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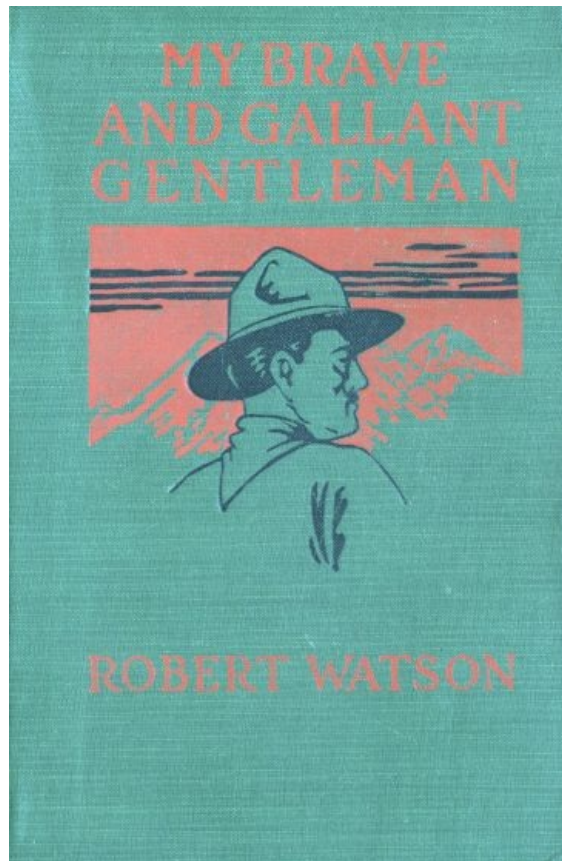
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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK MY BRAVE AND GALLANT GENTLEMAN: A ROMANCE OF BRITISH COLUMBIA ***



MY BRAVE and GALLANT GENTLEMAN

A Romance of British Columbia

BY

ROBERT WATSON

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TO A LADY CALLED NAN

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MY BRAVE AND GALLANT GENTLEMAN

CHAPTER I

The Second Son

Lady Rosemary Granton! Strange how pleasant memories arise, how disagreeable nightmares loom up before the mental vision at the sound of a name!

Lady Rosemary Granton! As far back as I could remember, that name had sounded familiar in my ears. As I grew from babyhood to boyhood, from boyhood to youth, it was drummed into me by my father that Lady Rosemary Granton, some day, would wed the future Earl of Brammerton and Hazelmere. This apparently awful calamity did not cause me any mental agony or loss of sleep, for the reason that I was merely The Honourable George, second son of my noble parent.

I was rather happy that morning, as I sat in an easy chair by the library window, perusing a work by my favourite author,—after a glorious twenty-mile gallop along the hedgerows and across country. I was rather happy, I say, as I pondered over the thought that something in the way of a just retribution was at last about to be meted out to my elder, haughty, arrogant and extremely aristocratic rake of a brother, Harry.

My mind flashed back again to the source of my vagrant thoughts. Lady Rosemary Granton! To lose the guiding hand of her mother in her infancy; to spend her childhood in the luxurious lap of New York's pampered three hundred; to live six years more among the ranchers, the cowboys and, no doubt, the cattle thieves of Wyoming, in the care of an old friend of her father, to wit, Colonel Sol Dorry; then to be transferred for refining and general educational purposes for another spell of six years to the strict discipline of a French Convent; to flit from city to city, from country to country, for three years with her father, in the stress of diplomatic service—what a life! what an upbringing for the future Countess of Brammerton! Finally, by way of culmination, to lose her father and to be introduced into London society, with a fortune that made the roués of every capital in Europe gasp and order a complete new wardrobe!

As I thought what the finish might be, I threw up my hands, for it was a most interesting and puzzling speculation.

Lady Rosemary Granton! Who had not heard the stories of her conquests and her daring? They were the talk of the clubs and the gossip of the drawing-rooms. Masculine London was in ecstasies over them and voted Lady Rosemary a trump. The ladies were scandalised, as only jealous minded ladies can be at lavishly endowed and favoured members of their own sex.

Personally, I preferred to sit on the fence. Being a lover of the open air, of the agile body, the strong arm and the quick eye, I could not but admire some of this extraordinary young lady's exploits. But,—the woman who was conceded the face of an angel, the form of a Venus de Milo; who was reported to have dressed as a jockey and ridden a horse to victory in the Grand National Steeplechase; who, for a wager, had flicked a coin from the fingers of a cavalry officer with a revolver at twenty paces; lassoed a cigar from between the teeth of the Duke of Kaslo and argued on the Budget with a Cabinet Minister, all in one week; who could pray with the piety of a fasting monk; weep at will and look bewitching in the process; faint to order with the grace, the elegance and all the stage effect of an early Victorian Duchess: the woman who was styled a golden-haired goddess by those on whom she smiled and dubbed a saucy, red-haired minx by those whom she spurned;—was too, too much of a conglomeration for such a humdrum individual, such an ordinary, country-loving fellow as I,—George Brammerton.

And now, poor old Hazelmere was undergoing a process of renovation such as it had not experienced since the occasion of a Royal visit some twenty years before: not a room in the house where one could feel perfectly safe, save the library: washing, scrubbing, polishing and oiling in anticipation of a rousing week-end House Party in honour of this wonderful, chameleon-like, Lady Rosemary's first visit; when her engagement with Harry would be formally announced to the inquisitive, fashionable world of which she was a spoiled child.

Why all this fuss over a matter which concerned only two individuals, I could not understand. Had I been going to marry the Lady Rosemary,—which, Heaven forbid,—I should have whipped her quietly away to some little, country parsonage, to the registrar of a small country town; or to some village blacksmith, and so got the business over, out of hand. But, of course, I had neither the inclination, nor the intention, let alone the opportunity, of putting to the test what I should do in regard to marrying her, nor were my tastes in any way akin to those of my most elegant, elder brother, Viscount Harry, Captain of the Guards,—egad,—for which two blessings I was indeed truly thankful.

As I was thus ruminating, the library door opened and my noble sire came in, spick and span as he always was, and happier looking than usual.

"Morning, George," he greeted.

"Good morning, dad."

He rubbed his hands together.

"Gad, youngster! (I was twenty-four) everything is going like clockwork. The house is all in order; supplies on hand to stock an hotel; all London falling over itself in its eagerness to get here. Harry will arrive this afternoon and Lady Rosemary to-morrow."

I raised my eyebrows, nodded disinterestedly and started in again to my reading. Father walked the carpet excitedly, then he stopped and looked down at me.

"You don't seem particularly enthusiastic over it, George. Nothing ever does interest you but boxing bouts, wrestling matches, golf and books. Why don't you brace up and get into the swim? Why don't you take the place that belongs to you among the young fellows of your own station?"

"God forbid!" I answered fervently.

"Not jealous of Harry, are you? Not smitten at the very sound of the lady's name,—like the young bloods, and the old ones, too, in the city?"

"God forbid!" I replied again.

"Hang it all, can't you say anything more than that?" he asked testily.

"Oh, yes! dad,—lots," I answered, closing my book and keeping my finger at the place. "For one thing—I have never met this Lady Rosemary Granton; never even seen her picture—and, to tell you the truth, from what I have heard of her, I have no immediate desire to make the lady's acquaintance."

There was silence for a moment, and from my father's heavy breathing I could gather that his temper was ruffling.

"Look here, you young barbarian, you revolutionary,—what do you mean? What makes you talk in that way of one of the best and sweetest young ladies in the country? I won't have it from you, sir, *this* Lady Rosemary Granton, *this* Lady indeed."

"Oh! you know quite well, dad, what I mean," I continued, a little bored. "Harry is no angel, and I doubt not but Lady Rosemary is by far too good for him. But,—you know,—you cannot fail to have heard the stories that are flying over the country of her cantrips;—some of them, well, not exactly pleasant. And, allowing fifty percent for exaggeration, there is still a lot that would be none the worse of considerable discounting to her advantage."

"Tuts, tush and nonsense! Foolish talk most of it! The kind of stuff that is garbled and gossiped about every popular woman. The girl is up-to-date, modern, none of your drawing-room dolls. I admit that she has go in her, vim, animal spirits, youthful exuberance and all that. She may love sport and athletics, but, but,—you, yourself, spend most of your time in pursuit of these same amusements. Why not she?"

"Why! father, these are the points I admire in her,—the only ones, I may say. But, oh! what's the good of going over it all? I know, you know,—everybody knows;—her flirtations, her affairs; every rake in London tries to boast of his acquaintance with her and bandies her name over his brandy and soda, and winks."

"Look here, George," put in my father angrily, "you forget yourself. These stories are lies, every one of them! Lady Rosemary is the daughter of my dearest, my dead friend. Very soon, she will be your sister."

"Yes! I know,—so let us not say any more about it. It is Harry and she for it, and, if they are pleased and an old whim of yours satisfied,—what matters it to an ordinary, easy-going, pipe-loving, cold-blooded fellow like me?"

"Whim, did you say? Whim?" cried my father, flaring up and clenching his hands excitedly. "Do you call the vow of a Brammerton a whim? The pledged word of a Granton a whim? Whim, be damned."

For want of words to express himself, my father dropped into a chair and drummed his agitated fingers on the arms of it.

I rose and went over to him, laying my hand lightly on his shoulder.

Poor old dad! I had not meant to hurt his feelings. After all, he was the dearest of old-fashioned fellows and I loved his haughty, mid-Victorian ways.

"There, there, father,—I did not mean to say anything that would give offence. I take it all back. I am sorry,—indeed I am."

He looked up at me and his face brightened once more.

"Gad, boy,—I'm glad to hear you say it. I know you did not mean anything by your brusqueness. You are an impetuous, headstrong young devil though,—with a touch of your mother in you,—and, 'gad, if I don't like you the more for it.

"But, but," he went on, looking in front of him, "you must remember that although Granton and I were mere boys at the time our vow was made,—he was a Granton and I a Brammerton, whose vows are made to keep. It seems like yesterday, George; it was a few hours after he saved my life in the fighting before Sevastopol. We were sitting by the camp-fire. The chain-shot was still flying around. The cries of the wounded were in our ears. The sentries were challenging continually and drums were rolling in the distance.

"I clasped Fred's hand and I thanked him for what he had done for me that day, right in the teeth of the Russian guns.

"'Freddy, old chap, you're a trump,' I said, 'and, if ever I be blessed with an heir to Brammerton and Hazelmere, I would wish nothing better than that he should marry a Granton.'

"'And nothing would please me so much, Harry, old boy,—as that a maid of Granton should wed a Brammerton,' he answered earnestly.

"'Then it's a go,' said I, full of enthusiasm.

"'It's a go, Harry.'

"And we raised our winecups, such as they were.

"'Your daughter, Fred!'

"'Your heir, Harry!'

"'The future Earl and Countess of Brammerton and Hazelmere,' we chimed together.

"Our winecups clinked and the bond was made;—made for all time, George."

My father's eyes lit up and he seemed to be back in the Crimea. He shook his head sadly.

"And now, poor old Fred is gone. Ah, well! our dream is coming true. In a month, the maid of Granton weds the future Earl of Brammerton.

"Gad, George, my boy,—Rosemary may be skittish and lively, but were she the most mercurial woman in Christendom, she has never forgotten that she is first of all a Granton, and, as a Granton, she has kept a Granton's pledge."

For a moment I caught the contagion of my father's earnestness. My eyes felt damp as I thought how important, after all, this union was to him. But, even then, I could not resist a little more questioning.

"Does Harry love her, dad?"

"Love her!" He smiled. "Why! my boy, he's madly in love with her."

"Then, why doesn't he mend a bit? give over his mad chasing after,—to put it mildly,—continual excitement; and demonstrate that he is thoroughly in earnest. You know, falling madly in love is a habit of Harry's."

"Don't you worry your serious head about that, George. You talk of Harry as if he were a baby. You talk as if you were his grandfather, instead of his younger brother and a mere boy."

"Does Lady Rosemary love Harry?" I asked, ignoring his admonition.

"Of course, she loves him. Why shouldn't she? He's a good fellow; well bred and well made; he is a soldier; he is in the swim; he has plenty to spend; he is the heir to Brammerton;—why shouldn't she love him? She is going to marry him, isn't she? She may not be of the gushing type, George, but she'll come to it all in good time. She will grow to love him, as every good wife does her husband. So, don't let that foolish head of yours give you any more trouble."

I turned to leave.

"George!"

"Yes, dad!"

"You will be on hand this week-end. I want you at home. I need you to keep things going. No skipping off to sporting gatherings or athletic conventions. I wish you to meet your future sister."

"Well,—I had not thought of that, dad. Big Jim Darrol, Tom Tanner and I have entered for a number of events at the Gartnockan Games on Saturday. I am also on the lists as a competitor for the Northern Counties Golf Championship on Monday."

My father looked up at me in a strange way.

"However," I went on quickly, "much as I dislike the rush, the gush and the clatter of house parties, I shall be on hand."

"Good! I knew you would, my boy," replied my father quietly. "Where away now, lad?"

"Oh! down to the village to tell Jim and Tom not to count on me for their week-end jaunt."

CHAPTER II

Another Second Son

I strolled down the avenue, between the tall trees and on to the broad, sun-baked roadway leading to the sleepy little village of Brammerton, which lay so snugly down in the hollow. Swinging my stout stick and whistling as I went, I felt at peace with the good old world. My head was clear, my arm was strong; rich, fresh blood was dancing in my veins; I was young, single, free;—so what cared I?

As I walked along, I saw ahead of me a thin line of blue-grey smoke curling up from the roadside. As I drew nearer, I made out the back of a ragged man, leaning over a fire. His voice, lusty and clear as a bell, was ringing out a strange melody. I went over to him.

I was looking over his shoulder, yet he seemed not to have heard me, so intent was he on his song and in his work.

He was toasting the carcass of a poached rabbit, the wet skin of which lay at his side. He was a dirty, ragged rascal, but he seemed happy and his voice was good. The sentiment of his song was not altogether out of harmony with my own feelings.

"A carter swore he'd love always
A skirt, some rouge, a pair of stays.
After his vow, for days and days,
He thought himself the smarter."

The singer bit a piece of flesh from the leg of his rabbit, to test its tenderness, then he resumed his toasting and his song.

"But, underneath the stays and paint
He found the usual male complaint:
A woman's tongue, with Satan's taint;
A squalling, brawling tartar.

"She scratches, bites and blacks his eye.
His head hangs low; he heaves a sigh;
He longs for single days, gone by.
He's doomed to die a martyr."

The peculiar fellow stopped, opened a red-coloured handkerchief, took out a hunk of bread and set it down by his side with slow deliberation. It was quite two minutes ere he started off again.

"Now, friends, beware, take my advice;
When eating sugar, think of spice;
Before you marry, ponder twice:
Remember Ned the carter."

From the words, it seemed to me that he had finished the song, but, judging from the tune, it was never-ending.

"A fine song, my good fellow," I remarked from behind.

The rascal did not turn round.

"Oh!—it's no' so bad. It's got the endurin' quality o' carrying a moral," he answered.

"You seem to be clear in the conscience yourself," said I.

"It'll be clearer when I get outside o' this rabbit," he returned, still not deigning to look at me.

"But you did not seem to be startled when I spoke to you," I remarked in surprise.

"What way should I? I never saw the man yet that I was feart o'. Forby,—I kent you were there."

"But, how could you know? I did not make a noise or display my presence in any way."

"No!—but the wind was blawin' from the back, ye see; and when ye came up behind the smoke curled up a bit further and straighter than it did before; then there was just the ghost o' a shadow."

I laughed. "You are an observant customer."

"Oh, ay! I'm a' that. Come round and let me see ye."

I obeyed, and he seemed satisfied with his inspection.

"Sit doon,—oot o' the smoke," he said.

I did so.

"You are Scotch?" I ventured.

"Ay! From Perth, awa'.

"A Scotch tinker?"

"Just that; a tinker from Perth, and my name's Robertson. I'm a Struan, ye ken. The Struans,—the real Struans,—are a' tinkers or pipers. In oor family, my elder brother fell heir to my father's pipes, so I had just to take to the tinkering. But we're joint heirs to my father's fondness for a dram. Ye havena a wee drop on ye?"

"Not a drop," I remarked.

"That's a disappointment. I was kind o' feart ye wouldna, when I asked ye."

"How so?"

"Oh! ye don't look like a man that wasted your substance. More like a seller o' Bibles, or maybe a horse doctor."

I laughed at the queer comparison, and he looked out at me from under his shaggy, red eyebrows.

"Have a bite o' breakfast wi' me. I like to crack to somebody when I'm eatin'. It helps the digestion."

"No, thank you," I said. "I have breakfasted already."

"It's good meat, man. The rabbit's fresh. I can guarantee it, for it was runnin' half an hour ago. Try a leg."

I refused, but, as he seemed crestfallen, I took the drumstick in my hand and ate the meat slowly from it; and never did rabbit taste so good.

"What makes ye smile?" asked my tattered companion. "Do ye no' like the taste o' it?"

"Oh! the rabbit is all right," I said, "but I was just thinking that had it lived its children might have belonged to a brother of mine some day."

"How's that? Is he a keeper? Od sake!" he went on, scratching his head, as it seemed to dawn on him, "ye don't happen to belong to the big hoose up there?"

"I live there," said I.

He leaned over to me quickly. "Have another leg, man,—have it;—dod! it's your ain, anyway."

"I haven't finished the first yet. Go ahead yourself."

He ate slowly, eying me now and again through the smoke.

"So you're a second son, eh?" he pondered. "Man, ye have my sympathy. I had the same ill-luck. That's how my brother Angus got the pipes and I'm a tinker. Although, I wouldna mind being the second son o' a Laird or a Duke."

"Well, my friend," said I; "that's just where our opinions differ. Now, I'd sooner be the second son of a rag-and-bone man; a—Perthshire piper of the name of Robertson; ay! of the devil himself,

—than the second son of an Earl."

"Do ye tell me that now!" he put in, with a cock of his trowsled head, picking up another piece of rabbit.

"You see,—you and these other fellows can do as you like; go where you like when you like. An Earl's second son has to serve his House. He has to pave the way and make things smooth for the son and heir. He is supposed to work the limelight that shines on his elder brother. He is tolerated, sometimes spoiled and petted, because,—well, because he has an elder brother who, some day, will be an Earl; but he counts for little or nothing in the world's affairs.

"Be thankful, sir, you are only the second son of a highland piper."

The tramp reflected for a while.

"Ay, ay!" he philosophised at last, "no doot,—maybe,—just that. I can see you have your ain troubles and I'm thinkin', maybe, I'm just as weel the way I am. But it's a queer thing; we aye think the other man is gettin' the best o' what's goin'. It's the way o' the world."

He was quiet a while. He negotiated the rabbit's head and I watched him with interest as he extracted every bit of meat from the maze of bone.

"And you would be the Earl when your father dies, if it wasna for your brother?" he added.

"Yes!" I answered.

"Man, it must be a dreadful temptation."

"What must be?"

"Och! to keep from puttin' something in his whisky; to keep from flinging him ower the window or droppin' a flower pot on his heid, maybe. If my ain father had been an Earl, Angus Robertson would never have lived to blow the pipes. As it was, it was touch and go wi' Angus;—for they were the bonny pipes,—the grand, bonny pipes."

"Do you mean to tell me, you would have murdered your brother for a skirling, screeching bagpipes?" I asked in horror.

"Och! hardly that, man. Murder is no' a bonny name for it. I would just kind o' quietly have done awa' wi' him. It's maybe a pity my conscience was so keen, for he's no' much good, is Angus; he's a through-other customer: no' steady and law-abidin' like mysel'."

"Well, my friend," I said finally—

"Donald! that's my name."

"Well, Donald, I must be on my way."

"What's a' the hurry, man?"

"Business."

"Oh! weel; give me your hand on it. You've a fine face. The face o' a man that, if he had a dram on him, he would give me a drop o' it."

"That I would, Donald."

"It's a pity. But ye don't happen to have the price o' the dram on ye?"

"Maybe I have, Donald."

I handed him a sixpence.

"Thank ye. I'm never wrong in the readin' o' face character."

As I made to go from him, he started off again.

"You don't happen to be a married man, wi' a wife and bairns?" he asked.

"No, Donald. Thank goodness! What made you ask that?"

"Oh! I thought maybe you were and that was the way you liked the words o' my bit song."

I left the tinker finishing his belated breakfast and hurried down the road toward the village.

The sun was getting high in the heavens, birds were singing and the spring workers were busy in the fields. I took the side track down the rough pathway leading to Modley Farm.

My good friend, big, brawny, bluff Tom Tanner,—who was standing under the porch,—hailed

me from a distance, with his usual merry shout.

"Where away, George? Feeling fit for our trip?" he asked as I got up to him.

"I am sorry, old boy, but, so far as I am concerned, the trip is off. I just hurried down to tell you and Jim.

"You see, Tom, there is going to be a House Party up there this week-end and my dad's mighty anxious to have me at home; so much so, that I would offend him if I went off. Being merely George Brammerton, I must bow to the paternal commands, although I would rather, a hundred times, be at the games."

Tom's face fell, and I could see he was disappointed. I knew how much he enjoyed those week-end excursions of ours.

"The fact is," I explained, "there is going to be a marriage up there pretty soon, and, naturally, I am wanted to meet the lady."

"Great Scott! George,—you are not trying to break it gently to me? You are not going to get married, are you?" he asked in consternation.

I laughed loudly. "Lord, no! Not for a kingdom. It is my big brother Harry."

Tom seemed relieved. He even sighed.

"I'm glad to hear you say it, George, for there's a lot of fine athletic meetings coming on during the next three or four months and it would be a pity to miss them for, for,— Oh! hang it all! you know what I mean. You're such a queer, serious, determined sort of customer, that it's hard to say what you will do next."

He looked so solemn over the matter that I laughed again.

His kind-hearted old mother, who had been at work in the kitchen and had overheard our conversation, came to the doorway and placed her arms lovingly around our broad shoulders.

"Lots of time yet to think about getting married. And, let me whisper something into your ears. It's an old woman's advice, and it's good:—when you do think of marrying, be sure you get a wife with a pleasant face and a good figure; a wife that other wives' men will turn round and admire; for, you know, you can never foretell what kind of temper a woman has until you have lived with her. A maid is always on her best behaviour before her lover. And, just think what it would mean if you married a plain, shapeless lass and she proved to have a temper like a termagant! Now, a handsome lass, even if she has a temper, is always—a handsome lass and something to rouse envy of you in other men. And, after all, we measure and treasure what we have in proportion as other people long for it. So, whatever you do, young men, make sure she is handsome!"

"Good, sensible advice, Mrs. Tanner; and I mean to take it," said I. "But I would be even more exacting. In addition to being sweet tempered and fair of face and form, she must have curly, golden hair and golden brown eyes to match."

"And freckles?" put in Mrs. Tanner with a wry face.

"No! freckles are barred," I added.

"But, golden hair and brown eyes are mighty rare to find in one person," said Tom innocently.

"Of course they are; and the combination such as I require is so extremely rare that my quest will be a long one. I am likely therefore to enjoy my bachelorhood for many days to come."

"Good-bye, Mrs. Tanner. Good-bye, Tom; I am going down to the smithy to see Jim."

I strolled away from my happy, contented friends, on to the main road again and down the hill to the village, little dreaming how long it would be ere I should have an opportunity of talking with them again.

CHAPTER III

Jim the Blacksmith

The village of Brammerton seemed only half awake. A rumbling cart was slowly wending its way up the hill, three or four old men were standing yarning at the inn corner; now and again, a busy housewife would appear at her door and take a glimpse of what little was going on and

disappear inside just as quickly as she had shown herself. The sound of the droning voices of children conning their lessons came through the open window of the old schoolhouse.

These were the only signs and sounds of life that forenoon in Brammerton. Stay!—there was yet another. Breaking in on the general quiet of the place, I could hear distinctly the regular thud of hard steel on soft, followed by the clear double-ring of a small hammer on a mellow-toned anvil.

One man, at any rate, was hard at work,—Jim Darrol,—big, honest, serious giant that he was.

Light of heart and buoyant in body, I turned down toward the smithy. I looked in through the grimy, broken window and admired the brawny giant he looked there in the glare of the furnace, with his broad back to me, his huge arms bared to the shoulders. Little wonder, thought I, Jim Darrol can whirl the hammer and put the shot farther than any man in the Northern Counties.

How the muscles bulged, and wriggled, and crawled under his dark, hairy skin! What a picture of manliness he portrayed! And, best of all,—I knew his heart was as good and clean as his body was sound.

I tiptoed cautiously inside and slapped him between the shoulders. He wheeled about quickly. He always was a solemn-looking owl, but this morning his face was clouded and grim. As he recognised me, a terrible anger seemed to blaze up in his black eyes. I could see the muscles tighten in his arms and his fingers close firmly over the shaft of the hammer he held. I could see a new-born, but fierce hatred burning in every inch of his enormous frame.

"Hello, Jim, old man! Who has been rubbing you the wrong way?" I cried.

His jaws set. He raised his left hand and pointed with his finger to the open doorway.

"Get out!" he growled, in a deep, hoarse voice.

I stood dumbfounded for a brief moment, then I replied roughly and familiarly: "Oh, you go to the devil! Keep your anger for those who have caused it."

"Get out, will you!" he cried again, taking a step nearer to me, his brows lowered, his lips drawn to a thin line.

I had seen these danger signals in Jim before, but never with any ill intent toward me. I was so astounded I could scarcely think aright. What could he mean? What was the matter?

"Jim, Jim," I soothed, "don't talk that way to old friends."

"You're no friend of mine," he shouted. "Will you get out of here?"

In some respects, I was like Jim Darrol: I did not like to be ordered about.

"No! I will not get out," I snapped back at him. "I mean to remain here until you grow sensible."

I went over to his anvil, set my leg across it and looked straight at him.

He raised his hammer high, as if to strike me; and I felt then that if I had taken my eyes from Jim's for the briefest flash of time, my last minute on earth would have arrived.

With an oath,—the first I ever heard him utter,—he cast the hammer from him, sending it clattering into a corner among the old horse shoes.

"Damn you,—I hate you and all your cursed aristocratic breed," he snarled. And, with the spring of a tiger, he had me by the throat, with those great, grabbing hands of his, his fingers closing cruelly on my windpipe as he tried to shake the life out of me.

I had always been able to account for Jim when it came to fisticuffs, but never at close quarters. This time, his attack was violent as it was unexpected. I did not have the ghost of a chance. I staggered back against the furnace wall, still in his devilish clutch. Not a gasp of air entered or left my body from the moment he clutched me.

He shook me as a terrier does a rat.

Soon my strength began to go; my eyes bulged; my head felt as if it were bursting; dancing lights and awful darknesses flashed and loomed alternately before and around me. Then the lights became scarcer and the darknesses longer and more intense. As the last glimmer of consciousness was leaving me, when black gloom had won and there was no more light, I felt a sudden release, painful and almost unwelcome to the oblivion to which I had been hurling. The lights came flashing back to me again and out of the whirling chaos I began to grasp the tangible once more. As I leaned against the side of the furnace, pulling at my throat where those terrible fingers had been,—gasping,—gasping,—for glorious life-giving, life-sustaining air, I gradually began to see as through a haze. Before long, I was almost myself again.

Jim was standing a few paces away, his chest heaving, his shaggy head bent and his great hands clenched against his thighs.

I gazed at him, and as I gazed something wet glistened in his eyes, rolled down his cheeks and splashed on the back of his hand, where it dried up as if it had fallen on a red-hot plate.

I took an unsteady step toward him and held out my hand.

"Jim," I murmured, "my poor old Jim!"

His head remained lowered.

"Strike me," he groaned huskily. "For God's sake strike me, for the coward I am!"

"I want your hand, Jim," I answered. "Tell me what is wrong? What is all this about?"

At last he looked into my eyes. I could see a hundred conflicting emotions working in his expressive face.

"You would be friends after what I have done?" he asked.

"I want your hand, Jim," I said again.

In a moment, both his were clasped over mine, in his vicelike grip.

"George,—George!" he cried. "We've always been friends,—chums. I have always known you were not like the rest of them."

He drew his forearm across his brow. "I am not myself, George. You'll forgive me for what I did, won't you?"

"Man, Jim,—there is nothing done that requires forgiving;—only, you have the devil's own grip. I don't suppose I shall be able to swallow decently for a week.

"But you are in trouble: what is it, Jim? Tell me; maybe I can help."

"Ay,—it's trouble enough,—God forbid. It's Peggy, George,—my dear little sister, Peggy, that has neither mother nor father to guide her;—only me, and I'm a blind fool. Oh!—I can't speak about it. Come over with me and see for yourself."

I followed him slowly and silently out of the smithy, down the lane and across the road to his little, rose-covered cottage. We went round to the back of the house. Jim held up his hand for caution, as he peeped in at the kitchen window. He turned to me again, and beckoned, his big eyes blind with tears.

"Look in there," he gulped. "That's my little sister, my little Peggy; she who never has had a sorrow since mother left us. She's been like that for four hours and she gets worse when I try to comfort her."

I peered in.

Peggy was sitting on the edge of a chair and bending across the table. Her arms were spread out in front of her and her face was buried in them. Her brown, curly hair rippled over her neck and shoulders like a mountain stream. Great sobs seemed to be shaking her supple body. I listened, and my ears caught the sound of a breaking heart. There was a fearful agony in her whole attitude.

I turned away without speaking and followed Jim back to the smithy. When we got there, something pierced me like a knife, although all was not quite clear to my understanding.

"Jim,—Jim," I cried, "surely you never fancied I—I was in any way to blame for this. Why! Jim,—I don't even know yet what it is all about."

He laughed unpleasantly. "No, George, no!—Oh! I can't tell you. Here—"

He went to his coat which hung from a hook in the wall. He pulled a letter from his inside pocket. "Read that," he said.

I unfolded the paper, as he stood watching me keenly.

The note was in handwriting with which I was well familiar.

"My DEAR LITTLE PEGGY,

I am very, very sorry,—but surely you know that what you ask is impossible. I shall try to find time to run out and see you at the usual place, Friday night at nine o'clock. Do not be afraid, little woman; everything will come out all right. You know I shall see that you are well looked after;

that you do not want for anything.

Burn this after you read it. Keep our secret, and bear up, like the good little girl you are.
Yours affectionately,

H——"

As I read, my blood chilled in my veins, was,—there could be no mistaking it.

"My God! Jim," I cried, "this is terrible. Surely,—surely——"

"Yes! George," he said, in a tensely subdued voice, "your brother did that. Your brother,—with his glib tongue and his masterful way. Oh!—well I know the breed. They are to be found in high and low places; they are generally not much for a man to look at, but they are the kind no woman is safe beside; the kind that gets their soft side whether they be angels or she-devils. Why couldn't he leave her alone? Why couldn't he stay among his own kind?"

"And now, he has the gall to think that his accursed money can smooth it over. Damn and curse him for what he is."

I had little or nothing to say. My heart was too full for words and a great anger was surging within me against my own flesh and blood.

"Jim,—does this make any difference between you and me?" I asked, crossing over to him on the spongy floor of hoof parings and steel filings. "Does it, Jim?"

He caught me by the shoulders, in his old, rough way, and looked into my face. Then he smiled sadly and shook his head.

"No, George, no! You're different: you always were different; you are the same straight, honest George Brammerton to me;—still the same."

"Then, Jim, you will let me try to do something here? You will promise me not to get into personal contact with Harry,—at least until I have seen him and spoken with him. Not that he does not deserve a dog's hiding, but I should like to see him and talk with him first."

"Why should I promise that?" he asked sharply.

"For one thing,—because, doubtless, Harry is home now. And again, there is going to be a week-end House Party at our place. Harry's engagement of marriage with Lady Rosemary Granton is to be announced; and Lady Rosemary will be there.

"It would only mean trouble for you, Jim;—and, God knows, this is trouble enough."

"What do I care for trouble?" he cried defiantly. "What trouble can make me more unhappy than I now am?"

"You must avoid further trouble for Peggy's sake," I interposed. "Jim,—let me see Harry first. Do what you like afterwards. Promise me, Jim."

He swallowed his anger.

"God!—it will be a hard promise to keep if ever I come across him. But I do promise, just because I like you, George, as I hate him."

"May I keep this meantime?" I asked, holding up Harry's letter to Peggy.

"No! Give it to me. I might need it."

"But I might find greater use for it, Jim. Won't you let me have it, for a time at least?"

"Oh! all right, all right," he answered, spreading his hands over his leather apron.

I left him there amid the roar of the fire and the odour of sizzling hoofs, and wended my way slowly up the dust-laden hill, back home, having forgotten entirely, in the great sorrow that had fallen, to tell Jim my object in calling on him that day.

CHAPTER IV

Viscount Harry, Captain of the Guards

On nearing home, I noticed the "Flying Dandy," Harry's favourite horse, standing at the front entrance in charge of a groom.

"Hello, Wally," I shouted in response to the groom's salute and broad grin. "Is Captain Harry home?"

"Yes, sir! Three hours ago, sir. 'E's just agoing for a canter, sir, for the good of 'is 'ealth."

I went inside.

"Hi! William," I cried to the retreating figure of our portly and aristocratic butler. "Where's Harry?"

"Captain Harry, sir, is in the armoury. Any message, sir?"

"No! it is all right, William. I shall go along in and see him."

I went down the corridor, to the most ancient part of Hazelmere House; the old armoury, with its iron-studded oaken doors and its suggestion of spooks and goblins. I pushed in to that sombre-looking place, which held so many grim secrets of feudal times. How many drinking orgies and all-night card parties had been held within its portals, I dared not endeavour to surmise. As to how many plots had been hatched behind its studded doors, how many affairs of honour had been settled for all time under its high-panelled roof,—there was only a meagre record; but those we knew of had been bloody and not a few.

Figures, in suits of armour, stood in every corner; two-edged swords, shields of brass and cowhide, blunderbusses and breech-loading pistols hung from the walls, while the more modern rifles and fowling pieces were ranged in orderly fashion along the far side.

The light was none too good in there, and I failed, at first, to discover the object of my quest.

"How do, farmer Giles?" came that slow, drawling, sarcastic voice which I knew so well.

I turned suddenly, and,—there he was, seated on a brass-studded oak chest almost behind the heavy door, swinging one leg and toying with a seventeenth century rapier. Through his narrow-slitted eyes, he was examining me from top to toe in apparent disgust: tall, thin, perfectly groomed, handsome, cynical, devil-may-care.

I tried to speak calmly, but my anger was greater than I could properly control. Poor little Peggy Darrol was uppermost in my thoughts.

"Gad, George,—you look like a tramp. Why don't you spruce up a bit? Hobnailed boots, homespun breeches; ugh! it's enough to make your noble ancestors turn in their coffins and groan.

"Don't you know the Brammerton motto is, 'Clean,—within and without.'"

He bent the blade of his rapier until it formed a half hoop, then he let it fly back with a twang.

"And some of us have degenerated so," I answered, "that we apply the motto only in so far as it affects the outside."

"While some of us, of course, are so busy scrubbing and polishing at our inwards," he put in, "that we have no time to devote to the parts that are seen. But that seems to me deuced like cant; and a cheap variety of it at that.

"So you have taken to preaching, as well as farming. Fine combination, little brother! However, George,—dear boy,—we shall let it go at that. There is something you are anxious to unload. Get it out of your system, man."

"I have just been hearing that you are going to marry Lady Rosemary Granton soon."

"Why, yes! of course. You may congratulate me, for I have that distinguished honour," he drawled.

"And you *do* consider it an honour?" I asked, pushing my hands deep into my pockets and spreading my legs.

He leaned back and surveyed me tolerantly.

"Gad!—that's a beastly impertinent question, George. Why shouldn't it be an honour, when every gentleman in London will be biting his finger-tips with envy?"

I nodded and went on.

"You consider also that she will be honoured in marrying a Brammerton?"

"Look here," he answered, a little irritated, "what's all this damned catechising for?"

"I am simply asking questions, Harry; taking liberties seeing I am a Brammerton and your

little brother," I retorted calmly.

"And nasty questions they are, too;—but, by Jove! since you ask, and, as I am a Brammerton, and it is I she is going to marry,—why! I consider she *is* honoured. The honour will be,—ah! on both sides, George. Now,—dear fellow,—don't worry about my feelings. If you have anything more to ask, why! shoot it over, now that I am in the mood for answering," he continued dryly. "I have a hide like a rhino'."

I looked him over coldly.

"Yes, Harry,—Lady Rosemary *will* come to you as a Granton, fulfilling the pledge made by her father. She will come to you with her honour bright and unsullied."

He bent forward and frowned at me.

"Do you doubt it?" he shot across.

I shook my head. "No!"

He resumed his old position.

"Glad to hear you say so. Now,—what else? Blest if this doesn't make me feel quite a devil, to be lectured and questioned by my young brother,—my own, dear, little, preaching, farmer, kid of a brother."

"You will go to her a Brammerton, fulfilling the vow made by a Brammerton, with a Brammerton's honour, unstained, unblemished,—'Clean,—within and without?'"

He rose slowly from the chest and faced me squarely.

There was nothing of the coward in Harry.

His eye glistened with a cruel light. "Have a care, little brother," he said between his regular, white teeth. "Have a care."

"Why, Harry," I remonstrated in feigned surprise, "what's the matter? What have I said amiss?"

He had always played the big, patronising, bossing brother with me and I had suffered it from him, although, from a physical standpoint, the suffering of late had been one of good-natured tolerance. To-day, there was something in my manner that told him he had reached the end of it.

"Tell me what you mean?" he snarled.

"If you do not know what I mean, brother mine, sit down and I will tell you."

"No!" he answered.

"Oh, well!—I'll tell you anyway."

I went up close to him. "What are you going to do about Peggy Darrol?" I demanded.

The shot hit hard; but he was almost equal to it. He sat down on the chest again and toyed once more with the point of the rapier. Then, without looking up, he answered:

"Peggy Darrol,—eh, George! Peggy Darrol, did you say? Who the devil is she? Oh,—ah,—eh,—oh, yes! the blacksmith's sister,—um,—nice little wench, Peggy:—attractive, fresh, clinging, strawberries and cream and all that sort of thing. Bit of a dreamer, though!"

"Who set her dreaming?" I asked, pushing my anger back.

"Hanged if I know; born in her I suppose. It is part of every woman's make-up. Pretty little thing, though; by Gad! she is."

"Yes! she is pretty; and she was good as she is pretty until she got tangled up with you."

Harry sprang up and menaced me.

"What do you mean, you,—you?— What are you driving at? What's your game?"

"Oh! give over this rotten hypocrisy," I shouted, pushing him back. "Hit you on the raw, did it?"

He drew himself up.

"No! it didn't. But I have had more than enough of your impertinences. I would box your ears for the unlicked pup you are, if I could do it without soiling my palms."

I smiled.

"Those days are gone, Harry,—and you know it, too. Let us cut this evasion and tom-foolery. You have got that poor girl into a scrape. What are you going to do about getting her out of it?"

"I have got her into trouble? How do you know I have? Her word for it, I suppose? A fine state of affairs it has come to, when any girl who gets into trouble with her clod-hopper sweetheart, has simply to accuse some one in a higher station than she, to have all her troubles ended."

He flicked some dust from his coat-sleeve. "Gad,—we fellows would never be out of the soup."

"No! not her word," I retorted. "Little Peggy Darrol is not that sort of girl and well you know it. I have your own word for it,—in writing."

His face underwent a change in expression; his cheeks paled slightly.

I drew his letter from my pocket.

"Damn her for a little fool," he growled. He held out his hand for it.

"Oh, no! Harry,—I am keeping this meantime." And I replaced it. "Tell me now,—what are you going to do about Peggy?" I asked relentlessly.

"Oh!" he replied easily, "don't worry. I shall have her properly looked after. She needn't fear. Probably I shall make a settlement on her; although the little idiot hardly deserves that much after giving the show away as she has done."

"Of course, you will tell Lady Rosemary of this before any announcement is made of your marriage, Harry? A Brammerton must, in all things, be honourable, 'Clean,—within and without.'"

He looked at me incredulously, and smiled almost in pity for me and my strange ideas.

"Certainly not! What do you take me for? What do you think Lady Rosemary is that I should trouble her with these petty matters?"

"Petty matters," I cried. "You call this petty? God forgive you, Harry. Petty! and that poor girl crying her heart out; her whole innocent life blasted; her future a disgrace! Petty!—my God!;—and you a Brammerton!"

"But I tell you," I blazed, "you shall let Lady Rosemary know."

"And I tell you,—I shall not," he replied.

"Then, by God!—I'll do it myself," I retorted. "I give you two hours to decide which of us it is to be."

I made toward the door. But Harry sprang for his rapier, picked it up and stood with his back against my exit, the point of his weapon to my breast.

There was a wicked gleam in his narrow eyes.

"Damn you! George Brammerton, for a sneaking, prying, tale-bearing lout;—you dare not do it!"

He took a step forward.

"Now, sir,—I will trouble you for that letter."

I looked at him in astonishment. There was a strange something in his eyes I had never seen there before; a mad, irresponsible something that cared not for consequences; a something that makes heroes of some men and murderers of others. I stood motionless.

Slowly he pushed the point of his rapier through my coat-sleeve. It pricked into my arm and I felt a few drops of warm blood trickle. I did not wince.

"Stop this infernal fooling," I cried angrily.

He bent forward, in the attitude of fence with which he was so familiar.

"Fooling, did you say? 'Gad! then, is this fooling?"

He turned the rapier against my breast, ripping my shirt and lancing my flesh to the bone. I staggered back with a gasp.

It was the act of a madman; and I knew in that moment that I was face to face with death by violence for the second time in a few hours. I slowly backed from him, but he followed me, step for step,

As I came up against and sought the wall behind me for support, my hand came in contact with something hard. I closed my fingers over it. It was the handle of an old highland broadsword

and the feel of it was not unpleasant. It lent a fresh flow to my blood. I tore the sword from its fastenings, and, in a second, I was standing facing my brother on a more equal, on a more satisfactory footing, determined to defend myself, blow for blow, against his inhuman, insane conduct.

"Ho! ho!" he yelled. "A duel in the twentieth century. 'Gad! wouldn't this set London by the ears? The Corsican Brothers over again!"

"Come on, with your battle-axe, farmer Giles, Let's see what stuff you're made of—blood or sawdust."

Twice he thrust at me and twice I barely avoided his dextrous onslaughts. I parried as he thrust, not daring to venture a return. Our strange weapons rang out and re-echoed, time and again, in the dread stillness of the isolated armoury.

My left arm was smarting from the first wound I had received, and a few drops of blood trickled down over the back of my hand, splashing on the floor.

"You bleed!—just like a human being, George. Who would have thought it?" gloated Harry with a taunt.

He came at me again.

My broadsword was heavy and, to me, unwieldy, while Harry's rapier was light and pliable. I could tell that there could be only one ending, if the unequal contest were prolonged,—I would be wounded badly, or killed outright. At that moment, I had no very special desire for either happening.

Harry turned and twisted his weapon with the clever wrist movement for which he was famous in every fencing club in Britain; and every time I wielded my heavy weapon to meet his light one I thought I should never be in time to meet his counter-stroke, his recovery was so very much quicker than mine.

He played with me thus for a time which seemed an eternity. My breath began to come in great gasps. Suddenly he lunged at me with all his strength, throwing the full weight of his body recklessly behind his stroke, so sure was he, evidently, that it would find its mark. I sprang aside just in time, bringing my broadsword down on his rapier and sending six inches of the point of it clattering to the floor.

"Damn the thing!" he blustered, taking a firmer grip of what steel remained in his hand.

"Aren't you satisfied? Won't you stop this madness?" I panted, my voice sounding loud and hollow in the stillness around us.

For answer he grazed my cheek with his jagged steel, letting a little more blood and hurting sufficiently to cause me to wince.

"Got you again, you see," he chuckled, pushing up his sleeves and pulling his tie straight. "George, dear boy, I'll have you in mincemeat before I get at any of your well-covered vitals."

A blind fury seized me. I drove in on him. He turned me aside with a grin and thrust heavily at me in return. I darted to the left, making no endeavour to push aside his weapon with my own but relying only on the agility of my body. With an oath, he floundered forward, and before he could recover I brought the flat of my heavy broadsword crashing down on the top of his head. His arm went up with a nervous jerk and his rapier flew from his hand, shattering against a high window and sending the broken glass rattling on to the cement walk below.

Harry sagged to the floor like a sack of flour and lay motionless on his face, his arms and legs spread out like a spider's.

I was bending down to turn him over, when I heard my father's voice on the other side of the door.

"Stand back! I'll see to this," he cried, evidently addressing the frightened servants.

I turned round. The door swung on its immense hinges and my father stood there, with staring eyes and pallid face, taking in the situation deliberately, looking from me to Harry's inert body beside which I knelt. Slowly he came into the centre of the room.

Full of anxiety, I looked at him. But there was no opening in that stern, old face for any explanations. He did not assail me with a torrent of words nor did he burst into a paroxysm of grief and anger. His every action was calculated, methodical, remorseless.

He turned to the open door.

"Go!" he commanded sternly. "Leave us,—leave Brammerton. I never wish to see you again. You are no son of mine."

His words seared into me. I held out my hands.

"Go!" he repeated quietly, but, if anything, more firmly.

"Good God! father,—won't you hear what I have to say in explanation?" I cried in vexatious desperation.

He did not answer me except with his eyes—those eyes which could say so much.

My anger was still hot within me. My inborn sense of fairness deeply resented this conviction on less than even circumstantial evidence; and, at the back of all that, I,—as well as he, as well as Harry,—was a Brammerton, with a Brammerton's temperament.

"Do you mean this, father?" I asked.

"Go!" he reiterated. "I have nothing more to say to such an unnatural son, such an unnatural brother as you are."

I bowed, pulled my jacket together with a shrug and buttoned it up. After all,—what mattered it? I was in the right and I knew it.

"All right, father! Some day, I know you will be sorry."

I turned on my heel and left the armoury.

The servants were clustering at the end of the corridor, with frightened eyes and pale faces. They opened up and shuffled uneasily as I passed through.

"William," I said to the butler, "you had better go in there. You may be needed."

"Yes, sir! yes, sir!" he answered, and hurried to obey.

Upstairs, in my own room, my knapsack was lying in a corner, ready for my proposed week-end tour. Beside it, stood my golf clubs. These will do, I found myself thinking: a knapsack with a change of linen and a bag of golf clubs,—not a bad outfit to start life with.

I opened my purse:—fifty pounds and a few shillings. Not much, but enough! In fact, nothing would have been plenty.

Suddenly I remembered that, before I went, I had a duty to perform. From my inside pocket, I took the letter which Harry had written to little, forlorn Peggy Darrol. I went to my writing desk and addressed an envelope to Lady Rosemary Granton. I inserted Harry's letter and sealed the envelope. As to the bearer of my message, that was easy. I pushed the button at my bedside and, in a second, sweet little Maisie Brant came to the door.

Maisie always had been my special favourite, and, on account of my having pulled her out of the river when she was only seven years old, I was hers. She had never forgotten. I cried to her in an easy, bantering way in order to reassure her.

"Neat little Maisie, sweet little Maisie;
Only fifteen and as fresh as a Daisy."

She smiled, but behind her smile was a look of concern.

"I am going away, Maisie," I said.

"Going away, sir?" she repeated anxiously, as she came bashfully forward.

"I won't be back again, Maisie. I am going for good."

She looked up at me in dumb disquiet.

"Maisie, Lady Rosemary Granton will be here this week-end."

"Yes, sir!" she answered. "I am to have the honour of looking after her rooms."

I laid my hand gently on her shoulder.

"I want you to do something for me, Maisie. I want you to give her this letter,—see that she gets it when she is alone. It is more important to her than you can ever dream of. She must have it within a few hours of her arrival. No one else must set eyes on it between now and then. Do you understand, Maisie?"

"Oh, yes, sir! You can trust me for that."

"I know I can, Maisie. You are a good girl."

I gave her the letter and she placed it in the safest, the most secret, place she knew,—her bosom. Then her eyes scanned me over.

"Oh! sir," she cried, in sudden alarm, "you are hurt. You are bleeding."

I put my hand to my cheek, but then I remembered I had already wiped away the few drops of blood from there with my handkerchief.

"Your arm, sir," she pointed.

"Oh!—just a scratch, Maisie."

"Won't you let me bind it for you, sir, before you go?" she pleaded.

"It isn't worth the trouble, Maisie."

Tears came to those pretty eyes of hers; so, to please her, I consented.

"All right," I cried, "but hurry, for I have no more business in here now than a thief would have."

She did not understand my meaning, but she left me and was back in a moment with a basin of hot water, a sponge, balsam and bandages.

I slipped off my coat and rolled up my sleeve, then, as Maisie's gentle fingers sponged away the congealed blood and soothed the throb, I began to discover, from the intense relief, how painful had been the hurt, mere superficial thing as it was.

She poured on some balsam and bound up the cut; all gentleness, all tenderness, like a mother over her babe.

"There is a little jag here, Maisie, that aches outrageously now that the other has been lulled to sleep." I pointed to my breast.

She undid my shirt, and, as she surveyed the damage, she cried out in anxiety.

It was a raw, jagged, angry-looking wound, but nothing to occasion concern.

She dealt with it as she had done the other, then she drew the edges of the cut together, binding them in place with strips of sticking plaster. When it was all over, I slipped into my jacket, swung my knapsack across my shoulders, took my golf-bag under my left arm,—and I was ready.

Maisie wiped her eyes with the corner of her apron.

"Never mind, little woman," I sympathised.

"Must you really go away, sir?" she sobbed.

"Yes!—I must. Good-bye, little girl."

I kissed her on the trembling curve of her red, pouting lips, then I went down the stairs, leaving her weeping quietly on the landing.

As I turned at the front door for one last look at the inside of the old home, which I might never see again, I saw the servants carrying Harry from the armoury. I could hear his voice swearing and complaining in almost healthy vigour, so I was pleasantly confirmed in what I already had surmised,—his hurt was as temporary as the flat of a good, trusty, highland broadsword could make it.

CHAPTER V

Tommy Flynn, The Harlford Bruiser

I hurried down the avenue to where it joined the dusty roadway.

I stood for a few moments in indecision. To my left, down in the hollow, the way led through the village. To my right, it stretched far on the level until it narrowed to a grey point piercing a semi-circle of green; but I knew that miles beyond, at the end of that grey line, was the busy town of Grangeborough, with its thronging people, its railways and its steamships. That was the direction for me.

I waved my hand to sleepy little Brammerton and I swung to the right, for Grangeborough and the sea.

Soon the internal tumult, caused by what I had just gone through, began to subside, and my spirits rose attune to the glories of the afternoon.

Little I cared what my lot was destined to be—a prince in a palace or a tramp under a hedge. Although, to say truth, the tramp's existence held for me the greater fascination.

I was young, my lungs were sound and my heart beat well. I was big and endowed with greater strength than is allotted the average man.

Glad to be done with pomp, show and convention, my life was now my very own to plan and make, or to warp and spoil, as fancy, fortune and fate decreed.

I hankered for the undisturbed quiet of some small village by the sea, with work enough,—but no more,—to keep body nourished and covered; with books in plenty and my pipe well filled; with an open door to welcome the sunshine, the scented breeze, the salted spray from the ocean and my congenial fellow-man.

But, if I should be led in the paths of grubbing men, 'mid bustle, strife and quarrel, where the strong and the crafty alone survived, where the weaklings were thrust aside, I was ready and willing to take my place, to take my chance, to pit brawn against brawn, brain against brain, to strike blow for blow, to fail or to succeed, to live or die, as the gods might decree.

As I filled my lungs, I felt as if I had relieved myself of some great burden in cutting myself adrift from Brammerton,—dear old spot as it was. And I whistled and hummed as I trudged along, trying to reach the point of grey at the rim of the semi-circle of green. On, on I went, on my seemingly unending endeavour. But I knew that ultimately the road would end, although merely to open up another and yet another path over which I would have to travel in the long journey of life which lay before me.

As I kept on, I saw the sun go down in a display of blood-red pyrotechnics. I heard the chatter of the birds in the hedgerows as they settled to rest. Now and again, I passed a tired toiler, with bent head and dragging feet,—his drudgery over for the day, but weighted with the knowledge that it must begin all over again on the morrow and on each succeeding morrow till the crash of his doom.

The night breeze came up and darkness gathered round me. A few hours more, and the twinkling lights of Grangeborough came into view. They were welcome lights to me, for the pangs of a healthy hunger were clamouring to be appeased.

As it had been with the country some hours before, so was it now with Grangeborough. The town was settling down for the night. It was late. Most of the shops were closing, or already closed. Business was over for the day. People hurried homeward like shadows.

I looked about me for a place to dine, but failed, at first, in my quest. Down toward the docks there were brighter lights and correspondingly deeper darkneses. I went along a broad thoroughfare, turned down a narrower one until I found myself among lanes and alleys, jostled by drunken sailors and accosted by wanton women, as they staggered, blinking, from the brightly lighted saloons.

My finer sensibilities rose and protested within me, but I had no choice. If I wished to quell my craving for food, there was nothing left for me to do but to brave the foul air and the rough element of one of these sawdust-floored, glass-ornamented whisky palaces, where a snack and a glass of ale, at least, could be purchased.

I looked about me and pushed into what seemed the least disreputable one of its kind. I made through the haze of foul air and tobacco smoke to the counter, and stood idly by until the bartender should find it convenient to wait upon me.

The place was crowded with sea-faring men and the human sediment that is found in and around the docks of all shipping cities; it resounded with a babel of coarse, discordant voices.

The greater part of this coterie was gathered round a huge individual, with enormous hands and feet, a stubbly, blue chin,—set, round and aggressive; a nose with a broken bridge spoiled the balance of his podgy face. He had beady eyes and a big, ugly mouth with stained, irregular teeth. From time to time, he laughed boisterously, and his laugh had an echo of hell in it.

He and his followers appeared to be enjoying some good joke. But whenever he spoke every one else became silent. Each coarse jest he mouthed was laughed at long and uproariously. He had a hold on his fellows. Even I was fascinated; but it was by the great similarity of some of the mannerisms of this uncouth man to those I had observed in the lower brute creation.

My attention was withdrawn from him, however, by the sound of the rattling of tin cans in another corner which was partly partitioned from the main bar-room. I followed the new sound.

A tattered individual was seated there, his feet among a cluster of pots and pans all strung together. His head was in his hands and his red-bearded face was a study of dejection and misery.

There was something strangely familiar in the appearance of the man.

Suddenly I remembered, and I laughed.

I went over and sat down opposite him, setting my golf clubs by my side. He ignored my arriving. That same old trick of his!

"Donald,—Donald Robertson!" I exclaimed, laughing again.

Still he did not look across.

Suddenly he spoke, and in a voice that knew neither hope nor gladness.

"Ye laugh,—ye name me by my Christian name,—but ye don't say, 'Donald, will ye taste?'"

I leaned over and pulled his hands away from his head. He flopped forward, then glared at me. His eyes opened wide.

"It's,—it's you,—is it? The second son come to me in my hour o' trial."

"Why! Donald,—what's the trouble?" I asked.

"Trouble,—ye may well say trouble. Have ye mind o' the sixpence ye gied me on the roadside this mornin'."

"Yes!"

"For thirteen long, unlucky hours I saved that six-pence against my time o' need. I tied it in the tail o' my sark for safety. I came in here an hour ago. I ordered a glass o' whisky and a tumbler o' beer. I sat doon here for a while wi' them both before me, enjoying the sight o' them and indulgin' in the heavenly joy o' antecipation. Then I drank the speerits and was just settlin' doon to the beer,—tryin' to make it spin oot as long as I could; for, ye ken, it's comfortable in here,—when an emissary o' the deevil, wi' hands like shovels and a leer in his e'e, came in and picked up the tumbler frae under my very nose and swallowed the balance o' your six-pence before I could say squeak."

I laughed at Donald's rueful countenance and his more than rueful tale.

"Did the man have a broken nose and a heavy jaw?" I asked.

"Ay, ay!" said Donald, lowering his voice. "Do ye happen to ken him?"

"No!—but he is still out there and he thinks it a fine joke that he played on you."

"So would I," said Donald, "if I had drunk his beer."

"What did you do when he swallowed off your drink?" I asked.

"Do!—what do ye think I did? I remonstrated wi' a' the vehemence that a Struan Robertson in anger is capable o'. But the vehemence o' the Lord himsel' couldna bring the beer back."

"Why didn't you fight, man? Why didn't you knock the bully down?" I asked, pitying his wobegone appearance.

"Mister,—whatever your name is,—I'm a man o' peace; and, forby I'm auld enough to ken it's no' wise to fight on an empty stomach. I havena had a bite since I saw ye last."

"Never mind, Donald,—cheer up. I am going to have some bread and cheese, and a glass of ale, so you can have some with me, at my expense."

His face lit up like a Roman candle.

"Man,—I'm wi' ye. You're a man o' substance, and I'm fonder o' substantial bread and cheese and beer than I am o' the metapheesical drinks I was indulgin' in for ten minutes before ye so providentially came."

I could not help wondering at some of the remarks of this wise, yet good-for-little, old customer; but I did not press him for more enlightenment.

I thumped the hand-bell on the table, and was successful in obtaining more prompt attention from the bar-tender than I had been able to do across the counter.

When the food and drink were placed between us and paid for, Donald stuffed all but one slice of his bread and cheese inside his waistcoat, and he sighed contentedly as he contemplated the sparkling ale.

But, all at once, he startled me by springing to his feet, seizing his tumbler in his hand and emptying the contents down his gullet at two monstrous gulps.

"No, no!—ye thievin' deevil," he shouted, as he regained his breath, "ye canna do that twice wi' Donald Robertson."

I looked toward the opening in the partition. Donald's recent enemy,—the man whom I had been studying at the other end of the bar-room,—was shouldering himself into our company. Behind him, in a semi-circle, a dozen faces grinned in anticipation of some more fun at Donald's expense.

The big bully glared down at me as I sat.

"That there is uncommon good beer, young un," he growled, "and that there is most uncommon good bread and cheese."

I glanced at him with half-shut eyelids, then I broke off another piece of bread.

"Maybe you didn't 'ear me?" he shouted again, "I said that was uncommon good beer."

"I shall be better able to judge of that, my man, after I have tasted it," I replied.

"Not that beer, little boy,—you ain't going to taste that," he thundered, "because I 'appens to want it,—see! I 'appens to 'ave a most aggrawating thirst in my gargler."

A burst of laughter followed this ponderous attempt at humour.

"'And it over, sonny,—I wants it."

I merely raised my head and ran my eyes over him.

He was an ugly brute, and no mistake. A man of tremendous girth.

Although I had no real fear of him,—for, already I had been schooled to the knowledge that fear and its twin brother worry are man's worst opponents.—I was a little uncertain as to what the outcome would be if I got him thoroughly angered. However, I was in no mind to be interfered with.

He thumped his heavy fist on the table.

"'And that over,—quick," he roared.

His great jaws clamped together and his thick, discoloured lips became compressed.

"Why!—certainly, my friend," I remarked easily, rising with slow deliberation. "Which will you have first:—the bread and cheese, or the ale?"

"'Twere the ale I arst and it's th' ale I wants,—and blamed quick about it or I'll know the reason w'y."

"Stupid of me!" I remarked. "I should have known you wanted the ale first. Here you are, my good, genial, handsome fellow."

I picked up the foaming tumbler and offered it to him. When he stretched out his great, grimy paw to take it, I tossed the stuff smack into his face, sending showers of the liquid into the gaping countenances of his supporters.

He staggered back among them, momentarily blinded, and, as he staggered, I sent the tumbler on the same errand as the ale. It smashed in a hundred pieces on the side of his broken nose, opening up an old gash there and sending a stream of blood oozing down over his mouth.

There was no more laughter, nor grinning. The place was as quiet as a church during prayer. I pushed into the open saloon, with the remonstrating Donald at my heels. Then the bull began to roar. He pulled off his coat, while half a dozen of his own kind endeavoured with dirty handkerchiefs and rags to mop the blood from his face.

"Shut the door. Don't let 'im away from 'ere," he shouted. "I'll push his windpipe into his boots, I will. Watch me!"

As I stood with my back against the partition, the bar-tender slipped round the end of the counter.

"Look here, guv'nor," he whispered with good intent, "the back door's open,—run like the devil."

I turned to him in mild surprise.

"Don't be an ijit," he went on. "Git. Why! he's Tommy Flynn, the champion rib cracker and face pusher of Harlford, here on his holidays."

"Tommy Flynn," I answered, "Tommy Rot fits him better."

"You ain't a-going to stand up and get hit, are you?"

"What else is there for me to do?" I asked.

He threw up his arms despairingly.

"Lor' lumme!—then I bids you good-bye and washes my hands clean of you." And he went round behind the counter in disgust, spitting among the sawdust.

By this time, Tommy Flynn, the champion rib cracker and face pusher, was rolling up his sleeves businesslike and thrusting off his numerous seconds in his anxiety to get at me.

"Ere, Splotch," he cried to a one-eyed bosom friend of his, "'old my watch, while I juggles the puddins out of this kid with a left 'ander. My heye!—'e won't be no blooming golfing swell in another 'alf minute."

He grinned at me a few times in order to hypnotise me with his beauty and to instil in me the necessary amount of frightfulness, before he got to work in earnest. Then, by way of invitation, he thrust forward his jaw almost into my face. I took advantage of his offer somewhat more quickly than he anticipated. I struck him on the chin with my left and drew my right to his body. But his chin was hard as flint and it bruised my knuckles; while his great body was podgy and of an india-rubberlike flexibility.

For my pains, he brushed my ear and drew a little blood, with the grin of an ape on his brutish face.

He threw up his arms to guard, fainted at me, and rushed in.

I parried his blows successfully, much to his surprise, for I could see his eyes widening and a wrinkle in his brow.

"Careful, Tommy!—careful," cautioned Splotch of the one eye. "He's a likely looking young bloke."

"Likely be blowed," said Tommy shortly, as he toyed with me. "Watch this!"

I saw that it would be for my own good, the less I let my antagonist know of my ability at his own game, and I knew also I would have to play caution with my strength all the way, owing to the trying ordeals I had already gone through that day.

Once, my antagonist tried to draw me as he would draw a novice. I ignored the body bait he opened up for me and, instead, I swung in quickly with my right on to his bruised nose, with all the energy I could muster. He staggered and reeled like a drunken man. In fact, had he not been half-besotted by dear-only-knows how many days of debauchery, it might have gone hard with me, but now he positively howled with pain.

I had hit on his most vulnerable part, right at the beginning.

Something inside of me chuckled, for, if there was one special place in any man's anatomy that I always had been able to reach, it was his nose.

Flynn rushed on me again and again. I was lucky indeed in beating back his onslaughts.

Once, a spent blow got me on the cheek; yet, spent as it was, it made me numb and dizzy for the moment. Once, he caught me squarely on the chest right over the wound my brother had given me. The pain of that was like the cut of a red-hot knife, but it passed quickly. I staggered and reeled several times, as flashes of weakness seemed to pass over me. I began to fear that my strength would give out.

I pulled myself together with an effort. Then, once,—twice,—thrice,—in a succession bewildering to myself, I smashed that broken nose of Flynn's, sending him sick and wobbling among his following.

He became maddened with rage. His companions commenced to voice cautions and instructions. He swore back at them in a muddy torrent of abuse.

Already, the fight was over;—I could feel it in my bones;—over, far sooner and more satisfactory to me than I had expected. And, more by good luck than by ability, I was, to all intents and purposes, unscathed.

Tommy Flynn could fight. But he was not the fighter he would have been had he been away from drink and in strict training, as I was. It was my good fortune to meet him when he was out of condition. He spat out a mouthful of blood and returned to the conflict, defending his nose with all the ferocity of a lioness defending her whelps.

"Look out! Take care!" a timely voice whispered on my left.

Something flashed in my opponent's hands in the gaslight. I backed to the partition. We had a

terrible mix-up just then. Blow and counterblow rained. He broke down my guard once and drove with fierce force for my face. I ducked, just in time, for he missed me by a mere hair's-breadth. His fist smashed into a metal bolt in the woodwork. Sparks flew and there was a loud ring of metal against metal.

"You cowardly brute!" I shouted, breaking away as it dawned on me that he had attacked me with heavy knuckle-dusters. My blood fairly danced with madness. I sprang in on him in a positive frenzy. He became a child in my hands. Never had I been roused as I was then. I struck and struck again at his hideous face until it sagged away from me.

He was blind with his own blood. I followed up, raining punch upon punch,—pitilessly,—relentlessly. His feet slipped in the slither of bloody sawdust. I struck again and he crashed to the floor, striking his head against the iron pedestal of a round table in the corner.

He lay all limp and senseless, with his mouth wide open and his breath coming roaring and gurgling from his clotted throat.

As his friends endeavoured to raise him, as I stood back against the counter, panting, I heard a battering at the main door of the saloon which had been closed at the commencement of the scuffle.

"Here, sir,—quick!" cried the sympathetic bartender to me. "The cops! Out the back door like hell!"

I had no desire to be mixed up in a police affair, especially in the company of such scum as I was then among. I picked up my golf bag and swung my knapsack on to my back once more. Then I remembered about Donald. I could not leave him. I searched in corners and under the tables. He was nowhere in sight.

"Is it the tinker?" asked the bar-tender excitedly.

"Yes, yes!"

"He's gone. He slunk out with his tin cans, through the back way, as soon as you got started in this scrap."

I did not wait for anything more, for some one was unlocking the front door. I darted out the back exit and into the lane. Down the lane, in the darkness, I tore like a hurricane, then along the waterfront until there was a mile between me and the scene of my late encounter.

I slowed up at a convenient horse-trough, splashed my hands and face in the cooling water and adjusted my clothing as best I could, then I strolled into the shipping shed, where stevedores and dock labourers were busy, by electric light, completing the loading of a smart-looking little cargo boat.

A notion seized me. It was a coaster, so I knew I could not be going very far away.

I walked up the gang-plank, and aboard.

CHAPTER VI

Aboard the Coaster

An ordinary seaman, then the second officer of the little steamer passed me on the deck, but both were busy and paid no more attention to my presence than if I had been one of themselves.

I strolled down the narrow companionway, into a cosy, but somewhat cramped, saloon.

After standing for a time in the hope of seeing some signs of life, I pushed open the door of a stateroom on the starboard side. The room had two berths. I tossed my knapsack and clubs into the lower one. As I turned to the door again, I espied a diminutive individual, no more than four and a half feet tall,—or, as I should say, small,—in the full, gold-braided uniform of a ship's chief steward.

He was a queer-looking little customer, grizzled, weather-beaten and, apparently, as hard as nails. He was absolutely self-possessed and, despite his stature, there was "nothing small about him," as an American friend of mine used to put it.

He touched his cap, and smiled. His smile told me at once that he was an Irishman, for only an Irishman could smile as he did. It was a smile with a joke, a drink, a kiss and a touch of the devil himself in it.

"I saw ye come down, sor. Ye'll be makin' for Glasgow?"

Glasgow! I cogitated, yes!—Glasgow as a starting point would suit me as well as anywhere else.

"Correct first guess," I answered. "But, tell me,—how did you know that that was my destination?"

He showed his teeth.

"Och! because it's the only port we're callin' at, sor. Looks like a fine trip north," he went on. "The weather's warm and there's just enough breeze to make it lively. Nothin' like the sea, sor, for keepin' the stomach swate and the mind up to the knocker."

I yawned, for I was dog-weary.

"When ye get to Glasgow, if ye are on the lookout for a place to slape,—try Barney O'Toole's in Argyle Street. The place is nothin' to look at, but it's a hummer inside, sor."

I yawned drowsily once more, but the hint did not stop him.

"If you'll excuse my inquisitiveness, sor,—or rather, what ye might call my natural insight,—I judge you're on either a moighty short tour, or a devil av a long one got up in a hurry."

The little clatterbag's uncanny guessing harried me.

"How do you arrive at your conclusions?" I asked, taking off my jacket and hanging it up.

"Och! shure it's by the size av your wardrobe. No man goes on a well-planned, long trip with a knapsack and a bag av golfsticks."

"Well,—it is likely to be long enough," I laughed ruefully.

"Had a row with the old man and clearin' out?" he sympathised. "Well, good luck to yer enterprise. I did the same meself when I was thirteen; after gettin' a hidin' with a bit av harness for doin' somethin' I never did at all. I've never seen the old man since and never want to. Bad cess to him.

"Would ye like a bite before ye turn in, sor? It's past supper-time, but I can find ye a scrapin' av something."

"A bite and a bath,—if I may?" I put in. "I'm sticky all over."

"A bath! Right ye are. I knew ye was a toff the minute I clapped my blinkers on ye."

In ten minutes my talkative friend announced that my bath was in readiness. For ten minutes more he rattled on to me at intervals, through the bathroom door, poking into my past and arranging my future like a clairvoyant.

Notwithstanding, he had a nice, steaming-hot supper waiting for me when I returned to my stateroom.

As I fell-to, he stood by, enjoying the relish I displayed in the appeasing of my hunger.

"If I was a young fellow av your age, strong build and qualities, do ye know where I would make for?" he ventured.

"Where?" I asked, uninterestedly.

He lowered his eyebrows. "Out West,—Canada," he said, with a decided nod of his head. "And, the farther west the better. The Pacific Coast has a climate like home, only better. For the main part, ye're away from the long winters;—it's a new country;—a young man's country:—it's wild and free:—and,—it's about as far away as ye can get from—from,—the trouble ye're leavin' behind."

I looked across at him.

"Oh! bhoy,—I've been there. I know what I'm talkin' about."

He sighed. "But I'm gettin' old and I've been too long on the sea to give it up."

He pulled himself together suddenly. Owing to his stature, that was not a very difficult task.

"Man!—ye're tired. I'll be talkin' no more to you. Tumble in and sleep till we get to Glasgow."

As he cleared away the dishes, I approached him regarding my fare.

"Look here, steward,—I had not time to book my berth or pay my passage. What's the damage?"

"Ten and six, sor, exclusive av meals," he answered, taking out his ticket book in a business-like way.

"What name, sor?"

"Name!—oh, yes! name!" I stammered. "Why!—George Bremner."

He looked at me and his face fell. I am sure his estimation of me fell with it. I was almost sorry I had not obliged him by calling myself Algernon something-or-other.

I paid him.

"When do you expect to arrive in Glasgow?" I asked.

"Eight o'clock to-morrow morning, sor. And," he added, "there's a boat leaves for Canada to-morrow night."

"The devil it does," I grunted.

He gave me another of his infectious smiles.

"Would ye like another bath in the mornin', sor, before breakfast?" he inquired, as he was leaving.

I could not bear to disappoint the little fellow any more.

"Yes," I replied.

Quarter of an hour later, I was lying on my back in the upper berth, gazing drowsily into the white-enamelled ceiling two feet overhead; happy in the reborn sensations of cleanliness, relaxation and satisfaction; loving my enemies as well, or almost as well, as I loved my friends. I could not get the little steward's advice out of my head. In a jumbled medley, "Out West,—out West,—out West," kept floating before my brain. "The Pacific Coast.—Home climate, only better.—A new country.—A young man's country.—Wild and free.—It's about as far away as ye can get,—as ye can get,—can get,—can get."

The rumbling of the cargo trucks, the hoarse "lower away" of the quartermaster, the whirr of the steam winch and the lapping of the water against the boat,—all intermingled, then died away and still farther away, until only the quietest of these sounds remained,—the lapping of the sea and "Canada,—Canada,—Canada." They kept up their communications with me, sighing and singing, the merest murmurings of the wind in a sea shell:—soothing accompaniments to my unremembered dreams.

CHAPTER VII

K. B. Horsfal, Millionaire

When I awoke, the sun was streaming through the porthole upon my face. It was early morning,—Saturday morning I remembered.

From the thud, thud, of the engines and the steady rise and fall, I knew we were still at sea. I stretched my limbs, feeling as a god must feel balancing on the topmost point of a star; so refreshed, so invigorated, so buoyant, so much in harmony with the rising sun and the freshness of the early day, that, to be exact, I really had no feeling.

I sprang to the floor of my cabin and dressed hurriedly in my anxiety to be on deck; but, at the door, I encountered my little Irish steward. He eyed me suspiciously, as if I had had intentions of evading my morning ablution,—so I swallowed my impatience, grabbed a towel and made leisurely for the bathroom, where I laved my face and hands in the cold water, remained inside for a sufficiently respectable time, then ran off the water and, finally, made my exit and clambered on deck.

As I paced up and down, enjoying the beauties of the fast narrowing firth, I no longer felt in doubt as to my ultimate destination. My subconscious self, aided and abetted by the Irish steward, had already decided that for me:—it was Canada, the West, the Pacific.

Soon after I had breakfasted, we reached the Tail of the Bank, and so impatient was I to be on my long journey that I bade good-bye to my little Irishman at Greenock, leaving him grinning and happy in the knowledge that I was taking his advice and was bound for the Pacific Coast.

In forty minutes more, I left the train at Glasgow and started in to a hurried and moderate

replenishing of my wardrobe, finishing up with the purchase of a travelling bag, a good second-hand rifle and a little ammunition.

I dispensed with my knapsack by presenting it to a newsboy, who held it up in disgust as if it had been a dead cat. Despite the fact that I was now on my own resources and would have to work, nothing could induce me to part with my golf clubs. They were old and valued friends. Little did I imagine then how useful they would ultimately prove.

At the head office of the steamship company, I inquired as to the best class of travelling when the traveller wished to combine cheapness with rough comfort; and I was treated to the cheering news that there was a rate war on between the rival Trans-Atlantic Steamship Companies and I could purchase a second-cabin steamboat ticket for six pounds, while a further eight pounds, thirteen shillings and four-pence would carry me by Colonist, or third class, three thousand miles, from the East to the Far West of Canada.

I paid for my ticket and booked my berth then and there, counted out my remaining wealth,—ten pounds and a few coppers,—and my destiny was settled.

With so much to tell of what befell me later, I have neither the time nor the inclination to detail the pleasures and the discomforts of a twelve days' trip by slow steamer across a storm-swept Atlantic, battered down for days on end, like cattle in the hold of a cross-channel tramp; of a six days' journey across prairie lands, in a railway car with its dreadful monotony of unupholstered wooden seats and sleeping boards, its stuffiness, its hourly disturbances in the night-time in the shape of noisy conductors demanding tickets, incoming and outgoing travellers and shrieking engines; its dollar meals in the dining car, which I envied but could not afford; its well-nigh unlightable cooking stoves and the canned beef and pork and beans with which I had to regale myself en route.

Jaded, travel-weary and grimy, I reached the end of my journey. It was late in the evening. I tumbled out of the train and into the first hotel bus that yawned for me, and not once did I look out of the window to see what kind of a city I had arrived at.

I came to myself at the entrance to a magnificent and palatial hotel; too much so, by far, I fancied, for my scantily-filled purse. But I was past the minding stage, and I knew I could always make a change on the morrow, if so be it a change were necessary.

And then I began to think,—what mattered it anyway? What were a few paltry sovereigns between one and poverty? Comforting thought,—a man could not have anything less than nothing.

I registered, ordered a bath, a shave, a haircut, a jolly good supper and a bed; and, oh! how I enjoyed them all! Surely this was the most wonderful city in the world, for never did bath, or shave, or supper, or bed feel so delicious as these did.

I swooned away at last from sheer pleasure.

The recuperative powers of youth are marvellously quick. I was up and out to view the city almost as soon as the sun was touching the snow-tipped tops of the magnificent mountain peaks which were miles away yet seemed to stand sentinels at the end of the street down which I walked. I was up and out long ere the sun had gilded the waters of the broad inlet which separated Vancouver from its baby sister to the north of it.

The prospect pleased me; there was freedom in the air, expanse, vastness, but,—it was still a city with a city's artifices and, consequently, not what I was seeking. I desired the natural life; not the roughness, the struggle, the matching of crafty wits, the throbbing blood and the straining sinews,—but the solitude, the quiet, the chance for thought and observation, the wilds, the woods and the sea.

As I returned to breakfast, I wondered if I should find them,—and where.

In the dining-room, during the course of my breakfast,—the first real breakfast I had partaken of in Canada,—my attention was diverted to a tall, well-groomed, muscular-looking man, who sat at a table nearby. He looked a considerable bit on the sunny side of fifty. He was clean shaven, his hair was black tinged with grey, and his eyes were keen and kindly.

Every time I glanced in his direction, I found him looking over at me in an amused sort of way. I began to wonder if I were making some breach of Canadian etiquette of which I was ignorant. True, I had eaten my porridge and cream without sprinkling the dish with a surface of sugar as he had done; I had set aside the fried potatoes which had been served to me with my bacon and eggs;—but these, surely, were trivial things and of no interest to any one but myself.

At last, he rose and walked out, sucking a wooden toothpick. With his departure, I forgot his existence.

After I had breakfasted, I sought the lounge room in order to have a look at the morning paper and, if possible, determine what I was going to do for a living and how I was going to get what I wanted to do.

I was buried in the advertisements, when a genial voice with a nasal intonation, at my elbow, unearthed me.

It was my observer of the dining-room. He had seated himself in the chair next to mine.

"Say! young man,—you'll excuse me; but was it you I saw come in last night with the bag of golf clubs?"

I acknowledged the crime.

He laughed good-naturedly.

"Well,—you had courage anyway. To sport a golfing outfit here in the West is like venturing out with breeches, a walking cane and a monocle. Nobody but an Englishman would dare do it. Here, they think golf and cricket should be bracketed along with hopscotch, dominoes and tiddly-winks; just as I used to fancy baseball was a glorified kids' game. I know better now."

I looked at him rather darkly.

"Oh!—it's all right, friend,—it takes a man to play baseball, same as it takes a man to play golf and cricket. Golfing is about the only vice I have left. Why, now I come to think of it, my wife clipped a lot of my vices off years ago, and since that my daughter has succeeded in knocking off all the others,—all but my cigars, my cocktails and my golf. I'm just plumb crazy on the game and I play it whenever I can. Maybe it's because I used to play it when I was a little chap, away back in England years and years ago."

"I am glad you like the game," I put in. "It is a favourite of mine."

"I play quite a bit back home in Baltimore," he continued, "that's when I'm there. My clubs arrived here by express yesterday. You see, it's like this;—I'm off to Australia at the end of the week, on a business trip,—that is, if I get things settled up here by that time. I am crossing over from there to England, where I shall be for several months. England is some place for golf, so I'm going to golf some, you bet.

"I'm not boring you, young friend?" he asked suddenly.

"Not a bit," I laughed. "Go on,—I am as interested as can be."

"I believe there's a kind of a lay-out they call a golf course, in one of the outlying districts round here. What do you say to making the day of it? You aren't busy, are you?" he added.

"No! no!—not particularly," I answered. I did not tell him that in a few days, if I did not get busy at something or other, I should starve.

"Good!" he cried. "Go to your room and get your sticks. I'll find out all about the course and how to get to it."

The brusque good-nature of the man hit me somehow; besides, I had not had a game for over three weeks. Think of it—three weeks! And goodness only knew when I should have the chance of another after this one. As for looking for work;—work was never to be compared with golf. Surely work could wait for one day!

"All right!—I'm game," I said, jumping up and entering into the spirit of gaiety that lay so easily on my new acquaintance.

"Good boy!" he cried, getting up and holding out his hand. "My name's Horsfal,—K. B. Horsfal,—lumberman, meat-packer, and the man whose name is on every trouser-suspender worth wearing. What's yours?"

"George Bremner," I answered simply.

"All right, George, my boy,—see you in ten minutes. But, remember, I called this tune, so I pay the piper."

That was music in my ears and I readily agreed.

"Make it twenty minutes," I suggested. "I have a short letter to write."

I wrote my letter, gave it to the boy to deliver for me and presented myself before my new friend right up to time.

In the half hour's run we had in the electric tram, I learned a great deal about Mr. K. B. Horsfal.

He had migrated from the Midlands of England at the age of seventeen. He had kicked,—or had been kicked,—about the United States for some fifteen years, more or less up against it all the time, as he expressively put it; when, by a lucky chance, in a poverty-stricken endeavour to repair his broken braces, he hit upon a scheme that revolutionised the brace business: was quick

enough to see its possibilities, patented his idea and became famous.

Not content to rest on his laurels,—or his braces,—he tackled the lumbering industry in the West and the meat-packing industry in the East, both with considerable success. Now he had to sit down and do some figuring when he wished to find out how many millions of dollars he was worth.

His wife had died years ago and his only daughter was at home in Baltimore.

Altogether, he was a new and delightful type to one like me,—a young man fresh from his ancestral roof in the north of staid and conventional old England.

He was healthy, vigorous, and as keen as the edge of a razor.

On and on he talked, telling me of himself, his work and his projects.

I got to wondering if he were merely setting the proverbial sprat; but the sprat in his case proved the whale. Every moment I expected him to ask me for some confidences in return, but on this point Mr. K. B. Horsfal was silent.

We discovered our golfing ground, which proved to be a fairly good, little, nine-holed country course, rough and full of natural hazards.

K. B. Horsfal could play golf, that I soon found out. He entered into his game with the enthusiasm and grim determination which I imagined he displayed in everything he took a hand in.

He seldom spoke, so intent was he on the proper placing of his feet and the proper adjustment of his hands and his clubs.

Three times we went round that course and three times I had the pleasure of beating him by a margin. He envied me my full swing and my powerful and accurate driving; he studied me every time I approached a green and he scratched his head at some of my long putts; but, most of all, he rhapsodised on my manner of getting out of a hole.

"Man,—if I only had that trick of yours in handling the mashie and the niblick, I could do the round a stroke a hole better, for there isn't a rut, or a tuft, or a bunker in any course that I seem to be able to keep out of."

I showed him the knack of it as it had been taught me by an old professional at Saint Andrews. K. B. Horsfal was in ecstasies, if a two-hundred-pound, keen, brusque, American business man ever allows himself such liberties.

Nothing would please him but that we should go another round, just to test out his new acquisition and give him the hang of the thing.

To his supreme satisfaction,—although I again beat him by the same small margin,—he reduced his score for the round by eight strokes.

On our journey back to the city, he began to talk again, but on a different tack this time.

"George,—you'll excuse me,—but, if I were you I would put that signet ring you are wearing in your pocket."

I looked down at it and reddened, for my ring was manifestly old, as it was manifestly strange in design and workmanship, and apt to betray an identity.

I slipped it off my little finger and placed it in my vest pocket.

My companion laughed.

"No sooner said than done," he quoted. "You see, George,—any one who saw you come in to the hotel last night could tell you had not been travelling for pleasure. The marks of an uncomfortable train journey, in a colonist car, were sticking out all over you. Now, golf clubs and a signet ring like that which you were sporting are enough to tell any man that you have been in the habit of travelling luxuriously and for the love of it."

I could not help admiring my new friend's method of deduction, and I thanked him for his kindly interest.

"Not a bit," he continued, "so long as you don't mind. For, it's like this,—I take it you have left home for some personal reason,—no concern of mine,—you have come out here to start over, or rather, to make a start. Good! You are right to start at the bottom of the hill. But, from the look of you, I fancy you won't stick at anything that doesn't suit you. You are the kind of a fellow who, if you felt like it, would tell a man to go to the devil, then walk off his premises. You see, I don't tab you as a milksop kind of Englishman exactly.

"Well,—out here they don't like Britishers who receive remittances every month from their

mas or pas at home, for they have found that that kind is generally not much good. Hope you're not one, George?"

"No!" I laughed, rather ruefully, almost wishing I were. "With me, it is sink or swim. And, I do not mind telling you, Mr. Horsfal, that it will be necessary for me to leave the hotel to-morrow for less pretentious apartments and to start swimming for all I am worth."

"Good!" he cried, as if it were a good joke. "How do you propose starting in?"

"I have already commenced keeping an eye on the advertisements, which seem to be chiefly for real estate salesmen and partners with a little capital," I said.

"But, the fact is, I have made an application this morning for something I thought might suit me. But, even if I am lucky enough to be considered, the chances are there will be some flies in the ointment:—there always are."

My friend looked at me, as I thought, curiously.

"To-morrow morning," I went on, "it is my intention to begin with the near end of the business district and call on every business house, one after another, until I happen upon something that will provide a start.

"I have no love for the grinding in an office, nor yet for the grubbing in a warehouse, but, for a bit, it will be a case of 'needs must when the devil drives,'—so I mean to take anything that I can get, to begin with, and leave the matter of choice to a more opportune time."

"And what would be your choice, George?" he inquired.

"Choice! Well, if you asked me what I thought I was adapted for, I would say, green-keeper and professional golfer; gymnastic instructor; athletic coach; policeman; or, with training and dieting, pugilist. At a pinch, I could teach school."

K. B. Horsfal grinned and looked out of the car window at the apparently never-ending sea of charred tree stumps through which we were passing.

"Not very ambitious, sonny!—eh!"

"No,—that is the worst of it," I answered. "I do not seem to have been planned for anything ambitious. Besides, I have no desire to amass millions at the sacrifice of my peace of mind. Why!—a millionaire cannot call his life his own. He is at the beck and call of everybody. He is consulted here and harassed there. He is dunned, solicited and blackmailed; he is badgered and pestered until, I should fancy, he wished his millions were at the bottom of the deep, blue sea."

"Lord, man!" exclaimed Mr. Horsfal, "but you have hit it right. One would almost think you had been through it yourself."

"I have not," I answered, "but I know most of the diseases that attack the man of wealth."

"Now, you have given me an idea of what you might *have* to do. But to get back to desire or choice;—what would it be then?" he inquired, as the electric tram passed at last from the tree stumps and began to draw, through signs of habitation, toward the city.

"If I had my desire and my choice, Mr. Horsfal, they would be: in such a climate as we have here but away somewhere up the coast, with the sea in front of me and the trees and the hills behind me; the open air, the sunlight; contending with the natural,—not the artificial,—obstacles of life; work, with a sufficiency of leisure; quiet, when quiet were desired; and, in the evening as the sun went down into the sea or behind the hills, a cosy fire, a good book and my pipe going good."

K. B. Horsfal, millionaire, patentee, lumberman and meat-packer, looked at me, sighed and nodded his head.

"After all, my boy," he said, almost sadly, "I shouldn't wonder if that isn't better than all the hellish wealth-hunting that ever was or ever shall be. Stick to your ideals. Try them out if you can. As for me,—it's too late. I am saturated with the money-getting mania; I am in the maelstrom and I couldn't get out if I tried. I'm in it for good."

Our conversation was brought to an abrupt ending, as Mr. Horsfal had to make a short call at one of the newspaper offices, on some business matter. We got out of the tram together. I waited for him while he made his call, then we walked back leisurely to the hotel; happy, pleasantly tired and hungry as hunters.

I was regaled in the dining-room as the guest of my American friend.

"Are you going to be in for the balance of the evening?" he asked, as I rose to leave him at the conclusion of our after-dinner smoke.

"Yes!"

"Good!" he ejaculated, rather abruptly.

And why he should have thought it "good," puzzled me not a little as I went up in the elevator.

CHAPTER VIII

Golden Crescent

I had been sitting in my room for two hours, reading, and once in a while, thinking over the strange adventures that had befallen me since I had started out from home some three short weeks before. I was trying to picture to myself how it had all gone in the old home; I was wondering if my father's heart had softened any to his absent son.

I reasoned whether, after all, I had done right in interfering between my brother Harry and his fiancée; but, when I thought of poor little Peggy Darrol and the righteous indignation and anger of her brother Jim, I felt, that if I had to go through all of it again, I would do as I had done already.

My telephone bell rang. I answered.

It was the hotel exchange operator.

"Hello!—is that room 280?"

"Yes!" I answered.

"Mr. George Bremner?"

"Yes!"

"A gentleman in room 16 wishes to see you. Right away, if you can, sir!"

"What name?" I asked.

"No name given, sir."

"All right! I'll go down at once. Thank you!"

I laid aside my pipe and threw on my coat. On reaching the right landing, I made my way along an almost interminable corridor, until I stood before the mysterious room 16.

As I entered, a respectably dressed, middle-aged man was coming out, hat in hand. Two others were sitting inside, apparently waiting an interview, while a smart-looking young lady,—evidently a stenographer,—was showing a fourth into the room adjoining.

It dawned on me that this request to call must be the outcome of the letter I had written that morning in answer to the newspaper advertisement.

I immediately assumed what I thought to be the correct, meek expression of a man looking for work; with, I hope, becoming timidity and nervousness, I whispered my name to the young lady. Then I took a seat alongside one of my fellow applicants, who eyed me askance and with what I took to be amused tolerance.

Five minutes, and the young lady ushered out the man who had been on the point of being interviewed as I had come in.

"Mr. Monaghan?" queried the lady.

Mr. Monaghan rose and followed her.

An interval of ten minutes, and Mr. Monaghan went after his predecessor.

"Mr. Rubenstein?" asked the lady.

Mr. Rubenstein, who, every inch of him, looked the part, went through the routine of Mr. Monaghan, leaving me alone in the waiting room.

At last my turn came and I was ushered into the "sanctum." I had put my head only inside the door, when the bluff voice I had learned that day to know shouted merrily:

"Hello! George. What do you know? Come on in and sit down."

And there was Mr. Horsfal, as large as life, sitting behind a desk with a pile of letters in front of him.

I was keenly disappointed and I fear I showed it. Only this,—after all my rising hopes,—the genial Mr. Horsfal wished to chat with me now that he had got his business worries over.

"Why!—what's the matter, son? You look crestfallen."

"I am, too," I answered. "I was not aware which rooms you occupied and, when I received the telephone message to come here and saw those men waiting, I felt sure I had received an answer to my application for a position I saw in the papers this morning."

Mr. Horsfal leaned back in his chair and surveyed me.

"Well,—no need to get crestfallen, George. When you had that thought, your thinking apparatus was in perfect working order."

My eyes showed surprise. "You don't mean—"

"Yes! George."

"What?—'wanted,—alert, strong, handy man, to supervise up-coast property. One who can run country store preferred. Must be sober,'" I quoted.

"The very same. I've been interviewing men for a week now and I'm sick of it. I got your letter this evening. But all day I have had it in my mind that you were the very man I wanted, sent from the clouds right to me."

"But,—but," I exclaimed. "I am afraid I have not the experience a man requires for such a job."

K. B. Horsfal thumped his desk.

"Lord sakes! man,—don't start running yourself down. Boost,—boost yourself for all you're worth."

"Oh, yes! I know," I said. "But this is different. I have become acquainted with you. I cannot sail under false colours. I have no experience. I am a simple baby when it comes to business."

He banged his desk again.

"George,—I'm the boss of this affair. You must just sit back quiet and listen, while I tell you about it; then you can talk as much as you want.

"There's a thousand acres of property that I, or I should say, my daughter Eileen owns some hundred miles up the coast from here. The place is called Golden Crescent Bay. My wife took a fancy to it in the early days, when she came with me on a trip one time I was looking over a timber proposition. I bought it for her for an old song and she grew so fond of the place that she spent three months of every year, as long as she lived, right on that very land. She left it all to Eileen when she died.

"As a business man, I should sell it, for its value has gone away up; but, as a husband, as a father and as a sentimentalist, I just can't do it. It would be like desecration.

"There's two miles of water frontage to it; there's the house we put up, also a little cabin where the present caretaker lives. The only other place within a couple of miles by water and four miles round by land through the bush, is a cottage that stands on the property abutting Eileen's, and close to her bungalow. It has been boarded up and unoccupied for quite a while. Of course, up behind, over the hills, there are ranches here and there, while, across the bay and all up the coast, there are squatters, settlers, fishermen and ranchers for a fare-you-well."

"You say there is a caretaker there already?" I put in.

"Yes!—I was just getting to that. He's an old Klondike miner; came out with a fortune. Spent the most of it before he got sober. Came to, just in time. Now he hoards what's left like an old skinflint. Won't spend a nickel, unless it's on booze. Drinks like a drowning man and it never fizzes on him. A good enough man for what he's been doing, but no good for what I want now."

"You don't want me to do him out of his place, Mr. Horsfal?" I asked.

"I was coming to that, too,—only you're so darned speedy.

"He's all right as a caretaker with little or nothing to do, and he will prove useful to you for odd jobs,—but, I have a salmon cannery some miles north of this place and I am going to have half a dozen lumber camps operating south, and further up, for the next few years. Some of them are going full steam ahead now.

"They require a convenient store, where they can get supplies; grub, oil, gasoline, hardware

and such like. I need a man who could look after a proposition of that kind,—good. The settlers would find a store up there a perfect god-send.

"The property at Golden Crescent is easily got at and is the most central to all my places. Now, having an eye to business, and with Eileen's consent, I have decided to convert the large front living-room of her bungalow into a store. It is plain, and can't be hurt. It's just suited for the purpose. I have had some carpenters up there this past week, putting in a counter and shelves and shutting the new store off completely from the rest of the house.

"A stock of groceries, hardware, etc., has already been ordered from the wholesalers and should be up there in a few days.

"Steamers pass Golden Crescent twice a week. When they have anything for you, they whistle and stand by out in the bay; when you want them, you hoist a white flag on the pole, on the rock, at the end of the little wharf; then you row out and meet them.

"These are the main features, George. Oh, yes! I'm paying one hundred dollars a month and all-found to the right man."

He stopped and looked over at me a little anxiously.

"George!—will you take the job?"

"What about those other poor beggars who have applied?" I asked.

"There you are again," he exclaimed impatiently. "They had the same chance as you had. Didn't I even keep you waiting out there till I had seen them in turn. Not one of them has the qualifications you have. I want a man with a brain as well as a body."

"But you don't know me, Mr. Horsfal. I have no friends, no testimonials; and I might be,—why! I might be the biggest criminal unhung."

"Testimonials be blown! Who wants testimonials? Any dub can get them. As for the other part,—do you think K. B. Horsfal of Baltimore, U. S. A., by this time, doesn't know a man after he has been a whole day in his company?

"Sonny, take it from me,—there are mighty few American business men, who have topped a million dollars, who don't know a man through and through in less time than that, and without asking very many questions, either. Why, man!—that's their business; that's what makes their millions."

There was no resisting K. B. Horsfal.

"Thanks! I'll take the job," I said. "And I'm mighty grateful to you."

"Good boy! You're all right. Leave it there!" His two hands clasped over mine.

"Gee! but I'm glad that's over at last."

"When do I start in?" I asked.

"Right now. I'll phone for a launch to be ready to start up with us to-morrow morning. I'll show you over the proposition and leave you there. Phone for any little personal articles you may want. I'll attend to the bedding and all that sort of thing. Have the boy call you at six a. m. sharp."

Nothing was overlooked by the masterly mind of my new, my first employer.

We breakfasted early. An automobile was standing waiting for us at the hotel entrance; while, at a down-town slip, a trig little launch, already loaded up with our immediate necessities, was in readiness to shoot out through the Narrows as soon as we got aboard.

This launch was named the *Edgar Allan Poe*, and, in consequence, I felt as if she were an old friend.

As soon as the ropes were cast from the wharf, a glorious feeling of exhilaration started to run through me; for it seemed that I was being loosed from the old life and plunged into a new; a life I had been for so long hungering; the life of the woods, the hills and the sea, the quiet and freedom; the life of my dreams as well as of my waking fancies. Whether or not it would come up to my expectations was a question of conjecture, but I was not in a mood to trouble conjecturing.

The swift little boat fought the tide rip in the Narrows like a lonely explorer defending his life against a horde of surging savages; and, gradually, she nosed her way through, past Prospect Point, then, inclining to the north shore, but heading forward all the time, past the lighthouse which stands sentinel on the rock at Point Atkinson; and away up the coast, leaving the city, with its dizzying and light-blotting sky-scrapers far and still farther behind, until nothing of that busy terminal remained to the observer but a distant haze.

The *Edgar Allan Poe* threaded her way rapidly and confidently among the rocks and fertile

little islands, up, up northward, ever northward, amid lessening signs of life and habitation; through the beautiful Strait of Georgia.

From eight o'clock in the morning till three o'clock in the afternoon we sailed on, amid a prodigality of scenic beauty,—sea, mountains and islands; islands, mountains and sea,—enjoying every mile of that beautiful trip. We conversed seldom, although there was much to discuss and our time was short.

At last, we sped past a great looming rock, which stood almost sheer out of the sea, then we ran into a glorious bay, where the sea danced and glanced in a fairy ecstasy.

"Golden Crescent Bay," broke in Mr. Horsfal. "How do you like it?"

"It is Paradise," I exclaimed, in breathless admiration. And never have I had reason to change that first impression and opinion.

We ran alongside a rocky headland close to the shore, on which stood two little wooden sheds bearing the numbers one and two. We clambered up.

"Number one is for gasoline; two for oil," volunteered my ever informing employer.

The rock was connected to the shore by a well-built, wooden wharf on piles, which ran directly into what I rightly guessed had been the summer home of Mrs. Horsfal. It was a plainly built cottage and trim as a warship. It bore signs of having been recently painted, while, all around, the grass was trim and tidy.

On the right of this, about fifty yards across, on the same cleared area, but out on a separate rocky headland, stood another well-built cottage, the windows of which were boarded up.

"My property starts ten yards to the south of the wharf here, George, and runs around the bay as far, almost, as it goes, and back to the hills quite a bit. That over there is the other house I spoke to you about. It, and the property to the south, is owned by some one in the Western States.

"But I wonder where the devil old Jake Meaghan is. Folks could land here and walk away with the whole shebang and he would never know of it."

As he spoke, however, a small boat crept out from some little cove about three hundred yards round the bay. It contained a man, who rowed it leisurely toward the wharf. We leaned over the wooden rail and waited.

The man ran the boat into the shingly beach, pulled in his oars, climbed out and made toward us. An Airedale dog, which had evidently been curled up in the bottom of the boat, sprang out after him, keeping close to him and eyeing us suspiciously and angrily.

In appearance the man reminded me of one of R. L. Stevenson's pirates, or one of Jack London's 'longshoremen.

He wore heavy logging boots, brown canvas trousers kept up by a belt, and a brown shirt, showing hairy brown arms and a bared, scraggy throat. A battered, sun-cast, felt hat lay on his head. His face was wrinkled and weather-beaten to the equivalent of tanned hide. He wore great, long, drooping moustaches snow white in colour. His eyes were limpid blue.

"It's you, Mr. Horsfal," he mumbled rather thickly, in a voice that seemed to come from somewhere underground; "didn't know you in the distance."

"Jake,—shake with Mr. George Bremner;—he's going to supervise the place and the new store, same as I explained to you two weeks ago. Hope you make friends. He's to be head boss man, and his word goes; but you'll find him twenty-four carat gold."

"That's darned fine gold, boss," grunted Jake.

He held out his horny hand and grasped mine, exclaiming heartily enough:

"Glad to meet you, George."

He pulled out a plug of tobacco from his hip pocket, brushed some of the most conspicuous dirt and grime from it, bit off what appeared to me to be a mouthful and began to look me over.

"He's new," he grunted, as if to himself; "but he's young and big. He looks tough; he's got the right kind of jaw."

Then he turned to Mr. Horsfal. "Guess, when he gets the edges rubbed off, he'll more than make it, boss," he said.

K. B. Horsfal laughed loudly.

"That's just what I thought myself, Jake. Now, give us the keys to the oil barns and the new

store. Go and help unload that baggage and truck from the launch. You can follow your usual bent after that, for I'll be showing George over the place myself."

I found the prospective store just as it had been described: a large, plain, front room, now fitted with shelves and a counter, and all freshly painted. Everything was in readiness to accommodate the stock, most of which was due to arrive the next afternoon. Where a door had been, leading into the other parts of the house, it was now solidly partitioned up, leaving only front and back entrances to the store.

We spent the afternoon in the open air, inspecting the property, which was perfectly situated for scenic beauty, with plenty of cleared, fertile land near the shore and rich in giant timber behind.

In the early part of the evening, after a cold lunch aboard the launch, we went back to the house and, for the first time, Mr. Horsfal inserted a key into the front door of the dwelling proper.

I had been not a little curious regarding this place and I was still wondering where it was intended that I should take up my quarters.

Jake Meaghan seemed all right in his own Klondikish, pork-and-beans-and-a-blanket way, but I hardly fancied him as a rooming partner and a possible bedfellow. To be candid, I never had had a bedfellow in all my life and I had already made up my mind that, rather than suffer one now, I would fix up one of the several empty barns which were scattered here and there over the property, and thus retain my beloved privacy.

My employer pushed his way into the house and invited me to follow him.

I found myself in a small, front room, neatly but plainly furnished. The floor was varnished and two bearskin rugs supplied the only carpeting. It had a mahogany centre table, on which a large oil-burning reading lamp was set. Three wicker chairs, designed solely for comfort, and a stove with an open front helped to complete its comfortable appearance. A number of framed photographs of Golden Crescent and some water colour paintings decorated the plain, wooden walls. In the far corner, beside a small side window, there stood a writing desk; while, all along that side of the wall, on a long curtain pole, there was hung, from brass rings, a heavy green curtain.

I took in what I could in a cursory glance and I marvelled that there could be so much apparent concentrated comfort so far away from city civilisation; but, when my guide pulled aside the curtain on the wall and disclosed rows and rows of books behind a glass front, books ancient and modern, books of religion, philosophy, medicine, history, fiction and poetry,—at least a thousand of them,—I gave up trying any more to fathom what manner of a man he was.

My eyes sparkled and explained to K. B. Horsfal what my voice failed to utter.

"Well,—what d'ye think of it all?" he asked at last.

"It is a delight,—a positive delight," I replied simply.

As I walked over to the front window, I wondered little that Mrs. Horsfal should have loved the place; and, when I looked away out over the dancing waters, upon the beauties of the bay in the changing light of the lowering sun, upon the rocky, fir-dotted island a mile to sea, and upon the lonely-looking homes of the settlers over there two miles away on the far horn of Golden Crescent, with the great background of mountains in purple velvet,—I wondered less.

"Yes! George,—it's pretty near what heaven should be to look at. But I guess it's the same old story that the poet once sang:

"'Where every prospect pleases and only man is vile.'

"That poet kind of forgot that, if what he said was true, it was only the vile man that the prospect could please, eh!

"You notice the house has been cleaned from top to toe. I had that done last week. I see to that every time I come west."

He put his hand on my shoulder. "George, boy,—no one but myself and Eileen has slept under this roof since my wife died, but I want you to make it your home."

I turned to remonstrate.

"Now,—don't say a word," he hurried on. "You can't bluff me with your self-defamatory remarks. You are not a Jake Meaghan, or one of his stamp. You are of the kind that appreciates a home like this to the extent of taking care of it.

"Come and have a look at the other apartments.

"This is the kitchen. It has a pantry and a good cooking-stove. There are four bedrooms in the house. This can be yours;—it's the one I used to occupy. This is a spare one. This is Eileen's. You

won't require it; and one never knows when Eileen might take it into her head to come up here and live.

"This is my Helen's room,—my wife's. It has not been changed since she died."

He went in. I remained respectfully in the adjoining apartment. I waited for five minutes.

When he returned, there were tears in his eyes. He locked the door with a sigh.

"George,—here are the keys to the whole she-bang. There isn't much more to keep me here. You have signed the necessary papers in connection with the trust account for \$5,000 in the Commercial Bank of Canada in Vancouver. Draw your wages regularly. Pay Jake his fifty a month at the same time. We find his grub for him.

"Run things at a profit if you can, for that's business. Stand strictly to the instructions I have given you regarding orders for supplies from the various camps and from the cannery. Use your own judgment as to credit with the settlers. I leave you a free hand up here.

"Send your monthly reports, addressed to me care of my lawyers, Dow, Cross & Sneddon of Vancouver. They will forward them.

"If any question should arise regarding the property itself, get in touch with the lawyers."

I walked with him down to the launch as he talked.

"Thanks to you, George,—I'll get to Vancouver in the small hours of the morning and I will be able to pull out for Sydney in the afternoon of to-morrow.

"Good-bye, boy. All being well, I'll be back within a year."

In parting with him, as he shook me by the hand, I experienced a tightening in my throat such as I had never felt when parting from any other man either before or since. Yet, I had only known him for two days. I could see that he, also, was similarly affected. It was as if something above and beyond us were making our farewell singularly solemn.

CHAPTER IX

The Booze Artist

I stood watching until the tiny launch rounded the point; then, as the light was still fairly good,—it being the end of the month of May,—and as I had no inclination for sleep as yet, I got into the smallest of the rowing boats that were tied up alongside the wharf, loosed it and pulled leisurely up the bay, with the intention of making myself a little better acquainted with the only living soul with whom I was within hail,—Jake Meaghan.

As I ran the boat into his cove, I could hear his dog bark warningly.

The door of his barn,—for it was nothing else,—was closed, and it was some time before I heard Meaghan's deep voice in answer to my knock, inviting me to come in and bidding his dog to lie down.

Meaghan was sitting, presumably reading a newspaper, which was the only kind of "literature" I ever saw him read. His attitude appeared to me to be assumed and I had a notion that, when the dog first barked at my approach, he had been busy with the contents of a brass-bound, wooden chest which now lay half under his bunk, in a recess in the far corner.

"Hello! Thought you might come over. Sit down," he greeted. "Saw the boss pull out half an hour ago. I'm just sittin' down for my turn at the newspaper. They leave me a bundle off the steamer once in a while. This one's from the old country;—the *Liverpool Monitor*. It's two months old, but what's the dif,—the news is just as good as if it was yesterday's or to-morrow's."

I looked round Jake's shanty. Considering it was a single-roomed place and used for cooking, washing, sleeping and everything else, it was wonderfully tidy, although, to say truth, there was little in it after all to occasion untidiness: a stove, a pot, a frying-pan, an enamelled tin teapot, some crockery, a table, an oil lamp, three chairs, the brass-bound trunk, two wheat-flake boxes and Jake's bed,—with one other addition,—a fifteen-gallon keg with a stopcock in it and set on a wooden stand close to his bunk.

An odour of shell-fish pervaded the atmosphere, coming from some kind of soup made from clams and milk, on which Jake had evidently been dining. The residue of it still sat in a pot on the stove. This, I discovered, was Jake's favourite dish.

He rose, took two breakfast cups from a shelf and went over to the keg in the corner. He filled up both of them to the brim.

"Have a drink, George?" he invited, offering me one of the cups.

"What is it?" I asked, thinking it might be a cider of some kind.

"What d'ye suppose, man?—ginger beer? It's good rye whiskey."

From the odour, I had ascertained this for myself before he spoke.

"No, thanks, Jake, I don't drink."

"Holy mackinaw!" he exclaimed, almost dropping the cups in his astonishment. "If you don't drink, how in the Sam Hill are you going to make it stick up here? Why, man, you'll go batty in the winter time, for it's lonely as hell."

"From all accounts, Jake, hell is not a very lonely place," I laughed.

"Aw!—you know what I mean," he put in.

"I'll have plenty of work to do in the store; enough to keep me from feeling lonely."

"Not you. Once it's goin', it'll be easy's rollin' off'n a log. What'll you do o' nights, 'specially winter nights,—if you don't drink?"

He sat down and began to empty his cup of liquor by the gulp.

His dog, which had been lying sullenly on the floor near the stove, got up and ambled leisurely to Jake's feet. It looked up at him as he drank, then it put its two front paws on Jake's knees, as if to attract his attention.

Meaghan stopped his imbibing and stroked the dog's head.

"Well,—well—Mike; and did I forget you?"

He poured a little liquor in a saucer and set it down on the floor before the dog, who lapped it up with all the relish of a seasoned toper. Then it put its paws back on Jake's knees, as if asking for more.

"No! Mike. Nothin' doin'. You've had your whack. Too much ain't good for your complexion, old man."

In a sort of dreamy, contemplative mood the dog sat down on its haunches between us.

"What'll you do o' nights if you don't drink? You ain't told me that, George," reiterated Jake, sucking some of the liquor from his drooping moustaches.

"Oh!" I replied, "I'll read, and sometimes I'll sit out and watch the stars and listen to the sea and the wind."

"And what after that?" he queried.

"I can always think, when I have nothing else to do."

"And what after that?" he asked again.

"Nothing, Jake,—nothing. That's all."

"No it ain't. No it ain't, I tell you;—after that,—it's the bughouse for yours. It's the thinking,—it's the thinking that does it every time. It's the last stage, George. You'll be clean, plumb batty inside o' six months."

The dog got up, after two unsuccessful attempts.

Never did I see such a strange sight in any animal. He put out one paw and staggered to the right. He put out another and staggered to the left. All the time, his eyes were half closed. He was quite insensible of our presence, for he was as drunk as any waterfront loafer. Staggering, stumbling and balancing, he made his way back to his place beside the stove, where, in a moment more, he was in a deep sleep and snoring,—as a Westerner would put it,—to beat the cars.

Meaghan noticed my interest in the phenomenon.

"That's nothin'," he volunteered. "Mike has his drink with me every night, for the sake o' company. Why not? He doesn't see any fun in lookin' at the stars and watching the tide come up o' nights. Worst is, he can't stand up to liquor. It kind o' gets his goat; yet he's been tipplin' for three years now."

Jake finished off his cup of whisky.

"Good Heavens, man!" I exclaimed in disgust and dismay, "don't you know you will kill yourself drinking that stuff in that way?"

"Guess nit," he growled, but quite good-naturedly. "I ain't started. I've been drinkin' more'n that every night for ten years and I ain't dead yet,—not by a damn sight. No! nor I ain't never been drunk, neither."

He took up the other cupful of whisky as he spoke and slowly drained it off before my eyes. He laid the empty cup on the table with a grunt of satisfaction, pulling at his long moustaches in lazy pleasure.

"That's my nightcap, George. Better'n seein' stars, too."

I could see his end.

"I'd much rather see stars than snakes," I remarked. But Jake merely laughed it off.

I rose in a kind of cold perspiration. To me, this was horrible;—drinking for no apparent reason.

He came with me to the door. His voice was as steady as could be; so were his legs. The effects of the liquor he had consumed did not show on him except maybe for a bloodshot appearance in the whites of his baby-blue eyes.

I was worried. I had known such another as Jake in the little village of Brammerton; and I knew what the inevitable end had been and what Jake's would be also.

"Don't be sore at me, George," he pleaded. "It's the only friend I got now."

"It is not any friend of yours, Jake."

"Well,—maybe it ain't, but I think it is and that's about the only way we can reckon our friends.

"When you find I ain't doin' my share o' the work because o' the booze or when you catch me drunk,—I'll quit it. Good-night, George."

I wished him good-night gruffly, hurried over the beach, scrambled into the boat and rowed quickly for my new home.

And, as I stood on the veranda for a long time before turning in, I watched the moon rise and skim her way behind and above the clouds, throwing, as she did so, great dark shadows and eerie lights on the sea.

In the vast, awesome stillness of the forest behind and the swishing and shuffling of the incoming tide on the shingles on the beach, I thought of what my good friend, K. B. Horsfal, had quoted:

"Where every prospect pleases and only man is vile."

CHAPTER X

Rita of the Spanish Song

Next morning I was awakened bright and early by the singing of birds. For a few moments I imagined myself back in England; but the ceaseless beat of the sea and the sustained, woody-toned, chattering, chirruping squeak of an angry squirrel on my roof gave me my proper location.

I had heard once, in a London drawing-room, that there were no singing birds in British Columbia; that the songsters of the East were unable to get across the high, eternal cold and snow of the Rockies. What a fallacy! They were everywhere around me, and in thousands. How they got there was of little moment to me. They were there, much to my joy; and the forests at my back door were alive with the sweetness of their melodies.

Early as I was, I could see a thin column of smoke rising from the cove where Jake was. When I went to the woodpile at the rear of my bungalow, I found more evidence of his early morning diligence. A heap of dry, freshly cut kindling was set out, while the chickens had already been fed and let out to wander at their own sweet wills.

For the first time in my very ordinary life, I investigated the eccentricities of a cook stove, overcame them and cooked myself a rousing breakfast of porridge and bacon and eggs with toast. How proud I felt of my achievement and how delicious the food tasted! Never had woman

cooked porridge and bacon and eggs to such a delightful turn.

I laughed joyously, for I felt sure I had stumbled across an important truth that woman had religiously kept from the average man throughout all the bygone ages: the truth that any man, if he only sets his mind to it, can cook a meal perfectly satisfactory to himself.

After washing up the breakfast dishes without smashing any, sweeping the kitchen floor and shovelling up—nothing; there was nothing left for me to do, for the north-going steamer was not due until early in the afternoon. When she should arrive and give me delivery of the freight which she was bringing, I knew I should have enough to occupy my attention for some days to come, getting the cases opened up and the goods checked over, priced and set out in the store; but, meantime, my time was my own.

It was a glorious morning. The sun was shining and the air was balmy as a midsummer's day at home. I opened the front door and gazed on the loveliness; I stretched my arms and felt vigour running to my finger-tips. Then I longed, how I longed, for a swim!

And why not! I slipped out of my shirt and trousers and got into my bathing suit. I ran down to the end of the wharf and out on to the rocks.

The water was calm, and deep, and of a pale green hue. I could see the rock cod and little shiners down there, darting about on a breakfast hunt.

Filling my lungs, I took a header in, coming up fifteen yards out and shaking my head with a gurgling cry of pleasure. I struck out, overhand, growing stronger and more vigorous each succeeding moment, as the refreshing sea played over my body. On, on I went, turning upon my breast sometimes, sometimes on my back, lashing the water into foam with my feet and blowing it far into the air from my mouth.

Half a mile out and I was as near to the island, in the middle of the Bay, as I was to the wharf. I knew I could make it, although I had not been in the water for several weeks. I had an abundance of time, the sea was warm, the island looked pretty,—so on I went.

I reached it at last, a trifle blown, but in good condition.

It had not been by any means a record swim for me. I had not intended that it should. All the way, it had been a pleasure trip.

I made for a sandy beach, between two rocky headlands. Soon, I got my footing and waded ashore. After a short rest, I set out to survey the island.

All the childhood visions I had stored in my memory of "Coral Island," "Crusoe's Island," and "Treasure Island" became visualised and merged into one,—the island I was exploring.

It was of fairy concept; only some four hundred yards long and about a hundred yards in breadth, with rugged rocks and sandy beaches; secret caves and strange caverns; fertile over all with small fir and arbutus trees, shrubs, ferns and turfy patches of grass of the softest velvet pile. In the most unlikely places, I stumbled across bubbling springs of fresh water forcing its way through the rocks. How they originated, was a mystery to me, for the island was separated from the mainland by a mile, at least, of salt water.

What an ideal spot, I thought, for a picnic! Would not some of my eccentric acquaintances at home,—the Duke of Athlane, for instance,—dearly love to take the whole thing up by the roots and transplant it in the centre of some of the artificial lakes they had schemed and contrived, in wild attempts to make more beautiful the natural beauties of their estates?

By this time, the warm air had dried my body. I climbed to the highest point of the island,—a small plateau, covered with short turf; a glorious place for the enjoyment of a sun bath. I lay down and stretched myself.

My only regret then was that I did not have a book with me to complete my Paradise.

Pillowed on a slight incline, I dreamily watched the scudding clouds, then my eyes travelled across to the mainland. I could see the smoke curl upward from my kitchen fire. I saw old Jake get into his boat, followed by the drunken rascal of a dog, Mike. All was still and quiet but for the seethe and shuffle of the sea.

Suddenly, on the other side of the water somewhere, but evidently far away, a voice, untrained, but of peculiar sweetness, broke into my drowsing. I listened for a time, trying to catch the refrain. As it grew clearer, I tried to pick up the words, but they were in a tongue foreign to me. They were not French, nor were they Italian. At last, it struck me that they were Spanish words; the words of a Spanish dancing song, which, when I was a gadding-about college boy, had been popular among us. I recalled having heard that it was sung by the chorus of a famous Spanish dancer, who, at one time, had been the rage of London and the Provinces, but who had mysteriously vanished from the footlights with the same suddenness as she had appeared there.

It was a haunting little melody, catchy and childishly simple; and it had remained in my memory all these years, as is so often the case with choruses that we hear in our babyhood.

Naturally, I was more than curious to see the singer, so I crept to the top of the grassy knoll and peered over, searching the far side of the island and over the water.

Away out, I discerned a small boat making in the direction of the island. The oars were being plied by a woman, or a girl,—I could not tell which, as her back was toward me and she was still a good way off. She handled her oars as if she were a part of the boat itself and the boat were a living thing.

She stopped every now and then, rose from her seat and busied herself with something. I wondered what she was doing. I saw her haul something into the boat. As she examined it in her hand, the sun flashed upon it. I could hear her laugh happily as she tossed it into the bottom of the boat.

She was trolling for fish and, evidently, getting a plentiful supply.

She rowed in as if intent upon fishing round the island. But, all at once, she changed her mind, turned the boat, pulled in her fishing line and shot into a sandy beach, springing out and pulling the boat clear of the tide.

She straightened herself as she turned and faced the plateau on the far incline of which I lay hidden. I saw at a glance that, though a mere girl in years,—somewhere between sixteen and eighteen,—yet she was a woman, maturing as a June rose, as a butterfly stretching its pretty wings for the first time in the ecstasy of its new birth. Of medium height; her hair was the darkest shade of brown and hung in two long, thick braids down to her neat waist. She seemed not at all of the countrified type I might have expected to encounter so far in the wilds.

She was dressed in a spotless white blouse, the sleeves of which were rolled back almost to her shoulders; with a dark-coloured, serviceable skirt, the hem of which hung high above a pair of small, bare feet and neat, supple-looking ankles. I could see her shoes and stockings, brown in colour, lying in the bow of the boat. She reached over, picked them up, then sat on a rock by the water's edge and pulled them on her feet.

But, after all, it was not her dress that held my attention; although in the main this was pleasing to the eye, nor yet was it the girl's features, for she was still rather far off for me to observe these distinctly. What riveted me was the light, agile rapidity of her every action; and her evident abandonment of everything else for what, for the moment, absorbed her.

As I watched, I became filled with conflicting thoughts. Should I remain where I was, or should I at once betray my presence?

I decided that the island was large enough for both of us. She was not interested in me, so why should I interrupt her in her lonely enjoyment?

I was perplexed more than a little in trying to place where she rightfully belonged. Naturally, I took her to be the daughter of one of the settlers on the far side of Golden Crescent. But there was a something in her entire appearance that seemed to place her on a different plane from that, a plane all by herself; while, again, there was the Spanish song which I had heard her lilt out on the water.

She brought my conjecturing to rather an abrupt conclusion, for, without any warning, she darted up over the rocks and through the ferns to where I lay, and she had almost trodden upon me before I had time to get out of her way.

She stepped back with an exclamation of surprise, but gave no sign to indicate that she was afraid.

I sprang to my feet.

"I am very sorry,—miss," I said sincerely.

"Oh!—there ain't much to be sorry over. This ain't my island. Still,—girls don't much care about men watching them from behind places," she replied, with a tone of displeasure.

"And I am sorry,—again," I answered. "Please forgive me, for I could hardly help it. I was lying here when I heard you sing. I became curious. When you landed, I intended making my presence known, but I said to myself just what you have said now:—'It is not my island.' However, I shall go now and leave you in possession."

"Where is your boat?"

"Didn't bring one with me."

"How did you get here then?"

Her blunt questioning was rather disconcerting.

"Oh! I walked it," I answered lightly, with a grin.

Her voice changed. "You're trying to be smart," she reprimanded.

"Sorry," I said, in a tone of contrition, "for I am not a bit smart in spite of my trying. Well,—I swam across from the wharf over there."

She looked up. "Being smart some more."

"No!—it is true."

She measured the distance from the island to the wharf with her eye.

I remarked, some time ago, that her hair was of the darkest shade of brown. I was wrong;—there was a darker hue still, and that was in her eyes; while her skin was of that attractive combination, olive and pink.

"Gee!—that was some swim.

"How are you going to get back?" she continued, in open friendliness.

"Swim!"

"Ain't you tired?"

"I was winded a bit when I got here, but I am all right again," I answered.

"You're an Englishman?"

"How did you guess it?" I asked, as if I were giving her credit for unearthing a great mystery.

Before answering, she sat down on the grass, clasping her hands over her knees. I squatted a short distance from her.

"Only Englishmen go swimming hereabouts in the morning."

"Do you often stumble across stray, swimming Englishmen?" I asked in banter.

"No!—but three summers ago there were some English people staying in that house at the wharf that's now closed up:—the one next Horsfal's, and they were in the water so much, they hardly gave the fish a chance. It was the worst year we ever had for fishing."

I laughed, and she looked up in surprise.

"Then we had an English surveyor staying with us for a month last year. He was crazy for the water. He went in for half an hour every morning and before his breakfast, too. You don't find the loggers or any of the settlers doing silly stunts like that. No, siree.

"Guess you're a surveyor?"

"No!"

"Or maybe a gentleman up for shooting and fishing? Can't be though, for there ain't any launches in the Bay. Yes, you are, too, for I saw a launch in yesterday."

"I hope I am always a gentleman," I said, "but I am not the kind of gentleman you mean. I have no launch and no money but what I can earn. I am the new man who is to look after Mr. Horsfal's Golden Crescent property. I shall be more or less of a common country storekeeper after to-day."

"Heard about that store from old Jake. Granddad over home was talking about it, too. It'll be convenient for the Camps and a fine thing for the settlers up here."

She jumped up. "Well,—I guess I got to beat it, Mister——"

"George Bremner," I put in.

"My name's Rita;—Rita Clark. I stay over at the ranch there, the one with the red-roofed houses. This island's named Rita, too."

"After you?"

"Ya!—guess so!"

She did not venture any more.

"Been here long?" I asked.

"Long's I can remember," she answered.

"Like it?"

"I love it. It's all I got. Never been away from it more'n three times in my life."

There was something akin to longing in her voice.

"I love it all the same,—all but that over there."

As she spoke, she shivered and pointed away out to the great perpendicular rock, with its jagged, devilish, shark-like teeth, which rose sheer out of the water and stood black, forbidding and snarling, even in the sunshine, to the right, at the entrance to the Bay, a quarter of a mile or so from the far horn of Golden Crescent.

"You don't like rocks?"

"Some rocks," she whispered, "but not 'The Ghoul.'"

"The Ghoul," I repeated with a shudder. "Ugh!—what a name. Who on earth saddled it with such a horrible name?"

"Nobody on earth. Guess it must have been the devil in hell, for it's a friend of his."

Her face grew pale and a nameless horror crept into her eyes.

"It ain't nice to look on now,—is it?"

"No!" I granted.

"You want to see it in the winter, when there's a storm tearing in, with the sea crashing over it in a white foam and,—and,—people trying to hang on to it. Oh!—I tell you what it is,—it's hellish, that's all. It's well named The Ghoul,—it's a robber of the dead."

"Robber of the dead!—what do you mean?"

"Everybody but a stranger knows:—it robs them of a decent burial. Heaps of men, and women too, have been wrecked out there, but only one was ever known to come off alive. Never a body has ever been found afterwards." She shivered and turned her head away.

For a while, I gazed at the horrible rock in fascination. What a reminder it was to the poor human that there is storm as well as calm; evil as well as good; that turmoil follows in the wake of quiet; that sorrow tumbles over joy; and savagery and death run riot among life and happiness and love!

At last, I also turned my eyes away from The Ghoul, with a strong feeling of anger and resentment toward it. Already I loathed and hated the thing as I hated nothing else.

I stood alongside the girl and we remained silent until the mood passed.

Then she raised her eyes to mine and smiled. In an endeavour to forget,—which, after all, was easy amid so much sunshine and beauty,—I reverted to our former conversation.

"You said you were seldom away from here. Don't you ever take a trip to Vancouver?"

"Been twice. We're not strong on trips up here. Grand-dad goes to Vancouver and Victoria once in a while. Grandmother's been here twenty years and never been five miles from the ranch, 'cept once, and she's sorry now for that once.

"Joe's the one that gets all the trips. You ain't met Joe. Guess when you do you and him won't hit it. He always fights with men of your size and build."

"Who is this Joe?" I asked. "He must be quite a man-eater."

"I ain't going to tell you any more. You'll know him when you see him.

"I'm going now. Would you like some fish? The trout were biting good this morning. I've got more'n we need."

We went down to the shore together. There were between thirty and forty beauties of sea-trout in the bottom of her boat. She handed me out a dozen.

"Guess that'll make a square meal for you and Jake."

Then she looked at me and laughed, showing her teeth. "Clean forgot," she said. "A swimming man ain't no good at carrying fish."

"Why not?" I asked.

I picked up some loose cord from her boat, strung the trout by the gills and tied them securely round my waist.

She watched me archly and a thought went flashing through my mind that it did not need the education of the city to school a woman in the art of using her eyes.

"Guess I'll see you off the premises first, before I go."

"All right!" said I.

We crossed the Island once more, and I got on to a rock which dipped sheer and deep into the sea.

She held out her hand and smiled in such a bewitching way that, had I not been a well-seasoned bachelor of almost twenty-five years' standing, I should have lost my heart to her completely.

"Good-bye! Mister,—Mister Bremner. Safe home."

"Good-bye! Miss—Rita."

"Sure you can make it?" she asked earnestly.

"Yes!" I cried, and plunged in.

As I came up, I turned and waved my hand. She waved in answer, and when I looked again she was gone.

I struck swiftly for the wharf, allowing for the incoming tide.

When I was half-way across, I heard the sound of oars and, on taking a backward glance, I saw Rita making toward me.

"Hello!" I cried, when she drew near. "What's the matter?"

A little shame-faced, she bent over. "I got scared," she said timidly, "scared you mightn't make it. Sure you don't want me to row you in?"

The boat was alluring, but my pride was touched.

"Quite sure," I answered. "I'm as fresh as the trout round my waist. Thanks all the same."

"All right! Guess I was foolish. You ain't a man; you're a porpoise."

With this half-annoyed sally, she swung the bow of the boat and rowed away.

CHAPTER XI

An Informative Visitor

That afternoon, prompt at two o'clock, a whistle sounded beyond the point and, shortly afterwards, the steamboat *Siwash*, north bound, entered the Bay.

Jake and I were waiting at the end of the wharf, seated in a large, wide-beamed, four-oared boat, with Mike, the dog,—still eyeing me suspiciously,—crouching between his master's feet.

We had a raft and half a dozen small rowing boats of all shapes and conditions, strung out, Indian file, from our stern. Every available thing in Golden Crescent Bay that could float, down to a canoe and an old Indian dug-out, we borrowed or requisitioned for our work. And, with this long procession in tow, we pulled out and made for the steamer, which came to a standby in the deep water, three hundred yards from the shore.

The merchandise was let down by slings from the lower deck, and we had to handle the freight as best we could, keeping closely alongside all the while.

A dozen times, I thought one or another of the boats would be overturned and its contents emptied into the Bay. But luck was with us. Jake spat tobacco juice on his hands every few minutes and sailed in like a nigger. Our clothes were soon moist through and through, and the perspiration was running over our noses long before our task was completed. But finally the last package was lowered and checked off by the mate and myself, a clear receipt given; and we (Jake and I) pushed for the shore, landing exhausted in body but without mishap to the freight.

Jake fetched some fresh clams to my kitchen for convenience and, after slapping half a plug of tobacco in his cheek, he started in and cooked us a savoury concoction which he called "chowder," made with baked clams mixed in hot milk, with butter and crumbled toast; all duly

seasoned:—while I smoked my pipe and washed enough dishes to hold our food, and set the table for our meal.

Already, I had discovered that dish-washing was the bugbear of a kitchen drudge's existence, be the kitchen drudge female or male. I had only done the job three or four times, but I had got to loathe and abhor the operation. Not that I felt too proud to wash dishes, but it seemed such a useless, such an endless, task. However, I suppose everything in this old world carries with it more or less of these same annoyingly bad features.

At any rate, I never could make up my mind to wash a dish until I required it for my next and immediate meal.

We dined ravenously, and throughout the proceeding, Mike sat in the doorway, keeping close watch that I did not interfere with the sacred person of his lord and master, Jake Meaghan.

Rested and reinvigorated, we set-to with box-openers, hammers and chisels, unpacking and unpacking until the thing became a boring monotony.

Canned milk, canned beef, canned beans, canned salmon, canned crabs, canned well-nigh-everything; bottled fruits, bottled pickles, bottled jams and jellies, everything bottled that was not canned; bags of sugar, flour, meal, potatoes, oats and chicken feed; hardware galore, axes, hammers, wedges, peevies, cant hoops, picks, shovels, nails, paints, brooms, brushes and a thousand other commodities and contrivances the like of which I never saw before and hope never to see again.

Never, in all my humble existence, did I feel so clerky as I did then.

I checked the beastly stuff off as well as I could, taking the Vancouver wholesalers' word for the names of half the things, for I was quite sure they knew better than I did about them.

With the assistance of Jake, as "hander-up," I set the goods in a semblance of order on the shelves and about the store.

We worked and slaved as if it were the last day and our eternal happiness depended on our finishing the job before the last trump sounded its blast of dissolution.

By the last stroke of twelve, midnight, we had the front veranda swept clean of straw, paper and excelsior, and all empty boxes cleared away; just in time to welcome the advent of my first Sabbath day in the Canadian West.

Throughout our arduous afternoon and evening, what a surprise old Jake was to me! Well I knew that he was hard and tough from years of strenuous battling with the northern elements; but that he, at his age and with his record for hard drinking, should be able to keep up the sustained effort against a young man in his prime and that he should do so cheerfully and without a word of complaint,—save an occasional grunt when the steel bands around some of the boxes proved recalcitrant, and an explosive, picturesque oath when the end of a large case dropped over on his toes,—was, to me, little short of marvellous.

Already, I was beginning to think that Mr. K. B. Horsfal had erred in regard to his man and that it was Jake Meaghan who was twenty-four carat gold.

If any man ever did deserve two breakfast cups brimful of whisky, neat, before turning in, it was old, walrus-moustached, weather-battered, baby-eyed, sour-dough Jake, in the small, early hours of that Sabbath morning.

I slept that night like a dead thing, and the sun was high in the heavens before I opened my eyes and became conscious again of my surroundings.

I looked over at the clock. Fifteen minutes past ten! I threw my legs over the side of the bed, ashamed of my sluggardliness.

Then I remembered,—it was Sunday morning.

Oh! glorious remembering! Sunday,—with nothing to do but attend to my own bodily comforts.

I pulled my legs back into the bed in order to start the day correctly. I lay and stretched myself, then, very leisurely,—always remembering that it was the Sabbath,—I put one foot out and then the other, until, at last, I stood on the floor, really and truly up and awake.

Jake had been around. I could see traces of him in the yard, though he was nowhere visible in the flesh.

After I had breakfasted and made my bed (I know little Maisie Brant, who used to make my bed away back over in the old home—little Maisie who had wept at my departure, would have laughed till she wept again, had she seen my woful endeavours to straighten out my sheets and smooth my pillow. But then, she was not there to see and laugh and—I was quite satisfied with my handiwork and satisfied that I would be able to sleep soundly in the bed when the night

should come again)—I hunted the shelves for a book.

Stevenson, Poe, Scott, Hugo, Wells, Barrie, Dumas, Twain, Emerson, Byron, Longfellow, Burns,—which should it be?

Back along the line I went, and chose—oh, well!—an old favourite I had read many times before.

I hunted out a hammock and slung it comfortably from the posts on the front veranda, where I could lie and smoke and read; also where I could look away across the Bay and rest my eyes on the quiet scene when they should grow weary.

Late in the afternoon, when I was beginning to grow tired of my indolence, I heard the thud, thud of a gasoline launch as it came up the Bay. It passed between Rita's Isle and the wharf, and held on, turning in to Jake Meaghan's cove.

I wondered who the visitor could be, then I went back to my reading.

Not long after, a shadow fell across my book and I jumped up.

"Pray, don't let me disturb you, my son," said a soft, well-modulated, masculine voice. "Stay where you are. Enjoy your well-earned rest."

A little, frail-looking, pale-faced, elderly gentleman was at my elbow.

He smiled at me with the smile of an angel, and my heart went out to him at once, so much so that I could have hugged him in my arms.

"My name is William Auld," he continued. "I am the medical missionary. What is yours, my son?"

He held out his hand to me.

"George Bremner," I replied, gripping his. "Let me bring you a chair."

I went inside, and when I returned he was turning over the leaves of my book.

"So you are a book lover?" he mused. "Well, I would to God more men were book lovers, for then the world would be a better place to live in, or rather, the men in it would be better to live among."

"Victor Hugo,—'Les Miserables'!—" he went on. "To my mind, the greatest of all novelists and the greatest of all novels."

He laid the book aside, and sought my confidences, not as a preacher, not as a pedagogue, but as a friend; making no effort to probe my past, seeking no secrets; but all anxiety for my welfare; keen to know my ambitions, my aspirations, my pastimes and my habits of living; open and frank in telling me of himself. He was a man's man, with the experience of men that one gets only by years of close contact.

"For twenty years it has been God's will to allow me to travel up and down this beloved coast and minister to those who need me."

"You must like the work, sir," I ventured.

"Like it!—oh! yes, yes,—I would not exchange my post for the City Temple of London, England."

"But such toil must be arduous, Mr. Auld, for you are not a young man and you do not look altogether a robust one."

He paused in meditation. "It is arduous, sometimes;—to-day I have talked to the men at eight camps and I have visited fourteen families at different points on my journey. But, if I were to stop, who would look after my beloved people in the ranches all up the coast; who would care for my easily-led, simple-hearted brethren in the logging camps, every one of whom knows me, confides in me and looks forward to my coming; not one of whom but would part with his coat for me, not one who would harm a hair of my head. I shall not stop, Mr. Bremner,—I have no desire to stop, not till God calls me."

"I see you have been making changes even in your short time here," he said, pointing to the store.

"Yes! I think Jake and I did fairly well yesterday," I answered, not a little proudly.

"Splendidly, my boy! And, do you know,—your coming here means a great deal. It is the commencement of a new departure, for your store is going to prove a great boon to the settlers. They have been talking about it and looking forward to it ever since it was first mooted."

"But it will not be altogether smooth sailing for you, for you must keep a close rein on your

credit."

It struck me, as he spoke, that he was the very man I was desirous of meeting regarding what I considered would prove my stumbling block.

"Can you spare me half an hour, sir, and have tea with me?" I asked.

"Yes! gladly, for my day's service is over,—all but one call, and a cup of tea is always refreshing."

I showed him inside and set him in my cosiest chair. While I busied with the table things,—washing some dishes as a usual preliminary,—I approached the subject.

"Mr. Auld,—I wished to ask your advice, for I am sure you can assist me. My employer, Mr. Horsfal, has given me a free hand regarding credit to the settlers. I know none of them and I am afraid that, without guidance, I may offend some or land the business in trouble with others. Will you help me, sir?"

"Why—of course, I'll help."

He took a sheet of paper from his pocket and commenced to write, talking to me as he did so.

"You know, if times are at all good, you can trust the average man who owns the ranch he lives on to pay his grocery bills sooner or later. Still, if I were you, I wouldn't let any of them get into debt more than sixty or seventy dollars, for they do not require to, and, once they get in arrears, they have difficulty in getting out.

"It is the floating population,—the here-to-day-and-away-to-morrow people who should not be given credit. And,—Mr. Bremner, if you desire to act in kindness to the men themselves, do not allow the loggers, who come in here, to run up bills for themselves personally. Not that they are more dishonest than other people,—far from it. I find it generally the other way round,—but they are notoriously improvident; inclined,—God bless them,—to live for the fleeting moment.

"In many ways they are like children in their simplicity and their waywardness,—and their lot is not one of roses and honeysuckle. They make good money and can afford to pay as they go. If they cannot pay, they can easily wait for what they want until they can, for they are well fed and well housed while in the camps."

We sat down at the table together.

"There is a list, George. May I call you George? It is so much more friendly."

I nodded in hearty approval.

"It is not by any means complete, but it contains the principal people among your near-hand neighbours. You can trust them to pay their last cent: Neil Andrews, Semple, Smith, Johannson, Doolan, MacAllister and Gourlay.

"Any others who may call,—make them pay; and I shall be glad to inform you about them when I am this way again."

"How often do you come in here, Mr. Auld?"

"I try to make it, at least, once in two weeks, but I am not always successful. I like to visit Jake Meaghan. Poor, old, faithful, plodding Jake,—how I tried, at first, to extract the thorn from his flesh—the accursed drink! I talked to him, I scolded him, I threatened him, but,—poor Jake,—he and his whisky are one, and nothing but death will ever separate them."

Suddenly his face lit up and his eyes seemed to catch fire.

"And who are we to judge?" he said, as if denying some inward question. "What right have we to think for a moment that this inherent weakness shall deprive Jake Meaghan of eternal happiness? He is honest; he does good in his own little sphere; he harms no one but himself, for he hasn't a dependent in the world. He fills a niche in God's plan; he is still God's child, no matter how erring he may be. He is some mother's son. George,—I am fully persuaded that my God, and your God, will not be hard on old Jake when his time comes; and, do you know, sometimes I think that time is not very far off."

We sat silent for a while, then the minister spoke again:

"Tell me, George,—have you met any of your neighbours yet?"

"Only two," I said, "Jake, and Rita Clark."

He raised his white, bushy eyebrows.

"So you have met Rita! She's a strange child; harboured in a strange home."

He sighed at some passing thought.

"It's a queer world,—or rather, it's a good world with queer people in it. One would expect to find love and harmony in the home every time away up here, but it does not always follow. Old Margaret Clark is the gentlest, dearest, most patient soul living. Andrew Clark is a good man in every way but one,—but in that one he is the Rock of Gibraltar itself, or, to go nearer the place of his birth, Ailsa Craig, that old milestone that stands defiantly between Scotland and Ireland. Andrew Clark is immovable. He is hard, relentless, fanatical in his ideas of right and wrong; cruel to himself and to the woman he vowed to love and cherish. Oh!—he sears my heart every time I think of him. Yet, he is living up to his idea of what is right."

The white-haired old gentleman,—bearer of the burdens of his fellows,—did not confide in me as to the nature of Andrew Clark's trouble, and it was not for me to probe.

"As for Rita," he pursued, "poor, little Rita!—she is no relative of either Margaret or Andrew Clark. She is a child of the sea. Hers is a pitiful story, and I betray no confidences in telling you of it, for it is common property.

"Fourteen years ago a launch put into the Bay and anchored at the entrance to Jake's cove. There were several ladies and gentlemen in her, and one little girl. They picnicked on the beach and, in the evening, they dined aboard, singing and laughing until after midnight. Jake was the only one who saw or heard them, and he swears they were not English-spoken. Though they were gay and pleasure-loving, yet they seemed to be of a superior class of people.

"He awoke before daylight, fancying he heard screams in the location of The Ghoul Rock. He got up and, so certain was he that he had not been mistaken, he got into his boat and rowed out and round The Ghoul,—for the night was calm,—but everything was quiet and peaceful out there.

"Next morning, while Joe Clark was scampering along the shore, he came across the unconscious form of a little girl about four years old, clad only in a nightdress and roped roughly to an unmarked life-belt. Joe carried her in to his grandfather, old Andrew, who worked over her for more than an hour; and at last succeeded in bringing her round.

"All she could say then was, "Rita, Rita, Rita," although, about a year afterwards, she started to hum and sing a little Spanish dancing song. A peculiar reversion of memory, for she certainly never heard such a song in Golden Crescent.

"Jake swears to this day that she belonged to the launch party, who must have run sheer into The Ghoul Rock and gone down.

"Little boy Joe pleaded with his grandfather and grandmother to keep the tiny girl the sea had given them, and they did not need much coaxing, for she was pretty and attractive from the first.

"Inquiries were set afoot, but, from that day to this, not a clue has been found as to her identity; so, Rita Clark she is and Rita Clark she will remain until some fellow, worthy of her I hope, wins her and changes her name.

"I thought at one time, Joe Clark would claim her and her name would not be changed after all, but since Joe has seen some of the outside world and has been meeting with all kinds of people, he has grown patronising and changeable with women, as he is domineering and bullying with men.

"He treats Rita as if he expected her to be continually at his call should he desire her, and yet he were at liberty to choose when and where he please."

"But, does Rita care for him?" I asked.

"Seems so at times," he answered, "but of late I have noticed a coldness in her at the mention of his name; just as if she resented his airs of one-sided proprietorship and were trying to decide with herself to tolerate no more of it.

"I tried to veer round to the subject with Joe once, but he swore an oath and told me to mind my own affairs. What Joe Clark needs is opposition. Yet Joe is a good fellow, strong and daring as a lion and aggressive to a degree."

I was deeply interested as the old minister told the story, and it was like bringing me up suddenly when he stopped. I had no idea how fast the time had been passing.

Well I could understand now why this Rita Clark intuitively hated The Ghoul Rock. Who, in her place, would feel otherwise?

The Rev. William Auld rose from the table.

"I must go now, my son, for the way is long. Thanks so much for the rest and for your hospitality. My only exhortation to you is, stand firm by all the principles you know to be true; never lose hold of the vital things because you are here in the wilds, for it is here the vital things count, more than in the whirr of civilisation."

"Thank you, sir. I'll try," I said. "You will come again, I hope."

"Certainly I shall. Even if you did not ask me, for that is my duty.

"If you accompany me as far as Jake's cove, where my launch is, I think I can furnish you with a paper from your countryside. I have friends in the city, in the States and in England, who supply me, every week, with American and Old Country papers. There are so many men from both lands in the camps and settled along the coast and they all so dearly love a newspaper. I generally try to give them what has been issued nearest their own home towns."

I rowed Mr. Auld over to his launch and wished him good-bye, receiving from his kindly old hands a copy of *The Northern Examiner*, dated three days after I had left Brammerton.

It was like meeting with an old friend, whom I had expected never to meet again. I put it in my inside pocket for consideration when I should get back to my bungalow with plenty of time to enjoy it.

I dropped in to Jake's shack, for I had not seen him all the sleepy day. I found him sitting in perfect content, buried up over the eyes in a current issue of *The Northern Lights*,—a Dawson newspaper, which had been in existence since the old Klondike days and was much relished by old-timers.

The dog was curled up near the stove, sleeping off certain effects; Jake was at his second cup of whisky. I left them to the peace and sanctity of their Sabbath evening and rowed back to "Paradise Regained," as I had already christened my bungalow.

I sat down on the steps of the veranda, to peruse the home paper which the minister had left with me, and it was not long before I was startled by a flaring headline. The blood rushed from my face to my heart and seemed as if it would burst that great, throbbing organ:—

"SUDDEN DEATH OF THE EARL OF BRAMMERTON AND HAZELMERE."

My eyes scanned the notice.

"News has been telegraphed that the Earl of Brammerton and Hazelmere died suddenly of heart failure at his country residence, Hazelmere. His demise has caused a profound sensation, as it occurred on the eve of a House Party, arranged in celebration of the engagement of his son, Viscount Harry Brammerton, Captain of the Coldstream Guards, to the beautiful Lady Rosemary Granton, daughter of the late General Frederick Granton, who was the companion and dearest friend of the late Earl of Brammerton in the early days of their campaigning in the Crimea and India."

A long obituary notice followed, concluding with the following paragraph:

"It is given out that the marriage of the present Earl with Lady Granton has been postponed and that, after the necessary business formalities have been attended to, Captain Harry will join his regiment in Egypt for a short term.

"Lady Rosemary Granton has gone to New York, at the cabled invitation of some old family friends."

"It is understood that the Hon. George Brammerton, second and only other son of the late Earl, is presently on a long walking tour in Europe. His whereabouts are unknown and he is still in ignorance of his father's death."

The pain of that sudden announcement, so soon after I had left home and right on the eve of my new endeavours, no one shall ever know.

My dear old father! Angry at my alleged eccentricities sometimes, but ever ready to forgive, —was gone: doubtless, passing away with a message of forgiveness to me on his lips.

And,—after the pain of it, came the conflict.

Had what I had done caused or in any way hastened my father's death? Admitting that Harry's fault was great and unforgiveable, would it not have been better had I allowed it to remain in obscurity, at least for a time? Was the keeping of the family name unsullied, was the untarnished honour of our ancient family motto, "Clean,—within and without," of greater importance than my father's life? Was it my duty to be an unintentional and silent partner to the keeping of vital intelligence from the fair Lady Rosemary?

Over all,—had I done right or wrong?

What did duty now demand of me? Should I hurry home and face the fresh problems there which were sure to arise now that Harry had succeeded to the titles and estates? Should I remain by the post I had accepted from the hands of Mr. K. B. Horsfal and test thoroughly this new and exhilarating life which, so far, I had merely tasted?

I had no doubts as to what my inclinations and desires were. But it was not a question of inclinations and desires:—it was simply one of duty.

All night long, I sat on the veranda steps with my elbows on my knees and my head in my upturned hands, fighting my battle; until, at last, when the grey was creeping up over the hills behind me and touching the dark surface of the sea in front here and there with mellow lights, I rose and went in to the house,—my conscience clear as the breaking day, my mind at rest like the rose-coloured tops of the mountains.

I had no regrets. I had done as a true Brammerton should. I had done the right.

I would not go back;—not yet. I would remain here for a while in my obscurity, testing out the new life and executing as faithfully as I knew how the new duties I had voluntarily assumed.

Further,—for my peace of mind,—so long as I remained in Golden Crescent, I decided I would not cast my eyes over the columns of any newspaper coming from the British Isles. If I were to be done with the old life, I must be done with it in every way.

CHAPTER XII

Joe Clark, Bully

With the advent of Monday morning, the Golden Crescent Trading Company, in charge of George Bremner, handyman, store-clerk, bookkeeper, buyer and general superintendent,—opened its doors for business.

I was not overburdened with customers, for which I was not sorry, as I had lots to do fixing the prices of my stock and setting it to rights.

But the arrival of the mail by the Tuesday steamer brought Neil Andrews, Doolan, Gourlay and the stern, but honest-faced old Scot, Andrew Clark, all at different times during the afternoon. Not one of them could resist the temptation and go away without making some substantial purchases.

I held religiously to the Rev. William Auld's list, but I found, in most cases, that my customers were prepared to pay for their first orders, at any rate, in cash; and, of course, I did not discourage them.

On Wednesday, a launch, with three men in her, put in from No. 1 camp at Susquahamma, bearing an order as long as my arm, duly endorsed in a business-like way and all according to requirements.

It took me most of the afternoon to put that order up. The men did not seem to mind, as they reckoned the going and returning to camp a well-nigh all-day job for them. They made Jake's shack their headquarters, spending all of the last two hours of their time in his cabin.

Thursday brought another launch, this time from Camp No. 3, and the same process was gone through as with No. 1, including the visit of the visitors to Jake's shack.

In an ordinary case, I would have been beginning to fear that that shack had become a common shebeen, but I knew Jake was not the man to accept money from any of his fellow creatures in exchange for any hospitality it might be in his power to offer. A few days later came a repeat order from No. 1 Camp, then a request from the Cannery, which I was able to fill only in part, as many things required by them had not been included in the original orders given to the Vancouver wholesalers.

I was beginning to wonder where Camp No. 2 was getting its supplies from, when, one day, about two weeks after my opening, they showed up.

Two men came over in a fast-moving launch of a much better type than those in use by the other camps. The men were big and burly fellows. One of them was unmistakably Irish; the other looked of Swedish extraction.

"You the man that looks after this joint?" asked the Swede.

"I am," I answered.

He looked me up and down, for I was on the same side of the counter as they. Then he turned to his Irish companion with a grin.

"Say, mister,—where's your hoss?" he asked, addressing me.

Both laughed loudly.

At first I failed to see the point of hilarity.

"What is the joke?" I asked.

"Guess you are!" said the Swede. And the two men laughed louder than ever.

"Look here!" I cried, my blood getting up, "I want you two to understand, first go off, that I am not in the habit of standing up to be grinned at. What do you want? Speak out your business or get out of here and tumble back into your boat."

"Ach!—it's all right, matey," put in the Irishman. "Just a bit av fun out av yer breeches and leggings. We Canucks don't wear breeches and leggings in grocery stores. Do we, Jan?"

"Guess nit," said Jan. And they both laughed again.

I cooled down, thinking if that were all their joke they were welcome to it, for I had already found my breeches and leggings mighty handy for getting through the bush with and for tumbling in and out of leaky rowing boats.

I grinned. "All right, fellows," I cried, "laugh all you want and I'll leave you a legging each as a legacy when I die."

"Say, sonny,—you're all right!" he exclaimed.

Good humour returned all round.

"We're from No. 2 Camp at Cromer Bay and we want a bunch of stuff."

"Where is your list and I'll try to fill it?" I inquired.

The Swede handed over a long order, badly scrawled on the back of a paper bag. The order was unstamped and unsigned, and not on the company's order form.

"This is not any good," I said. "Where is the company's order?"

The Swede looked blankly at the Irishman, and the Irishman gazed dreamily at the Swede.

"Guess that's good enough. Ain't it, Dan?"

"Shure!" seconded Dan.

"It can't be done, boys," I said. "Sorry,—but I have my instructions and they must be followed out."

I handed back the list.

The Swede stared at it and then over at me.

"Ain't you goin' to fill this?"

"No!"

"Well, I'll be gosh-dinged! Say! sonny,—there'll be a hearse here for you to-morrow. The boss wrote this."

"How am I to know that?" I retorted.

"Damned if I know," he returned, scratching his forelock. "But it'll be merry hell to pay if we go back without this bunch of dope."

"And it might be the devil to pay, if I gave you the goods without a proper order," I followed up.

"Some of this stuff's for to-morrow's grubstake," put in the Swede, "and most of the hardware's wanted for a job first crack out of the box in the morning."

"Sorry to disoblige you, fellows," I said sincerely, "but your boss should not have run so close to the wind. Further, I am going to work this store right and that from the very beginning."

"And you're not goin' to fill the boss's own caligeography, or whatever you call it?" reiterated the Irishman.

"No!"

"Wouldn't that rattle ye?" exclaimed Dan to his friend.

"It do," conceded the Swede, who put his hand into his pocket and tossed fifteen cents on to the counter.

"Well,—give us ten cents chewing tobacco, and a packet of gum."

I filled this cash order and immediately thereafter the two walked out of the store and sailed away without another word or even a look behind them.

I was worried over the incident, for I did not like to think myself in any way instrumental in depriving the men of anything they might require for their supper, and it was farthest from my desires to stop or even hamper the work at Camp No. 2. But I had been warned that there was only one way to operate a business and that was on business lines, according to plan, so my conscience would not permit of any other course than the one I had taken.

Had the store been my own, I might have acted differently, but it was merely held by me in trust, which was quite another matter.

Next forenoon, a tug blew her whistle and put into the Bay, coming-to on the far side of Rita's Isle. A little later, as I stood behind the counter writing up some fresh orders to the wholesalers, to replenish my dwindling stock, a dinghy, with one man at the oars and another sitting in the stern, appeared round the Island and pointed straight for the wharf.

The oarsman ran the nose of the boat on the beach and remained where he was. The man who had been sitting in the stern sprang out and came striding in the direction of the store.

He stopped at the door and looked around him, ignoring my presence the while.

What a magnificent specimen of a man he was! Never in my life had I seen such a man, and, with all the sight-seeing I have done since, I have never met such another.

I fancied, with my five feet eleven inches, that I was of a good height; but this giant stood six feet four inches, if he stood an inch. He looked quite boyish; not a day older than twenty-two. His hair was very fair and wavy, and he had plenty of it.

He was cleanly shaven and cleanly and neatly dressed. His eyes were big and sky blue in colour. They were eyes that could be warm or cold at will. Just then, they were passively cold.

His was a good face, reflecting strength and determination, while honesty, straight-forwardness and absolute fearlessness lent a charm to it that it otherwise would have lacked.

After all, it was the glory of his stature that attracted me, as he stood, framed by the door, dressed in his high logging boots, with khaki-coloured trousers and a shirt to match; a soft felt hat on the back of his head set a little sportily to one side.

Myself an admirer of the human form, a lover of muscle and sinew, strength, agility and virility, it always was the physique of a person that arrested my attention.

What a man this was for a woman to love! flashed the thought through my mind. Gazing at him, I could not help feeling my own insignificance in comparison, although, far down inside of me, there was a hungry kind of longing to match my agility and science against his tremendous brute strength, a wondering what the outcome would be. It was, however, merely a feeling of friendly antagonism.

But this was the fancy of a passing moment, for I was waiting for the big fellow to speak.

He did speak, and rather spoiled the impression.

"What'n the hell kind of a dump is this anyway?" he exploded.

I was hit as with a brickbat, but I tried not to show it.

"This is the Golden Crescent Trading Company," I answered quietly and, if anything, with an assumption of meekness which I was far from feeling;—just to see how much rope this big fellow would take to hang himself with.

I suppose my tone made him think that his verbal onslaught had been as effective as it had been short.

He turned his eyes on me for the first time. They fixed on mine, and never once flickered.

"You—don't—say!" he returned, in measured words.

Then he flared up again.

"Say!—who's the boss here?"

"I am," I retorted, getting warm.

He came over to the middle of the floor.

"And where'n the hell do I come in?" he asked.

"Don't know, I'm sure, mister; and I don't care very much either. But I have an idea that you or I will go out, quick, if you don't cool down."

"Here!—you cut that stuff out." He came up to the counter, clenching his huge hands. "I'm Joe Clark,—see."

"Pleased to meet you, Mr. Clark. I'm George Bremner."

"Who'n the hell's George Bremner?" he burst out.

"That's just what I was wondering in regard to Joe Clark," I retorted, returning glare for glare. "But look you here,—whoever you may be, you may get off with this sort of language elsewhere, but it doesn't have any effect on the man who is running the Golden Crescent Trading Company."

He tried hard to hold himself together.

"Guess you're one of them new-broom-sweep-clean smart Alicks," he said.

"About as smart as you are civil, Mr. Clark."

"Well, Mister Man, supposin' you and me gets down to brass tacks, right now. I'm the Superintendent of No. 2 Camp, with a say in the management of Camps No. 1 and No. 3. I own three tugs operatin' on the coast here."

He thumped his fist on the counter,—“and anything I have a hand in, my word goes,—understand."

"You are a lucky man," I answered. "But your word won't go here unless it coincides with mine, Mister Clark."

"Now," I added briskly, "tell me your business, or get out. I have other work to do."

He raised his hand and leaned across the counter, as if to clutch me by the throat, and a terrible paw of a hand it was, too. But, evidently, he thought better of it.

Not that I fancied for a moment that he was afraid of me at all, because I knew quite well that he was not.

He sat down on a box and watched me closely, sizing me up at every angle as I busied myself adjusting some tins on the shelves that were in no way in need of adjustment.

"Guess you think I pay men to take picnics for the good of their health down to this one-horse outfit."

"I have not wasted any thoughts on you at all, so far, Mr. Clark," I replied.

"Why'n the hell didn't you fill my order yesterday?"

"Was it your order?"

"Course it was. Wrote it out myself, every bit of it."

"Well,—you're a rotten writer, Mr. Clark."

"Oh!—can it. What kind of a tin-pot way of doin' business was that? What was this damned place started for anyway, if not for the convenience of the Camps?"

"I suppose you think I ought to know your writing?" I asked. "Well,—Mr. Clark, even if I had known it, I would not have accepted the order as it was. My positive instructions are that all camp orders have to be filled only on receipt of a stamped and signed document on the Company's business form for that purpose. And that's the only way goods will go out from here, whether for Joe Clark or for any one else."

"And what if I ain't got an order with me now? Guess you'll turn me down same as you did the others yesterday?"

"That is just what I would have to do."

"The hell you would!" He put his hand into his pocket and brought out some papers, one of which he threw on the counter. "There's your blasted order. Get a wiggle on, for I ain't here on a pleasure jaunt,—not by a damn sight. I'll be back in an hour for them goods."

"Better make it an hour and a half. It's a big order and it will not be ready a minute sooner."

"Gosh!" he growled, as he strode out, "some store-clerk,—I don't think."

I filled the requirements of Camp No. 2 to the best of my ability, packing up the goods and making everything as secure as necessary for the boat trip. I had the stuff all piled nicely on the veranda and was sitting on the steps contemplating and admiring the job, when the dinghy came back with Joe Clark in the stern as before.

"Hi, there!—you with the breeches and the leggings,—ain't you got that order of mine ready yet?"

"It is all here waiting for you," I shouted back, striking a match on my much maligned breeches and lighting my briar pipe leisurely.

"Well,—why'n the devil don't you bring it aboard?"

"Why don't you come and fetch it?" I cried. "I'm a store-keeper, Mister Joe Clark,—not a delivery wagon. I sell f.o.b. the veranda." And I smoked on.

He jumped out of the boat and rushed up the beach like a madman. I sat still, smoking away dreamily, but with a weather eye on him.

He stood over me, rolled up his sleeves and contemplated me, then he turned and shouted to his man:

"Hi, Plumbago! Come on and lend a hand with this cargo. No use wasting any time on this tom-fool injun."

To say I was surprised, was to put it mildly, for I was sure a quarrel was about to be precipitated.

Joe Clark and his man set to, carrying the boxes, and bundles, and packages piecemeal from the veranda to the boat, while I smoked and smoked as if in complete ignorance of their presence.

I knew I was acting aggravatingly, but then, I had been very much aggravated.

In an ordinary circumstance I would have been only too pleased to lend a hand if asked and, possibly, without being asked,—although there was nothing calling for me to do so,—but when ordered,—well,—how would any other fellow with a little pride in him have acted? Still, I must give Joe Clark his due. He made two trips to that dinghy against his helper's one and he always tackled the heaviest and the most unwieldy packages.

When he came for the last box, I rose to go into the house. As I turned, he caught me by the arm.

"Here!" he shouted.

I whipped round.

"Take your hands off me," I cried angrily, jerking my arm in an old wrestling trick and throwing my weight on him at an unbalanced angle, freeing myself and sending him back against the partition.

He recovered himself and we stood facing each other defiantly.

"God!" he growled, "but I'd like to kill you. You think you've won this time. Maybe you have, but, by God! you won't be in this store a month from now. I'll hound you out, or kick you out,—take it from me."

"And I'll stand by," I replied, "and take it all quietly like the simple little lamb I'm not."

I went into the house and closed the door, and the last I saw of Joe Clark that day was through the window as he packed his last box and pushed off in the dinghy.

CHAPTER XIII

A Visit, A Discovery and a Kiss

In the cool of the evening, I came to the conclusion that I had earned for myself the privilege of the enjoyment of a swim, so I threw my clothes on my bed, got into my costume, ran out on to

the rocks, dived in and away.

I did not go out into the Bay this time, but kept leisurely along the beach fronting the neighbouring property, keeping at a safe distance from the tangle of seaweed, which, somehow, seemed to gather at that particular part of the Crescent.

I amused myself for half an hour, then I returned dripping and in splendid humour with myself, with my friends and even with Joe Clark.

I did not notice an extra boat moored alongside the miscellaneous small craft at the wharf, so, when I stepped noiselessly into my front room, I was more than surprised to find Rita Clark standing there, in the fading light, looking over my book shelves.

She turned with an exclamation, and her face lit up with a smile which was bewitching, although I fancied it just a little bit forced.

"Oh!—it's you," she cried. "I knew you wouldn't be very long away. Been having another try to see whether you're a man or a fish? Guess the fish will win out if you're not careful."

She became solemn suddenly.

"Say!—you go in there and get dressed. I just got to talk to you about something."

"Gracious goodness! Is it as serious as all that, Miss Clark?" I quizzed.

"Serious enough. You go in and hurry, anyway."

"I won't be two minutes," I cried, going into my bedroom and dressing as quickly as possible, puzzling all the while as to what the girl had on her mind. Something connected with Joe,—I hadn't a doubt.

"Well,—what's the trouble?" I asked, as I returned and sat down in a wicker chair opposite her.

She seemed more glum than ever.

"What did you want to go and scrap with Joe for?" she asked in a worried way.

"I'm very sorry, Miss Clark——"

"Oh!—call me Rita," she put in impatiently.

"Well,—I'm very sorry,—Rita,—but I did not quarrel with Joe. He quarrelled with me."

"It's all the same," she replied. "Takes two to do it. Couldn't you find another way than that?"

Her eyes were bright and her bosom was disturbed.

"I thought, maybe, you and him might be friends; but I might have known," she went on bitterly. "He only makes friends with the men who lay down to him. You ain't that sort."

I threw out my hands helplessly.

"Well, Rita, don't you worry your little head over it. It is all right."

"Oh, no, it ain't! Don't fool yourself. You don't know Joe."

"I reckoned him a man who could keep his own counsel. How did you come to hear there had been any words?"

"He was over home. He only comes once in a while now. He didn't do anything but talk about you. Called you all kinds of things. Says he'll fix you good;—and he will, too, or he ain't the Joe Clark everybody knows around here."

Her eyes became tender and moist as she held out her hands to me with an involuntary movement. "Oh! what did you want to quarrel with him for, before you knew anything about him?"

I rose and laid my hand lightly on her shoulder, as I would with a little sister,—had I had one,—for she seemed only a slip of a girl and it hurt me to see her so upset.

"Look here! little maid," I said, "you forget all about it. Joe came in here and asked me to do what the man who employed me particularly instructed me against doing. I declined, and Joe became foolish, losing his temper completely. This Joe likes to trample on men. He grew angry because I would not let him do any trampling on me. No! Rita, I am not a teeny-weeny little bit afraid of Joe Clark."

She looked up at me in astonishment, then she sort of despaired again.

"Oh! that's 'cause you don't know him. Everybody's got to do as Joe says,—here and in the Camps and pretty near all along the coast."

I laughed easily; for what did I care? Joe's worst, whatever it might be, could not hurt me very badly. I was not so deeply into anything yet for that.

"He's a big man, and can hurt,—and he hurts everybody that runs up against him."

I leaned over against the window ledge and surveyed Rita.

"Well,—" I said, "I'm not as big as Joe is, but I have been schooled to hold my own. Joe shall have a good run for his money when he starts."

"Oh!—I know you're strong, and big, though not as big as him, and that you ain't afraid. Maybe that's why I like Joe sometimes,—he's never afraid."

"Still,—I don't like him half as much as I used to," she sighed. "But I didn't mean fighting when I talked of him being big and strong. Joe's got influence, Joe's got money, he's got tugs and he's superintendent of the Camps. He says he's boss of the whole shootin' match, and you'll find it out soon."

"He may be nearly all you say, but he has nothing to do with George Bremner running this little Trading Company any more than being under the necessity of buying his supplies here. I was put in by Mr. Horsfal himself, to be under no one, and with the appointment of superintendent of his Golden Crescent property. So, here I am like to stay as long as I want to, or until Mr. Horsfal says differently."

Rita glanced up at me and her eyes brightened with a ray of hope.

"And Joe ain't got nothing to say about it?"

"Not a particle. If he had had, I would not be here now. He would have sacked me on the spot."

"Really and truly, he ain't?" she cried, with fresh anxiety.

"Really and truly," I repeated.

"Oh! goody, goody,—"

Poor little Rita;—all sunshine and shower. She was as merry as a kitten for a time, then she dropped back into her serious mood.

"What!—haven't all your worries gone yet?" I asked.

"Some," she said, "but not them all. Do you know what Joe is, George? He's a bully."

"He is, undoubtedly," I agreed.

"Ya!—he is, all right. Still,—it ain't all his fault either. He's handling rough men, and men that are bullies same as he is. He's got to get the work done and done quick."

"Joe ain't bad. No, siree. Ask Josh Doogan, who was down and out with something in his inside last year. When the doctor told him an operation by a specialist in Philadelphia was the only thing that would save him, and he hadn't a cent, Joe fixed him up and Josh is back working in the Camps to-day. Yes!—ask Jem Sullivan, who got into trouble with the police in Vancouver. He's working for Joe and he's making good, too. Ask Jenny Daykin who it was that took care of her for a year, after her Sam was drowned out at The Ghoul there, until her young Sam finished for a school teacher. Ask,—Oh! ask most anybody; grand-dad even, though he won't take a nickel from Joe or anybody else except what he works for,—ask him. He's queer, is Joe, and I ain't a bit struck on him,—not now,—I 'most hate him. But he ain't got a bad heart, all the same."

"Rita," I put in, "I believe every word of it, and, what is more, I am mighty glad to hear you say it, for the first impression I had of him was, 'Here's a man with a good, open, honest face, and his body is a perfect working machine,—a real man after my own heart.' But he jumped on me with both hands and feet, as I might say;—I jumped back,—and, there we are."

"I know what's wrong with him, Rita. As far as I can see, he has been lucky,—luckier than most men. He has not had a single set-back. He has been what they call a success. He is younger than I am by a year or two, and he owns tugs and superintends camps, while I,—well, I am just starting in. But he has got to putting down all this progress to his own superior ability absolutely. He does not think that, maybe, circumstances have been kind to him."

Rita looked guardedly at me.

"Don't misunderstand me,—I'm not saying that he has not been clever and has not grasped every opportunity that came his way, worked hard and all that;—Oh! you know what I mean. But he has got to thinking that Joe Clark is everything and no one else is anything. It is bad for any

man when he gets that way. Give Joe Clark a set-back or two and he will come out a bigger and a better man.

"He is gluttoned and bloated with too much of his own way,—that's his trouble."

Rita sighed.

"I guess you're right,—Joe used to be good friends with me. When we were kids, Joe said he was going to marry me when he got big. He don't say that any more though. Guess he's got too big. Tells me all about the fine ladies he meets in Vancouver and Victoria and up the coast. Wouldn't ever give me a chance, though, to get to know how to talk good, and all that. Oh!—I know I ain't good at grammar. I wanted to be. Joe said schooling just spoiled girls, and I was best at home. Still, he talks about the ones that has the schooling.

"He started in telling me about his lady friends again, to-day. I didn't want to know about them, so I just told him. I was mad, anyway;—about him and you, I guess. He was mad, too. Said I was fresh. Grand-dad took your part against Joe. Said he liked you anyway. Then he took my part. He knows Joe,—you bet.

"He says, 'That'll do, Joe. You leave Rita be. She's a good lass and you ain't playin' the game fair.'

"I didn't hear any more, for I ran out. Didn't go back either, till Joe cleared out."

"What relation is Joe to the others, Rita?" I asked in puzzlement.

"Joe's an orphan, same as me. His dad was grand-dad's only son, who got killed in a blasting accident up the coast. Joe's mother was a Swede. She died two months after Joe was born. Since Joe got moving for himself, he don't stay around home very much. Sleeps mostly at the Camps or on the tugs. Says grandmother and grand-dad make him tired; says they're silly fools,—because,—because,—"

Tears gathered in Rita's eyes and she did not finish.

I let her pent-up emotion have free run for a while; probably because I was ill at ease and knew I should look an idiot and talk like an imbecile if I tried to console her, although I recalled having heard somewhere that it is generally best to let a woman have her cry out once she gets started.

At last Rita wiped her eyes and looked over at me.

"Guess you think me a baby,—guess I am, too," she said. "Never cried before that I have mind. Never had anybody to cry to."

I smiled. And Rita smiled,—a moist and trembling sort of smile in return.

"Joe Clark has been taking me, same as he takes most things, too much for granted. Thinks I don't know nothing, because I'm up here at the Crescent and not been educated any more'n grandmother and grand-dad could teach me. But I've got feelings and I ain't going to have anything more to do with him. Well,—not till he knows how to treat me, same as I should be treated. Guess not then either. I don't care now. I might not want him later,—might hate him. I believe I shall, too."

There was nothing of the soft, weepy baby about this young lady, and I could see from the flash in her dark eyes and the set of her mouth that she meant every word of what she said.

She was a dainty, pretty, and alluring little piece of femininity; and I could have taken her in my arms and hugged her, only I did not dare, for like as not she would have boxed my ears. All I could say was:

"Good for you, little girl. That's the way to talk."

She smiled, and in little more than no time at all she was back into her merry mood.

We chatted and laughed together at the window until the dusk had crept into darkness and Rita's Isle had become merely a heavy shadow among the mists.

"I got to be getting back," she said at last. "Can you fix up my groceries for me, if you please?"

I went into the store and packed together the few humble necessities which had been Rita's excuse for coming over, although, I discovered later, that Rita was pretty much of a free agent and did not require an excuse to satisfy either her grandmother or her grandfather, both of whom trusted her implicitly.

Time went past quickly in there.

"Rita, it is almost dark. Will you let me accompany you across the Bay? I can fix a tow line

behind for your little boat."

"That would be nice," she answered simply. "But I can see in the dark near as well as in the day time. I could row across there blindfold."

As I paddled her over, I thought what a pity it was she could not talk more correctly than she did. It was the one, the only jarring, note in her entire make-up. But for that, she was as perfect a little lady as I had ever met.

Why not offer to teach her English? came the question to me;—and I decided I would some day, but not just then. I would wait until I knew her a little better; I would wait until I had become better acquainted with her people; until the edge of my quarrel with Joe had worn off.

As we grounded on the shore, in front of Rita's home, old Andrew Clark,—short and sturdy in appearance and dour as any Scot could ever be,—was on the beach. He came down to meet us and invited me up for a cup of tea.

I accepted the invitation, as I had a business project to discuss with the old man, something that should prove a benefit to the store and a financial benefit to him.

He led me into the kitchen, where his wife,—a quiet, white-haired old lady with a loving face and great sad eyes,—was sitting in an armchair darning.

She looked up as we entered.

Andrew Clark did not seek to introduce me, which I thought unmannerly. I turned round for Rita, but Rita had not followed us in; so I went forward and held out my hand. The dear old woman took it and smiled as if to say, "How sensible of you."

"Sit down and make yourself at home," she said kindly.

She spoke with the accent of an Eastern Canadian, although it was evident she had spent many years in the West.

Andrew Clark still held to his mother tongue,—Lowland Scots. But his speech was also punctuated with Western slang and dialect.

Every article of furniture in that kitchen was home-made:—chairs, table, picture frames, washstands,—everything, and good solid furniture it was too.

The table was already set for tea. Mrs. Clark busied herself infusing the refreshment, then Rita came in and we all sat down together.

Andrew Clark's grace was quite an event,—as long as the ten commandments, sonorous, impressive and flowery.

I found he could talk, and talk well; and of many out-of-the-common subjects he displayed considerably more than a passing knowledge.

Margaret Clark,—for that was the lady's name,—was quiet and seemed docile and careworn. She impressed me as being the patient bearer of a hidden burden.

There was something in the manner in which our conversation was conducted that I could not fathom. And I was set wondering wherein its strangeness lay. But, try as I liked, I could not reason it out. Everybody was agreeable and pleasant; Rita was almost gay. But at the back of it all, time and again it recurred to me,—what is wrong here?

Not until the tea was over and I was seated between Andrew Clark and Margaret before the fire, did the mystery solve itself.

I approached the business part of my visit.

"Mr. Clark, you have two or three hundred chickens on the ranch here."

"Ay," he nodded reflectively, puffing at his pipe.

"You send all your eggs to Vancouver?"

"Ay!"

"How many do you send per week, on an average?"

"Ask Margaret,—she'll tell you."

I turned and addressed Mrs. Clark, who looked over at her husband sadly.

"When the season is good, maybe fifty dozen a week; sometimes more, sometimes not so many, Mr. Bremner. Of course, in the winter, there's a falling off."

"I understand, Mrs. Clark.

"I have a big demand from the Camps for eggs," I explained. "What I get, I have to order from Vancouver. Now, it costs you money to send your eggs to the market there, and it costs me money to bring mine from the market. Why cannot we create a home exchange? I could afford to pay you at least five cents a dozen more than you are getting from the city dealers, save you and myself the freight charges, and still I could be money ahead and I would always be sure of having absolutely fresh stock. Besides, I would pay cash for what I got."

Andrew Clark nodded his head. "A capital plan, my boy,—a capital plan. Man," he exclaimed testily, "Joe, wi' all his smartness, would never have thought o' that in a thousand years."

I laughed. "Why!—there is no thinking to it, Andrew. It is simply the A.B.C. of arithmetic.

"What do you say to the arrangement then?" I asked.

"Better ask Margaret,—she looks after the chickens. That's her affair."

I turned to the quiet old woman, and she heartily agreed with the plan.

"Would you ask Andrew, Mr. Bremner, if we had better not take supplies from your store in part payment for the eggs?" she inquired.

I put the question to Andrew as things began to dawn in my mind.

"Tell her it'll suit me all right," he agreed.

And so—I acting as spokesman and go-between,—the arrangement was made that I should use all the output of the chicken-farm and pay a price of five cents per dozen in advance of the Vancouver market price on the day of each delivery.

I rose to go, bidding good-night to the old people. Rita came down to the boat. Her face was anxious and she was searching mine for something she feared to find.

"Poor little girl," I exclaimed, as I laid my hand on her head. "How long has this been going on between your grandmother and grand-dad?"

Her eyes filled.

"Oh! George,—it ain't grandmother's fault. She'd give her soul if grand-dad would only speak to her. It's killing her gradual, like a dry rot."

"How long has it been going on?" I asked again.

"Oh!—long's I can remember; near about ten years. There was a quarrel about something. Grandmother wanted to visit some one in Vancouver. Grand-dad didn't want her to go. At last he swore by the Word of God if she went he'd never speak to her again. Grandmother cried all night, and next day she went. When she came back, grand-dad wouldn't speak to her; and he ain't ever spoken to her since."

"My God!" I exclaimed with a shudder.

"That's why Joe ain't struck on staying at the ranch. Says it's like a deaf and dumb asylum."

I didn't blame Joe.

Good God! I thought. What a life! What an existence for this poor woman! What a hell on earth!

I became madly enraged at that dour old rascal, who would dare to sour a home for ten years because of a vow made in a moment of temper.

If any one deserved to be stricken dumb forever, surely he was that one! And saying a grace at the tea-table that would put a bishop to scorn,—all on top of this: oh! the devilish hypocrisy of it!

Rita came close to me and laid her head lightly on my shoulder.

"Don't be cross at grand-dad, George. He's a mighty good grand-dad. There ain't a better anywhere. In everything, but speaking to grandmother, he's a good grand-dad."

I could not trust myself to say much. I climbed into the boat and made to push off.

"A good grand-dad," I exclaimed bitterly; "good mule, you mean.

"Rita,—I know what would cure him."

"No!—you don't, George,—for you don't know grand-dad."

"Yes!—I know what would cure him, Rita."

"What?"

"A rope-end, well applied." And I pushed off.

She ran into the water up to her knees and caught hold of the stern of my boat.

"You ain't mad with me, George," she cried anxiously.

"No, no! Rita. Poor little woman,—why should I be?"

She pouted.

"Thought maybe you was.

"Well,—if you ain't, won't you kiss me before you go, George?"

I leaned forward. She held up her face innocently and I kissed her lightly on the lips.

And to me, the kiss was as sweet and fresh as a mountain dew-drop.

She sighed as if satisfied that our friendship had held good, then she ran out of the water, up the beach and into the house.

CHAPTER XIV

The Coming of Mary Grant

When first I arrived at Golden Crescent, I was not a little worried as to whether or not there would be sufficient work in the store and on the property to keep two men busy. It did not take me long to discover that there really was not; but then, few people in and around that easy-going little settlement cared about being very busy. Still, when Jake and I wished for work, there was always enough of it at hand; just as, when we felt inclined to be idle, there was no very special reason why we should not, for there seldom was anything calling for immediate accomplishment unless it were the transporting of goods from the up-going steamers to the store and the putting up of camp orders. I did not have to concern myself much over the fixing of leaky boats, the building and repairing of fences, the erection of any small sheds or buildings required, the felling of trees, the sawing and splitting up of our winter supply of fuel, the raising and feeding of our very small poultry family and the tending of the garden. These had been Jake's departments before my coming, and, as he looked after them as no other man I knew could have done, they remained his especial cares.

Jake was never tremendously occupied, yet he always was doing something during the day time,—something worth while, something that showed.

However, when there was a particularly big wash-up on the beach of stray timber logs from some of the booms travelling along the coast, both Jake and I had to knuckle down with a will and an energy in order to push them off with the next out-going tide so as to prevent them jamming and piling on our tidy, clear and well-kept foreshore.

Outside of an almost unnecessary supervision, the store was my only care; consequently, once things were running properly, I had lots of time on my hands to fish over by Rita's Isle if I so desired, to shoot in the woods behind when the inclination seized me, to swim, to smoke, or read and daydream as fancy dictated.

I thrived on the life. Maybe, I grew lazy. Anyway, I enjoyed every minute of it, working or idling, waking or sleeping.

I soon got to know the men from the Camps, and they me. With the knowledge of them came an ever-increasing regard and admiration for those simple, uncomplaining, hard-working, easily led world-wanderers, who, most of them, were ever ready to gamble all they had on the toss of a coin or the throw of a die and, if they lost, laugh, and start off afresh.

That there were evilly disposed men among them,—men who would stop at nothing,—men who, already, had stopped at nothing,—I knew, but with most of them, their hearts were good.

Joe Clark did not honour me with a visit for many a day after our first encounter. Almost I had begun to congratulate myself that he had decided to let slumbering dogs lie, when, one afternoon, as I was sorting the newly arrived and scanty mail, I was surprised to find a letter bearing the name of Dow, Cross & Sneddon of Vancouver and addressed:—

Mr. George Bremner,
Superintendent, Golden Crescent Trading Co.,
Golden Crescent Bay, B. C.

Hello! I thought; Joe Clark at last has been putting some of his threats into execution. Now for the fireworks!

I opened the envelope and found that my conjecture was a wrong one and that Joe Clark's knife for me,—if he had one,—was not yet sharpened.

"Dear Sir," the letter ran,

"We have received a letter from Messrs. Eldergrove & Price, Solicitors for the property adjoining that of the Golden Crescent Co.'s, informing us that some friends of the owner have permission from him to occupy his house at Golden Crescent. This refers to the house in proximity to the wharf and the store. It is at present boarded up.

"Two Japanese women will arrive by the steamer *Cloochman* at the end of the week to open up, air, clean out the house and put it in order. These cleaners will return to Vancouver by the same steamer on her southward journey the following week.

"This letter is written simply to inform you of the facts, so that you may know that nothing illegal is going on.

"Of course, we are in no way interested in this property.

"Yours truly,
"DOW, CROSS & SNEDDON."

I showed the letter to Jake, who expressed a fear that the Bay was becoming "a damned pleasure resort," as this would make the second time in five years that visitors had been staying in that house. On the strength of the news, he drank an extra half-cup of whisky, then said, for decency's sake he would row out and bring the Japs ashore when the *Cloochman* came in.

Two shy, pretty, little women they proved, who thanked Jake with smiles and profuse bows, much to that old rascal's confusion. They were all bustle and work. They had the boards down from the windows and had the doors and windows wide open five minutes after they got ashore. Morning, noon and night, they were scrubbing, washing, beating, dusting, polishing and airing, until I was more inquisitive than an old maid's cat to view the results of their labours. But my sense of propriety overcame my curiosity, and, for the time being, I remained in ignorance.

One night, after the little workers had gone back to Vancouver, I was lying in my bed enjoying Robert Louis Stevenson's "Virginibus Puerisque," when I fancied I heard the throbbing of a gasoline launch. I rose and looked out at the open window; but it was one of those inky-black nights, without either moon or stars, a night when even the sea became invisible,—so I saw nothing.

When the throbbing ceased, I heard the sound of oars and, as a small boat evidently neared the shore, there came a sound of voices, both male and female.

Two trips were made from the launch, one bearing the people, I presumed, the other conveying their baggage. I had no doubt in my mind that my new neighbours were arriving, although I might have been stone-blind so far as anything being visible was concerned.

It was chilly standing there at the window, in the night air, in my pyjamas. The nights were always chilly at Golden Crescent. So I went back to bed, determined to wait and see what the morrow would disclose.

My first glance out of doors, early next morning, materialised what I had a vague notion might have been a dream. There was no sign of any stir in the house across the little, wooden, rustic bridge that connected it, over a narrow creek, with the roadway leading to the store. That was only natural, as, in all probability, the travellers were journey-weary. But a freshly painted rowing boat, with light oars, was made fast to the off side of the wharf, while several leather travelling bags and other packages were piled on the veranda of that house over the way.

I had shaved, parted my hair at its most becoming angle and dressed myself with particular care that morning, going to the extent of sewing a burst seam in my breeches and polishing my leggings; all in anticipation of a visit from the new arrivals, thinking they would be almost certain to call at the store that forenoon to arrange for their supplies.

I dusted the shelves, polished the scales, put the sacks of potatoes where they belonged, mopped up some molasses that had escaped to the floor from a leaky can and swept out the

store; then I waited in blissful anticipation for my new customers.

I caught a glimpse of Jake in the distance. In some strange, wireless-telepathic manner, he must have got wind of what had occurred during the night, for I noticed that he had been suddenly attacked by the same fever for cleanliness and smartness as I had been. He had turned his neckcloth, and the clean side of it was now trying to delude the innocent outside world that it (the neckcloth) had been freshly washed. Mike,—bad luck to his drunken carcass,—looked sick and appeared to be slowly recovering from the evil effects of a bath.

As the morning wore on I saw an elderly, rotund lady come out to the veranda and take the baggage inside. That was the only bit of excitement that happened, after all my preparations.

Later, a launch called from Camp No. 1, with an order for a thousand and one different commodities, and all required right away. That put idle, inquisitive thoughts out of my head for the remainder of the forenoon.

I got out of my best clothes, donned a half-dirty shirt, a suit of overalls and a pair of old boots, then got busy selecting, sorting and packing until my brow was moist and my hair was awry.

I had just got rid of the men and was standing surveying my topsy-turvy store, with everything lying around in tremendous confusion and all requiring to be set to rights again before I would know where to lay my hands on a single article; when a melodious, but rather measured, feminine voice, in the vicinity of my left shoulder, startled me into consternation.

A young lady, almost of a height with me, was standing by my side, while a stout, elderly lady, —the same lady I had seen on the veranda over the way,—was filling the doorway.

I was messy all over with flour dust, brown earth from the potato sacks, grease and grime. I had slipped at the water edge while assisting the loggers to load their goods, and this did not contribute to the improvement of my personal appearance. I wiped my hands on my damp overalls, and my hands came out of the contact worse than before.

"I wish to see the manager," demanded the melodious voice, its owner raising her skirts and displaying,—ah, well!—and stepping over some excelsior packing which lay in her way.

"Your wish is granted, lady," I answered.

"Are you the manager?" she asked, raising her eyebrows in unfeigned astonishment.

"I have that honour, madam," I responded with a bow, but not daring to look at her face in my then dishevelled state.

"I am Miss Grant," she said.

"Miss Grant! Pleased to meet you."

I shoved out a grimy paw, like the fool I was. When it was too late, I remembered my position and brought the paw back to my side.

The young lady had already drawn herself up with an undefinable dignity.

It was a decided snub, and well merited, so I could hardly blame her.

I saw, in the hurried glimpse I got of her then, that she was hatless and that her hair was a great crown of wavy, burnished gold, radiating in the sunlight that streamed through the doorway despite the obstruction of the young lady's companion.

"It is our intention to live at Golden Crescent for some time, sir. I understand we may purchase our supplies here?"

"Yes! madam,—miss."

I backed, in order to get round to my proper side of the counter. But, unfortunately, I backed without looking; I stumbled over an empty box and sprawled like a clown into the corner, landing incontinently among bundles of brooms and axe handles.

Never in all my life did I feel so insignificant or so foolish as then. The very devil himself seemed to have set his picked imps after me; for it was my habit, ordinarily, to be neither dirty as I was then, nor clownish as I must have appeared.

To put it mildly, I was deeply embarrassed, and at a woman, too. Oh! the degradation of it.

As I rose, I fancied that my ears caught the faintest tinkle of a laugh. I turned my frowning eyes on the young lady, but she was a very owl for inscrutable solemnity. I looked over at the elderly person in the doorway; she was smiling upon me with a most exasperating benignity.

"What kind of business do you run here?" asked the self-possessed young lady.

"Strictly cash, miss,—excepting the Camps and the better class of settlers."

"I did not inquire *how* you ran your business, but what kind of business you ran," she retorted icily. "Of course,—we shall pay as we purchase."

I was hastening from bad to worse. I could have bitten my tongue out or kicked myself. With a tremendous effort, I pulled myself together and assumed as much dignity as was possible in my badly ruffled internal and external condition.

"Are there any men about the place?" she asked, changing the subject with disconcerting suddenness.

I flushed slightly at the taunt.

"N-no! miss," I replied, in my best shop-keeper tone, "sorry,—but we are completely out of them."

She must have detected the flavour of sarcasm, for her lips relaxed for the briefest moment, and a smile was born which showed two rows of even white teeth. I ventured a smile in return, but it proved a sorry and an unfortunate one, for it killed hers ruthlessly and right at the second of its birth, too.

I almost waited for her to tell me I was "too fresh," but she did not do so. She had a more telling way. She simply wilted me with a silent reserve that there was no combating.

Only on one or two occasions had I encountered that particular shade of reserve that adjusts everything around to its proper sphere and level without hurting, and it was always in elderly, aristocratic, British Duchesses; never in a young lady with golden hair and eyes,—well! at that time, I could not tell the colour of her eyes, but there was something in them that completed a combination that I seemed to have been hunting for all my life and had never been able to find.

"Mr. Store-keeper," she commenced again.

I felt like tearing my hair and crying aloud. "Mr. Store-keeper," forsooth.

"You appear anxious to misconstrue me. Let me explain,—please."

I bowed contritely. What else could I do?

"This afternoon, I have a piano,—boxed,—coming by the steamer *Siwash*. I would like if you could find me some assistance to get it ashore and placed in my house."

She said it so easily and it sounded so simple. But what a poser it was! Bring a full-fledged piano from a steamer three hundred yards out in the Bay, land it and place it in a house on the top of a rock. Heaven help the piano! I thought, as I gaped at her in bewilderment.

"Oh!—of course," she put in hurriedly, toying with the chain of her silver purse,—"if you are afraid to tackle it, why!—I'll—we shall do it ourselves."

She turned on her heel.

She looked so determined that I had not the least doubt but that she would have a go at it anyway.

"Not at all,—not at all. It will be a pleasure,—I am sure," I said quickly, as if I had been reared all my life on piano-moving.

She turned and smiled; a real, full-grown, able-bodied, entrancing, mischievous smile, and all of it full on the dirty, grimy individual,—me.

"It does not happen to be the kind of piano one can take to pieces, Miss Grant, is it?" I asked.

"It is," she answered, "but that one might not be able to put it together again."

It was another bull's eye for the lady.

She went on. "I have never received a piano,—knocked down."

Something inside of me sniggered at the phrase, for it was purely a business one. But I was too busy just then figuring the ins and outs of the matter to give way to any hilarity.

"Thanks so much! What a relief!" she sighed, with a nod to her silent companion, who nodded in return.

"Oh!—may I have five cents' worth of pins,—Mister, Mister—"

"Mr. Bremner," I added.

"Thank you!"

"Hair pins, hat pins, safety pins or clothes pins?" I queried.

"Just pins,—with points and heads on them,—if you don't mind."

I bowed ceremoniously.

"We shall be over this afternoon, when we have made a list of the supplies we require," she went on.

As I hunted for the pins, she began to look in her purse for a five cent piece.

"Oh!—never mind," I said; "I can charge these to your bill in the afternoon."

"No! thank you," she replied, airily and lightly;—oh! so very, very airily that I would not have been surprised had she flown away.

"Your terms are strictly cash;—I would not disturb your business routine for worlds."

As I held out the package to her, I stopped and, for the first time, I felt really at ease and equal to her.

"Possibly you would prefer that I send this package round by the delivery wagon?" I said.

She picked the paper package from between my fingers and her chin went into the air at a most dangerous elevation, while her eyelids closed over her eyes, allowing long, golden-brown lashes to brush her cheeks. Then, without a word, she turned her back on me and passed through the doorway with her companion, or chaperon, or aunt, or whatever relation to her the elderly lady might be.

"So foolish!" I heard her exclaim, under her breath, then she went over something on her fingers to the elderly lady, who laughed and started in to talk volubly.

The mystery of that madam's benign smile solved itself: she was evidently talkative enough, but she was as deaf as a wooden block and used her smile to cover her deficiency.

Had I only known, how I could have defended myself against, and lashed out in return at, that tantalising, self-possessed, wit-battling, and, despite it all, extremely feminine young lady!

They left my place and went over to their own bungalow. Soon they reappeared with large sun-hats on their heads, for the sun was beautifully bright and exceedingly warm. They went down to the beach together. The elderly lady got into the rowing boat, while my late antagonist pushed it into the water and sprang into it with a most astounding agility. In a few moments, they were out on the Bay.

Miss Grant,—as I remembered her name was,—handled the oars like an Oxford stroke and with that amazing ease, attained only after long practice, which makes the onlooker, viewing the finished article in operation, imagine that he can do it as well himself, if not a shade or so better,—yes! and standing on his head at that.

For an hour, I worked in the store righting the wrongs that were visible everywhere, vowing to myself that never again would it be found in such a disgraceful condition; not even if the three Camps should come down together and insist on immediate service.

At high noon, I went over to Jake's shack and found him preparing his usual clammy concoction.

I broached the subject of the piano to him, putting it in such a way that I left him open to refuse to do the job if he felt so inclined.

He did not speak for a minute or two, but I knew he was thinking hard.

"Well,—I'll be gol-darned," he said at last. "They'll be transporting skating rinks and picture shows up here next. It'll be me for the tall timbers then, you bet."

A little later, he went on,

"Guess, George,—we got to do it, though. Young ladies is young ladies these days, and we might as well be civil and give in right at the start, for we got to do it in the finish."

I agreed.

As we were in a hurry, I helped Jake to eat his clam chowder. We went down to the beach to review the situation and inspect the apparatus we had to work with.

I told Jake the piano would probably weigh about five hundred pounds and that we would require to bolster up the raft sufficiently to carry some three hundred pounds more in order to be safe.

As it stood, the raft was capable of carrying some four hundred pounds, so we had just to

double its capacity.

Jake knew his business. He rowed along the beach, and picked out short logs to suit his needs. He lashed them together and completed a raft that looked formidable enough to carry the good ship *Siwash* herself across the Bay to the shore.

We put off with a rowing boat fore and aft, long before the *Siwash* whistle announced her coming.

Had the sea been otherwise than calm as a duck pond, we would have experienced all kinds of trouble, for our raft was nothing more or less than an unwieldy floating pier.

When the steamer ran into the Bay, I noticed Miss Grant put out alone and row toward us.

"Jake," I exclaimed somewhat hotly, "if that young lady interferes with the way we handle this job, by as much as a single word, we'll steer straight for the shore and leave the piano to sink or swim."

"You bet!" agreed Jake.

"Skirts is all right, but they ain't any good movin' pianners off'n steamers. Guess we ain't proved ourselves much good neither, so far, George," he added with a grin.

The *Siwash* came to a standstill and we threw our ropes aboard and were soon made fast alongside.

Everything there went like clockwork. The piano was on the lower deck and slings were already round it, so that all that was necessary to do was to get the steamer's winch going, hoist the instrument overboard and lower it on to the raft. The piano was set on a low truck with runners, contrived for the purpose of moving. I arranged that this truck be left with us and I would see to its return on the steamer's south-bound journey.

Our chiefest fear was that the piano might get badly placed or that the balance of the raft might prove untrue, the whole business would topple over and the piano would be dispensing nautical airs to the mermaids at the bottom of Golden Crescent Bay.

Jake's work stood the test valiantly, and, with the hooks and rings he had fixed into the logs at convenient distances, we lashed the instrument so firmly and securely that nothing short of a hurricane or a collision could possibly have dislodged it.

Miss Grant stood by some fifteen yards away, watching the proceedings interestedly, and anxiously as I thought; but not a word did she utter to show that she had anything but absolute confidence in our ability.

Finally, they cast our ropes off, and Jake and I, with our four oars, manned our larger rowing boat and headed for shore. It was hard pulling, but we ran in on the off side of the wharf, directly in line with the rocks at the back of which Miss Grant's bungalow was built,—all without mishap.

Despite the great help of the piano-truck, Jake and I, strive as we liked, were unable to move the heavy piece of furniture from the raft. We tugged, and pulled, and hoisted, but to no purpose, for the wheels of the truck got set continually between the logs.

Once, I went head over heels backward into the water; and once Jake tripped over a cleat and did likewise.

"All we need, Jake," I remarked, "is about one hundred and fifty pounds more leverage."

Miss Grant heard and jumped out of her boat.

"Mr.—Mr. Bremner,—could I lend you that extra hundred and fifty pounds or so?"

I looked at her. She was all willingness and meekness; the latter a mood which I, even with my scant knowledge of her, did not altogether believe in.

"Sure, miss," put in Jake. "Come on, if you ain't skeered o' soilin' your glad rags."

She waited for my word.

"I am sure your help would be valuable, Miss Grant," I said. "It might just turn the trick in our favour."

She scrambled up the rock and returned in half a minute with a pair of stout leather gloves on her hands. She jumped up on to the raft and lent her leverage, as Jake and I got our shoulders under the lift.

Bravo! It lifted as easily as if it had been a toy. All it had required was that little extra aid.

We three ran it clear of the raft, down on to the beach, over the pebbles and right under the rocks.

I knew, in the ordinary course, that our troubles would only be beginning, but I had figured out that the only possible way to get over this difficulty of the rocks was to erect a block and tackle to the solid branch of a tree which, fortunately, overhung the face of the cliffs.

In half an hour, we had all secure and ready for the attempt.

I worked the gear, while Jake did the guiding from below.

When we had the piano safely swung, it took our combined strength and weight to bring it in on top of the rocks. After that, it was simply a matter of hard work.

So, in three hours after receiving it from the steamer *Siwash*, the piano was out of its casing and set safely, without a scratch on it, in a corner of Miss Grant's parlour.

Jake and I never could have done it ourselves. Both of us knew that. It was Miss Grant's untiring assistance that pulled the matter to a successful conclusion.

She thanked us without ostentation, as she would have thanked a piano-mover or the woodman in the city.

It nettled me not a little, for, to say truth, I was half dead from the need of a cup of good strong tea and my appetite gnawed over the odour of home-made scones that the elderly, rotund lady was baking on Miss Grant's kitchen stove. All day I had been picturing visions of being invited to remain for tea, of my making witty remarks under Jake's mono-syllabic applause, looking over the photo albums and listening in raptures to Miss Grant's playing and singing. And I was sour as old cider as I descended the veranda steps, soaking, as I was, with brine and perspiration.

Jake was perfectly happy, however, and all admiration over Miss Grant's physical demonstration.

"Gee! Miss," he exclaimed, in a sort of Klondike ecstasy, "but you're some class at heavin' cargo. Guess, if you put on overalls and cut off your hair, you could get a fifty-cents-an-hour job at pretty near any wharf on the Pacific seaboard."

I could see that Jake's doubtful compliment was not exactly relished by the lady. Nevertheless, she smiled on him so sweetly that he stood grinning at her, and might still have been so standing had not I pulled him to earth by the sleeve, three steps at a time.

CHAPTER XV

"Music Hath Charms—"

He left me at the wharf without a word. I went into the house, threw off my dirty overalls and indulged in the luxury of a bath. Not a salt-water apology for one,—a real, live, remove-the-dirt, soapy, hot-water bath;—and it did me a world of good both mentally and bodily.

I dressed myself in clean, fresh linen, donned my breeches, a pair of hand-knitted, old-country, heather hose and a pair of white canvas shoes. I shaved and brushed my hair to what, in my college days, I had considered its most elegant angle.

The remainder of the afternoon and evening was my own. I was just at that agreeable stage of body-weariness where a book and a smoke seemed angels from heaven. I had the books,—lots of them,—I had tobacco and my pipe, I had a hammock to sling from the hooks on the front veranda,—so, what care had I?

I chose a volume of "Macaulay's Essays" and, with a sigh,—the only articulate sign of an unutterable content,—I stretched myself in the hammock, blew clouds of smoke in the air and resigned myself to the soothing influences.

I had lain thus for perhaps an hour, when a shadow intervened between the page I was reading and the glare of the sun.

It was Miss Grant.

She had come by the back path and, in her noiseless rubber shoes, I had not heard her.

I sprang out of the hammock, loosed the ring from the hook and threw the canvas aside to make way for her.

She appeared a perfect picture of glorious loveliness and contagious health. She did not

speak for a moment, but her eyes took me in from head to heel.

I felt confident in the knowledge that the figure I presented was decidedly more pleasing than when last she had seen me.

I was glad, for I knew, even with my small acquaintance with the opposite sex, that the woman is not alive who does not prefer to see a man clean, tidy and neat.

I pushed the store doors open and followed her in.

Again, that bewitching little uplifting of the eyebrows; again the alluring relaxation of her full lips; silent ways, apparently, of expressing her pleasure. The appearance of my store, on this occasion, met with her approval.

She laid aside her sunshade and handed me a long, neatly written list of groceries which she required; not all, but most of which, I was able to fill.

"Make up the bill,—please. I wish to pay it now. I shall not wait until you make up the goods. If not too much trouble, would you—"

I was listening to the soft cadences of her voice, when she stopped.

She was leaning lightly with her elbow on the counter. I was on the inner side, bending over my order book.

When her voice stopped, I felt that she was looking at the top of my head. I raised my face suddenly and, to her, unexpectedly. For the first time, I saw clearly into her eyes. My breath caught, as, like a flash, I saw myself standing in the doorway of Modley Farm, along with my old chum, Tom Tanner; his mother beside us, with her arms round our shoulders; and I remembered the flippant conversation we had at that time.

The young lady before me had eyes of a liquid, golden-brown, lighter in colour than her hair, yet of wondrous depth and very attractive; inexpressibly attractive.

I averted my gaze quickly, but not quickly enough for her to miss the admiration I had so openly shown.

She picked up a tin from the counter and scanned the label.

"The delivery wagon is at your service, my lady," I put in lightly.

"Thank you!" she answered in relief.

I totted up the bill and handed it to her. "Eight dollars and thirty-five cents," I said.

"Now, Mr. Bremner,—please add your charge for the conveying of my piano, so that I may pay my debts altogether."

I gasped in amazement. I straightened myself indignantly, for the idea of making a charge for that work had never entered my head. And I knew Jake had never thought of such a thing either. It had been simply a little neighbourly assistance.

The mention of payment annoyed me.

"There is no charge, Miss Grant," was all I could trust myself to say.

"What do you mean?" she asked. "Surely you must understand that it is not my habit to engage men to work for me without payment!"

"We did not look upon it in the nature of ordinary work," I put in. "It was a pleasure, and we did it as any neighbours would do a favour."

Her eyes closed a little angrily.

"I do not accept favours from men I am unacquainted with," she retorted unreasonably. "How much do I owe,—please?"

"And I do not hire myself out, like a dock labourer or a mule, to any one who cares to demand my services," I replied, in equally cold tones.

She stood in hesitation, then she stamped her rubber-soled foot petulantly. "But I will not have it. I insist on paying for that work."

I shook my head.

"If you wish to insult me, Miss Grant,—insist."

I could see that she was suffering from conflicting lines of reasoning. Her haughtiness changed and her eyes softened.

"Mr. Bremner,—what do I owe for the work,—please?" she pleaded. "You are a gentleman,—you cannot hide that from me."

Discovered! I said to myself.

"Surely you understand my position? Surely you do not wish to embarrass me?"

Ah, well! I thought. If it will please her, so be it. And I'll make it a stiff charge for spite.

"Thirty dollars!" I exclaimed, as if it had been three. "Our labour was worth that much." I looked straight at her in a businesslike way.

It was her turn to gasp, but she recovered herself quickly.

"The cost of labour is, I presume, high, up here?" she commented.

"Yes!—very high,—sky-high! You see, I shall have to pay that old Jew-rascal assistant of mine at least two and a half dollars for his share, so that it will not leave very much for the master-mind that engineered the project."

She turned her eyes on me to ascertain if I were funning or in earnest, but my face betrayed nothing but the greatest seriousness.

She counted out her grocery money and I gave her a receipt. Then she laid three ten dollar bills on the counter to pay for the piano moving.

"Thank you!" I said, as I walked round the counter to a little box which was nailed on the wall near the door; a box which the Rev. William Auld had put up with my permission on the occasion of his last visit, a box which I never saw a logger pass without patronising if he noticed it. On the outside, it bore the words:—"Sick Children's Aid." I folded the notes and inserted them in the aperture on top.

Miss Grant watched me closely all the while.

When I got back behind the counter, she went over to the box and read the label. She opened her purse, with calm deliberation, and poured all it contained into her hand. She then inserted the coins, one by one, in the opening of the box and, with honours still even, if not in her favour, she sailed out of the store.

I was annoyed and chagrined at the turn of events, yet, when I came to consider her side of the argument, I could not blame her altogether for the stand she had taken.

I put up her order in no very pleasant frame of mind.

When I saw her and her chaperon row out from the wharf into the Bay, I carried over the groceries, piecemeal, and placed them in a shady place on their veranda. I then turned back to the house and prepared my evening meal.

When the sun had gone down and darkness had crept over Golden Crescent, I returned to my hammock and my reading, setting a small oil lamp on the window ledge behind me. It was agreeably cool then and all was peace and harmony.

From where I lay, I could cast my eyes over the land and seascapes now and again. I commanded a good view of the house across the creek. The kitchen lamp was alight there and I could see figures passing backward and forward.

Suddenly an extra light travelled from the kitchen to the front parlour and, soon after, a ripple of music floated on the evening air.

I listened. How I listened!—like a famished cougar at the sound of a deer.

The music was sweet, delicious, full of fantastic melody. It was the light, airy music of Sullivan; and not a halt, not even a falter did the player make as she tripped and waltzed through the opera. One picture after another rose before me and dissolved into still others, as the old, haunting tunes caught my ears, floating from that open window.

I could see the lady under the soft glow of the lamp, sitting at the piano, smiling and all absorbed,—the light gleaming gold on her coils of luxuriant hair.

After a time the mood of the pianist changed. She drifted into the deeper, the more sombre, more impressive "Kamennoi-Ostrow" of Rubinstein. She played it softly, so softly, yet so expressively sadly, that I was drawn by its alluring to leave my veranda and cross over the wooden bridge, in order to be nearer and to hear better.

Quietly, but quite openly, I took the path by the house, on to the edge of the cliffs, where I could hear every note, every shade of expression; where I could follow the story:—the Russian setting, the summer evening, the beautiful lady, the pealing of the bells calling the worshippers to the chapel for midnight mass; the whispered conversations, the organ in solemn chant, the

priests intoning the service, the farewell, and, lastly, the lingering chords of the organ fading into the deep silence of slumber.

Just as I was about to sit down, I descried the solitary, shadowy outline of a figure seated a few yards away.

It was Jake,—poor, old, lonely, battle-scarred Jake. His head was in his hands and he was gazing out to sea as if he were dreaming.

I walked over to him and sat by his side. His blue eyes were filled with tears, tears that had not dimmed his eyes for years and years; tears in the eyes of that old Klondike tough, calloused by privation and leather-hided by hard drinking; tears, and at music which he did not understand any more than that it was something outside of his body altogether, outside of the material world, something that spoke only to the soul of him.

I did not speak,—I dared not speak, for the moment was too sacred.

So we two sat thus, knowing of each other's presence, yet ignoring it, and listening, all absorbed, entranced, almost hypnotised by the subtleties of the most charming of all gifts, the perfect interpretation of a work of art.

We listened on and on,—after the chilly night wind had come up from the sea, for we did not know of its coming until the music ceased and the light faded away from the parlour of the house behind us.

"Gee!" exclaimed Jake at last, spitting his mouthful of tobacco over into the water and wiping his eyes with his coat sleeve, "but that dope pulls a gink's socks off,—you bet.

"Guess, if a no-gooder like me had of heard that stuff oftener when he was a kid, he wouldn't be such a no-gooder;—eh! George."

I followed Jake to his boat and, somewhere out of the darkness, Mike the dog appeared and tailed off behind us.

I accompanied the old fellow to his shack, for this love of music in him was a new phase of his temperament to me and somehow my heart went out to him in his loneliness, in his apparent heart-hunger for something he could hardly hope to find.

We talked together for a long time, and as we talked I noticed that Jake made no effort to start his usual drinking bout, although Mike the dog reminded him of his neglect as plainly as dog could, by tugging at his trousers and going over to the whisky keg and whimpering.

This sudden temperance in Jake surprised me more than a little.

I noticed also that the brass-bound chest still lay under Jake's bunk. Several times I had been going to speak to him about that trunk and its contents, and the questionable security of a shack like his, but I had always evaded the subject at the last minute as being one in which I was not concerned.

But that night everything was different somehow.

"Look here, Jake," I said, in one of the quiet spells, "don't you think this old shack of yours isn't a very safe place to keep your money in?"

"How do you mean?" he asked suspiciously.

"There are lots of strange boats put in here of a night; some of them containing beach-combers who do not care who they rob or what they do so long as they get a haul. Besides, the loggers are not all angels and they generally pay you a visit every time they come in. Some of the worst of them might get wind that you keep all your savings here and might take a fancy to some of it."

"Guess all I got wouldn't pay the cost of panning," grunted Jake. "They ain't goin' to butt in on me. Anyway,—I got a pair of good mits left yet."

"Yes!—that is all right, Jake, but nowadays a man does not require to run the risk. The banks are ready and willing to take that responsibility, and to pay for the privilege, too. The few dollars I have are safely banked in Vancouver."

"Banks be damned!" growled Jake. "I ain't got no faith in banks,—no siree. First stake I made went into a bank, Goodall-Towser Trust Co. of 'Frisco. 'Four per cent interest guaranteed,' it said on the front of the bank book they gave me. That book was all they ever gave me; all I ever saw of my five thousand bucks. I thought because it said 'Trust' on the window, it was right as rain. I ain't trustin' 'Trust' any more.

"I raised Cain in that Trust outfit. Started shootin' up. Didn't kill anything, but got three months in the coop. Lost my five thousand plunks and got three months in the pen, all because I put my dough in the bank.

"Banks be damned, George. Not for mine,—no siree."

Jake puffed his pipe reflectively, after his long tirade.

"That's all very well, but there are good banks nowadays and good Trust Companies, too, although I prefer regular chartered banks every time. Those banks are practically guaranteed by the country and the wealthiest men in Canada use them. Why!—Mr. Horsfal has thousands in the Commercial Bank of Canada now. Here is the bank book,—see for yourself! I send in a deposit every week for him."

Jake was impressed, but not unduly. He suddenly switched.

"Say, George,—who told you I had any dough?"

"Oh! I knew you had, Jake. Everybody in Golden Crescent knows. But, to be honest, the minister told me,—in the hope that I would be able to induce you to place it in safety somewhere."

Jake became confident, a most unusual condition for him.

"Well, George,—I can trust you,—you're straight. I got something near ten thousand bucks in that brass chest. I don't need it, but still I ain't givin' it away. I had to grub damned hard to get it. It's kind o' good to know you ain't ever likely to be a candidate for some Old Men's Home."

"It is indeed," I replied, "and I admire you for having saved so much. But won't you put it into the bank, where it is absolutely safe for you? It is a positive temptation to some men, lying around here."

"The bank will give you a receipt for the money; you can draw on it when you wish and it will be earning three per cent or three hundred dollars a year for you all the time it is there."

He pondered for a while, then he dismissed the subject.

"No! Guess I'll keep it by me. No more banks for mine. I ain't so strong as I used to be and I guess three months in the coop would just about make me cash in. I ain't takin' no more chances."

Jake's method of reasoning was amusing. After all, it was no affair of mine and, now that I had unburdened myself, I felt conscience clear.

As I rose to leave, he started to talk again.

"George,—guess you'll think I'm batty,—but I'm goin' to cut out the booze."

"You are!" I exclaimed in astonishment.

"Ya! Guess maybe you think I'll make a hell of a saint, but I ain't goin' to try to be no saint; just goin' to cut out the booze, that's all."

"What has given you this notion?" I could not help inquiring.

"Oh! maybe one thing, maybe another. Anyhow, I ain't had a lick to-night. My stomach's on fire and my head's givin' me Hail Columbia, but—I ain't had a drink to-night."

"Go easy with it, Jake," I cautioned. "You know a hard drinker like you have been can't stop all at once without hurting himself."

"I can. You just watch me," he said with determination.

"Well, then,—I think the best thing you can do in these circumstances is to take that keg in the corner there, roll it outside, pull out the stop-cock and pour the contents on to the beach."

"No! I ain't spoilin' any booze,—George. If I can't stop it because a keg of whisky is sittin' under my nose, then I can't stop boozin' nohow. And, if I can't stop boozin' nohow, what's the good of throwin' away the good booze I already got, when I'd just have to order another keg and maybe have to go thirsty waitin' for it to come up."

"All right, old man," I laughed, slapping him between the shoulders, "please yourself and good luck to your attempt, anyway."

"Say!—George."

"Yes!"

"You won't say anything about this to the young lady that plays the pianner? Because, you see, I might fall down."

"I won't say a word, Jake."

"And—not to Rita, neither?" he asked plaintively, "because Rita's about the only gal cares two straws for me. She comes often when nobody knows about it. She brings cake and pie, and swell cooked meat sometimes. When I find anything on the table,—I know Rita's been. I've knowed Rita since she was a baby and I've always knowed her for a good gal."

"Well, Jake;—I will keep your secret as if I had never heard it. But don't allow that drunken chum of yours, Mike, to lead you astray."

"Guess nit! Mike's got to sign the pledge same's me," he laughed in his guttural way.

I stood at the door. "And you are not going to put that money of yours in the bank, Jake?"

He spat on the ground.

"To hell with banks," he grunted and turned inside.

CHAPTER XVI

The Devil of the Sea

It was Sunday morning, the first Sunday morning after the arrival of the American ladies at the house over the way,—for I took them to be such, and, later, my conjecture proved not a very long way out.

It had been a week of hard work, petty annoyances and unsatisfying little pleasures.

When I got up that morning, I felt jaded. As I ate my breakfast, I became more so; but, as I went out on to the veranda to look upon the beauties of Golden Crescent,—as I did every morning,—I came to myself.

This will never do, George Bremner! What you need is a swim!

I had hit it. Why had not I thought of it sooner? I undressed, and in less time than it takes to retell it, I was in the water and striking straight for Rita's Isle.

When I got there, I sunned myself on the rocks, as was my wont. I looked across towards Clarks' farm, in the hope that I might espy Rita somewhere between,—yet half hoping that I would not, for I was browsing in the changing delights and sensations of the thoughts which my solitariness engendered.

For one thing;—I had made the discovery the night before that Miss Grant's Christian name was Mary.

I had found a torn label on the beach; one, evidently, from a travelling bag. It read:

Miss Mary Grant,
Passenger
to Golden Crescent Bay, B. C. Canada.
ex San Francisco, per P. C. S. S. Co. to Vancouver.

That was all.

I lay on my back on the rocks, turning the name over in my mind.

Mary.... It did not sound very musical. It was a plain-Jane-and-no-nonsense kind of name.

I started in to make excuses to myself for it. Why I did so, I have no idea, but I discovered myself at it.

Mary was a Bible name. Yes!—it had that in its favour.

Famous queens had been called Mary. Yes!

The lady who owned the world-famous "little lamb" was called Mary.

And there was "Mary, Mary, quite contrary."

Why, of course! there were plenty of wonderful Marys. Notwithstanding, I could not altogether shake off the feeling of regret that came to me with the discovery that the young lady over the way was called Mary.

Had her name been Marguerite, or Dorothea, Millicent or even Rosemary, I would have been contented and would have considered the name a fitting one,—but to be common-or-garden Mary!

Oh, well!—what mattered it anyway? The name did not detract from the attractiveness of her long, wavy, golden hair, nor did it change the colour or lessen the transparency of her eyes. It did not interfere with her deft fingers as they travelled so artistically over the keyboard of her piano; although I kept wishing, in a half-wishful way, that it could have changed her tantalising and exasperating demeanour toward me.

From the beginning, we had played antagonists, and from the beginning this playing antagonists had been distasteful to me.

What was it in me? I wondered,—what was it in her that caused the mental ferment? I had not the slightest notion, unless it were a resentfulness in me at being taken only for what I, myself, had chosen to become,—store-clerk in an out-of-the-way settlement; or an annoyance in her because one of my station should place himself on terms of social equality with every person he happened to meet.

I was George Bremner to her. True! Then,—she was merely Mary Grant to me. Mary Grant she was and Mary Grant she would doubtless remain, until,—until somebody changed it to probably—Mary-something-worse.

As I day-dreamed, I felt the air about me more chilly than usual.

All the previous night, the sea had been running into the Bay choppy and white-tipped, but now it was as level as the face of a mirror, although everywhere on the surface of the water loose driftwood floated.

I let myself go, down the smooth shelving rock upon which I had been lying. I dropped noiselessly far down into the deep water. I came up and struck out for home,—all my previous lassitude gone from me.

I was swimming along leisurely, interested only in my thoughts and the water immediately around me, when something a bit ahead attracted my attention.

I was half-way between Rita's Isle and the shore at the time. The object in front kept bobbing,—bobbing. At first, I took it to be part of a semi-submerged log, but as I drew nearer I was quite surprised to find that it was an early morning swimmer like myself. Nearer still, and I discovered that the swimmer was a woman whose hair was bound securely by a multi-coloured, heavy, silk muffler, such as certain types of London Johnnies affected for a time.

Whoever the swimmer was, she had already gone at least half a mile, for that was the distance to the nearest point of land and there was no boat of any kind in her tracks.

Half a mile!—and another half-mile to go! Quite a swim for a lady!

Afraid lest it should prove more than enough for a member of what I had always been taught to recognise as the more delicately constituted of the sexes, I drew closer to the swimmer.

When only a few yards behind, she turned round with a startled exclamation.

It was Mary Grant.

A chill ran along my spine. I became unreasonable immediately. What right had she to run risks of this nature? Was there not plenty of water for her to swim in near the shore where she would be within easy hail of the land should she become exhausted?

Almost angrily, I narrowed the space between us.

She had recognised me at her first glimpse.

"Are you not rather far from the shore, Miss Grant?" I inquired brusquely.

"Thank you! Not a bit too far," she exclaimed, keeping up a steady progress through the water.

She moved easily and did not betray any signs of weariness, except it were in a catching of her voice, which almost every one has who talks in the water after a long swim.

I could not but admire the power of her swimming, despite the evident fact that she was not at all speedy.

"But you have no right to risk your life out here, when you do not know the coast," I retorted.

"What right have you to question my rights, sir?" she answered haughtily. "Please go away."

"I spoke for your own good," I continued. "There may be currents in the Bay that you know nothing of. Besides, the driftwood itself is dangerous this morning."

She did not reply for a bit, but kept steadily on.

When I took up my position a few yards to the left and on a level with her, she turned on me indignantly.

"Excuse me, Sir Impertinence,—but do you take me for a child or a fool? Are you one of those inflated individuals who imagines that masculine man is the only animal that can do anything?"

"Far from it," I answered, "but as it so happens I am slightly better acquainted with the Bay than you are and I merely wished you to benefit from my knowledge."

"I am obliged to you for your interest, Mr. Bremner. However, I know my own capabilities in the water, just as you know yours. Now,—if you do not desire to spoil what to me has been a pleasure so far, you will leave me."

I fell back a few yards, feeling that it would have given me extreme pleasure to have had the pulling of her ears. And, more out of cussedness,—as Jake would put it,—than anything else, I kept plodding along slowly, neither increasing nor diminishing the distance between us.

She was well aware of my proximity, and, at last, when we were little more than a hundred yards from the point of the rock at the farthest out end of the wharf, she wheeled on me like the exasperated sea-nymph she was.

"I told you the other day, Mr. Bremner, that you could not hide the fact that you were a gentleman. If you do not wish me to regret having said that,—you will go away. I am perfectly capable of looking after myself."

That was the last straw for me. I could see that she was a splendid swimmer and that she was likely to make the shore without mishap, although I could also tell that she was tiring.

"All right!—I'll go," I shouted. "But please be sensible,—there was a heavy drift of wood and seaweed last night. The seaweed always gathers in at your side of the wharf, and it is treacherous. Come this way and land ashore from my side."

"Thank you! Mr. Bremner," she called back quite pleasantly, "but I came this way and saw very little seaweed, so I fancy I shall be able to get back."

Maddened at her for being so headstrong, I veered to the left of the rocks, while she held on to the right.

I did not look in her direction again, but, with a fast, powerful side-stroke, I shot ahead and soon the rocks divided us.

I was barely a hundred yards from the beach, when I heard, or fancied I heard, just the faintest of inarticulate cries.

I listened, but it was not repeated. In the ordinary course, I would have paid no heed, but something above and beyond me prompted me to satisfy myself that all was right.

I swung round and started quickly for the point of the rocks again. In a few seconds, I reached it and swam round to the other side. I scanned the water between me and the shore,—it was as smooth as glass, with only bobbing brown bulbs everywhere denoting the presence of the seaweed.

I looked at the beach, and across to Miss Grant's house,—there was no one in sight.

A feeling of horror crept over me. It was improbable,—impossible,—that she could have reached the shore and got inside the house so quickly.

I glanced over the surface of the water again.

Good God!—what was that?

Not fifty yards from the beach, and just at the point where the bobbing brown bulbs were thickest, a small hand and an arm broke the surface of the water. The fingers of the hand closed convulsively and a ring glittered in the sunlight. Then the hand vanished.

With a vigorous crawl stroke,—keeping well on the surface for safety,—I tore through that intervening space.

Oh!—how I thanked God for my exceptional ability in diving and swimming under water.

As I got over the spot where I reckoned the hand had appeared, I became cautious, for I knew the danger and I had no desire to get entangled and thus end the chances of both of us. I

sank down, slowly and perpendicularly, keeping my knees bent and my feet together, feeling carefully with my hands the while. The water was clear, but I could see only a little way because of the seaweed.

How thickly it had gathered! Long, curling, tangling stuff!

Several times, I had to change my position quickly in order to avoid being caught among the great, waving tendrils which, lower down, interweaved like the meshes of a gigantic net.

I stayed under water as long as I dared, then with lungs afire I had to come to the surface for air.

Desperately, I started again.

I swam several yards nearer to the rocks and sank once more. This time, my groping hands found what they were seeking. Far down, almost at the bottom of the sea, the body of Miss Grant lay.

I passed my hands over her. Her head and arms were clear of the awful tangle, but both her legs were enmeshed.

Fighting warily and working like one possessed, I tore at the slithering ropes and bands that bound her. I got one foot and leg clear, then, with bursting lungs I attacked the other.

It seemed as if I should never get her free. How I fought and struggled with that damnable sea-growth! fearing and fearing afresh that I would have to make to the surface for air, or drown where I was.

As I worked frantically, I grew defiant, and decided to drown rather than leave the girl who had already been far too long under water.

My head throbbed and hammered. My senses reeled and rallied, and reeled again as I tore and struggled. Then, when hope was leaving me, I felt something snap. I caught at the body beside me and I drifted upward, and upward;—I did not know how or where.

The thought flashed through me;—this is the last. It is all over.

I opened my throat to allow the useless carbonised air to escape. I was conscious of the act and knew its consequences:—a flood of salt water in my lungs, then suffocation and death. But I did not care now.

My lungs deflated, then—oh! delicious ecstasy!—instead of water, I drew to my dying body,—air; reviving, life-giving, life-sustaining oxygen.

I panted and gasped, as life ran through my veins. Blood danced in my thumping heart. I caught at my reeling senses. I clutched, like a miser, at the body I held.

I struggled, and opened my eyes.

I was on the surface of the water,—afloat. In my arms, I held the lady I had wrested from the deadly seaweed.

How well I knew, even in those awful moments, that I was not the cause of that wonderful rescue. I was present,—true,—but it was the decreeing of the great, living, but Unseen Power, who had further use for both of us in the bright old world, who had more work for us to perform ere he called us to our last accounting.

Well I knew then that every moment of time was more precious than ordinary hours of reckoning, yet I dared not hurry with my burden across that short strip of water, lest we should again become entangled.

Foot by foot, I worked my way, until I was clear of the seaweed, then I kicked forcefully for the shore, and with my unconscious, perhaps dead, burden in my arms, I scrambled up the face of the rocks and into the house.

"Quick! For God's sake! Hot water,—blankets!" I cried to Miss Grant's semi-petrified companion.

She stood and looked at me in horror and bewilderment. Then I remembered that my shouting was in vain, for she was stone-deaf.

But this good old lady's helplessness was short-lived.

"Lay her down," she cried; "I know how to handle this. If there's a spark of life in her I can bring her round."

I laid the limp form on the bed, on top of the spotless linen.

As I did so, I looked upon the pale face, with its eyes closed and the brine rolling in drops

over those long, golden eyelashes; then upon the glorious sun-kissed hair now water-soaked and tangled.

I cried in my soul, "Oh, God!—is this the end and she so beautiful."

Already the elderly lady had commenced first aid, in a businesslike way. It was something I knew only a little about, so I went into the kitchen in a perspiring terror of suspense,—and I stood there by the stove, ready to be of assistance at any moment, should I be called.

After what seemed hours of waiting, I heard a moan, and through the moaning came a voice, sweet but pitiful, and breathing of agony.

"Oh! why did you bring me back? Why did you not let me die?"

Again followed a long waiting, with the soothing voice of Miss Grant's able companion talking to her patient as she wrought with her.

There was a spell of dreadful nausea, but when it came I knew the worst was over.

The elderly lady came to the door, with a request for a hot-water bottle, which I got for her with alacrity.

At last she came out to me, and her kindly face was beaming.

"My dear, good boy," she said, as tears trickled down her cheeks, "she is lying peacefully and much better. In an hour or two, she will be up and around. Would you care to see her, just to put your mind at ease?"

"Indeed I would," I responded.

She led the way into the room, and there on the bed lay Miss Grant,—breathing easily,—alive,—life athrob in her veins.

A joyful reaction overwhelmed me, for, no matter how humble had been my part, I had been chosen to help to save her.

As I stood by her, her eyes opened;—great, light-brown eyes, bright and a gleam as of molten gold. They roved the room, then they rested on me.

"What!" she groaned, "you still here? Oh!—go away,—go away."

My heart sank within me and my face flushed with confusion.

I might have understood that what she said was merely the outpouring of an overpowering weakness which was mingling the mental pictures focussed on the young lady's mind;—but I failed to think anything but that she had a natural distaste for my presence and was not, even now, grateful for the assistance I had rendered.

With my head bowed, I walked to the door.

Mrs. Malmsbury,—for that was the elderly lady's name,—came to me. She had not heard, but she had surmised.

"Oh! Mr. Bremner,—if my dear Mary has said anything amiss to you, do not be offended, for she is hardly herself yet. Why!—she is only newly back from the dead."

She held out her hand to me and I took it gratefully. But as I walked over to my quarters and dressed myself, the feeling of resentment in my heart did not abate; and I vowed then to myself that I would think of Mary Grant no more; that I would avoid her when I could and keep strictly to my own, beloved, masculine, bachelor pursuits and to the pathway I had mapped out for myself.

CHAPTER XVII

Good Medicine

The Rev. William Auld was due to visit Golden Crescent that afternoon. I almost wearied for his coming, for he was entertaining and uplifting. He, somehow, had the happy knack of instilling fresh energy, fresh ambition, fresh hope, into every one with whom he came in contact.

His noisy launch at last came chug-chugging up the Bay. He started with the far point of the Crescent and called at every creek, cove and landing at which there was a home. Then he crept

along the shore-line to Jake's place.

My turn next,—I soliloquised. But, no!—he held out, waving his hand in salutation.

It was evidently his intention to make a call on Miss Grant before finishing his Sabbath labours at my bungalow.

He stayed there a long time: so long, that I was beginning to give up hope of his ever getting my length; but, finally, his cheery voice hailed me from my doorway and roused my drooping spirits.

His pale, gentle face was wreathed in smiles.

"Good boy! Good boy!" he commented. "God bless you! He is blessing you,—eh, George!"

"How is the lady?" I inquired.

"Almost as well as ever," he replied. "She has had a severe shake-up though. It must have been touch and go.

"She was up, George, and talked to me. She told me everything she could remember; how she refused to take your well-intentioned advice, and suffered the consequences of her folly. She gave me this note for you."

He held out an envelope and I took it and put it in my pocket.

He raised his eyebrows, "Read it, man;—read it."

"It will do later, Mr. Auld;—there is no hurry."

He shook his old, grey head in surprise.

"Well,—well,—well," he exclaimed.

"Have you visited the Clarks yet, George?" he asked after a pause.

"Yes!"

"And what did you find there?"

"Discord," I answered.

"So you know all about it, eh!"

"You are a minister of God, Mr. Auld; you have influence with such a man as Andrew Clark. Surely you can move him from the damnable position he has taken up?"

"I would to God I could," he said fervently. "For ten years, I have preached to him, scolded him, cajoled him, threatened him with hell-fire and ever-lasting torment; yes! I have even refused to dispense the sacrament to him unless he relented, but I might as well have expended my energies on The Ghoul Rock out there at the opening to the Bay."

"But he professes to be a good Christian, Mr. Auld," I put in.

"Yes! and no man on the coast tries to live a good life more than he does. I am sure, every moment of his life he deeply regrets the rash vow he made, but he believes, in the sight of God, he is doing right in keeping to it. He is obsessed.

"Now, George,—what is there left for me to try?"

"Physical force," I exclaimed angrily.

"George,—" he said, almost horrified, "it is not for a minister of the gospel to think of violence."

"Why not?" I went on. "Andrew Clark is slowly torturing his wife to death. Surely, if there ever was an occasion,—this is it! A few days' violence may save years of torture to both and, maybe, save his eternal soul besides."

He sat in silence for a while, then he startled me.

"Come, boy! You have a scheme in your head. Tell me what it is, and,—may God forgive me if I do wrong,—but, if it appeals to me as likely to move that old, living block of Aberdeen granite, or even to cause a few hours' joy to his dear, patient wife, Margaret, I'll carry it through if I can."

I unfolded what had been in my mind.

"What do you think of it?" I asked.

He shook his head dubiously.

"It is dangerous; it is violent; it is not what a minister is expected to do to any of his flock;—and it is only a chance that it will effect its purpose."

"Where would you put him?" I asked, as if he had agreed.

He smiled.

"Oh!—there is the log cabin at the back of the farm, where he keeps nothing but an incubator. It has a heavy door and only a small window.

"Man,—if we could inveigle him in there!"

The Rev. William Auld positively chuckled as he thought of it.

I knew then that he was not so very far away from his schoolboy days, despite his age and experiences.

"When can we start in?"

He thought a little.

"The sooner the better," he said. "Joe is busy towing booms this week and there is no possible chance of his coming home. I am not too busy and can spare the part of three or four consecutive days for the job.

"If we can only get Margaret and Rita to agree."

"I can guarantee Rita," I said.

"And I can coerce Margaret," he put in.

"We'll arrange with the women folks to-morrow sometime, and we'll tackle poor old Andrew the following afternoon."

The minister waited and had tea with me. It was late when he took his departure.

Just as I was tumbling into bed, I remembered Mary Grant's letter. I took it out of my coat pocket and opened it. It was not a letter, after all; merely a note.

"Please,—please forgive me," it read. "You are a brave and very gallant gentleman.

"MARY GRANT."

"George, my boy!" I soliloquised, "that ought to satisfy you."

But it did not. In the frame of mind I then was in, nothing could possibly have propitiated me.

As I dropped to sleep, the phrase recurred again and again: "You are a brave and very gallant gentleman." That,—maybe,—but after all a poor and humble gentleman working for wages in a country store;—so, why worry?

Next morning, although it was not the day any steamer was due, I ran the white flag to the top of the pole at the point of the rocks, in the hope that Rita would see it and take it as a signal that I wished to speak with her; and so save me a trip across, for I expected some of the men from the Camps and I never liked to be absent or to keep them waiting.

Just before noon, Rita presented herself.

"Say, George!—what's the rag up for? Did you forget what day of the week it was, or is it your birthday?"

"I brought you a pie, in case it might be your anniversary. Made it this morning."

I laughed to the bright little lass who stood before me with eyes dancing mischievously, white teeth showing and the pink of her cheeks glowing through the olive tint of her skin.

The more I saw of Rita, the prettier she seemed in my eyes, for she was lively and agile, trim, neat and beautifully rounded, breathing always of fragrant and exuberant health.

"Sit down beside me on the steps here, Rita," I said. "I want to talk to you. That is why I put the flag up.

"Rita,—what would you give to have your grand-dad renounce his vow some day and begin

speaking to your grandmother as if nothing had ever been amiss?"

She looked at me and her lips trembled.

"Say, George! Don't fool me. I ain't myself on that subject."

"What would you give, Rita?"

"I'd give anything. I'd pretty near give my life, George; for grandmother would be happier'n an angel."

"Would you help, if some one knew a way?"

"George,—sure you ain't foolin'? True,—you ain't foolin'?"

For answer, I plunged into the scheme.

"Now,—all we require of you and your grandmother is to sit tight and neither to say nor do anything that would interfere. Leave it to—leave it to the minister. He is doing this, and he believes that it is the only way to bring your grand-dad to his senses. Mr. Auld has already tried everything else he can think of."

"It won't kill grand-dad, though?" she inquired.

"Kill him,—no! Why! it won't even hurt him, unless, maybe, his pride.

"Do you agree, Rita?"

"Sure!" she said. "But—if you or Mr. Auld hurt my grand-dad, I guess I'll kill you both,—see."

Her eyes flashed for a second and I could tell she was in deadly earnest over it. But she soon laughed and became happy once more.

"Rita,—would you like to be able to talk English,—proper English,—just as it should be talked? Would you care to learn English Grammar?" I asked, changing the subject partly.

She came close to me on the veranda steps with a jump.

"Say that over again, George. I want to get it right," she said plaintively.

"Would you like me to teach you English Grammar, Rita?" I repeated.

"Would I? Oh! wouldn't I just!"

She looked away quickly. "You wouldn't waste your time teachin' the likes of me."

"I have been through college. I know something of English Grammar and English Literature. It would be the pleasure of my life to be permitted to impart some of what I know to you."

"Oh!—but it would take years, and years, and—then some," she put in.

"Not a bit of it! It would take an hour or two of an evening, maybe twice a week. That is all,—provided you went over and learned in between times all that was given you to master."

"Gee! I could do that. You just try me."

"Well, Rita. Here is your first lesson.

"Never say 'gee.' It is not good English."

And I never heard Rita use the expression again.

I had expected to see her smile with happiness, but she was too tremendously in earnest about it. Determination was written all over her sweet little face.

"George,—I'll learn anything you tell me. I'll work hard and I'll learn terrible fast, for I know I ain't no good now at talking slick."

"Here is another for you, Rita. Never say 'ain't no good.' Say, 'I am not any good.' 'Ain't' is not a word; it does not appear in any standard dictionary of English.

"Well, little girl,—if your grand-dad is agreeable and will permit you to come over now and again of an evening, we can make a start as soon as I get the book I require from Vancouver.

"I would come over to your place, but it is quite a distance from the store and I do not like to be too long away, especially in the evenings; for I have seen Chinese in their fishing boats around, and strange launches keep coming into the Bay to anchor overnights. It does not do, you know, to neglect another man's property and goods when the other man pays me for looking after them."

"Oh! grand-dad won't mind me coming. He lets me do pretty near anything. Besides, somebody's got to come over to the store now we're getting our groceries from you instead of ordering them from Vancouver."

I was not so sanguine as Rita was, especially after what Joe had probably said to Andrew Clark regarding me.

"Well!" I concluded, "that will be my excuse when I come over with the medicine for your grand-dad's chronic complaint,—dumbness. So, don't say a word about it until I get over."

The Rev. William Auld ran in early that afternoon. He was all excitement.

"George,—I saw Margaret and I have fixed her. Poor woman,—she is as nervous as a kitten and as worried as a mother cat, fearing we may hurt Andrew. The old rascal;—he's not so easily hurt, eh, George?"

"You saw Rita?"

"Yes! And she is like Mrs. Clark, but the prize looks too alluring for her to refrain from entering the gamble."

"George! Why should we leave this till to-morrow?"

"I don't know why."

"We could start in to-night, just as easily as to-morrow, and it will be over a day sooner. What do you say?"

"I am ready when you are, Mr. Auld."

"Right! Now, I am going to leave the conversation to you. You must work it round to fit in. I shall do the rest,—the dirty work, as the villain says in the dime novel."

"What do you know about dime novels?" I laughed.

"I am a minister of the gospel now, but ... I was a boy once."

The Rev. William Auld had dinner with me, then he started out in his launch for Clark's ranch. It was arranged that I follow immediately in a rowing boat, which would take me longer to get there and would thus disarm any suspicion of complicity.

When I arrived at Clark's, I could hear the minister talking and Andrew Clark laughing heartily. Mr. Auld was telling some interesting story and he had the old man in the best of humours.

I was welcomed with cheerfulness, and the minister shook hands with me as if he had not seen me for a month of Sundays.

Rita was a-missing. Mrs. Clark seemed nervous and ill-at-ease. Andrew, however, was in his happiest of moods.

"What special brought ye over, George?" he asked.

I told him of Rita's anxiety to be able to talk English properly and of my willingness to teach her if it could be arranged conveniently. The minister backed up the project with all his ministerial fluency, but Andrew Clark was not the man to agree to a thing immediately, no matter how well it appealed to him.

"Rita's a good lassie," he said, "and she hasna had schoolin' except what Marget and me taught her, and that's little more than being able to read and add up a few lines o' figures."

"George Bremner,—you're an honest man and I like ye fine. You'll ha'e my answer by the end o' the week."

"Right you are!" I exclaimed.

Andrew then started in to tell Mr. Auld of the method he had adopted in regard to the disposition of his output of eggs, and that gave me just the opportunity I wanted.

"How do you raise your chicks, Mr. Clark?" I asked. "Do you use an incubator?"

"Sure thing! And a grand little incubator I ha'e too," he answered. "She takes two hundred and fifty eggs at a time and gives an average of eighty per cent chicks."

I had lit on Andrew Clark's one and only hobby.

He got up. "Come and ha'e a look at it. It's called 'The Every-Egg-A-Chick' Incubator, and it nearly lives up to its name."

"But it's a pity I ha'e nothin' in her at the minute.

"Come on, too, Mr. Auld. It'll do ye good to learn something about chickens, even if you are busy enough lookin' after the sheep."

Andrew took a huge key from a nail in the wall and we followed him out to the log cabin, both of us full of forced interest and bubbling over with pent-up excitement.

Old man Clark talked all the way on his favourite topic; he talked while he inserted the key in the door and he kept on talking as he walked in, all intent on his wonderful egg-hatcher.

He left the key in the door.

Just as I was due to enter, I stepped back. With a quick movement, the minister pulled the door to and turned the key, taking it out of the lock and putting it in his trouser pocket.

"Hey!—what's the matter?" came a voice from the inside.

We did not answer.

Andrew Clark battered on the door with his fists.

"Hey there! The door has snappit to. Open it and come awa' in."

The minister put his lips to the keyhole.

"Andrew Clark,—that door is not going to be opened for some time to come."

"Toots! What are ye bletherin' about? What kind o' a schoolboy trick is this you're up to? Open the door and none o' your nonsense."

I chuckled with delight, as I ran off for some boards and nails which I hammered up against the small window for extra security.

When I finished the job, the Rev. William Auld was getting through his lecture to Andrew.

"—And you won't step a foot out of this place, neither shall you eat, till you renounce your devilish vow and speak to the wife of your bosom, as a God-fearing man should."

Sonorously from behind the door came Clark's voice.

"Willum Auld!—are ye a meenister o' the gospel?"

"Yes!"

"And ye would try to force a man to break a vow made before the Lord?"

"Yes! Andrew."

"Ye would starve a man to death,—murder him?"

"No!—but I would make him very uncomfortable. I would make him so hungry that he would almost hear the gnawing in his internals for meat, if I thought good would come of it."

The man behind the door became furious.

"Willum Auld!"

"Yes! Andrew."

"If ye don't open that door at once, I'll write a complaint to the Presbytery. I'll ha'e ye shorn o' your releegious orders and hunted frae the kirk o' God."

"Be silent! you blasphemer," commanded the frail but plucky old minister. "How dare you talk in that way? Do you wish to bring down a judgment on yourself? Good-night! Andrew,—I'll be back to-morrow; and I would strongly recommend you, in the interval, to get down on your knees and pray to your Maker."

This proved almost too much for Andrew.

"Willum!—Willum!—Come back," he cried through the door.

"What is it?" asked the minister, returning.

"There's neither light nor bed here, and I'm an ageing man."

"Darkness is better light and earthen floors are softer bedding than you will have in the place you are hastening to if you do not repent and talk to Margaret."

There was a spell of silence again.

"Willum!—Willum! Are ye there?"

"Yes! Andrew."

"Could I ha'e my pipe and tobacco and a puckle matches? They're on the kitchen mantel-piece."

"Unless it is a drink of water, not a thing shall pass through this doorway to you till you pledge me that you will speak to Margaret, as you did before you took your devil's vow."

The dour old man, in his erstwhile prison, had the last word:

"Gang awa' wi' ye,—for it'll be a long time, Willum Auld. The snaw will be fallin' blue frae the Heavens."

We went back to the cottage and gave implicit instructions to Margaret and Rita how they were to handle the prisoner. Neither of them was in an easy frame of mind, and I feared considerably for their ability to stand the test and keep away from the log hut. But the minister retained the key, so that nothing short of tearing the place down would let Andrew Clark out.

Next day, late in the afternoon, the minister called in for me and we sailed over to the ranch.

Margaret, though sorely tempted, had kept religiously away from her husband; but, already, she had a variety of foodstuffs cooked and waiting his anticipated release.

We went over to the barn and the minister rapped on the door.

"Are you there, Andrew?"

No answer.

"Andrew Clark,—are you there?"

Still no response.

I looked though the boarded window. The old Scot was standing with his back to us in a studied attitude.

Once more the minister spoke, but still he received no answer.

The women folks were waiting anxiously, and keen was their disappointment when they heard that another day would have to pass ere the head of their house could be released.

"God forgive me if I am doing wrong," exclaimed William Auld to me, "but I am determined, now that I have put my hand to the plough, I shall not turn back."

Wednesday came, and we called again.

"Andrew," called the minister through the door, "will you relent and talk to Margaret?"

"Give me a drink of water," came a husky voice from behind the door.

A saucer of cold water was passed under the door to him and he seized it and drank of it eagerly.

"Will you talk to Margaret, Andrew?"

"No!" snapped the old fellow. And back again he dropped into silence.

Still another day and the performance was repeated. Still Andrew Clark remained adamant; still Margaret Clark begged and prayed on her knees for his release.

"We will give him one more day," said the minister, "and then, if it is God's will, we will release him and take the consequences of our acts."

On the Friday afternoon, we made what we considered would be our last trip.

Dour, stubborn, old man! It looked as if he were about to beat us after all, for we could not afford to injure his health, no matter what the reason for it. As it was, we had broken the law of the land and we were liable to punishment at the hands of the law.

The Rev. William Auld, suffering far more than the prisoner could have suffered during that trying time, knocked at the solid door once more.

"Andrew! Andrew!" he cried, "for God's sake, be a man."

He had the key to the door in his hand, ready to open it.

Suddenly, a broken voice came in answer:

"Bring me Marget! Bring me Marget!"

"Do you wish to speak to her, Andrew?"

"Bring me Marget, won't you," came again the wavering voice.

I brought the dear old woman from her kitchen. She was trembling with anxiety and suspense.

William Auld threw the door open.

Andrew Clark was standing in the middle of the floor, with a look on his face that I had never seen there before,—a look of holy tenderness. He held out his arms to the white-haired old lady, who tottered forward to meet him.

"Marget! Marget! My own lass, Marget!" he cried huskily, as tears blinded his sight. He caught her and crushed her to him.

Margaret tried to speak, but her voice caught brokenly.

"Andrew! Andrew!—don't, lad,—oh! don't."

She laid her head on his breast and sobbed in utter content, as he stroked her hair.

"It's been ten year o' hell for me, Marget: ten year o' hell for us both," he went on, "but God has spoken to me in the darkness, in the quietness; through hunger and thirst. My lass, my lass;—my own, dear, patient lass."

He was holding her tightly to him and did not seem to know of our presence. Our hearts were too full to remain. We turned and left them in the joy of their reborn love.

The minister, with face aglow, got into his launch, while I jumped into my rowing boat.

When I was quite a long way from the shore, I looked back across the water to the cottage; and there, kneeling together on their veranda steps, their arms around each other, their heads bent in prayer, I saw Andrew Clark and Margaret.

The next afternoon, Andrew called on me. He was waiting for me at the store, as Jake and I returned with two boat-loads of fresh stock which we were out receiving from the *Clochman*.

The old fellow took me by the hand and surprised me by his smile of open friendship.

"I would ha'e come over sooner, George, but I couldna get away frae the ranch these last few days." His eyes turned humorously as he said it.

"I might ha'e run over this mornin', but Marget and me ha'e a lot o' leaway to make up.

"Say! man,—I'll be glad if you will do what ye can to help Rita. Make your ain arrangements;—for, what suits you, suits me and Marget."

CHAPTER XVIII

A Maid, a Mood and a Song

In Golden Crescent Bay things moved quietly, almost drowsily. There were the routine of hurried work and the long spells of comparative idleness.

As for the people over the way, I saw little of them outside of business.

I had not spoken to Mary Grant since the peremptory dismissal I had received from her during her recovery from the drowning accident.

I had not acknowledged her note by a visit, as probably I should have done; but, then,—how was I to know but that the note had been sent merely as a matter of form and common courtesy? She had no reason to think me other than what I showed myself to be,—an ordinary store-clerk; and this being so she might have considered it presumptuous had I endeavoured in any way to avail myself of the advantage I had secured in being of service to her, for, despite her endeavours, she could not disguise from me,—who was in a position to judge in a moment,—that her upbringing and her education had been such as only the richest could afford and only the best families in America and Europe could command. Yet she had a dash and wayward individualism that were all her own;—savouring of the prairies and the wilder life of the West.

To me, she was still an enigma.

Mrs. Malmsbury had been making all the purchases at the store; and, naturally, conversation with her was of a strictly business order. She seldom had a word to say that was not absolutely necessary, because, from long experience, she had gathered wisdom and knew that talking begot answering and questioning, and when these answers and questions were unheard conversation was apt to become a monologue.

She had no information to impart, no reminiscences to recount, no pet theories to voice on evolution or female suffrage, no confessions or professions to make, no prophecies to advance even regarding the weather.

As for Mary Grant,—she was seldom idle. I had seen her make her own clothes, I had seen her over the washtub with her sleeves rolled up to her fair, white shoulders, I had seen her bake and houseclean; sharing the daily duties with her elderly companion.

Yet she enjoyed to the full the delights that Golden Crescent afforded. In her spare time, she rowed on the water, bathed, roved the forests behind for wild flowers and game, read in her hammock and revelled in her music.

And she was not the only one who revelled in that glorious music, for, unknown to her, Jake and I listened with delight to her uplifting entertainment; I from the confines of my front veranda and Jake, night after night, from his favourite position on the cliffs.

He confessed to me that it was a wonderful set-off to the cravings that often beset him for the liquor which he was still fighting so nobly and victoriously.

Poor old Jake! More than once I had almost been tempted to coax him to go back to his nightly libations, for, since he had begun his fight for abstinence, he seemed to be gradually going down the hill; losing weight, losing strength, losing interest in his daily pursuits, and, with it all, ageing.

The minister had noticed the change and had expressed his concern. Rita also had talked of it to me; and her visits to the old man had become more frequent, her little attentions had grown in number and her solicitude for his bodily comfort had become almost motherly.

Rita always could manipulate Jake round her little finger. He was clay in her hands, and obeyed her even to the putting of a stocking full of hot salt round his neck one night he had a hoarseness in his throat.

"If she ever insists on me puttin' my feet in hot-water and mustard," he confessed to me once, "God knows how I shall muster up the courage to refuse."

I had sent to Vancouver for the grammar-book with which I intended starting Rita's tuition, but it had only arrived,—its coming having been delayed on account of the book-sellers not having it in stock and having to fill my requirement from the East,—but I had promised Rita, much to her pleasure, that we should start in earnest the following evening.

I had been reading in my hammock until the daylight had failed me. And now I was lying, resting and hoping that any moment Miss Grant would commence her nightly musicale.

Jake, and his dog Mike, I presumed, were already in their accustomed places, Jake smoking his pipe and Mike biting at mosquitoes and other pestiferous insects which lodged and boarded about his warm, hairy person.

The cottage door opened and our fair entertainer stepped out.

She came across the rustic bridge and made straight for my place, humming softly to herself as she sauntered along. She was hatless as usual and her hair was done up in great, wavy coils on her well-poised head. Her hands were jammed deep into the pockets of her pale-green, silk sweater-coat. She impressed me then as being at peace with the world and perfectly at ease; much more at ease than I was, for I was puzzling myself as to what her wish with me could be, unless it were regarding some groceries that she might have overlooked during the day.

She smiled as she came forward.

I rose from the hammock.

"Now, don't let me disturb you," she said. "Lie where you are."

"I shall do splendidly right here."

She sat down on the top step of the veranda and turned half round to me.

"Do you ever feel lonely, Mr. Bremner?"

"Yes!—sometimes," I answered.

"What do you do with yourself on such occasions?"

"Oh!—smoke and read chiefly."

"But,—do you ever feel as if you had to speak to a member of the opposite sex near your own age,—or die?"

She was quite solemn about this, and seemed to wait anxiously as if the whole world's welfare depended on my answer.

"Sometimes!" I replied again, with a laugh.

"What do you do then?"

"I lie down and try to die."

"—and find you can't," she put in.

"Yes!"

"Just the same as I do. Well!—" she sighed, "I have explored all the beauties of Golden Crescent; I have fished—and caught nothing. I have hunted,—and shot nothing. I have read,—and learned nothing, or next to it, until I have nothing left to read. So now,—I have come over to you. I want to be friends."

"Are we not friends already?" I asked, sitting on the side of my hammock and filling my vision with the charming picture she presented.

She sighed and raised her eyebrows.

"Oh!—I don't know. You never let me know that you had forgiven me for my rudeness to you."

"There was nothing to forgive, Miss Grant."

"No! How kind of you to say so! And you are not angry with me any more?"

"Not a bit," I answered, wondering at the change which had come over this pretty but elusive young lady.

"Well, Mr. Bremner,—I see you reading very often. I came across to inquire if you could favour me with something in the book line to wile away an hour or so."

"With pleasure," I answered.

"Mr. Horsfal, my employer, has a well-stocked little library here and you are very welcome to read anything in it you may fancy. Will you come inside?"

She looked up shyly, then her curiosity got the mastery.

"Why, yes!" she cried, jumping up. "I shall be delighted."

I led the way into the front room, fixing the lamp and causing a flood of mellow light to suffuse the darkness in there. I went over and threw aside the curtains that hid the book-shelves.

"You have a lovely place here," she exclaimed, looking round in admiration. "I had no idea ... no idea—"

"—That a bachelor could make himself so comfortable," I put in.

"Exactly! Do you mind if I take a peek around?" she asked, laughing.

"Not a bit!"

She "peeked around" and satisfied her curiosity to the full.

"I am convinced," she said at last, "that in all this domestic artistry there is the touch of a feminine hand. Who was, or who is,—the lady?"

"I understand Mrs. Horsfal furnished and arranged this home. She lived here every summer before she died. That made it very easy for me. All I had to do was to keep everything in its place as she had left it."

Miss Grant was enraptured with the library. I thought she would never finish scanning the titles and the authors.

"This is a positive book-wormery," she exclaimed.

She chose a volume which revealed her very masculine taste in literature, although, after all, it did not astonish me greatly but merely confirmed what I already had known to be so;—that,

while boys and men scorn to read girls' and women's books, yet girls and women seem to prefer the books that are written more especially for boys and men and the more those books revel and riot in sword play, impossible adventure and intrigue, the more they like them.

"Might I ask if you would be so good as to return my visit?" said my visitor at last. "You saved my life, you know, and you have some right to take a small friendly interest in me.

"If you could spare the time, I should be pleased to have you over for tea to-morrow evening and to spend a sociable hour with us afterwards;—that is, if you care for tea, sociability and—music."

I looked across at her,—so straight, so ladylike, so beautiful; almost as tall as I and so full of bubbling mischief and virile charm.

"I am a veritable drunkard with tea, and as for music—ask Jake, out there sitting on the cliffs in the darkness, if I like music. He knows. Ask me, as I lie in my hammock here, night after night, waiting for you to begin,—if Jake likes music, and the answer will satisfy you just how much both of us appreciate it.

"But, I am very sorry I shall be unable to avail myself of your kind invitation to come to-morrow evening."

My new friend could not disguise her surprise. I almost fancied I traced a flush of embarrassment on her cheeks.

"No!" was all she said, and she said it ever so quietly.

"I have a pupil coming to-morrow evening for her first real lesson in English Grammar. She has waited long for it. The book I desired to start her in with has only arrived. She would be terribly disappointed if I were now to postpone that lesson."

"Your pupil is a lady?"

"Yes!—a sweet little girl called Rita Clark, who lives at the ranch at the other side of the Crescent. She comes here often. You must have noticed her."

"What!—that pretty, olive-skinned girl, with the dark hair and dark eyes?"

"Yes! I have noticed her and I have never since ceased to envy her complexion and her woodland beauty. I would give all I have to look as she does.

"You are most fortunate in your choice of a pupil?"

"Yes! Rita is a good-hearted little girl," I lauded unthinkingly.

"I spoke to her once out on the Island," said Miss Grant, "but she seemed shy. She looked me over from head to heel, then ran off without a word.

"Well,—Mr. Bremner, days and evenings are much alike to some of us in Golden Crescent. Shall we say Wednesday evening?"

"I shall be more than pleased, Miss Grant," I exclaimed, betraying the boyish eagerness I felt, "if—?"

"If?" she inquired.

"If you will return the compliment by allowing me to take you out some evening in the boat to the end of Rita's Isle there, where the sea trout are,—or away out to the passage by The Ghoul where the salmon are now running. I have seen you fishing very often and with the patience of Job, yet not once have I seen you bring home a fish. Now, Rita Clark can bring in twenty or thirty trout in less than an hour, any time she has a fancy to.

"I should like to break your bad luck, for I think the trouble can only be with the tackle you use."

Mary Grant's brown eyes danced with pleasure, and in the lamplight, I noticed for the first time, how very fair her skin was,—cream and pink roses,—tanned slightly where the sun had got at it, but without a blemish, without even a freckle, and this despite the fact that she seldom took any precautions against the depredations of Old Sol.

"I shall be glad indeed. You are very kind; for what you propose will be a treat of treats, especially if we catch some fish."

She held out her hand to me. Mine touched hers and a thrill ran and sang through my fingers, through my body to my brain; the thrill of a strange sensation I had never before experienced. I gazed at her without speaking.

She raised her eyes and mine held hers for the briefest of moments.

To me it seemed as if a world of doubt and uncertainty were being swept away and I were looking into eyes I had known through all the ages.

Then her golden lashes dropped and hid those wonderful eyes from me.

Impulsively, yet fully knowing what I did, I raised her hand and touched the back of her fingers with my lips.

She did not draw her hand away. She smiled across to me ever so sweetly and turned from me into the darkness.

Not for an hour did I wake from my reveries. The spell of new influences was upon me; the moon, climbing up among the scudding night-clouds, never seemed so bright before and the phosphorescent glow and silver streaks on the water never so beautiful.

A light travelled across the parlour over the way. I saw Miss Grant seat herself by the piano, and soon the whole air became charged with the softest, sweetest cadences,—elusive, faint and fairylike.

How I enjoyed them! How old Jake on the cliffs must have enjoyed them! What an artist the lady was, and how she excelled herself that evening!

I lay in a transport of pleasure, hoping that the music might never cease; but, alas for such vain hoping,—it whispered and died away, leaving behind it only the stillness of the night, the sighing of the wind in the tops of the tall creaking firs, the chirping of the crickets under the stones and the call of the night bird to her mate.

I raised my eyes across to the cottage.

In the lamplight, I could discern the figure of the musician. She was seated on the piano stool, with her hands clasped in front of her and gazing out through the window into the darkness of the night.

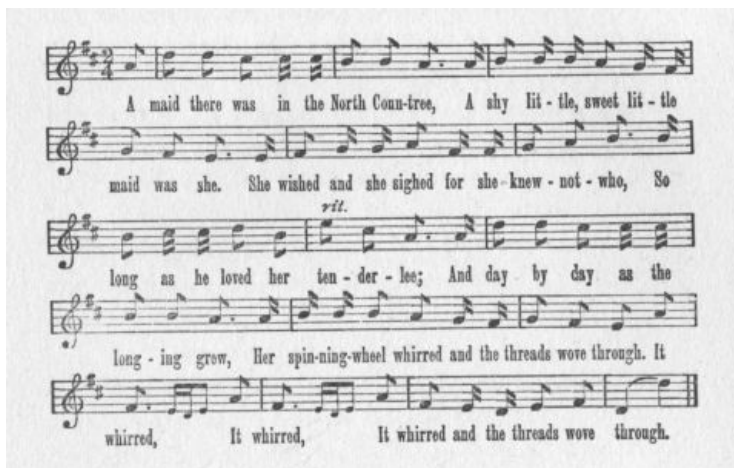
Surely it was a night when hypnotising influences were at work with all of us, for I had not yet seen Jake return; he was evidently still somewhere out on the cliffs communing with the spirits that were in the air.

Suddenly I observed a movement in the room over the way.

Miss Grant had roused herself from her dreaming. She raised her hand and put the fingers I had kissed to her own lips. Then she kissed both her hands to the outside world. She lowered the light of the lamp until only the faintest glow was visible.

She ran her fingers over the piano keys in a ripple of simple harmonies. Sweet and clear came her voice in singing. I caught the lilt of the music and I caught the words of the song:—

A maid there was in the North Coun-tree,
A shy lit-tle, sweet lit-tle maid was she.
She wished and she sighed for she knew-not-who,
So long as he loved her ten-der-lee;
And day by day as the long-ing grow,
Her spin-ning-wheel whirred and the threads wove through.
It whirred, It whirred, It whirred and the threads wove through.



A maid there was in the North Countree;
A gay little, blythe little maid was she.
Her dream of a gallant knight came true.
He wooed her long and so tenderlee.
And, day by day, as their fond love grew,
Her spinning wheel stood with its threads askew;

It stood.—It stood.—It stood with its threads askew.

A maid there was in the North Countree;
A sad little, lone little maid was she.
Her knight seemed fickle and all untrue
As he rode to war at the drummer's dree.
And, day by day, as her sorrow grew,
Her spinning wheel groaned and the threads wove through.
It groaned.—It groaned.—It groaned and the threads wove through.

A maid there is in the North Countree;
A coy little, glad little maid is she.
Her cheeks are aglow with a rosy hue,
For her knight proved true, as good knights should be.
And, day by day, as their vows renew,
Her spinning wheel purrs and the threads weave through;
It purrs.—It purrs.—It purrs and the threads weave through.

Why she had not sung before, I could not understand, for a voice such as she had was a gift from heaven, and it was sinful to keep it hidden away. It betrayed training, but only in a slight degree; not sufficient to have spoiled the bewitching, vagrant plaintiveness which it possessed; an inexpressible allurements of tone which a few untrained singers have, trained singers never, for the rigours of the training steal away that peculiar charm as the great city does the bloom from the cheek of a country maiden.

I listened for the verses of the song which I knew should follow, but the singer's voice was still and the faint glow of the lamp was extinguished.

CHAPTER XIX

The "Green-eyed Monster" Awakes

Rita had just had her first real lesson in English. Already,—but without giving her the reason why, except that it was incorrect,—I had taught her never to say "ain't" and "I seen"; also that "Gee," "Gosh" and "you bet your life" were hardly ladylike expressions. She now understood that two negatives made a positive and that she should govern her speech accordingly.

She was an apt pupil; so anxious to improve her way of talking that mine was not a task, it was merely the setting of two little feet on a road and saying, "This is your way home," and those two little feet never deviated from that road for a single moment, never side-stepped, never turned back to pick up the useless but attractive words she had cast from her as she travelled.

How I marvelled at the great difference the elimination of a few of the most common of her slangy and incorrect expressions and the substitution of plain phrases in their places made in her diction! Already, it seemed to me as if she understood her English and had been studying it for years.

How easy it was, after all, I fancied, as I followed my train of thought, for one, simply by elimination, to become almost learned in the sight of his fellow men!

But now Rita had been introduced to the whys and wherefores in their simplest forms, so that she should be able, finally, to construct her thoughts for herself, word by word and phrase by phrase, into rounded and completed sentences.

At the outset, I had told her how the greatest writers in English were not above reading and re-reading plain little Grammars such as she was then studying, also that the favourite book of some of the most famous men the world ever knew, a book which they perused from cover to cover, year in and year out, as they would their family Bible,—was an ordinary standard dictionary.

I gave Rita her thin little Grammar and a note book in which to copy her lessons, and she slipped these into her bosom, hugging them to her heart and laughing with pleasure.

She put out her hands and grasped mine, then, in her sweet, unpremeditated way, she threw her arms round my neck and drew my lips to hers.

Dear little girl! How very like a child she was! A creature of impulse, a toy in the hands of her own fleeting emotions!

"Say! George,—I just got to hug you sometimes," she cried, "you are so good to me."

She stood back and surveyed me as if she were trying to gauge my weight and strength.

As it so happened, that was exactly what she was doing.

"You aren't scared of our Joe,—are you?" she asked.

"No!" I laughed. "What put that funny question into your head?"

She became serious.

"Well,—if I thought you were, I wouldn't come back for any more Grammar."

"Why?" I asked.

"Joe's not very well pleased about it. Guess he thinks nobody should be able to speak better'n he can."

"Oh!—never mind Joe," I exclaimed. "He'll come round, and your grand-dad's consent is all you need anyway."

"Sure! But I know, all the same, that Joe's got it in for you. He hasn't forgot the words you and he had."

"When did you see him last, Rita?"

"He was in to-day. Wanted to know where I was going. Grand-dad told him, then Joe got mad. Says you're 'too damned interfering.' Yes! Joe said it. He said to Grand-dad, 'You ain't got no right lettin' that kid go over there. Girls ain't got any business learnin' lessons off'n men.'

"Grand-dad said, 'Aw! forget it, Joe. She's got my permission, so let that end it. George Bremner's all right.'

"The settlers are arranging for a teacher up here next summer. Why can't she wait till then and get her lessons from a reg'lar professional, and no gol-durned amatoor,' said Joe.

"See here, Mister man!' I said, 'you're sore,—that's your trouble. But I'm not going to be bullied by you,—so there. I'm through with you, Joe Clark;—and, what's more, you needn't take any interest in me any more. I can look after myself.'

"He gripped my arm. It's black and blue yet. See!

"You ain't goin',' said he, madder'n ever.

"Yes! I am,' I said.

"If you go, by God, I'll kill that son-of-a-gun. Watch me! I ain't forgot him, though maybe he's fool enough to think I have.'

"Then he got kind of soft.

"Don't you go, Rita.'

"Why?' I asked.

"Because I don't want you to.'

"That's no reason,' I said.

"I'll send you to a school in Vancouver this winter, if you'll wait,' he coaxed.

"You see, George,—Joe ain't half bad sometimes. But I was scared he might think I was givin' in.

"Don't want your schooling. It's too late,' said I. 'I've arranged for myself, Joe Clark,—so there.'

"I ran out and left him.

"He's pretty mad, but I don't care any more, now you're goin' to help me with this grammar.

"You're sure you're not scared of Joe?" she repeated.

"I have a strong right arm," I declared, "and I have been taught to look after myself."

I went down to the boat with her, and as she was stepping in she caught me by the shirt sleeve.

"You and Joe aren't goin' to fight, George? Promise me you won't fight."

"I could not promise that, little girl, for I cannot control the future. But I promise you that I shall not seek any quarrel with Joe. But, if he insulted you, for instance, or tried to commit a bodily violence on me, I would fight him without any hesitation. Wouldn't that be the right thing to do, Rita?"

Her head nodded wistfully. "Yes! Guess it would," she whispered, as I pushed her boat out into the water where the darkness swallowed it up.

CHAPTER XX

Fishing!

In the fulfilling of a promise, I called the following evening on Miss Grant.

It was the first of a number of such visits, for I found that the old feeling of antagonism between us had entirely disappeared and, consequently, I enjoyed the sociability refreshingly.

Our meetings, while not by any means of the 'friendly admiration' kind, were of a nature beneficial to both of us.

She learned that I was an Englishman of good family. I gathered, her mother had been a Virginian and her father an Englishman; that she loved the American Continent and always considered the United States her country as her mother had done before her. But further than this we did not get, for we were both diffident in talking of our lives prior to our coming to Golden Crescent. Still, we had many never-failing topics of conversation, many subjects to discuss in literature, music, philosophy and economics.

We travelled along in our acquaintance easily,—leisurely,—as if time were eternal and the world were standing still awaiting our good pleasure.

Late one afternoon, when I was sitting out on the rocks, near the oil barns at the end of the wharf, enjoying the cooling breezes after the trying heat of that midsummer's day, I saw Miss Grant come down the path with her fishing lines in her hand and her sweater-coat over her arm. She went to her boat and started to pull it toward the water.

I scrambled over and down the rocks, to lend a hand.

"Any room for me, Miss Grant?" I asked boldly.

"Why, yes!" she smiled eagerly, "if only you would come. You promised once, you know, but, somehow, that promise is still unfulfilled."

I handed her into the boat, pushed off and leaped in beside her. She took the oars and, with the swift easy strokes, full of power and artistic grace, which I had noticed the first time I saw her on the water, she pulled out to the west of Rita's Isle.

Her hair was hanging negligently, in loose, wavy curls, over her shoulders. Her dimpled arms and her neck were bared to the sunshine. Her mouth was parted slightly and her teeth shone ivory-like, as she plied her oars.

"Let me take a turn now," I asked, "and run out your line."

She did so, and I took her slowly round the Island without her feeling so much as a tiny nibble.

"How stupid!" I exclaimed. "What's the good of me coming out here, if I do not try to discover the cause of your continual non-success as a fisher? Pull in your line and let me have a look at the spoon."

I examined the sinker and found it of the proper weight and properly adjusted, fixed at the correct length from the bait. Next, I took the spoon in my hand. It was a small nickel spinner,—the right thing for catching sea-trout round Rita's Isle. I was puzzled for a little, until I laid the spoon and the hook flat on the palm of my hand, then I knew where the trouble was.

The barb of the hook hung fully an inch and a half too far from the spoon.

I adjusted it and handed it back to my lady-companion.

"Try that," I said with a smile.

In dropped the line and out it ran to its full length.

Miss Grant held it taut. Suddenly she gave it a jerk. She stopped in breathless excitement. Then she jerked again.

"Oh, dear me!" she cried anxiously, "there's something on."

"Pull it in," I shouted, "steady,—not too quickly."

Immediately thereafter, a fine, two-pound trout lay flopping in the bottom of the boat.

"Just think of that," cried my fair troller, "my first fish! And all by moving up a foolish little hook an inch or so."

Her eyes were a gleam. She chatted on and on almost without ceasing, almost without thinking, so excited and absorbed did she become in the sport.

Back went the line, and in it came again with another wriggling, shining trout.

For an hour I rowed round the Island, and, in that hour, Mary Grant had equalled Rita's best that I knew of, for between thirty and forty fish fell a prey to the deadly bait and hook.

"How would you like to try for a salmon?" I asked at last. "They are running better now than they have done all the year so far."

"All right!" she agreed, with a sigh of pent-up excitement, pulling in her trout line and running out a thicker one with a large salmon spoon and a fairly heavy sinker.

I rowed out to the mouth of the Bay, keeping inside the Ghoul Rock; then I started crossways over to the far point.

We were half-way across, when Mary Grant screamed. The line she was holding ran with tremendous rapidity through her fingers. I jammed my foot on the wooden frame lying in the bottom of the boat and to which the line was attached. I was just in time to save it from following the rest of the line overboard.

I pulled in my oars and caught up the line.

Away, thirty yards off, a great salmon sprang out of the water high into the air, performing a half-circle and flopping back with a splash from its lashing tail.

"She is yours," I cried. "Come! play her for all you can."

But, as I turned, I saw that Miss Grant's fingers were bleeding from the sudden running-out of the line when the salmon had struck; so I settled down to fight the fish myself.

All at once, the line slacked. I hauled it in, feeling almost certain that I had lost my prize. But no! Off she went again like a fury, rising out of the water in her wild endeavours to free herself.

For a long time I played her. My companion took the oars quietly and was now doing all she could to assist me.

Next, the salmon sank sheer down and sulked far under the water. Gradually, gradually I drew her in and not a struggle did she make. She simply lay, a dead thing at the end of my line.

"She's played out, Miss Grant. She's ours," I cried gleefully, as I got a glint of her under the water as she came up at the end of my line.

But, alas! for the luck of a fisherman. When the salmon was fifteen feet from the boat, she jerked and somersaulted most unexpectedly, with all the despair of a gambler making his last throw. She shot sheer out of the water and splashed in again almost under the boat. My line, minus the spoon and the hook, ran through my fingers.

"Damn!" I exclaimed, in the keenest disappointment.

"And—that's—just—what—I—say—too," came my fair oars-woman's voice. "If that isn't the hardest kind of luck!"

Away out, we could see our salmon jump, and jump, and jump again, out of the water ten feet in the air, darting and plunging in wide circles, like the mad thing she probably was.

"It serves me rightly, Miss Grant. I professed to be able to fix your tackle and yet I did not examine that spoon before putting it into use. It has probably been lying in a rusty condition for a year or so.

"Well,—we cannot try again to-night, unless we row in for a fresh spoon-hook."

"Oh!—let us stop now. We have more fish already than we really require."

"Shall I row you in?" I asked.

"Do you wish to go in?"

"Oh, dear, no! I could remain here forever,—at least until I get hungry and sleepy," I laughed.

"All right!" she cried, "let us row up into the Bay and watch the sun go down."

I pulled along leisurely, facing my fair companion, who was now reclining in the stern, with the sinking sun shining in all its golden glory upon the golden glory of her.

Moment by moment, the changing colours in the sky were altering the colours on the smooth waters to harmonise: a lake of bright yellow gold, then the gold turned to red, a sea of blood; from red to purple, from purple to the palest shade of heliotrope; and, as the sun at last dipped in the far west, the distant mountains threw back that same attractive shade of colour.

It was an evening for kind thoughts.

We glided up the Bay, past Jake Meaghan's little home; still further up, then into the lagoon, where not a ripple disturbed that placid sheet of water: where the trees and rocks smiled down upon their own mirrored reflections.

We grew silent as the nature around us, awed by the splendours of the hushing universe upon which we had been gazing.

"It is beautiful! oh, so beautiful!" said my companion at last, awaking from her dreaming. "Let us stay here awhile. I cannot think to go home yet."

She threw her sweater-coat round her shoulders, for, even in the height of summer, the air grows chilly on the west coast as the sun goes down.

"You may smoke, Mr. Bremner. I know you are aching to do so."

I thanked her, pulled in my oars and lighted my pipe.

Mary Grant sat there, watching me in friendly interest, smiling in amusement in the charming way only she could smile.

"Do you know, I sometimes wonder," she said reflectively, "why it is that a man of your education, your prospective attainments, your ability, your physical strength and mental powers should keep to the bypaths of life, such as we find up here, when your fellows, with less intellect than you have, are in the cities, in the mining fields and on the prairies, battling with the world for power and fortune and getting, some of them, what they are battling for."

"I am not trying to probe into your privacy, but what I have put into words has often recurred to me regarding you. Somehow, you seem to have all the qualities that go to the making of a really successful business man."

"Do you really wonder why?" I smiled. "—And yet you profess to know me—a little."

It was an evening for closer friendships.

"If you promise for the future to call me George and permit me the privilege, when we are alone, of calling you Mary, I shall answer your query."

"All right,—George,—it's a bargain," she said. "Go ahead."

"Well! in the first place, I know what money is; what it can bring and what it can cause. I never cared for money any more than what could provide the plain necessities of life. As for ambition to make and accumulate money;—God forbid that I should ever have it. I leave such ambitions to the grubs and leeches."

Mary listened in undisguised interest.

"Oh! I have had opportunities galore, but I always preferred the simpler way,—the open air, the sea and the quiet, the adventure of the day and the rest after a day well spent.

"No man can eat more than three square meals a day and be happy; no man can lie upon more than one bed at a time;—so, what right have I, or any other man for the matter of that, to steal some other fellow's food and bedding?"

"But some day you may wish to marry," she put in.

"Some day,—yes! maybe. And the lady I marry must also love the open air, away from the city turmoil; she must hanker after the glories of a place such as this; otherwise, we should not agree for long.

"And,—Mary,—" I continued, "the man you would marry,—what would you demand of him?"

"The man I would marry may be a Merchant Prince or a humble tiller of the soil. A few things only I would demand of him, and these are:—that he love me with all his great loving heart; that

he be honourable in all things and that his right arm be strong to protect his own and ever ready to assist his weaker brother.

"Marriages may be made in heaven, George, but they have to be lived on earth, and the one essential thing in every marriage is love."

She sat for a while in thought, then she threw out her hands as if to ward off a danger.

"Of what use me talking in this way," she cried. "Marriage, for me, with my foolish ideas, is impossible. I am destined to remain as I am."

My pulse quickened as she spoke.

"And why?" I asked;—for this evening of evenings was one for open hearts and tender feelings.

"It was arranged for me that by this time I should be the wife of a man; and,—God knows,—though I did not love him, I meant to be a true and dutiful wife to him, even when I knew my eternal soul would be bruised in the effort.

"This man was taller than you are, George. Sometimes, in your devil-may-care moods, I seem to see him again in you. I am glad to say, though, the similarity ends there.

"For all his protestations of love for me, for all his boasted ideals, his anxiety for the preservation of his honour as a gentleman, he proved himself not even faithful in that which every woman has a right to demand of the man she is about to marry, as he demands it of her.

"I would not marry him then. I could not. I would sooner have died.

"That was my reward for trying to do my duty."

Her voice broke. "Sometimes, I wonder if any man is really true and honourable."

She covered her face with her hands; she, who had always been so self-possessed.

"The shame of it! The shame of it!" she sobbed.

In my heart, I cursed the dishonour of men. Would the dreadful procession of it never cease? Deceit and dishonour! Dishonour and deceit! Here, there, everywhere,—and always the woman suffering while the man goes free!

I moved over beside her in the stern of the boat. I laid my hand upon her shoulder. In my rough, untutored way, without breaking into the agony of her thoughts, I tried to comfort her with the knowledge of my sympathetic presence.

For long we sat thus; but at last she turned to me and her hair brushed my cheek. She looked into my eyes and I know she read what was in my heart, for it was brimming over with a love for her that I had never known before, a love that overwhelmed me and left me dumb.

"George!" she whispered softly, laying her hand upon mine, "you must not, you must not."

Then she became imperious and haughty once more.

"Back to your oars, sailorman," she cried, with an astonishing effort at gaiety. "The dark is closing in and Mrs. Malmsbury will be thinking all kinds of things she would not dare say, even if she were able."

Late that night, I heard the second verse of Mary's little song. It was hardly sung; it was whispered, as if she feared that even the fairies and sprites might be eavesdropping; but, had she lilted it in her heart only, still, I think, I should have heard it.

A maid there was in the North Countree;
A gay little, blythe little maid was she.
Her dream of a gallant knight came true.
He wooed her long and so tenderlee.
And, day by day, as their fond love grew,
Her spinning wheel stood with its threads askew;
It stood.—It stood.—It stood with its threads askew.

CHAPTER XXI

The Beachcombers

The Autumn, with its shortening days and lengthening nights, was upon Golden Crescent, but still the charm and beauty of its surroundings were unimpaired.

I never tired of the scenes, for they were kaleidoscopic in their changing. Even in the night, when sleep was unable to bind me, I have risen and stood by my open window, in reverie and peaceful contemplation, and the dark has grown to dawn ere I turned back to bed.

It was on such an occasion as I speak of. I was leaning on the window ledge, looking far across the Bay. The sea was a mirror of oily calm. A crescent moon was shining fairly high in the south, laying a streak of silver along the face of the water near the far shore. It was a night when every dip of an oar would threaten to bring up the reflected moon from the liquid deep; a night of quiet when the winging of a sea-fowl, or the plop of a fish, could be heard a mile away. In the stillness could be heard the occasional tinkle, tinkle of a cow-bell from the grazing lands across the Bay.

As I listened to the night noises, I heard the distant throb of a launch out in the vicinity of the Ghoul Rock. Suddenly, the throbbing stopped and I fancied I caught the sound of deep voices. All went still again, but, soon after, my ear detected the splashing of oars and the rattle of a badly fitting rowlock.

I watched, peering out into the darkness. The moon shot swiftly from under a cloud and threw its white illuminant like a searchlight sheer upon a large rowing boat as it crept up past the wharf, some fifty yards out from the point.

I counted five figures in the boat, which was heading up the Bay.

A cloud passed over the moon again and the picture of the boat and its occupants vanished from my sight.

Strange, I thought, why these men should arrive in a launch, leave it so far out and come in with a rowing boat of such dimensions, when there was good, safe and convenient anchorage almost anywhere close in!

I listened again. The sound of the rattling row-lock ceased and I heard the grinding of a boat's bottom on the gravel somewhere in the vicinity of Jake's cove.

I stood in indecision for some minutes, then I decided that I would find out what these men were up to. I put on my clothes without haste, picked up a broken axe-handle that lay near the doorway and started noiselessly down the back path in the direction of Meaghan's shack, reaching there about half an hour after I had first detected the boat. When I came to the clearing, I saw a light in the cabin. As I drew closer, I heard the sound of hoarse voices. Stepping cautiously, I went up to the window and peered through.

I saw four strange men there. The lower parts of their faces were masked by handkerchiefs in real highwaymen fashion.

With a dirty neckcloth stuffed into his mouth, old Jake was sitting on a chair and tied securely to it by ropes. Mike, his faithful old dog, was lying at his feet in a puddle of blood.

The liquor keg in the corner had been broached, and I could see that, already, the men had been drinking. Jake's brass-bound chest had been dragged to the middle of the floor and the man who appeared to be the leader of the gang was sitting astride of it, with a cup of liquor in his hand, laughing boisterously.

My anger rose furiously.

"The low skunks," I growled, gripping my improvised club as I tip-toed quietly to the door, hoping to rush in, injure some of them and stampede the others before they would know by how many they were being attacked.

I was gently turning the handle, when something crashed down on my head. I stumbled into the shack, sprawled upon the floor, strange voices sang in my ears and everything became blurred.

It could have been only a few minutes later when I revived. I was in Jake's cabin, and was trussed with ropes, hands and feet, to one of the wooden uprights of the old Klondiker's home-made bed. I could feel something warm, oozy and clammy, making its way from my hair, down the back of my neck.

I opened my eyes wide, and reason enough came to me to close them quickly again. Then I opened them once more, cautiously and narrowly.

Five strange men were now in the cabin, which was cloudy with tobacco smoke. The carousal had increased rather than otherwise. The men were gathered round Jake, laughing and cursing in wild derision. They were not interested in me at the moment, so I stayed quiet, making pretence that the unconsciousness was still upon me, whenever any of them turned in my direction.

Through my half-opened eyelids, I fancied I recognised the leader of the crowd as a black-

haired, beady-eyed, surly dog of a logger who had come in several times from Camp No. 2 to help with the taking up of their supplies,—but of his identity I was not quite certain.

As my scattered senses began to collect, I hoped against hope that these men would keep up their drinking bout until not one of them would be able to stand. But, while they drank long and drank deeply, they were too wise by far to overdo it.

Then I got to wondering what they were badgering old Jake about, for I could hear him growl and curse, his gag having fallen to the floor.

"Go to hell and take the trunk, the booze and the whole caboose with you, if you want to. I don't want none of it. I ain't hoggin' booze any more."

"Ho, ho! Hear that," yelled the big, black-haired individual, "he ain't boozin'! The old swiller ain't boozin' and him keeps a keg o' whisky under his nose.

"Ain't boozin' with common ginks like us,—that's what he means.

"Come on! We'll show him whether he ain't boozin' or not."

He got a cupful of the raw spirits and stuck it to Jake's mouth. But Jake shook his head.

"Come on! Drink it up or I'll sling it down your gullet."

Still Jake refused.

Then my blood ran cold, and boiled again. The veins stood out on my forehead with rage.

The foul-mouthed creature hit my old helper full across the mouth and a trickle of blood immediately began to flow down over Jake's chin.

I struggled silently with my ropes, but they were taut and merely cut into my flesh. But I made the discovery then, that my captors had failed to take into account that the bed to which they had tied me had been put up by Jake and, at that, not any too securely.

I felt that if I threw all my weight away from the stanchion to which I was bound, I might be able to pull the whole thing out bodily. But I knew that this was not the moment for such an attempt.

They were five men to one; they had sticks and clubs, maybe revolvers, so what chance would I have?

I decided to bear with the goading of Jake as long as it were possible.

"Guess you'll drink it now,—you old, white-livered miser," cried the dark man.

He dashed some of the liquor in Jake's face. Jake opened his mouth and gasped. The big bully then threw the remainder of the spirits, with a splash, sheer into Jake's mouth.

"He boozed that time, boys. You bet your socks!" he laughed uproariously. The others joined in the hilarity.

The Jake I looked upon after that was not the Jake I had known for the past few months.

He sat staring in front of him for a little while, then he exclaimed huskily, almost hungrily:

"Say, fellows! Give us some more. It tastes pretty good to me."

"Thought he would come to it," shouted the black-haired man triumphantly. "We ain't refusin' no booze to-night. Fetch a cup o' rye for Jake."

One of the others brought it, and it was held to the old man's lips. He let it over his throat almost at a single gulp.

"More,—more!"

More was brought, and again he drank.

Three times Jake emptied that brimming cup of raw spirits.

I shivered with abhorrence at the sight.

"More?" queried the big man.

"Yep! More," craved Jake.

"Nothin' doin'! You've had enough, you old booze-fighter.

"Say! How's that top-notch swell Bremner comin' on?"

He turned to me.

"Let's fill him up, too."

They came over to me, but I pretended still to be unconscious. My head was limply bent over my chest.

They jerked it up by my forelock and looked into my face.

The foulness of their breath almost nauseated me, but I stood the test, keeping my eyes tightly closed and allowing my head to flop forward the moment it was released from their clutch.

"What in the hell did you hit him so hard for?" cried the leader, turning savagely to the man at his left elbow. "We ain't lookin' for any rope-collars over this. Guess we'd better beat it. Get busy with that chest some of you. Come on!"

They raised their masks from their mouths and had another drink all round, then two of them, under the big man's directions, caught up the chest, and they all crowded out and down toward their boat.

The moment after they were gone I threw my weight and growing strength away from the upright to which I was bound. It creaked and groaned. I tried again, and still again. At the third attempt, the entire fixtures fell on top of me to the floor.

I struggled clear of the débris, and the rest was easy. I slipped the ropes from the wooden post and, in their now loosened condition, I wriggled free.

I did not wait to do anything for Jake, nor yet to consider any plan of operation. My blood was up and that was all I knew.

I picked my axe-handle from the floor and dashed out after the robbers.

The five men were with the boat at the water's edge. Two were sitting at the oars in readiness, two were on the beach raising Jake's trunk to the fifth man who was standing in the stern of the boat.

I sprang upon them. I hit one, with a sickening crash, over the head. He let go his hold of the trunk and toppled limply against the side of the boat, as the trunk splashed into the shallow water.

I staggered with the impetus, and from the impact of my blow let my club drop from my jarred hand. Before I could recover, the big man,—who had been helping to raise the trunk,—bore down on me. He caught me by the throat in a horrible grip, and tried to press me backward; but, with a short-arm blow, I smashed him over the mouth with telling force, cutting my knuckles in a splutter of blood and broken teeth.

His grip loosened. He shouted to his fellows for assistance as he sprang at me once more.

But, somewhere in the darkness behind me, a pistol-shot rang out and the big man staggered, letting out a howl of pain, as his arm dropped limp to his side.

He darted for the boat and threw himself into it, seized a spare oar and pushed off frantically.

"Pull,—pull like hell," he yelled.

They needed no second bidding, for they shot out into the Bay as if a thousand devils were after them.

I turned to ascertain who my deliverer could be; and there, on the beach, only a few yards away, stood Mary Grant with a serviceable-looking revolver held firmly in her right hand.

"What? You! Mary,—Mary," I cried in an agony of thought at the awful risk she had run.

"Are you all right, George?" she inquired anxiously.

"Right as rain," I answered, hurrying to her side.

"Did they get Jake's trunk away?"

"No! The low thieves! It is lying there in the water. Do you think you could help me up with it?"

She caught up the trunk at one end, while I took the other. And we carried it back between us to Jake's cabin.

Poor old Jake! I could hardly smother a smile as I saw the dejected figure he presented. His grey hair was drooping over his forehead, every line in his face showed a droop, and his long, white moustache drooped like the tusks of a walrus, or like the American comic journals' representations of the whiskers of ancient and fossilised members of the British peerage.

He was sitting bound, as the robbers had left him.

I cut him free and he staggered to his feet.

He was sober as a jail bird, and, excepting for his broken lip and chafed wrists, he was, to all appearances, none the worse for his experiences. It surprised me to notice how little he seemed interested in the recovery of his money. All his attention and sympathy were centred on the wretched dog, Mike, who was slowly getting over the clubbing he had received and was whimpering like a discontented baby.

Mike had a long gash in his neck, evidently made by one of the robbers with Jake's bread-knife. Mary washed out the wound and I stitched it up with a needle and thread, so that, all things considered, Mike was lucky in getting out of his encounter as easily as he did.

As for the crack I had received over the head, it had made me bloody enough, but it was superficial and not worth worrying about.

I decided I would not leave Jake alone that night and that, as soon as I had seen Mary safely home, I would return and sleep in his cabin till morning.

"When you come back," said Jake gruffly, "bring ink and paper with you. I want you to do some writin' for me, George."

I laughed, for I knew what was in his mind.

As Mary and I wended our way back through the narrow path, in the dead of that moonlight night, the daring and bravery of her action caught me afresh. How I admired her! I could scarcely refrain from telling her of it, and of how I loved her. But it was neither the time nor the place for protestations of affection.

"How in the world did you happen to get down there at the right moment?" I asked.

She gave a quiet ripple of laughter.

"I couldn't sleep and I was up and standing at the window——"

"Just as I was doing," I put in.

"I saw that boat come up,—as you must have seen it, George,—I went to the door, and, in the moonlight, I saw you come out and take the back path. Later still, I heard noises and the cursing of these men.

"I became afraid that something was wrong, so I dressed, took up my little revolver and followed you.

"I was at the window of Jake's cabin all the time he was being forced to drink and while you were tied up. I had to get out of the way when they came out."

At the door of Mary's house I took her hand in mine.

"We are quits now, Mary. Those blackguards certainly would have finished me off but for you.

"Where did you learn to shoot, you wild and woolly Westerner?" I asked.

"Why! Didn't I ever tell you? For quite a while, when I was a youngster, I lived on a ranch in the Western States. Everybody could shoot down there."

"But, what would you have said had you killed that big black robber or winged me?" I asked. "We were all in a higgledy-piggledy mix-up when you fired."

She smiled.

"I can generally hit what I aim at."

I nodded my head. "Ay! And I think you can hit sometimes even when you don't aim."

"George!" she admonished, "we were referring simply to shooting with a gun,—not with a bow and arrows."

CHAPTER XXII

Jake Stops the Drink for Good

By the time I got back to Jake, he had his bed hammered up into position again.

He insisted that I, as his guest, should occupy it, while he would enjoy nothing so well as being allowed to curl himself up in a blanket on the floor, in the company of the convalescing Mike.

"Say, George!—before we turn in, I want you to write two letters for me. I ain't goin' to have no more hold-ups round this joint. Them ten thousand bucks is goin' to your bank;—what do you call it?"

"The Commercial Bank of Canada," I answered.

"Write a letter to them and ask them to send somebody up to take this darned chest away. A receipt looks good enough to me after this scrap."

He smoked his pipe reflectively as I wrote out the letter to the Bank Manager, asking him to send up two men to count over Jake's hoard and take it back with them, giving him a receipt to cover.

"Know any good lawyers, George? Most of them ginks are grafters from away back,—so I've heard,—but I guess maybe there's one or two could do a job on the level."

"Of course there are, Jake. Dow, Cross & Sneddon for instance. They are Mr. Horsfal's lawyers and solicitors. They are straight, honest business men, too."

"Guess they'll fill the bill, all right."

"What is on your mind, Jake?" I asked.

"Write them as well, George. Tell them to send up a man who can draw up a will. I ain't dead yet,—not by a damn' sight,—but some day I'll be as dead as a smelt, and what's the good o' havin' dough if you ain't got nobody to leave it to?"

"Good boy!" I cried, and I wrote out letter number two, asking the lawyers, if possible, to send their representative along with the Commercial Bank men, so that we could get the whole business fixed up and off-hand at the one time.

Next morning when I awoke, although it was still early, I found Jake already dressed. Not only that, but he was at the whisky-keg in the corner, filling up a cup.

"My God! Jake,—you don't mean to tell me you are back to that stuff?"

"Yep! I ain't preachin' tee-total any more after this."

My heart sank within me. This,—after all his fighting.

I remonstrated with him all I could.

"But, man alive!" I said, "this is the early morning. Are you crazy? You never drank in the mornings before. Wait till night time. Give yourself a chance to get pulled together. You'll be feeling different after a while."

"Think! What will Rita say? What will Miss Grant think? How will you be able to face Mr. Auld? They all know of the good fight you have been putting up."

"Jake,—Jake,—for shame! Throw the stuff out at the door."

Jake only shook his head more firmly.

"It ain't no good preachin', George, or gettin' sore,—for I've quit tryin'."

"What'n the hell's the good, anyway. The more you fight, the rawer a deal you get in the finish. Forget it! I'm drinkin' now whenever I'm good and ready; any old time at all and as much as I want,—and more."

I could do no more for him. It was Jake for it.

I stopped the southbound *Cloochman* that afternoon and put Jake's letters aboard. Two days later, two clerks from the Commercial Bank and a young lawyer from Dow, Cross & Sneddon's came into Golden Crescent in a launch. I took them over to Jake Meaghan's. I introduced them, then busied myself outside while the necessary formalities were gone through, for I did not wish to be in any way connected with Jake's settlements. At last, however, the old fellow came to the door.

"George,—I guess you'd better take care o' them for me. That's my bank receipt. That's my death warrant," he grinned, "I mean my will. You're better'n me at lookin' after papers."

We carried the brass-bound trunk to the launch and waved it a fond farewell, without tears or regrets.

For two weeks, morning, noon and night, Jake indulged in a horror of a drinking bout.

The very thought of that orgy still sets my blood running cold.

We pleaded, we threatened; but of no avail. The minister even closeted himself with Jake for a whole afternoon without making the slightest impression on him.

It was always the same old remark:

"I've boozed for ten years and it ain't hurt me, so I guess I can booze some more."

And the strange feature of it was that the more he drank the more sober he seemed to become. He did his work as well as ever. His eyes retained their same innocent, baby-blue expression and his brain was as clear as a summer sky.

One Sunday forenoon, I was busy in the yard taking down my Saturday's washing from the clothes line, when Jake's dog, Mike, came tearing along the back path, making straight for me. That, in itself, was an unusual thing, for Mike never showed any violent affection for any one but Jake and he was more or less inclined to shun me altogether.

Now, he stood in front of me and barked. I kept on with my work. He followed every step I took and kept on barking and yelping excitedly, looking up into my face.

"What the dickens is the matter, old man?" I asked.

When he saw me interested in him, he turned and ran down toward the beach. I did not follow.

He came back and went through the same performance. Then he got angry and caught me by the foot of the overalls, trying to pull me in the direction he wanted.

It struck me then that an old stager, like Mike was, would not misbehave himself as he was doing for the mere fun of it. I left my newly dried clothes and followed him. He ran on ahead and into my boat, getting up on the side and barking toward Jake's place.

I became anxious. I pushed off hurriedly and rowed as hard as I could up the Bay in the direction of the cove.

As I was turning in at Jake's landing, Mike grew excited again, running to the right side of the stern and whining.

"What on earth can the dog mean?" I soliloquised, making up my mind to call in at the shack first, at any rate, and investigate.

But Mike jumped out of the boat and swam off further up, turning back to me every few yards and yelping.

The dog evidently knew more than I did, so I followed him.

He led me to Jake's favourite clam-hunting ground.

As soon as I turned into that little cove, I saw my old helper lying on his back on the beach. I pulled in and hurried over to him.

The dog was there before me, his tongue out and his tail wagging as if to say:

"It is all right now."

The old man's eyes were wide open and glazed. He was blowing stentoriously through his closed mouth and a white ooze was on the corners of his lips. His body was tense and rigid, as if it had been frozen solid in the Arctic snows.

Poor old Jake! I knew what had seized him. I had seen something of the trouble before.

I lifted him gently and carried him into the boat, pushing off and rowing as quickly as possible for his home.

I got him into bed, but it was an hour before he showed any signs of consciousness, for I could do nothing for him,—only sit and watch.

At last he recognised me and tried to talk, but his speech was thick and nothing but a jabber of sounds.

He cast his eyes down his right side as if to draw my attention to something. His eyes, somehow, seemed the only real live part of him. I examined him carefully and saw what he meant.

Poor fellow! Tears ran down my cheeks in pity for him.

His right side was numb and paralysed.

I hurried over to Mary's. She and Mrs. Malmsbury returned with me and attended him, hand and foot, until the minister came in late that afternoon.

Mr. Auld was a medical missionary, and he confirmed what I had feared. Jake had had a stroke.

The only articulate words Meaghan uttered in his mumblings were, "Rita, Rita, Rita." Again and again he came over the name. At last I promised him I would run over and bring her to him.

That seemed to content him, but his eyes still kept roving round restlessly.

Mr. Auld injected some morphine through Jake's arm in order to give his brain the rest that it evidently sorely needed.

"There is little we can do, George," said the minister. "He may be all right to-morrow, but for his physical helplessness;—and, even that may abate. Between you and me, I pray to God he may not live."

"But what can have caused it, Mr. Auld?"

"If Jake only could have been able to drink as other men do,—drink, get drunk and leave off,—he never would have come to this. His constitution was never made for such drinking as he has indulged in. No man's constitution is."

"Are you going to send him down to the city?" I asked.

"Not if you will bear with him here. It would do no good to move him. I would advise his remaining here. He will be happier, poor fellow. I shall run in early to-morrow."

I fetched Rita over that night and she remained with the old miner right along.

Her cheery presence brightened up the stricken man wonderfully.

Next day, he could talk more intelligibly and, with help, he got up and sat on a chair.

The Rev. William Auld called and left a jar containing some hideous little leeches in water. He gave me instructions that, if Jake took any sudden attack and the blood pressure in his head appeared great, I was to place two of these blood-sucking creatures on each of his temples, to relieve him.

He showed me how to fix them to the flesh.

"Once they are on, do not endeavour to pull them off," he explained. "When they have gorged themselves, they will drop off. After that, they will die unless you place them upon a dish of salt, when they will sicken and disgorge the blood they have taken. Then, if you put them back into a jar of fresh water, they will become lively as ever and will soon be ready for further use."

"I hope to God I may not have to use them," I exclaimed fervently, shuddering at the gruesome thoughts the sight of the hideous little reptiles conjured up in me.

And I was saved from having to participate in the disgusting operation, for, at the end of the week, Jake was seized through the night for the second time. Toward morning, he revived and spoke to Rita and me like the dear old Jake we used to know.

"Guess I got to pass in my checks, folks. I ain't been very good neither. But I ain't done nobody no harm as I can mind;—nobody, but maybe Jake Meaghan.

"Say, George! You like me,—don't you?"

"I like you for the real gentleman you are, Jake," I answered, laying my hand on his brow.

"You like me too, Rita,—don't you?"

"You bet I do!" she replied, dropping back into the slang that Jake best understood.

He was happy after that and smiled crookedly. But, in the early morning, a violent fit of convulsions, in all its contorting agonies, caught hold of him. His head at last dropped back on Rita's arm and Jake Meaghan was no more.

I covered up his face with a sheet, and we closed the door, leaving the faithful Mike alone by the bedside.

I led the little, sorrowing Rita down to her boat and kissed her as I sent her across the Bay, home. Then, with a leaden heart, I went back, to sit disconsolately in my own cottage, feeling as if I had lost a part of myself in losing my old, eccentric, simple-minded friend.

I opened up the papers Jake had left in my care and, as I read his will, it made me feel how

little I knew of him after all and what a strange way he had of working out his ideas to what he considered their logical conclusion.

His will was a short document, and quite clear.

He wished to be buried in Vancouver. All he possessed, he left to Rita 'because Rita was always a good girl.' If Rita married George Bremner, the ten thousand dollars lying in the bank was to become her own, under her immediate and full control; but, should she marry any other man, or should she remain unmarried for a period of three years from Jake's death, this money was to be invested for her in the form of an annuity, in a reliable insurance company whose name was mentioned.

He left Mike, the dog, to the care of George Bremner.

The more I thought over that will, the more I cogitated over what was really at the back of Jake's mind.

Did he think, in some way, that there was an understanding between Rita and me? or, as probably was more likely, was it an unexpressed desire of his that Rita,—my little, mercurial pupil, Rita,—and I should marry and settle down somewhere at Golden Crescent?

Alas! for old Jake. Who knows what was in that big, wayward heart of his?

Mike kept faithful watch over Jake's body, until they came to take it away. He neither ate nor slept. He just lay on the floor, with his head resting on his front paws and his eyes riveted on the bed where Jake was.

We had to throw a blanket over Mike and hold him down bodily before the undertakers could remove his dead master.

All the way out to the steamer, we could hear Mike's dismal howling. Never did such cries come from any dog. They did not seem the howls of a brute, but the wailings of a human soul that was slowly being torn to shreds.

My heart ached more for that poor creature than it did even for Jake.

All afternoon, all through that first night and still in the early hours of the next morning, the dog sobbed and wailed as if its more-than-human heart were breaking.

At last, I could stand the strain no longer. I went down with some food and drink for him and in the hope that I would be able to pacify him and comfort him in his loss. But the moment I opened the door, he tore out, as if possessed, down on to the beach and into the water. Out, out he went, in the direction the steamer had gone the day before.

I got into Jake's boat and followed him as quickly as I could, but we were a long way out before I got up with him,—swimming strongly, gamely, almost viciously; on,—on,—heading for the Ghoul Rock and for the cross-currents at the open sea.

I reached alongside him, but always he sheered away.

I spoke to him kindly and coaxingly, but all I got from him in reply was a whimpering sob, as if to say:—

"Oh! you are only a human: how can you understand?"

I succeeded in catching hold of him and I lifted him into the boat. He struggled out of my grasp back into the water. Three times I brought him in and three times he broke from me and plunged into the sea, swimming always out and out.

I had not the heart to trouble him any more.

After all, what right had I to interfere? What right had I to try to go between the soul of a man and the soul of a dog?

"God speed!—you brave, old, lion-hearted Mike. God speed!" I cried. "Go to him. You were two of a kind. May you soon catch up with him, and may both of you be happy."

CHAPTER XXIII

The Fight in the Woods

I did not engage any one to fill Jake's place, for I felt that no man really could fill it. In any

case, with the approach of the wet, wintry weather, the work at Golden Crescent diminished. I did not have the continuous supplies to make ready for the Camps, such as they demanded in the summer months. When they called, they generally took away enough to last them over several weeks. Again, Jake had cut, sawn and stacked all my winter supply of firewood long before he took sick.

Taking all these things into consideration, I decided I would go through the winter, at least, without fresh help.

Mary Grant and Mrs. Malmsbury still remained at the cottage over the way.

Often I asked Mary,—almost in dread,—if she were going away during the stormier months, but she always said she had not made any arrangements so far.

Not once, but many times, I tried to break through the reserve which she had hedged round herself ever since our evening in the lagoon after our first fishing experience when we had drawn so near in sympathy to each other. I felt afraid lest I should forget myself some time and tell her all that was in my heart craving to be told, for something kept whispering to me that, if I did, I might lose her altogether.

Rita's lessons went on apace. Twice a week she came over in the evenings for instruction. She was quickly nearing the point where I would be of no further service, for I had imparted to her almost all I was capable of imparting in the way of actual grammar.

I hoped to be able to complete her course before Christmas came round. Then it would be merely a question of selection of reading matter.

Rita's manner of speaking had undergone a wonderful change. There were no slangy expressions now; no "ain'ts" or "I guess"; no plural nouns with singular verbs; no past participles for the past tense; no split infinitives. To all intents and purposes, Rita Clark had taken a course of instruction at a good grammar school.

And what a difference it made in her, generally! Even her dress and her deportment seemed to have changed with her new manner of speaking.

It is always so. The forward progress in any one direction means forward progress in almost every other.

Rita was a sweet, though still impetuous, little maiden that any cultured man might have been proud to have for a wife.

One rainy night, she and I were sitting by the stove in my front room. I was in an easy chair, with a book in my hand, while Rita was sitting in front of me on a small, carpet-covered stool, leaning sideways against my legs and supposedly doing some paraphrasing. A movement on her part caused me to glance at her.

She had turned and was staring toward the window and her eyes were growing larger and larger every moment. Her face grew pale, while her lips parted and an expression, akin to fear, began to creep into her eyes.

I turned my head hurriedly to the window, but all was dark over there and the rain was pattering and splashing against the glass.

Still, Rita sat staring, although the look of fear had gone.

I laid my hand on her shoulder.

"Rita, Rita!—what in the world is wrong?"

"Oh, George,—I,—I saw Joe's face at the window. I never saw him look so angry before," she whispered nervously.

I laughed.

"Why!—you foolish little woman, I looked over there almost as soon as you did, but I saw no one."

"But he was there, I tell you," she repeated.

I rose to go to the door.

"No, no!" she cried. "Don't go."

But I went, nevertheless, throwing the door wide open and getting a gust of wind and rain in my face as I peered out into the night.

I closed the door again and came back to Rita.

"Why! silly little girl, you must have dreamed it. There is no one there."

I tapped her on the cheek.

"I did not know Rita Clark was nervous," I bandied.

She looked dreamily into the fire for a while, then she turned round to me and laid her cheek against my knee.

"George!—Joe's been coming home more and more of late. He's been lots nicer to me than he used to be. He brought me a gold brooch with pearls in it, from Vancouver, to-day."

"Good for him!" I remarked.

"It was a lovely brooch," she went on. "I put it in my dress, it looked so pretty. Then Joe asked me to go with him along the beach. Said he wanted to talk to me. I went with him, and he asked me if I would marry him.

"Marry him, mind you!—and I have known him all my life.

"He said he didn't know he loved me till just a little while ago. Said it was all a yarn about the other girls he met.

"He was quiet, and soft as could be. I never saw Joe just the way he was to-day. But I don't feel to Joe as I used to. He has sort of killed the liking I once had for him.

"I got angry about the brooch then. I took it off and handed it back to him.

"Here's your brooch, Joe,' I said. 'I didn't know you gave it to me just to make me marry you. I don't love you, Joe, and I won't marry a man I don't love. You mustn't ask me again. You get somebody else.'

"Big Joe was just like a baby. His face turned white.

"You're in love with Bremner,' he said, catching me by the wrist. I drew myself away.

"I'm not,' I said. 'I like him better than I like any other man,—you included,—but I don't love him any more than he loves me.'"

Rita looked up at me and her eyes filled with tears.

"Ain't Bremner in love with you?' Joe asked.

"No!' I said.

"Then Joe got terribly mad.

"By God in Heaven!' he cried, 'I'll kill that son-of-a-gun, if I hang for it!'

"He meant you, George. He went off into the wood, leaving me standing like a silly.

"Say! George,—the way Joe said that, makes me afraid that some day he will kill you."

"Don't you worry your little head about that, Rita," I said.

"Oh!—that's all very well,—but Joe Clark's a big man. He's the strongest man on the coast. He's always in some mix-up and he always comes out on top. And I'm more afraid for you, because you are not afraid of him."

I rowed Rita across home that evening in order to reassure her, and, on our journey, neither sound nor sign did we experience of Joe Clark.

When the time came again for her next lesson, Rita seemed to have forgotten her former fears.

I had fixed up a blind over the window and had drawn it down, so that no more imaginary peering faces would disturb the harmony of our lesson and our conversation.

How long we sat there by the stove, I could not say; but Rita was soft, and gentle, and tender that night,—sweet, suppliant and loving. She was all woman.

When our lesson was over, she sat at my feet as usual. She crossed her fingers over my knee and rested her cheek there, with a sigh of contentment.

I stroked her hair and passed my fingers through the long strands of its black, glossy darkness, and I watched the pretty curves of her red, sensitive lips.

"Rita! Rita!" I questioned in my heart, as her big eyes searched mine, "I wonder, little maid, what this big world has in store for you? God grant that it be nothing but good."

I bent down and kissed her once,—twice,—on those soft and yielding upturned lips.

With terrifying suddenness, something crashed against my front window and broken glass clattered on the floor.

A great hand and arm shot through the opening and tore my window blind in strips from its roller. And then the hand and arm were withdrawn.

In the visual illusion caused by the strong light inside and the deep darkness without, we saw nothing but that great hand and arm.

I sprang up and rushed to the door, followed by Rita.

There was no sign of any one about. I ran round the house, and scanned the bushes; I went down on to the beach, then across the bridge over the creek, but I failed to detect the presence of any man.

I came back to Rita to ease her mind, and found her anxious yet wonderfully calm.

"George!—you need not tell me,—it was Joe. I know his hand and arm when I see them. He is up to something.

"Oh! You must be careful. Promise me you will be careful?"

I gave her my word, then I set her in her boat for home, asking her to wait for a moment until I should return.

Before setting her out on her journey, I wished to make perfectly sure that there was no one about. I again crossed the creek, past Mary's house, which was in complete darkness, and down on to her beach. There, hiding in the shelter of the rocks, was a launch, moored to one of the rings which Jake had set in at convenient places just for the purpose it was now being used.

I ran out and examined it. It was Joe Clark's.

So!—I thought,—he is still on this side.

I returned to Rita, wished her good-night and pushed her out on the water.

I came leisurely up the beach, keeping my eyes well skinned. But, after a bit, I began to laugh, chiding myself for my childish precautions.

I went into the kitchen, took an empty bucket in each hand and set out along the back path for a fresh supply of water for my morning requirements, to the stream, fifty yards in the wood, where I had hollowed out a well and boarded it over.

It was dark, gloomy and ghostly in the woods there, for the moon was stealing fitfully under the clouds and through the tall firs, throwing strange shadows about.

I had almost reached the well, when I heard a crackling of dead wood to my right.

A huge, agile-looking figure pushed its way through, and Joe Clark stood before me, blocking my path.

He held two, roughly cut clubs, one in each hand. His sleeves were rolled up over his tremendous arms; his shirt was open at the neck, displaying, even in the uncertain moonlight, a great, hairy, massive chest over which muscles and sinews crawled.

I scanned his face. His jaw was set, his lips were a thin line, his eyes were gleaming savagely and a mane of fair hair was falling in a clump over his brow. He looked dishevelled and was evidently labouring under badly suppressed excitement.

"Where's Rita?" he growled.

I put my buckets aside and took my pipe from between my teeth.

"Half-way home by this time, I hope," I said.

"She is,—eh!" he cut in sarcastically. "Guess so! Look here, Bremner,—what'n the hell's your game with Rita, anyway?"

I went straight up to him.

I did not want to quarrel. Not that I was afraid of him, even knowing, as I did, that I would be likely to get much the worse of any possible encounter;—but, for Rita's sake, I preferred peace.

"My good fellow," I said, "why in heaven's name can't you talk sense? I have no game, as you call it, with Rita.

"If you would only play straight with her, you might get her yourself. But I'll tell you this,—

skulking around other people's property, after the skirts of a woman, never yet brought a man anything but rebuffs."

"Aw!—cut out your damned yapping, Bremner," he yelled furiously. "Who the hell wants any of your jaw? Play straight the devil! You're some yellow cuss to talk to anybody about playin' straight."

It was all I could do to keep my temper in check.

"What d'ye bring her over to your place at night for, if you're playin' straight?" he continued.

"To teach her grammar;—that's all," I exclaimed.

"Grammar be damned," he thundered. "What d'ye put up blinds for if you're playin' straight?"

"To keep skulkers from seeing how respectable people spend their evenings," I shot at him.

"You're a confounded liar," he yelled, beside himself. "I know what you're up to, with your oily tongue and your Jim Dandy style.

"Rita was mine before you ever set your damned dial in Golden Crescent. She'd 've been mine for keeps by this time, but you got her goin'. Now you're usin' her to pass the time, keepin' men who want to from marryin' her."

With a black madness inside me, I sprang in on him. He stepped aside.

"No, you don't!" he cried. "Take that."

He threw one of his clubs at my feet.

"Fists ain't no good this trip, Mister Man. I was goin' to kill you, but I thought maybe it'd look better if we fight and let the best man win."

I stood undecided, looking first at this great mountain of infuriated humanity and then at the club he had tossed to me;—while around us were the great trees, the streams of ghostly moonlight and the looming blacknesses.

"Come on!—damn you for a yellow-gut. Take that up before I open your skull with this."

He prodded me full in the chest with the end of his weapon. I needed no second bidding. Evidently, it was he or I for it.

In fact, since the moment we first met at Golden Crescent that had been the issue with which I had always been confronted. Joe Clark or George Bremner!—one of us had to go down under the heel of the other.

I grabbed up the club and stood on guard for the terrific onslaught Joe immediately made on me.

He threw his arm in the air and came in on me like a mad buffalo. Had the blow he aimed ever fallen with all its original force, these lines never would have been written; but its strength was partly shorn by the club coming in contact with the overhanging branch of a tree.

I parried that blow, but still it beat down my guard and the club grazed my head.

I gave ground before Clark, as I tried to find an opening. I soon discovered, however, that this was not a fight where one could wait for openings. Openings had to be made, and made quickly. I threw caution to the winds. I drew myself together and rushed at him as he had rushed at me. His blow slanted off my left shoulder, numbing my arm to the finger-tips. Mine got home on a more vital place: it caught him sheer on the top of the head.

I thought, for sure, I had smashed his skull. But no such luck; Joe Clark's bones were too stoutly made and knit.

He gasped and staggered back against a tree for a second, looking dazed as he wiped a flow of blood from his face.

"For God's sake, man," I shouted, "let us quit this."

He laughed derisively.

"The hell you say! Quit,—nothin'; not till one of us quits for keeps."

He rallied and came at me once more, but with greater wariness than previously. He poked at me and jabbed at me. I warded him off, keeping on the move all the time. He swung sideways on me, but I parried easily; then, with a fierce oath, he caught his club with both hands, raised it high in the air and brought it down with all his sledge-hammer strength.

This time, I was ready for Joe Clark. I was strong. Oh!—I knew just how strong I was, and I

gloried in my possession.

I had a firmer grip of my cudgel than before. There was going to be no breaking through as he had done last time; not if George Bremner's right arm was as good as he thought it was.

I met that terrific crash at the place I knew would tell. With the crack of a gun-shot, his club shivered into a dozen splinters against mine, leaving him with nothing but a few inches of wood in his torn hands.

He stood irresolute.

"Will you quit now?" I cried.

But he was game. "Not on your life," he shouted back. "We ain't started yet. Try your damndest."

He tossed aside the remainder of his club and jumped at me with his great hands groping. I stepped back and threw my stick deliberately far into the forest, then I stopped and met him with his own weapons. After all, I was now on a more equal footing with him than I had been when both of us were armed.

We clinched, and locked together. We turned, and twisted, and struggled. He had the advantage over me in weight and sheer brute strength, but I had him shaded when it came to knowing how to use the strength I possessed.

We smashed at each other with our fists wherever and whenever we found an opening. Our clothes were soon in ribbons. Blood spurted from us as it would from stuck pigs.

Gasping for breath with roaring sounds,—choking,—half-blind, we staggered and swayed, smashing into trees and over bushes.

At last I missed my footing and stumbled over a protruding log, falling backward. Still riveted together,—Joe Clark came with me. The back of my head struck, with a sickening crash, into a tree and I knew no more.

When consciousness came back to me, I groaned for a return of the blessed sleep from which I had awakened, for every inch of my poor body was a racking agony.

A thousand noises drummed, and thumped, and roared in my head and the weight of the entire universe seemed to be lying across my chest.

I struggled weakly to free myself, and, as I recollected gradually what had happened to me, I put out my hands. They came in contact with something cold and clammy.

It was the bloody face of Joe Clark, who was lying on top of me.

I wriggled and struggled with the cumbersome burden that had been strangling the flickering life in me. Every effort, every turn was a new pain, but all my hope was in getting free.

At last, I got from under him and staggered to my knees. I was a very babe for weakness then. I clutched at the tree-trunk for support and raised myself to my feet. I looked down on the pale face of Joe Clark, as he lay there, the moon on his face disclosing a great open gash on his forehead.

Evidently, he had struck the tree, face on, with the same impact as I had done backward.

"Oh, God!" I groaned. "He is dead, ... Joe Clark is..."

Then the blissful mists and darkneses came over me again and I crumpled to the earth.

CHAPTER XXIV

Two Maids and a Man

When next I awoke, it was amid conflicting sensations of pains and pleasantnesses. My eyes gradually took in my surroundings. Instead of being in Heaven, or the other place of future abode as I fully expected to be, I was lying on my own bed, in my own room, in a semi-darkness.

A quiet, shadowlike form was flitting about. I followed it with my eyes for a while, enjoying the fact that it did not know that I was watching it. Then it tip-toed toward me and bent over me.

All my doubts and fears departed. After all, I was in Heaven; for Mary,—the Mary I so loved,

—was bending over me, crooning to me, with her face so near, and placing her cooling, soothing hand on my hot brow.

I must have tried to speak, for, as if far away, I could hear her enjoining me not to talk, but just lie quiet and I would soon be well.

She put a spoon to my mouth and, sup by sup, something warm, good and reviving slowly found its way down my throat.

What hard work it was opening my lips! What a dreadful task it was to swallow and how heavy my feet and hands seemed!—so heavy, I could not lift them.

As the singing voice crooned and hushed me, I grew, oh! so weary of the labour of swallowing and breathing that I dropped away again into glorious slumberland.

When again I opened my eyes, it was evening. My reading lamp was burning dimly on a table, near by. The air was warm from a crackling fire in the stove. Some one was kneeling at my bedside.

I looked along the sheets that covered me.

It was Mary.

All I could see of her head were the coils of her golden hair, for she had my hand in both her own and her face was hidden on the bed-spread. I could hear her voice whispering softly. She was praying. She repeated my name ever so often. She was praying that I might be allowed to live.

From that moment I lived and grew stronger. But I dared not move in case I might disturb her.

She rose at last and bent over my bandaged head. She scrutinised my face. As she leaned closer, I caught the fragrance of her breath and the perfume of her hair. And then,—God forgive me for my deceit! although, for such an ecstasy I would go on being deceitful to the end of time,—she stooped lower and her full, soft, warm lips touched mine.

I raised my eyelids to her blushing loveliness. I tried to smile, but she put her finger up demanding silence. She fed me again and new strength flowed through my veins.

What questions I asked her then! How did I get here? What day of the week was it? Was Joe Clark dead?

"Hush, hush!" she chided. "You must go on sleeping."

"But I can't sleep forever. Already I have been asleep for years," I complained feebly.

"Hush, then, and I will tell you."

She sat down by my bedside and I lay still and quiet as she went over what she knew.

"This is Saturday evening. I found you, lying unconscious,—dead as I thought,—out on the path, as I went for fresh water yesterday morning.

"I brought you here. I did not know what had befallen you. I was afraid you had been set upon by the thieves who tried to rob Jake Meaghan; but from what you have just said, it was Superintendent Clark who attacked you."

I nodded.

"Was he not lying there beside me,—dead?" I asked.

"Hush! There was no one near you; but the place looked as if a herd of buffalo had thundered over it."

I was puzzled, but I tried to laugh and the attempt hurt me.

"How did you get me here?" I interrupted.

"Now!" she said, "if you speak again, I will tell you nothing."

"I ran home for blankets. I got two poles and fixed the blankets to these. I rolled you over on to my improvised stretcher and trailed you here, Indian fashion. It was easy as easy. Mrs. Malmsbury was abed and I did not wish to disturb her just then. Later, when I got you here, she helped me to put you to bed.

"Oh! I am so glad that man did not murder you."

"But it would not have been murder, Mary," I put in. "It was a fair fight."

"But why should two, strong, clean-living young men want to fight? Don't answer me, George," she added quickly, "for I am merely cogitating. Men seem such strange animals to us women."

I smiled.

Other questions I asked, but Mary declined to answer and I had, perforce, to lie still, with nothing to do but follow her with my eyes wherever she went.

For one more day, she kept me on my back, bullying me and tyrannising over me, when I felt strong enough to be up and about my business.

Sometimes, when she came near enough, I would lay my hand over hers. She would permit the caress as if she were indulging a spoiled baby. Sometimes, I would lie with my eyes closed in the hope that she might be tempted to kiss me, as she had done before; but Mary Grant saw through the pretence and declined to become a party to it.

The Rev. Mr. Auld came during the early afternoon of that Sunday. He examined my bruises and contusions with professional brutality. He winked, and ordered me up, dressed and into a wicker chair,—for the lazy, good-for-nothing rascal that I was. And,—God bless his kindly old heart!—he told Mary I might smoke, in moderation.

He did not remain long, for he said he had been called to attend another and a very urgent case of a malady similar to mine, at Camp No. 2.

"Why!—that's Joe Clark's Camp," I said.

"I am well aware of the fact," said he. "If you ask any more questions or venture any more information, I shall order you back to bed and I shall cancel your smoking permit."

As he was going off, he came over to me and whispered in my ear:—

"Man!—I would give something for the power of your right arm."

All the remainder of that afternoon, Mary read to me, as I browsed [Transcriber's note: drowsed?] in an easy chair among cushions and rugs, stretching first one leg and then the other, testing my arms, trying every joint, every finger and toe, to satisfy myself that I was still George Bremner, complete in every detail.

Just as Mary was preparing to say good-bye to my little place, late that same day,—for her vigils over me were no longer necessary,—Rita Clark ran in, flushed with hurried rowing and labouring under a strong excitement. She flashed defiance at Mary, then she threw herself at my feet and sobbed as if her little heart would break.

I put my hand on her head and tried to comfort her, and, when I looked up again, she and I were alone.

"Rita, Rita!" I admonished.

"Oh!—no one told me," she wailed. "And it was all my fault. I know I should not have come when Joe was that way about it.

"If he had killed you! Oh! George,—if he had killed you!"

Her eyes were red from weeping and dread still showed in her expressive face.

"There, there," I comforted. "He did not kill me, Rita, so why worry?"

"I shall be back at work in the store to-morrow, same as before. Cheer up, little girl!"

"But nobody at the Camp can understand it," she went on with more composure. "They all knew there had been a fight. They were sure you had been killed, for nobody ever stands up against Joe without coming down harder than he does, and they say Joe was pretty nearly done for."

"How is he now?" I inquired, inquisitive to know if he were suffering at least some of what I had suffered.

"Mr. Auld just came in as I left. Joe's been unconscious for two days."

"Good!" I exclaimed, almost in delight.

Rita's face expressed a chiding her tongue refused to give.

"He only came to, when the minister got there this afternoon. Joe's arm is broken. Two of his ribs are stove in. He's bruised and battered all over. Mr. Auld says the hole in his forehead is the serious one. Thinks you must have uprooted a tree and hit him with it."

I laughed. But Rita was still all seriousness.

"He'll pull through all right. Minister says he'll be out in two or three weeks. Says it's a miracle how Joe ever got back to Camp. Must have crawled to the launch, looked after the engine and steered all the way himself, and him smashed up as he was. Funny he didn't come over home. Guess he didn't want any of us to know about it.

"They found his boat run up on the beach at Camp and him lying in the bottom of it, unconscious; engine of his boat still going full speed.

"Joe was delirious and muttering all the time:

"'I killed that son-of-a-gun, Bremner. I killed Bremner.'

"You know, George,—most of the men like Joe; for he's good to them when they're down and out. But none of them has much sympathy for him this time. Mr. Auld says they have heard him talk about doing you up ever since you came to Golden Crescent. And now, Joe's the man that's done up.

"Better for him if he had let you be.

"But, maybe after all, it is the best thing that ever happened,—for Joe, I mean. It will let him see that brute force isn't everything; that there never was a strong man but there was a stronger one still. Eh! George."

Rita's mood changed.

"But, if you and Joe quarrel again, I'm going to run away. So there.

"I'm not beholden to any one now,—thanks to dear old Jake Meaghan. I can get money,—all I want. Then maybe Joe'll be sorry.

"You won't fight any more, George? Say you won't!"

She put her arm round my shoulder and her cheek against mine, in her old coaxing way.

Dear little woman! It was a shame to have worried her as Joe and I had done.

"Well, Rita," I laughed, "I promise you I won't fight if Joe won't. And, anyway,—Joe is not likely to seek another encounter till his arm and ribs are well; and that will take six weeks all told. So don't worry yourself any more about what is going to happen six weeks hence."

As Rita started out for home, I rose to accompany her to the boat.

"No, no!" she cried. "Why!—you are under doctor's orders."

"I have to work to-morrow, Rita, so I might as well try myself out now, as later."

I was shaky at the knees, but, with Rita's arm round my waist, I managed to make the journey with little trouble.

As we got to her boat, Rita pouted.

"What's the matter now, little maid?" I asked.

"I don't think you like me any more, George,—after bringing this on you. And we've been pretty good pals too, you and I."

Her eyes commenced to fill.

"Why, foolish! Of course, we have been good pals and we are going to stay good pals right to the end; no matter what happens."

"Sure?" she asked, taking an upward, sidelong glance at me.

"Sure as that," I exclaimed. I put my hands round her trim waist, and, weak as I was, I lifted her up from the ground and kissed her laughing mouth.

She struggled free, jumped into the boat and rowed away, with a laugh and a blown kiss to me from her finger tips.

As I turned, I cast my eyes up along the wharf.

A figure was standing there, motionless, as if hewn in stone.

It was Mary Grant.

Her hands were pressed flat against her bosom as if she were trying to stifle something that should not have been there. Her face wore a strange coldness that I had never seen in it before.

I could not understand why it should be so,—unless,—unless she had misconstrued the good-

bye of Rita and me. But, surely,—surely not!

Slowly and laboriously, I made in her direction, but she sped away swiftly down the wharf, across the rustic bridge and into her cottage, closing the door behind her quickly.

As I sat by the fireside, thinking over what possibly could have caused Mary to behave so, something spoke to me again and again, saying:—

"Go over and find out. Go over and find out."

But I did not obey. My conscience felt clear of all wrong intent and I decided it would be better to wait till morning, when I would be more fit for the ordeal and Mary would have had time for second thoughts.

Had I only known what the decision meant to me; the hours of mental torment, the suspense, the dread loneliness, I would have obeyed the inner voice and hastened to Mary's side that very moment, stripping all wrong ideas and wrong impressions of their deceitful garments, leaving them bare and cold and harmless.

I did not know, and, for my lack of knowledge or intuition, I had to suffer the consequences.

Later in the evening, a yacht put into the Bay. It carried some ladies and gentlemen who had been on a trip to Alaska and were now returning south.

They called in for a few supplies, the getting of which I merely supervised. They asked and obtained permission from me to tie up at the wharf for the night.

After they had returned aboard and just as I was laboriously undressing, I heard music floating across from Mary's. It was the same sweet, entrancing, will-o'-the-wisp music that her touch always created.

But to-night, she played the shadowy, mysterious, light and elusive Ballade No. 3 of Chopin. How well I knew the story and how sympathetically Mary followed it in her playing! till I could picture the scenes and the characters as if they were appearing before me on a cinema screen:—the palace, the forest and the beautiful lake; the knight and the strange, ethereal lady; the bewitchment; the promise; the new enchantress, the lure of the dance, the lady's flight and the knight's pursuit over the marshes and out on to the lake; the drowning of the unfaithful gallant and the mocking laugh of the triumphant siren.

The music swelled and whispered, sobbed and laughed, thundered and sighed at the call of the wonderful musician who translated it.

I was bewitched by the playing, almost as the knight had been by the ethereal lady of the music-story.

Suddenly the music ceased. I thought Mary had retired to rest. But again, on the night air, came the introduction to the little ballad I had already heard her sing in part. Her voice, with its plaintive sweetness, broke into melody.

She lilted softly the first verse,—and I waited.

She sang the second verse. Again I waited, wondering, then hoping and longing that she would continue.

The third verse came at last and—I regretted its coming.

A maid there was in the North Countree;
A sad little, lone little maid was she.
Her knight seemed fickle and all untrue
As he rode to war at the drummer's dree.
And, day by day, as her sorrow grew,
Her spinning wheel groaned and the threads wove through;
It groaned.—It groaned.—It groaned and the threads wove through.

"What a stupid little song, after all!" I exclaimed. "Surely there must be another verse to it? Where does the happy ending come in?"

But, though I listened eagerly, no further sounds broke the stillness of the night save the sobbing and moaning of the sea and the hooting of a friendly owl in the forest behind.

CHAPTER XXV

The Ghoul

Next morning, I looked out upon a wet mist that hung over Golden Crescent like a spider's gigantic web all a-drip with dew.

My visitors of the previous night had gone three hours ago. I had heard them getting up steam, but I was still too weak and stiff to think of getting out of bed so early to see them off.

I turned, as usual, to watch the upward, curling smoke from Mary's kitchen fire. Strange to say, this morning there *was* no smoke.

"Taking a rest," I thought, "after her long watching and nursing over a good-for-nought like me! Ah, well!—I shall breakfast first then I shall pay my respects and ask forgiveness of the lady for 'the things I have done that I ought not to have done,' and all will be well."

I hurried over that porridge, and bacon and eggs. I dressed with scrupulous care, even to the donning of a soft, white, linen collar with a flowing tie.

"Surely," I reasoned, "she can never be cruel to me in this make-up."

When I started out, all seemed quiet and still over there at Mary Grant's.

With a feeling of disrupting foreboding, which dashed all my merriment aside, I quickened my footsteps.

The windows were closed; the door was shut tight. I knocked, but no answer came. I tried the door:—it was locked.

"Why! What can it be?" I asked myself.

My roving eyes lit on a piece of white paper pinned to the far post of the veranda. It was in pencil, in Mary's handwriting.

"George,

"There is yet another battle for you to fight. I am going away. Please do not try to find out where, either by word or by deed.

"Golden Crescent will always be in my thoughts. Some day, maybe, I will come back.

"God bless you and keep you, and may you ever be my brave and very gallant gentleman.

"Mary Grant."

I read it over, and over again, but it seemed as if the words would never link themselves together in my brain and form anything tangible.

Gone away! Oh, God! Meaghan gone;—Mary gone;—every one to whom my heart goes out leaves me the same way. What is it in me? Oh, my God! my God!

I staggered against the veranda rail for support, then, like a blind man groping for a path in a forest, I made my journey across the rustic bridge, and home.

I am not ashamed to own it: in my anguish and my physical weakness, I threw myself upon my bed and sobbed; sobbed until my sorrow had spent itself, until my spirit had become numbed and well-nigh impervious to all feeling.

In desperation, I threw myself into my work.

Never was store kept so clean nor in such a well-stocked condition as mine was; never was home so tidy.

I sawed timber, when there were stacks of it cut, piled and dry in my wood sheds. I built rafts. I repaired the wharf. I added barns to my outhouses, when, already, I had barns lying empty.

I insisted on delivering the requirements of every family in Golden Crescent, instead of having them take their goods from the store.

With no object in view, other than the doing of it, I tackled the wintry winds and the white-

tipped breakers, in my little rowing boat, when none other dared venture from the confines of his beach.

When the sea came roaring into the Bay, tumbling and foaming, boiling and crawling mountains high, breaking with all its elemental fury, I would dash recklessly into it and swim to Rita's Isle and back, with the carelessness and abandon of one who had nothing to live for.

As I look back on it all now, I feel that death was really what I courted.

Remonstrances fell on deaf ears. My life was my own,—at least, I thought it was,—my own to do with as I chose. What mattered it to any one if the tiny spark went out?

My books had little attraction for me during those wild, mad days. Work, work, work and absorption were all my tireless body and wearied brain craved for; and work was the fuel with which I fed them.

I was aware that the minister knew more of Mary's going and her present whereabouts than I did, and, sometimes, I fancied he would gladly have told me what he knew. But he could find no opening in the armour of George Bremner for the lodgment of such information.

Rita and he got to know, after a while, that the name of Mary Grant was a locked book and that Mary Grant alone held the key to it.

Christmas,—my first Christmas from home;—Christmas that might have been any other time of the year for all the difference it made to me, came and went; and the wild, blustering weather of January, with its bursts and blinks of sunshine, its high winds and angry seas, was well upon us.

There had been little to do in and around the store, so I was taking the excuse to row over to Clarks' with their supplies, intending to bring back any eggs they might have for my camp requirements.

It was a cold, blustery morning, with a high, whistling wind coming in from the Gulf. The sky was clear and blue as a mid-summer's day and the sun was shining as if it had never had a chance to shine before.

It was with difficulty that I got into my boat without suffering a wetting, but I was soon bobbing on the crest of the waves or lying in the troughs of the pale-green, almost transparent sea, making my way across the Bay, as the waves climbed higher and still higher, with white-maned horses racing in on top of the flowing tide.

It was hard pulling, but I was strong and reckless, fearing neither man nor elements.

Every minute of that forenoon brought with it an increasing fury of the storm; every minute greater volumes of water lashed and dashed into the Bay, until, away out, The Ghoul looked more like a waterspout than a black, forbidding rock.

Rita was surprised and angry at my daring in crossing, yet she could not disguise her pleasure now I was with her, for she chafed with the restrictions of a stormy winter and craved, as all healthy people do, for the society of those of her own age.

"Seems as if it's goin' to be a hurricane," remarked old Andrew Clark, looking out across the upheaving waters. "Never saw it so bad;—yet it's only comin' on.

"Guess you'll ha'e to stop wi' us the night, George."

"—And welcome," put in his good lady. "There's always a spare bed for George Bremner in this house. Eh! Andrew."

"Ay,—ay!" remarked the old man, reflectively. "We're no' havin' ye drooned goin' away frae this place,—that I'm tellin' ye."

Like me, Rita was a child of stress and storm. She loved to feel the strong wind in her face and hair. She gloried in the taste of the salt spray. She thrived in the open and sported in the free play of her agile limbs. Unafraid, and daring to recklessness, nothing seemed to daunt her; nothing, unless, maybe, it were the great, cruel, sharks' teeth of The Ghoul over which the sea was now breaking, away out there at the entrance to the Bay: that rock upon which she had been wrecked in her childhood; that relentless, devilish thing that had robbed her of her mother and of her birthright.

Even then, as she and I scampered and scrambled along the shore line, over the rocks and headlands,—whenever she gazed out there I fancied I detected a shudder passing over her.

For an hour, with nothing to do but pass the time, we kept on and on, along the shore, until we reached Neil Andrews' little house on the far horn of the Crescent, standing out on the cliffs.

We stood on the highest rock, in front of the old fisherman's dwelling, watching the huge waves rolling in and breaking on the headlands with deafening thundering, showering us with

rainbow sprays and swallowing up the sounds of our voices.

Rita kept her eyes away from the horrible rock, which seemed so much nearer to us now than when we were in the far back shelter of the Bay. And, indeed, it was nearer, for barely a quarter of a mile divided it from Neil's foreshore. But such a quarter of a mile of fury, I had never before seen.

Different from Rita, I could hardly take my eyes away from that rock. To me, it seemed alive in its awful ferocity. It was the point of meeting of three different currents and it gave the impression to the onlooker that it was drawing and sucking everything to its own rapacious maw.

Old Man Andrews saw us from his window and came out to us, clad in oilskins and waders.

"Guess it's making for a hum-dinger, George," he roared into my ears. "Ain't seen its like for a long time. God help anything in the shape of craft that gets caught in this. She's sprung up mighty quick, too.

"Got a nice cup of tea ready, Rita. Come on inside, both of you. It ain't often I see you up here. Come on in!"

But Rita was standing apart, straining her eyes away far out into the Gulf.

"What is it, lass?" shouted the old fellow. "See something out there?"

"It is a boat," she cried back anxiously. "Yes!—it is a boat."

Old Neil scanned the sea. "Can't see nothing, lass. Can you, George?"

I followed the direction of Rita's pointing.

"I'm not quite sure," I answered at last, "but it looks to me as if there was something rising and falling away there to the right."

Neil ran into the house for his telescope.

"By God!" he cried, "it's a tug. She's floundering like a duck on ice. Steering gear gone, or something! Hope they can keep heading out for the open, or it's all up with them," he said.

We watched the boat for a while, then we turned into the house and partook of the old fellow's tea and hot rolls.

In half an hour, we went out again.

"George, George!" cried Rita, with a voice of terror, looking back to us from her position on the high rock. "Quick!—they are driving straight in shore."

We ran up beside her and looked out.

The tug,—for such it was,—was coming in at a great rate on the crest of the storm, beam on. Water was breaking over her continuously as she drove, and drove,—a battered, beaten object,—straight for The Ghoul.

We could see three men clinging to the rails.

Rita was standing, transfixed with horror at the coming calamity which nothing on earth could avert.

Old man Andrews closed his telescope with a snap.

"Guess you'd better go inside, Rita," he spoke tenderly.

"No, no!" she cried furiously, her lips white and her eyes dilated. "You can't fool me. That's Joe's tug. Give me that glass. Let me see."

"Better not, Rita. 'Tain't for gals."

"Give it to me," she cried savagely. "Give it to me."

She snatched the instrument from him and fixed it on the vessel. Then, with that awful pent-up emotion, which neither speaks nor weeps, she handed back the telescope to the fisherman.

We stood there against the wind, as doomed and helpless Joe Clark's tug crashed on to the fatal Ghoul. It clung there, as if trying to live. Five,—ten,—fifteen minutes it clung, being beaten and ripped against the teeth of the rock; then suddenly it split and dissolved from view.

Neil had the telescope at his eye again. He handed it to me quickly. "George!—look and tell me. D'ye see anybody clinging there to the far tooth of The Ghoul? My eyes ain't too good. But, if yon's a man, God rest his soul."

I riveted my gaze on the point.

There I could see as clearly as if it were only a few yards off. Even the features of the man who clung there so tenaciously I could make out.

"My God! It is Joe Clark," I exclaimed in excitement.

With the cry of a mother robbed of her young, Rita dashed down the rocks to the cove where Neil Andrews' boat lay. She pushed it into the water and sprang into it, pulling against the tide-rip like one possessed. I darted after her, but she was already ten yards out when the boat swamped and was thrown back on the beach.

Just as the undertow was sucking Rita away, I grabbed at her and dragged her to safety.

"Let me go! Let me go!" she screamed, battering my chest. "It's Joe. It's my Joe. He's drowning."

I held her fast.

She looked up at me suddenly with a strange quietness, as if she did not understand me and what I did. As she spoke, she forgot her King's English.

"Ain't you goin' to help him? It's Joe. You ain't scared o' the sea. You can do it. Get him to me, George. Oh!—get me Joe. I want him. I want him. He's mine."

I grasped her by the arm and shook her, as I shouted in her ear:

"Do you love Joe,—Rita;—love him enough to marry him if I go out for him?"

"Oh, yes, yes! Get him, George. I love Joe. I always loved him."

In that moment, I made up my mind.

"If we come back, little woman," I cried, "it will be down there at the end of the Island. Run home;—get grand-dad and the others in some boats. It isn't so bad down there. Watch out for us.

"If I don't come back, Rita,—dear, little Rita——"

I took her face in my hands and pressed my lips on hers.

I ran from her, up over the cliffs, away to the far side of the horn, where the eddy made the sea quieter. I threw off my boots and superfluous clothing and sprang into the water. Out, out I plunged, and plunged again, keeping under water most of the time, until at last I got caught in the terrible rush three hundred yards straight out from the point.

I well knew the dreadful odds I was facing, yet I was unafraid. The sea was my home, almost as much as the land. I laughed at its buffeting. I defied it. What cared I? What had I to lose?—nothing! And,—I might win Joe for Rita, and make her happy.

In the very spirit of my defiance, I was calling up forces to work and fight for me, forces that faint-heartedness and fear could never have conjured to their aid.

On,—on I battled,—going with the rush,—holding back a little,—and easing out, and out, all the time toward the Rock.

Half an hour passed;—perhaps an hour,—for I lost count of time and distance in my struggling. But, at last, battered and half-smothered, yet still crying defiance to everything, I found myself rising with a mountainous sea and bearing straight upon The Ghoul. As I was lifted up, I strained my eyes toward the teeth of the rock.

Joe Clark,—that Hercules of men,—was still hanging on desperately:—no hope in his heart, but loth as ever to admit defeat, even to the elements.

With tremendous force, I was thrown forward. As the wave broke, I flashed past Joe in the mad rush of water. I grabbed blindly, feeling sure I should miss,—for it was a thousand chances to one,—but I was stopped up violently. I tightened my clutch in desperation. I pulled myself up, and clasped both hands round the ledge of the rock, clinging to it precariously, my nails torn almost from my fingers. My hands were touching Joe's. My face came up close to his. Almost he lost his hold at the suddenness of my uncanny appearing.

He shouted to me in defiance, and it surprised me how easily I could hear him, despite the hiss and roar of the waters. I could hear him more easily than I had heard Rita on the beach at Neil Andrews', so long, long ago.

"My God! Bremner,—where did you come from? What d'ye want?" he shouted.

"I want you, Joe," I cried, right into his ear. "Rita sent me for you,—will you come?"

"It ain't no good," he replied despairingly;—"nobody gets off'n this hell alive."

"But we shall," I yelled. "Rita wants you. She loves you, Joe. Isn't that worth a try, anyway?"

"You bet!" he cried, as the water dashed over his face, "but how?"

I screamed into his ear again.

"Let go when I shout. Drop on your back. After that, don't move for your life. Leave the rest to me. Don't mind if you go under. It's our only chance."

He nodded his head.

I waited for an abatement of the surge.

"Now!" I yelled, as a great, unbroken swell came along.

Away we whirled on top of it; past the side of The Ghoul like bobbing corks,—into the rip and race of the tide,—sometimes above the water, most of the time under it,—gasping,—choking,—fighting,—then away,—in great heaving throws, from that churning death.

How brave Joe was! and how trusting! Not a struggle did he make in that awful ordeal. He lay pliable and lightly upon me, as I floated up the Bay,—or wherever the current might be taking us. But there was only one direction with that flowing tide, after we had passed The Ghoul, and I knew it was into the Bay. So quiet did Joe lie, that I began to think the life had gone out of him. But I could do nothing for him; nothing but try, whenever possible, to keep his head and my own out of the sea.

How long I struggled, I cannot tell. My arms and legs moved mechanically. I took the battering and the submerging as a matter of course. A pleasing lethargy settled over my brain and the terror of it all went from me.

When twenty minutes, or twenty years, might have flown, my head crashed against something hard. I turned quickly. I seized at the obstruction. It was a log from some broken boom. I threw my arm around it for support, then I caught Joe up and pulled his hand over it. In a second, he was all life. He clutched the log tightly, and hung on.

Thus, he and I together,—enemies till then, but friends against our mutual foe, the storm,—floated to safety and life.

I remember hearing voices on the waters and seeing, in a blur, Joe's giant body being raised into a boat. But, of myself, I remember not a thing.

Later on, they told me that, as soon as they hoisted Joe, I let go my hold on the log, as if I had no further interest in anything, no more use for life.

But old Andrew Clark was too quick for me. He caught me by the arm and clung on, just as I was going down.

And it was Joe Clark,—despite all he had gone through,—who carried me in his great strong arms from the beach to his grand-dad's cottage, crooning over me like a mother. It was Joe who fed me with warm liquids. It was Joe I saw when I opened my eyes once more to the material world.

"Shake hands, old man," he said brokenly, "if mine ain't too black. Used to think I hated you, George. I ain't hatin' anything or anybody no more. You're the whitest man I know, Bremner, and you got me beat six days for Sunday."

CHAPTER XXVI

"Her Knight Proved True"

I was leaning idly against a post on my front veranda, watching the sun dancing and scintillating on the sea; listening the while to the birds in the woods behind me as they quarrelled and fought over the choosing of their lady-loves for the coming spring.

I was thinking of how the time had flown and of the many things that had happened since first I set foot in Golden Crescent, not so much as a short year ago.

Already a month had slipped by since I had wished good-bye to little Rita,—happy, merry, little, laughing Rita,—and her great, handsome giant of a husband, Joe; holding the end of the rope ladder for them, from my rowing boat, as they clambered aboard the *Siwash*, at the start of their six months' honeymoon trip of pleasure and sight-seeing.

What an itinerary that big, boyish fellow had arranged for the sweet, little woman he had won!—Vancouver, Victoria, Seattle, San Francisco, Los Angeles, all the big cities in the States right through to New York, then back again over the Great Lakes, across the Western Prairies, up over the Rockies and home:—home to the pretty bungalow that was already well on the way toward completion, out there on the promontory just below their grand-dad's place.

A warning toot from the *Cloochman* awoke me from my reveries. I ran to my small boat and pulled out as she came speeding into the Bay.

There was little cargo, and less mail—one single letter. But what a wonder of wonders that letter was! It was for me, and, oh! how my heart beat! It was in the handwriting I had seen only a few months before but had learned to know so well.

I tore the envelope into pieces in my haste to be at the contents.

Dear George, it ran,

Reta and Joe (Mr. & Mrs. Clark) called to see me. If you only could see the happiness of them, how you would rejoice! knowing that you had brought it all about.

Every day from now, look for me at the little cottage across the rustic bridge; for, some day, I shall be there. Golden Crescent is ever in my thoughts.

Good-bye for the present, my brave and very gallant gentleman.

Mary.

In my little rowing boat, out there in the Bay, I cried to God in thankfulness for all his goodness.

Every day I looked across to Mary's bungalow, wondering if this would be the day.

I was loth to sleep, lest she should arrive without my knowing of it. I could hardly bear to leave home for even an hour in case she should come when I was away. And yet,—so it happened.

Late one afternoon, I was standing on Clark's veranda, chatting with Margaret over a letter that had arrived from Rita; when I noticed a fast-moving launch dart into the Bay full speed, straight for my landing, lower a dinghy, land some people, then turn and speed out again almost before my brain could grasp the full purport.

I dashed suddenly away from my old lady friend, without so much as a word of explanation. I tumbled into my boat and rowed furiously for home. How I railed at that long half-hour! To think of it,—Mary in Golden Crescent half-an-hour and I had not yet spoken to her!

I jumped ashore at last, ran up the rocks and into her house without ceremony.

"Mary, Mary!" I called. "Where are you?"

And all I heard in answer, was a sigh.

I pushed in to the front parlour, where Mary,—my Mary,—was. She was standing by the window and had been gazing dreamily out into the Bay. She turned to me in all the charm of her golden loveliness, holding out her hands to me in silent welcome.

I took her hands in mine and we looked into each other's eyes for just a moment, then I caught her to me and crushed her in my embrace.

"Mary,—Mary,—Mary!" I cried brokenly. "Mary,—Mary!"

Gently and shyly, but smiling in her gladness, she freed herself from my enfolding arms.

"George,—sit down, dear. I have much to tell you before—before——"

A blush spread over her cheeks and she turned away in embarrassment.

"—Before what, Mary?" I craved.

"Before—I can listen to you.

"George!—I love you with all my heart. I have always loved you,—I could not help myself. That, I think, is why I quarrelled with you so,—at first. But I was afraid that my loving would avail me little and would probably cause you pain, for I was pledged to marry a man I did not love; and, because of that pledge, I was not free to give my love to any other man.

"George!—that man is dead now. He died a month ago in a street riot with some natives in

Cairo.

"All his sins are covered up with him," she sighed. "And, after all, maybe Harry Brammerton was not——"

"Harry Brammerton!—" I cried, springing up in a tremble of excitement. "My God! Oh, my God! I thought,—I,—I understood,—I—I—oh, God!"

I clutched at the table for support as the awful truth began to dawn on me.

Mary rose in alarm.

"Why! What is it? What have I said? George,—didn't you know? Didn't I tell you before? You have heard of him?—you are acquainted with him,—Viscount Harry Brammerton—"

"Oh! Mary, Mary," I cried huskily, "please,—please do not go on. It is more than I can bear now.

"I didn't know. I,—I am that man's brother. I am George Brammerton."

She stood ever so quietly.

"You!—You!" she whispered. And that was all.

Thus we stood,—stricken,—speechless,—under the cloud of the unexpected, the almost impossible that had come upon us.

Yet Mary, or rather Rosemary, was the first to regain her composure. Kindly, sweetly, she came over to me and placed her hands on my shoulders. Her brown eyes were wells of sympathy and tenderness.

"George,—we each must fight this out alone. Come back to me in the morning. I shall be waiting for you then."

And I left her.

But it seemed to me as if the morning would never come.

Unable to bear the burden of my thoughts longer amid the confines of my rooms, I went out at last into the moonlight, to wait the coming of the dawn.

As I stood out on the cliffs,—where old Jake Meaghan so often used to sit listening to Mary's music,—she came to me; fairylike, white-robed, all tenderness, all softness and palpitating womanliness.

"George,—my George," she whispered, "I could not wait till morning either.—And why should we wait, when my father's and your father's pledge, the vow they made for you and for me,—although we have not known it till now,—need not be broken after all."

I caught her up and kissed her lips, her eyes, her hair,—again and again,—until she gasped, thinking I should never cease.

With our arms around each other, we waited on the cliffs for the sunrise. We watched it come up in all its rosy loveliness, paling the dying moon and setting the waters of the Bay ablaze.

"And we must leave all this, my Lady Rosemary?" I said, with a sigh of regret.

"For a time,—yes! But not altogether, George; not always; for the little bungalow behind us is mine now,—ours; a gift last Christmas to me from my father's dear American friend, my friend, Colonel Sol Dorry, with whom, in Wyoming, I spent the happiest of all my girlhood days."

"Mary,—Rosemary," I exclaimed, as an unsatisfied little thought kept recurring to me, refusing to be set aside even in the midst of our great happiness,—"there is a little maid 'in the North Countree' in whom I am deeply interested. The last I heard of her, she had been jilted by her lover. Didn't he ever come back to her?"

Rosemary laughed.

"It is getting near to breakfast-time; so, if George, Earl of Brammerton and Hazelmere, Storekeeper at Golden Crescent, runs over home and listens very attentively while he is burning his porridge and *boiling* his tea,—he may hear of what happened to that sweet, little maid."

And, sure enough, as I stood, with my sleeves rolled up, stirring oatmeal and water that threatened every minute to stick to the bottom of the pot; there came through my open window the sounds of the bewitching voice of Rosemary,—my own, my charming Lady Rosemary:—

A maid there is in the North Countree;
A coy little, glad little maid is she.
Her cheeks are aglow with a rosy hue,

For her knight proved true, as good knights should be.
And, day by day, as their vows renew,
Her spinning wheel purrs and the threads weave through;
It purrs. It purrs. It purrs and the threads weave through.

THE END

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK MY BRAVE AND GALLANT GENTLEMAN: A
ROMANCE OF BRITISH COLUMBIA ***

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