from him. But to guard his secret at the cost of another life, and that a young, vigorous, battling life full of future and promise, full of youth and the glory of living, the life of a boy he loved--that was another matter. Never had he reckoned with a thing such as that. Life had always been so direct, so square-cut for Joseph Winthrop. To think right, to do right, to serve God; these things had always seemed very simple. But the thing that he had done to-day was breaking his heart. He could not have done otherwise. He had been given no choice, to be sure.

But was it possible that God would have allowed things to come to that issue, if somewhere, at some turn in that line of circumstances which had led up to this day, Joseph Winthrop had not done a wrong? It did not seem possible. Somewhere he had done wrong or he had done foolishly--and, where men go to direct the lives of others, to do unwisely is much the same as to do wickedly.

What use to go over the things that he had done, the things that he had advised? What use to say, here he had done his best, there he thought only of the right and the wise thing. Somewhere he had spoken foolishly, or he had been headstrong in his interference, or he had acted without thought and prayer. What use to go over the record? He could only carry this matter to God and let Him see his heart.

He stumbled in the half light of the darkened little church and sank heavily into the last pew. Out of the sorrow and anguish of his heart he cried out from afar to the Presence on the little altar, where he, Bishop of Alden, had often spoken with much authority.

When Cynthe Cardinal saw Ruth Lansing go up into the witness stand she sank down quietly into a front seat and seemed fairly to devour the other girl with the steady gaze of her fierce black eyes. She hung upon every fleeting wave of the contending emotions that showed themselves on Ruth's face. She was convinced that this girl knew that Rafe Gadbeau had confessed to the murder of Samuel Rogers and that Jeffrey Whiting was innocent. She had not thought that Ruth would be called as a witness, and Dardis, in fact, had only decided upon it at the last moment.

Once Cynthe Cardinal had been very near to hating this girl, for she had seen Rafe Gadbeau leave herself at a dance, one afternoon a very long time ago, and spend the greater part of the afternoon talking gaily to Ruth Lansing. Now Rafe Gadbeau was gone. There was nothing left of him whom Cynthe Cardinal had loved but a memory. But that memory was as much to her as was the life of Jeffrey Whiting to this other girl. She was sorry for the other girl. Who would not be? What would that girl do? If the question was not asked directly, it was not likely that the girl would tell what she knew. She would not wish to tell. She would certainly try to avoid it. But if the question came to her of a sudden, without warning, without time for thought? What then? Would that girl be strong enough to deny, to deny and to keep on denying?

Who could tell? The girl was a Catholic. But she was a convert. She did not know the terrible secret of the confessional as they knew it who had been born to the Faith.

Cynthe herself had meant to keep away from this trial. She knew it was no place for her to carry the awful secret that she had hidden away in her heart. No matter how deeply she might have it hidden, the fear hung over her that men would probe for it. A word, a look, a hint might be enough to set some on the search for it and she had had a superstition that it was a secret of a nature that it could not be hidden forever. Some day some one would tear it from her heart. She knew that it was dangerous for her to be in Danton during these days when the hill people were talking of nothing but the killing of Rogers and hunting for any possible fact that might make Jeffrey Whiting's story believable. But she had been drawn irresistibly to the trial and had sat all day yesterday and to-day listening feverishly, avidly to every word that was said, waiting to hear, and praying against hearing the name of the man she had loved. The idea of protecting his name and his memory from the blight of his deed had become more than a religion, more than a sacred trust to her. It filled not only her own thought and life but it seemed even to take up that great void in her world which Rafe Gadbeau had filled.

When she had heard his name mentioned in that sudden questioning of the Bishop, she had almost jumped from her seat to cry out to him that he must know nothing. But that was foolish, she reflected. They might as well have asked the stones on the top of the Gaunt Rocks to tell Rafe Gadbeau's secret as to ask it from the Bishop.

But this girl was different. You could not tell what she might do under the test. If she stood the test, if she kept the seal unbroken upon her lips, then would Cynthe be her willing slave for life. She would love that girl, she would fetch for her, work for her, die for her!

When that point-blank question came leaping upon the tortured girl in the stand, Cynthe rose to her feet. She expected to hear the girl stammer and blurt out something that would give them a chance to ask her further questions. But when she saw the girl reel and quiver in pain, when she saw her gasp for breath and self-control, when she saw the hunted agony in her eyes, a great light broke in upon the heart of Cynthe Cardinal. Here was not a pale girl of the convent who could not know what love was! Here was a woman, a sister woman, who could suffer, who for the sake of one greater thing could trample her love under foot, and who could and did sum it all up in one steady word--"Nothing."

Cynthe Cardinal revolted. Her quickened heart could not look at the torture of the other girl. She wanted to run forward and throw herself at the feet of the other girl as she came staggering down from the stand and implore her pardon. She wanted to cry out to her that she must tell! That no man, alive or dead, was worth all this! For Cynthe Cardinal knew that truth bitterly. Instead, she turned and ran like a frightened, wild thing out of the room and up the street.

She had seen the Bishop come direct from the little church to the court. And as she watched his face when he came down from the stand, she knew instinctively that he was going back there. Cynthe understood. Even M'sieur the Bishop who was so wise and strong, he was troubled. He thought much of the young Whiting. He would have business with God.

She slipped noiselessly in at the door of the church and saw the Bishop kneeling there at the end of the pew, bowed and broken.

He was first aware of her when he heard a frightened, hurrying whisper at his elbow. Some one was kneeling in the aisle beside him, saying:

Mon Pere, je me 'cuse.

The ritual would have told him to rise and go to the confessional. But here was a soul that was pouring its secret out to him in a torrential rush of words and sobs that would not wait for ritual. The Bishop listened without raising his head. He had neither the will nor the power to break in upon that cruel story that had been torturing its keeper night and day. He knew that it was true, knew what the end of it would be. But still he must be careful to give no word that would show that he knew what was coming. The French of the hills and of Beaupre was a little too rapid for him but it was easy to follow the thread of the story. When she had finished and was weeping quietly, the Bishop prompted gently.

"And now? my daughter."

"And now, *Mon Pere*, must I tell? I would not tell. I loved Rafe Gadbeau. As long as I shall live I shall love him. For his good name I would die. But I cannot see the suffering of that girl, Ruth. *Mon Pere*, it is too much! I cannot stand it. Yet I cannot go there before men and call my love a murderer. Consider, *Mon Pere*. There is another way. I, too, am guilty. I wished for the death of that man. I would have killed him myself, for he had made Rafe Gadbeau do many things that he would not have done. He made my love a murderer. I went to keep Rafe Gadbeau from the setting of the fire. But I would have killed that man myself with the gun if I could. So I hated him. When I saw him fall, I clapped my hands in glee. See, *Mon Pere*, I am guilty. And I called joyfully to my love to run with me and save himself, for he was now free from that man forever. But he ran in the path of the fire because he feared those other men.

"But see, *Mon Pere*, I am guilty. I will go and tell the court that I am the guilty one. I will say that my hand shot that man. See, I will tell the story. I have told it many times to myself. Such a straight story I shall tell. And they will believe. I will make them believe. And they will not hurt a girl much," she said, dropping back upon her native shrewdness to strengthen her plea. "The railroad does not care who killed Rogers. They want only to punish the young Whiting. And the court will believe, as I shall tell it."

"But, my daughter," said the Bishop, temporising. "It would not be true. We must not lie."

"But M'sieur the Bishop, himself," the girl argued swiftly, evidently separating the priest in the confessional from the great bishop in his public walk, "he himself, on the stand--"

The girl stopped abruptly.

The Bishop held the silence of the grave.

"*Mon Pere* will make me tell, then--the truth," she began. "*Mon Pere*, I cannot! I--!"

"Let us consider," the Bishop broke in deliberately. "Suppose he had told this thing to you when he was dying. You would have said to him: Your soul may not rest if you leave another to suffer for your deed. Would he not have told you to tell and clear the other man?"

"To escape Hell," said the girl quickly, "yes. He would have said: Tell everything; tell anything!" In the desolate forlornness of her grief she had not left to her even an illusion. Just as he was, she had known the man, good and bad, brave and cowardly--and had loved him. Would always love him.

"We will not speak of Hell," said the Bishop gently. "In that hour he would have seen the right. He would have told you to tell."

"But he confessed to M'sieur the Bishop himself," she retorted quickly, still seeming to forget that she was talking to the prelate in person, but springing the trap of her quick wit and sound Moral Theology back upon him with a vengeance, "and he gave *him* no leave to speak."

The Bishop in a panic hurried past the dangerous ground.

"If he had left a debt, would you pay it for him, my daughter?"

"*Mon Pere*, with the bones of my hands!"

"Consider, then, he is not now the man that you knew. The man who was blind and walked in dark places. He is now a soul in a world where a great light shines about him. He knows now that which he did not know here--Truth. He sees the things which here he did not see. He stands alone in the great open space of the Beyond. He looks up to God and cries: *Seigneur Dieu*, whither go I?"

"And God replying, asks him why does he hesitate, standing in the open place. Would he come back to the world?"

"And he answers: 'No, my God; but I have left a debt behind and another man's life stands in pledge for my debt; I cannot go forward with that debt unpaid.'

"Then God: 'And is there none to cancel the debt? Is there not one in all that world who loved you? Were you, then, so wicked that none loved you who will pay the debt?'"

"And he will answer with a lifted heart: 'My God, yes; there was one, a girl; in spite of me, she loved me; she will make the debt right; only because she loved me may I be saved; she will speak and the debt will be right; my God, let me go.'"

The Bishop's French was sometimes wonderfully and fearfully put together. But the girl saw the pictures. The imagery was familiar to her race and faith. She was weeping softly, with almost a little break of joy among the tears. For she saw the man, whom she had loved in spite of what he was, lifted now out of the weaknesses and sins of life. And her love leaped up quickly to the ideal and the illusions that every woman craves for and clings to.

"This," the Bishop was going on quietly, "is the new man we are to consider; the one who stands in the light and sees Truth. We must not hear the little mouthings of the world. Does he care for the opinions or the words that are said here? See, he stands in the great open space, all alone, and dares to look up to the Great God and tell Him all. Will you be afraid to stand in the court and tell these people, who do not matter at all?"

"Remember, it is not for Jeffrey Whiting. It is not for the sake of Ruth Lansing. It is because the man you loved calls back to you, from where he has gone, to do the thing which the wisdom he has now learned tells him must be done. He has learned the lesson of eternal Truth. He would have you tell."

"*Mon Pere*, I will tell the tale," said the girl simply as she rose from her knees. "I will go quickly, while I have yet the courage."

The Bishop went with her to one of the counsel rooms in the courthouse and sent for Dardis.

"This girl," he told the lawyer, "has a story to tell. I think you would do wisely to put her on the stand and let her tell it in her own way. She will make no mistakes. They will not be able to break her down."

Then the Bishop went back to take up again his business with God.

As a last, and almost hopeless, resort, Jeffrey Whiting had been put upon the stand in his own defence. There was nothing he could tell which the jurors had not already heard in one form or another. Everybody had heard what he had said that morning on Bald Mountain. He had not been believed even then, by men who had never had a reason to doubt his simple word. There was little likelihood that he would be believed here now by these jurors, whose minds were already fixed by the facts and the half truths which they had been hearing. But there was some hope that his youth and the manly sincerity with which he clung to his simple story might have some effect. It might be that a single man on that jury would be so struck with his single sturdy tale that he would refuse to disbelieve it altogether. You could never tell what might strike a man on a jury. So Dardis argued.

Jeffrey Whiting did not care. If his counsel wished him to tell his story he would do so. It would not matter. His own friends did not believe his story. Nobody believed it. Two people *knew* that it was true. And those two people had stood up there upon the stand and sworn that they did not know. One of them was a good man, a man of God, a man he would have trusted with every dear thing that life held. That man had stood up there and lied. The other was a girl whom he loved, and who, he was sure, loved him.

It had not been easy for Ruth to tell that lie--or maybe she did not consider it a lie: he had seen her suffer terribly in the telling of it. He was beginning to feel that he did not care much what was the outcome of the trial. Life was a good thing, it was true. And death, or a life of death, as a murderer, was worse than twenty common deaths. But that had all dropped into the background. Only one big thing stood before him. It laid hold upon him and shook him and took from him his interest in every other fact in the world.

Ruth Lansing, he thought he could say, had never before in her life told a lie. Why should she

have ever told a lie. She had never had reason to fear any one; and they only lie who fear. He would have said that the fear of death could not have made Ruth Lansing lie. Yet she had stood up there and lied.

For what? For a church. For a religion to which she had foolishly given herself. For that she had given up him. For that she had given up her conscience. For that she had given up her own truth!

It was unbelievable. But he had sat here and listened to it.

He had heard her lie simply and calmly in answer to a question which meant life or death to him. She had known that. She could not have escaped knowing it if she had tried. There was no way in which she could have fooled herself or been persuaded into believing that she was not lying or that she was not taking from him his last hope of life.

Jeffrey Whiting did not try to grapple or reason with the fact. What was the use? It was the end of all things. He merely sat and gazed dumbly at the monstrous thing that filled his whole mental vision.

He went forward to the witness chair and stood woodenly until some one told him to be seated. He answered the questions put him automatically, without looking either at the questioner or at the jury who held his fate in their hands. Men who had been watching the alert, keen-faced boy all day yesterday and through to-day wondered what had happened to him. Was he breaking down? Would he confess? Or had he merely ceased hoping and turned sullen and dumb?

Without any trace of emotion or interest, he told how he had raced forward, charging upon the man who was setting the fire. He looked vacantly at the Judge while the latter ordered that part of his words stricken out which told what the man was doing. He showed no resentment, no feeling of any kind. He related how the man had run away from him, trailing the torch through the brush, and again he did not seem to notice the Judge's anger in cautioning him not to mention the fire again.

At his counsel's direction, he went through a lifeless pantomime of falling upon one knee and pointing his rifle at the fleeing man. Now the man turned and faced him. Then he heard the shot which killed Rogers come from the woods. He dropped his own rifle and went forward to look at the dying man. He picked up the torch and threw it away.

Then he turned to fight the fire. (This time the Judge did not rule out the word.) Then his rifle had exploded in his hands, the bullet going just past his ear. The charge had scorched his neck. It was a simple story. The thing *might* have happened. It was entirely credible. There were no contradictions in it. But the manner of Jeffrey Whiting, telling it, gave no feeling of reality. It was not the manner of a man telling one of the most stirring things of his life. He was not telling what he saw and remembered and felt and was now living through. Rather, he seemed to be going over a wearying, many-times-told tale that he had rehearsed to tedium. A sleeping man might have told it so. The jury was left entirely unconvinced, though puzzled by the manner of the recital.

Even Lemuel Squires' harping cross questions did not rouse Jeffrey to any attention to the story that he had told. At each question he went back to the point indicated and repeated his recital dully and evenly without any thought of what the District Attorney was trying to make him say. He was not thinking of the District Attorney nor of the story. He was still gazing mentally in stupid wonder at the horrible fact that Ruth Lansing had lied his life away at the word of her church.

When he had gotten back to the little railed enclosure where he was again the prisoner, he sat down heavily to wait for the end of this wholly irrelevant business of the trial. Another witness was called. He did not know that there was another. He had expected that Squires would begin his speech at once.

He noticed that this witness was a girl from French Village whom he had seen several times. Now he remembered that she was Rafe Gadbeau's girl. What did they bring her here for? She could not know anything, and why did they want to pester the poor thing? Didn't the poor little thing look sorry and troubled enough without fetching her down here to bring it all up to her? He roused himself to look reassuringly at the girl, as though to tell her not to mind, that it did not matter anyway, that he knew she could not help him, and that she must not let them hurt her.

Dardis, to forestall objections and to ensure Cynthe against interruptions from the prosecutor or the Judge, had told her to say nothing about fire but to speak directly about the killing of Rogers and nothing else. So when, after she had been sworn, he told her to relate the things that led up to the killing, she began at the very beginning:

"Four years ago," she said, "Rafe Gadbeau was in Utica. A man was killed in a crowd. His knife had been used to kill the man. Rafe Gadbeau did not do that. Often he has sworn to me that he did not know who had done it. But a detective, a man named Rogers, found the knife and traced it to Rafe Gadbeau. He did not arrest him. No, he kept the knife, saying that some day he would call upon Rafe Gadbeau for the price of his silence.

"Last summer this man Rogers came into the woods looking for some one to help get the people to sell their land. He saw Rafe Gadbeau. He showed him the knife. He told him that whatever he laid upon him to do, that he must do. He made him lie to the people. He made him attack the young Whiting. He made him do many things that he would not do, for Rafe Gadbeau was not a bad man, only foolish sometimes. And Rafe Gadbeau was sore under the yoke of fear that this

man had put upon him.

"At times he said to me, 'Cynthe, I will kill this man one day, and that will be the end of all.' But I said, '*Non, non, mon Rafe*, we will marry in the fall, and go away to far Beaupre where he will never see you again, and we will not know that he ever lived.'"

Cynthe had forgotten her audience. She was telling over to herself the tragedy of her little life and her great love. Genius could not have told her how better to tell it for the purpose for which her story was here needed. Dardis thanked his stars that he had taken the Bishop's advice, to let her get through with it in her own way.

"But it was not time for us to marry yet," she went on. "Then came the morning of the nineteenth August. I was sitting on the back steps of my aunt's house by the Little Tupper, putting apples on a string to hang up in the hot sun to dry." The Judge turned impatiently on his bench and shrugged his shoulders. The girl saw and her eyes blazed angrily at him. Who was he to shrug his shoulders! Was it not important, this story of her love and her tragedy! Thereafter the Judge gave her the most rigid attention.

"Rafe Gadbeau came and sat down on the steps at my feet. I saw that he was troubled. 'What is it, *mon Rafe*?' I asked. He groaned and said one bad word. Then he told me that he had just had a message from Rogers to meet him at the head of the rail with three men and six horses. 'What to do, *mon Rafe*?' 'I do not know,' he said, 'though I can guess. But I will not tell you, Cynthe.'

"'You will not go, *mon Rafe*. Promise me you will not go. Hide away, and we will slip down to the Falls of St. Regis and be married--me, I do not care for the grand wedding in the church here--and then we will get away to Beaupre. Promise me.'

"' *Bien*, Cynthe, I promise. I will not go to him.'

"But it was a man's promise. I knew he would go in the end.

"I watched and followed. I did not know what I could do. But I followed, hoping that somewhere I could get Rafe before they had done what they intended and we could run away together with clean hands.

"When I saw that they had gone toward the railroad I turned aside and climbed up to the Bald Mountain. I knew they would all come back there together. I waited until it was dark and they came. They would do nothing in the night. I waited for the morning. Then I would find Rafe and bring him away. I was desperate. I was a wild girl that night. If I could have found that Rogers and come near him I would have killed him myself. I hated him, for he had made me much suffering.

"In the morning I was in the woods near them. I saw Rafe. But that Rogers kept him always near him.

"I saw Rogers go out of the wood a little to look. Rafe was a little way from him and coming slowly toward me. I called to him. He did not hear. I saw the look in his face. It was the look of one who has made up his mind to kill. Again I called to him. But he did not hear.

"I saw Rogers go running along the edge of the wood. Now he came running back toward Rafe. He stopped and turned.

"The young Whiting was on his knee with the rifle raised to shoot. I looked to Rafe. The sound of his gun struck me as I turned my face. The bullet struck Rogers in the back of the head. I saw. The young Whiting had not fired at all.

"I turned and ran, calling to Rafe to follow me. 'Come with me, *mon Rafe*,' I called. 'I, too, am guilty. I would have killed him in the night. Come with me. We will escape. The fire will cover all. None will ever know but you and me, and I am guilty as you. Come.'

"But he did not hear. And I wished him to hear. Oh! I wished him at least to hear me say that I took the share of the guilt, for I did not wish to be separated from him in this world or the next.

"But he ran back always into the path of the fire, for those other men, the old M'sieur Beasley and the others, were closing behind him and the fire."

She was speaking freely of the fire now, but it did not matter. Her story was told. The big, hot tears were flowing freely and her voice rose into a cry of farewell as she told the end.

"Then he was down and I saw the fire roll over him. Oh, the great God, who is good, was cruel that day! Again, at the last, I saw him up and running on again. Then the fire shut him out from my sight, and God took him away.

"That is all. I ran for the Little Tupper and was safe."

Dardis did not try to draw another word from her on any part of the story. He was artist enough to know that the story was complete in its naïve and tragic simplicity. And he was judge enough of human nature to understand that the jury would remember better and hold more easily her own unthought, clipped expressions than they would any more connected elaborations he might try to make her give.

Lemuel Squires was a narrow man, a born prosecutor. He had always been a useful officer to the railroad powers because he was convinced of the guilt of any prisoner whom it was his business to bring into court. He regarded a verdict of acquittal as hardly less than a personal insult. He denied that there were ever two sides to any case. But his very narrowness now confounded him here. This girl's story was true. It was astounding, impossible, subversive of all things. But it was true.

His mind, one-sided as it was always, had room for only the one thing. The story was true. He asked her a few unimportant questions, leading nowhere, and let her go. Then he began his summing up to the jury.

It was a half-hearted, wholly futile plea to them to remember the facts by which the prisoner had already been convicted and to put aside the girl's dramatic story. He was still convinced that the prisoner was guilty. But--the girl's story was true. His mind was not nimble enough to escape the shock of that fact. He was helpless under it. His pleading was spiritless and wandering while his mind stood aside to grapple with that one astounding thing.

The Judge, however, in charging the jury was troubled by none of these hampering limitations of mind. He had always regarded the taking and discussion of evidence as a rather wearisome and windy business. All democracy was full of such wasteful and time-killing ways of coming to a conclusion. The boy was guilty. The powers who controlled the county had said he was guilty. Why spoil good time, then, quibbling.

He charged the jury that the girl's testimony was no more credible than that of a dozen other witnesses--which was quite true. All had told the truth as they understood it, and saw it. But he glided smoothly over the one important difference. The girl had seen the act. No other, not even the accused himself, had been able to say that.

He delivered an extemporaneous and daringly false lecture on the comparative force of evidence, intended only to befog the minds of the jurors. But the effect of it was exactly the opposite to that which he had intended, for, whereas they had up to now held a fairly clear view of the things that had been proven by the adroit handling of his facts by the District Attorney, they now forgot all that structure of guilt which he so laboriously built up and remembered only one thing clearly. And that thing was the story of Cynthe Cardinal.

Without leaving their seats, they intimated that they had come to an agreement.

The Judge, glowering dubiously at them, demanded to know what it was.

Jeffrey Whiting stood up.

The foreman rose and faced the Judge stubbornly, saying:

"Not guilty."

The Judge polled the jury, glaring fiercely at each man as his name was called, but one after another the men arose and answered gruffly for acquittal. The hill people rushed from the courthouse, running for their horses and shouting the verdict as they ran. Then sleepy little Danton awoke from its September drowse and was aware that something real had happened. The elaborate machinery of prosecution, the whole political power of the county, the mighty grip and pressure of the railroad power had all been set at nothing by the tragic little love story of an ignorant French girl from the hills.

Dardis led Jeffrey Whiting down from the place where he had been a prisoner and brought him to his mother.

Jeffrey turned a long searching gaze down into his mother's eyes as he stooped to kiss her. What he saw filled him with a bitterness that all the years of his life would not efface. What he saw was not the sprightly, cheery, capable woman who had been his mother, but a grey, trembling old woman, broken in body and heart, who clung to him fainting and crying weakly. What men had done to him, he could shake off. They had not hurt him. He could still defy them. But what they had done to his little mother, that would rankle and turn in his heart forever. He would never forgive them for the things they had done to her in these four weeks and in these two days.

And here at his elbow stood the one person who had to-day done more to hurt his mother and himself than any other in the world could have done. She could have told his mother weeks ago, and have saved her all that racking sorrow and anxiety. But no, for the sake of that religion of hers, for the sake of what some priest told her, she had stuck to what had turned out to be a useless lie, to save a dead man's name.

Ruth stood there reaching out her hands to him. But he turned upon her with a look of savage, fleeing contempt; a look that stunned the girl as a blow in the face would have done. Then in a strange, hard voice he said brutally:

"You lied!"

Ruth dropped her eyes pitifully under the shock of his look and words. Even now she could not speak, could not appeal to his reason, could not tell him that she had heard nothing but what had come under the awful seal of the confessional. The secret was out. She had risked his life and lost his love to guard that secret, and now the world knew it. All the world could talk freely about what she had done except only herself. Even if she could have reached up and drawn his head down to her lips, even then she could not so much as whisper into his ear that he was right, or try to tell him why she had not been able to speak. She saw the secret standing forever between their two lives, unacknowledged, embittering both those lives, yet impassable as the line of death.

When she looked up, he was gone out to his freedom in the sunlight.

The hill people were jammed about the door and in the street as he came out. Twenty hands reached forward to grasp him, to draw him into the midst of their crowd, to mount him upon his own horse which they had caught wandering in the high hills and had brought down for him.

They were happy, triumphant and loud, for them--the hill people were not much given to noise or demonstration. But under their triumph and their noise there was a current of haste and anxious eagerness which he was quick to notice.

During the weeks in jail, when his own fate had absorbed most of his waking moments, he had let slip from him the thought of the battle that yet must be waged in the hills. Now, among his people again, and once more their unquestioned leader, his mind went back with a click into the grooves in which it had been working so long. He pushed his horse forward and led the men at a gallop over the Racquette bridge and out toward the hills, the families who had come down from the nearer hills in wagons stringing along behind.

When they were well clear of the town, he halted and demanded the full news of the last four weeks.

It must not be forgotten that while this account of these happenings has been obliged to turn aside here and there, following the vicissitudes and doings of individuals, the railroad powers had never for a moment turned a step aside from the single, unemotional course upon which they had set out. Orders had gone out that the railroad must get title to the strip of hill country forty miles wide lying along the right of way. These orders must be executed. The titles must be gotten. Failures or successes here or there were of no account. The incidents made use of or the methods employed were of importance only as they contributed to the general result.

Jeffrey Whiting had blocked the plans once. That was nothing. There were other plans. The Shepherd of the North before the Senate committee had blocked another set of plans. That was merely an obstacle to be gone around. The railroad people had gone around it by procuring the burning of the country. The people, left homeless for the most part and well-nigh ruined, would be glad now to take anything they could get for their lands. There had been no vindictiveness, no animus on the part of the railroad. Its programme had been as impersonal and detached as the details in any business transaction. Certain aims were to be accomplished. The means were purely incidental.

Rogers, whom the railroad had first used as an agent and afterwards as an instrument, was now gone--a broken tool. Rafe Gadbeau, who had been Rogers' assistant, was gone--another broken tool. The fire had been used for its purpose. The fire was a thing of the past. Jeffrey Whiting had been put out of the way--definitely, the railroad had hoped. He was now free again to make difficulties. All these things were but changes and moves and temporary checks in the carrying through of the business. In the end the railroad must attain its end.

Jeffrey Whiting saw all these things as he sat his horse on the old Piercefield road and listened to what had been happening in the hills during the four weeks of his removal from the scene.

The fire, because it had seemed the end of all things to the people of the hills, had put out of their minds all thought of what the railroad would do next. Now they were realising that the railroad had moved right on about its purpose in the wake of the fire. It had learned instantly of Rogers' death and had instantly set to work to use that as a means of removing Jeffrey Whiting from its path. But that was only a side line of activity. It had gone right on with its main business. Other men had been sent at once into the hills with what seemed like liberal offers for six-month options on all the lands which the railroad coveted.

They had gotten hold of discouraged families who had not yet begun to rebuild. The offer of any little money was welcome to these. The whole people were disorganised and demoralised as a result of the scattering which the fire had forced upon them. They were not sure that it was worth while to rebuild in the hills. The fire had burned through the thin soil in many places so that the land would be useless for farming for many years to come. They had no leader, and the fact that Jeffrey Whiting was in jail charged with murder, and, as they heard, likely to be convicted, forced upon them the feeling that the railroad would win in the end. Where was the use to struggle against an enemy they could not see and who could not be hurt by anything they might do?

Jeffrey Whiting saw that the fight which had gone before, to keep the people in line and prevent them from signing enough options to suit the railroad's purpose, had been easy in comparison with the one that was now before him. The people were disheartened. They had begun to fear the mysterious, unassailable power of the railroad. It was an enemy of a kind to which their lives and training had not accustomed them. It struck in the dark, and no man's hand could be raised to punish. It hid itself behind an illusive veil of law and a bulwark of officials.

The people were for the large part still homeless. Many were still down in the villages, living upon neighbourhood kindness and the scant help of public charity. Only the comparative few who could obtain ready credit had been able even to begin rebuilding. If they were not roused to prodigious efforts at once, the winter would be upon them before the hills were resettled. And with the coming of the pinch of winter men would be ready to sell anything upon which they had a claim, for the mere privilege of living.

When they came up into the burnt country, the bitterness which had been boiling up in his heart through those weeks and which he had thought had risen to its full height during the scenes of to-day now ran over completely. His heart raved in an agony of impotent anger and a thirst for revenge. His life had been in danger. Gladly would he now put it ten times in danger for the power to strike one free, crushing blow at this insolent enemy. He would grapple with it, die with it only for the power to bring it to the ground with himself!

The others had become accustomed to the look of the country, but the full desolation of it broke upon his eyes now for the first time. The hills that should have glowed in their wonderful russets

from the red sun going down in the west, were nothing but streaked ash heaps, where the rain had run down in gullies. The valleys between, where the autumn greens should have run deep and fresh, where snug homes should have stood, where happy people should now be living, were nothing but blackened hollows of destitution. From Bald Mountain, away up on the east, to far, low-lying Old Forge to the south, nothing but a circle of ashes. Ashes and bitterness in the mouth; dirt and ashes in the eye; misery and the food of hate in the heart!

Very late in the night they came to French Village. The people here were still practically living in the barrack which the Bishop had seen built, the women and children sleeping in it, the men finding what shelter they could in the new houses that were going up. There were enough of these latter to show that French Village would live again, for the notes which the Bishop had endorsed had carried credit and good faith to men who were judges of paper on which men's names were written and they had brought back supplies of all that was strictly needful.

Here was food and water for man and beast. Men roused themselves from sleep to cheer the young Whiting and to hobble the horses out and feed them. And shrill, voluminous women came forth to get food for the men and to wave hands and skillets wildly over the story of Cynthe Cardinal.

The mention of the girl's name brought things back to Jeffrey Whiting. Till now he had hardly given a thought to the girl who, by a terrible sacrifice of the man she loved, had saved him. He owed that girl a great deal. And the thought brought to his mind another girl. He struck himself viciously across the eyes as though he would crush the memory, and went out to tramp among the ashes till the dawn. His body had no need of rest, for the exercise he had taken to-day had merely served to throw off the lethargy of the jail; and sleep was beyond him.

At the first light he roused the hill men and told them what the night had told him. Unless they struck one desperate, destroying blow at the railroad, it would come up mile by mile and farm by farm and take from them the little that was left to them. They had been fools that they had not struck in the beginning when they had first found that they were being played falsely. If they had begun to fight in the early summer their homes would not have been burned and they would not be now facing the cold and hunger of an unsheltered, unprovided winter.

Why had they not struck? Because they were afraid? No. They had not struck because their fathers had taught them a fear and respect of the law. They had depended upon law. And here was law for them: the hills in ashes, their families scattered and going hungry!

If no man would go with him, he would ride alone down to the end of the rails and sell his life singly to drive back the work as far as he could, to rouse the hill people to fight for themselves and their own.

If ten men would come with him they could drive back the workmen for days, days in which the hill people would come rallying back into the hills to them. The people were giving up in despair because nothing was being done. Show them that even ten men were ready to fight for them and their rights and they would come trooping back, eager to fight and to hold their homes. There was yet wealth in the hills. If the railroad was willing to fight and to defy law and right to get it, were there not men in the hills who would fight for it because it was their own?

If fifty men would come with him they could destroy the railroad clear down below the line of the hills and put the work back for months. They would have sheriffs' posses out against them. They would have to fight with hired fighters that the railroad would bring up against them. In the end they would perhaps have to fight the State militia, but there were men among them, he shouted, who had fought more than militia. Would they not dare face it now for their homes and their people!

Some men would die. But some men always died, in every cause. And in the end the people of the whole State would judge the cause!

Would one man come? Would ten? Would fifty?

Seventy-two grim, sullen men looked over the knobs and valleys of ashes where their homes had been, took what food the French people could spare them, and mounted silently behind him.

Up over the ashes of Leyden road, past the cellars of the homes of many of them, for half the day they rode, saving every strain they could upon their horses. A three-hour rest. Then over the southern divide and down the slope they thundered to strike the railroad at Leavit's bridge.

IX

THE COMING OF THE SHEPHERD

The wires coming down from the north were flashing the railroad's call for help. A band of madmen had struck the end of the line at Leavit's Creek and had destroyed the half-finished bridge. They had raced down the line, driving the frightened labourers before them, tearing up the ties and making huge fires of them on which they threw the new rails, heating and twisting

these beyond any hope of future usefulness.

Labourers, foremen and engineers of construction had fled literally for their lives. The men of the hills had no quarrel with them. They preferred not to injure them. But they were infuriated men with their wrongs fresh in mind and with deadly hunting rifles in hand. The workmen on the line needed no second warning. They would take no chances with an enemy of this kind. They were used to violence and rioting in their own labour troubles, but this was different. This was war. They threw themselves headlong upon handcars and work engines and bolted down the line, carrying panic before them.

In a single night the hill men with Jeffrey Whiting at their head had ridden down and destroyed nearly twenty miles of very costly construction work. There were yet thirty miles of the line left in the hills and if the men were not stopped they would not leave a single rail in all the hill country where they were masters.

The call of the railroad was at first frantic with panic and fright. That was while little men who had lost their wits were nominally in charge of a situation in which nobody knew what to do. Then suddenly the tone of the railroad's call changed. Big men, used to meeting all sorts of things quickly and efficiently, had taken hold. They had the telegraph lines of the State in their hands. There was no more frightened appeal. Orders were snapped over the wires to sheriffs in Adirondack and Tupper and Alexander counties. They were told to swear in as many deputies as they could lead. They were to forget the consideration of expense. The railroad would pay and feed the men. They were to think of nothing but to get the greatest possible number of fighting men upon the line at once.

Then a single great man, a man who sat in a great office building in New York and held his hand upon every activity in the State, saw the gravity of the business in the hills and put himself to work upon it. He took no half measures. He had no faith in little local authorities, who would be bound to sympathise somewhat with the hill people in this battle.

He called the Governor of the State from Albany to his office. He ordered the Governor to turn out the State's armed forces and set them in motion toward the hills. He wondered autocratically that the Governor had not had the sense to do this of himself. The Governor bridled and hesitated. The Governor had been living on the fiction that he was the executive head of the State. It took Clifford W. Stanton just three minutes to disabuse him completely and forever of this illusion. He explained to him just why he was Governor and by whose permission. Also he pointed out that the permission of the great railroad system that covered the State would again be necessary in order that Governor Foster might succeed himself. Then the great man sent Wilbur Foster back to Albany to order out the nearest regiment of the National Guard for service in the hills.

Before the second night three companies of the militia had passed through Utica and had gone up the line of the U. & M. Their orders were to avoid killing where possible and to capture all of the hill men that they could. The railroad wished to have them tried and imprisoned by the impartial law of the land. For it was characteristic of the great power which in those days ruled the State that when it had outraged every sense of fair play and common humanity to attain its ends it was then ready to spend much money creating public opinion in favour of itself.

Jeffrey Whiting stood in the evening in the cover of the woods above Milton's Crossing and watched a train load of soldiers on flat cars come creeping up the grade from the south. This was the last of the hills. He had refused to let his men go farther. Behind him lay fifty miles of new railroad in ruins. Before him lay the open, settled country. His men, once the fever of destruction had begun to run in their blood, had wished to sweep on down into the villages and carry their work through them. But he had stood firm. This was their own country where they belonged and where the railroad was the interloper. Here they were at home. Here there was a certain measure of safety for them even in the destructive and lawless work that they had begun. They had done enough. They had pushed the railroad back to the edge of the hills. They had roused the men of the hills behind them. Where he had started with his seventy-two friends, there were now three hundred well-armed men in the woods around him. Here in their cover they could hold the line of the railroad indefinitely against almost any force that might be sent against them.

But the inevitable sobering sense of leadership and responsibility was already at work upon him. The burning, rankling anger that had driven him onward so that he had carried everything and everybody near him into this business of destruction was now dulled down to a slow, dull hate that while it had lost nothing of its bitterness yet gave him time to think. Those men coming up there on the cars were not professional soldiers, paid to fight wherever there was fighting to be done. Neither did they care anything for the railroad that they should come up here to fight for it. Why did they come?

They had joined their organisation for various reasons that usually had very little to do with fighting. They were clerks and office men, for the most part, from the villages and factories of the central part of the State. The militia companies had attracted them because the armouries in the towns had social advantages to offer, because uniforms and parade appeal to all boys, because they were sons of veterans and the military tradition was strong in them. Jeffrey Whiting's strong natural sense told him the substance of these things. He could not regard these boys as deadly enemies to be shot down without mercy or warning. They had taken their arms at a word of command and had come up here to uphold the arm of the State. If the railroad was able to control the politics of the State and so was able to send these boys up here on its own business, then other people were to blame for the situation. Certainly these boys, coming up

here to do nothing but what their duty to the State compelled them to do; they were not to be blamed.

His men were now urging him to withdraw a little distance into the hills to where the bed of the road ran through a defile between two hills. The soldiers would no doubt advance directly up the line of what had been the railroad, covering the workmen and engineers who would be coming on behind them. If they were allowed to go on up into the defile without warning or opposition they could be shot down by the hill men from almost absolute safety. If he had been dealing with a hated enemy Jeffrey Whiting perhaps could have agreed to that. But to shoot down from ambush these boys, who had come up here many of them probably thinking they were coming to a sort of picnic or outing in the September woods, was a thing which he could not contemplate. Before he would attack them these boys must know just what they were to expect.

He saw them leave the cars at the end of the broken line and take up their march in a rough column of fours along the roadbed. He was surprised and puzzled. He had expected them to work along the line only as fast as the men repaired the rails behind them. He had not thought that they would go away from their cars.

Then he understood. They were not coming merely to protect the rebuilding of the railroad. They had their orders to come straight into the hills, to attack and capture him and his men. The railroad was not only able to call the State to protect itself. It had called upon the State to avenge its wrongs, to exterminate its enemies. His men had understood this better than he. Probably they were right. This thing might as well be fought out from the first. In the end there would be no quarter. They could defeat this handful of troops and drive them back out of the hills with an ease that would be almost ridiculous. But that would not be the end.

The State would send other men, unlimited numbers of them, for it must and would uphold the authority of its law. Jeffrey Whiting did not deceive himself. Probably he had not from the beginning had any doubt as to what would be the outcome of this raid upon the railroad. The railroad itself had broken the law of the State and the law of humanity. It had defied every principle of justice and common decency. It had burned the homes of law-supporting, good men in the hills. Yet the law had not raised a hand to punish it. But now when the railroad itself had suffered, the whole might of the State was ready to be set in motion to punish the men of the hills who had merely paid their debt.

But Jeffrey Whiting could not say to himself that he had not foreseen all this from the outset. Those days of thinking in jail had given him an insight into realities that years of growth and observation of things outside might not have produced in him. He had been given time to see that some things are insurmountable, that things may be wrong and unsound and utterly unjust and still persist and go on indefinitely. Youth does not readily admit this. Jeffrey Whiting had recognised it as a fact. And yet, knowing this, he had led these men, his friends, men who trusted him, upon this mad raid. They had come without the clear vision of the end which he now realised had been his from the start. They had thought that they could accomplish something, that they had some chance of winning a victory over the railroad. They had believed that the power of the State would intervene to settle the differences between them and their enemy. Jeffrey Whiting knew, must have known all along, that the moment a tie was torn up on the railroad the whole strength of the State would be put forth to capture these men and punish them. There would be no compromise. There would be no bargaining. If they surrendered and gave themselves up now they would be jailed for varying terms. If they did not, if they stayed here and fought, some of them would be killed and injured and in one way or another all would suffer in the end.

He had done them a cruel wrong. The truth of this struck him with startling clearness now. He had led them into this without letting them see the full extent of what they were doing, as he must have seen it.

There was but one thing to do. If they dispersed now and scattered themselves through the hills few of them would ever be identified. And if he went down and surrendered alone the railroad would be almost satisfied with punishing him. It was the one just and right thing to do.

He went swiftly among the men where they stood among the trees, waiting with poised rifles for the word to fire upon the advancing soldiers, and told them what they must do. He had deceived them. He had not told them the whole truth as he himself knew it. They must leave at once, scattering up among the hills and keeping close mouths as to where they had been and what they had done. He would go down and give himself up, for if the railroad people once had him in custody they would not bother so very much about bringing the others to punishment.

His men looked at him in a sort of puzzled wonder. They did not understand, unless it might be that he had suddenly gone crazy. There was an enemy marching up the line toward them, bent upon killing or capturing them. They turned from him and without a spoken word, without a signal of any sort, loosed a rifle volley across the front of the oncoming troops. The battle was on!

The volley had been fired by men who were accustomed to shoot deer and foxes from distances greater than this. The first two ranks of the soldiers fell as if they had been cut down with scythes. Not one of them was hit above the knees. The firing stopped suddenly as it had begun. The hill men had given a terse, emphatic warning. It was as though they had marked a dead line beyond which there must be no advance.

These soldiers had never before been shot at. The very restraint which the hill men had shown

in not killing any of them in that volley proved to the soldiers even in their fright and surprise how deadly was the aim and the judgment of the invisible enemy somewhere in the woods there before them. To their credit, they did not drop their arms or run. They stood stunned and paralysed, as much by the suddenness with which the firing had ceased as by the surprise of its beginning.

Their officers ran forward, shouting the superfluous command for them to halt, and ordering them to carry the wounded men back to the cars. For a moment it seemed doubtful whether they would again advance or would put themselves into some kind of defence formation and hold the ground on which they stood.

Jeffrey Whiting, looking beyond them, saw two other trains come slowly creeping up the line. From the second train he saw men leaping down who did not take up any sort of military formation. These he knew were sheriffs' posses, fighting men sworn in because they were known to be fighters. They were natural man hunters who delighted in the chase of the human animal. He had often seen them in the hills on the hunt, and he knew that they were an enemy of a character far different from those harmless boys who could not hit a mark smaller than the side of a hill. These men would follow doggedly, persistently into the highest of the hills, saving themselves, but never letting the prey slip from their sight, dividing the hill men, separating them, cornering them until they should have tracked them down one by one and either captured or killed them all.

These men did not attempt to advance along the line of the road. They stepped quickly out into the undergrowth and began spreading a thin line of men to either side.

Then he saw that the third train, although they were soldiers, took their lesson from the men who had just preceded them. They left the tracks and spreading still farther out took up the wings of a long line that was now stretching east to west along the fringe of the hills. The soldiers in the centre retired a little way down the roadbed, stood bunched together for a little time while their officers evidently conferred together, then left the road by twos and fours and began spreading out and pushing the other lines out still farther. It was perfect and systematic work, he agreed, that could not have been better done if he and his companions had planned it for their own capture.

There were easily eight hundred men there in front, he judged; men well armed and ready for an indefinite stay in the hills, with a railroad at their back to bring up supplies, and with the entire State behind them. And the State was ready to send more and more men after these if it should be necessary. He had no doubt that hundreds of other men were being held in readiness to follow these or were perhaps already on their way. He saw the end.

Those lines would sweep up slowly, remorselessly and surround his men. If they stood together they would be massacred. If they separated they would be hunted down one by one.

Their only chance was to scatter at once and ride back to where their homes had been. This time he implored them to take their chance, begged them to save themselves while they could. But he might have known that they would do nothing of the kind. Already they were breaking away and spreading out to meet that distending line in front of them. Nothing short of a miracle could now save them from annihilation, and Jeffrey Whiting was not expecting a miracle. There was nothing to be done but to take command and sell his life along with theirs as dearly as possible.

The echoes of the outbreak in the hills ran up and down the State. Men who had followed the course of things through the past months, men who knew the spoken story of the fire in the hills which no newspaper had dared to print openly, understood just what it meant. The men up there had been goaded to desperation at last. But wise men agreed quietly with each other that they had done the very worst thing that could have been done. The injury they had done the railroad would amount to very little, comparatively, in the end, while it would give the railroad an absolutely free hand from now on. The people would be driven forever out of the lands which the railroad wished to possess. There would be no legislative hindrances now. The people had doomed themselves.

The echoes reached also to two million other men throughout the State who did not understand the matter in the least. These looked up a moment from the work of living and earning a living to sympathise vaguely with the foolish men up there in the hills who had attacked the sacred and awful rights of railroad property. It was too bad. Maybe there were some rights somewhere in the case. But who could tell? And the two million, the rulers and sovereigns of the State, went back again to their business.

The echo came to Joseph Winthrop, Bishop of Alden, almost before a blow had been struck. It is hardly too much to say that he was listening for it. He knew his people, kindly, lagging of speech, slow to anger; but, once past a certain point of aggravation, absolutely heedless and reckless of consequences.

He did not stop to compute just how much he himself was bound up in the causes and consequences of what had happened and what was happening in the hills. He had given advice. He had thought with the people and only for the people.

He saw, long before it was told him in words, the wild ride down through the hills to strike the railroad, the fury of destruction, the gathering of the forces of the State to punish.

Here was no time for self-examination or self-judgment. Wherein Joseph Winthrop had done

well, or had failed, or had done wrong, was of no moment now.

One man there was in all the State, in all the nation, who could give the word that would now save the people of the hills. Clifford W. Stanton who had sat months ago in his office in New York and had set all these things going, whose ruthless hand was to be recognised in every act of those which had driven the people to this madness, his will and his alone could stay the storm that was now raging in the hills.

Once the Bishop had seen that man do an act of supreme and unselfish bravery. It was an act of both physical and moral courage the like of which the Bishop had never witnessed. It was an act which had revealed in Clifford W. Stanton a depth of strong fineness that no man would have suspected. It was done in the dim, dead time of faraway youth, but the Bishop had not forgotten. And he knew that men do not rise to such heights without having very deep in them the nobility to make it possible and at times inevitable that they should rise to those heights.

After these years and the encrusting strata of compromise and cowardice and selfishness which years and life lay upon the fresh heart of the youth of men, could that depth of nobility in the soul of Clifford W. Stanton again be touched?

Almost before the forces of the State were in motion against the people of the hills, the Bishop, early of a morning, walked into the office of Clifford Stanton.

Stanton was a smaller man than the Bishop, and though younger than the latter by some half-dozen years, it was evident that he had burned up the fuel of life more rapidly. Where the Bishop looked and spoke and moved with the deliberate fixity of the settling years, Stanton acted with a quick nervousness that shook just a perceptible little. The spiritual strength of restraint and inward thinking which had chiselled the Bishop's face into a single, simple expression of will power was not to be found in the other's face. In its stead there was a certain steel-trap impression, as though the man behind the face had all his life refused to be certain of anything until the jaws of the trap had set upon the accomplished fact.

Physically the two men were much of a type. You would have known them anywhere for New Englanders of the generation that has disappeared almost completely in the last twenty years. They had been boys at Harvard together, though not of the same class. They had been together in the Civil War, though the nature of their services had been infinitely diverse. They had met here and there casually and incidentally in the business of life. But they faced each other now virtually as strangers, and with a certain tightening grip upon himself each man realised that he was about to grapple with one of the strongest willed men that he had ever met, and that he must test out the other man to the depths and be himself tried out to the limit of his strength.

"It is some years since I've seen you, Bishop. But we are both busy men. And--well-- You know I am glad to have you come to see me. I need not tell you that."

The Bishop accepted the other man's frank courtesy and took a chair quietly. Stanton watched him carefully. The Bishop was showing the last few years a good deal, he thought. In reality it was the last month that the Bishop was showing. But it did not show in the steady, untroubled glow of his eyes. The Bishop wasted no time on preliminaries.

"I have come on business, of course, Mr. Stanton," he began. "It is a very strange and unusual business. And to come at it rightly I must tell you a story. At the end of the story I will ask you a question. That will be my whole business."

The other man said nothing. He did not understand and he never spoke until he was sure that he understood. The Bishop plunged into his story.

"One January day in 'Sixty-five' I was going up the Shenandoah alone. My command had left me behind for two days of hospital service at Cross Keys. They were probably some twenty miles ahead of me and would be crossing over the divide towards Five Forks and the east. I thought I knew a way by which I could cut off a good part of the distance that separated me from them, so I started across the Ridge by a path which would have been impossible for troops in order.

"I was right. I did cut off the distance which I had expected and came down in the early afternoon upon a good road that ran up the eastern side of the Ridge. I was just congratulating myself that I would be with my men before dark, when a troop of Confederate cavalry came pelting over a rise in the road behind me.

"I leaped my horse back into the brush at the side of the road and waited. They would sweep on past and allow me to go on my way. Behind them came a troop of our own horse pursuing hotly. The Confederate horses were well spent. I saw that the end of the pursuit was not far off. The Confederates--some detached band of Early's men, I imagine--realised that they would soon be run down. Just where I had left the road there was a sharp turn. Here the Confederates threw themselves from their horses and drew themselves across the road. They were in perfect ambush, for they could be seen scarcely fifteen yards back on the narrow road.

"I broke from the bush and fled back along the road to warn our men. But I did no good. They were beyond all stopping, or hearing even, as they came yelling around the turn of the road.

"For three minutes there was some of the sharpest fighting I ever saw, there in the narrow road, before what remained of the Confederates broke after their horses and made off again. In the very middle of the fight I noticed two young officers. One was a captain, the other a lieutenant. I knew them. I knew their story. I believe I was the only man living who knew that story. Probably I did not know the whole of that story.

"The lieutenant had maligned the captain. He had said of him the one thing that a soldier may

not say of another. They had fought once. Why they had been kept in the same command I do not know.

"Now in the very hottest of this fight, without apparently the slightest warning, the lieutenant threw himself upon the captain, attacking him viciously with his sword. For a moment they struggled there, unnoticed in the dust of the conflict. Then the captain, swinging free, struck the lieutenant's sword from his hand. The latter drew his pistol and fired, point blank. It missed. By what miracle I do not know. All this time the captain had held his sword poised to lunge, within easy striking distance of the other's throat. But he had made no attempt to thrust. As the pistol missed I saw him stiffen his arm to strike. Instead he looked a long moment into the lieutenant's eyes. The latter was screaming what were evidently taunts into his face. The captain dropped his arm, wheeled, and plunged at the now breaking line of Confederates.

"I have seen brave men kill bravely. I have seen brave men bravely refrain from killing. That was the bravest thing I ever saw."

Clifford Stanton sat staring directly in front of him. He gave no sign of hearing. He was living over for himself that scene on a lonely, forgotten Virginia road. At last he said as to himself:

"The lieutenant died, a soldier's death, the next day."

"I knew," said the Bishop quietly. "My question is: Are you the same brave man with a soldier's brave, great heart that you were that day?"

For a long time Clifford Stanton sat staring directly at something that was not in the visible world. The question had sprung upon him out of the dead past. What right had this man, what right had any man to face him with it?

He wheeled savagely upon the Bishop:

"You sat by the roadside and got a glimpse of the tragedy of my life as it whirled by you on the road! How dare you come here to tell me the little bit of it you saw?"

"Because," said the Bishop swiftly, "you have forgotten how great and brave a man you are."

Stanton stared uncomprehendingly at him. He was stirred to the depths of feelings that he had not known for years. But even in his emotion and bewilderment the steel trap of silence set upon his face. His lifetime of never speaking until he knew what he was going to say kept him waiting to hear more. It was not any conscious caution; it was merely the instinct of self-defence.

"For months," the Bishop was going on quietly, "the people of my hills have been harassed by you in your unfair efforts to get possession of the lands upon which their fathers built their homes. You have tried to cheat them. You have sent men to lie to them. You tried to debauch a legislature in your attempt to overcome them. I have here in my pocket the sworn confessions of two men who stood in the shadow of death and said that they had been sent to burn a whole countryside that you and your associates coveted--to burn the people in their homes like the meadow birds in their nests. I can trace that act to within two men of you. And I can sit here, Clifford Stanton, and look you in the eye man to man and tell you that I *know* you gave the suggestion. And you cannot look back and deny it. I cannot take you into a court of law in this State and prove it. We both know the futility of talking of that. But I can take you, I do take you this minute into the court of your own heart--where I know a brave man lives--and convict you of this thing. You know it. I know it. If the whole world stood here accusing you would we know it any the better?"

"Now my people have made a terrible mistake. They have taken the law into their own hands and have thought to punish you themselves. They have done wrong, they have done foolishly. Who can punish you? You have power above the law. Your interests are above the courts of the land. They did not understand. They did not know you. They have been misled. They have listened to men like me preaching: 'Right shall prevail: Justice shall conquer.' And where does right prevail? And when shall justice conquer? No doubt you have said these phrases yourself. Because your fathers and my fathers taught us to say them. But are they true? Does justice conquer? Does right prevail? You can say. I ask you, who have the answer in your power. Does right prevail? Then give my stricken people what is theirs. Does justice conquer? Then see that they come to no harm.

"I dare to put this thing raw to your face because I know the man that once lived within you. I saw you--!"

"Don't harp on that," Stanton cut in viciously. "You know nothing about it."

"I *do* harp on that. I have come here to harp on that. Do you think that if I had not with my eyes seen that thing I would have come near you at all? No. I would have branded you before all men for the thing that you have done. I would have given these confessions which I hold to the world. I would have denounced you as far as tongue and pen would go to every man who through four years gave blood at your side. I would have braved the rebuke of my superiors and maybe the discipline of my Church to bring upon you the hard thoughts of men. I would have made your name hated in the ears of little children. But I would not have come to you.

"If I had not seen that thing I would not have come to you, for I would have said: What good? The man is a coward without a heart. A *coward*, do you remember that word?"

The man groaned and struck out with his hand as though to drive away a ghastly thing that would leap upon him.

"A coward without a heart," the Bishop repeated remorselessly, "who has men and women and

children in his power and who, because he has no heart, can use his power to crush them.

"If I had not seen, I would have said that.

"But I saw. I *saw*. And I have come here to ask you: Are you the same brave man with a heart that I saw on that day?

"You shall not evade me. Do you think you can put me off with defences and puling arguments of necessity, or policy, or the sacredness of property? No. You and I are here looking at naked truth. I will go down into your very soul and have it out by the roots, the naked truth. But I will have my answer. Are you that same man?

"If you are not that same man; if you have killed that in you which gave life to that man; if that man no longer lives in you; if you are not capable of being that same man with the heart of a great and tender hero, then tell me and I will go. But you shall answer me. I will have my answer."

Clifford Stanton rose heavily from his chair and stood trembling as though in an overpowering rage, and visibly struggling for his command of mind and tongue.

"Words, words, words," he groaned at last. "Your life is made of words. Words are your coin. What do you know?

"Do you think that words can go down into my soul to find the man that was once there? Do you think that words can call him up? When did words ever mean anything to a man's real heart! You come here with your question. It's made of words.

"When did men ever do anything for *words*? Honour is a word. Truth is a word. Bravery is a word. Loyalty is a word. Hero is a word. Do you think men do things for words? No! What do you know? What *could* you know?

"Men do things and you call them by words. But do they do them for the words? No!

"They do them-- Because *some woman lives, or once lived!* What do *you* know?

"Go out there. Stay there." He pointed. "I've got to think."

He fell brokenly into his chair and lay against his desk. The Bishop rose and walked from the room.

When he heard the door close, the man got up and going to the door barred it.

He came back and sat awhile, his head leaning heavily upon his propped hands.

He opened a drawer of his desk and looked at a smooth, glinting black and steel thing that lay there. Then he shut the drawer with a bang that went out to the Bishop listening in the outer office. It was a sinister, suggestive noise, and for an instant it chilled that good man's heart. But his ears were sharp and true and he knew immediately that he had been mistaken.

Stanton pulled out another drawer, unlocked a smaller compartment within it, and from the latter took a small gold-framed picture. He set it up on the desk between his hands and looked long at it, questioning the face in the frame with a tender, diffident expression of a wonder that never ceased, of a longing never to be stilled.

The face that looked out of the picture was one of a quiet, translucent beauty. At first glance the face had none of the striking features that men associate with great beauty. But behind the eyes there seemed to glow, and to grow gradually, and softly stronger, a light, as though diffused within an alabaster vase, that slowly radiated from the whole countenance an impression of indescribable, gentle loveliness.

Clifford Stanton had often wondered what was that light from within. He wondered now, and questioned. Never before had that light seemed so wonderful and so real. Now there came to him an answer. An answer that shook him, for it was the last answer he would have expected. The light within was truth--truth. It seemed that in a world of sham and illusions and evasions this one woman had understood, had lived with truth.

The man laughed. A low, mirthless, dry laugh that was nearer to a sob.

"Was that it, Lucy?" he queried. "Truth? Then let us have a little truth, for once! I'll tell you some truth!

"I lied a while ago. He did *not* die a soldier's death. I told the same lie to you long ago. Words. Words. And yet you went to Heaven happy because I lied to you and kept on lying to you. Words. And yet you died a happy woman, because of that lie.

"He lied to you. He took you from me with lies. Words. Lies. And yet they made you happy. Where is truth?

"You lived happy and died happy with a lie. Because I lied like what they call a man and a gentleman. *Truth!*"

He looked searchingly, wonderingly at the face before him. Did he expect to see the light fade out, to see the face wither under the bitter revelation?

"I've been everything," he went on, still trying to make his point, "I've done everything, that men say I've been and done. Why?

"Well--Why?" he asked sharply. "Did it make any difference?

"Hard, grasping, tricky, men call me that to my face--sometimes. Well--Why not? Does it make

any difference? Did it make any difference with you? If I had thought it would-- But it didn't. Lies, trickery, words! They served with you. They made you happy. *Truth!*"

But as he looked into the face and the smiling light of truth persisted in it, there came over his soul the dawn of a wonder. And the dawn glowed within him, so that it came to his eyes and looked out wondering at a world remade.

"Is it true, Lucy?" he asked gently. "Can that be *truth*, at last? Is that what you mean? Did you, deep down, somewhere beneath words and beneath thoughts, did you, did you really understand--a little? And do you, somewhere, understand now?"

"Then tell me. Was it worth the lies? Down underneath, when you understood, which was the truth? The thing I did--which men would call fine? Or was it the words?"

"Is that it? Is that the truth, Lucy? Was it the fine thing that was really the truth, and did you, do you, know it, after all? Is there truth that lives deep down, and did you, who were made of truth, did you somehow understand all the time?"

He sat awhile, wondering, questioning; finally believing. Then he said:

"Lucy, a man out there wants his answer. I will not speak it to him. But I'll say it to you: Yes, I am that same man who once did what they call a fine, brave thing. I didn't do it because it was a great thing, a brave thing. I did it for you.

"And--I'll do this for you."

He looked again at the face in the picture, as if to make sure. Then he locked it away quickly in its place.

He thought for a moment, then drew a pad abruptly to him and began writing. He wrote two telegrams, one to the Governor of the State, the other to the Sheriff of Tupper County. Then he took another pad and wrote a note, this to his personal representative who was following the state troops into the hills.

He rose and walked briskly to the door. Throwing it open he called a clerk and gave him the two telegrams. He held the note in his hand and asked the Bishop back into the office.

Closing the door quickly, he said without preface:

"This note will put my man up there at your service. You will prefer to go up into the hills yourself, I think. The officers in command of the troops will know that you are empowered to act for all parties. The Governor will have seen to that before you get there, I think. There will be no attempt at prosecutions, now or afterwards. You can settle the whole matter in no time.

"We will not buy the land, but we'll give a fair rental, based on what ores we find to take out. You can give *your* word--mine wouldn't go for much up there, I guess," he put in grimly--"that it will be fair. You can make that the basis of settlement.

"They can go back and rebuild. I will help, where it will do the most good. Our operations won't interfere much with their farm land, I find.

"You will want to start at once. That is all, I guess, Bishop," he concluded abruptly.

The Bishop reached for the smaller man's hand and wrung it with a sudden, unwonted emotion.

"I will not cheapen this, sir," he said evenly, "by attempting to thank you."

"A mere whim of mine, that's all," Stanton cut in almost curtly, the steel-trap expression snapping into place over his face. "A mere whim."

"Well," said the Bishop slowly, looking him squarely in the eyes, "I only came to ask a question, anyhow." Then he turned and walked briskly from the office. He had no right and no wish to know what the other man chose to conceal beneath that curt and incisive manner.

So these two men parted. In words, they had not understood each other. Neither had come near the depths of the other. But then, what man does ever let another man see what is in his heart?

All day long the line of armed men had gone spreading itself wider and wider, to draw itself around the edges of the shorter line of men hidden in the protecting fringe of the hills. All day long clearly and more clearly Jeffrey Whiting had been seeing the inevitable end. His line was already stretched almost to the breaking point. If the enemy had known, there were dangerous gaps in it now through which a few daring men might have pushed and have begun to divide up the strength of the men with him.

All the afternoon as he watched he saw other and yet other groups and troops of men come up the railroad, detrain and push out ever farther upon the enveloping wings to east and west.

Twice during the afternoon the ends of his line had been driven in and almost surrounded. They had decided in the beginning to leave their horses in the rear, and so use them only at the last. But the spreading line in front had become too long to be covered on foot by the few men he had. They were forced to use the speed of the animals to make a show of greater force than they really had. The horses furnished marks that even the soldiers could occasionally hit. All the afternoon long, and far into the night, the screams of terrified, wounded horses rang horribly through the woods above the pattering crackle of the irregular rifle fire. Old men who years before had learned to sleep among such sounds lay down and fell asleep grumbling. Young men and boys who had never heard such sounds turned sick with horror or wandered frightened through the dark, nervously ready to fire on any moving twig or scraping branch.

In the night Jeffrey Whiting went along the line, talking aside to every man; telling them to slip quietly away through the dark. They could make their way out through the loose lines of soldiers and sheriffs' men and get down to the villages where they would be unknown and where nobody would bother with them.

The inevitable few took his word-- There is always the inevitable few. They slipped away one by one, each man telling himself a perfectly good reason for going, several good reasons, in fact; any reason, indeed, but that they were afraid. Most of them were gathered in by the soldier pickets and sent down to jail.

Morning came, a grey, lowering morning with a grim, ugly suggestion in it of the coming winter. Jeffrey Whiting and his men drew wearily out to their posts, munching dryly at the last of the stores which they had taken from the construction depots along the line which they had destroyed. This was the end. It was not far from the mind of each man that this would probably be his last meal.

The firing began again as the outer line came creeping in upon them. They had still the great advantage of the shelter of the woods and the formation of the soldiers, while their marksmanship kept those directly in front of them almost out of range. But there was nothing in sight before them but that they would certainly all be surrounded and shot down or taken.

Suddenly the fire from below ceased. Those who had been watching the most distant of the two wings creeping around them saw these men halt and slowly begin to gather back together. What was it? Were they going to rush at last? Here would be a fight in earnest!

But the soldiers, still keeping their spread formation, merely walked back in their tracks until they were entirely out of range. It must be a ruse of some sort. The hill men stuck to their shelter, puzzled, but determined not to be drawn out.

Jeffrey Whiting, watching near the middle of the line, saw an old man walking, barehead, up over the lines of half-burnt ties and twisted rails. That white head with the high, wide brow, the slightly stooping, spare shoulders, the long, swinging walk-- That was the Bishop of Alden!

Jeffrey Whiting dropped his gun and, yelling to the men on either side to stay where they were, jumped down into the roadbed and ran to meet the Bishop.

"Are any men killed?" the Bishop asked before Jeffrey had time to speak as they met.

"Old Erskine Beasley was shot through the chest--we don't know how bad it is," said Jeffrey, stopping short. "Ten other men are wounded. I don't think any of them are bad."

"Call in your men," said the Bishop briefly. "The soldiers are going back."

At Jeffrey's call the men came running from all sides as he and the Bishop reached the line. Haggard, ragged, powder-grimed they gathered round, staring in dull unbelief at this new appearance of the White Horse Chaplain, for so one and all they knew and remembered him. Men who had seen him years ago at Fort Fisher slipped back into the scene of that day and looked about blankly for the white horse. And young men who had heard that tale many times and had seen and heard of his coming through the fire to French Village stared round-eyed at him. What did this coming mean?

He told them shortly the terms that Clifford W. Stanton, their enemy, was willing to make with them. And in the end he added:

"You have only my word that these things will be done as I say. *I* believe. If you believe, you will take your horses and get back to your families at once."

Then, in the weakness and reaction of relief, the men for the first time knew what they had been through. Their knees gave under them. They tried to cheer, but could raise only a croaking quaver. Many who had thought never to see loved ones again burst out sobbing and crying over the names of those they were saved to.

The Bishop, taking Jeffrey Whiting with him, walked slowly back down the roadbed. Suddenly Jeffrey remembered something that had gone completely out of his mind in these last hours.

"Bishop," he stammered, "that day--that day in court. I--I said you lied. Now I know you didn't. You told the truth, of course."

"My boy," said the Bishop queerly, "yesterday I asked a man, on his soul, for the truth--the truth. I got no answer.

"But I remembered that Pontius Pilate, in the name of the Emperor of all the World, once asked what was truth. And *he* got no answer. Once, at least, in our lives we have to learn that there are things bigger than we are. We get no answer."

Jeffrey inquired no more for truth that day.

It was morning in the hills; morning and Spring and the bud of Promise.

The snow had been gone from the sunny places for three weeks now. He still lingered three feet deep on the crown of Bald Mountain, from which only the hot June sun and the warm rains would drive him. He still held fastnesses on the northerly side of high hills, where the sun could not come at him and only the trickling rain-wash running down the hill could eat him out from underneath. But the sun had chased him away from the open places and had beckoned lovingly to the grass and the germinant life beneath to come boldly forth, for the enemy was gone.

But the grass was timid. And the hardy little wild flowers, the forget-me-nots and the little wild pansies held back fearfully. Even the bold dandelions, the hobble-de-hoys and tom-boys of meadow and hill, peeped out with a wary circumspection that belied their nature. For all of them had been burned to the very roots of the roots. But the sun came warmer, more insistent, and kissed the scarred, brown body of earth and warmed it. Life stirred within. The grass and the little flowers took courage out of their very craving for life and pushed resolutely forth. And, lo! The miracle was accomplished! The world was born again!

Cynthe Cardinal was coming up Beaver Run on her way back to French Village. She had been to put the first flowers of the Spring on the grave of Rafe Gadbeau, where Father Ponfret had blessed the ground for him and they had laid him, there under the sunny side of the Gaunt Rocks that had given him his last breathing space that he might die in peace. They had put him here, for there was no way in that time to carry him to the little cemetery in French Village. And Cynthe was well satisfied that it was so. Here, under the Gaunt Rocks, she would not have to share him with any one. And she would not have to hear people pointing out the grave to each other and to see them staring.

The water tumbling down the Run out of the hills sang a glad, uproarious song, as is the way of all brooks at their beginnings, concerning the necessity of getting down as swiftly as possible to the big, wide life of the sea. The sea would not care at all if that brook never came down to it. But the brook did not know that. Would not have believed it if it had been told.

And Cynthe hummed herself, a sad little song of old Beaupre--which she had never seen, for Cynthe was born here in the hills. Cynthe was sad, beyond doubt; for here was the mating time, and-- But Cynthe was not unhappy. The Good God was still in his Heaven, and still good. Life beckoned. The breath of air was sweet. There was work in the world to do. And--when all was said and done--Rafe Gadbeau was in Heaven.

As she left the Run and was crossing up to the divide she met Jeffrey Whiting coming down. He had been over in the Wilbur's Fork country and was returning home. He stopped and showed that he was anxious to talk with her. Cynthe was not averse. She was ever a chatty, sociable little person, and, besides, for some time she had had it in mind that she would some day take occasion to say a few pertinent things to this scowling young gentleman with the big face.

"You're with Ruth Lansing a lot, aren't you?" he said, after some verbal beating about the bush; "how is she?"

"Why don't you come see, if you want to know?" retorted Cynthe sharply.

Jeffrey had no ready answer. So Cynthe went on:

"If you wanted to know why didn't you come up all Winter and see? Why didn't you come up when she was nursing the dirty French babies through the black diphtheria, when their own mothers were afraid of them? Why didn't you come see when she was helping the mothers up there to get into their houses and make the houses warm before the coming of the Winter, though she had no house of her own? Why didn't you come see when she nearly got her death from the 'mmonia caring for old Robbideau Laclair in his house that had no roof on it, till she shamed the lazy men to go and fix that roof? Did you ask somebody then? Why didn't you come see?"

"Well," Jeffrey defended, "I didn't know about any of those things. And we had plenty to do here--our place and my mother and all. I didn't see her at all till Easter Sunday. I sneaked up to your church, just to get a look at her. She saw me. But she didn't seem to want to."

"But she should have been delighted to see you," Cynthe snapped back. "Don't you think so? Certainly, she should have been overjoyed. She should have flown to your arms! Not so? You remember what you said to her the last time you saw her before that. No? I will tell you. You called her 'liar' before the whole court, even the Judge! Of one certainty, she should have flown to you. No?"

Now if Jeffrey had been wise he would have gone away, with all haste. But he was not wise. He was sore. He felt ill-used. He was sure that some of this was unjust. He foolishly stayed to argue.

"But she--she cared for me," he blurted out. "I know she did. I couldn't understand why she couldn't tell--the truth; when you--you did so much for me."

"For you? For *you!*" the girl flamed up in his face. "Oh, villainous monster of vanity! For *you!* Ha! I could laugh! For *you!* I put *mon Rafe*--dead in his grave--to shame before all the world, called him murderer, blackened his name, for *you!*"

"No! No! *No! Never!*"

"I would not have said a word against him to save you from the death. *Never!*"

"I did what I did, because there was a debt. A debt which *mon Rafe* had forgotten to pay. He was waiting outside of Heaven for me to pay that debt. I paid. I paid. His way was made straight. He could go in. I did it for *you!* Ha!"

The theology of this was beyond Jeffrey. And the girl had talked so rapidly and so fiercely that he could not gather even the context of the matter. He gave up trying to follow it and went back to his main argument.

"But why couldn't she have told the truth?"

"The truth, eh! You must have the truth! The girl must tell the truth for you! No matter if she was to blacken her soul before God, you must have the truth told for you. The truth! It was not enough for you to know that the girl loved you, with her heart, with her life, that she would have died for you if she might! No. The poor girl must tear out the secret lining of her heart for you, to save you!

"Think you that if *mon Rafe* was alive and stood there where you stood, in peril of his life; think you that he would ask me to give up the secret of the Holy Confession to save him. *Non! Mon Rafe* was a *man!* He would die, telling me to keep that which God had trusted me with!

"Name of a Woodchuck! Who were you to be saved; that the Good God must come down from His Heaven to break the Seal of the Unopened Book for *you!*"

"You ask for truth! *Tiens!* I will tell you truth!"

"You sat in the place of the prisoner and cried that you were an innocent man. *Mon Rafe* was the guilty man. The whole world must come forth, the secrets of the grave must come forth to declare you innocent and him guilty! You were innocent! You were persecuted! The earth and the Heaven must come to show that you were innocent and he was guilty! *Bah! You were as guilty as he!*"

"I was there. I saw. Your finger was on the trigger. You only waited for the man to stop moving. Murder was in your heart. Murder was in your soul. Murder was in your finger. But you were innocent and *mon Rafe* was guilty. By how much?"

"By one second. That was the difference between *mon Rafe* and you. Just that second that he shot before you were ready. *That* was the difference between you the innocent man and *mon Rafe!*"

"You were guilty. In your heart you were guilty. In your soul you were guilty. M'sieur Cain himself was not more guilty than you!"

"You were more guilty than *mon Rafe*, for he had suffered more from that man. He was hunted. He was desperate, crazy! You were cool. You were ready. Only *mon Rafe* was a little quicker, because he was desperate. Before the Good God you were more guilty."

"And *mon Rafe* must be blackened more than the fire had blackened his poor body. And the poor Ruth must break the Holy Secret. And the good M'sieur the Bishop must break his holiest oath. All to make you innocent!"

"*Bah! Innocent!*"

She flung away from him and ran up the hill. Cynthe had not said quite all that she intended to say to this young gentleman. But then, also, she had said a good deal more than she had intended to say. So it was about even. She had said enough. And it would do him no harm. She had felt that she owed *mon Rafe* a little plain speaking. She was much relieved.

Jeffrey Whiting stood where she had left him digging up the tender roots of the new grass with his toe. He did not look after the girl. He had forgotten her.

He felt no resentment at the things that she had said. He did not argue with himself as to whether these things were just or unjust. Of all the things that she had said only one thing mattered. And that not because she had said it. It mattered because it was true. The quick, jabbing sentences from the girl had driven home to him just one thing.

Guilty? He *was* guilty. He was as guilty as--Rafe Gadbeau.

Provocation? Yes, he had had provocation, bitter, blinding provocation. But so had Rafe Gadbeau: and he had never thought of Rafe Gadbeau as anything but guilty of murder.

He turned on his heel and walked down the Run with swift, swinging strides, fighting this conviction that was settling upon him. He fought it viciously, with contempt, arguing that he was a man, that the thing was done and past, that men have no time for remorse and sickish, mawkish repentance. Those things were for brooding women, and Frenchmen. He fought it reasonably, sagaciously; contending that he had not, in fact, pulled the trigger. How did he know that he would ever have done so? Maybe he had not really intended to kill at all. Maybe he would not have killed. The man might have spoken to him. Perhaps he was going to speak when he turned that time. Who could tell? Ten thousand things might have happened, any one of which would have stood between him and killing the man. He fought it defiantly. Suppose he had killed the man? What about it? The man deserved it. He had a right to kill him.

But he knew that he was losing at every angle of the fight. For the conviction answered not a word to any of these things. It merely fastened itself upon his spirit and stuck to the original indictment: "As guilty as Rafe Gadbeau."

And when he came over the top of the hill, from where he could look down upon the grave of Rafe Gadbeau there under the Gaunt Rocks, the conviction pointed out to him just one enduring fact. It said: "There is the grave of Rafe Gadbeau; as long as memory lives to say anything about that grave it will say: a murderer was buried here."

Then he fought no more with the conviction. It gripped his spirit and cowed him. It sat upon his shoulders and rode home with him. His mother saw it in his face, and, not understanding, began to look for some fresh trouble.

She need not have looked for new trouble, so far as concerned things outside himself. For Jeffrey was doing very well in the world of men. He had gotten the home rebuilt, a more comfortable and finer home than it had ever been. He had secured an excellent contract from the railroad to supply thousands of ties out of the timber of the high hills. He had made money out of that. And once he had gotten a taste of money-making, in a business that was his by the traditions of his people and his own liking, he knew that he had found himself a career.

He was working now on a far bigger project, the reforestation of thirty thousand acres of the higher hill country. In time there would be unlimited money in that. But there was more than money in it. It was a game and a life which he knew and which he loved. To make money by making things more abundant, by covering the naked peaks of the hill country with sturdy, growing timber, that was a thing that appealed to him.

All the Winter nights he had spent learning the things that men had done in Germany and elsewhere in this direction, and in adding this knowledge to what he knew could be done here in the hills. Already he knew it was being said that he was a young fellow who knew more about growing timber than any two old men in the hills. And he knew how much this meant, coming from among a people who are not prone to give youth more than its due. Already he was being picked as an expert. Next week he was going down to Albany to give answers to a legislative committee for the Forest Commission, which was trying to get appropriations from the State for cleaning up brush and deadfalls from out of standing timber--a thing that if well done would render forest fires almost harmless.

He was getting a standing and a recognition which now made that law school diploma--the thing that he had once regarded as the portal of the world--look cheap and little.

But, as he sat late that night working on his forestry calculations, the roadway of his dreams fell away from under him. The high colour of his ambitions faded to a grey wall that stood before him and across the grey wall in letters of black he could only see the word--*guilty*.

What was it all worth? Why work? Why fight? Why dream? Why anything? when at the end and the beginning of all things there stood that wall with the word written across it. Guilty--guilty as Rafe Gadbeau. And Ruth Lansing--!

A flash of sudden insight caught him and held him in its glaring light. He had been doing all this work. He had built this home. He had fought the roughest timber-jacks and the high hills and the raging winter for money. He had dreamt and laboured on his dreams and built them higher. Why? For Ruth Lansing.

He had fought the thought of her. He had put her out of his mind. He had said that she had failed him in need. He had even, in the blackest time of the night, called her liar. He had forgotten her, he said.

Now he knew that not for an instant had she been out of his mind. Every stroke of work had been for her. She had stood at the top of the high path of every struggling dream.

Between him and her now rose that grey wall with the one word written on it. Was that what they had meant that day there in the court, she and the Bishop? Had they not lied, after all? Was there some sort of uncanny truth or insight or hidden justice in that secret confessional of theirs that revealed the deep, the real, the everlasting truth, while it hid the momentary, accidental truth of mere words? In effect, they had said that he was guilty. And he *was* guilty!

What was that the Bishop had said when he had asked for truth that day on the railroad line? "Sooner or later we have to learn that there is something bigger than we are." Was this what it meant? Was this the thing bigger than he was? The thing that had seen through him, had looked down into his heart, had measured him; was this the thing that was bigger than he?

He was whirled about in a confusing, distorting maze of imagination, misinformation, and some unreadable facts.

He was a guilty man. Ruth Lansing knew that he was guilty. That was why she had acted as she had. He would go to her. He would--! But what was the use? She would not talk to him about this. She would merely deny, as she had done before, that she knew anything at all. What could he do? Where could he turn? They, he and Ruth, could never speak of that thing. They could never come to any understanding of anything. This thing, this wall--with that word written on it--would stand between them forever; this wall of guilt and the secret that was sealed behind her lips. Certainly this was the thing that was stronger than he. There was no answer. There was no way out.

Guilty! Guilty as Rafe Gadbeau!

But Rafe Gadbeau had found a way out. He was not guilty any more. Cynthe had said so. He had gotten past that wall of guilt somehow. He had merely come through the fire and thrown himself at a man's feet and had his guilt wiped away. What was there in that uncanny thing they called confession, that a man, guilty, guilty as--as Rafe Gadbeau, could come to another man, and, by

the saying of a few words, turn over and face death feeling that his guilt was wiped away?

It was a delusion, of course. The saying of words could never wipe away Rafe Gadbeau's guilt, any more than it could take away this guilt from Jeffrey Whiting. It was a delusion, yes. But Rafe Gadbeau *believed* it! Cynthe believed it! And Cynthe was no fool. *Ruth* believed it!

It was a delusion, yes. But--*What* a delusion! What a magnificent, soul-stirring delusion! A delusion that could lift Rafe Gadbeau out of the misery of his guilt, that carried the souls of millions of guilty people through all the world up out of the depths of their crimes to a confidence of relief and freedom!

Then the soul of Jeffrey Whiting went down into the abyss of despairing loneliness. It trod the dark ways in which there was no guidance. It did not look up, for it knew not to whom or to what it might appeal. It travelled an endless round of memory, from cause to effect and back again to cause, looking for the single act, or thought, that must have been the starting point, that must have held the germ of his guilt.

Somewhere there must have been a beginning. He knew that he was not in any particular a different person, capable of anything different, likely to anything different, that morning on Bald Mountain from what he had been on any other morning since he had become a man. There was never a time, so far as he could see, when he would not have been ready to do the thing which he was ready to do that morning--given the circumstances. Nor had he changed in any way since that morning. What had been essentially his act, his thought, a part of him, that morning was just as much a part of him, was himself, in fact, this minute. There was no thing in the succession of incidents to which he could point and say: That was not I who did that: I did not mean that: I am sorry I did that. Nor would there ever be a time when he could say any of these things. It seemed that he must always have been guilty of that thing; that in all his life to come he must always be guilty of it. There had been no change in him to make him capable of it, to make him wish it; there had been no later change in him by which he would undo it. It seemed that his guilt was something which must have begun away back in the formation of his character, and which would persist as long as he was the being that he was. There was no beginning of it. There was no way that it might ever end.

And, now that he remembered, Ruth Lansing had seen that guilt, too. She had seen it in his eyes before ever the thought had taken shape in his mind.

What had she seen? What was that thing written so clear in his eyes that she could read and tell him of it that day on the road from French Village?

He would go to her and ask her. She should tell him what was that thing she had seen. He would make her tell. He would have it from her!

But, no. Where was the use? It would only bring them to that whole, impossible, bewildering business of the confessional. And he did not want to hear any more of that. His heart was sick of it. It had made him suffer enough. And he did not doubt now that Ruth had suffered equally, or maybe more, from it.

Where could he go? He must tell this thing. He *must* talk of it to some one! That resistless, irrepressible impulse for confession, that call of the lone human soul for confidence, was upon him. He must find some other soul to share with him the burden of this conviction. He must find some one who would understand and to whom he could speak.

Jeffrey Whiting was not subtle. He could not have analysed what this craving meant. He only knew that it was very real, that his soul was staggering alone and blind under the weight of this thing.

There was one man who would understand. The man who had looked upon the faces of life and death these many years, the man of strange comings and goings, the Bishop who had set him on the way of all this, and who from what he had said in his house in Alden, that day so long ago when all this began, may have foreseen this very thing, the man who had heard Rafe Gadbeau cry out his guilt; that man would understand. He would go to him.

He wrote a note which his mother would find in the morning, and slipping quietly out of the house he saddled his horse for the ride to Lowville.

"I came because I had to come," Jeffrey began, when the Bishop had seated him. "I don't know why I should come to you. I know you cannot do anything. There is nothing for any one to do. But I had to tell some one. I *had* to say it to somebody."

"I sat that day in the courtroom," he went on as the Bishop waited, "and thought that the whole world was against me. It seemed that everybody was determined to make me guilty--even you, even Ruth. And I was innocent. I had done nothing. I was bitter and desperate with the idea that everybody was trying to make me out guilty, when I was innocent. I had done nothing. I had not killed a man. I told the men there on the mountain that I was innocent and they would not believe me. Ruth and you knew in your hearts that I had not done the thing, but you would not say a word for me, an innocent man."

"It was that as much as anything, that feeling that the whole world wanted to condemn me knowing that I was innocent, that drove me on to the wild attack upon the railroad. I was fighting back, fighting back against everybody.

"And--this is what I came to say--all the time I was guilty--guilty: guilty as Rafe Gadbeau!"

"I am not sure I understand," said the Bishop slowly, as Jeffrey stopped.

"Oh, there's nothing to understand. It is just as I say. I was guilty of that man's death before I saw him at all that morning. I was guilty of it that instant when Rafe Gadbeau fired. I am guilty now. I will always be guilty. Rafe Gadbeau could say a few words to you and turn over into the next world, free. I cannot," he ended, with a sort of grim finality as though he saw again before him that wall against which he had come the night before.

"You mean--" the Bishop began slowly. Then he asked suddenly, "What brought your mind to this view of the matter?"

"A girl," said Jeffrey, "the girl that saved me; that French girl that loved Rafe Gadbeau. She showed me."

Ah, thought the Bishop, Cynthe has been relieving her mind with some plain speaking. But he did not feel at all easy. He knew better than to treat the matter lightly. Jeffrey Whiting was not a boy to be laughed out of a morbid notion, or to be told to grow older and forget the thing. His was a man's soul, standing in the dark, grappling with a thing with which it could not cope. The wrong word here might mar his whole life. Here was no place for softening away the realities with reasoning. The man's soul demanded a man's straight answer.

"Before you could be guilty," said the Bishop decisively, "you must have injured some one by your thought, your intention. Whom did you injure?"

Jeffrey Whiting leaped at the train of thought, to follow it out from the maze which his mind had been treading. Here was the answer. This would clear the way. Whom had he injured?

Well, *whom* had he injured? *Who* had been hurt by his thought, his wish, to kill a man? Had it hurt the man, Samuel Rogers? No. He was none the worse of it.

Had it hurt Rafe Gadbeau? No. He did not enter into this at all.

Had it hurt Jeffrey Whiting, himself? Not till yesterday; and not in the way meant.

Whom, then? And if it had hurt nobody, then--then why all this--? Jeffrey Whiting rose from his chair as though to go. He did not look at the Bishop. He stood with his eyes fixed unseeing upon the floor, asking:

Whom?

Suddenly, from within, just barely audible through his lips there came the answer; a single word:

"God!"

"Your business is with Him, then," said the Bishop, rising with what almost seemed brusqueness. "You wanted to see Him."

"But--but," Jeffrey Whiting hesitated to argue, "men come to you, to confess. Rafe Gadbeau--!"

"No," said the Bishop quickly, "you are wrong. Men come to me to *confession*. They come to *confess* to God."

He took the young man's hand, saying:

"I will not say another word. You have found your own answer. You would not understand better if I talked forever. Find God, and tell Him, what you have told me."

In the night Jeffrey Whiting rode back up the long way to the hills and home. He was still bewildered, disappointed, and a little resentful of the Bishop's brief manners with him. He had gone looking for sympathy, understanding, help. And he had been told to find God.

Find God? How did men go about to find God? Wasn't all the world continually on the lookout for God, and who ever found Him? Did the preachers find Him? Did the priests find Him? And if they did, what did they say to Him? Did people who were sick, and people who said God had answered their prayers and punished their enemies for them; did they find God?

Did they find Him when they prayed? Did they find Him when they were in trouble? What did the Bishop mean? Find God? He must have meant something? How did the Bishop himself find God? Was there some word, some key, some hidden portal by which men found God? Was God to be found here on the hills, in the night, in the open?

God! God! his soul cried incoherently, how can I come, how can I find! A wordless, baffled, impotent cry, that reached nowhere.

The Bishop had once said it. We get no answer.

Then the sense of his guilt, unending, ineradicable guilt, swept down upon him again and beat him and flattened him and buffeted him. It left him shaken and beaten. He was not able to face this thing. It was too big for him. He was after all only a boy, a lost boy, travelling alone in the dark, under the unconcerned stars. He had been caught and crushed between forces and passions that were too much for him. He was little and these things were very great.

Unconsciously the heart within him, the child heart that somehow lives ever in every man, began to speak, to speak, without knowing it, direct to God.

It was not a prayer. It was not a plea. It was not an excuse. It was the simple unfolding of the heart of a child to the Father who made it. The heart was bruised. A weight was crushing it. It could not lift itself. That was all; the cry of helplessness complete, of dependence utter and unreasoning.

Suddenly the man raised his head and looked at the stars, blinking at him through the starting

tears.

Was that God? Had some one spoken? Where was the load that had lain upon him all these weary hours?

He stopped his horse and looked about him, breathing in great, free, hungry breaths of God's air about him. For it *was* God's air. That was the wonder of it. The world was God's! And it was new made for him to live in!

He breathed his thanks, a breath and a prayer of thanks, as simple and unreasoning, unquestioning, as had been the unfolding of his heart. He had been bound: he was free!

Then his horse went flying up the hill road, beating a tattoo of new life upon the soft, breathing air of the spring night.

With the inconsequence of all of us children when God has lifted the stone from our hearts, Jeffrey had already left everything of the last thirty-six hours behind him as completely as if he had never lived through those hours. (That He lets us forget so easily, shows that He is the Royal God in very deed.)

Before the sun was well up in the morning Jeffrey was on his way to French Village, to look out the cabin where Ruth had cared for old Robbideau Laclair, and had shamed the lazy men into fixing that roof.

What he had heard the other day from Cynthe was by no means all that he had heard of the doings of Ruth during the last seven months. For the French people had taken her to their hearts and had made of her a wonderful new kind of saint. They had seen her come to them out of the fire. They had heard of her silence at the trial of the man she loved. They had seen her devoting herself with a careless fearlessness to their loved ones in the time when the black diphtheria had frightened the wits out of the best of women. All the while they knew that she was not happy. And they had explained fully to the countryside just what was their opinion of the whole matter.

Jeffrey, remembering these things, and suddenly understanding many things that had been hidden from him, was very humble as he wondered what he could say to Ruth.

At the outskirts of the little unpainted village he met Cynthe.

"Where is she?" he asked without preface.

Cynthe looked at him curiously, a long, searching look, and was amazed at the change she saw.

Here was not the heady, thoughtless boy to whom she had talked the other day. Here was a man, a thinking man, a man who had suffered and had learned some things out of unknown places of his heart.

I hurt him, she thought. Maybe I said too much. But I am not sorry. *Non*.

"The last house," she answered, "by the crook of the lake there. She will be glad," she remarked simply, and turned on her way.

Jeffrey rode on, thanking the little French girl heartily for the word that she had thought to add. It was a warrant, it seemed, of forgiveness--and of all things.

Old Robbideau Laclair and his crippled wife Philomena sat in the sun by the side of the house watching Ruth, who with strong brown arms bare above the elbow was working away contentedly in their little patch of garden. They nudged each other as Jeffrey rode up and left his horse, but they made no sign to Ruth.

So Jeffrey stepping lightly on the soft new earth came to her unseen and unheard. He took the hoe from her hand as she turned to face him. Up to that moment Jeffrey had not known what he was to say to her. What was there to say? But as he looked into her startled, pain-clouded eyes he found himself saying:

"I hurt God once, very much. I did not know what to say to Him. Last night He taught me what to say. I hurt you, once, very much. Will you tell me what to say to you, Ruth?"

It was a surprising, disconcerting greeting. But Ruth quickly understood. There was no irreverence in it, only a man's stumbling, wholehearted confession. It was a plea that she had no will to deny. The quick, warm tears of joy came welling to her eyes as she silently took his hand and led him out of the little garden and to where his horse stood.

There, she leaning against his horse, her fingers slipping softly through the big bay's mane, Jeffrey standing stiff and anxious before her, with the glad morning and the high hills and all French Village observing them with kindly eyes, these two faced their question.

But after all there was no question. For when Jeffrey had told all, down to that moment in the dark road when he had found God in his heart, Ruth, with that instinct of mothering tenderness that is born in every woman, said:

"Poor boy, you have suffered too much!"

"What I suffered was that I made for myself," he said thickly. "Cynthe Cardinal told me what a fool I was."

"What did Cynthe tell you?"

"She told me that you loved me."

"Did you need to be told that, Jeffrey?" said the girl very quietly.

"Yes, it seems so. I'd known your little white soul ever since you were a baby. I knew that in all your life you'd never had a thought that was not the best, the truest, the loyalest for me. I knew that there was never a time when you wouldn't have given everything, even life, for me. I knew it that day in the Bishop's house. I knew it that morning when you came to me in the sugar cabin."

"Yes, I knew all that," he went on bitterly. "I knew you loved me, and I knew what a love it was. I knew it. And yet that day--that day in the courtroom, the only thing I could do was to call you liar!"

She put up her hands with an appeal to stop him, but he went on doggedly.

"Yes, I did. That was all I could think of. I threw it at you like a blow in the face. I saw you quiver and shrink, as though I had struck you. And even that sight wasn't enough for me. I kept on saying it, when I knew in my heart it wasn't so. I couldn't help but know it. I knew you. But I kept on telling myself that you lied; kept on till yesterday. I wasn't big enough. I wasn't man enough to see that you were just facing something that was bigger than both of us--something that was bigger and truer than words--that there was no way out for you but to do what you did."

"Jeffrey, dear," the girl hurried to say, "you know that's a thing we can't speak about--"

"Yes, we can, now. I know and I understand. You needn't say anything. I *understand*."

"And I understand a lot more," he began again. "It took that little French girl to tell me what was the truth. I know it now. There was a deeper, a truer truth under everything. That was why you had to do as you did. That's why everything was so. I wasn't innocent. Things don't *happen* as those things did. They work out, because they have to."

The girl was watching him with fright and wonder in her eyes. What was he going to say? But she let him go on.

"No, I wasn't innocent," he said, as though to himself now. "I fooled myself into thinking that I was. But I was not. I meant to kill a man. I had meant to for a long time. Nothing but Rafe Gadbeau's quickness prevented me. No, I wasn't innocent. I was guilty in my heart. I was a murderer. I was guilty. I was as guilty as Rafe Gadbeau! As guilty as Ca--!"

The girl had suddenly sprung forward and thrown her arms around his neck. She caught the word that was on his lips and stopped it with a kiss, a kiss that dared the onlooking world to say what he had been going to say.

"You shall not say that!" she panted. "I will not let you say it! Nobody shall say it! I defy the whole world to say it!"

"But it's--it's true," said the boy brokenly as he held her.

"It is not true! Never! Nothing's true, only the truth that God has hidden in His heart! And that is hidden! How can we say? How dare we say what we would have done, when we didn't do it? How do we know what's really in our hearts? Don't you see, Jeffrey boy, we cannot say things like that! We don't know! I won't let you say it.

"And if you do say it," she argued, "why, I'll have to say it, too."

"You?"

"Yes, I. Do you remember that night you were in the sugar cabin? I was outside looking through the chinks at Rafe Gadbeau. What was I thinking? What was in my heart? I'll tell you. I was out there stalking like a panther. I wanted just one thing out of all the world. Just one thing! My rifle! To kill him! I would have done it gladly--with joy in my heart! I could have sung while I was doing it!

"Now," she gasped, "now, if you're going to say that thing, why, we'll say it together!"

The big boy, holding the trembling girl closer in his arms, understood nothing but that she wanted to stand with him, to put herself in whatever place was his, to take that black, terrible shadow that had fallen on him and wrap it around herself too.

"My poor little white-souled darling," he said through tears that choked him, "I can't take this from you! It's too much, I can't!"

After a little the girl relaxed, tiredly, against his shoulder and argued dreamily:

"I don't see what you can do. You'll have to take *me*. And I don't see how you can take me any way but just as I am."

Then she was suddenly conscious that the world was observing. She drew quickly away, and Jeffrey, still dazed and shaken, let her go.

Standing, looking at her with eyes that hungered and adored, he began to speak in wonder and self-abasement.

"After all I've made you suffer--!"

But Ruth would have none of this. It had been nothing, she declared. She had found work to do. She had been happy, in a way. God had been very kind.

At length Jeffrey said: "Well, I guess we'll never have to misunderstand again, anyway, Ruth. I had to find God because I was--I needed Him. Now I want to find Him--your way."

"You mean--you mean that you *believe*!"

"Yes," said Jeffrey slowly. "I didn't think I ever would. I certainly didn't want to. But I do. And it isn't just to win with you, Ruth, or to make you happier. I can't help it. It's the thing the Bishop once told me about--the thing that's bigger than I am."

Now Ruth, all zeal and thankfulness, was for leading him forthwith to Father Ponfret, that he might begin at once his course of instructions which she assured him was essential.

But Jeffrey demurred. He had been reading books all winter, he said. Though he admitted that until last night he had not understood much of it. Now it was all clear and easy, thank God! Could she not come home, then, to his mother, who was pining for her--and--and they would have all their lives to finish the instructions.

On this, however, Ruth was firm. Here she would stay, among these good people where she had made for herself a place and a home. He must come every week to Father Ponfret for his instructions, like any other convert. If on those occasions he also came to see her, well, she would, of course, be glad to see him and to know how he was progressing.

Afterwards? Well, afterwards, they would see.

And to this Jeffrey was forced to agree.

Old Robbideau Laclair, when he heard of this arrangement, grumbled that the way of the heretic was indeed made easy in these days. But his wife Philomena, scraping sharply with her stick, informed him that if the good Ruth saw fit to convert even a heathen Turk into a husband for herself she would no doubt make a good job of it.

So love came and went through the summer, practically unrebuked.

Again the Bishop came riding up to French Village with Arsene LaComb. But this time they rode in a jogging, rattling coach that swung up over the new line of railroad that came into the hills from Welden Junction. And Arsene was very glad of this, for as he looked at his beloved M'sieur l'Eveque he saw that he was not now the man to have faced the long road up over the hills. He was not two, he was many years older and less sturdy.

The Bishop practised his French a little, but mostly he was silent and thoughtful. He was remembering that day, nearly two years ago now, when he had set two ambitious young souls upon a way which they did not like. What a coil of good and bad had come out of that doing of his. And again he wondered, as he had wondered then, whether he had done right. Who was to tell?

And again to-morrow he was to set those two again upon their way of life, for he was coming up to French Village to the wedding of Ruth Lansing to Jeffrey Whiting.

Jeffrey Whiting knelt by Ruth Lansing's side in the little rough-finished sanctuary of the chapel which Father Ponfret had somehow managed to raise during that busy, poverty-burdened summer. But Jeffrey Whiting saw none of the poor makeshifts out of which the little priest had contrived a sanctuary to the high God. He was back again, in the night, on a dark, lone road, under the unconcerned stars, crying out to find God. Then God had come to him, with merciful, healing touch and lifted him out of the dust and agony of the road, and, finally, had brought him here, to this moment.

He had just received into his body the God of life. His soul stood trembling at its portal, receiving its Guest for the first time. He was amazed with a great wonder, for here was the very God of the dark night speaking to him in words that beat upon his heart. And his wonder was that from this he should ever arise and go on with any other business whatever.

Ruth Lansing knelt, adoring and listening to the music of that *choir unseen* which had once given her the call of life. She had followed it, not always in the perfect way, but at least bravely, unquestioningly. And it had brought her now to a holy and awed happiness. Neither life nor death would ever rob her of this moment.

Presently they rose and stood before the Bishop. And as the Shepherd blessed their joined hands he prayed for these two who were dear to him, as well as for his other little ones, and, as always, for those "other sheep." And the breathing of his prayer was:

That they be not afraid, my God, with any fear; but trust long in Thee and in each other.

THE END

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*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE SHEPHERD OF THE NORTH ***

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