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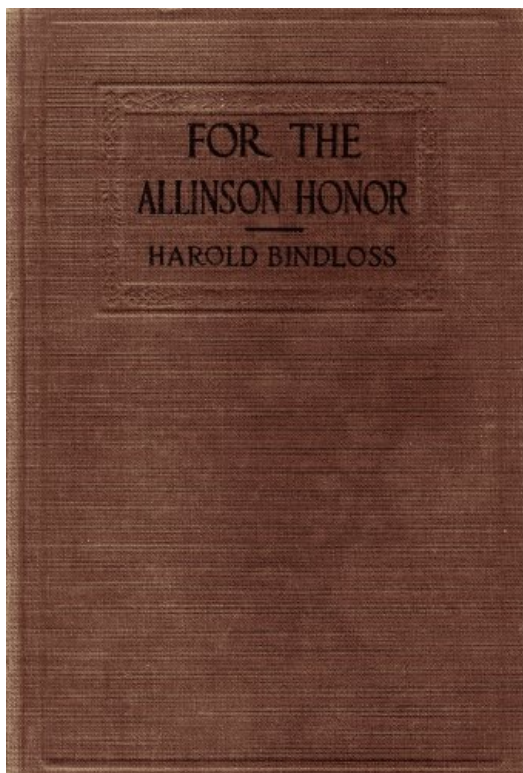
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"TWO MORE APPEARED ... DRAGGING ALONG A THIRD"—[Page 48](#)

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# FOR THE ALLINSON HONOR

BY  
HAROLD BINDLOSS

AUTHOR OF  
PRESCOTT OF SASKATCHEWAN, WINSTON  
OF THE PRAIRIE, ETC.

FRONTISPIECE  
By CYRUS CUNEO

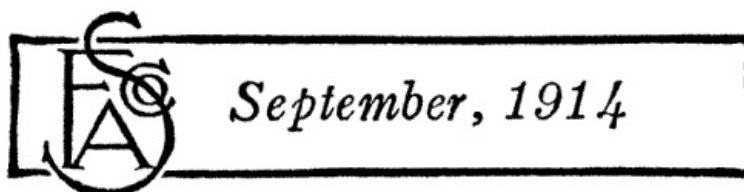


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## FOR THE ALLINSON HONOR

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### CHAPTER I

#### THE TENANT AT THE FIRS

It was a hot autumn afternoon. Mrs. Olcott, a young and attractive woman, reclined in a canvas chair beside a tea-table on the lawn in front of the cottage she had lately taken in the country. Her thin white dress displayed a slender and rather girlish form; her dark hair emphasized the delicate coloring of her face, which wore a nervous look. As a matter of fact, she felt disturbed. Clare Olcott needed somebody to take care of her; but she had few friends, and her husband held a government appointment in West Africa. His pay was moderate and he had no private means. His relatives justified their neglect of his wife by the reflection that he had married beneath him; and this was why he had commended her, with confidence, to the protection of a friend.

Andrew Allinson, who had made Olcott's acquaintance when serving as lieutenant of yeomanry during the Boer campaign, sat on a grassy bank near by with a teacup in his hand. He was strongly built and negligently dressed, in knickerbockers and shooting jacket. The bicycle he had just ridden leaned against the hedge. Andrew had lately reached his twenty-ninth year. He had large blue eyes that met you with a direct glance, a broad forehead, and a strong jaw. On the whole, he was a good-looking man, but his characteristic expression was one of rather heavy good-humor. Though by no means stupid, he had never done anything remarkable, and most of the Allinsons thought him slow.

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Raising himself a little, he looked slowly round. Beyond the hedge the white highroad climbed a bold ridge of moor that blazed in the strong sunshine with regal purple; farther back, smooth-topped hills faded into an ethereal haziness through varying shades of gray. The head of the deep valley near the house was steeped in blue shadow, but lower down oatfields gleamed with ocher and cadmium among broad squares of green. There were flowers in the borders about the tiny lawn, and creepers draped the front of the house. The still air was filled with the drone of bees; all was eminently peaceful.

"How do you like the place?" he asked. "It's nicer than London in weather like this, and you're looking better than you did when I saw you there."

Mrs. Olcott gave him a grateful smile.

"I haven't regretted leaving town. I was miserable and scarcely saw anybody after Tom sailed. Our small flat was too far from the few people I knew; and even if it had been nearer, I couldn't entertain. I was feeling very downhearted the day you called."

Andrew remembered having found her looking very forlorn in a dingy and shabbily furnished room. She was sitting at a writing-table with a pile of bills before her, about which she had made a naive confession.

"I'm glad you find things pleasant here; I thought you would," he said.

"It's so fresh and green. In the morning and at sunset the moorland air's like wine. Then the house is very pretty and remarkably cheap."

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She looked at him sharply, for he had found the house for her; but he answered with heavy calm.

"I don't think it's dear."

After that there was a few moments' silence, during which they heard the soft splash of a stream falling into the valley. Then he turned to her with a resolute air.

"And now, about those bills? You have put me off once or twice, but I want to see them."

Mrs. Olcott colored and hesitated, but she opened a drawer in the table and took out a bundle of papers, which she handed to him. To her surprise and consternation, he counted them before he put them into his pocket.

"These are not all. Give me the others."

"I can manage about the rest," she protested.

"Let me have them; you can't begin here in difficulties."

Mrs. Olcott rose and he watched her enter the house with quiet pity. She was not a capable woman, and he was thankful that she had not got into worse embarrassments. She came back, still somewhat flushed, and gave him a few more papers.

"I'm afraid I'm a wretchedly bad manager," she confessed. "As soon as my next remittance comes, I will send you a check."

"When it suits you," he said, and added thoughtfully: "One of us should tell your husband about this; perhaps it had better be you."

She smiled, for he was now and then boyishly ingenuous. He sat directly opposite the gate, where all passers-by could see him, and he had somehow an unfortunate air of being at home in the place.

"Yes," she said, "I will write by the first mail. I feel less embarrassed because Tom told me that if I was ever in any difficulty I might consult you. He described you as the right sort—and I have found it true."

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"I suppose you know that I owe a good deal to your husband," Andrew answered awkwardly.

"He told me that you and he were in the field hospital together for a time, and before then he helped you in some way when you were wounded, but he never said much about it. What did he do? You may smoke while you tell me."

"I think you ought to know, because it will show the claim Tom has on me."

Andrew lighted a cigarette and began in a disjointed manner, for he was not a fluent speaker:

"It was a dazzlingly bright morning and getting very hot—our side had been badly cut up in the dark, and we were getting back, a mixed crowd of stragglers, a few miles behind the brigade. Tom and Sergeant Carnally, the Canadian, had no proper business with the wreck of my squadron, but there they were. Anyhow, only half of us were mounted, and when we found ourselves cut off we tried to hold a kopje—the horses back in a hollow, except mine, which was shot as I dismounted. I was fond of the poor faithful brute, and I suppose that made me savage, for I felt that I must get the fellow who killed it."

He paused and his face hardened.

"There we were, lying among the stones, with the sun blazing down on us; faint puffs of smoke on the opposite rise, spirts of sand jumping up where the Mauser bullets struck. Now and then a man dropped his rifle and the rest of us set our teeth. It wasn't a spectacular fight, and we kept it up in a very informal way; two or three commissioned officers, dismounted troopers, and a few lost line Tommies, firing as they got a chance. The man I wanted had gone to earth beside a big flat stone, and I dropped the bullets close about it; a hundred yards I made it and the light good. I suppose I was so keen on my shooting that I didn't pay much attention when somebody said they were flanking us; and the next thing I knew a Boer had put a bullet in my leg. Anyhow, I couldn't get up, and when I looked round there was no one about. Then I must have shouted, for Tom

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came running back, with the sand spirting all round. Carnally was behind him. It looked like certain death, but Tom got hold of me, and dragged me a few yards before Carnally came up. Then we all dropped behind a big stone, and I'm not clear about the rest. Somebody had heard the firing and detached a squadron with a gun. But I can still picture Tom, running with his face set through the spirting sand—one doesn't forget things like that."

The blood crept into Clare Olcott's pale cheeks and her eyes shone. No one could have doubted that she admired and loved her absent husband.

"Were you not with Carnally when he broke out of the prison camp?" she asked presently.

"I was. Our guard was friendly and careless, and we picked up a hint of a movement we thought our army ought to know about. We were caged in behind a very awkward fence, but I'd found a wire-nipper in the sand—they were used to cut defense entanglements. Then we held a council and decided that somebody must break out with the news, but while two men might do so, more would have no chance to dodge the guard. Carnally and I were picked, and after waiting for a dark night we cut the wire and crawled out, close behind a sentry we hadn't seen. Of course, knowing what we did about the Boers' intentions, we couldn't give up our plan."

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Mrs. Olcott recognized that Andrew Allinson was not the man to abandon a duty, though he was unarmed and the sentry carried a magazine rifle.

"Well," he resumed, "I crept up and seized the fellow by the leg. He dropped his rifle, and Carnally slipped away. We'd arranged that if we got out one was not to stop for the other."

"But what happened to you? Did the Boer pick up his rifle?"

"No," said Andrew quietly; "I got it first."

"But——" said Mrs. Olcott, and stopped.

Andrew smiled.

"You see, he had called out when I grabbed him and several of his friends were running up. I didn't think he'd noticed Carnally, who had got clear off, and there was a chance of its being some time before they missed him. Then the fellow had shown us one or two small favors—given me some tobacco, among other things he might have got into trouble for."

"Ah!" said Mrs. Olcott expressively. "So you let them take you back to prison. But what about the Canadian?"

"He got through safely and they made a fuss over him. Offered him a commission, which he was too sensible to take."

"Tom came home promoted and got his West African appointment; Carnally could have had a commission; and you went back to prison. Though of course they deserved it, didn't it strike you that the rewards were not very fairly shared out?"

"I believe my people were disappointed when I returned as undistinguished as I went out, though I don't know that they were surprised. So far as I was concerned, it was an inglorious campaign—twice in a hospital, and some months in a prison camp. And yet, I'll admit that I left England determined on doing something brilliant."

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Mrs. Olcott made no remark. He did not seem to attach much importance to the incident that had secured his comrade's escape. His conduct was not of the kind that catches the public eye, but her husband, whose opinion was worth having, believed in Allinson.

"Well," he resumed, "I've stayed some time. Are you sure you're quite comfortable here? There's nothing you feel short of?"

"Oh, no," she said. "I ought to be happy. It's perhaps a trifle quiet: nobody has called on me yet."

"I dare say that can be altered," he replied; and though she did not suppose her solitude was likely to be enlivened at his request, she gave him her hand gratefully and let him go.

Picking up his bicycle, he wheeled it up the road, which wound between yellow harvest fields and dark-green clover to the long ascent of the moor. Here the gray stone walls broke off and the open heath ran up, steeped in strong color: the glowing crimson of the ling checkered with the purple of the heather, mossy patches showing lemon and brightest green, while the gaps from which peat was dug made blotches of rich chocolate-brown. Andrew noticed it all with quiet appreciation, though he was thinking hard as he slowly climbed the hill. He had made Mrs. Olcott a promise, and he meant to keep it, but the thing was beginning to look more difficult than he had imagined. His sisters might have helped him by recognizing the lonely woman, but they had shown some prejudice against her, and this was unfortunate, for their attitude would have its effect on their neighbors.

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The Allinsons were people of importance in the countryside and the history of the family was not without romance. Long ago an Andrew Allinson had become possessed, by violence most probably, of a strong stone peel, half fortress, half farmstead, that commanded a fertile dale up which the Scots moss-troopers often rode to the foray. Little was known of his descendants, except that they held the peel for several generations and were buried with a coat of arms roughly cut upon their tombstones in a moorland kirkyard. Then had come a break, when they

were perhaps driven out by economic changes, for the family vanished from the dale and next appeared as London goldsmiths in Queen Anne's reign. Later, Andrew's grandfather, retiring from his banking business, resumed the coat of arms, bought back the peel and built a commodious house about it. On his death it was discovered that his property had shrunk in value owing to changing times, and his shrewd north-country widow gave up the hall and coat of arms and made her son reopen the family business. He had prospered and maintained the best traditions of the ancient firm, for Allinson & Son was noted for caution, decorum and strict probity. The firm was eminently sound and carried on its business in an old-fashioned, austere way.

To its head's keen disappointment, his only son, Andrew, showed no aptitude for commerce, and after two years in the counting-house was allowed to follow his own devices. Then on the marriage of Andrew's sister to a clever young business man, the latter was made a partner. Soon after this Andrew's father died, leaving him a large share of his money, which was, however, to remain in the business, over which his brother-in-law, Leonard Hathersage, now had control.

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When the gradient grew easier Andrew mounted, but got down again with a frown a few minutes later. The Boer's nicked bullet had badly torn the muscles of his thigh, and now and then the old wound troubled him. Though he loved horses, he could no longer ride far with pleasure, and, being of active temperament, had taken to the bicycle.

He had not gone far before he saw a girl ride out from behind a grove of gnarled spruce firs and he joined her when she pulled up her horse to wait for him. Ethel Hillyard looked well in the saddle: tall and rather largely built, she was nevertheless graceful and generally characterized by an air of dignified repose. Now, however, there was amusement in the fine gray eyes she fixed on Andrew.

"You look moody, and that's not usual," she said.

They were old friends, and Andrew answered her confidentially.

"I've been thinking and, for another thing, I found I couldn't get up this bit of a hill. I suppose it oughtn't to worry me, but it does. You see, a lameness that comes on when I least expect it is all I brought back from South Africa."

Ethel gave him a sympathetic nod as she started her horse.

"It's a pity, but you might have suffered worse; and, after all, distinction is sometimes cheaply gained."

"You don't win it by keeping people busy curing you and seeing that you don't break out of prison camps," Andrew retorted grimly.

"But what else were you thinking of that disturbed you?"

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"My thoughts were, so to speak, all of a piece—one led to another. I did nothing in South Africa, and it has struck me lately that I haven't done much anywhere else, except to catch salmon in Norway and shoot a few Canadian deer. Now there's Leonard, who's not an Allinson, making money for all of us and managing the firm."

"Leonard got money and the opportunity for making more from Allinson's."

"That's true, but it doesn't excuse me. I ought to be a power in the firm, and I don't suppose I could even keep one of its books properly."

He walked on in silence for the next minute or two and his companion watched him with interest. His brows were knit, his brown face looked strong as well as thoughtful, and Ethel did not agree with his relatives, who thought him a bit of a fool. She was inclined to believe that Leonard had spread that impression and the others had adopted it without consideration. Andrew had been idle, but that was his worst fault, and he might change. There was, however, nothing significant in his taking her into his confidence; he had often done so, though she realized with half regretful acquiescence that it was only as a confidante that he thought of her. He could not have chosen a better one, for Ethel Hillyard was a girl of unusual character, and she now determined to exert her influence for his benefit.

"Isn't Allinson's rather branching out of late?" she asked.

"It is. The West African goldfield was a new kind of venture, though it's paying handsomely; and we're now taking up a mine in Canada. Of course, the old private banking business has gone under and one must move with the times; but, in a sense, it's a pity."

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Ethel understood him. Her father had dealt with Allinson's and she knew the firm had hitherto been dignified and conservative, while Leonard was essentially modern in his methods and what is known as pushing. She foresaw disagreements if Andrew ever took an active part in the business, which he had a right to do.

"Perhaps it isn't necessary that you should be good at bookkeeping," she said. "Is there no place for you in these new foreign schemes? You have traveled in the Canadian bush to shoot deer, and you seemed to like it; wouldn't it be as interesting if you went there to look for minerals or manage a mine? You would have the free life in the wilds, but with an object."

"There's something in that," Andrew replied thoughtfully. "I happen to know the country where

the mine is and it's unusually rough. It's curious that you have made a hazy idea I've had a little clearer. I'll think over the thing."

Ethel knew that she had said enough. She would miss the man if he went away, but it would be better for him and she knew that she would never have more than his liking.

"Where is the mine?" she asked.

"It's among the rocks some distance back from the Lake of Shadows in western Ontario."

"The Lake of Shadows!" Ethel exclaimed. "A friend I made in London used to go there with her father for fishing and shooting; but that's not important."

"Well," said Andrew, "I've talked enough about myself. There's a favor I want to ask. Will you call on Mrs. Olcott?" [Pg 12]

Ethel started. Mrs. Olcott was young and pretty; nobody knew anything about her husband; Andrew's visits had already excited comment.

"Why should I call?" she inquired.

He gave her the best reasons he could think of for befriending the lonely woman, and she pondered them for a moment or two. Then she asked bluntly:

"How was it that Mrs. Olcott chose this neighborhood, where she knows nobody?"

"I suggested it," said Andrew, simply. "The Firs was empty, and she has few friends anywhere."

Though she had attached no importance to the remarks that had been made about him, Ethel found his unembarrassed candor reassuring. He had, however, asked her to do something that was harder than he imagined, and she hesitated.

"Very well," she said; "I will call."

"Thanks. I knew I could count on you."

They had now reached the top of the hill, and Ethel took a crossroad while Andrew mounted his bicycle, but she turned her head, and watched him ride across the moor. Andrew, however, did not look back at her, and by and by she urged her horse to a trot.

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## **CHAPTER II**

### **THE FAMILY PRIDE**

The hall which Andrew's grandfather had built around the peel had for years been let with its shooting rights. Ghyllside, however, where Andrew lived, was a commodious house, and Leonard Hathersage was frequently glad to spend a week-end there. He and his wife had arrived on the previous evening, and he was now busy in the library while Andrew sat talking to his sisters on the terrace.

Though the light was fading, it was not yet dark, and the air was still and fragrant with flowers. Yew hedges and shrubberies were growing indistinct; a clump of firs in a neighboring meadow loomed up black and shadowy, but a band of pale saffron light still shone behind the hall on the edge of the moorland a mile away. The square peel stood out harsh and sharp against the glow, the rambling house with its tall chimneys trailing away into the gloom on its flanks.

Andrew, who had early lost his mother, had three sisters. Florence, Leonard's wife, his senior by several years, was a tall, prim and rather domineering woman; Gertrude, who had married Antony Wannop, a local gentleman, was gentler and less decided than her sister; Hilda, the youngest of all, was little, dark, and impulsive.

Wannop leaned on the terrace wall between the flower urns with a cigar in his mouth. He was stout and generally marked by a bluff geniality.

"Where did you go this afternoon, Andrew, when you wouldn't come with us to the Warringtons'?" Hilda asked. [Pg 14]

Andrew would have preferred to evade the question, but that seemed impossible.

"I went to see Mrs. Olcott."

"Again!" exclaimed Hilda, who prided herself on being blunt.

Wannop chuckled softly, but Florence claimed Andrew's attention.

"Don't you think you have been there often enough?"

"It hasn't struck me in that light."

"Then," replied Florence, "I feel it's time it did."

"Come now!" Wannop broke in. "Three to one is hardly fair. Don't be bullied, Andrew; a bachelor can be independent."

"How do you make it three?" Hilda asked. "Only Florence and I mentioned the matter."

"I am, of course, acquainted with Gertrude's views," Wannop explained.

Hilda laughed. Antony, with his characteristic maladroitness, had somehow made things worse, and Andrew's face hardened. His sisters were generally candid with him, but they had gone too far. With a thoughtlessness he sometimes showed, he had told them nothing about his acquaintance with Clare Olcott's husband.

"You're not much of an ally," he said with a dry smile. "Anyway, as there's no reason why I shouldn't go to The Firs, I'm not likely to be deterred. I may as well mention that I met Ethel Hillyard and begged her to call."

"On Mrs. Olcott?" Florence cried. "What did she say?"

"She promised."

The astonishment of the others was obvious, but Hilda was the only one who ventured to express it. [Pg 15]

"Andrew, you're a wonder! You haven't the least idea of scheming, and you'd spoil the best plot you took a hand in, and yet you have a funny, blundering way of getting hard things done."

"You have hinted that I was a bit of a fool," said Andrew; "but I don't see why this should be hard."

As an explanation was undesirable, Hilda let his remark pass and addressed the others.

"He has beaten us and we may as well give in gracefully. If Ethel goes, all the people who count will follow her."

"There's more in Andrew than his friends suspect," Wannop observed, laughing.

They let the subject drop, and Florence went in search of her husband.

"What's your opinion of Allinson's new policy, Andrew?" Wannop asked.

"I don't know what to think. One can be too conservative nowadays, but I'll confess that I liked the firm's old-fashioned staidness better. Even the old dingy offices somehow made you feel that the Allinsons were sober, responsible people. The new place with its brass-work, plate-glass and gilding was somewhat of a shock to me; but the business is flourishing. Mining speculation was quite out of my father's line, but Leonard makes it pay."

"I've a few thousands in the African concern," Wannop remarked with complacent satisfaction. "As it looks as if I'd get my money back in about seven years, I wish I'd put in twice as much."

Hilda let her eyes rest on the fading outline of the grim old peel.

"Well," she said, "I don't agree with Leonard's methods. They're vulgarly assertive, and the new offices strike me as being out of place. Allinson's ought to be more dignified. Even when we stole cattle from the Scots in the old days we did so in a gentlemanly way." [Pg 16]

"Is stealing ever gentlemanly?" Wannop inquired.

"It's sometimes less mean than it is at others. Though I've no doubt that we robbed the Armstrongs and the Elliots, I can't think that we plundered our neighbors or took a bribe to shut our eyes when the Scots moss-troopers were riding up the dale. The Allinsons couldn't have betrayed the English cause, as some of the Borderers did."

"No," said Wannop, "it would certainly have been against their traditions. And in times that we know more about, nobody has ever questioned the honor of the House."

Andrew looked up with a reserved smile.

"I don't think it's likely that anybody ever will."

He got up and started toward the house.

"I must have a talk with Leonard," he said.

When he had left them, Wannop turned to the others.

"Now and then you can see the old stock in Andrew; and, after all, he has a controlling interest in the firm."

"Andrew may not do much good," Hilda declared, "but he'll do Allinson's no harm. He'll stick to the best of the old traditions." She paused with a laugh. "Perhaps we're silly in our family pride and sometimes think ourselves better than our neighbors with very little reason; but it's a clean pride. We're a mercantile family, but Allinson's has always ranked with the Bank of England."

When Andrew reached the library, his brother-in-law sat at a writing-table on which stood a tall silver lamp. The light fell in a sharply defined circle on the polished floor, which ran back beyond [Pg 17]



it into shadow. The windows at the western end were open and, for it was not quite dark yet, the long rows of bookcases, dimly visible against the wall, emphasized the spaciousness of the room. The scent of flowers that drifted in was mingled with the smell of a cigar, and as Andrew's footsteps echoed through the room Leonard laid down his pen. The strong light fell upon him, showing his thin face and tall, spare figure. His hair receded somewhat from his high forehead, and he had the colorless complexion of a man who lives much indoors; but his eyes were singularly penetrating. Dressed with fastidious neatness he had an air of elegance and, by comparison, made Andrew, who was of robuster build, look heavy and awkward.

"I'm glad of an excuse for stopping," he said. "Will you sit down and smoke?"

"What are you doing? I thought you came here for a rest," said Andrew, lighting a cigarette.

"The firm is a hard task-master, and it's difficult to get a few minutes undisturbed in town. That's why I brought these papers down. Writing a prospectus is a business which demands both caution and imagination. Would you like to see the draft?"

"I thought a boundless optimism was the most essential thing," Andrew replied, taking the paper handed him. "You're moderate," he continued when he had read it. "Ten per cent. is all you promise, though as far as my experience goes, twenty's the more usual thing."

"Allinson's does not promise more than it can fulfill."

"That's true and quite in accordance with my views. Until lately, however, prospectuses were very much out of our line."

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Leonard was surprised and annoyed. Andrew was associating himself with the business in an unusual manner; although he had a right to do so.

"If there's anything you wish to ask, I shall be glad to explain it."

"These underwritten shares—I suppose you're letting the fellows have them below par? Is that because you expect any difficulty in getting the money?"

"No; any project we're connected with will be taken up. Still, when you launch a good thing, it's policy to let a few members of the ring in at bottom and give them a share of the pickings."

Andrew frowned.

"It sounds like a bribe. But these pickings? They must come out of the shareholders' pockets."

"In the end, they do."

"Though I'm not a business man, it seems to me that capital put into shafts and reducing plant stands a fair chance of being productive. That spent in starting the concern is largely wasted."

"We are spending less than usual. May I ask what your idea of the object of floating a company is?"

"Mine would be the expectation of getting a good dividend on the stock I took in it."

Leonard looked amused.

"Excellent, so far as it goes; but there's sometimes a little more than that."

Andrew sat silent a while. Then he said:

"I gather that this new scheme will be subscribed for because Allinson's guarantees it."

"It's impossible to guarantee a mining scheme, but, in a sense, you're right. The firm's name will count."

"Well," said Andrew, "I'd like to go to Canada and take some share in starting things—you see, I know the country. Then, as I suppose some of my money will be put into the business, you might, perhaps, make me a director. I'd be of no use in London, but I might do something in Canada."

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Leonard was surprised, but the suggestion pleased him. The name of Andrew Allinson would have its influence on investors.

"It is not a bad idea," he said. "We'll see what can be done."

Andrew then changed the subject.

"How's business generally?"

"Pretty fair; we have made some profitable ventures in South America. You will remember my bringing Señor Piñola down? We made some money out of him."

"How?" Andrew asked without much interest. "The fellow had a dash of the nigger or Indian in him."

"He was Dictator Valhermosa's secret agent."

"Then you supported Valhermosa's administration during the unsuccessful revolution?"

"We did. They wanted to re-arm the troops quietly in preparation; Piñola came over to buy new

rifles and machine-guns, and as he couldn't pay ready money we arranged the matter. There was a risk, but we got some valuable concessions as security, and turned them over afterward to a German syndicate on excellent terms."

Andrew's face was grim when he looked up.

"And I gave Piñola two days' shooting instead of pitching him into the nearest bog! To think of Allinson's backing that brute Valhermosa is somewhat of a shock."

"What do you know about him?"

"A good deal. Warren, the naturalist who was with me in Canada, spent some time in his country and has friends there. He used to talk about the things he'd seen, and the memory of his stories makes me savage yet, because I believe them. I have other acquaintances who have lived in parts of the world that business men don't often reach. If you don't know how rubber's collected and minerals are worked in countries where there's a subject native population, you'd better not find out." Andrew broke into a harsh laugh.

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"You didn't suspect that while the firm helped the Dictator, I, its sleeping partner, gave Warren a check for the rebels, and I'd like to think that every cartridge my money bought accounted for one of the brutes who flog women to death and burn Indians at the stake when the revenue falls off."

Leonard looked grieved.

"I'm sorry to hear this; though it's possible that Warren was exaggerating. Anyway, we're out of it now. The deal was a matter of business—we couldn't be expected to know what was being done in the back-country, and after all it's no concern of ours."

Lighting another cigarette, Andrew smoked half of it in silence.

"The thing will hardly bear speaking of," he said finally; "and the fault is partly mine for not taking the interest in the firm I should have done."

He paused and looked Leonard steadily in the face.

"From what I've heard, those concessions may be good for another two or three years; and then, when Valhermosa's victims revolt again, if Allinson's can take any hand in the matter, it will be on the other side. Now we'll let the subject drop."

Leonard acquiesced with a tolerant gesture, though he was disconcerted by Andrew's tone. It implied that his opinions would have to be considered in the future.

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"By the way," Leonard said, "there's a matter I must mention, though it's delicate. I saw Judson this morning and he grumbled about the liberality you have shown of late."

"Judson's niggardliness has lost me one or two good tenants."

"It's possible; but he told me that you had let The Firs to Mrs. Olcott for ten pounds less than he could easily have obtained. As he's a talkative fellow and nothing is kept secret here, do you think you were wise in letting her have the place below its value?"

"You have been given a hint, Leonard. What do you know about Mrs. Olcott?"

"Nothing. The point is that nobody else seems to know anything. I merely wished to suggest that it might be well to be more cautious."

The color crept into Andrew's face.

"The next time you hear Mrs. Olcott mentioned you may say that her husband is a friend of mine; that he served with credit as captain through the recent war; and that he now holds a government post in West Africa, though the climate compelled him to leave his wife at home. Now, would you like a game of pool?"

Leonard said that he would be busy for a while, and when Andrew went out he leaned back in his chair to think. On the death of Andrew's father, he had been left in control of the business, though, as he had not brought much capital into the firm, his share of the profits was not large. There was a good deal to be paid over to members of the family and, getting tired of slow and steady progress, he had of late launched out into bold speculations.

Since his first advancement he had looked on his brother-in-law as an obstacle in his way, and had quietly strengthened his own position. He had made Andrew's brief business experience distasteful to him, by seeing that the young man was kept busy at monotonous tasks that he could take no interest in. Afterward, when Andrew retired from the counting-house, he had missed no opportunity for suggesting that he was right in doing so, because he was obviously unfitted for a commercial career. Now and then he went farther and hinted that the young man was not gifted with much intelligence. It was, however, done cleverly; nobody realized that the impression that Andrew was something of a fool had originated with his brother-in-law, but in time it was generally held. This promised to make Leonard's position safer, because the firm was a family one, and though Andrew held a good deal of the capital, his opinion would not have much weight with his relatives.

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Nevertheless, to some extent, Leonard was honest in what he had done. Andrew was undoubtedly

not clever and Leonard believed that for him to have any say in matters would be detrimental to the firm. Now that he was inclined to assert his rights, it would be well to send him to Canada. This implied some risk, as there were matters connected with the mine which Leonard preferred to conceal, but it was unlikely that Andrew would make any undesirable discovery. However, as Andrew's inaptitude for business was taken for granted, it might be wise to give the family a reason for entrusting him with the post, and Leonard thought it could be supplied by making the most of his acquaintance with Mrs. Olcott. Having arrived at this conclusion, he dismissed the matter and busied himself with the prospectus.

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## CHAPTER III

### A COUNCIL

Hot sunshine flooded the Ghyllside lawn, but there was a belt of shadow beneath a copper beech, where a family group had gathered. Leonard sat in a basket-chair, talking to Mrs. Fenwood, an elderly widow with an austere expression; his wife and Gertrude Wannop were whispering over their teacups; Wannop, red-faced and burly, stood beside Robert Allinson, a solemn-looking clergyman.

"We have been here half an hour and not a word has been said yet upon the subject everybody's itching to talk about. We're a decorous lot," Wannop remarked, surveying the others with amusement. "Personally, I should be glad if we were allowed to go home without its being broached. It's hardly the thing to discuss Andrew's shortcomings round his table."

"There are times when it's a duty to overcome one's delicacy," Robert replied. "If I have been correctly informed, the matter demands attention. Hitherto the Allinsons have never given their neighbors cause to criticize their conduct."

"None of them? I seem to remember——"

"None of them," Robert interposed firmly. "There was once a malicious story about Arthur, but I am glad to say it was disproved. But this Mrs. Olcott, whom I haven't seen—I suppose she's attractive?"

Wannop smiled.

"Distinctly so; what's more, she has a forlorn and pathetic air which is highly fetching. Still, I'm convinced that there's no harm in her."

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"A married woman living apart from her husband!" Robert exclaimed severely. "I understand that Andrew is at her house now, and I must confess that after walking some distance I feel hurt at his not being here to receive us."

"He didn't know you were coming," Wannop pointed out, and added with a roguish air: "We have all been young and I don't suppose you used to look the other way when you met a pretty girl; but I'll go bail Andrew only visits her out of charity. However, if you are determined to have your say, you may as well begin and get it over."

Robert left him and addressed Leonard in a formal tone.

"I am told that Andrew is going out to assist in the development of the new mine and wishes to be made a director. As a relative and a shareholder, may I ask if you consider him fit for the post?"

Leonard had been waiting for an opening, and he welcomed the inquiry.

"Andrew has every right to demand the position, which I could not refuse." He paused, for the next suggestion must be skilfully conveyed. "As it happens, his abilities hardly enter into the question. It is merely needful that we should have a representative on the spot to whom we can send instructions, and I dare say he will get a good deal of the fishing and shooting he enjoys. All matters of importance will be decided in London."

"Then I take it that his inexperience and inaptitude can do the company no harm?"

Leonard was grateful to him for so plainly expressing his meaning.

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"Oh, no! Besides, I imagine that the change will be beneficial in several ways."

Glancing at the others, he knew that he had said enough. It would have been difficult for any of the family to cite a remark of his in open disparagement of his brother-in-law, though he had cunningly fostered their disbelief in him. His wife, however, was endowed with courage as well as candor.

"There is nothing to be gained by shutting one's eyes to the truth," she observed. "We all know that Andrew's visits to this woman are being talked about. What is more serious is that he induced her to come here, and let her have The Firs on purely nominal terms."

"Is it so bad as that?" Mrs. Fenwood, with a shocked look, turned to the clergyman, as if begging

him to deal with the painful situation.

"The thing must be stopped; nipped in the bud," said Robert firmly. "I agree with Leonard that our infatuated relative should be sent to Canada at once."

Wannop smiled.

"It strikes me as fortunate that Andrew is willing to go."

"It's a favorable sign," said Mrs. Fenwood. "He may be struggling against the creature's influence, in which case it's our duty to assist him."

"That wasn't what I meant. I've a suspicion that we have fallen into a habit of underestimating Andrew's abilities and determination." Wannop looked hard at Leonard. "You are going to put him into a position of responsibility and teach him to use his power. Are you prepared for the possible consequences?"

Nobody paid much attention to this, and Leonard after a moment's hesitation dismissed the matter. The Allinsons regarded Wannop as a thoughtless person whose moral code was somewhat lax. Nevertheless, he was shrewd and had read Andrew's character better than Leonard.

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"If Andrew ever wishes to have his say in business matters, I should have neither the desire nor the authority to object," Leonard said.

"Then we may rest assured that everything will be done to facilitate his departure for Canada," Robert said decidedly. "There is only another point—I wonder whether Mrs. Olcott could by any means be induced to leave the neighborhood."

Wannop's eyes sparkled angrily. He was easy-going, but there was a chivalrous vein in him.

"It would be wiser to leave the hatching of the plot until Andrew has sailed!" he said indignantly.

"Plot is not the right word; and you are mistaken if you imagine that any fear of Andrew's displeasure would deter me in a matter of duty. With the welfare of the parish at heart——"

Wannop checked him.

"Duty's a good deal easier when it chimes with one's inclinations; and the welfare of the parish isn't threatened by Mrs. Olcott. There are, however, one or two abuses you could put your finger on to-morrow if you liked, though I dare say it would get you into trouble."

Robert reddened and Mrs. Wannop made her husband a peremptory sign to stop.

"I think we needn't talk about the matter any more," she said. "It is decided that Andrew shall be sent to Canada."

They changed the subject, and a few minutes later Wannop left them. Crossing the lawn, he met Hilda in a shrubbery walk.

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"Where have you been?" he asked. "I haven't seen you since we came."

"Florence found me an errand that kept me out of the way," said Hilda pointedly. "Now what have you and the others been talking about?"

"I mustn't betray a confidence," answered Wannop with twinkling eyes. "Still, I dare say you can guess."

"Of course! They were discussing my erring brother. Aren't they silly?"

"I think so. It's curious that you and I, whose opinions don't count for much, should venture to differ with the rest."

Hilda gave him a grateful glance.

"But we are the ones who see most clearly. I have always felt that you are to be trusted."

He made her a humorous bow.

"I must try to deserve such confidence."

"Don't be foolish; this is serious. They mean well, but they're all wrong about Andrew. Of course, I make fun of him now and then, but I'm very fond of him. It's a mistake to think he's stupid; and Leonard's responsible for it."

"I'll admit that something of the kind has occurred to me," Wannop said.

Hilda hesitated.

"Well," she said, "I have never had much confidence in Leonard, though the others think him perfect. I've an idea that all along he has been gently pushing Andrew aside, making him look silly, and undermining the influence he ought to have. Now he's sending him to Canada—I very much wonder why? He has some reason."

Wannop started.

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"My dear, your suspicions go a trifle farther than mine. You may be right, though it's not nice to think so. But where does all this lead?"

"Andrew may need supporters who don't altogether believe in the immaculate Leonard some day. I think, if needful, he could count on us."

"And on nobody else?"

"Not until the others understood; and it would be hard to make them see."

"Uncommonly hard," Wannop admitted. "Well, Hilda, you and I will be allies. We can conspire together unsuspected, because we are the two who are not supposed to count—you because you're too young and charming; I because I haven't the fine moral fastidiousness and air of distinction that marks the Allinsons. But I'll let you into a secret—Gertrude's wavering in her ideas about Andrew: I'm perverting her."

"There's something I'd better tell you. I met Mrs. Olcott half an hour ago and I stopped and spoke. I like her—there isn't the least reason why I shouldn't—and I'm sorry for her. I know she feels being left alone, and we're going to be friends. Now if the others should try to make things unpleasant?"

"I imagine Robert means mischief."

"I was afraid of it," said Hilda. "Of course, he's as silly and unable to see things properly as an owl in daylight, but solemn stupid people often pass for being wise, and he might do harm. If he tries, can you stop him? I know Andrew would like it."

Wannop made a sign of rather dubious assent.

"As I'm unromantically stout, getting elderly, and devoid of personal charm, I might perhaps venture to interfere in this matter. After all, there's a sense in which Andrew is undoubtedly to blame. Why do you let him go to The Firs so often?"

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"If I should give him a hint that people are talking, it would only make him angry. You know he really is slow at understanding now and then."

They strolled back to the party, which soon afterward broke up, for although Hilda begged them to wait for dinner nobody seemed anxious to meet Andrew. When they had gone, Hilda turned to Leonard with a smile.

"Had an interesting talk?" she asked. "You all looked so serious that I was afraid to join you."

Leonard glanced at her sharply.

"As you grow older you'll find that there are matters which can't be treated humorously."

"It's possible," Hilda agreed. "Still, that remark is too much in Robert's style. Improving conversation is apt to get tiresome."

She moved away and Leonard watched her with thoughtful eyes. He believed he enjoyed her sisters' confidence, but he was doubtful of Hilda.

Three weeks later Andrew sailed, and soon after he had done so Wannop called one afternoon at The Firs, where he was received by Mrs. Olcott in the garden. He thought she looked harassed, but he had expected this.

"I believe you have met my wife," he began, taking the canvas chair she indicated.

"Yes," said Mrs. Olcott. "She called on me and, if I remember right, stayed five minutes."

This was not encouraging.

"You know my sister-in-law, Hilda, better?" Wannop ventured.

Mrs. Olcott's expression softened.

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"That is true; I have reason to be grateful to her."

"Hilda is a very nice girl. I verily believe that we are fond of each other, and as I am more than double her age, she now and then favors me with her confidence. In fact, she suggested that I might be able to help you out of a difficulty."

His hostess studied him carefully. He was burly and looked hot after his walk, but he had a reassuring smile and his red face seemed to indicate good-nature. She thought that he could be trusted.

"It's about the house," she said. "I don't know where else to go and it looks as if I might be turned out."

That this should distress her hinted at some degree of poverty, and Wannop felt compassionate. She was young and inexperienced, and had been coldly treated by her neighbors.

"How is that?" he asked.

After a moment of irresolution Mrs. Olcott decided to tell him.

"Mr. Allinson arranged about the house. Perhaps I shouldn't have allowed this, but when he was wounded in the war my husband carried him out of reach of the Boer fire."

"Ah! Andrew ought to have made that clear. But won't you go on with the explanation?"

"Mr. Allinson told me that no papers were needed, I was to pay the rent to a man called Judson. He came here and said that there had been some mistake. The rent was ten pounds more and I must share the cost of the alterations, while the field adjoining, which must go with The Firs, would be another extra. When I declared I couldn't pay all this he said I was undoubtedly liable, but he could find another tenant who would take the house off my hands."

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"I see a clerical finger in this pie," said Wannop half aloud, and smiled at his hostess. "I beg your pardon. I suppose you didn't know that this is Andrew Allinson's house."

Mrs. Olcott started and colored.

"I did not know. But if it is, I can't understand why his agent—"

"Somebody is back of him. Now we had better be candid. I venture to believe you can confide in me."

"What proof can I have of that? You are a connection of the Allinsons, who seem bent on persecuting me. Have they sent you here?"

"Hilda did," Wannop replied with quiet good-humor. "Perhaps I had better say that on some points she and I are not quite in accord with the rest of the family. I suppose Andrew promised your husband to look after you until his return?"

Mrs. Olcott agreed, for her suspicions about his errand had vanished. Wannop mused for a few moments.

"I think you should stay here and fight it out until he comes back," he said. "After all, your neighbors are honest as far as they see, and you'll find them ready to make amends."

Mrs. Olcott's eyes sparkled, but she hesitated.

"I'm afraid I can't hold out. They have attacked me where I'm weakest."

"Will you leave the matter of the house to me? It can be put right."

"Why are you willing to take the trouble?"

Wannop laughed.

"For one thing, I enjoy putting a spoke in the parson's wheel; for another, Andrew made you a promise, and the Allinsons like to keep their word."

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He got up and held out his hand.

"I'll have a talk with Mr. Judson. Show your courage and hold your ground. You'll be glad you did so by and by."

The next morning Wannop called at the agent's office in a neighboring town. He was shown into a dingy room, where an elderly man with spectacles received him with deference.

"I've been looking into accounts, Judson," Wannop began abruptly. "After deducting your commission and the cost of the repairs you agreed to, I find that the return on my property for the past year is small. Now I met Maxwell the other day and he hinted that it might be managed to better advantage."

The agent looked alarmed.

"I understood you didn't wish to put the screw on your tenants; and it isn't good policy."

"No," said Wannop; "I want to be fair. I don't think Andrew Allinson would wish any undue pressure put on his tenants either. As we talk over things now and then, I know his views."

Judson pondered this without answering, and Wannop resumed:

"My business and Andrew's should be worth a good deal to you, though Maxwell seemed to think that both could be improved."

"Maxwell couldn't get you a penny more than I have got," Judson declared. "I should be very sorry if you contemplated a change."

"I shouldn't do so without a strong reason. You look after the Reverend Robert Allinson's property, but your commission on it can't be large."

"It is not," said Judson, beginning to understand where the other's remarks led.

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"Well," went on Wannop, "I saw Mrs. Olcott yesterday, and she mentioned the misunderstanding about her lease. I may tell you that Mrs. Wannop and Miss Allinson are friends of hers."

Judson was surprised, but decided that if he must offend either Wannop or the clergyman, it would better be the latter.

"Mr. Andrew called here in a hurry and said he had got a tenant for The Firs and I was to have some alterations made. He was driving, and as his horse was restive he ran out before we could talk over details."

Wannop thought this was correct, for Andrew was sometimes careless.

"Atkinson will take the field off your hands. It's not usual to charge a tenant with needful repairs; and you mustn't be hard on Mrs. Olcott about the rent. Perhaps you had better go over and put things straight with her."

Judson promised to do so and Wannop took out some papers.

"Here's a more important matter. I've decided to buy Bell's place, and you can see his agent and the architect as soon as convenient."

He rode away, knowing that his hints would be attended to. During the evening he met Hilda.

"I've seen Mrs. Olcott and Judson," he told her. "It's very unlikely that she'll have any more trouble about The Firs."

"That's splendid!" cried Hilda. "But how did you manage it?"

Wannop chuckled.

"My dear girl, an explanation isn't always desirable. When you know how a thing's done it spoils the trick." [Pg 34]

"Oh, well," said Hilda, "it doesn't matter, but you have a suspiciously complacent look. One could imagine that you felt satisfied with yourself."

"There's some truth in that," Wannop laughed. "I feel that we have held our own against the more brilliant members of the family. But here's Robert!"

The clergyman appeared around a turn in the road and joined them.

"You seem amused," he remarked. "May I share the joke?"

"The point's involved," Wannop said. "However, you'll agree that the wisest people's plans sometimes fail."

"I can't deny it," said Robert, looking puzzled. "Still, I fail to understand what the failure of wise people's plans has to do with us."

"As a modest man," said Wannop, "I'll admit that it doesn't seem to have much to do with me." [Pg 35]

## **CHAPTER IV**

### **THE LAKE OF SHADOWS**

The evening was gloomy and there was a boisterous onshore wind when Jake Carnally stood on a sawmill dump, looking out across the Lake of Shadows. Its troubled waters reflected the color of the leaden clouds above, though they were laced with tumbling foam, and short, white-topped waves broke angrily upon the sweating sawdust at Carnally's feet. The tall pines that rolled back from the beach had faded to a deep somber hue; the distance was blurred and gray. The lake is a large one, stretching many leagues to the south, but it is strewn with forest-clad islets, and those inshore obstructed Carnally's view. On the nearest of them wisps of smoke drifted out from among the shadowy trunks and an aromatic smell of burning cedar reached him across the spray-swept sound. Holiday-makers from Winnipeg had pitched a summer camp there.

Seeing nothing out on the lake, he turned and glanced past the tall iron chimney-stacks toward a row of pretty wooden houses beside the river mouth. A moving cloud of sooty smoke floated above them, and he knew that a west-bound train was pulling out of the station. Then a man came up to him.

"Why, Jake!" he cried. "You look as if you'd been up against it! When did you come down?"

Carnally smiled. He was tall, and sparely but strongly built. His knee-boots were dilapidated; his brown overalls badly torn. [Pg 36]

"This afternoon," he answered. "Took the river for it with two of the boys, and a mighty tough time we had in getting through. Water was on the rock portages and we had to shove round through the bush. It didn't seem worth while getting out my glad rags, as I have to take the new boss up early to-morrow."

"Looks as if he'd got lost," said the other. "I guess you heard he left for Duck Island with two of the Company's roustabouts day before yesterday. They hadn't much grub with them, but he allowed he'd be back this morning."

"What did he go to Duck Island for?"

"To prospect the fireclay bed. Seemed to think the Company might put up a smelter."

"It's early for that," said Carnally with a grin. "They've got to raise milling ore and pack it down first. I suppose you've seen him; what's he like? I don't even know his name."

"Big man, about your age. Kind of slow, thinks before he speaks, but for an English sucker he shows some sense. It's my notion he's a stayer."

"Were they river-jacks he took along?"

"Struck me as more like railroad shovelers, though they could paddle in smooth water. As there's a nasty sea running in the open, you'd better look for him. If those fellows wreck his canoe and he has to spend the night on an island with nothing to eat while you sit in the hotel, it's steep chances he fires you."

"I don't care two bits whether I get fired or no. The Rain Bluff Mining Company is the meanest business proposition I've ever run up against, except the Mappin Transport, which is worse. All the same, I guess I'll have to go. If you're going back to the hotel, you might tell the boys to bring my canoe and blankets." [Pg 37]

The man promised to do so, and Carnally sat down out of the wind to smoke until the craft arrived. He was tired by an arduous journey down a river swollen by heavy rain, which, throughout a good deal of its course, poured over ledges and ran furiously between fangs of rock. It had needed nerve and skill to shoot the rapids, and to force a passage over the rugged portages had taxed the party's strength. Now he must launch out again and paddle, perhaps all night, in search of his missing chief.

The canoe came lurching to the foot of the dump, and as there was a chance of swamping her alongside it, Carnally ran out on a treacherous drift-log and sprang on board. A man untrained to river work would have upset the craft or gone through her bottom, but Carnally came down safely and seized the steering paddle.

"This is rough on us, boys, but it has to be done," he said. "Shove her straight out for the gap."

His companions were wiry, dark-faced and dark-haired men whose French-Canadian blood had in it a strain of the Indian—hard to beat at river work or travel through the wilds. Toiling strenuously, they drove the light craft over the short seas, with the spray whipping their faces and the foam washing in at the bows. Now and then they made no headway for a minute or two against a savage gust, but when it lulled they slowly forged on again, though they knew that to find a canoe among the maze of islands was as difficult a task as could be set them. When they labored out into the more open spaces of the lake as dusk was closing in, Carnally roused himself to keen alertness. Here the waves were dangerously high and an error of judgment might involve a capsize. [Pg 38]

As it happened, the craft they sought was battling with the breeze some distance offshore, and Andrew Allinson, kneeling astern, glanced anxiously to leeward when he dared take his eyes off the threatening seas ahead. They rolled down on the canoe, ridged with foam, and it needed quick work with the paddle to help her over them. To make things worse, she was half full of water, and nobody could spare a hand to bale it out. Andrew was not an expert at canoeing, but he had once made a journey up the Canadian waterways and had been a yachtsman at home; and when the breeze freshened and the waves got steeper it had become evident that neither of his companions was capable of managing the craft in broken water. He had accordingly taken the helmsman's post and after running before the sea for the greater part of the day without a meal, had discovered at dusk a long ridge of rocks and pines looming up not far ahead.

They lost it in the growing darkness, for Andrew knew the risk of trying to land among big boulders on which the surf was breaking. He must paddle out and clear the end of the island, in the hope of finding a harbor on its sheltered side; but it still lay to lee of him, and breaking waves and savage gusts drove them nearer the threatening shore. He was wet through and very tired, one galled hand bled freely, and the party had consumed the last of their provisions at breakfast. This was the cause of the distressful stitch in his side, and he was painfully cramped, but he knew that he had to choose between paddling and trying to crawl out of the surf on a rugged beach amid the wreckage of the canoe. So far as the other two could judge, he was still serene, and now and then his voice reached them, hoarse but cheerful. [Pg 39]

"A bit of a lull, boys; drive her at it in the smooth!"

He could see nothing to leeward except flying spray, but he was not deceived by the emptiness. The island must be close to them. He did not think he could clear it, but he meant to fight until the last moment.

"Put some weight into the stroke! We'll make a few yards now!" he cried.

"Hold on!" shouted one of the others. "What's that?"

A hail reached them faintly and, when they answered, rose again, a little nearer.

"Are you the Rain Bluff crowd?"

"Sure we are!"

"Then follow us!" cried a voice, as the blurred shape of a canoe appeared ahead. "Don't let her



sag to lee; keep right astern!"

They got the canoe round, stern to sea, in some peril of being overturned, and drove away at a furious pace, with the other craft lurching before them through the spray. In a few minutes shadowy pines appeared, then a strip of foam-swept beach, at which Andrew glanced anxiously. He could not turn back now; the dark, froth-ridged seas drove him on, but in a few more minutes the end of the beach slipped past and a narrow strip of water with pines about it opened up. They ran in, the wild lurching ceased, and they paddled through smooth water, until the craft ahead gently took the beach. Andrew now realized that he had mistaken two islands for one, and was in the sound between them. It was very dark among the trees when he came ashore, but he heard one of the strangers asking for the boss, and answered him.

"Sit down out of the wind while we make a fire and get supper," said the other. "I understood that your grub might be running out, so we brought some along." [Pg 40]

The man's voice sounded familiar, but Andrew was too tired and cold to exert his memory. Finding a sheltered place among the rocks, he waited until he was called. Then he saw that a fire had been lighted, a shelter of bark and branches made, and a meal which looked very inviting laid out beside it. All had been done with remarkable neatness as well as celerity, and Andrew recognized the experienced bushman's skill. Then the firelight fell on his pilot's face, and he started.

"Carnally, by all that's wonderful!" he cried.

Carnally gazed at him in astonishment for a moment or two, and then his expression grew reserved.

"Yes," he said; "that's my name."

"Then you ought to remember me!"

"Sure! You're Lieutenant Allinson, late of the Imperial Yeomanry, and, I understand, in charge of the Rain Bluff mining operations. I'm the mine boss's assistant, at your service."

It was the greeting of a subordinate to his superior, and Andrew was puzzled. He owed a good deal to the man and they had treated each other as comrades in South Africa when, as had happened once or twice, the accidents of the campaign had enabled them to sink the difference of rank. Now it was the inferior who obviously meant to bear their relative positions in mind; and that is not the Canadian employee's usual attitude toward his master. The man he had known and liked as Sergeant Carnally had rather pointedly declined to see that he wished to shake hands.

"I'm very glad to run across you again and to find that we shall be working together," Andrew said.

"Mutual pleasure," Carnally replied. "Sit right down; supper will be getting cold." [Pg 41]

The united party gathered round the fire, sharing the meal, but Andrew failed in his attempts to lead Carnally into friendly talk. The man answered readily, but he would not continue a conversation and there was a strange reserve about him. Indeed, Andrew was glad when the meal was over; and soon afterward he lay down, wrapped in damp blankets, and went to sleep. The next morning the wind had fallen, the lake lay shimmering with light under a cloudless sky, and they paddled smoothly between islands covered with dusky pines whose reflections quivered in the glassy water, until they reached the little wooden town. When they landed, Andrew touched Carnally's arm.

"Will you have supper with me to-night at my hotel?" he asked.

"Sorry I can't," said Carnally. "Got to meet a man at the other place. If it will suit, I'll come over during the evening."

Andrew told him to do so, though he was piqued. He took supper with Mappin, the head of a transport and contracting company with which it seemed he was to have business relations. Mappin, he thought, was about thirty years of age; a powerfully built man of city type, with sleek black hair and a fleshy but forceful face. His manner to the waitresses jarred on Andrew, for he gazed at one who was pretty with insolent admiration, and bullied another who was nervous and plain. In conversation he was brusque and opinionated; but Andrew was soon convinced that he possessed marked business ability. After supper they sat smoking on a wooden balcony while the clean fragrance of the pines and the murmur of running water filled the cooling air. Andrew, who was by no means oversensitive, was unpleasantly affected by the way Mappin bit off the end of his cigar. He had large and very white teeth, but his lower lip was unusually thick, and there was something suggestive of an animal in the trifling action which made it repulsive, though on the whole the fellow was coarsely handsome. [Pg 42]

"I noticed a very pretty wooden house on one of the islands we passed this morning," Andrew said. "Whom does it belong to?"

"You must mean Frobisher's place. Calls it a summer camp, though it's fitted up luxuriously. He's from across the frontier and a bit of a sport; the Americans are coming north largely now for shooting and fishing. However, as he'll be here soon, you're sure to meet him."

"A pleasant man?"

Mappin laughed.

"He can be very dry and you'd find it hard to get ahead of him; but he's hospitable, and you can't get a dinner like he puts up out of Montreal. I'll take you across some evening; he's by way of being a friend of mine. Then Geraldine Frobisher's a picture: figure like classical sculpture, face with each feature molded just as it ought to be. It's a feast for the eyes to watch that girl walk."

Andrew had occasionally listened to similar descriptions of young women, but he resented something in Mappin's appreciation of Miss Frobisher. It struck him as wholly physical and gross.

"Well," he said curtly, "I'll think over the matters we have talked about and let you know my decision."

Mappin looked surprised, as if he had taken Andrew's assent to his suggestions for granted.

"No hurry, but you'll have to write," he said. "As you're going up to the mine, I'll pull out on the Toronto express in the morning. And now there are some letters I must get off by the mail."

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Andrew was not sorry to have him go; and when Carnally entered the balcony a few minutes later he was struck by the contrast between the two men. The bushman was lean and wiry; there was a lithe grace in his quick movements, and a hint of the ascetic in his keen, bronzed face. One could imagine that this man's body was his well-trained servant and would never become his pampered master.

"Sit down, Jake," said Andrew, determined to penetrate his reserve. "Take a cigar. Now, we got on pretty well in the hospital and the prison camp, didn't we?"

Carnally's eyes twinkled when he had lighted his cigar.

"That's so; I wasn't in your squadron then. Besides, you've got moved up since; you're colonel now."

"In a sense, I am. I don't know how you rank yet, but I have some say in choosing my officers. But we'll drop this fencing. Why did you hold off last night when I meant to be friendly?"

Carnally considered before he answered.

"I know my place; you're my boss. If my attitude didn't please you, tell me what you expect."

"I'll try. To begin with, when I speak as the Company's representative, I must have what I want done."

"That's right. I'm agreeable, so long as I hold my job."

"Don't you mean to hold it?"

"That depends. I haven't made up my mind yet."

"Then I want a man that I can rely on to help me through any trouble I meet," Andrew went on. "One that I can consult, when it's needful, with confidence."

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"It's quite likely that we might look at things from a different point of view."

Andrew was frankly puzzled by his companion's manner. His reserve and lack of response were not in accordance with what he knew of Carnally.

"Well," he asked, "what are you going to do?"

"We might give the thing a trial. Do you know much about mining?"

"Nothing," said Andrew. "I'll admit that to you. I don't think you'll take advantage of it."

"But how did you come to be sent over in charge of the mine if you don't know your work?"

"I'm a director of the Company, and a good deal of the family money has gone into it."

Carnally looked grave at this, and sat silent a few moments studying his companion.

"Did you have anything to do with fixing up things on this side?" he asked.

"No. My brother-in-law, Hathersage, came over and made all arrangements. I'm rather ignorant about them."

"Then he didn't take you much into his confidence about this mining proposition?"

"No; I can't say that he did."

"And you expect a fair return on your money and mean to see that your friends who have invested don't get left? That's all?"

"Of course; I've no claim to anything else."

"That," said the Canadian dryly, "is a point on which there might be some difference of opinion. You want the shareholders to make a good thing?"

"Yes. The firm has backed this mine; I believe the name helped to float the scheme. That makes me responsible to the people who found the money."

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Carnally gave him a long searching glance, and his expression changed.

"Well," he said with an air of quiet resolve, "I guess I'll have to see you through."

When Carnally left a half-hour later he met a storekeeper of the town outside the hotel.

"You're looking serious, Jake," the man remarked. "Been with your new boss, I heard. What do you think of him?"

"Well," Carnally answered gravely, "it's my idea he's white."

"Then you're not going to quit, as you talked of doing?"

"No, sir; I guess the new boss and I will pull along."

"If he's square, why's he working with Mappin and the other grafters?"

Carnally laughed.

"That's a point I don't understand yet. But it's my notion there's going to be less graft about this Rain Bluff proposition than you fellows think."

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## CHAPTER V THE FIRST SUSPICIONS

Trails of mist floated among the pines that stretched their ragged branches across the swollen river. Though there had been rain in abundance, it flowed crystal clear out of the trackless wilderness of rock and forest that rolls north from the Lake of Shadows toward Hudson Bay. This rugged belt, which extends from Ottawa River to the fertile prairie, had until very recent days been regarded as valueless to man, except for the purpose of trapping fur-bearing animals. The pines are, for the most part, too small for milling, and there is little soil among the curiously rounded rocks. Moreover, the agents of the Hudson Bay Company, which long held dominion over the Canadian wilds, did not encourage the intrusion of adventurous settlers into their fur preserves. At last, however, the discovery that there were valuable minerals in the rocks was made, and hardy treasure-seekers braved the rigors of the North.

Andrew and Carnally knelt in the bottom of their canoe, plying the paddle, while a big half-breed stood upright, using an iron-shod pole when the nature of the bottom permitted it. The stream ran strong against them; they were wet, and had laboriously forced a passage between big boulders, up rapids, and a few slacker reaches, since early morning. A fine drizzle obscured their view, but so far as they could see, the prospect was far from cheerful. Ahead, stony ledges broke the froth-streaked surface of the flood; the pines were green by the waterside, growing with vigor where they could find a hold among the rocks, but farther back they were small and tangled, leaning athwart each other, stripped of half their branches. Some had been blackened by fire, and there were unsightly avenues of tottering charred logs. The picture was dreary and desolate.

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"Isn't it getting time for supper?" Andrew asked as they rounded a bend in the river.

"Not quite. Besides, there's a Mappin camp not far ahead, and if we can make it we'll be saved some trouble."

Andrew nodded, for he had discovered that cooking supper and arranging a shelter for the night is a tiresome business when one is wet and worn out by a long day's journey.

"Then we'd better go on. I suppose Mappin's boys are road-making?"

"Yes," said Carnally. "Transport is going to be one of the Company's biggest expenses. Though the river is available it pays to cut out the worst of the portages. Packing ore over a mile or two of slippery rock costs money, and the river makes a big bend full of rapids a little higher up."

"I remember now. The road is to go straight across by the old fur-trade traverse, and when it's finished we'll put wagons on. From the looks of the country it will be an undertaking."

"Sure!" agreed Carnally. "Still, if you get it done at a reasonable figure, it ought to pay."

"It has struck me that we're giving a good deal of work to Mappin. Ever since we left the landing we have come across his men."

"It's usual to put jobs you're unable to attend to into a contractor's hands," Carnally replied.

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The men were now on more friendly terms, but Andrew had noticed that his companion was generally content with answering questions and seldom made a suggestion. Moreover, he had an idea that Carnally was quietly studying him. The man's attitude was puzzling, but he thought he would in due time find an explanation.

They paddled on for another half-hour, and then a sharp report rang out of the mist ahead. It was followed by a succession of heavy crashes that might have been made by falling rock, and

Carnally turned the canoe's head toward the bank.

"Giant-powder," he explained. "The camp's near by, and the boys haven't quit for supper yet."

On landing, they left the half-breed to look after the canoe, while they followed a narrow track through a belt of dismal tottering pines. A low log-building stood in a clearing and beyond it the new road led up a ravine with rocky slopes. In one place they had been violently rent, for the ground was strewn with great fragments, over which a cloud of dust still floated. A group of men stood a short distance away, as if afraid to approach nearer, and their attitude suggested that something unusual was going on. As Andrew hurried toward them, two more appeared, staggering out of the dust and vapor in a curious drunken manner and dragging along a third. His limpness and the slack way his arms hung down were unpleasantly suggestive.

"What's happened? Has he been hit by a stone?" Andrew asked the nearest man; but the tall, light-haired fellow shook his head as if he did not understand.

Andrew questioned another, with no better success, and then noticed two others moving cautiously toward the dust and smoke. Their care seemed uncalled for, as the explosion had already occurred; but it was obvious that somebody was lying in need of assistance among the stones brought down by the shot, and Andrew ran forward.

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Plunging into the dust he noticed that it had an acrid smell, and a moment later he felt dizzy. Then he was conscious of an intolerable headache and a feeling of nausea. He could hardly see; he was losing control of his limbs; but he struggled on and, overtaking the others, helped to drag out an unconscious man. Then he sat down, gasping, and found it difficult to prevent himself from slipping off the stone.

"I'm sorry," said Carnally, coming up at that moment. "I stopped behind to talk to one of the boys and as I didn't know what you were doing I couldn't warn you. You'll feel better presently."

"What is it?" Andrew asked. "What knocked me and the other fellows over?"

"Giant-powder gas. Some kinds are worse than others, though they're all poisonous. Sit quiet while it works off."

After a while Andrew's head got clearer and the pain less severe, and then Carnally took him to the log-building, where supper was ready. Finding him a seat at the end of a long table, he handed him a pannikin of strong tea. Andrew felt better when he had drunk it, and he began to look about.

The building was a wretched, decrepit hovel. The logs were small and sagged in the middle; one could hardly stand up in the room; and the rain that had run in through the leaking roof stood in pools on the earthen floor. The bunks consisted of two split-board ledges against the walls, littered with dirty, damp blankets and miry clothing which filled the place with a sour, unpleasant smell. The long table which ran up the middle of the one room was crowded with unkempt men, eating voraciously and talking in what Andrew presently recognized as Norwegian, though he thought he caught a word or two of German occasionally. A very neat Chinaman laid a plate before him; but, hungry as he had been before he breathed the powder fumes, he revolted from the food. The greasy pork smelt rancid; the potatoes were rotten.

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"I couldn't eat this if I were feeling fit," he said disgustedly.

Carnally called the Chinaman, who took the plate away and substituted a piece of pie and one or two desiccated apricots. This was better, and Andrew ate a little, although he suspected that there was something wrong with the lard used in the pie, and the fruit was small and worm-eaten.

"Let's get out," he said. "I don't think I'm dainty, but this place is too much for me."

Leaving the building, they sat down at the foot of a rock which kept the drizzle off them. Andrew breathed the clean fragrance of the pines with delight.

"This is a great improvement," he declared. "Will you tell Lucien to pitch our tent where there's shelter?"

"As you wish," said Carnally. "I had figured on our sleeping and getting breakfast in the shack."

"Heavens, no!"

Andrew lighted his pipe.

"I've recovered enough to feel curious. How did the accident happen? The men who use it must know that the fumes of giant-powder are dangerous; why didn't they wait?"

"It might be better if I let the man responsible explain."

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Carnally beckoned the foreman.

"Mr. Allinson wants to know why you didn't keep the boys back until the fumes had cleared."

"I gave them about the usual time; but it looks as if I'd cut it too fine. Guess the damp and there being no wind stopped the gas from getting away. Besides, we're not using a high-grade powder."

"But if there was any doubt, couldn't you have given them another few minutes?" Andrew asked.

The foreman smiled.

"I had to hold up a dozen men while that shot was fired, and the rain has kept us back lately. Now a boss contractor knows how many yards of dirt a man can move in a day and how much rock you ought to shift with a stick of giant-powder. It's easy figuring how far the road should be pushed ahead for the money spent, and I've got to keep up to schedule."

Andrew studied the man. He looked hard, capable of getting the most out of his subordinates, but not brutal.

"Then no allowances are made?" he suggested.

"No, sir; not on a Mappin job. You have to put through the work or get!"

He left them and Andrew turned to Carnally.

"Is the shack these fellows live in better or worse than the average?" he asked.

"Worse. The boys are often quite comfortably fixed."

"What about the food?"

"You can judge for yourself," Carnally drawled. "It's the meanest hash I ever struck; and you want to remember it's no fault of the cook's. The stuff is mighty bad when a Chinaman can't dish it up fit to eat."

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"Are the men boarded free?"

"Not much! They pay about six dollars a week; and it's enough. Now, as a rule, an employer doesn't look for a profit on the grub; taking camps all round, the boys get pretty good value for their money."

"Then it looks as if this one were an exception," said Andrew. "Why do they employ so many Scandinavians?"

"They get them cheap: catch them newly landed, anxious for a job, before they find out what they ought to have. A dollar looks big after a kroner. That's my notion, but we'll see if it's right." He called a Canadian workman. "What would you fix a road-maker's wages at, Jim?"

"You ought to know. A good chopper and shoveler would get up to two-fifty, so long as he was west of cleared Ontario."

"Two dollars and a-half a day," Carnally repeated to Andrew in emphasis, and addressed the man again: "What are you making now?"

"Dollar, seventy-five. I was cleaned out when I took the job. These blamed Dutchmen get one-fifty. The Mappin crowd's the meanest I've ever been up against."

"That leaves them three dollars a week for clothing and all expenses," Andrew observed, when the workman went away. "Considering what things cost in Canada, it isn't a great deal. Mappin seems a hard master. Do you know anything about him?"

"He's a smart man," said Carnally with a smile. "I met him for the first time when I hired out with your Company, but I heard that he hadn't a dollar a few years ago." He paused and added: "In fact, I've wondered where he got the capital to finance this job."

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When they moved off to the camp which the half-breed had pitched, Andrew sat thoughtfully smoking outside the tent while the mist gathered thicker about the dripping pines and the roar of the river rang in his ears. He had been unfavorably impressed by Mappin, and had since learned that he treated his workmen with marked injustice; indeed, he had suffered in person from the fellow's greed. Andrew felt that a Company of which he was a director ought not to make a profit by trickery and oppression; but that was taking something for granted, for he had not ascertained that the Rain Bluff Company received the benefit. He must reserve the question for future consideration. Moreover, he had been struck by the manner in which Carnally had explained how the contractor conducted his business. He had called in outsiders to check his statements, and allowed them to supply the most damaging particulars. It had been done with some skill. Andrew felt that Carnally was anxious that he should learn the truth about Mappin, though his object was far from clear.

Then he began to think about Carnally. He had learned in South Africa that the man had courage and keen intelligence; and that he was to be trusted. Though fond of the vernacular, his intonation was clean; he had good manners; and there were signs that he had enjoyed an excellent education.

"Jake," he said at last, "is there any reason why the Company shouldn't do its own transport work?"

"I don't know of any. You would have to let Mappin get through with his contracts first."

"Of course. What I mean is, could we do it as cheaply as he does and pay regulation wages?"

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"It would take some figuring to answer that. Speaking without the book, you ought to do the work

at the contractor's prices and have a profit. He must make one; and you can buy plant and tools on as good terms as he can."

"That's obvious. Then, on the whole, it ought to pay the Company?"

"What do you mean by the Company?"

"Well, the shareholders."

"It might pay—they," said Carnally with suggestive emphasis.

Andrew smoked his pipe out before he answered.

"I'll consider it when I've a little more to go on. It strikes me that I'm learning things. And now I think I'll get to sleep; my head's aching."

He lay down on a bed of spruce twigs and soon sank into restful slumber, but Carnally sat a while in the tent door, watching the dark river roll by. Allinson evidently meant to make him his confidential adviser, and he felt his responsibility.

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## CHAPTER VI DREAM MINE

The next morning the party broke camp, and after toiling hard with pole and paddle reached, toward evening, a forest-shrouded gorge through which the flood swept furiously. A quarter of a mile ahead steep rocks pent in the raging water, which was veiled in spray; but nearer at hand the stream widened into a pool at which Andrew gazed with misgivings. Evidently Carnally meant to cross it. A wall of crag formed one bank; the opposite beach was strewn with massy boulders, over which the pine branches stretched; and in between there ran a great wedge-shaped track of foam. No canoe, Andrew thought, could live through that tumult of broken water; but it ran more slackly near the boulder bank, and a short distance higher up an angry eddy swung back, close inshore, to the head of the pool, where it joined the main downward rush. At the junction a spur of rock ran out into the wild side-swirl of the flood. Shut in as it was by dripping pines, the place had a forbidding look.

"It strikes me that the Company will find carrying up its stores and plant very costly work," Andrew remarked, as they rested in an eddy behind a stone. "I'm beginning to understand why Leonard asked for so much capital. My idea is that we'll have to do some preliminary reducing on the spot to save mineral transport."

Carnally nodded. For a novice in such matters, Allinson was showing an unusual grasp of details. [Pg 56]

"It's a question of the quality of the ore. In the North you must have a high-grade product that can be handled at a profit in small quantities. It doesn't pay to work rock that carries a low percentage of metal."

"What grade of stuff are we turning out? I've been unable to learn anything about it since I saw the results of the first assays."

"So far, the Company has not got up much ore: the boys have been kept busy at development work. But you'll be able to judge for yourself shortly, and we had better get on. There's a slack along the edge of the spur at the head of the pool which we ought to make, and it will save us some trouble in portaging. I'll land you if you'd rather, but I want a hand, and Lucien must give us a lift by tracking."

"If you can take the canoe up, I'll go with you," said Andrew quietly.

They headed for the boulder beach, where they landed the half-breed. He made a line fast to the craft and went up-stream with the end of it, while Carnally thrust the canoe out and, with Andrew's help, forced her up against the current, aided by the line. It was arduous work. The foam stood high about the bows; eddies swirling up from the rough bottom swung them to and fro and, although they strained every muscle, now and then brought them to a standstill. Angry waves broke on board freely, and Andrew realized that if Lucien lost his footing or slackened his efforts the line would be torn from him and they would be swept back to the tail of the pool. This, however, would be better than being sucked into the cataract close outshore, which would no doubt result in the canoe's capsizing. At last they reached a spot where they must stem the main rush, which swung in nearer the bank. [Pg 57]

"Can we get through there?" Andrew asked breathlessly.

"I'll try," said Carnally. "If we fail, I guess you'll have to swim."

Andrew said nothing, but the swollen veins rose on his forehead as he strained upon his pole. Frothing water broke into the canoe; Lucien was knee-deep in the foam, braced tensely against the drag of the line. Spray lashed their hot faces, and the air was filled with the roar of the torrent. For nearly a minute they hung stationary, their strength taxed to the utmost, the pole-

shoes gripping the bottom. Then they moved a foot or two, and the work was a little easier when they next dipped the poles. They made a few yards. With a cry to the half-breed, Carnally loosed the line, and they shot forward up-stream with a back-eddy. It swirled about them in curious green upheavals, streaked with lines of foam, and they sped with it past boulder and shingle at a furious pace. This was exhilarating; but when steep rocks dropped to the water Andrew glanced anxiously toward the white confusion where the eddy reunited with the downward stream. Its descent was not to be thought of, but he could see no alternative except being dashed against the crag.

Carnally, however, did not seem disturbed. He knelt in the stern, his eyes fixed ahead, quietly dipping the steering paddle, for they had laid down the poles.

"Use all your strength when I give the word," he said.

They slid on, a tall, projecting spur of rock drawing nearer, with furious waves leaping down-stream a yard or two outshore of it. It seemed to Andrew that destruction surely awaited them. The turmoil grew closer, the rock was only a yard or two away; in another few moments the bow of the canoe would plunge into the tumbling foam. Then came a cry from Carnally:

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"Now, with your right! Shoot her in!"

Andrew felt the stout paddle bend and afterward thought he had never made a stronger effort. The bow swung inshore, the rock unexpectedly fell back, and as they drove past its end a narrow basin opened up. The next moment they had entered it and, gliding forward, grounded on a gravelly bank. A man scrambled down a ledge and helped them to drag out the canoe.

"I've been watching you; didn't think you would make it," he said. "The stream's stronger than usual. Come along to my camp; I'll put you up to-night."

"Thanks," responded Carnally. "This is Mr. Allinson, of the Rain Bluff Mine." He turned to Andrew. "Mr. Graham, from the Landing."

Andrew saw that the man was studying him with quiet interest. Graham was elderly; his hair was gray, and his face and general appearance indicated that he led a comfortable, domestic life. Andrew supposed he was in business, but when they reached his camp he recognized that it had been laid out by a man with some knowledge of the wilds.

Graham gave them a supper of gray trout and bannocks and they afterward sat talking while the half-breed went fishing. The rain had ceased, though the mist still drifted heavily down the gorge, and the aromatic smell of wood-smoke mingled with the scent of the pines. Somewhere in the shadows a loon was calling, its wild cry piercing through the roar of water.

"A rugged and beautiful country," Graham remarked. "Is this your first visit to it, Mr. Allinson?"

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"No," Andrew replied. "I was once some distance north, looking for caribou. I'm glad of an opportunity for seeing it again. It gets hold of one."

"So you know that; you have felt the pull of the lonely North! Curious how it draws some of us, isn't it?"

"Have you been up there?"

"Oh, yes; as a young man I served the Hudson Bay. I've been through most of the barrens between Churchill and the Mackenzie. Perhaps that's the grimmest, hardest country white men ever entered; but it's one you can't forget."

"It's undoubtedly hard," said Andrew. "We scarcely reached the fringe of it, but I was dressed in rags and worn very thin when we struck Lake Manitoba. I suppose you live at the Landing now?"

"I've been there twenty years; built my house myself when there was only a shack or two and a Hudson Bay store. The railroad has changed all that."

"Mr. Graham is treasurer for the sawmill," Carnally explained.

"Didn't you find it tamer than serving the fur company?" Andrew asked.

A curious smile crept into Graham's eyes.

"One can't have everything, Mr. Allinson. I've been content, a willing slave of the desk, only seeing the wilds for a week or two in summer. But I've thought I might make another trip before I get too old."

"I think I understand," Andrew replied; "if I've a chance, I'm going before I return home. There's so much up yonder that impresses me—the caribou, the timber wolves, the lake storms, and the break up of the rivers in the spring. What a tremendous spectacle the last must be!—six-foot ice, piled up in wild confusion, thundering down the valleys. I've only followed the track of it in summer, but I've seen the wreckage of rubbed-out buttes and islands, and boulders smashed to rubble."

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"It is grand," said Graham quietly.

"I wonder if you'd mind telling Mr. Allinson about the silver lode you found?" Carnally suggested. "I guess he'd be interested."

Graham needed some persuasion before he began his tale.

"It happened a long time ago and I seldom mention it now; in fact, I'll confess that the lode is looked upon as a harmless illusion of mine. My friends call it my Dream Mine. When I was a young man I was stationed at a Hudson Bay factory about four hundred miles north of here and was despatched with two half-breeds and a canoe to carry stores to a band of Indians. No doubt you know that the great Company held sovereign authority over the North for a very long time and the Indians depended on it for their maintenance. Well, we set off with the canoe, paddling and portaging up rivers and across the height of land, toward the south."

"Then you were working across country toward the headwaters of this river," Andrew remarked.

"We didn't get so far, but I did my errand, and one day when crossing a divide we nooned beside a little creek. As I filled the kettle I noticed something peculiar about the pebbles and picked up a few. They were unusually heavy and dully lustrous, which made me curious. Following the creek back, I found a vein of the same material among the rocks. I filled a small bag with specimens and took the bearings of the spot, though we had to get on without loss of time because the rivers would soon be freezing up. On reaching the fort I showed the agent the specimens. I can remember his look of disgust. He was a grim old Scot."

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"Just pebbles; I'm no saying but they might be pretty,' he remarked, and opening the door threw them out. 'Ye'll think nae mair o' them. The Company's no collecting precious stones, and ye should ken a souter's expected to stick till his last.'"

"I wonder," said Andrew, "which of you hailed from the Border."

"Both," laughed Graham. "He was a Hawick terry; I was born between Selkirk and Etrick shaws. The official language of the Company was Caledonian; but that's beside the point. I was young enough to feel hurt; though I knew my man and how staunch he was to the Company's traditional policy."

"What was that policy?"

"The North for the Hudson Bay. As you know, in Canada all minerals belong to the Crown. The first discoverer can claim the right to work them, so long as he complies with the regulations."

"I see," said Andrew. "Prospectors might scare away animals with skins worth a good deal of silver. But I didn't mean to interrupt you."

"A day or two later I thought I would look for the stones, but there had been a heavy fall of snow and I found only a few of them. I never got the rest, because I was away when the thaw came. About a year later I was sent back with the same companions to the band of Indians. It was winter, they were starving, and the agent recognized their claim. There was no oppression of native races in the Hudson Bay domains; not a yard of the Indians' land was taken from them, and drink could not be bought at the factories. The Company offered them a higher standard of comfort if they would work for it, but there was no compulsion. If they found English guns and stores and blankets better than the articles they had used, the agents were there to trade."

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Graham paused with a smile.

"I'm discursive, Mr. Allinson, but I've a grievance against the Hudson Bay, and I want to be fair."

"I'm interested," Andrew declared. "It's a clean record for a commercial monopoly, considering how cocoa, rubber, and one or two other things, are often procured."

"We reached the Indian camp, handed over the supplies, and started back, with rations carefully weighed out to see us through. In winter starvation stalks one closely across the northern wilds. Now I had meant to visit the creek where I'd found the stones, but there was the difficulty that, as the Indians had changed their location, it would mean a longer trip. I couldn't rob the starving trappers of anything that had been sent them, and I must make our provisions cover an extra three or four days. There was a danger in this, because an unexpected delay might be fatal, and the dogs were already in poor condition. I faced the risk. We set off, the sledge running heavily over soft snow, and we reached the neighborhood of the creek in a raging blizzard, and camped for twenty-four hours. I could not find the creek, it was impossible to wait, and we went on through the bitterest weather I have known. Gales and snowstorms dogged our steps all the way to the fort and we reached it, starving, four days late. One of the half-breeds had a badly frozen foot and I'll carry a memento of that march for the rest of my life."

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Graham held up his left hand, which was short of two fingers.

"The result of a small ax cut and putting on a damp mitten, when we were near the creek."

"That put an end to your prospecting?"

"It did. I think the agent suspected me, for he took care that I was not sent south again, and during the next year I left the Company's service. I kept the stones and after some time took them to an American assayer. He found them rich in lead and silver, which are often combined, and his estimate of the value of the matrix rock startled me. It was beyond anything I had imagined."

"Then there's a fortune awaiting exploitation beside that creek," exclaimed Andrew. "Did you do nothing about it?"



Graham smiled at him.

"I was married then, Mr. Allinson; a clerk in a small sawmill. What could I do? Stories of such strikes in the wilderness are common, and I had nothing but two or three bits of stone to show a capitalist. The country's difficult to traverse; it would have needed a well-equipped party to carry up stores and haul a canoe over the divides. In winter, provisions and sledge dogs could be obtained only from the Hudson Bay agents. The Company had to be reckoned with, and it was too strong for me."

"They couldn't have forbidden you to prospect in their territory."

"Oh, no; after all, it belongs to Canada. But their agents could refuse me the assistance and supplies I couldn't do without. It was impossible to hire an Indian guide or packer without their consent. If I'd been able to raise a thousand dollars, I might have beaten them; but that was out of the question."

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"You tried, I've no doubt?"

"I spent a year's savings on a visit to Montreal and made the round of the banks and financiers' offices. Here and there a man listened with some interest, but nobody would venture five dollars on the project."

"And then?" said Andrew.

"I gave up all idea of developing the mine. I had two children to bring up; my salary was small. From the beginning, my wife made light of my discovery—I dare say she feared I might go back to the North—the children as they grew up took her view, and my silver mine became a joke among us. For twenty years I've led a happy, domestic life; but I've never forgotten the lode and I've thought of it often the last year or two. My girl is teaching, the boy has got a post, and I have a few dollars accumulating in the bank."

Graham, breaking off, filled his pipe and laughed softly before he went on.

"That's my story, Mr. Allinson; but perhaps it isn't finished yet. I may take the trail again some day, but it will have to be soon. The North is a hard country, and I'm getting old."

Andrew was moved. Loving adventure as he did, he could imagine what Graham's self-denial had cost him while he had cheerfully carried out his duty to his family.

"Prospecting would no doubt be easier now?" he suggested.

"Much easier," said Graham. "The railroad has opened up the country, and the Company finds miners very good customers. Only, when you get back a short distance from the track, the North is still unsubdued. To grapple with its snow and ice, its rapids and muskegs, is mighty tough work."

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They talked about other matters, until the chilly mist, gathering thicker round the camp, drove them into the tent.

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## **CHAPTER VII**

### **THE AMATEUR MINER**

It was afternoon, and hot sunshine poured down into the little valley. Andrew stood at the foot of a low range, looking about with keen interest. The strip of level ground between rock and river was strewn with small fir stumps, among which lay half-burned logs and branches. On the edge of the clearing stood two log shacks and a smith's shop, with an unsightly heap of empty cans, broken boots and discarded clothing in front of them. A bank of shattered stone stretched toward the stream, and on a scarped slope of the hillside where the rocks shone a warm pink there was a black hole. A stream of water flowing out of it ran down a trench. This was the Rain Bluff Mine. Andrew felt disappointed. There was not much to show for the capital that had been subscribed. He supposed, however, that the pieces of machinery which lay in disorder about the waterside were expensive, and he meant to ascertain their cost.

"Why don't they get those things fitted up and working?" he asked Carnally, who stood near him.

"They're not complete. We're waiting until the Mappin people bring the rest of them."

Andrew pointed to several stacks of small logs.

"I suppose those are props? You seem to use a good many. Do you cut them on the spot?"

"The Mappin boys do. The Company pays for them by the foot."

"It strikes me that Mappin's doing a good deal of the Company's work. However, it looks as if we meant to dig the ore out."

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Carnally saw impatience and suspicion in his face.

"I'm asking a good many questions, Jake," Andrew went on: "but I'm in the unfortunate position of having to look after matters I know nothing about. That's a rather remarkable qualification for a director."

"It isn't altogether unusual," Carnally replied. "I could point out one or two men who couldn't tell a pump from a rock drill, and control mining concerns."

"It sounds surprising. How's it done?"

"By hiring subordinates with brains and keeping a careful eye on them."

"I'm serious, Jake. The Company pays my expenses and two hundred dollars a month while I'm in Canada. It's the shareholders' money; I feel that I ought to earn it."

"You may have trouble."

"That won't matter. I've had only a few words with the mine boss, Watson. What kind of man is he?"

"He's straight; a smart manager underground, good at timbering and getting ore out; but that's as far as he goes."

"Well, we'll look at the workings."

As they approached the adit Watson came to meet them. He was a short, wiry man, clad in wet, soil-stained overalls. Andrew indicated the drainage trench.

"There seems to be a good deal of water in the mine."

"That's so," said Watson. "We want to get rid of it. I've several boys in the sump, baling it up with coal-oil cans."

"You mean the five-gallon drums you get your kerosene in?" Andrew asked in surprise. "Why don't you order a pump?"

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"We've got half of one and the engine's fixed. Guess we'll get the rest when Mappin's ready."

"I'll send down word about it to the Landing."

"You needn't. One of the river bosses is up here; he's getting his dinner now."

"But dinner has been finished some time."

"That don't count. We had pork to-day and the Mappin man figured he'd like trout, so I had to tell Yan Li to cook him some. If you want your plant brought up, you have to be civil to the transport people."

The color swept into Andrew's face.

"Bring the fellow here!"

Watson grinned and called to a miner at work on the dump. The miner disappeared and presently came back with a man.

"You sent for me, Mr. Allinson?" he said, as if he resented it.

"I did," answered Andrew curtly. "You have a pump of ours which has been in your hands some time. I want it delivered here immediately."

The man looked surprised at his tone.

"We'll do what we can, but most of the boys are busy on the road."

"Then you had better send them back to the canoes. Our supplies must not be stopped."

"It's awkward," said the other. "You don't quite understand yet how things are run here, Mr. Allinson. You want to give and take."

"I expect to understand them better soon," Andrew dryly rejoined. "What we want at present is the pump, and if it isn't here by next week I'll charge your employer with the extra expense we're being put to."

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"The office wouldn't allow your claim."

"I won't make one," said Andrew. "I'll knock it off your bill. No accounts will be paid without my sanction."

"Oh, well," said the other, "since you make a point of it, I'll get down the river right away and see where that pump is."

He left them, and Watson looked at Carnally as they entered the mine.

"And I thought he was an English sucker!" he remarked.

"You were wrong," said Carnally. "You'll know Mr. Allinson better in a little while."

Seeing that Andrew was waiting, Watson gave him a small flat lamp to hook in his hat, and they

went down a narrow gallery. By the uncertain smoky light Andrew could see that it was strongly timbered: stout props were ranged along its sides, and beams, some cracked and sagging, spanned the roof between. The floor was wet and strewn with large fragments, which seemed to have fallen lately. Watson explained that they were working through treacherous rocks. Presently they stopped at the top of a dark hole, where a man was busy at a primitive windlass.

"Lode dips sharply here," Watson explained. "We had to go down a bit, but we'll push on this heading. Pay dirt's badly broken up, but we'll fix things different when we strike it fair. It's pretty wet in the lower level; do you feel like going down?"

Andrew put on the waterproof jacket that had been given him, and looked at the pit. A rough ladder ran down its side, but the man at the windlass turned to him as he emptied a big can into the drainage trench. [Pg 70]

"The rope's quicker and quite as safe," he said. "One of the Mappin boys made that ladder and fixed it wrong. Catch hold here and get a turn round your foot; you don't want to go through the bottom of the can."

Andrew having done as he was directed, the man called a warning to somebody beneath and then let him go. When he had descended a short distance, the rope was checked, and a man seizing it swung him across a murky pool, in which the reflection of faint lights quivered; then springing down, he found himself in a short gallery. A smoky lamp burned here and there among the timbering, and shadowy figures were busy in recesses with hammer and drill. The floor was strewn with broken rock, damming back the stream that ran along it, and water freely trickled in. Near at hand three or four men were building up a square pillar of timber and rock toward the roof. They wore no clothing above the waist, and the drips from the stone splashed on their wet skin. Watson spoke to one of them before he turned to Andrew.

"Ore's pretty good, here," he said. "We had to make a show for the people in Montreal to do some figuring on—that is why I cut so much stuff without leaving more support, though I didn't know the roof was quite so bad. We'll have her shored up in a day or two, but the worst trouble's the water."

Andrew asked him a few questions, and presently went back to the surface, where he sat down in the sunshine and lighted his pipe. A good deal of capital had already been expended, and the result looked discouragingly small. The Company owned a short tunnel, driven into what was evidently inferior ore, and another at the bottom of a pit, which might be choked up by a fall of roof and was threatened with inundation. Still, Andrew supposed that success depended upon the quality of the main body of the ore, which they had hardly reached as yet. When he had finished his pipe, he joined Carnally, who was busy among the machinery by the river. [Pg 71]

"Jake," he said, "I want you to go to the Landing and see that the Mappin people send up the plant Watson expects as soon as it's off the cars. I shall stay here a while and try to learn something about my business."

"Well," drawled Carnally with signs of amusement, "there is a good deal to learn."

He set off early the next morning, and Andrew, putting on a suit of overalls, went down into the mine and insisted on being given practical instruction in the use of the drill. It was a painful process: he was forced to kneel on sharp stones and sometimes in water while he held the steel bar, which jarred his hands when his companion struck it. Nor did he find the work easier when he came to strike, standing in a cramped position without room to swing the hammer, his eyes fixed upon the end of the drill, which must be squarely hit. To miss might result in the other man's knuckles being smashed. The inch of metal which glimmered in the lamplight formed a perplexing mark. Andrew had an accurate eye, however, and did not often miss; and he forgave his instructor for hitting him on the wrist, though this necessitated its being bound up for several days. He learned the quick twist of the drill which brings the cutting edge to bear, and how to wedge up the roof by setting a prop, sawed a little too long for the position, slantwise beneath a beam and hammering it straight; and then he turned his attention to more advanced subjects. [Pg 72]

"Watson," he commented one morning, "this mine strikes me as being badly arranged. The best ore's on the lower level, the lode dips, and having the shaft underground must give you extra trouble in getting the stone and water out."

"It does," Watson assented. "You want to remember that we took over Rain Bluff after work had been begun, and the fellows who locate these bush mines often don't know much about their job. If they think the ore's there, they start to get it out the best way they can. I've seen that we'll have to drive a lower adit right in from outside sooner or later, but I'm shy of the expense."

"It seems to me that the money will be profitably spent," Andrew said when they had discussed it for a while. "You'll get it back by saving labor and pumping, while the extra cost you're put to now would probably increase. You'd better start the work at once; I'll be responsible."

Watson was beginning to understand that the resident director possessed abilities which he had by no means suspected at first. He did as he was told, and for the next few weeks Andrew was pleasantly occupied. He learned to nip detonators on to fuses, and how a stick of giant-powder should be inserted into a firing hole. He studied the lines of cleavage in the rock, calculated the cost in labor and explosives of the stone brought down, and found it all interesting. As a matter of fact, it was the first time he had seriously interested himself in anything except sport, and there

was encouragement in feeling that he possessed some useful powers. Watson spoke to him as to one who could understand; the miners did not seem to notice his clumsiness. He had expected some banter from them, but none was offered, and he remembered that it was Leonard and his relatives who had shown an amused disbelief in his capabilities.

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One day he descended to the lower level, where the men were having trouble in the manager's absence. A number of lamps were burning and the place looked wetter than usual in the unsteady light. Water trickled down the end wall, the rows of props were dripping, and the half-naked men splashed through pools when they moved to and fro. They were feverishly busy: one group building a massive pillar, others putting up fresh props; only two or three were breaking out ore at the working face. Then Carnally came toward him, and his wet face showed tense and anxious in the light of Andrew's lamp.

"The blamed roof's very shaky," he said. "We've had two ugly cave-ins. I wish Watson was back. And I'm getting scared about the water; expect we're tapping a tank-pot in the hill, but there's nothing to help us in locating it. You might give the boys a hand with the pillar."

Andrew stripped to shirt and overall trousers, and hurried toward the spot. He saw that the men needed help, for the cracked roof was bulging downward ominously and there were several heaps of freshly fallen stones. They were constructing a square frame of logs, crossed at the ends, and filling it in with broken rock as fast as they could; but there remained a wide gap between its top and the roof it was meant to support. For an hour he worked savagely, wet with falling water and dripping with perspiration, passing up heavy beams and stones to the men who laid them in place. He grew breathless and tore his hand, but the flakes of rock which fell at intervals urged him on. Once or twice there was a crash farther down the tunnel and he saw shadowy figures scatter and others run in with props, but for the most part he fixed his attention on his task, because it looked as if they had no time to lose. When a gush of water flowing down the heading splashed about his boots, he called Carnally.

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"Is this tunnel going to cave in?" he asked.

"That's more than I can tell," Carnally replied. "We may be able to shore her up, but if it's not done soon, the chances of her crushing in are steep."

"I see," said Andrew, and turned to his companions. "Boys, I'll stand for a ten-dollar bonus if this job's finished in half an hour."

One of them laughed, but there was no other response and they did not seem to increase their exertions much. This suggested that they had been doing their utmost already, with a clear recognition of the risk they ran. Their pay was good, but something besides their interest urged them to keep the mine open. These were men who would not easily be beaten by inpouring water or crushing rock: they had braced themselves for a grapple with their treacherous natural foes.

Andrew, however, was feeling the strain. His injured hand was painful, the stones he had to lift were heavy, his arms and back ached; but he meant to hold out, for the gap between roof and pillar was getting narrow. He had raised a ponderous piece of rock and was holding it up to a man who reached for it when there was a smashing sound above and a dark mass rushed past him. The tunnel echoed with a crash, and Andrew received a violent blow on his head. The pain of it turned him dizzy, but he heard a clamor of voices and harsh warning cries. They were followed by a smashing of timber; he saw two or three props crush in; and then half the lights went out and he felt the water washing past his boots.

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The next moment his legs were wet, and he set off for the shaft, knee-deep in a rushing flood. There was a confused uproar behind him: stones falling, timber breaking; and then the last of the lamps went out. It cost him an effort to keep his head. Hurrying men jostled him; he struck his feet against sharp stones and was thankful that he did not fall. While he battled with a growing horror, he made for the feeble glimmer which marked the bottom of the shaft. It was a short distance, and he presently stood in the gathering water among a group of half-seen men, watching one being slowly drawn up toward the brighter light above. Another was hurriedly climbing the ladder, while a comrade waited to follow as soon as he was high enough. Then Andrew felt a hand on his arm.

"I was looking for you," Carnally said. "You had better get up. Take the rope as soon as it drops."

Andrew felt a strong desire to do so, but he mastered it.

"No," he returned calmly; "not yet. In a sense, it's my mine; I must see the boys out."

A man near him raised a shout.

"What's the matter with the winch! Can't you heave on it?"

A deepening rush of water swirled about them and there were sharp cries:

"You above, get on to the handles! When's that rope coming? She ought to carry two!"

A man clutched at the rope, which fell among them but when another grasped it Andrew interfered.

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"Steady, boys!" he said. "The winch won't lift you both. Being heaved up is too slow. Tell them to make the rope fast, and then climb; it's strong enough to carry two or three."

There was a growl of approval; instructions were shouted up; and while the water rapidly deepened, the group at the foot of the shaft decreased. Andrew, however, was above his waist before he clutched the ladder, while Carnally seized the rope. There was a man above him whose feet he must avoid, and he felt the timber shake, but it was with vast relief that he climbed out of the flood. He was near the top when a cross-batten broke and Grennan, the fellow above him, slipping down a foot or two, bruised Andrew's fingers with his heavy boot. For a brief moment Andrew clung by one hand, and then, his overtired arm suddenly relaxing, his fingers loosed their grasp and he fell, half dazed from pain and horror, into the swirling flood below. A crash of the timbers somewhere in the shaft preceded a fresh onrush of water. The flood was neck-deep and rapidly rising.

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## CHAPTER VIII

### THE ISLAND OF PINES

When Carnally crawled out, wet and breathless, into the open air with the last of the men, he turned to speak to Andrew.

"Where's the boss?" he demanded quickly of Grennan.

Just then the roar of a fresh rushing of waters was borne up to them, and Carnally was filled with anxiety as he leaned over the edge of the pit.

"Allinson!" he shouted.

No answer came, and before the scared miners could fully realize what had happened, Carnally was sliding down the rope. In the feeble light at the bottom he saw Andrew's arms reaching above his head grasping desperately on to the ladder. He seemed unable to pull himself up, but held on with a vise-grip.

"All right, Allinson!" Carnally called across reassuringly.

Letting go of the rope, a few strokes in the water brought him to the ladder.

"My knee!" explained Allinson, his face gray with pain. "Struck a sharp ledge at the bottom!"

With Carnally's assistance, he managed to climb to the top of the ladder, where a dozen arms were extended to pull him to safety. He had a bad gash on his knee, his fingers on one hand were bruised and bleeding, and there was a large welt on his head where the cross-beam had struck him; but there seemed to be nothing serious.

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He held out his hand to Carnally, and they gripped in silence. Words were unnecessary.

"The cross-pieces of the ladder could not have been properly notched in," Andrew said after a while. "I think it was supplied by Mappin?"

"Yes," answered Carnally; "and it's a rough job!"

"I must endeavor to see that Mappin does his work better. But what's to be done about the flooded level?"

"Try to pump it out; it's fortunate that with a wood-burning engine fuel costs you nothing. I expect Watson will start all the boys at the new heading as soon as he gets back."

They discussed the mine until Yan Li called them to supper, and for the next two weeks they worked very hard. Then Andrew went down to the Landing on business, and one day he sat lazily in a rowing skiff on the Lake of Shadows. A blaze of sunshine fell upon the shimmering water, which farther on was streaked with deep-blue lines, but close at hand it lay dim and still, reflecting the somber pines. The skiff was drifting past the shore of a rocky island, on which a few maples, turning crimson, made patches of glowing color among the dusky needles, when Andrew saw a girl sitting on the shore. She was near when he noticed her, and it struck him that she was remarkably pretty. The thin white dress, cut in the current American fashion, left her finely molded arms uncovered to the elbow and revealed her firm white throat. Her hands were shapely; and, for her hat lay beside her, he noticed the warm coppery tones in her hair. She had gray eyes and her face pleased him, though while observing the regularity of her features, he could not clearly analyze its charm. Then feeling that he had gazed at her as long as was admissible, he dipped his oars, but, somewhat to his astonishment, she called to him.

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"Did you see a canoe as you came?" she asked.

"No," Andrew answered. "Have you lost yours?"

"It floated away; I didn't notice until it was too late. It went toward the point."

She indicated the end of the island, and Andrew nodded.

"It would drift to leeward. I'll go and look for it."

As he swung the skiff round it struck him that she had kept curiously still. Her pose was somewhat unusual, for she sat with her feet drawn up beneath her skirt, and skirts, as he remembered, were cut decidedly short. He rowed away and presently saw the canoe some distance off. On running alongside, he noticed a pair of light stockings in the bottom, and laughed as the reason for the girl's attitude became apparent. Pulling back with the canoe astern, he loosed the light craft and drove it toward the beach with a vigorous push.

"Thank you," said the girl, and he tactfully rowed away.

He had not gone far when he heard a hail and saw her standing on the point, waving her hand. For a moment or two he hesitated. As the canoe had grounded within her reach, he could not see what she wanted; and, in view of the discovery he had made, he had imagined that she would have been glad to get rid of him. Still, she had called him and he pulled back.

"Can I be of any further assistance?" he asked, noticing with some relief that she now had her shoes on.

"Yes," she said frankly. "I am marooned here; there's no paddle in the canoe."

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"No paddle? But how could it have fallen out?"

"I don't know; and it doesn't seem an important point. Perhaps the canoe rocked, and it overbalanced."

"I could tow you to the Landing," Andrew suggested.

His manner was formally correct and she felt half amused. This young man was obviously not addicted to indiscriminate gallantry.

"I don't want to go to the Landing, and the canoe would tow easier with no one on board. Your skiff should carry two."

He ran the craft in, made fast the canoe, and then held out his hand. When she was seated, he pushed off.

"Where shall I take you?" he asked gravely.

"To the large island yonder—the Island of Pines," she said, indicating it; and he knew that this was Geraldine Frobisher, whom Mappin had discussed. Andrew admitted that his description of her was warranted.

"You have been unlucky," he remarked.

"I've been careless and have had to pay for it. We got breakfast early and I've missed my lunch."

"It's nearly three o'clock," said Andrew, pulling faster. "But how is it no one came to look for you?"

"My aunt goes to sleep in the afternoon; my father had some business at the Landing—if he had been at home it would have taken him some time to find me. He would have searched the nearer islands first, systematically and in rotation." She smiled. "That's the kind of man he is. I suppose you have guessed who I am?"

"Miss Frobisher?"

"And you're Mr. Allinson. It wasn't hard to identify you. Perhaps you know that your doings are a source of interest to the people at the Landing."

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"I can't see why that should be so."

"For one thing, they seem to think you are up against what they call 'a tough proposition'."

Andrew's face grew thoughtful. Since the collapse of the heading, he had spent a fortnight in determined physical toil, as his scarred hands and broken nails testified. It had been a time of stress and anxiety, and during it he had realized that the mine would be a costly one to work. The ore must carry a high percentage of metal if it were to pay for extraction.

"I'm afraid that's true," he said.

"Then you won't get much leisure for hunting and fishing?"

Andrew laughed.

"After all, those were not my objects in coming out, though you're not the only person who seems to have concluded that they were."

"I have no opinion on the matter," Geraldine declared. "But at the Landing you are supposed to be more of a sportsman than a miner—isn't it flattering to feel that people are talking about you? Then you are really working at the mine?"

"So far, I've saved the Company about two dollars and a-half a day."

"But isn't your voice in controlling things worth more than that?"

"No," Andrew replied; "I'm afraid it isn't."

"Then you don't know much about mining?"

"I believe," Andrew answered dryly, "I know a little more than I did."

Geraldine was pleased with him. The man was humorously modest, but he looked capable and resolute.

"Well," she said, "it can't be easy work; though one understands that getting the ore out is not always the greatest difficulty."

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"It's hard enough when the roof comes down, and the props crush up, and the water breaks in. Still, I believe you're right."

"I know something about these matters," she said, and then surprised him by a sudden turn of the subject. "There's one man you can trust. I mean Jake Carnally."

"Do you know him?"

"He built our boat pier and cleared the bush to make our lawn. We often made him talk to us; and I know my father, who's a good judge, thought a good deal of him."

"Jake," said Andrew cautiously, "rather puzzles me: I can get so little out of him, though I like the man. As you seem to know the people I have to deal with, is there anybody else whose trustworthiness you would vouch for?"

Geraldine's face hardened.

"No, I don't know of anybody else; but you will soon be able to form your own opinion."

This struck Andrew as significant, because she must have heard of his connection with Mappin, who visited the house. Just then he caught sight of a boat that swung around the end of an island and headed toward them with bows buried in foam.

"A gasoline launch," he said. "She's traveling very fast."

"It's ours," explained Geraldine. "My father must have got back from the Landing and has come to look for me."

The launch was soon abreast of them and stopped near the skiff. A man of middle age, in light clothes, held the tiller and looked at Geraldine inquiringly.

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"I suppose you have been dreadfully worried," she said with a smile at him. "I was cast away on a desolate island when the canoe went adrift, and should have been there still, only that Mr. Allinson came to my rescue." She turned to Andrew. "My father, Henry T. Frobisher."

Andrew noticed that Frobisher glanced at him keenly when he heard his name, but he started the engine and ran the launch alongside.

"Come on board and see our island," he said. "I'll take you back to the Landing afterward."

Andrew followed Miss Frobisher into the craft and made the skiff and canoe fast astern, and they set off and presently reached a short pier which ran out into still, clear water. A lawn stretched down to the shore, bordered with flowers, and at the end of it a wooden house stood against a background of somber pines. A veranda ran across the front, the rows of slender columns braced by graceful arches; above were green-shuttered windows, steep roofs, and gables. Moldings, scrolls and finials had been freely and tastefully used to adorn the building, though Andrew understood that Frobisher used it only occasionally as a summer resort.

Andrew was taken in and presented to Frobisher's sister, Mrs. Denton, a lady with a languid expression and formal manners. Then tea was served in artistic china, and after some general conversation Frobisher led Andrew to a small room on the upper story, which looked out upon the lake, and gave him an excellent cigar. Noticing him glance at the maps unrolled on a table, he smiled.

"I find that I can't get away from business," he explained. "It follows me down here; and in a new country like this there's generally some interesting project cropping up. I go off into the bush hunting, and see something that looks like an opportunity; the idea sticks to me and begins to develop."

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"So far, I haven't found the prospects here very encouraging; but I suppose mining's slow," Andrew responded. "What do you deal in?"

"Land, lumber, waterfalls that will drive turbines—anything in the shape of natural resources. But how are you getting on at Rain Bluff?"

Andrew reflected that as the Company's operations would be freely discussed at the Landing, there was no reason why he should be reticent. Besides, he felt inclined to trust his host. The man had a keen, thoughtful face, but its seriousness was relieved by his genial smile.

"I'm afraid we're not getting on very fast," he said, and related the mishaps they had met with.

"You seem to find the work harder than you expected."

"I must admit it," said Andrew. "If it were merely a question of propping up the roof, getting rid

of the water, and cutting out the ore, I'd feel less diffident. It's the business complications that I have the most trouble in understanding."

Frobisher gave him a keen glance.

"That side's generally involved. Rain Bluff, however, has a good big capital, I understand."

"Which means big liabilities. We're naturally expecting to pay dividends on it."

"It's an expectation that's not invariably realized," Frobisher remarked dryly. "You feel that your shareholders ought to be satisfied?"

"Of course. That's why I'm here."

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"Our acquaintance is short, but if you don't feel that I'm too much of a stranger, I might perhaps be able to throw some light on any points that you're puzzled about. I've had a pretty extensive experience in these matters."

He was mildly gratified by his guest's ready confidence, but Andrew had been endowed with a quick and accurate judgment of character. He talked without reserve as Frobisher drew him out; and the American listened with unusual interest. The affairs of the Rain Bluff Company were no concern of his, but the working of Allinson's mind fixed his attention. Allinson was obviously a novice in such matters, but, for an untrained man, he showed a grasp of the salient points and a boldness in attacking difficulties which Frobisher thought remarkable. Lighting a fresh cigar when Andrew had finished, he smoked a while in silence. With a few words he might explain the Company's situation in a manner that would fill his guest with astonishment and perhaps dismay, but on the whole it did not seem advisable that they should be spoken. It would be better that Allinson should find out for himself how matters stood. Frobisher felt strongly curious about what he would do then.

Andrew presently looked up, as if he expected some comment.

"There are one or two suggestions I might make," said Frobisher.

They were not of much moment, though they promised to save Andrew some time and trouble, and after discussing them he rose to go. When they reached the hall Geraldine met them.

"If you are going to the Landing, I'll come with you," she said. "There are a few things I want from the stores."

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"Then if Mr. Allinson will excuse me, I'll let you take him. I have some matters to consider before the mail to-morrow; and waiting while you buy millinery is a tedious business."

Frobisher shook hands with Andrew cordially.

"Come back to the Island of Pines whenever you feel inclined," he said, and Andrew and Geraldine walked down to the pier.

She started the engine and stood aft, holding the helm, while Andrew sat on a locker, looking about while the launch swept noisily away. The days were rapidly getting shorter and the sunlight had faded off the lake. The breeze had fallen and the water lay gleaming, smooth as oil, with the shadow of the rocks and trees floating on it. Here and there a clump of pines to the westward stood out, black and rugged, against a glow of pink and green; the air was cold and filled with a resinous fragrance. But Geraldine occupied most of Andrew's attention. She stood, gracefully poised, her light dress fluttering in the draught made by the launch's speed, and a clear warm color glowing in her face. Fine spray leaped about the bows, around which there curled a wisp of foam, and the froth streamed back far across the lake.

Andrew was inclined to be sorry the launch was so fast: it was not far to the Landing, and he could have spent an hour or two pleasantly on board. Miss Frobisher was not the first attractive young woman he had met, and she had neither said nor done anything in particular to excite his admiration. Indeed, when he came to think of it, she had said little to him; but somehow she impressed him as no other girl had done. When presently she made some remark which demanded an answer, they chatted gaily until she ran the launch alongside the wharf. There Andrew left her and went to his hotel.

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After making her purchases, Geraldine returned to the island, where she found her father sitting on the pier with a notebook in his hand.

"You landed your passenger safely, I see. What did you think of him?"

"He didn't give me much opportunity for forming an opinion, except that he's rather serious," Geraldine answered with a smile. "Besides, I don't suppose my opinion would be worth as much as yours."

"That's a very modest admission; I thought you imagined yourself a good judge of young men. Anyway, I'm interested in this one; perhaps because he has upset the ideas I had about him."

"How?"

"For one thing, he's straight—straight as a plumb-line, which isn't altogether what I expected. Then, for a man engaged in business, he's a type that's new to me."



"Are those remarks connected?" Geraldine asked with a laugh. "You're in business and nobody could be straighter than you are."

Frobisher looked at her with appreciation.

"I'm afraid there have been occasions when I had to sail dangerously near the wind; but that's outside the question. I'm sorry for this young fellow—there's trouble ahead of him."

"You mean financial trouble? Of course, I've heard people talking about the mine."

"Not altogether; anyway, if I'm right about him, I don't think he'll find that the worst." Frobisher broke into a thoughtful smile. "After all, I have met business men who didn't consider their money the most important thing they could lose. But I'm inclined to think the people who sent Allinson over here have made a mistake."

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Geraldine was unwilling to betray too great an interest in the man; and, indeed, her curiosity about him did not go very far.

"Oh, well," she said, "it really doesn't concern us."

She turned toward the house, and Frobisher looked out across the water. From what he knew about Rain Bluff Mine he had concluded that Allinson must be either a clever and somewhat unscrupulous exploiter of such ventures, or a guileless ignoramus who could be made a tool of. Now, having met him, he was convinced that the man was neither of these. However, he had other things to think about; and opening the notebook he busied himself with a scheme for utilizing some water-power.

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## CHAPTER IX AMONG THE ICE

Graham was sitting on the veranda of his house at the Landing after supper one evening when Andrew joined him. The veranda was broad, and covered with mosquito-netting, and furnished with a table and one or two chairs; the wooden house was small but pretty. In front a plot of grass, kept green throughout the hot summer by an automatic sprinkler, ran, unfenced, to the edge of the dusty road. Across this a belt of blackened fir stumps stretched back to the stacks of lumber by the sawmill, and beyond that the lake lay shining in the evening light.

A window was open and Andrew could hear a girl singing. A rattle of crockery which suggested that Mrs. Graham was busy with domestic duties also reached him now and then; and a lad who had greeted him pleasantly as he passed sat on the nearest fir stump talking with a companion. Graham seemed to indicate it all with a movement of his pipe as he turned to Andrew.

"My world, Mr. Allinson," he said. "A happy one, but narrow."

"I feel inclined to envy you," Andrew replied.

"I am to be envied; I admit it with gratitude." Graham glanced half wistfully at a map on the table. "For all that, I remember the wide spaces up yonder now and then."

"If I were in your place, I wouldn't study that map too much."

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"Ah! It isn't an amusement that I often indulge in; but sometimes, when I've spent a week making up trumpery lumber bills or getting in five-dollar accounts, I find it a solace to recall what I used to do. However, I've inconsistently practised prudent self-denial in other ways. There was a moose head—a beast I shot—I took off its stand and gave to the Institute; an old pair of snowshoes that hung above the mantel I gave my boy. He said they were very poor things and sadly out of date."

Andrew glanced at the map and noticed the lines penciled across it. He felt that he was not acting considerably in tempting Graham, but he could not resist.

"Those marks show the marches you have made?" he asked.

Graham laid his finger on the map, moving it from spot to spot.

"Yes. I don't need a diary; I can see it all again. We started here one winter and made three hundred miles on half rations, with wind and snow ahead all the way. There we camped three days in a blizzard among a clump of willows, while the snow piled up six feet deep to lee of us. I made this line through a country new to me; two hundred miles over soft snow, with the dogs playing out and the timber wolves on my trail for the last few days. This lake ends in a big muskeg, and we snagged our canoe there one fall. As she'd ripped her bilge open, we left her and spent a day and a half floundering through two or three feet of water and tall reeds, and carrying loads of sixty pounds." He paused and indicated a line that broke off abruptly in a wide bare space. "The lode lies south of here, and I believe I'm the only survivor of the few who knew of it. One half-breed was drowned in a rapid, another lost in a blizzard; the agent, so I heard afterward, left the factory to visit some Indians three or four miles off and they found him next

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day in a snowdrift, frozen to death."

"A grim country," Andrew said thoughtfully, "One to make a man afraid, and yet——"

Graham laughed, rather harshly.

"Yes; I think you know! Well, I'm glad that for twenty years I've mastered the longing and kept my head. Now, however, my children have made a fair start, with prospects of going farther than I have done, and my responsibility is lightening. A winter up there would satisfy me—I'm afraid it would be all I could stand now—and though it's still out of the question, I've a feeling that a way may be found before I grow too old."

He rolled up the map resolutely and laid it aside, and soon afterward Mrs. Graham's voice reached them.

"Bring Mr. Allinson in. It's getting chilly."

Andrew rose and followed Graham into his sitting-room. It was very small and there were signs of economy in its appointments, but it had a homelike charm. Two or three sketches in color which showed some talent hung on the varnished board walls. The lamp, though obviously cheap, was of artistic design; the rug on the stained floor and the hangings were of harmonious hue. Mrs. Graham, a little, faded woman with a cheerful air, sat sewing at a table, and opposite her a girl was busy with some papers. Both greeted Andrew cordially, and a few minutes later the young man he had seen outside came in with a humorous tale he had heard.

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He was a handsome lad, quicker of speech and more assertive than his father, and the girl, who now and then made a remark, had a decided air. Though Graham would occasionally talk without reserve, he was as a rule quiet and dreamy. It was not from him that his children had acquired a trace of the somewhat aggressive smartness which characterizes the inhabitants of the new western cities: he had more in common with the silent dwellers in the lonely wilds. These are, for the most part, sentimentalists of a kind; loving the wilderness, not for what can be made out of it, and untouched by the materialistic ideas of the towns, where the business chance is the chief thing sought. Their gifts become most manifest when the ice breaks up on the rivers across which they must get the dog-sleds, and when all the powers of mind and body are taxed to traverse the frozen waste before starvation cuts short the march. It struck Andrew that Graham, dressed in shabby clothes, listening good-humoredly while his children talked, had somehow the look of a captive eagle, conscious of crippled wings, though the simile was a bad one because there was no predatory fierceness in him.

"One of you might shut the door," said Mrs. Graham. "The nights are getting colder fast; we'll soon have to light the basement heater." She turned to Andrew. "This is a hard country in winter. I've seen the thermometer stand a week at fifty below."

"Don't be scared, Mr. Allinson," laughed the lad, as he closed the door. "It's not often too fierce, and in a place like the Landing there's generally something going on. Will the frost interfere with your mining?"

"Not underground," said Andrew. "I understand that nothing can be done on the surface, but we expect to send off a good lot of ore for experimental reduction in the next week or two. Then we'll have something to base our plans on."

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"Mappin's going to handle the transport, I guess. That man's surely on to a soft thing. I s'pose you know he's making his pile out of the Rain Bluff?"

Mrs. Graham glanced at her son in rebuke.

"I don't think you should talk to Mr. Allinson in that manner, Jim. He's a good deal older and more experienced than you are."

"Your ideas are out of date, Mother; we've grown ahead of them. Mr. Allinson doesn't look as if he minded. Anyway, he doesn't know as much as I do about the Canadian contractor." He turned to Andrew. "Do you like it up yonder?"

"Yes," Andrew answered good-humoredly; "I like the work better than anything I remember having done."

"A matter of taste. Now, I can't see much amusement in rolling rocks about or standing in wet slickers in a dark pit watching the boys punch the drills."

"Mr. Allinson is not doing it for amusement," said his mother.

"Well, money isn't often made that way. You don't get rich by knowing how to use the hammer and giant-powder."

"I believe that's true," Andrew responded with a smile.

"A sure thing! Money is made by sitting tight in your office and hiring other fellows to do the rough work. They break up the rocks and cut the milling logs; you take the profit. It's business, first and last, for mine!"

"Then it's fortunate there are people with different views," his sister interposed. "If nobody were willing to live in the logging camps all winter and go prospecting in the bush, you would be badly

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off."

"But so long as there are people who like doing that kind of thing, we're glad to let them."

"This is a favorite pose of his," the girl explained to Andrew. "It's the latest fashion among the boys; they're afraid of being thought altruistic."

"Now that everything is controlled by mergers and they make all we need so dear, one is forced to be practical," Mrs. Graham remarked feelingly. "For all that, it jars on me to hear our young people talk as they do."

"We're realists, with no use for sentiment," Jim replied. "We don't let our imagination run away with us. It doesn't pay."

"You may be wrong in that," said Andrew, smiling, "I'm not much of a philosopher, but it seems to me that imagination's now and then a useful thing. I've seen it help a man through tight places. Take your prospectors, for example; they often face risks that couldn't be justified by a return in money. I heard of one fellow crossing a lake in a savage storm in a leaky canoe, to keep the time he'd allowed for his journey, because he wouldn't be beaten; and of another making two hundred miles on snowshoes with very little food, because a party he'd promised to meet was expecting him."

"That," said the lad, "is the kind of thing father would do; he's given to impractical idealism. There's a mine up in the barrens he has talked about as long as I remember; but if he found it I believe he'd be content with that and sell the claim to any one for a few hundred dollars. Getting yourself frozen for an abstract idea isn't good business."

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Graham laughed and changed the subject, and soon afterward Andrew took his leave. He spent the next evening with Frobisher, whom he had now visited several times, and on the following morning set out for the mine, where he worked very hard for a few weeks. They were still using the old adit, though the new one was being driven toward the lower level. Then he and Carnally left the camp in a canoe to hurry forward some stores and, after arranging for their quicker transport, stood on a little promontory, looking down the river, late one gloomy afternoon.

Winter had set in with unusual rigor. The gray sky was barred with leaden cloud; the pines, which looked strangely ragged and somber, stood out with harsh distinctness against the first thin snow; and the river flowed, a dark-colored riband, through a clean-cut channel in the ice. A nipping wind blew down the gorge, and now and then light flakes of snow fell.

"We had better push on," Carnally suggested. "It looks as if the messenger hadn't got through, and we'll hardly make the mine before midnight. There's heavy snow coming and we have no provisions or camp outfit."

"Wait an hour," said Andrew. "The smelter people promised to let me know the results they got and the letter was due yesterday. I'm anxious about the thing."

Carnally agreed. They had sent out a quantity of ore for reduction, and particulars of the yield in refined metal would throw a useful light on the prospects of the mine. The last analysis of specimens selected to represent the bulk had not been encouraging, but this test was unsatisfactory because the ore was variable.

"Let's get out of the wind," Carnally said. "If I'd expected this kind of weather, I'd have brought my fur-coat along."

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They found a sheltered spot among a clump of pines, where they sat down; but Andrew felt disturbed and apprehensive. The Company had spent money freely, the mine was expensive to work, and of late Watson had grown morose and reserved. Even when Andrew pressed him, he had avoided giving his opinion. The report of the smelting company would, however, show how matters stood, and Andrew looked out anxiously for the expected messenger.

It got dark, though they could still see the glimmer of the ice, and at length they heard a faint, regular splashing, made by canoe poles. A shout answered their hail, and when they ran down the bank a man came cautiously across the fringe of ice.

"Here's your mail," he said, handing Andrew some letters. "Now that I've given it to you, we'll get back."

"Won't you come on to the mine with us?"

"No, sir! It's steep chances you don't get there to-night and we can make a Mappin camp in about three hours down-stream."

"It would be wiser to follow him," Carnally suggested. "We'll have heavy snow before long."

"I'm going on," said Andrew doggedly. "I must compare the report with our books and get Watson to tell me what he thinks as soon as possible."

Launching their canoe, they poled her laboriously against the current, which ran fast between its banks of ice. Andrew was thankful that the snow on the frozen surface threw up a faint light and they could see the glimmer of the floes that drifted down, though it was not always possible to avoid them. Once or twice there was a crash as a heavy mass struck the canoe, which was too lightly built to stand much of this buffeting. Andrew had thick mittens, but they soon got wet and

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his hands grew numbed. He was not clad for rigorous weather, and his exertions failed to keep him warm.

Still, they were making progress, and they met with no serious difficulty until they entered a slacker reach. It had been open when they came down, but now the channel made by the current was glazed with thin ice, through which they could hardly drive the canoe. Indeed, in some places Carnally was forced to break the crust with the pole while Andrew paddled.

"If there's much more of this, it will be late to-morrow before we make camp," Andrew remarked.

"We'll have to leave the river pretty soon, but we'll stick to it as long as we can," Carnally replied. "It's rough traveling through the bush, and the shore ice is hardly safe yet."

They got through the reach, paddled laboriously against a swifter stream, and dragged the canoe over a portage, stumbling among big stones and across frozen pools. During this passage Andrew fell and hurt himself; but stopping was out of the question. Launching the craft on the upper edge of the rapid, they drove her out. For a minute or two they made no progress, and Andrew, straining at his pole, feared that they would be swept down the wild, foaming rush; but they found slacker water and the ominous roar of the rapid died away. Then snow began to fall, making it difficult to see, though they had the faint glimmer of the shore-ice for a guide. In the reach up which they were poling, it did not run out far because the stream was strong, and they had gone some distance when there was a heavy thud and a curious crunch at the bows.

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"In with her!" cried Carnally. "Head for the slack behind the point!"

They ran in through crackling ice and had reached the thicker strip along the bank when Andrew felt his knees grow wet. Feeling with his hand, he found there was an inch or two of water in the bottom of the craft.

"Skin's punched through," Carnally explained. "We can't bale her and use the pole. You'll have to get out."

Andrew did so hastily, but the ice on which he landed cracked as he moved, and he had gone several yards before it seemed strong enough to bear him. Carnally dragged the canoe out, and then turned cautiously up-stream.

"We'll have to chance the ice for the next mile or two," he said. "It's rough country—steep rock and very thick scrub—on this side."

As they moved forward Andrew noticed that the snow was falling faster and the wind freshening. The cold flakes drove into his tingling face and he had to brace himself against the gusts. The gorge they followed was wrapped in obscurity and filled with the roar of water and the wailing of the trees. However, he held on for some time; and then suddenly felt no support for his foot. It was too late to stop; the next moment he was in the water. The shock took his breath away; he had a horrible fear of being drawn under the ice, and it was with vast relief that he found he could stand up waist-deep. Moving cautiously, he got his knee upon the ice, but it broke away; then he saw that Carnally was lying down near the edge and holding out his hand.

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"Get your arms on it, and catch hold," he said. As he obeyed, Andrew heard the ice crack, but his weight was now well distributed and he crawled forward, clutching Carnally's hand. Then he got up, dripping and shaking with cold.

"Thanks!" he said. "That's a risk I don't mean to run again. If it had been a foot deeper I'd never have got out."

Carnally turned toward the bank and, in thick darkness, they scrambled up a steep slope among stunted pines. Leaving its summit, they floundered over the rounded surfaces of outcropping rocks and plunged into hollows filled with thick brush. The pines were smaller farther on, which made things worse, for they had to force a passage through the snow-laden needles. Some had been partly blown down and leaned on one another in tangles which would have been difficult to traverse in daylight. How Carnally kept his line Andrew could not tell, for they had lost the sound of the river, and the snow was thick; but he steadily pushed on and after a while the country grew more open. Here the wind was worse and Andrew, who was getting worn out, struggled forward stupidly with lowered head and labored breath. He could not remember how long he kept it up, but at last a light blinked among the trees and he recognized joyfully that it came from a shack at the mine.

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## CHAPTER X

### A CRISIS

It was late at night when Andrew entered Watson's office at the mine with the letters he had brought. Though a bitter wind blew the snow about it, the little wooden building was hot and filled with the smell of pine boarding. A stove, glowing a dull red, stood at one end, and a kerosene lamp hanging from a beam threw a bright light on the faces of the men. They were

eager and expectant, but Andrew's bore the stamp of fatigue, for the journey up-river had tried his strength. Moreover, he shrank from learning what the smelting company's report might reveal. Drawing a chair to the table, he sat for a few moments lost in troubled thought.

When he first reached the mine he had found a keen and scarcely expected pleasure in his work. Its difficulties seized his interest, and for a while he enjoyed the grapple with them. Then misgivings crept in; he felt that there was something wrong. Watson displayed no enthusiasm about the Company's prospects, and Carnally let fall disturbing hints. Andrew, however, steadily occupied himself with his task, which gained a stronger hold on him, until he realized that all his mind was bent upon its successful accomplishment. Now he must put his half-formed plans and surmises to a searching test. Bracing himself, he opened a large sealed envelope with a steady hand.

As he took out the first of its contents he made an abrupt movement, but he read on through several sheets while his face hardened; and then he sat very still, with the papers scattered about the table. [Pg 101]

"Well?" said Watson, in harsh inquiry.

Gathering up the papers, Andrew passed them to him without a word, while Carnally waited as if he knew what to expect. When he in turn took the report from Watson, there was an oppressive silence in the shack. Andrew could hear the billets snap in the stove and the murmur of the river among the ice.

"It seems to me that this report leaves us no room for doubt," he said, when Carnally had finished reading the papers. "We can't keep the mine working on such returns as these. But I want your honest opinion."

Watson made a sign of agreement.

"Well," he said frankly, "you have got to have the truth, though I guess it will cost me my job. Rain Bluff will never pay its shareholders."

"You knew this some time ago?"

"I was afraid of it; but it wasn't my business. I was sent here to get out as much ore as I could, and I've done so."

"Have you any suggestion to make?"

"If you wrote down your capital, got rid of Mappin, and did your transport work yourselves, you might keep going. The ore's there, though its hard to get at and not worth much."

Andrew turned to Carnally.

"You suspected how matters stood from the beginning. I see now that you meant to warn me."

"I guessed. I couldn't speak plainly without proof."

"Oh," said Andrew in a strained voice, "you knew; so did Watson, and no doubt every man who works for us. I and the unfortunate people who found the money were the only ones deceived." He turned to the manager sharply. "What did you mean when you said the mine would never pay its shareholders? Do you imply that somebody else may make a profit out of it?" [Pg 102]

"You've hit it. Mappin's making his pile, and I guess there's a man with money backing him; but that's no concern of mine. I'm sorry for you, Mr. Allinson, but I suppose I must hand you my notice and tell the boys to quit?"

"No," said Andrew; "not yet. Let them go on as usual, until I speak to you again."

"I'm not anxious to leave your service—you're square," Watson replied with an air of relief. "Now, if you don't want me any more, I'll go to bed."

He left them and Andrew quietly filled his pipe, while Carnally watched him with interest. Andrew had had a shock, but he had borne it well. Instead of unnerving, it had braced him to grapple with a difficult situation. He had courage and determination; but there was something else he must be told.

"Jake," Andrew said at length, "this has been a blow. I put a good deal of money into the Company and will lose it, but that's only half the trouble—the rest will hardly bear thinking of. My firm put its stamp on this venture, backed it with its name; and it was rotten from the first!" His face suddenly darkened with suspicion. "How Leonard came to take it up I can't imagine."

"If he's the man who fixed things in Montreal, I guess he'd tell you it was a fair business risk; but you don't quite understand the matter yet. It's clear that Mappin has the support of Mr. Hathersage; he finds him the money, gives him the job at prices higher than you need pay, and no doubt takes a share of the profit." [Pg 103]

Andrew started.

"It's hard to admit, but I believe you're right!" Then his mind leaped to a wider conclusion. "I dare say the Company was started solely for Hathersage's benefit!"

"I guess there's some foundation for that," Carnally said pointedly.

Neither spoke for the next few moments; and then Andrew looked up with a grim smile.

"I'm beginning to understand your attitude toward me when I first came. You thought I was in the ring—one of the people who, knowing how bad it was, led investors into this rotten scheme!"

"I allow I did think something of the kind."

"And afterward? My guess isn't flattering, but I can't blame you, Jake. You believed I was what you call a sucker, sent here because I was too big a fool to find things out."

Carnally looked embarrassed.

"I figured it out like this," he said: "the people who sent you expected you'd spend your time hunting and fishing, without taking much interest in the mine. Then, if trouble came, they'd leave you to face it. Being on the spot, it would be your fault for not learning what was wrong."

"A clever plan. After all, it's possible they took too much for granted."

"They did," Carnally declared. "You have shown a grip of things they didn't look for. In my opinion they picked the wrong man for the part: but you're in a pretty tight place. You can't make this mine pay." [Pg 104]

"No," said Andrew; "I don't mean to try. If I can get his consent, I'm going to look for Graham's lode."

Carnally started.

"It's a great plan! Will you want me?"

"Of course! I'd be helpless without you."

"No," Carnally corrected him with a smile. "So far, I've given you hints about things you couldn't be expected to know; but I've taught you all I can, and you take your right place now. You're boss in this new proposition, and I'll be glad to be your second."

"Thank you," said Andrew. "We'll start for the Landing to-morrow and see Graham."

They left the mine at daybreak, and on reaching the town Andrew had first of all an interview with Graham's employer. The president of the lumber company sat at a desk in his office at the mill and listened attentively while Andrew explained the object of his visit. He was an elderly man with a keen but good-humored expression, and once or twice he glanced at Andrew as if surprised. When the latter had finished, the mill-owner took a box from a shelf.

"Have a cigar," he said.

Andrew lighted one and looked round the room. It was dusty and dingy, with a rough board floor; and a cloud of steam from a neighboring stack obscured the light that entered the windows. A rusty stove stood at one end, with a desk near it which Graham had occupied for twenty years.

"So the mine has not turned out all you expected?" commented the lumber-man.

"Far from it," Andrew acknowledged.

"And you feel it a duty to do something to protect the interests of the shareholders?" [Pg 105]

"Yes," said Andrew, and added with a direct glance: "Are you surprised?"

A smile crept into his companion's eyes.

"I guess we can let that go. You have done the square thing in coming to me before you spoke to Graham. He's a man we value and he has served us well, but I've now and then felt sorry for him. It's possible he hasn't found it easy to spend the best part of his life here, keeping our accounts on a very moderate salary, though we pay him more than we could get another man for."

"It's strange he didn't break loose from it long ago."

"I guess it cost him something to stay. We're an optimistic people, Mr. Allinson, with a hankering after adventure; but Graham could never put by money enough to make the plunge. He had his children to bring up and he spared nothing to give them a fair start. I suppose this isn't quite the line you thought I would take?"

Andrew admitted it with some embarrassment, and the lumber-man looked amused.

"There are plenty of big mills run entirely on the laws of supply and demand, where men are scrapped as freely as obsolete plant, and the one thing looked for is the maximum output. Still, you see, our isolated position gives us a monopoly, and we're small enough to take a personal interest in our older hands. As a matter of fact, we find it pays; but that is not the point. You are willing to guarantee Graham against any loss if your search is unsuccessful?"

"Yes," Andrew promised; "he shall not suffer."

"Then we'll do our share in keeping his place open as long as may be needful. As it happens, things are slack just now; and to make this journey will set his mind at rest. He'll be content with [Pg 106]

the old routine when he comes back."

"Then you count on his coming back to the mill?"

The lumber-man looked sympathetic.

"I don't wish to discourage you, but if Graham finds that lode I shall be surprised."

Andrew thanked him and returned to his hotel, where he wrote some letters and afterward decided to visit Frobisher, who was staying at the Island of Pines for a week or two. Graham was away on business down the line and would not return until the next day, and Andrew, being in a restless mood, felt that a talk with Frobisher or his daughter might soothe him. They were intelligent and sympathetic people; and he had thought a good deal about Geraldine of late.

Fine snow was driving before a stinging breeze when he walked out upon the frozen lake. Here and there its surface had been swept clear by the wind, leaving stretches of smooth ice, but, for the most part, its white covering offered good foothold. It was dark and bitterly cold; Andrew's hands grew stiff in his thick mittens and he shivered as he faced the stronger gusts, guiding himself by the loom of the rocks and trees that now and then showed faintly through the snow. The walk was far from pleasant, and he realized that things would be much worse when he went up into the trackless spaces of the frozen North.

Reaching the house without misadventure, he was received by Geraldine. Mrs. Denton, she explained, was invalided by a cold caught on the train, and her father had driven across to the Landing for his mail, but would be back soon. She led Andrew into a room which looked delightfully bright and comfortable after the shack at the mine, and made him sit down by the hearth, on which a pine-log fire burned gaily.

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"You are thinner than you were when we last saw you, and you don't look so cheerful," she said, taking a low chair opposite him.

"I think both things are explainable," Andrew replied with a rueful smile.

Geraldine quietly studied him. He was troubled and could not hide it, and he interested her. The man was honest and forceful in an untrained way. She could imagine his grappling with unaccustomed difficulties, clumsily, perhaps, but resolutely. Though several years his junior, she knew that she had the keener intelligence; but this did not make her attitude contemptuous. He had shown signs of qualities which sometimes carried one farther than superficial smartness.

"I suppose you have had some trouble at the mine?"

"Yes," he said, though he could not account for his candor; "I've had an experience that has rudely shaken me. After all, it's possible that one needs something of the kind now and then; and until lately I've escaped it."

"I wonder whether that's unfortunate?"

"It is, beyond a doubt. I've taken life easily, generally getting what I wanted without much trouble, and now, when I've no experience to fall back on, I'm landed in a maze of difficulties. But all this is too personal; forgive me for boring you."

"But I'm interested," she declared. She felt that he would find a way out, though it might not be the easiest one. "As you came over to Canada, I suppose you must have found the smooth life you led grow monotonous."

"Not exactly. I liked it; but I'd a feeling now and then that it might be more bracing to do something useful; make things, for instance, or even go into business."

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Geraldine laughed, and it struck Andrew that she was very pretty as she looked at him with sparkling eyes.

"You're delightfully matter-of-fact. You might have hinted at a longing for high adventure or something romantic."

"The worst of adventure is that you often get a good deal more than you bargain for," said Andrew soberly.

"You learned that in the North?"

"Yes," he answered with a moody air; "that and other things. For example, I learned how money's sometimes made, and it was a shock."

"Ah! The money was yours?"

"That's where the trouble lies. So far, I've been content with spending it."

"And you now feel that your responsibility doesn't end there? But if you wished to go into business, why didn't you do so?"

"That is rather more than I can tell. Still, whenever I hinted at it, I was quietly discouraged. I suppose it wasn't expected of me, and the general opinion was that I was incapable."

Geraldine thought that his friends were mistaken in this conclusion, but she could imagine his yielding to the representations of cleverer people, without questioning the accuracy of their

views about him. He had, however, obviously broken loose from his tutelage, and now stood firm, ignorant perhaps of much that men who worked for their living knew, confronting with undisciplined courage troubles new to him. She had no doubt that he had courage and strong sincerity.

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"I'm afraid I'm not very entertaining," he apologized with a smile.

"It's a compliment that you're natural," Geraldine said graciously. "One doesn't always expect to be amused. But you have Carnally to help you at the mine. What do you think of him?"

"I have a high opinion of Jake."

"I believe you're right; he's a favorite of mine. What he undertakes he carries out. You feel that he can be relied on; that he would do the square thing, however difficult it is. After all, one couldn't say much more of any man."

"No," Andrew responded gravely. "The trouble often is to see how the square thing should be done."

There were footsteps in the hall, and Frobisher came in and greeted Andrew cordially.

"I heard you were at the Landing, and I'm not sorry you'll have to stay all night," he said. "It's snowing so hard that I had some difficulty in getting home with the team."

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## CHAPTER XI THE REAL BOSS

"How have you been getting on in the bush?" Frobisher asked his guest when they sat talking in his smoking-room. "You look worried."

"There's a reason for it—the mine's no good." Andrew looked Frobisher steadily in the face. "I dare say you knew that some time ago."

"I had my suspicions. I wasn't singular in that."

"So it seems. I must ask you to believe that it was only during the last few days that I found out the truth."

Frobisher smiled.

"After that, I'd better say that I exonerated you—I think it's the right word—as soon as we'd had our first talk. I saw that you were being made a tool of."

"You were right," said Andrew. "It isn't a pleasant situation. I don't mind its not being flattering; that's the least trouble."

"What are you going to do about it?"

"The square thing, so far as I'm able. Allinson's, so to speak, guaranteed the undertaking."

There was some extra color in Andrew's face and pride in his voice, though he spoke quietly, and Frobisher sat silent a moment or two.

"Have you made any plans yet?" the American then asked.

Andrew told him that he proposed to take Carnally and Graham north to search for the silver lode; and Frobisher looked grave.

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"There's a point to be remembered," he cautioned. "Minerals in Canada belong to the State, which makes a grant of them to the discoverer on certain terms. The lode will therefore become the property of whoever first locates and records it, which will be open to any member of your party."

"I've thought of that. The expedition will be financed by me, and I'll have an understanding with Graham and Carnally as to their share before we start."

"Three claims could be staked, and your companions could make them over to you when the development work was done. If properly patented, you would be the legal owner."

"I intend to become the owner."

Frobisher looked as if the statement surprised him.

"Then you'd better cut your connection with Rain Bluff before you set off," he advised. "It might prevent some complications. The directors might contend that you were not entitled to undertake private mining operations while you represented the Company and drew its pay."

"I don't think you understand. I mean to hold the claims in my own name, so as to strengthen my position, which will need it. I expect to have serious trouble over the Company's affairs."



Frobisher laughed softly.

"You're no fool! You feel that you undertook to look after the shareholders' interests when you came over, and you have to make good?"

"Yes," Andrew assented; "I feel something of the kind."

"Then we'll assume that you find the lode and that it's as rich as Graham believes—which is taking a good deal for granted. Your shareholders, learning that Rain Bluff is worthless, would probably jump at a proposition that would give them back their money, or even part of it. You could buy them out and afterward repay yourself handsomely by developing the new mine."

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Andrew's face hardened.

"When these people gave us their money, they did so expecting to get any profit that could be made. It's their due and, so far, Allinson's has never broken faith with those who trusted it."

Frobisher was not surprised at the answer. There was, he had seen, a clean pride in the man, whom he felt disposed to pity. Allinson had obviously little knowledge of business, and would have to meet the determined opposition of the clever tricksters who had floated the Company. He was entering on a hard fight with unaccustomed weapons. Nevertheless, Frobisher would not venture to predict his defeat. Courage such as Allinson showed often carried one a long way, and he had the right upon his side. Frobisher's business experience had not made him an optimist, but he was prepared to watch this altruistic champion's struggles with friendly interest and to assist him as far as he could.

"You have undertaken a pretty big thing," he said. "To begin with, it's a lonely country that you're going into, and though having the lakes and rivers frozen may simplify traveling, you'll find it tough work living in the open with the thermometer at forty below. Winter's a bad time for prospecting; but as timber's plentiful, you may be able to thaw out enough of the surface to test the lode, and something might be done with giant-powder. Provisions will be your chief difficulty. You will need a number of packers."

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"If possible, I must make the trip with no companions except Carnally and Graham. Everybody at the Landing has heard about the lode, and if we took up a strong party and failed to locate it, we'd have shown them roughly where it lay. That would give the packers a chance for forestalling our next attempt. Their right to record the minerals would be as good as ours."

Frobisher was somewhat surprised. Allinson had thought out the matter in a way that would have done credit to a more experienced man.

"Suppose we go down now," he suggested after a while. "I'll get Geraldine to sing for us."

Andrew agreed, and was glad he had done so when Miss Frobisher opened the piano. He was not a musician, but there was a sweetness in her voice that greatly pleased him. He sat listening with quiet enjoyment to her first song, watching her with appreciation. The light from a shaded lamp forced up the strong warm coloring of her hair and fell on her face, which was outlined in delicate profile against a background of ebony. Her figure lay half in shadow, but the thin evening-dress shimmered in places, flowing about her in graceful lines.

He grew more intent when she sang again. It was a ballad of toil and endeavor, and the girl had caught its feeling. Andrew wondered whether she had chosen it by accident, for the words chimed with his mood, and he was stirred and carried away as he listened. Obscure feelings deep in his nature throbbed in quick response. After wasted years of lounging, he had plunged into the struggle of life and become a citizen of the strenuous world. Ingenuous as he was, some of his lost youthful fervor awoke again; he would never sink back into his former state of slothful ease; bruised, beaten perhaps, he must go on. The duty to which he had long been blind now burned like a beacon through the mists ahead. Yet it was no evanescent, romantic sentiment. Andrew was a solid and matter-of-fact person.

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When Geraldine closed the piano he rose and looked at her with a gleam in his eyes.

"Thank you; I mean it sincerely," he said. "It's a very fine song."

"It's stirring," she replied. "I dare say it's true—one would like to think so."

There was some color in her face, and his heart throbbed at the knowledge that she had meant the song for him.

Then Frobisher broke in humorously:

"That kind of thing appeals more to young folk. When one gets to my age, one would rather be soothed. We've had enough of the rough-and-tumble scuffle; it's time to retire from the ring and sit comfortably in a front seat, looking on."

"It would soon get tiresome," declared Geraldine. "You would want to take a side and instruct the combatants," she added with an affectionate smile. "The temptation would be irresistible if somebody whom you thought didn't deserve it were getting badly hurt."

"I don't know. Interfering is a dangerous habit, and people aren't always grateful." Frobisher's glance rested for a moment on his guest. "However, I might still step into the ring if the provocation were very strong."

Then they engaged in casual talk until it got late, and when Geraldine and her father wished him goodnight Andrew said diffidently: [Pg 115]

"I'm grateful to you for keeping me here. I'll go back feeling brighter than when I came."

He left them and Frobisher looked after him with a humorous expression.

"That young man has chosen a hard row to hoe, though I don't think he quite sees all he's up against. It's safer to take a bone from a hungry dog than to do a business man out of the pickings he thinks he's entitled to, especially if he's engaged in floating companies."

"But that is part of your business."

"Sure!" said Frobisher. "It's wiser to speak of the things you know. I've picked up one or two good bones."

"But you had a right to them," Geraldine declared confidently.

Frobisher's eyes twinkled.

"I believe there was a difference of opinion on the point, but I'd got my teeth in first. However, I'll admit that unless Allinson was convinced the bone belonged to him he'd let it go. That's the kind of man he is, and he's not likely to grow more prudent if you let him see that you agree with him."

"Do you think I've done so?" Geraldine asked.

"I don't know," Frobisher smiled. "It seems possible; but I've no doubt your intentions were excellent. You're a bit of an idealist. However, the fellow will do you credit. He has sense and grit, though he's what one might perhaps call superfluously honest."

"How could his virtues reflect any credit on me?" Geraldine retorted. "Besides, your cynicism is assumed. I don't believe you ever took a dollar you were not entitled to. Why do you always make a joke of things?" [Pg 116]

"It's true that my ventures have generally paid a dividend, but I've a suspicion that it was a lucky accident that one or two of them did so. When I was young, I was as serious as Mr. Allinson, but people sometimes grow more humorous as they get older. They don't expect so much and they learn to make allowances."

"That's a mistake," said Geraldine. "I should never be content with the mediocre."

She left him with a smile, but Frobisher looked thoughtful as he lighted a last cigar. He had led a strenuous life, stubbornly struggling upward from a humble beginning, and the years of effort had tried him hard. He had taken big risks, and exacted every dollar he could, but after all he did not think he had wronged anyone badly. Now that he had acquired power and influence, he regarded human nature with whimsical forbearance, but he was glad that his daughter seemed to demand conformity with higher standards, thought she was free from the cant and prudery he hated. Then he thought of Allinson, for whom he had a warm liking. He had fought many a stern battle before he was Allinson's age, but this did not make him contemptuous. Allinson was late in beginning, but he showed a determination and, what was more remarkable, a sagacity that pleased Frobisher well. Besides this, the purity of his motives and his fastidious honesty roused the American's admiration. Frobisher would not have embarked on a long struggle for a principle, but he could respect a man who did so. Allinson and Geraldine had apparently the same ideals, they had rapidly fallen into confidential terms—but that was a subject on which it was premature to speculate. [Pg 117]

Andrew left the house the next day, and on entering his hotel in the afternoon he found Mappin sitting in the unoccupied general-room. He laid down his newspaper as Andrew came in and looked up with a truculent expression in his heavy face.

"I got your letter at Fort William as I was coming here," he said. "It seemed to need an explanation. What d'you mean by giving me warning to quit?"

His tone was offensive, but Andrew sat down quietly, knowing it was desirable to keep cool.

"I thought I'd better send you notice that we may terminate our arrangements in three months, as we have the option of doing," he replied.

"But why do you want to terminate them?"

"We may shut down the Rain Bluff. It's not paying."

Mappin gave a snorting laugh.

"What has that to do with it?"

"It ought to be obvious," Andrew said curtly. "If the mine won't pay, it must be closed. Allinson's is not in the habit of carrying on a business for its private benefit at the investors' expense."

"I shouldn't have thought it," Mappin sneered, and looked hard at Andrew. "You seem to be taking a pretty decided line. May I ask whom you are speaking for?"

"For myself, in the first place, but I believe the shareholders would support me. Though I haven't interfered much so far, I'm the head of the firm."

Mappin was impressed by Andrew's manner, and his tone became more conciliatory.

"I'm afraid you have kept out of business so long that you don't quite understand matters. Your brother-in-law has arranged things here much better than you, in your inexperience, could do. This proposition's too big and complicated for a beginner to meddle with; you'd only involve yourself and everybody concerned in a deplorable mess. Be warned and let up. Make any small improvements and economies you can, but leave the main points of Hathersage's scheme alone."

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There was some ground for Mappin's opinion, and his air of conviction had weight; but Andrew had no thought of yielding.

"So far, I can't tell what changes may be necessary, but I expect to make them, whatever they are, as occasion arises."

"Then hadn't you better wait until you know?"

Mappin took a letter from his pocket. "Suppose you tear this thing up?"

"No," Andrew said firmly; "the notice stands."

There was a moment's silence while their glances met, and each recognized that there should be no compromise: henceforward they must be enemies.

"Oh, well," said Mappin, with an air of ironic resignation, "I'll continue to look after your transport until the time expires. Now that we understand things, let's talk of something else. Have you seen Frobisher lately? I'm going across to his place after supper."

A sudden anger seized Andrew, though he scarcely realized that it sprang from jealousy. This coarse fellow with his low cunning and sensual nature had no right to enter the house that sheltered Geraldine Frobisher. It was repugnant to think of his meeting her on friendly terms and, having heard that he had been a frequent visitor, he wondered what had induced Frobisher to tolerate him. An unpleasant suspicion crept into his mind—perhaps the man had a friend in Mrs. Denton, who differed from her brother in many ways. However, Andrew concealed his annoyance.

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"It will be a fine night, though the snow's rather deep," he said. "Now what about the provisions I ordered?"

They discussed the matter for a while, and then Andrew went out to look for Graham. He found him alone in the mill office, and the elder man listened eagerly to what he had to say. Then Graham jumped up and strode excitedly up and down the room.

"After all the years of waiting, I can hardly realize that I'm to have my chance!" he exclaimed. "I feel dazed; the thing's—overwhelming!"

"There's no doubt about it," said Andrew. "I've arranged matters satisfactorily with your president. You have only to say that you will come."

"Come!" Graham's eyes glowed; but he paused in sudden hesitation. "Still, I don't know how my wife will face it. She must be told at once. Come with me and explain—I think you will do it better than I can."

He threw a book into the desk, shut the desk noisily, and took out his watch.

"Mr. Allinson," he said, "I believe this office has never been closed five minutes before the proper time since I first entered it, but the habits of twenty years have lost their grip to-night. I feel like a man unexpectedly let out of prison."

Andrew went out with him and nothing was said until they reached his house. The table was neatly laid for supper, and Mrs. Graham was cheerfully bustling about it. She stopped and looked at her husband with a start when he came in. The man was trying hard to maintain his usual calm, but his expression was strained and eager, and his manner deprecatory, as if he were half ashamed. Andrew thought Mrs. Graham knew.

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"Can you spare me a few minutes?" Andrew asked. "I have something to say."

She sat down with forced quietness, though her color faded.

"I'm afraid it will be a shock, Martha," Graham broke in; "he means to tell you that I am going north to look for the lode with him."

The woman did not flinch. She looked at her husband gravely, with no sign of reproach; and Andrew saw that she had courage.

"I have expected this; I knew it must come sooner or later," she said quietly. "But go on, Mr. Allinson; I will listen."

Andrew felt relieved. She would give no trouble, but her tense expression caused him a sense of guilt. He explained the arrangements he had made and handed her two or three documents, which included an order on a bank for certain payments to be made her if the expedition did not return by a specified date.

Mrs. Graham took the papers with a gesture of repugnance, but a moment later she looked up

quietly.

"It's fair; it's generous, Mr. Allinson. I am getting old and my daughter is very young." Then her lips quivered and she broke into a pitiful smile. "You have done what you can, but it doesn't cover the greatest risk I run."

"I know," responded Andrew gently; "I am asking a great deal from you."

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"Well," she said, "for his sake, perhaps for my sake, I must try to let him go." She paused for a moment and then asked with an effort: "When do you start?"

"As soon as we can." Andrew felt that it would be tactful to take his leave. "But I have a letter I must mail."

"Come back, please," she said. "Supper will be ready in about ten minutes."

When Andrew had gone out Graham turned to his wife.

"I'm sorry, Martha. I feel that I must go."

She came to him and put her hands on his shoulders, smiling bravely.

"Why, of course, dear! I wouldn't stop you."

Graham threw his arms around her.

"It isn't all restlessness, Martha—there is a chance! What have I done so far but keep you poor? It has hurt me to see you always hard at work at some drudgery, living in this poor little house, planning to save a few cents wherever you could. Now there may be a change; our life will be very different and the children's future brighter if I can find the lode. But if I am to find it, I must go now. In a few more years it would be too late."

"Yes," she said softly. "But, after all, we have been happy here."

He kissed her, protesting that he had been far happier than he deserved; but she drew away from him.

"Still, you have had your bad hours. Do you think I don't know? It wasn't easy to go to the office day after day and keep accounts, with the longing you couldn't get over, and dreams of riches in your mind."

"I'm afraid I let you guess it. But they're not dreams. I found a lode rich in silver; I may locate it again."

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Mrs. Graham smiled rather wearily.

"Dear, I hardly care whether you find the lode or not. You will be content when you have looked for it, and I shall be happier knowing that the restlessness you couldn't master has gone and will never trouble us again."

When Jim and his sister came in for supper, Andrew joined them, and found that he was expected to talk over his plans. It was obvious that Graham had not strained his authority: his was a harmonious household and its younger members expressed their opinions with freedom. Andrew was, however, amused to see that their father had risen in their esteem. They had never attached much importance to his belief in the lode; but since he had gained the support of a man of means, it looked as if there might be something in the project. Nevertheless, they bantered Andrew freely and he took it in good part. When he left, Mrs. Graham accompanied him to the door.

"You'll try to forgive me?" he begged, stopping a moment in the narrow, shabby hall.

"Yes," she said. "I can't fairly blame you, and I have been prepared for what has happened." Then she laid her hand on his arm. "I am trusting you with a great deal, Mr. Allinson. It's a heavy responsibility."

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## **CHAPTER XII**

### **INTERRUPTED PLANS**

Mrs. Denton reclined in an easy-chair in her room at Frobisher's house. A shawl of beautiful texture covered her shoulders, her feet rested on a stool, and the lamp on a neighboring table was carefully shaded. The dull pallor of her skin and the gauntness of her face suggested the invalid, but her health, while far from good, had suffered from the thought she bestowed on it. She was a reserved and selfish woman, and her mean ambitions were responsible for much of the trouble that had befallen her. Geraldine and she were generally at variance, Frobisher bore with her, but there was one person for whom she cherished a somewhat misguided tenderness. Mappin had been her favorite from his earliest years.

His father had been her lover when the Frobishers were poor, and she had returned his affection.

Nevertheless she had thrown him over when a richer suitor appeared, and her marriage had turned out disastrously. Urged by a desire for social prominence and love of ostentation, she had driven her husband into hazardous speculations, for which he had weakly reproached her when the crash came. He escaped total ruin by Frobisher's help, but he afterward went downhill fast, wrangling with his wife until his death set her free. Her old lover had also married, and died a widower, leaving one son, and Mrs. Denton had shown a benevolent interest in the boy. He was bold and ambitious, which was what she liked, and she was not deterred by the lack of principle he early displayed. Success was the one thing she respected, and as he grew up young Mappin promised to attain it. Now she was expecting him, for he came to see her whenever he was in the neighborhood, and Frobisher made him welcome for her sake.

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When Mappin came in he was red-faced from the frosty air.

"This place is stiflingly hot," he said. "I'm afraid that's because you're not feeling very fit yet."

Mrs. Denton told him she could not get rid of her cold, and he had the tact to listen with a show of interest while she talked about her health.

"You will stay all night?" she asked.

"Yes, I'm sorry I must get back to-morrow."

"Then I've no doubt it's necessary," she remarked in a suggestive tone.

Mappin laughed as if he understood her.

"It is. As things are going, business must come first. Besides, I can't flatter myself that I gained much by my last visit."

"That's a point I can't speak upon, but you're not likely to lose your head. There's a cold-blooded, calculating vein in you. I wonder whether that was why you came straight to my room, though the society of a crotchety old invalid can't have much charm for you."

The man's heavy face grew a trifle redder than usual.

"No," he protested, "it wasn't. I'm not dirt mean."

"Oh, well," said Mrs. Denton, looking at him gently, "you know I'm your friend. But I never pretended not to guess what brought you here."

"And I haven't made a secret of it. I mean to marry Geraldine."

"She'll have a good deal of money some day."

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Mappin looked up angrily.

"I'll admit that my interest generally comes first; but I'd be mighty glad to take Geraldine without a cent."

"Then you had better bestir yourself. Allinson has been here pretty often and she seems to like him. Besides, he's made a good impression on her father."

"Ah!" exclaimed Mappin, "that confounded Englishman again! It's only a few hours since he threatened to cut my connection with the Rain Bluff; and one way and another that's a bad setback." He frowned and the veins showed on his forehead. "I was coining money out of my contract, and I need it, because I have my feelings and I won't ask Frobisher for Geraldine like a beggar. He has a cool, smiling way of saying unpleasant things that makes me mad. I want to show him I'm as smart as he is and can give the girl as much as he can."

When they were detached from his business, Mappin's ideas were crude, but Mrs. Denton was not refined and found no fault with them. Moreover, she had an interest in his success. For a long time she had been the mistress of her brother's house and directed his social affairs. The position was a desirable one, especially as she had been left without means; but it was threatened. It was inevitable that Geraldine would take the power she enjoyed out of her hands, unless she married. Had Mappin not entered the field, Mrs. Denton would have furthered the claims of any suitor, to get the girl out of her way.

"I suppose money would gratify your pride, but you may find waiting risky," she said. "If you're wise, you'll make all the progress with Geraldine you can."

He smiled ruefully.

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"I sometimes feel that I'm making none. She looks at me half amused and half astonished when I express my opinions; I have to keep a curb on myself when I talk to her. In fact, I've once or twice got mad. I can take a joke, but her condescending smile is riling."

"Then why do you want to marry her?"

"It puzzles me when I think it over coolly, but that's difficult. When she's near me I only know that I want her." His eyes gleamed and his face grew flushed as he proceeded. "Guess it must be her wonderful eyes and hair and skin; the shape of her, the way she stands, the grit she shows. Once when I said something she flashed out at me in a fury, and I liked her for it." He clenched a big hand. "Somehow I'm going to get her!"

Mrs. Denton smiled. The savagery of his passion did not jar on her; she admired his determined boldness. She respected force that was guided by capacity; she liked a man who was strong or cunning enough to take what he desired. Her niece, however, held different views.

"That sounds genuine," she said. "Still, you had better talk to Geraldine in a more polished strain."

"No; I'd do it badly, and it wouldn't pay. There's red blood in me, and I haven't found much difference in men and women. If you hit straight at their human nature, you can't go wrong. A girl's never offended because you like her for being pretty."

He was wise, in that he knew his limitations and never pretended to be what he was not. His knowledge of human weaknesses had been profitable, for he had not scrupled to prey upon them, but he erred in assuming that his was the only rule of life. Virtue he frankly regarded as either absence of desire or a sentimental pose. [Pg 127]

"You're too coarse, too crude in your methods," Mrs. Denton persisted. "If you're not careful, you'll disgust Geraldine. You don't seem to see that she's different from the girls you are accustomed to."

Mappin laughed.

"Oh," he said, "at heart, they're all the same."

"In a sense, you're wrong. Allinson lets Geraldine see that he puts her on a higher plane, and she likes it. If you can't imitate him, you had better watch him."

"If Allinson's likely to make trouble, I'll fix him quick. Pretty talk and finicking manners, that's all there is to him, except a few fool notions about the mining business which he hasn't the grit or ability to carry out. But you look as if you had a headache and I guess I've talked enough."

She let him go, fearing to strain the consideration he sometimes showed her, for he was the only person for whom she had a scrap of affection. Mappin left her with half-contemptuous pity. He owed her some gratitude, because it was on her account that he had been received in the house; but he knew how little her support was worth, for he was shrewd enough to see that her brother and her niece held her in no great esteem. Indeed, he knew his position was not encouraging. Geraldine had shown him no favor, and Frobisher's attitude was more marked by forbearance than friendliness; but Mappin was not deterred. He had stubborn courage and a firm belief in his powers.

Reaching the bottom of the stairs, he stopped in the shadow of a heavy curtain as Geraldine came out of a door at the farther end of the large hall. The girl did not see him and, prompted by curiosity to learn what effect his sudden appearance would have, he stood watching her. She looked thoughtful, and moved slowly, but with a grace he did not miss. The soft rustle of her dress stirred him, he noticed with greedy eyes the fine outline about which the light material flowed, the bloom of her complexion, the beauty of her pose. Indeed, he forgot why he had waited, for his heart was beating fast and he felt his nerves tingle. He was filled with a burning desire to possess her. [Pg 128]

Then she saw him and recoiled. There was a glitter in his eyes from which she shrank, his face was stamped with gross sensual passion. It alarmed her and filled her with disgust. Mappin, however, could not guess her feelings. She was obviously startled; perhaps he had shown what he thought of her too plainly and shocked her prudishness; but this after all was no great matter. Delicacy was unknown to him; he could hardly have been made to understand that Geraldine regarded him with downright loathing. Still, as he could think of nothing to say, he was not sorry that she turned back without a word; and with a harsh laugh he opened an adjoining door to look for Frobisher. Geraldine returned to the room she had left, and sat down with a sense of repulsion that presently gave place to burning anger. She felt that she had received an outrageous insult.

She did not see Mappin again until the next morning, when she was coldly polite, and he left in a state of half-puzzled irritation, thinking more about Allinson than he had done. The man might prove a dangerous rival, unless something were done to prevent it. Mappin, however, thought that he could deal with him and was glad he had written to Hathersage, giving him a hint that Allinson threatened to make trouble for them both. [Pg 129]

As a result of Mappin's letter Andrew was handed a cablegram one evening when he was discussing the preparations for the journey with Carnally and Graham in the latter's house. When he had opened it he frowned.

"This promises to complicate matters. It's from my brother-in-law," he explained and read out the message:

*"Do nothing until I arrive; sailing Sylvitanian."*

Graham took up a Montreal paper.

"One of the fast boats. He should be here in nine days." Then he looked disturbed. "It may prevent your going North."

"No," Andrew said resolutely; "it shall not do that; but I'll have to see him. It's strange he should

come, though I told him the mine wasn't paying."

"You want to remember that Mappin's a friend of his," Carnally interposed. "There's another thing: you can't tell him about the lode, which, so far, doesn't belong to you. I guess the less you say about your plans the better."

"I believe that's true," Andrew agreed. "Well, our start must be put off a while."

Leonard arrived, accompanied by Wannop, who explained that he had come to see the country and look up one or two old friends. Soon after they reached the Landing, Leonard had an interview with Watson, who had been summoned to meet him; then he went with Andrew to his room at the hotel. It was small and scantily furnished, but a galvanized pipe which ran up through the floor from the basement heater made it comfortably warm; and Leonard, sitting in a rickety chair, watched his brother-in-law closely while he talked about the mine. Andrew had acquired a quickness of thought and a decision of manner which were new to Leonard. There was a pause after he had finished his explanation, for both felt that the next few minutes might prove momentous. They held widely different views and an unconsidered remark might bring them into open collision. Leonard waited, ready to profit by any mistake the other made, until Andrew spoke.

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"I was surprised to hear you were coming over; though perhaps it's as well you did so."

"When I got your letter the matter seemed serious enough to require my personal attention."

"You may tell me what you think," said Andrew, "and I'll consider it carefully."

"To begin with, why did you give Mappin notice to terminate his contract?"

"It seemed the best thing to be done in the shareholders' interest."

There was something impressive in Andrew's tone. Leonard knew that a conflict, which he wished to avoid, was imminent.

"I won't mince matters," he replied. "You have no business experience and know nothing about mining. You have acted rashly. I made the arrangements with Mappin and considered them satisfactory."

"I'm sorry to hear it. I wish it had been somebody less closely connected with Allinson's who concluded the deal with him. The man's making a good thing out of his contract at the Company's expense."

"You mustn't be hypercritical. Opportunities for picking up a few dollars are often attached to operations like ours, and it's wiser to let one's friends have them and look for favors in return. Besides, the man does his work well."

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"No," corrected Andrew, "he does it badly, with a cool assurance that no fault will be found and we'll pass his bills. In fact, for the firm to take any favors from him would savor of corruption. In the end, the shareholders would have to pay for them."

"Be careful," Leonard warned him. "You may cause a good deal of trouble without doing any good. Remember that you're only here on trial and accountable to the rest of the directors. If necessary, the power you're overstraining could be withdrawn."

"I think not," said Andrew. "In a sense, I'm Allinson's; it would be a difficult matter to get rid of me. I have neglected my duties, but it's not too late to make a change."

Leonard paused to light a cigarette. He had been met with a firmness he had not expected, and he realized that Andrew might prove a formidable antagonist.

"Very well," he conceded, "if you insist on our giving no more work to Mappin, I suppose he must be sacrificed, though you place me in an unpleasant position. After all, he's comparatively unimportant; we must talk about the mine. You seem to think it ought to be closed, which is out of the question for the present. You have, no doubt, learned that it often takes time to reach payable ore; all sorts of preliminary difficulties have to be overcome, and investors have frequently to exercise patience and put up with disappointments."

"You promised a good dividend in the prospectus."

"We didn't promise it on the first six months' working. Besides, one makes allowances for prospectus statements."

"It shouldn't be needful where Allinson's is concerned. But what do you suggest?"

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"That we keep the mine open, and do everything possible to increase the output and strike better ore. In the meanwhile, we won't say too much about our troubles."

"When you increase the output you increase expenses. This doesn't matter so long as the refined metal will pay for it, but it's a ruinous policy where the ore's no good. Then, you can't hide our difficulties. The shareholders will expect a dividend, and if it isn't forthcoming they'll demand an explanation at their meeting."

"That might be prevented. The family vote could be relied on, and it's often possible to control a meeting and silence objectors. These are matters you can leave to me."

"The objectors have a right to be heard; they could be silenced only by trickery. If we have made a mistake, we must admit it and consider how we can cut the loss."

"Admit our mistake?" Leonard laughed. "You're talking at random."

Andrew leaned forward, his eyes fixed on his brother-in-law.

"This Company should never have been floated. We'll let it go at that: the less said upon the point the better. The question is—what is to be done now? Well, I've decided on two things—we'll keep a few men working at the mine, because the yield will cover their wages, while I go into the bush and look for a richer lode I've heard about. If I'm successful, we'll consider the new situation."

Seeing that objections would be useless, Leonard reluctantly acquiesced, and it was a relief to both when Wannop came in. [Pg 133]

"There's a friend of yours asking for you, Andrew; I brought him up," he explained, and stood aside as Frobisher entered.

"I came to ask you over for a day or two, and I shall be glad if your relatives will come as well," he said. "We have plenty of room and have been rather dull lately. Besides, the hotel is too full to be comfortable."

After some demur they agreed to go, and Andrew felt grateful to Frobisher, for the visit would relieve the strain that Leonard's society threatened to impose on him. Half an hour later they took their places in Frobisher's sleigh.

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## **CHAPTER XIII**

### **LOVE'S ENCOURAGEMENT**

It was after dinner and Wannop, lounging comfortably over his cigar in Frobisher's smoking-room, smiled at Andrew, who sat opposite.

"This is a very nice house and I like your friend," he commented. "It's lucky he invited us, because I don't know how they'd have put us up at the hotel."

"What brought you over with Leonard?" Andrew asked bluntly.

"Gertrude wanted to make some visits this winter, which set me free. I've never been much away from home, and it struck me as a good chance for seeing Canada; then Jack Cartwright—you may remember him—is in Toronto. It's twelve years since I've met him, though he has often urged me to come over; and there's another man I know in Winnipeg."

"I wonder whether that was all?"

Wannop looked amused. He was stout and clumsy, but he had his jovial air.

"You seem to have been getting smarter since you came to Canada," he said. "Perhaps I'd better admit that I was anxious to see how you were getting on."

"Didn't Leonard tell you?"

"Leonard was as guarded and diplomatic as usual. He informed us that there had been some trouble at the mine and he was afraid you hadn't experience enough to deal with the situation. Then he gave us the impression that you were inclined to be rash and might make a mess of things unless he came over and put you right." [Pg 135]

"Ah!" exclaimed Andrew; "I expected something of the sort."

They looked at each other with mutual comprehension.

"Can matters be straightened out?" Wannop asked.

"Not in the few days that Leonard intends to devote to it. It's most unlikely that the Rain Bluff will ever pay."

"I'm sorry to hear it. A good deal of my money and Gertrude's has gone into the mine."

"You needn't be alarmed. I don't think the shareholders will suffer."

Andrew's tone was impressive, and Wannop looked at him sharply.

"That doesn't seem to agree with your last remark."

"I've a plan for working a richer lode, but I can't tell you anything further, because the secret belongs to another man until the minerals have been recorded; and it wouldn't be fair to Leonard and the directors, who haven't been consulted about the project yet. When my plans are ready, they will be disclosed. Perhaps I'm straining your confidence."

"It will stand some strain. But are you sure that Leonard will be fair to you?"



"That is another matter," Andrew said quietly.

"Well, I'm glad you have told me something: it gives me a lead. It was obvious that you and Leonard were at variance. In fact, I've foreseen a split for some time, and if a side must be taken, I'd rather stand by you."

"Thanks! But it may get you into trouble."

Wannop lighted another cigar and then looked up with a chuckle.

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"We're neither of us sentimentalists, but there's something to be said. You and I have always got on well, and when I married Gertrude you didn't lay such stress on the favor shown me in being allowed to enter the family as your estimable relatives did. Then we're the two whose abilities aren't held in much esteem, which is some reason why we should stick together. With all respect for the others, I sometimes think they're wrong."

Andrew laughed.

"We'll come to business," Wannop went on. "While the Rain Bluff shares were well taken up by outside investors, a good many are held by the family; these count as a compact block, a strong voting power—though it's remarkable that Leonard holds less than any of the rest of us. So if there's to be a fight between you and him, it will begin among your relatives; their opinion is more important than that of the general shareholders."

"Yes," assented Andrew, "Leonard would be powerful if backed by the solid family vote."

"The point is that he may not get it. Anyhow, Gertrude and I will support you, and we hold a good deal of stock between us."

"Thanks!" said Andrew. "Still, it may not come to a struggle of that kind, after all. It must be avoided if possible."

Then Frobisher came in and interrupted them.

Leonard spent a week with Frobisher, driving across to the Landing each morning on business. He and Andrew now and then discussed the Company's affairs without open disagreement. His attitude toward Andrew was friendly, but marked by a tone of good-humored forbearance, and when he spoke of him to Frobisher it was with a trace of amusement, as if Andrew were erratic and needed judicious guidance. It was done cleverly, for Leonard carefully avoided detraction, but his remarks conveyed the impression that Andrew was something of a simpleton.

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"If Allinson hasn't much judgment, why did you send him over to look after the mine?" Frobisher once asked him bluntly.

Leonard smiled at this.

"We didn't give him much responsibility; to tell the truth, we wanted to get him away for a while. There was a young grass-widow that it seemed possible he might make a fool of himself about. Rather a dangerous woman, I believe, and Andrew's confiding."

When his guests had returned to the Landing, Frobisher remarked to his daughter:

"Mr. Hathersage doesn't seem to think much of his brother-in-law."

"So it seems," said Geraldine, with an angry sparkle in her eyes. "He never missed an opportunity for cunningly disparaging him."

"Then you don't agree with his opinion?"

"I don't know that it was his real opinion," Geraldine replied. "I wouldn't trust the man." She paused and asked sharply: "Would you?"

"If I had to choose, I think I'd rather put my confidence in Allinson."

He looked thoughtful when his daughter left him, for he had not spoken to her without an object, and her indignation had its significance. On the whole, however, Frobisher saw no cause for uneasiness. He liked Andrew, and though Leonard's explanation might have had a deterrent effect, he disbelieved it.

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Before returning to England, Leonard had an interview with Mappin at the hotel.

"Do you know anything of the lode Allinson talks about?" he asked him.

"Nothing except that it lies up in the northern barrens, a mighty rough country, and that people think it's a delusion of the man who claims to have discovered it. But didn't your brother-in-law talk it over with you, if he's interested in the thing?"

"He did not. I may as well admit that there are points upon which his views don't agree with mine."

"So I imagined," Mappin remarked pointedly.

"He's in favor of closing the Rain Bluff. If that were done, it would, of course, cost you your contract."

Mappin looked thoughtful. Leonard had already sketched out a plan by which the notice Andrew had given Mappin might be rendered of no effect.

"Well," he said, "I'd much rather keep it; but we had better be frank. You would prefer that Allinson didn't find the lode?"

"I don't want him to waste the Company's time and money on a journey into the wilds, and expensive prospecting work which will probably lead to nothing. It would be wiser to keep the Rain Bluff going and get out as much ore as possible. I needn't point out that this would be more to your interest."

"That's so," chuckled Mappin. "I begin to see. I'm to make all the difficulties I can for Allinson?"

Leonard hesitated. He was asked to give his confederate dangerous powers, but he thought the safety of his position required it. There did not seem to be much likelihood of Andrew's discovering valuable minerals, but he might perhaps find somewhat better ore than the Rain Bluff was turning out, and with a practical scheme for working it gain support enough to embarrass the directors. If, however, Andrew failed in his search, it would be easier to discredit him, and the demand he would no doubt make for the abandoning of the mine could be withstood. [Pg 139]

"I think that's what I meant," he said. "You are in charge of our transport and I expect he'll need a quantity of food and prospecting tools sent up into the bush. I can leave you to work out details."

Mappin's eyes flashed.

"I guess I can fix it; let it go at that. Now there's another matter I want to mention."

Leonard acquiesced in the change of subject, feeling that he had done all that was possible to counteract Andrew's projects. He left with the Montreal express the next morning.

Two days later Mappin was summoned to Andrew's room at the hotel and found him studying a list of provisions.

"We shall get off in the next few days," he said. "I want you to send these supplies up to the mine, where we'll call for them."

"What about the rest of your truck?" Mappin inquired.

"Carnally has sent it off already."

Mappin saw that he could not do as much as he had expected to delay the party.

"Is there anything else?" he asked.

"Yes," said Andrew. "As we can't transport stores enough for the whole march, provisions will have to be cached for use on our return. Do you know where Whitefish Creek is?"

"It's a very long way up and said not to be indicated very correctly on the map. Two forks, aren't there?" [Pg 140]

Andrew nodded.

"A lake lies about two days' march up the east branch, and there's an island in it with a sandy tongue at one end. Take this list of provisions and have a cache made there. Get them up in a month from now. You can do that?"

"Oh, yes; I've some smart packers."

"Then here's another list. To get to the Whitefish you cross the height of land and there's a low neck in the middle of the long ridge. I want another cache made at the bottom of the gap. You understand that? It's important."

"I'll make a careful note of it," Mappin promised. "Your idea is to travel with light loads, and replenish your stores at the caches as you come back?"

"Precisely. Carnally and Graham have been calculating our supplies closely and we shall not have much left when we reach the first cache. You had better put a barked fir-pole on the top of it; there are trees about."

"The boys I'll send up will see to it," said Mappin, and after a few questions took his leave.

A day or two later Andrew walked across the ice in the evening to see the Frobishers before he started on his journey, and when he had spent some time with them Geraldine went down with him to the hall. They were alone, for her father was searching for a compass he wished to give Andrew. Geraldine stopped when she reached the foot of the stairs and stood with her hand on the balustrade. Her unstudied pose was graceful, she made a very attractive picture, and though she saw Andrew's admiration she was not displeased. It was different from that which Mappin had bestowed on her. [Pg 141]

"I think you are doing a very fine thing," she said diffidently. "You see, I know something, besides what you have told me, about the mine and Allinson's. Ethel Hillyard wrote to me not long ago—I knew her in England—and she said several nice things about you."

"Did she?" said Andrew, with some embarrassment. "Ethel's a good friend. But it's rather trying to have things said about you."

"Now you're curious," Geraldine replied, "and I'll be indiscreet enough to mention one. She said you were always sincere, and to be relied on." She paused a moment and added: "I think that's true; your going to search for the lode proves it."

Andrew looked at her steadily, his heart throbbing.

"Would you be surprised to hear that you are largely responsible for the search?"

"I! What could I have to do with it?"

"I'll try to explain. There was a time when I was half afraid to go on with my plans; I could see nothing but trouble ahead. Then one day when you were speaking of Carnally you said something about doing the square thing. That and the song you sang one evening soon afterward decided me."

"Then I'm afraid I've been very rash; it's a responsibility I should not have assumed. After all, I know nothing about the difficulties you may meet with."

"And I know very little, except that they'll certainly be plentiful. Ignorance is a heavy handicap, and it doesn't make things better when it's your own fault. Still, whether you meant it or not, you showed me that there was only one course open—to go straight ahead and leave the rest to Fate."

His words awoke a responsive thrill in Geraldine, for she knew his worth. There was courage in him and sterling honesty; he was entering on a hard fight for the sake of people unknown to him who had trusted to the honor of his house. He would, she believed, be opposed by clever trickery, prejudice and strong commercial interests, but if the world were ruled by right, as she tried to believe, it was unthinkable that he should be beaten.

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"Well," she said, with the color in her face and sympathy in her eyes, "I wish you good luck. But be careful up there among the rocks and muskegs. Don't run too many risks. Come back safe."

"Thank you! It would be something to you if we kept out of trouble?"

His gaze was steadily searching and for a moment she turned her head. Then, though there was a slight change in her manner, she looked around with a smile.

"Yes, of course," she answered. "I shall be anxious while you are away and eager for news."

Andrew saw that there was nothing more to be said, and he was glad that Frobisher came down the stairs with the compass in his hand.

"It's one of the cutest things of the kind I've seen," said the American. "There's very little oscillation, the card can't come unshipped, and you can take a bearing correctly with the sights on this sliding ring."

When Andrew had thanked him for the gift, he left the house. It was a still night and bitterly cold, but he walked back across the ice to the Landing with a glow at his heart.

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## CHAPTER XIV

### TREACHERY

The afternoon was nearly over and the frost intense when Andrew plodded up the frozen river with Carnally and Graham. The snow crunched with a squeaking sound beneath their moccasins, which Andrew had had specially made because ordinary boots are not adapted to the extreme cold of the North. On their western hand the pines stood out sharp and black against a coppery glare, and as they passed the wider openings the light struck dazzlingly into their aching eyes. Ahead the white riband of river led into a wilderness of rocks and stunted trees, but there was no sign of life in all the picture, and everything was very still.

The men were not heavily loaded, for most of their supplies had been sent on to the mine, but Andrew had found his pack a bad enough handicap on the long march up-river and had noticed with some concern that Graham seemed to feel the weight more than he did. The old man had lagged behind, but he now came up breathless.

"You want to get a move on," Carnally advised. "It's 'most six miles yet to Rain Bluff and I'm feeling ready for my supper."

"So am I," said Graham; "but it was too cold to rest by the greenwood fire when we nooned, and I'm not so young as you are. Then it is remarkable how twenty years of domestic life soften one."

"Sure!" grinned Carnally. "You don't find the man who gets his dinner every day leading in a long, hard march. That was Allinson's trouble when he first took the trail with me."

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"There may be disadvantages in having regular meals, but I know from painful experience what

an ache in the side you get when forced to go without," Andrew returned. "It's one of the things I've learned in Canada."

"You'll learn a few more of the same kind before you're through," Carnally drawled. "But how do you like your moccasins?"

"They're comfortable; the American shoe people have made them well; but I'm not sure they'll last the journey through. It's lucky we have some spare pairs among the provisions Mappin has sent up."

"It might have been better if we'd hired two or three boys at the Landing and packed the truck up along with us," Carnally remarked.

"Mappin engaged to forward the things. It's his business."

Carnally looked unconvinced.

"I never deal with a man who's not straight if I can help it. You can't tell when he may go back on you, unless you can fix it so that his interest is the same as yours; and you and Mappin don't agree."

"That's a fact," Andrew admitted. "However, we'll soon find out about the provisions."

He forced the pace, but it slackened again. He was tired; the red glare, which grew more lurid, hurt his eyes, and he was thankful when it suddenly faded, leaving the wilderness wrapped in soft blue shadow. The pack-straps galled his shoulders, his fur-cap was thick with rime, and its fringe of frosted hair stung his forehead. They came to a narrow reach where the stream ran fast and the ice was thrown up in ragged hummocks. It was difficult to pick their way in the dim light; they slipped and stumbled, breaking through the treacherous snow bridges between the blocks; and when they came out upon a better surface it was dark. Shadowy firs rose about them; here and there an ice-crusting rock showed above the gray level of the stream. Except for their soft footsteps there was a deathly silence. Graham was now some distance behind them, and after a while he made protest.

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"Hold on!" he cried. "I'm not toughened up to your mark yet."

Andrew was glad to wait for him, though the frost bit keenly when he stopped and he was anxious to finish the long day's march. The ranks of stunted pines looked inexpressibly dreary looming out of the darkness, and, fatigued as he was, the savagery of the surrounding desolation oppressed him. They would reach warmth and shelter in another hour, but when they went on again Andrew thought with a heavy heart of the leagues of travel through the grim solitudes of the frozen North. Up there, their only resting-place would be a hollow behind a rock or a trench scooped out of the snow. Still, he was not daunted. He had undertaken a big thing, and he meant to carry it out.

At last a twinkle of light showed among the trees, and when they approached one of the shacks at the mine the door opened and a dark figure appeared against the brightness of the interior.

"Is that you, Watson?" Andrew asked. "Has Mappin sent up some provisions for us?"

"Nothing has turned up lately except some tools," Watson answered. "But come right in."

They entered the shack, which for the first few minutes felt intolerably hot.

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"Did those tools come in cases with a Toronto freight tag?" Carnally asked.

"They did," said Watson.

Carnally looked at Andrew.

"That's what misled me. I found out the cases had left the Landing and thought they held our truck. What I wasn't sure about was whether they'd reach here."

"The provisions haven't come, and a day or two's rest will do us good," Andrew replied. "I suppose the fellow will send some explanation."

"That's certain. He won't want you to go down and look him up; you'll get word from him before long. Whether you'll get your provisions or not is another matter."

"Let it drop," Andrew advised; and soon afterward they sat down to supper. In an hour or two they were all asleep; but the next day passed before they heard anything about the missing supplies. They were sitting round the stove in the evening when Watson came in with a letter.

"One of Mappin's boys has brought you this," he said.

Andrew opened it and looked up with a frown.

"No answer. Let him go back when he likes."

When Watson left them he turned to the others.

"Mappin regrets to say that our stores have been lost in transit, and though he is trying to trace them, there may be some delay. He thinks I would like to know this at once—which looks like ironical wit. If needful, he will order a duplicate lot."

"Is it worth while to go down and see him?" Graham asked.

"I'd enjoy it," said Andrew grimly. "However, now that we have come so far, we can't waste time in going back, and I've no doubt it would be a week or two before I could get the goods. We'll have to do without them, which is unfortunate." [Pg 147]

His anger was justified. Travel in the North, where food is scarce, is a question of transport. As the traveler must take all he needs with him, his supplies must be carefully regulated in accordance with the distance and his power of carrying them, while an error in his calculations may result in starvation. Knowing this, Carnally and Graham had considered how the weight could be cut down by the use of certain condensed foods, as well as clothing and camp equipment made to combine the greatest warmth with lightness. The goods were expensive, but their value could hardly be reckoned in money.

"Then we had better push on at once," Graham suggested. "We have the things Carnally sent up and we ought to get some provisions at the Hudson Bay factory, where I expect to hire the sledge dogs. It will add to our loads and shorten our stay, but we'll have to put up with that."

"You should have cut Mappin right out of this business," Carnally said to Andrew. "His first trick hasn't stopped us, but I feel uneasy about leaving him to handle the food we'll need when coming down."

Andrew looked grave.

"The man's treacherous; but he has gone as far as is safe already. Taking it for granted that he wishes to prevent our finding the lode, one can understand his trying to hinder our outward journey. He would, however, gain nothing by delaying our return, and he's too clever to risk getting himself into trouble without a good reason." [Pg 148]

"That sounds right; I can find no fault with it," Carnally agreed. "We'll pull out to-morrow, but I'd feel easier if the making of those caches wasn't in Mappin's hands."

They left Rain Bluff the next morning and it was a week later when Mappin learned that he had failed to detain them. He had just returned to the Landing from a business visit, and was sitting in his room at the hotel when the messenger came in.

"Did Mr. Allinson seem annoyed?" he asked.

"Can't say," the man replied. "He didn't say a word to me; told Watson there was no answer, and pulled out with the other fellows next day."

"I suppose they went off with pretty heavy loads?"

"That's so. Took some of Watson's blue camp blankets, and I guess they'll soon get tired. Two of them are tenderfoots at the job."

"Carnally's a smart bushman, isn't he?"

"Sure! But he'd all he could carry."

Mappin was surprised at the turbulence of his feelings. Though of gross nature, ambition and avarice had hitherto dominated him, and he was generally marked by a cold-blooded calm. Now, however, his passions were aroused, and he was filled with an anger which he thought must be subdued before it led him into rashness. He had done all he could to delay Allinson, and though he had failed it was not his habit to grow savage at a reverse; moreover, it was unlikely that the prospectors would get very far. For all that, he was disturbed. Allinson, whom he had regarded with contempt as a fastidious tenderfoot, might prove a dangerous rival. That he had refrained from sending down an angry remonstrance suggested strong self-control and a suspicion of Mappin's motives. He must be careful, and must make all the progress he could with Geraldine while Allinson was away. [Pg 149]

During the next three weeks he saw the Frobishers often, though he had undertaken an important railroad contract for which his men were cutting lumber in the bush. Geraldine treated him with a conventional politeness which misled him, for he was inexperienced in dealing with girls of her character. Indeed, except for his business capacity, Mappin was undeveloped and primitive. For all that, he felt that he was not advancing much in Geraldine's favor and he made up his mind to press his suit without delay. Allinson would be back before very long, and the provisions he would need for his return journey must shortly be sent off.

After waiting for an opportunity, he found Geraldine alone one evening in her drawing-room and sat down feeling unusually diffident as well as eager, though he forced himself to talk about matters of no importance. For one thing, the room had a disturbing effect on him. It was furnished with refined taste and all its appointments seemed stamped with its owner's personality; a faint perfume that she was fond of clung about it. All this reacted on the man, and the girl's beauty worked on his passions.

She listened with indifference, now and then glancing toward him. He was smartly dressed, but he looked out of place—too big and gross for his surroundings. Then by degrees she grew more intent; there was a hint of strain in his voice and a gleam in his eyes which caused her vague alarm. His face was slightly flushed, he looked coarser than usual, and when he was silent his lips set in an ugly, determined fashion. At last, when she was thinking of an excuse for leaving him, [Pg 150]

he rose.

"Geraldine," he said, "I have something to tell you."

She looked up quickly; somewhat frightened, he thought, and he was not displeased.

"Oh!" she exclaimed. "Is it necessary?"

"I think so; you shall judge. For a long while I've been very fond of you."

His ardent glance repelled her. She resented it and this gave her courage.

"I wonder what you mean by that?" she asked coldly.

The man failed to understand her. Love was not a complex thing to him.

"It ought to be pretty simple. You're the girl I mean to marry; I set my heart on it some time ago."

"*Mean* to marry? You're not diffident."

Mappin laughed and his amusement filled her with repulsion. She was not encouraging, he thought; but he had not expected her to be so.

"No," he replied, "I'm not. Bashfulness doesn't pay, and I haven't had time to study saying pretty things. I want you—there it is."

"It's a pity you didn't tell me this earlier. It might have saved you some disappointment," said Geraldine.

She was angry and alarmed, but keenly interested. She had not expected that her first offer would take this abrupt form; but there was no doubting the strong primitive passion in the man. It was a force to be reckoned with; one could not treat it with indifference. He looked big and clumsy as he stood with his eyes fixed on her, but his face and pose suggested power.

"Well," he explained, "there was a reason. I was pretty low down in the world; I hadn't much to offer, and I wouldn't have you think I wanted you for your money. Now I've got on; I begin to see how I'm going to make a big success. There's no longer anything to stop my claiming you." [Pg 151]

This sounded sincere, but it was unthinkable that she should feel any tenderness for the man, and he must be made to understand.

"Mr. Mappin," she began; but he checked her.

"Let me get through. You shall have all you want: a house in Montreal or Toronto, as you like, smart friends and position—guess if I set my mind on it I can get them. In fact, you shall have what you wish—you'll only need to ask for it. I want my wife to take a leading place, and I'll see she gets there."

"I'm sorry, but it's impossible for me to marry you," said Geraldine firmly.

Mappin regarded her with a grim smile.

"You look as if you meant it."

"I do." Geraldine tried hard to preserve her calm. "Please understand that my mind is made up."

"Oh," he replied tolerantly, "I didn't expect to get you first try. Guess I'll have to wait until you get used to the idea."

"I shall never get used to it!"

He had held himself in hand, but as he heard the decision in her tone his passion mastered him.

"Never is a mighty long time; you have got to yield sooner or later. I can make you!"

Geraldine rose with all the dignity she could assume; but he moved between her and the door.

"Wait a bit," he said with a harsh laugh. "Now, what's the matter with me?"

"I think I need only say that you're very far from being the kind of man I could marry. Let me pass!"

Mappin barred her way.

"Well," he said, "I know my value. I'll stand comparison with that finicking Englishman!"

Her blush told that this shot had reached the mark and he turned on her with fury.

"You'll never get him! Count on that; I'll break the fellow!"

Geraldine recoiled. She thought that he meant to seize her; he was capable of it. Indeed, he moved a pace or two, but this gave her an opportunity for reaching the door. There she turned and saw that he was watching her with a curious grim smile.

"The subject is closed," she said. "You have behaved hatefully!"

Escaping into the hall, she sought her room and shut herself in. She felt humiliated, and,

although there had once or twice been something ludicrous in the situation, the man's overbearing boldness had strongly impressed her. She was afraid of him; he would not readily be beaten.

Mappin left the house without speaking to Frobisher and returned to the Landing. The next day he sent for the packer who was to lead the party taking up Andrew's supplies. The fellow was some time in coming and Mappin waited for him in a threatening mood. Geraldine's blush had filled him with jealous hatred. Allinson was a dangerous rival. Let him beware!

"You know the Whitefish Creek," he said to the man he had summoned. "What lies between the forks?"

"A piece of high and very rough country; muskegs full of little pines mused up with blown trees in the hollows."

"Well," said Mappin, "you'll cache the supplies for Allinson where I've put the cross on this map. Think you've got it right?"

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"Yes," answered the packer. "It must be near the tall butte, a piece up the creek. That's a pretty good mark."

"Then there's the other lot of supplies. You can see the place for them on the height of land, south of the Whitefish."

The man glanced at the map and nodded.

"We'll dump those first. Everything's ready. We'll pull out as soon as I can get the boys together."

He left the room and Mappin lighted a cigar. He felt somewhat nervous, as if he had undergone a strain.

"If Allinson gets through, I'll allow he's the better man," he mused.

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## **CHAPTER XV**

### **THE SILVER LODGE**

A half-breed stood on the river bank beside his dog-team while Andrew handed Carnally the packs from the sled. It was late in the afternoon, the valley was swept by driving snow, and the men's hands were so numbed that they found it difficult to strap on their heavy loads. The ice was several feet in thickness on the deeper pools, but the stream ran strong along the opposite shore, and its frozen surface was rough, and broken in places by pools of inky water.

"It would save some trouble if we made our caches among these boulders," Graham suggested.

"That's so," agreed Carnally. "Still I guess it would be safer on the other side, where we'll strike it sooner coming back. It's wise to take no chances in this country."

They were loaded at last, and the gorge looked very desolate when the half-breed vanished with his dogs beyond the summit of the bank. He was not a man of much conversational powers, but they had found his company pleasant in the grim solitudes. Andrew had hired him at an outlying Hudson Bay factory, where he had had no trouble in obtaining food. The fur trade was languishing thereabout, and prospectors for timber and minerals were made welcome. The Scot in charge of the lonely post had, however, no dogs for sale, though he engaged to transport a limited quantity of provisions to a point which one of the company's half-breeds, despatched on another errand, would pass with his team.

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Andrew considered Carnally's caution well justified. Their supply of food was scanty, and the journey attended by risks enough; but he could sympathize with Graham. It was snowing hard, the wind was rising, and there was no sign of a camping-place in all the desolation. They had gone a long way since sunrise, and were too tired to think of lengthening the journey by looking for a better place to cross the river. They went forward, carefully avoiding the hummocks, and winding around the larger cracks. Andrew was too occupied in picking his way to notice that Graham had fallen some distance behind; but when he had skirted a tall hummock, a sharp cry reached him, and he stopped in alarm. He could see nothing except a stretch of rugged ice and a high white bank fading into the driving snow. Their companion had disappeared.

"Guess he was straight behind us!" cried Carnally, as they turned back, running.

Andrew fell over a block of ice, but he was up in a moment, for the cry came again, and when they had passed a black pool he saw what seemed to be the head and shoulders of a man projecting from a fissure. He sprang across a dangerous crack and as he ran he saw Graham's face turned toward him, with a strained, tense look. Carnally was a pace or two in front and had seized Graham's arm when Andrew came up and grasped his collar. They dragged him out of the crevice and set him, gasping breathlessly, on the ice, with the water running from one of his moccasins.

"You were only just in time," he said after a moment or two. "There was snow across the crack and it broke under me. Couldn't crawl out, with my pack dragging me down."

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"It's blamed unfortunate you got your moccasin wet," Carnally remarked. "It ought to come off right away, but we haven't another. Think the water has got through?"

"I'm afraid it has; the back seam opened up a bit yesterday. But my feet are so cold I can hardly feel."

"If Mappin hadn't played that trick on us, you'd have a sound dry pair to put on. But you want to keep moving, and it's getting dark."

They crossed the ice without further misadventure, toiled up a steep bank where short brush that impeded them badly rose out of the snow, and an hour afterward found a hollow among the rocks sheltered by a few junipers and tottering firs. Carnally loosed the load from his aching shoulders and threw it down with relief.

"It's that hog Mappin's fault we're packing a pile of unnecessary weight along," he said. "I'm looking forward to a talk with him when I get back."

He set to work, hacking rotten branches from a leaning fir, while Andrew scraped away the snow and built a wall of it between them and the wind. Graham lighted a fire, filled the kettle with snow, and spread branches and twigs to lay their blankets on. It took time, and Andrew knew of no labor so irksome as making camp after an exhausting march; but no pains could be spared if they wished to sleep without freezing. At last they gathered about a crackling fire which threw an uncertain light upon their faces, and Carnally cooked a frugal supper.

"I guess we could eat more, but it wouldn't be prudent," he said as he shared out the food. "Your lode's about a hundred miles off yet, isn't it, Graham?"

"Yes, as near as I can calculate."

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"Call it six days; a fortnight anyhow before we get back here, and that won't allow much time for thawing out and shot-firing. Then we'll have to reach our first cache before the grub runs out. It's going to be a blamed tight fit."

Andrew consumed his portion and glanced regretfully at the empty frying-pan. Then, for fatigue had soured his temper, he broke out:

"I'd like to have the brute who cut our rations short up here to-night! Blast his greed! It's an infamous thing that a man should make money by starving his fellow creatures!"

"They seem to consider it legitimate in the cities," said Graham dryly. "We have mergers controlling almost everything we eat and drink, and men get rich by bull deals in the wheat pits. However, your sentiments are not exactly new. What do you think, Jake? I haven't heard you on politics."

Carnally grinned.

"As it looks as if I'm going to be hungry, I'm a hard-shelled grit—something like your Radicals," he explained to Andrew. "But if I thought we could get a good one, I'd prefer being governed by an emperor. So far as my experience goes, one live man can run things much better than a crowd, and it's a poor mine or railroad boss who can't beat a board of directors."

"That's so," Graham assented. "They're most capable when they let one of them drive the lot. But there's the trouble that you might get the wrong kind of emperor. It's hard to tell a good man until he gets to work."

"Sure!" agreed Carnally. "If you're not pleased with the Laurier gang, you can fire them out, and then you might not find the other crowd much better. But if a bad emperor meant to stay with it, you'd have to use dynamite."

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The others laughed, but Andrew, awkwardly filling his pipe with numbed fingers, looked serious. There was a truth in his companion's remarks that touched him personally. It was undoubtedly difficult to get rid of an able man entrusted with power which he abused. To attack him might imply the break-up of the organization which had appointed him; one might have to use destructive methods, and Andrew wished to build up the Rain Bluff Company, not pull it down. For all that, Leonard must be stripped of the authority he had wrongly used, though the task would be extremely troublesome. With one or two unimportant exceptions, he enjoyed the confidence of the Allinson family, as well as the support of the directors; and Andrew knew what his relatives thought of him. In the first place, however, he must find the lode, and he was glad to think it lay within a week's march from camp.

"Have you got that wet moccasin off yet?" Carnally asked Graham.

Graham confessed that he had been too tired and hungry to remember it, and after drawing it off with some trouble he spent a while in chafing his foot, which he afterward wrapped in a blanket. Then while the men sat silent a long howl came faintly down the bitter breeze.

"A timber wolf," said Carnally. "I saw some tracks this morning and the half-breed told me they'd had a number of the big gray fellows near the factory. They get pretty bold when there's no caribou about, and it's unlucky we haven't struck any caribou. It would help out the grub."



"Three men with a camp-fire going are safe enough," said Graham.

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"Oh, yes," Carnally assented. "Still, a timber wolf is a beast I've no kind of use for in winter."

They lay down soon afterward, but Andrew heard the wolves again before he went to sleep. He was very cold when he awakened the next morning and found Carnally busy about the fire. There was no wind, the smoke went straight up, and the snow stretched back from the camp, glistening a faint silvery gray. The firs were very black but indistinct in the growing light.

"Get a move on; we should have been off long ago," Carnally said; and Andrew, rising with cramped limbs and sore shoulders, awkwardly set about rolling up his pack.

He shivered as he did so. The cold bit through him, his mittened hands would hardly bend, but he strapped up his bundle and helped Graham to put on his frozen moccasin. They were careful to hang up their footwear in a warm place at night, but the fire had sunk while they slept. Then they ate a hurried meal and struck out into the white wilderness as the light grew stronger. They made, by estimation, eighteen miles by nightfall, finding a creek and one or two small lakes over which traveling was easy, but most of the way led across hillocks of rounded rock and through tangles of tottering pines, where snow-shoes could not be used. Some of the trees had been partly burned, and others were slanted and distorted by the savage winds.

Toward the end of the march Graham dragged behind, and when they made camp he spent some time rubbing his foot.

"It feels dead," he told them. "I'm afraid I got it nipped a bit, but I don't think it's bad."

"See that you get your moccasin properly dry to-night," Carnally warned him.

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The next morning he felt lame and the country was rougher, but they made thirty miles in two days, and set out again on the third dawn with thick snow driving into their faces. Fortunately, the ground was smoother, and they plodded on stubbornly with a short halt at noon, Carnally breaking the trail for the two behind. Graham had trouble in keeping up with his companions; but they had no thought to spare for him during the laborious march. It needed all their resolution to press forward against the searching wind. At nightfall they camped in a sheltered ravine and when supper was over Graham got Carnally to help him off with his moccasin. While they pulled at it he made an abrupt movement, and Carnally, stopping, glanced at a dark stain on the leather.

"That looks like blood!"

"I think it is," said Graham. "I slept with the thing on last night. To tell the truth, I was afraid to take it off."

"It will have to come off now."

Carnally's face turned grave when Graham removed his stocking. Part of his foot felt cold and lifeless; the rest was inflamed, and there was a red patch, rubbed raw by the frozen moccasin.

"Looks bad," Carnally said. "Have you got an old handkerchief or anything to wrap round it?"

"I couldn't walk with a bandage under my stocking."

"You're not going to walk; you ought to know what trouble that might make." Carnally turned to Andrew. "He can't go on. It's a dangerous thing to gall a frostnipped foot. I don't see how it got so bad in four days' time."

Graham broke into a wry smile.

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"It began to hurt soon after I left the factory, and getting it wet didn't improve things; but I thought I could hold out until we made the lode."

There was silence for a few moments. Graham's foot was throbbing painfully, and having gone on until compelled to stop, he knew his helplessness. His comrades realized that they were burdened with a crippled man, far from shelter and assistance in an icy waste. Dejection seized them; and Andrew, glancing at the darkness round about, felt a sudden horror of the desolation. This, however, was a dangerous feeling to yield to, and he strove to overcome it.

"We're two days' march from the lode," he said. "It's unthinkable that we should turn back without trying to locate it. Graham may be better after a rest. It might be possible, Carnally, that by forcing the pace we could knock a day off the double journey."

"I'll give you six days," Graham said. "I can stay here; but if you don't start the first thing tomorrow, I'll crawl on myself."

"No," Andrew declared; "whether we strike the lode or not, we'll be back before the fourth morning. The next thing is to consider what to do then. Provisions aren't plentiful."

They discussed the matter at length, for even the finding of the lode was, by comparison unimportant. It would be some time before Graham could walk far, and, with each day's journey seriously curtailed there was grave danger of their food running out. At first, Carnally was in favor of trying to reach the factory, where they would find shelter, but yielded to the objection that it was farther off than the nearer of the caches which Mappin had been engaged to make. He agreed that they would save several days by cutting the back trail between the mine and the spot where they had diverged to reach the factory, and they would then pick up a hand sled they had

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used for a time and abandoned when the country grew very rough and their load lighter. If Graham's foot was still troublesome, they could haul him on the sled and still make a good day's march. The plan was agreed on, and after carefully arranging their packs for the expedition and getting the clearest instructions that Graham could give them, they went to sleep.

The next morning long before daylight Andrew and Carnally were getting together a supply of branches and logs so that Graham might keep a fire going night and day until their return: for the double purpose of warmth and of protection against the timber wolves. When they had made Graham comfortable, they set off. They had heard no wolves of late, which was reassuring, but they had grave misgivings about leaving the crippled man, and meant to save every possible minute on the march. It was comparatively open country, they could use their snow-shoes, and they pressed on until dusk without stopping, though the last league taxed Andrew's strength. He was badly tired when at noon the next day they reached a hillside commanding a rocky basin filled with stunted pines. A shallow ravine ran at their feet.

Carnally stopped suddenly.

"I believe we've struck it!" he cried. "That must be the creek Graham talks about!"

Forgetting their weariness, they ran down the hill and stopped beside a frozen stream hemmed in by ice-glazed rocks.

"I guess we're somewhere about the spot, and we'll fire a dump shot on yonder ridge where there's not much snow," Carnally said. "That's all we can do."

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"Can't we stake three claims?" Andrew suggested. "The recorder might allow Graham one if things were explained."

"It can't be done. You get the frontage you apply for on the reef, but its extent is limited and full particulars must be supplied, while a man can hold only one claim on the same vein. Then a record isn't secret. If you don't stake off the best of the lode, you give the thing away, and send off every prospector who hears of it to locate what you have missed."

The situation was clear to Andrew, and it was daunting. After all the fatigue and dangers of the journey, he must go back without accomplishing anything useful; but there was no help for it.

"I suppose if we had a week we might form some idea of what is worth staking off, even with the snow on the ground," he said. "However, as it is, we have got about two hours. We had better make the most of them."

They lighted a fire and sat beside it, thawing two sticks of dynamite, a proceeding attended by some risk, which Carnally seriously increased when he crimped the powerful detonating caps on the fuses with numbed and clumsy fingers. Both men were moody and dejected, but they did not express their feelings, for they were capable of meeting reverses with silent fortitude. Carnally stood to lose more money than he had ever had a prospect of earning until his companion took him north; Andrew knew at what a disadvantage his failure would place him in the struggle with Leonard. He was sincere in his purpose to see justice done, but he had no romantic ideas about it. His task was based on common honesty: Allinson's had guaranteed the undertaking and Allinson's must make good. Andrew was, however, troubled by two conflicting claims. He had a duty to the shareholders which could best be discharged by remaining near the lode until he proved its value; and a duty to Graham, whom he had promised to bring home safe and sound. Graham, most unfortunately, was crippled, and the scarcity of provisions made it doubtful whether he could be taken back to the Landing, unless they started without delay. The shareholders must wait.

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Carnally kneaded the softening dynamite round the detonators.

"Try to scrape down to the rock on the spot I marked," he said. "I'll come when you're ready and we'll fire the shot."

Andrew had some trouble in carrying out his instructions, but when he had done so Carnally laid the cartridges on the stone and covered them with snow carefully pressed down. Then they dragged up a small fallen spruce and, laying it on the spot, lighted the fuses and hastily retired. In a minute there was a flash, a sharp report; and a shower of flying fragments plunged into the snow, while a cloud of vapor curled up. Andrew sprang from his shelter, but Carnally seized his arm.

"Hold on!" he cried. "You don't want the fumes to knock you over. I guess we'll get dinner while we wait. You can't expect any startling results from one shot."

Eager as he was, Andrew ate his share of the scanty meal; he could practise self-control and he had marched a long way on short rations in bitter frost.

When they had examined the cavity made by the explosion, Carnally covered it with snow, and picked up the broken bits of rock. They had gathered a small heap, and Carnally, carefully selecting a few, looked at Andrew with a smile.

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"I suppose you feel that you'd like to take the whole lot?"

"I thought we might carry half of them," Andrew admitted.

"Unless you're willing to dump your blankets, these will be enough. It's a long way to the Landing

and we have to make the first food cache quick."

"You're right," said Andrew. "Besides, we must reach Graham's camp by to-morrow night."

"Rough on you!" Carnally sympathized; "I haven't as big a stake."

Nothing more was said while they rolled up their packs and set off grimly on the return trail.

It had been dark for several hours the next night when Andrew wearily toiled up a long rise dotted with ragged spruces. He was hungry and very cold, though he panted with the exertion he was forced to make. There was no feeling in his feet, which were bound to big snow-shoes; his hands were powerless in his thick mittens, and he carried a light ax under his arm. Fortunately, the trail they had broken when coming out led straight up the rise, and Carnally pressed on in front, a gray shape outlined against the glitter of the snow. A half-moon hung above them in a cloudless sky, the frost was intense, and the white desolation lay wrapped in an impressive silence. Not a breath of wind stirred the tops of the spruces.

Andrew's knees were giving way, and it seemed to him that the ascent they were laboriously mounting ran on for ever. He felt as if they had spent hours on it, though the frozen river at its foot was not far behind them. It was discouraging to fix his eyes on the black shape of a spruce ahead and see how slowly it grew nearer, but he felt unequal to contemplating the long trail to the summit, and he divided the distance into stages between tree and tree.

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At last they crossed the ridge and it was a relief to go downhill, though the spruces grew in thicker belts and there was half a mile of timber that they were forced to traverse in their moccasins. Fallen logs obstructed their passage, they plunged into tangles of blown-down branches, the snow was loose among the slender trunks and here and there they sank deep in it. Andrew was, however, consumed by an anxiety which would brook no delay, and when he had with difficulty replaced his snow-shoes he looked up at his companion.

"We can't be far from camp?" he queried.

"About three miles. We ought to see it when we're through the timber on the lower bench. Graham had wood enough to keep a good fire going."

They pressed on, slipping down the steeper slopes, stumbling now and then, for both had regretted the necessity for leaving Graham alone, and at sunset they had seen the tracks of wolves. At last they plunged into a thick belt of spruce, where the trees were fairly large and there was not much fallen wood. Here and there a broad patch of moonlight glittered on the snow, confusing after the deep gloom, but the men could get through on their snow-shoes and avoid the trunks. They made good speed and when they broke out into the open Andrew stopped. Where a bright blaze should have marked Graham's fire there were only a few dying embers. The old man was nowhere to be seen.

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## CHAPTER XVI

### THE CACHE

The two prospectors forgot their weariness as they rushed to the dying fire. Carnally looked at the embers.

"Can't have been gone long," he declared.

"Shout, Jake!" cried Andrew. "I'm out of breath."

Carnally called, and Andrew's heart throbbed when a faint cry rose in answer. His anxiety had not been groundless: a lonely man runs many risks in the frozen North. Following the sound, they hastened up the ravine, and as they rounded a projecting boulder, a red glow flashed out a little distance ahead, died down, and rose more clearly.

"That's mighty good to see!" Carnally exclaimed.

Graham met them as they entered the firelight.

"Had any trouble?" Andrew asked anxiously.

"No; and the foot's feeling better. The rest has done it good. I've been pretty comfortable since you left, though the wolves got so friendly last night that I thought I'd better shift my camp a bit to-night. I didn't allow you could get back before to-morrow, and I knew I'd hear you shout if you did. I left the other fire burning as a beacon."

Andrew breathed deeply.

"It's a wonderful relief!" he said.

Carnally looked hard at Graham's face.

"Guess you didn't sleep well, but we'll get a good rest to-night, now there are three of us. A

timber wolf is a cussed mean brute. Government ought to supply the bush settlers with free arsenic."

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There was a brief silence, while Graham waited, intent and eager, until Carnally broke into a soft laugh.

"We struck it, partner! Guess your lode's right there, but we couldn't do enough prospecting to tell you what it's worth."

Graham turned his head for a moment, and his eyes glittered when he looked around.

"That is my misfortune and Mappin's fault. But you must have your supper, and then we'll talk."

Carnally glanced at Andrew, who had thrown off his pack and sat down on it in an attitude of exhaustion.

"Allinson allowed we'd be back to-night, and he hustled me along pretty lively for a tenderfoot."

They laughed at this and began the meal which Graham soon had ready. Then, sitting close beside the fire, they filled their pipes and Graham carefully examined the bits of stone Carnally produced. He poised them in his hands, because the weight is a rough test, before he looked up.

"What do you think of them, Jake?" he asked.

"My idea is that they're pretty good, though they are not carrying a remarkable quantity of metal. Of course, we may have struck only the edge of the lode. There wasn't time to find how it ran."

Graham sat silent a while, and then turned to Andrew with a strained expression.

"I agree with Carnally. So far as I can judge, these specimens are not very rich, though the ore might pay for reduction. That I feel disappointed after waiting twenty years for this chance doesn't need saying; but I've brought you here at a big expense and risk and I can't blame you if you let the matter drop."

"Nothing is farther from my mind," declared Andrew, smiling. "It's unpleasant to feel beaten; and I'm partly responsible for our failure by confiding in Mappin. If you and Carnally still think I'm to be trusted as a partner, we'll come back again, though I'd prefer waiting until the ice breaks up in the spring."

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Graham's relief carried him away.

"I'd trust you with my life, Allinson! It's hard to express what I feel, but I've got to talk. If we had failed to find the lode, I'd have gone home, content, I think, to forget it; but to have struck it and got no farther would have been maddening! The thing would have haunted me for the rest of my days; but I hardly expect any one would have put up the money for another search. I can see myself hanging round mining men's offices, laughed and sneered at, neglecting my work until the sawmill people turned me out—they'll tell you at the Landing that I'm a crank. But the silver's there, Allinson! You have only to look for it!"

"We'll have a good try," Andrew promised cheerfully. "But the first thing we have to do is to get home, and I'm afraid it won't be easy. I wish the Hudson Bay factory weren't so far off."

They discussed their return, Graham declaring that his foot was much better and that he ought to have no difficulty in keeping up with them, and soon afterward they went to sleep.

At daybreak they set off in a haze of driving snow, and Andrew long remembered the march with a shudder. There was only one thing in their favor—the raging wind which drove the loose snow in clouds along the frozen creeks blew behind them. The cold was intense; even when no snow fell the light was dim; but they stumbled on, making the best progress they could. On the second day out Graham sat down among the willows on an island trying to alter the fastenings of his snow-shoe. Carnally, turning back with Andrew through a cloud of drifting flakes glanced sharply at the sitting man.

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"Ah!" he said, indicating a broad smear on his moccasin; "that's fresh and bigger than before."

"Broken out again," said Graham, curtly. "There's no use in talking about it. I can't nurse it now."

"Can you walk?" Andrew asked.

"I'll have to," Graham answered, getting up.

The truth of this was obvious, for the alternative was to freeze to death. He managed to keep up with the others, though Carnally slackened the pace all the afternoon. When they camped at nightfall, Graham would not let him examine his foot.

"If the moccasin comes off, I'll never get it on again," he declared.

After this, the distance traversed daily was reduced and rations were cut down to match. One day when the wind raged behind them, they made fourteen miles along a frozen creek; but more often they made eight or nine; and part of the time Graham carried his snowshoes and limped in his moccasins. His companions helped him as much as they could over the roughest ground; but the only effectual way of assisting a crippled man is to carry him, which they could not do. Their faces grew sterner and gaunter, but with grim restraint they husbanded the rapidly running out

provisions, and one blustering morning they came upon the sled they had left on their outward journey, half covered with snow.

The traces, though frozen hard, were still attached to it, and Andrew slipped them over his shoulders when Graham, wrapped in all their blankets, sat down on the sled. It was a relief to get rid of their loads, and for a while Andrew made a moderate pace. The wind had hardened the surface of the snow, and the runners slid along easily, but he found it different when he came to the next ascent. The trace hurt his chest, the weight he was hauling seemed to increase, his breathing got harder, his knees and shoulders ached.

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"You had better let me have hold," Carnally suggested.

"I'll get off," said Graham. "I could hobble along if you fixed the back posts so I could lean on them."

"Stay where you are!" Carnally bade him curtly. "We have to make good time and we're going faster with you on the sled."

They altered the traces and plodded forward side by side, until the sled overturned on a steep slope and flung Graham off. For the next hour he had to walk while they struggled across rocky hummocks and through belts of small spruces, and his face was gray with pain when he resumed his place. Still, they made progress and felt more cheerful when they camped at night.

"I allow we're four miles to the good on this stage," Carnally said. "That's a quarter of a day knocked off. With luck and a smooth trail, we're going through."

Somehow they maintained the speed, though the struggle was almost unbearably hard, and one afternoon they nerved themselves to an extra effort as they toiled up a creek. It ran between rugged hills and the snow was good. They were badly worn out and Andrew had a distressing pain in his side, but he braced himself against the drag of the trace, watching the white hill-shoulders change their shapes ahead. They were on the Whitefish Creek, and the first provision cache was not far off. When they reached it they would rest and feast luxuriously.

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"Keep her going," urged Carnally "We want to make the island where the cache is before dark."

For an hour they struggled on in a state of tension, the snow crunching beneath their shoes, large flakes blowing past them. A heavy gray sky hung over head, and the cold was biting. Then the hills in front grew dimmer, the scattered spruces lost their sharpness of form; dusk was falling when they came to a narrow lake. Here the snow was very firm and the pace grew faster. They broke into a run when a blurred mass of willows came into sight. The cruel aches in joints and muscles were no longer felt; the food they craved was close at hand. They drew near the willows rapidly, though Andrew was panting with exhaustion; the first of the bushes slipped behind, but more rose ahead, and he grew savage as he glanced at them. He knew that the island was small, but they seemed to be getting no nearer to its upstream tongue where he had arranged with Mappin that the cache should be made.

"Get on!" he cried hoarsely. "I can stand a little more yet."

A few minutes later they dropped the traces, and the sled, driving in among the willows, stopped with a crash. Leaving Graham to hobble after them, Andrew and Carnally plunged through the branches and came out on a short level strip. It was nearly dark now, but the snow glimmered faintly and only a few clumps of brush broke its surface. Andrew stopped, breathing hard, and dismay seized him as he glanced about.

"This is the place," he said hoarsely. "I can't see the cache."

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"Search round here; I'll try farther on," Carnally said, and vanished among the willows.

Pulling himself together, Andrew spent a few anxious minutes hurrying up and down the open space, but found nothing to suggest that it had lately been visited by a transport party. When he stopped, Graham awkwardly hobbled toward him.

"Haven't you found it yet?" he asked.

"No," said Andrew, as calmly as he could. "There may have been a mistake about the spot. Carnally's gone back to look."

They stood still for a few moments while the willows rustled harshly in the bitter wind. A little snow blew about them and it was very cold. Then Andrew broke away from his companion and, plunging into the bushes that grew thickly up the middle of the island, savagely floundered through them. He could not see where he was going, snow-laden branches whipped him, and he stuck fast now and then; but he thought that nobody could have traversed those thickets without leaving traces of his passage, and, finding none, he presently returned to the clear space. Graham was still standing in the middle of it, but they waited in silence until Carnally appeared. He was walking heavily, and they knew he had been unsuccessful.

"Nothing; not a sign of a cache," he reported in a strained voice. "So far as I can see, this is the only place on the island where one could have been made. I found a few small spruces on a higher patch. We'll pack the truck along and camp there."

It took them some time and they had trouble in helping Graham through the brush, but scarcely a word was spoken until they gathered about their fire. Then Carnally broke into a harsh laugh as

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he laid three morsels of pork in the frying-pan and took out a very small bannock baked the previous night.

"This isn't the kind of supper I looked forward to but we'll get less to-morrow," he said. "The blasted hog has played another trick on us!"

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## **CHAPTER XVII**

### **THE GAP IN THE RIDGE**

The scanty supper was finished before the three men held a council.

"We'll have another search in the morning, but you can take it for granted that there's no cache here," Carnally said grimly.

"Could Mappin have made a mistake about the place?" Graham suggested.

"No, sir! That's a sure thing. But wait a minute. I think I see!" Carnally lighted his pipe before he resumed: "Now, you want to remember that we're up against a clever man. He didn't mean us to find the food but he'd see that there was a chance of our getting through without it and try to fix things so Allinson wouldn't have much ground for making trouble. So he sent the supplies up."

"Then where are they?" Andrew broke in.

"Let me finish. I guess there was nobody else about when you told him where to make the cache?"

Andrew nodded, and Carnally went on:

"You said the east Whitefish, and he sent the truck to the west fork. It's a point where one might go wrong, and he'll claim that he misunderstood you and you didn't make your instructions clear."

"I believe you're right!" Andrew had a savage glitter in his eyes. "But the brute's cold-blooded cunning is devilish! He meant to starve us to death because I threatened his contract!"

"That's not all. Mappin's dirt mean, but I guess he has a stronger count against you."

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"Ah!" said Andrew sharply, as a light dawned on him. "I wonder whether you have hit the mark?"

In spite of the peril to which he was exposed he felt a thrill of satisfaction. It looked as if Mappin, whom he suspected of seeking Geraldine's favor, had some ground for believing him a successful rival. Perhaps the girl had inadvertently betrayed a preference for him. Mappin would not be driven into a risky course by impulse; he must have believed his jealousy well-founded. This was comforting; but Andrew had now to consider how he and his comrades were to escape from their difficulties.

"Couldn't we get across to the west fork?" he suggested.

"We'll try," said Carnally. "It's a rough bit of country."

"Very rough," Graham agreed. "A low range with steep rock on this side runs through it. I've no doubt Mappin knew that when he decided to make the cache on the other fork."

"Then suppose we can't get over?"

Carnally looked thoughtful.

"If that's so, we'll push on for the second cache."

They looked at him in astonishment and he smiled. "The cache is there—somewhere about the neck you told him of—though I guess he'll have had it put where we won't find it easily. Anyhow, it will have to be found and, when it comes to bush work, my head's as good as Mappin's."

Andrew made a gesture of assent. Apart from his knowledge of the wilds, Carnally had shown a power of close and accurate reasoning which had surprised him. Indeed, Andrew was inclined to think him a match for Mappin all round, and was glad of it, because there was no doubt that he needed a keen-witted supporter.

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"There's another thing," Carnally remarked presently "Has it struck you that Hathersage may have given the hog a hint?"

Andrew flushed.

"No," he said sternly. "It's unthinkable! I can't discuss the point."

"Oh, well," acquiesced Carnally. "Now that we've decided what to do, we'd better get to sleep. We have to look for a way across the range the first thing to-morrow."

At noon the next day Andrew stood, breathless, half-way up a gully filled with hard snow. Walls of

ice-glazed rock shut it in, but it led straight up the face of a towering crag toward an opening high above. Andrew carried a thick, sharp-pointed stick with which he had laboriously broken holes for his feet, because soft moccasins are treacherous things on a steep snow-slope. He and Carnally had spent half an hour over the ascent, and Andrew, looking up with a sinking heart, thought it would take them as long to reach the summit, provided they could avoid slipping, which was doubtful.

The gully lay in shadow, a long, deep rent, widening toward the bottom, in which the snow gleamed a soft blue-gray, though a ray of sunlight struck the beetling crag so that it flashed with steely brightness. Here and there a spur of rock broke the smooth surface and offered a resting-place, but some of the spaces between them seemed dangerously precipitous. Andrew, worn with hunger and fatigue, frowned at the sight.

"This looked the quickest way up and we haven't much time to lose," he said. "I'll feel very savage if we don't get a clear view from the top." [Pg 178]

"You'll get that," replied Carnally, finding a precarious seat near by. "Whether you'll see a way through the rocks on the other side or not is another matter, and I'm doubtful. Better get a move on, hadn't you?"

Andrew placed his foot in a hole he had made, but the snow broke as he rested on it, and he slipped down several yards before the stick brought him up. He shuddered as he glanced below, for it struck him that had he slid a little farther he would not have stopped until he reached the bottom.

"This is an abominable slope," he exclaimed. "I've been on worse in Switzerland, but I had an ice-ax and wasn't half starved then. However, we'll have another try."

He got up twenty yards, clawing at the snow, and then stopped for breath, glancing ruefully at his mittens, which showed signs of wearing through.

"It means frost-bitten hands if these things give out, and they won't stand much more," he said. "The worst of it is that you think we'll find we have wasted our labor when we get to the top. I believe I could feel cheerful if I could see Mappin crawling up after us."

"Mappin has more sense. He stays in his office, which is how money is made. You don't, as a rule, get much for doing this kind of thing. Still, he has to take some chances, and one he didn't size up right is going back on him. When I'm feeling tired and hungry I like to think of my meeting with that man."

"When you're feeling tired and hungry!" Andrew exclaimed. "I feel both all the time!"

"Well," returned Carnally, "what can you expect? If you will make trouble instead of letting things alone, you must take the consequences. Now, if you had been a sensible man and not worried about shareholders you have never seen, you might have been sitting down to your lunch at home. Think of it! A nice warm room, a butler, or somebody of the kind, bringing you a menu as long as your hand. Put you there right now, and you'd take the whole lot. Say, what do you have as a rule?" [Pg 179]

"Stop!" said Andrew. "It won't bear thinking of! I know what I'll get for supper, and that's an inch or two of flinty bannock, burned black outside."

It was surface jesting and forced upon them, because they would not face the tragic possibilities of the situation before it was necessary. It was easier to do what could be done with a laugh. Still, they had not laughed much lately, until the imminence of disaster braced them to it.

Changing places now and then to relieve the leader of the work of breaking footholds, they reached the summit, and Andrew's heart sank as he gazed at the landscape which stretched away before him. The air was clear, bright sunshine glittered on the high rocks, but the snow in the shadow was steeped in ethereal blue; dark spruces broke the gleaming surface with a delicate intricacy of outline. The scene had a wild grandeur, but from Andrew's point of view it was inexpressibly discouraging. They had laboriously scaled the first and largest rampart, but beyond it lay a series of lower ridges with rugged and almost precipitous sides. The hollows, so far as he could see, were filled with spruce muskeg—the small rotting trees falling across each other with underbrush pushing up between. To traverse these places would be a very difficult matter. [Pg 180]

"It looks pretty bad," he said slowly. "Mappin knew his business when he had the cache made on the wrong side of the range."

"He's smart," Carnally agreed. "A hard man to beat, and you want to use a full-sized club when you stand up to him; but I guess he'd go down if he got the right knock-out."

Andrew, tired and hungry, failed to see how the decisive blow could be given: there did not seem to be much probability of his ever coming to close quarters with his enemy. So far as his brief experience went, injustice was singularly hard to vanquish and the reformer's path rough.

"Couldn't we work around the hills to the other fork?" he asked.

"The grub would run out before we got there."

"I suppose we couldn't push straight across, leaving Graham until we came back?"

"We might, if we had time enough. I believe there's forty miles of this broken country. Look at it!"

Andrew had already done so, and it had daunted him. He remembered that they had been since sunrise reaching the top of the first ridge.

"Then what must be done?"

"My advice is to look for the second cache."

They turned back, following the crest until they found an easier but longer way down. Graham glanced at them sharply when they reached the camp, and guessed the truth, though Andrew tried to smile.

"Leave me behind," he urged.

"No," said Andrew firmly; "not while we have strength enough to haul the sled. There's no more to be said on that point. We're going on together to the gap in the long ridge."

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"When do you mean to start?"

"Right now!" Carnally broke in. "Get the camp truck rolled up. We'll have mighty keen appetites before we make the cache."

In quarter of an hour they crossed the creek and toiled up a broken slope, and when they gained the top Andrew looked back at the island with a grim smile.

"Yesterday afternoon I came up that river at four miles an hour, looking forward to my supper like an epicure. Now I'm glad to see the last of the place."

"Quit talking!" said Carnally. "We can make a few minutes by a hustle down the pitch ahead."

They went down, stumbling and sliding, while Graham clung tightly to the lurching sled. Time was of vital importance to them now, for its flight could be measured by the exhaustion of their food supply. For the hour or two of daylight that remained Carnally drove his comrade hard, and it was with a strange savage hilarity that they rushed the sled down declivities and dragged it with many a crash and bump through thickets. Their course was roughly south and any deviation was intolerable. Night closed in, but it was far from dark and they held on until Andrew stumbled and fell. The sled struck him before he could get up, but a hard smile was on his lips when he rose shakily and looked about. There was an uncovered rock not far off with a few junipers growing beside it.

"This is far enough, Jake," he said. "You're bad to tire, but I don't suppose you feel equal to hauling another passenger."

They broke camp in the dark the next morning, and the forced marches they made during the next seven days wore the half-starved men terribly. Sometimes they had to contend with fresh snow, in which the sled runners sank; sometimes they plodded doggedly with lowered heads while a raging wind drove the stinging flakes into their pinched faces; and there were days of bitter frost when they could not keep warm. Still, they crept on across the rugged desolation, and one evening reached a belt of timber beneath a low range that stretched across their path. The ridge was broken by a gap a mile or two ahead, and it was there that Andrew had instructed Mappin to make the second cache. A crescent moon rose above the dark tree-tops as they lighted a fire. Andrew glanced at the hillside irresolutely.

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"There's food up yonder, if we could get our hands on it, and I would enjoy a good supper, Heaven knows; but I don't feel equal to facing another disappointment," he said. "I'm afraid we'll have to wait until to-morrow."

"That's my feeling," Carnally agreed. "I've gone as far as I'm able, and that grub won't be found easily. You may as well gather some wood and fill the kettle."

When they had eaten the few morsels he allowed them they sat smoking beside the fire. The thin spruce boughs above them were laden with snow which now and then fell upon the brands; a malignant wind swept between the slender trunks and blew the smoke about the men. After a while the casual talk, which had cost them an effort to keep up, died away, and there was a long silence until Carnally spoke.

"I guess we're all thinking about those provisions. We'll look for them at sun-up. What I've been trying to do for several days is to put myself in Mappin's place."

"It must have been difficult," Andrew remarked. "If I thought you could do so, I'd disown you. But go on."

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"Well," said Carnally, "we have agreed that he meant to make it hard for us to find the cache; but he'd try to fix things so the packers he sent up with the truck shouldn't guess his object. He wouldn't tell them to pick a place where nobody would think of looking."

"You're assuming that he'd employ honest men," Graham objected. "What's to prevent his hiring three or four toughs and bribing them to say nothing?"

"He's too smart," said Carnally promptly. "He'd know that if we got lost up here the fellows could keep striking him for money and he'd have to pay; while if we got through, there'd be a risk of our finding them and buying them over. Besides, men of the kind he'd want are scarce in the



bush. If they're to be found, it's hanging round the saloons in the cities."

"Then we'll assume that the boys were square. That would make it harder for him and easier for us. What follows?"

Carnally drank some tea from a blackened can before he answered.

"This matter needs a lot of thinking out, and it looks as if our lives depended on our thinking right. Allinson's instructions to the hog seem to have been pretty clear, and he wouldn't plant the cache too far from the gap. Then he'd have to arrange things so the boys would think they'd dumped the truck in a handy place for a party coming down from the north."

"I believe he has never been up here," Andrew argued. "Are there any good maps? I couldn't get one."

"They're sketchy," Graham said. "My idea is that Mappin would get hold of a prospector who knows the country and have a good talk with him; but he wouldn't send him up with the other men."

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"It's probable," agreed Carnally. "Well, in my opinion the provisions are lying south of the pass in one of the gulches leading down from the height of land, but not directly on our line of march. You can come up from Rain Bluff several ways, and the hog would mark a route for the boys which would bring them in, so far as he could figure, a bit outside the shortest track. We've got to find the gulch they'd pitch on. It's our brains against Mappin's."

"Your brains," Andrew corrected him.

Carnally knocked out his pipe.

"I allow I'll want a clear head to-morrow and I'm going to sleep."

He and Andrew left camp in the dark the next morning; but day had broken when they stood in the gap of the neck, looking down on the broken country beneath. For a short distance the descent from the pass was clearly defined, leading down a hollow among the rocks, but after that it opened out on to a scarp of hillside from which a number of ravines branched off and led to the banks of a frozen creek. They seemed to be filled with brush, and the spurs between them were rough. It was a difficult country to traverse, and Andrew realized with concern that the search might last several days.

"Take that right hand gulch," Carnally directed. "Follow it right down to the creek and come back up the next farther on, while I prospect east. If we find nothing in the ravines, we'll try the spurs."

"The obvious place is the gap we're standing in," Andrew pointed out. "How would Mappin get over that without making his packers suspicious?"

"I thought of it," said Carnally. "He'd contend that he was afraid the cache might get snowed up; and it would be a pretty good reason. The drifts pile up deep in a gap like this."

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Andrew left him and spent a long while climbing down a rough ravine which led him to the river. It was noon when he came back up another and the exertion had told on him, but they had long ago dispensed with a midday meal and he held on at a dragging pace until a thrill ran through him at the sight of a tall pole among the rocks ahead. He made for it in haste, floundering over the snow-covered stones, and lost it once or twice at a bend in the gully. At last he stopped in the bottom of the hollow, looking up at a steep face of rock. It was ragged and broken, glazed with ice in some places, and he doubted whether he could get up; but a foot or two of the pole rose above the top. Following up the gully, he looked for an easier ascent, but he could not find one. Fearing to lose the pole, he stopped and shouted on the chance that Carnally might be in the neighborhood. Presently a cry answered him, and when Carnally came scrambling down the hollow Andrew took him back and pointed out the pole.

"A dead fir!" cried Carnally. "Looks as if somebody had broken the branches off, and there are no other trees about! The trouble is, we can't get up from here."

"We will have to!" declared Andrew. "If you could give me a lift up over the worst bits, I'd help you when I had found a hold. Anyway, we must try!"

Carnally consented dubiously. The rock was about thirty feet in height and very steep, though there were several crevices and broken edges. Andrew ascended one of the latter, gripping it with hands and knees. Reaching a narrow ledge, he leaned down and gave his hand to Carnally, and when he had helped him up they stopped for a minute or two. They were weak and hungry, and there was an awkward bulge above.

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"Steady me up," said Andrew. "If I can find a crack for my hand, I can get up there."

For a few moments he rested his foot on Carnally's back; then he pressed his toes against the stone and his comrade watched him disappear beyond the bulging rock with unpleasant sensations, knowing that he would have to follow. Presently, however, the bottom of Andrew's fur coat fell over the edge and Carnally, seizing it, scrambled up three or four feet, until the projecting stone forced him outward. Losing hold with his feet, he hung by his hands for a moment or two, in a state of horrible fear.

"Throw one arm over the projection!" Andrew shouted.

Carnally found a hold; Andrew seized his arm; and after an arduous struggle he stood, gasping, on a snowy knob. The sharp edge of a big slab rose eight or nine feet above him.

"Take a rest," advised Andrew. "If you go slowly, you ought to get up this last bit."

"I'll have to try. It's a sure thing I can't get down. But how d'you come to be so smart at this work?"

"I used to do something like it in Switzerland."

"Well," said Carnally, "you're a curious kind of man: I guess you didn't have to climb. I'd find it a bit too exciting if I wasn't doing it for money."

"We're not climbing for money now," Andrew grimly reminded him. "There's food ahead of us and we must get on!"

They made the ascent, though it tried their nerve severely. When they finally crawled up to the summit Andrew stopped, growing suddenly white in the face.

"Look!" he said hoarsely.

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Carnally sat down heavily in the snow.

"A dead tree! Nobody put it there; it grew!"

With an effort he pulled himself together.

"Come! We'll try farther on!"

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## **CHAPTER XVIII**

### **THE EMPTY FLOUR-BAG**

When it was getting dark Andrew and Carnally gave up the useless search. A red glow, flickering among the spruce trunks, guided them down the pass, and they saw Graham's figure, black against the firelight, as they approached the camp. He was standing up, looking out for them, but they came on in silence and after a quick glance at their faces he turned away and busied himself getting supper. He knew they had failed and words were superfluous.

They ate the small bannock he took from the frying-pan, and Andrew glanced about the camp when he had lighted his pipe. Graham had been at work while they were away, laying down spruce branches and raising a wall to keep off the wind. It was warm beside the fire, and the place looked comfortable.

"There wouldn't be much to complain of if we had enough to eat," said Andrew. "It's surprising how soon one gets grateful for such a shelter as this, and I believe I've slept as soundly in the snow as I ever did in bed."

"I tried to fix things neatly, though I wouldn't have been sorry if I'd wasted my labor," Graham replied and glanced at Carnally. "It struck me we might be here a day or two."

Carnally's smile was rather grim.

"It's very likely. S'pose I ought to play up to Allinson, but he's put it a notch too high. I've been doing some hard thinking while I was on the hill. We're certainly up against a tough proposition."

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"You're still convinced the grub is here?"

"That is a sure thing—all we have to do is to find it; but it's going to be a big job. I expect both of you want me to talk?"

Their willingness to hear his views was obvious.

"The trouble is," he explained, "you can get down from the neck a number of different ways—there are the spurs one could break a trail along and there are the ravines. We may try them all before we strike the right one; but we'll have a better chance if we work up instead of down."

"Why?" Andrew asked.

"Because the packers would start from the low ground, and the benches look different from below."

"Do you think Mappin told them to pick any particular place?"

"I've been figuring on that. He's learned something about the ground, and my idea is that the provisions are dumped in a hollow that looks like a good road up to the gap; that is, as you would see it from the creek. What we don't know is where his boys would strike the ice. It might be anywhere within three or four miles."

Andrew knit his brows.

"It's a puzzling question and we have only a day or two to find the answer. The worst of it is that we're worn out and famishing; I feel that my wits would be quicker if I could come at it fresh from a square meal."

"No, sir! A man's brain is keenest when he's working on short rations."

"I believe that's true," Graham said.

"Our rations," contended Andrew, "couldn't be much shorter; but I couldn't think of anything intelligently as I stumbled along through the snow to-day. And yet——"

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He broke off, remembering that once or twice of late he had become capable of a strange clarity of thought, accompanied by an unusual emotional stirring. It had passed, but it had left its mark on him. After all, it was in the stern North that he had first seen things in their true proportions; it was there that the duty he had vaguely realized had grown into definite shape, and Leonard's treachery to Allinson's had been clearly perceived. Moreover, he had somehow gained a new and unexpected sense of power. Then as the fire blazed up he glanced with sudden interest at the faces of his comrades. They were worn and haggard, and Graham's was stamped with lines of pain; but there was something in them he could best describe as fine. Hunger and toil, instead of subduing the men, had given them new strength and an elusive dignity. Andrew remembered having seen that puzzling look in the lean, brown faces of tired and thirsty soldiers as a brigade went by through the rolling dust of the African veldt. It had been flung back, shattered, from a rock fortress, and was pressing on, undaunted, to a fresh attack. Andrew's heart had throbbed faster at the sight, and he now felt something of the same thrill again; but these things were not to be spoken of.

"Well," said Carnally, "I might feel content if I thought Mappin was as hungry as we are; but there's not much fear of that. The blasted hog has sense enough to keep out of the bush; going about the country getting his hands on other men's money pays him better. He's no use for eating supper behind a bank of snow; the Place Viger and the Windsor in Montreal are more his style."

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This was far from heroic, but Andrew laughed; the minor weaknesses of human nature seldom jarred on him.

"I think," he suggested lightly, "you might, for a change, call him the swine. It's a term we sometimes use and it sounds grosser than the other. The hogs I've seen running in the Ontario bush were thin and not repulsive."

"I'll admit it's foolish; but when I think of that man studying the menu, I get mad! Can't you see him picking out the dollar dishes, on the European plan? Canvasbacks and such, if they're in season."

"They wouldn't give him much canvasback for a dollar," Graham objected.

"That doesn't count. The point is—where does he get the dollar?"

"I'm afraid he has got a few of them out of us," said Andrew. "He has got more out of the Rain Bluff shareholders; though I'm glad to think that supply will be stopped. Anyhow, our first business is to find the cache."

"That's so," assented Carnally, as he threw some branches on the fire. "We'll try again at sun-up. Though it makes you feel easier now and then, talking doesn't do much good."

A few minutes later they were all asleep, and when day broke Andrew and Carnally descended a steep, snow-covered bank below the neck. Their search proved unsuccessful, and they were very silent after they returned to camp in the evening. The next morning Graham gave them a very small bannock for breakfast, and then threw an empty flour-bag into the snow.

"Boys," he said gravely, "you have got to find the cache to-day."

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Spurred on by the imminence of starvation, they started off again, beating their way against a driving snowstorm, stumbling often and rising each time with greater difficulty; always, however, keeping eager watch for the pole that should mark the spot of the cache.

After three days of fruitless search, they could not bear to talk when they met in camp in the evening. They knew that starvation was upon them; their last strength was fast running out. They were not the men, however, to give up easily; and once more they set off grimly at sunrise.

It was snowing hard when Andrew, knowing that he could drag himself no farther, crawled into the shelter of a rock on the desolate hillside and sat down shivering. There was an intolerable pain in his left side, he was faint with hunger, and his muscles ached cruelly. His fur coat was ragged, his moccasins were cut by the snow-shoe fastenings and falling to pieces; his face was pinched and hollow. It was some hours since he had seen Carnally. He was physically unable to continue the search, but he shrank from going back to camp, where there was nothing to eat, and facing his famishing comrade. Indeed, as he grew lethargic with cold, it scarcely seemed worth while to make the effort of getting on his feet again. He sat still, listlessly looking down across the white slopes; Carnally would probably pass near the spot, though there was now no expectation of his finding the cache. During the last few days they had sometimes met while they searched and exchanged a brief "Nothing yet," or a dejected shake of the head. It would be the

same again, though Andrew felt that his comrade might have succeeded if they could have held out.

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He could not see far through the snow, which swept along the hillside before a savage wind. Blurred clumps of spruce marked the edge of the lower ground, but the river was hidden and the straggling junipers on the spurs were formless and indistinct. At last, however, Andrew noticed something moving near the end of a long ridge and, as it must be a man, he concluded it was Carnally returning. Then he imagined that the hazy figure stopped and waved an arm, as if signaling to somebody below; that was curious, for his comrade would be alone.

Andrew decided that he had been mistaken, and bent down to brush the gathering snow from his torn moccasins; but he started when he looked up. There were now two men on the slope below, and while he gazed at them a third emerged from among the rocks.

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## CHAPTER XIX

### A WOMAN'S WAY

They had not been forgotten while they journeyed through the wilds. Frobisher thought of them now and then, and his daughter more often; indeed, her mind dwelt a good deal on Andrew after he left and she found herself looking forward eagerly to his return. She spent some weeks in an American city with her father, but its gaieties had less attraction for her than usual, and she was glad when they went back for a time to the Lake of Shadows. On the day after her arrival she drove across the ice to the Landing and inquired at a store where news circulated whether anything had been heard of the Allinson expedition. The proprietor had nothing to tell her, but while she spoke to him a man crossed the floor, and she saw with annoyance that it was Mappin. She left while he made his purchases, but he joined her when she was putting some parcels into the sleigh, and did not seem daunted by the coldness of her manner.

"I didn't know you were coming back so soon," he greeted her.

"Didn't you?" she asked indifferently. "When my father had finished his business we suddenly made up our minds to leave, without consulting Mrs. Denton. I suppose that explains your ignorance."

"You're smart," he said. "As soon as you're ready to receive people I must make my call."

It was getting dark, but the lights from the store window fell on his face, and Geraldine saw a glitter in his eyes. She thought he meant to defy her.

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"You are excused, so far as I am concerned," she replied uncompromisingly.

Mappin stood silent a moment or two, looking at her hard, and she felt half afraid of him.

"You would rather see Allinson! But that's a pleasure you may find deferred. You didn't get much news of him just now!"

"I don't doubt that you heard me ask for it, though there were two teamsters waiting to buy things, who had the good manners to keep away."

"Certainly I heard," he answered coolly; "that's the kind of man I am. I don't let chances pass."

Geraldine knew that he would make unscrupulous use of those he seized, but his candor had its effect on her. He was overbearing, but there was force in the man, and she grew uneasy. Though she shrank from him, she admitted his power; unless she roused herself to fight, he might break her will.

"One could hardly consider it an admirable type," she said, getting into the sleigh. "However, it's too cold to stand talking."

Mappin was obliged to step back when she started the team, and she drove off in some confusion, glad to escape, but feeling that she had run away. It had seemed the safest course, though she did not think she was a coward. Then as the team trotted across the frozen lake she remembered Mappin's curious tone when he had spoken of Andrew Allinson. He had suggested with an unpleasant hint of satisfaction that Andrew's return might be delayed, and she grew troubled as she thought of it. Still, she reasoned, as no news had reached the Landing, Mappin could know nothing about the matter, and the men Andrew had with him were accustomed to the bush. Dismissing the subject, she urged the horses and drew the thick driving-robe close about her. It was very cold and she shivered as she wondered how Andrew and his comrades were faring in the North.

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Some days later she met Mrs. Graham at the post-office and inquired about her husband. Geraldine thought she looked anxious.

"He's a little behind time; but soft snow or storms might delay the party."

"Then he mentioned a time when you could expect him?"

"Yes," said Mrs. Graham. "He warned me that he might be a week late; but they thought out the journey very carefully, because it was a question of carrying enough food."

"You mean that helped to fix the time of their return?"

"Of course! They couldn't get food anywhere except at a Hudson Bay factory, and they couldn't take a large quantity. That means they knew within a week or so when they must reach the provision caches that were to be made for them north of the mine."

"I understand," said Geraldine. "They wouldn't delay when they came to the caches, except, perhaps, for a day's rest. I suppose the food was taken up?"

"Oh, yes! I saw the packers leave and come down. They were good bushmen and one of them knew the country. He made the caches at the places decided on."

"Then the expedition should be quite safe," said Geraldine cheerfully; but when she left Mrs. Graham she grew thoughtful.

Andrew was late and Geraldine saw that delay might be dangerous. The men would lose no time in coming south, because, considering the difficulty of transport, the margin of provisions would not be large. Nothing but a serious accident would detain them, which was disconcerting to reflect upon. Then she reasoned that their provisions would be nearly exhausted when they reached the caches, and her mind dwelt on the point, because it was essential that they should obtain fresh supplies. She felt uneasy as she remembered a remark of Mappin's, which she did not think he had made casually. There had been a significant grimness in his manner when he had spoken of Allinson. After all, however, it was possible that there was no ground for anxiety: the prospectors might turn up in the next few days.

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As there was no news of them, however, Geraldine drove to the settlement one evening and called on Mrs. Graham. She found her seriously disturbed.

"A man came down from the mine this morning, and my husband hadn't arrived," she said. "I'm afraid something has gone wrong!"

"What can have gone wrong?"

"I don't know; I've been thinking about it all the last few days and trying not to be afraid. Of course, they would be safe if they reached the food caches."

"Yes," said Geraldine; "those caches are important. But as nobody has turned up I don't think you need be alarmed. The worst would be if one came back alone."

Mrs. Graham did not seem much comforted when Geraldine left her; and the girl, driving home in the moonlight, tried to face the situation calmly. She admitted, without reserve for the first time, that she loved Andrew Allinson; and he was in danger. Something must be done to extricate him, and while she wondered how she ought to set about it her thoughts turned to Mappin. It dawned on her that he knew what peril threatened the party, and this suggested that he had either allowed the men to involve themselves in unsuspected difficulties, or had brought the difficulties about. They had depended on him in some way and he had betrayed them. Geraldine shuddered at the thought, but she roused herself, for it was obvious that if her suspicions were correct, the man's designs must be combated. Mappin was strong and cunning; but she had ready wits and her lover's safety was at stake.

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The next evening Mappin came to the house, and Geraldine carefully made some changes in her dress before she entered the drawing-room, where he was talking with Mrs. Denton. He rose with a challenging smile as she came in, and Geraldine was glad to feel that she was looking her best. It was humiliating to dress to please this man, but there was a struggle before her and she must use such weapons as she had.

"You're surprised to see me?" he said.

"Oh, no! I didn't doubt your boldness."

Mappin glanced at her sharply, for there was nothing ungracious in her tone. Her manner hinted at a change of mood; but he understood that women were variable.

"Then I have your permission to remain?"

"I'm not sure that you need it, and it would be inhospitable to refuse it," Geraldine replied, as if amused.

Mrs. Denton looked from one to the other in a puzzled way, but she said nothing, and Mappin began to talk, relating scraps of news picked up at the Landing. Geraldine showed some interest, and after a while Mrs. Denton, seeing them apparently on good terms, judiciously left them. Then the girl ceased to respond to her companion's remarks, and Mappin, never a brilliant conversationalist, found it hard to go on. He began to show impatience, and Geraldine enjoyed his embarrassment. At last he glanced toward the piano.

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"I wish you would play or sing something," he begged.

Geraldine rose good-humoredly and opened the piano.

"I didn't know you cared for music."

"I don't, as a rule."

"That sounds like a compliment," she answered, smiling. "It's a pity I haven't any jingling rag-time tunes."

"They're what I like—my taste isn't classical; but I don't mind your taking a shot at me. One doesn't want music to make one serious."

"You think one should be serious only where money is concerned?"

"Well," he said grimly, "I haven't found trying to get it very amusing; but I can be in earnest in other matters."

"So I suppose," responded Geraldine, turning over the music. "Here's something that might please you. Will you light the candles?"

Her amiability had cost her an effort, and it grew harder as she opened the song. It was pointed with witty coquetry, and she hesitated for a moment with a feeling of humiliation, though she meant to play out her part. Andrew and his friends were in peril in the icy wilds; somehow they were at the mercy of this cruel, gross-natured man; and, hateful as her task was, she must not shrink. She thought he could be led on to betray himself. Tingling with shame, she sang with all the fire and art she could command, and Mappin was swept off his feet.

Music had no great charm for him, but the ballad was one he could appreciate, and the girl's beauty had a stronger effect. The light of the shaded candles fell on her face, which was slightly flushed, and forced up gleams in her hair. She looked inexpressibly alluring; her fine voice and arch smile well brought out the half-tender mockery of the song. He noticed the supple shapeliness of her figure and the polished whiteness of her skin, and his heart began to throb fast and his eyes to glisten. Turning over a leaf, he came near shaking down the music, and he drew back thrilled when she made a gesture of amused rebuke. There was, he felt, something very friendly in it.

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When she stopped he leaned on the piano looking down at her, and Geraldine knew that she had gone far enough. After having treated him with cold indifference, she must not be too gracious, lest his suspicions be aroused. The man was in her hands, but he was not a fool. She hated him as she saw the crude desire in his face.

"Thank you," he said hoarsely, and picked out another song at random. "Won't you try this? I've never heard it."

"No," she answered firmly; "not that one."

It was the ballad which Andrew had told her helped to send him up into the wilds where his duty lay. Henceforward it was sacred—not to be sung to such a man as Mappin.

"Why?" he demanded.

"I sing that only to people who I know will appreciate it."

"And you don't think I would?"

"It strikes me as very doubtful," she said with a smile in which there was a touch of scorn.

His color deepened. She had shown signs of yielding, and how he wondered whether she had after all been amusing herself with him. Stirred as he was by passion he was in no reasoning mood; savage jealousy filled his heart.

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"It's the kind of thing you keep for sentimental fools like Allinson!" he exclaimed.

Geraldine had expected some such outbreak. Indeed it was what she desired.

"Well," she said with a tenderness which was meant to disturb her companion, "I sang it to him once."

"It will be a long while before you sing it to him again!"

The voice rang harsh with exultant fierceness and Geraldine knew that she had gained her object in rousing the brute in him. She had learned the truth—for whatever danger threatened her lover this man was responsible. But there was more she must know.

"As he's a friend of ours, you're not very considerate," she said. "What makes you speak with so much certainty?"

Mappin saw that he had been rash, and he was instantly on his guard.

"It was a fool thing to go North in winter. It's no country for a raw tenderfoot, and Allinson should have taken a stronger party. I know something about transport work in the bush."

"I suppose food would be their greatest difficulty," Geraldine remarked with a thoughtful air.

"No. Fresh snow and blizzards would trouble them worse."

"Still, food would be a consideration," Geraldine persisted. "I know they thought a good deal about the matter and had some caches made. If they couldn't find them coming back, it would be serious, wouldn't it?"

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Mappin's jealousy was heightened by her interest, but he regretted his haste and meant to be cautious. Unfortunately for him, the charm Geraldine had exercised had carried him away. He could not think as clearly as usual.

"The provisions were carefully packed and sent up in charge of good men," he declared hotly. "They were properly cached; every precaution was taken."

"Were they your men?"

Mappin glanced at her sharply, but read nothing in her face. He could not evade the question without rousing suspicion.

"Yes," he said; "that's why I know they could be relied on to do their work."

Geraldine sat silent a moment, struggling to preserve her calm. She had found out what she wished to know. She understood now why Mappin had insisted on the dangers of the journey and made light of the question of food. He had, with scarcely conceivable cruelty, cut off the party's supplies. Still, he must not suspect that she knew this. With an effort she took up another piece of music.

"We are anxious for news of the expedition, and it's comforting to remember that they had an excellent guide," she said. "But I'll play you something."

Before the piece was finished, her father came in and she left him to entertain their guest. Seeking her room she sat down, feeling suddenly limp from strain. That she was humbled and ashamed did not matter; she was filled, on the one hand, with hatred and loathing for the man she had led on, and, on the other, with anxiety for Andrew.

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## **CHAPTER XX**

### **THE RESCUE PARTY**

When Mappin left, Frobisher went to his smoking-room, where he was surprised to find Geraldine waiting for him.

"I think," he said with mock severity, "it was mean of you to leave Mr. Mappin on my hands, particularly as I don't suppose his visit was made on my account."

"Did he bore you very badly?" Geraldine inquired.

"We have had guests here whom I'd rather entertain; but for your aunt's sake I try to be civil. After all, we have known the man for a long while."

"I feel that we have been very patient in putting up with him! He's insufferable!"

"Ah!" said Frobisher, taking out a cigar. "Then you didn't happen to be here by accident? Sit down and we'll have a talk."

Geraldine took the chair he indicated.

"I have something to tell you," she said with an effort. "Mappin asked me to marry him a little while ago."

"It strikes me as curious that this is the first I've heard of it."

"I was ashamed to tell you," Geraldine admitted, shyly. "I felt degraded. Besides, you must have guessed——"

"Yes. I had some idea of the man's ambitions; in my opinion, he's too cold-blooded to be influenced by any more tender sentiment. We'll take it for granted that you refused him. Nowadays it seems to be a father's business to sanction and not to interfere; but I really think if you had wanted to marry the fellow I'd have been as firm as adamant. However, this is not to the purpose. Why do you tell me about it now?"

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"You'll see presently. But try to remember that he has other feelings than avarice. The man's unscrupulous and full of savage cruelty."

"Well?"

"To begin with, will you read this? It's from Ethel Hillyard, whom I met in London. You have heard me speak of her."

She gave him a letter containing sufficient information about the house of Allinson to explain why Andrew had gone to Canada. His character and his relations with Hathersage and the rest of the family were cleverly sketched. Frobisher studied it carefully before he looked up.

"All this is not exactly new to me, though Miss Hillyard, who seems to be a shrewd young lady, speaks strongly in Allinson's favor. From odd things he let fall, I'd formed a pretty good idea of

the situation. Now that you have cleared the ground, you had better go on."

"Father," said Geraldine, "so far, you have done nearly everything I asked you, and that is why I'm not afraid to ask for something else. I want you to send up a party to look for Mr. Allinson. He and the others are in danger of starving in the snow."

Frobisher looked at her searchingly, and she met his gaze for a moment, though a flush crept into her face.

"Well," he said simply, "he is a straight man."

"And a friend of yours. But you will send him help at once?"

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"First of all, tell me why you think it is needful."

Geraldine spent some time over the explanation and concluded:

"You must see that their safety depends on their finding the provisions, and Mappin has had the caches made at the wrong places."

For the next few minutes Frobisher sat silent, the smoke curling up from his neglected cigar, while Geraldine watched him in suspense.

"You have reasoned the matter out remarkably well," he said, "and it strikes me that you're near the truth. However, I don't understand how you led Mappin into making the dangerous admissions that gave you a clue; he's a brute, but I thought him a cunning one. Perhaps I'd better not inquire."

Geraldine's embarrassment was obvious and there were signs of amusement on her father's face.

"After all," he resumed, "when you play a game for high stakes with a man like Mappin, you can't be fastidious."

"But what about the relief party?" Geraldine asked.

"I think the situation is serious enough to need one. I'll drive over to the Landing and see about it the first thing to-morrow."

He got up, and as he reached the door Geraldine, following, put her arms about his neck and kissed him. Then she went past swiftly and vanished down the passage.

The next morning Frobisher learned that Mappin had gone east by an early train and that there was not a man capable of undertaking a difficult journey into the wilds disengaged. Mappin had hired all the available choppers and packers and sent them into the bush to cut some lumber he required for his railroad contract. Frobisher could not determine whether this had been done with the object of preventing their being employed on a relief expedition, but it looked suspicious. Being in a difficulty, he called on the owner of the sawmill and told him as much as he thought advisable.

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"As it happens, I can help you," said the lumber-man. "There are two or three fellows on our pay roll whom we haven't much work for at present, though we'll need them later. They're good bushmen, and I might raise one or two more by sending up to our logging camp."

"Thanks," said Frobisher; "it will be a favor. It's lucky I thought of coming to you."

"Never mind that. I feel that I ought to help Graham out: he's an old and valued servant. But I don't see how you are interested in the thing."

Frobisher smiled.

"It's one's duty to help a fellow creature who's in serious danger. Then I believe I may call myself a friend of Allinson's."

"There's a point to be considered. The most likely place to meet the party would be in the neighborhood of the food caches. You intimate that there's a risk of Allinson's missing them; but he must have a rough idea as to about where they are. As Mappin's out of town, wouldn't it be well to wire and ask him exactly where they were to be made?"

"On the whole, I'd rather get the information from Mrs. Graham. No doubt she knows her husband's plans."

The mill-owner gave him a searching glance. He was a shrewd man and suspected that there was a good reason for his visitor's preference.

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"Yes," he said pointedly, "that might be wiser."

"There may have been some misunderstanding about the precise location of the caches," Frobisher explained. "Mrs. Graham will know where her husband meant them to be made—which of course is the most important thing."

"Just so," agreed the other. "Excuse me for a few minutes."

He went out, and returning a little later announced that three men would be ready to start up-river during the afternoon and that some more from the logging camp would follow in a few days. Frobisher left him and, after calling on Mrs. Graham, went to the store, where he ordered a



quantity of provisions to be prepared. It was evening when he reached home. Finding Geraldine waiting for him, he smiled at her as he took off his furs.

"I've had a busy day, but I've got things satisfactorily fixed," he said.

"You have found men to take up provisions?" Geraldine asked eagerly.

"Better than that," replied Frobisher. "I've sent them off."

Seeing the pleasure in his daughter's face, he nodded reassuringly and left her.

The relief expedition had orders to lose no time. Two of the men, as it happened, had themselves narrowly escaped starvation in the wilds, and their experience led them to urge the pace. It was afterward admitted that they made an excellent march, which was fortunate, because a few hours meant much to the starving men.

As Andrew crouched at the side of the rock, half-dazed with fatigue and want of food, it was a moment or two before he could believe that he was not the victim of a disordered imagination as he stared at the three figures on the hillslope. But the figures moved and grew more distinct. He could not doubt that they were men, and they were coming up the hill! With his heart beating painfully fast, he staggered up and raised a wild, hoarse cry.

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It was answered. One of the men waved to him. They came on faster, though he could see that they were heavily loaded, stumbling now and then in their haste. He could not imagine what had brought them into the wilds, but they were obviously well supplied, and he could purchase their provisions and recompense them for an abandoned journey. When they were close to him, the leader stopped a moment and called back to the others:

"We've struck it right! It's Mr. Allinson!"

Andrew, recognizing the man, whom he had seen at the Landing, stumbled forward and shook hands with him.

"I'm uncommonly glad to see you; but what brought you here?" he cried.

"Where's the rest of you?" the other asked.

"Carnally's down the hill somewhere; Graham's in camp beyond the gap."

The man looked relieved.

"That's good. We felt scared when we saw you were alone. Thought we might have come too late, though we hurried some."

"Then you knew we were here?"

"Sure! Frobisher sent us up with provisions for you. We made a few caches as we came along, and there ought to be three more of the boys on the trail behind us. You don't want to worry; we'll see you down."

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Andrew felt shaky. Relief had come so unexpectedly; his troubles were over. But there was more than this. Frobisher had despatched the men; he might have done so at his daughter's request; at least it showed a very friendly feeling. Andrew began to wonder how Frobisher could have known he needed help; but this was a matter of much less importance, and he turned to the packers.

"If one of you would go down the next spur and look for Carnally, I'd be glad," he said. "I expect he's near the river and he's pretty hungry."

A man threw off his load and set off rapidly downhill, while Andrew climbed with the others toward the neck, scarcely able to keep on his feet. His companions slackened their pace and glanced at him compassionately. Crossing the gap, they saw the light of Graham's fire in the gathering dusk, and when they neared the belt of timber Andrew waved his hand to a dark figure that appeared in an opening among the trunks.

"No more trouble!" he cried. "Help has arrived!"

A few minutes later Graham shook hands with the newcomers, whom he knew.

"Boys," he said hoarsely, "now that I see who you are, I know you made good time; and you hadn't much to spare. When did you leave?"

One of them told him, and he and Andrew looked astonished, while the packer laughed.

"We certainly hustled," he said with a deprecatory air. "But I've been four years at the mill and never had trouble over charging my time. Your pay-sheet was square."

"That's so," agreed his companion. "They might have laid me off a while last summer when we ran out of logs, but Mr. Graham fixed it so I kept my job."

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Andrew smiled at Graham, who looked confused.

"If you do these things, you must take the consequences; but I've met people with shorter memories."

"Anyhow, we've got here ahead of the logging crowd and I'm mighty glad," said the first packer.

"Those fellows think nobody can break a trail unless he lives in the woods. Now you sit by quiet while we get supper."

Before the meal was ready Carnally arrived with the man who had gone to look for him, and the party feasted royally. When they had finished, Carnally sighed with deep content.

"I just don't want to move," he remarked. "I feel most too good to talk; but if the rest of you have anything to say, I'll try to listen."

"What's your program?" one of the men asked. "We have food enough to take us down, going easy."

"I want two days' rest," said Andrew. "Until they're up, we'll do nothing but eat and lie about the fire and smoke."

Carnally looked up lazily.

"That sounds nice, but I'm going to locate Mappin's cache before we start."

The others began to talk to Graham, but Andrew did not know how long they continued, for he was soon fast asleep.

They broke camp on the third morning and when they crossed the neck Carnally divided the party, which had been joined by the loggers. Some he told to follow down one or two ravines at a distance, which he had not searched, and then meet the others, who would work along the ridge. Toward evening a man hailed him and Andrew from a slope some way off, and when they joined him he led them into a deep hollow. In the middle of it a small, barked fir projected from a snowy mound.

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"It's the kind of place you'd break a trail up if you were trying to make the neck," the packer explained.

"It looks a good road from here," Carnally assented. "We didn't get so far along, but we'll climb up a piece."

The hollow died out into a snow slope, and when they had walked on farther they lost sight of it. Then Carnally stopped and carefully looked about.

"We might have struck that gulch first shot, but the chances were against it; you can only see it from below. You want to remember that the line the fellows who made the cache would take would depend on where they left the big loop of the lower river. Mappin was smart enough to see that. Now we'll have a look at the provisions."

They proved to be sufficient in quantity and in excellent order when the cache was opened; but Carnally had expected that.

"I wonder how Mappin will feel when he sees us come marching in?" Andrew said lightly. They could laugh now.

"Not very comfortable, I'll promise you!" Carnally declared with a glint in his eyes.

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## **CHAPTER XXI**

### **A BUSHMAN'S SATISFACTION**

Andrew reached the Landing physically exhausted and troubled by a heavy depression. The long-continued strain had left its mark on him, for, having proposed the expedition, he felt responsible for the safety of his friends; and his strength and endurance deserted him shortly after the arrival of the rescue party. Relief had been followed by a severe reaction, which left him limp and nerveless; and the homeward march proved long and toilsome. As they had food, there was no longer the same necessity for haste, but the rigor of the weather forced the men to push on as fast as possible, and Andrew found it difficult to emulate his rescuers' pace. Moreover, he was seriously troubled about Graham, whose foot appeared to be getting worse, and he was deeply disappointed with the result of his search. He had found the lode, but, so far as he had been able to test it, the ore did not promise much.

Dusk was falling when they saw the lights of the settlement, and as they passed the first house a man greeted them. After a word or two, he ran on ahead; and the party, following slowly, worn with the march, found most of the inhabitants gathering in the street. Eager helpers took their packs from them and seized the traces of the sled; questions and congratulations were showered on them, and, to Andrew's annoyance, they entered the town in a triumphal procession. He was plodding along, too tired and listless to notice the remarks of the curious and sympathetic crowd, when Carnally touched his arm.

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"You can go straight to the hotel," he said. "I'll take Graham home."

"No," said Andrew firmly; "that's my business and it can't be shirked. You might send the doctor."

Carnally disappeared among the crowd and Andrew went on, shrinking from the meeting with his comrade's wife, though when the time came he found it less trying than he had feared. As they turned into a side street there was a shout:

"Make room; let her pass! It's Mrs. Graham!"

The men in the traces stopped and Graham spoke to them.

"You might help me up, boys."

They got him on his feet and fell back as a woman hurried toward him. She flung her arms about his neck and it was several moments before she saw Andrew.

"We have brought him back, but I'm afraid he's a little the worse for wear," he said.

"You have brought him back!" she cried. "That is the greatest thing."

Graham walked along with her for a few yards, and then stopped, his face contorted.

"If you don't mind, I'll finish the journey on the sled. My foot's rather sore."

When they reached his house, he insisted on getting up, and after telling Andrew to follow, limped in unhelped, but he sat down heavily on a couch.

"I suppose this moccasin had better come off now, though it's going to give me trouble," he said with a rueful smile.

"No," advised Andrew, "not until the doctor comes; he should be here directly. I'd like to see him, Mrs. Graham, but you'll want to talk to your husband. May I wait in the other room?" [Pg 214]

She let him go and he spent an anxious half-hour. He heard the doctor arrive and Mrs. Graham hurry about the house—getting water and bandages, he thought. Then there was silence for a while, until the doctor entered the room where he was sitting.

"His foot's in a very bad state," he reported. "There's some risk of mortification, though I think it can be averted. I'll be able to tell you more in a day or two."

"Do you know of any surgeon in Winnipeg or Toronto you would like to bring out?"

"There's a good man in Winnipeg, which is much nearer. On the whole, it might be advisable to get his opinion."

"Then wire for him," said Andrew, "and send for a trained nurse if one can be had."

The doctor left and Andrew rose as Mrs. Graham came in.

"I'm afraid you'll find it hard to forgive me," he said.

Mrs. Graham looked troubled.

"I must try to be fair. You are really not to blame; even if he hadn't met you, he would have gone to look for the lode some day. Then I'm confident you took every care of him. But, after all——"

"I know," Andrew sympathized. "He was well and strong when I took him away, and I have brought him back disabled. That can't be got over." He paused and resumed in a diffident tone: "I feel responsible. There are things I can't put right—your distress, the pain your husband suffers, his regret at being laid up helpless while his foot gets better—but I must insist on making what amends are in my power. I think you understand." [Pg 215]

"Yes." Mrs. Graham gave him a grateful glance. "But we'll talk of that later." Then she smiled. "He sent you a message—you are to mail the specimens to an assayer the first thing."

"I'll do so," Andrew promised, turning toward the door. "I'll come back and see how he's getting on early to-morrow."

On reaching the hotel he sought Carnally.

"Jake," he said, "you might fix things with the packers; give them any bonus you think fit over regulation wages. Then, because we owe them more than we can pay in money, you had better get up a supper and dance they could bring their wives to."

"It's a good idea! They'll like that. I'll see about it to-morrow. I need a rest to-night, and there's a job I want to be fit for in the morning."

Andrew was too weary to ask him what it was and after sending a message to Frobisher and getting supper he went off to bed. Rising late the next day, he went to Graham's and then took a sleigh drive, and by doing so missed a scene which caused some sensation in the town.

About the middle of the morning Mappin was sitting in his office, which was situated above a store opposite the second-class hotel. The hotel was full, for some loggers had come in the previous night, and a number of railroad carpenters, whose work had been interfered with by a snowstorm, were staying there. Mappin had heard of Andrew's return and he was in a thoughtful mood, though he had so far avoided meeting with any of the party. He could not, however, continue to do so, and he felt that he might as well get the interview with Allinson over as soon as possible. Even if Allinson suspected treachery, he had no proof, and the worst charge he could [Pg 216]

make would be one of carelessness. On the whole, it had been a relief to see that the man had escaped: he had acted in the heat of passion when he cut off his supplies and had afterward experienced a twinge of remorse. Mappin felt that he was a match for the fellow, and he had gone a needless length in plotting to destroy him.

He was thinking over the matter when he heard some one ask for him in the store, through which it was necessary to pass to reach his office. Then there were footsteps on the stairs and he looked up in surprise as Carnally came in. It was Allinson he had expected to see.

Carnally was smartly dressed, and though his face was thin and worn it wore a look of satisfaction that puzzled Mappin.

"Where's your boss this morning?" Mappin inquired. "I've been waiting for him."

"At Graham's," said Carnally, sitting down. "I've come instead. Mr. Allinson's got into a habit of leaving matters to me. There are things I do better than he can. I'm not so fastidious as he is."

"Then let me know what you want."

"It's about those provisions you sent up. Mr. Allinson told you where to make the caches?"

"Yes; I carefully put it down."

"Got the paper or the notebook?"

"I can't say where the notebook is, but I believe I could find it."

Carnally smiled, as if he were enjoying the situation.

"If you produce the book, it will be because it doesn't agree with what Mr. Allinson says he told you; but that wouldn't prove much. You're capable of writing down what you meant to do and not what he said. If you're not able to find it, the reason is that you thought of the trick you played us after you saw him."

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"Then you didn't find the provisions I sent as easily as you expected?"

"No; you know we didn't."

Mappin had plenty of courage.

"Well, what about it?" he asked with a little smile of scorn.

"I know the hand you're playing from; it's a pretty good one. Mr. Allinson believes he gave you orders to make the caches in certain places; you contend he told you somewhere else, and there was nobody about when you were talking to decide the thing. Somehow an unfortunate mistake was made."

"It looks like that," said Mappin, feeling uneasy at the man's ready acquiescence in the situation.

"Sure thing!" Carnally cheerfully assented. "You fixed it all so neatly that you left only one way of getting after you; but I won't grumble, because it's the one I like." He rose and his expression changed. "The mistake you meant to make came mighty near starving three men to death. Stand up and answer for it, you blasted hog!"

"So that's your line?"

Mappin did not move as he rapidly considered his course. Overbearing as he was, he did not often give way to anger unless his passions were strongly roused. A brawl with Carnally could lead to no useful result, and it would attract undesirable attention.

"You have hit it first time! Got feet, haven't you? You seem to want some stirring up!" Carnally reached for an inkwell and flung it across the office at Mappin's head. "Sorry I missed," he said. "But I've spoiled your clothes."

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Mappin rose with a savage frown.

"Do you mean to go on with this fooling?"

"Sure!" replied Carnally. "If I can't wake you any other way, I'll fire your office fixings out of the window. Guess that will bring the boys around and I'll be glad to tell them what the trouble's about."

A heavy account-book, deftly thrown, swept Mappin's desk, scattering pens and papers across the room. Seeing that a struggle was unavoidable, he sprang forward. Caution had hitherto held him back, but his patience had its limits, and he was the heavier man. He missed Carnally with his first two blows, but the third took effect with sledge-hammer force, flinging him back upon the office-table, and during the next few minutes Carnally gasped and dodged. He saw that he must try to wear out his antagonist, and he watched his chance before he clinched. For a while they grappled in the middle of the floor, swaying, breaking ground with heavy feet, striking when they could; and then as Mappin freed himself the door was flung open and the storekeeper and several of his customers ran in.

"Hold on!" he cried. "What's the trouble? I thought you were coming through my ceiling!"

Carnally looked around, flushed and breathless.

"Stand back! This business has to be got through, with! It's pretty well known that the fellow's smart at stealing his boys' time, but he took on too big a contract when he played a low-down trick on me." He turned to Mappin. "Are you ready, you fat swine, or must I fire you down the stairs?"

"Leave them to it," advised a big logger with an appreciative grin. "I'll put a dollar on the bushman!"

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"You're wrecking the place!" objected the storekeeper, indicating the dislodged stove, from which thick smoke was pouring, and a broken chair.

"That doesn't matter," Carnally replied. "Mappin can meet the bill. He seems a bit slow in moving: they've been too liberal with the corn."

One or two of the men laughed; but Mappin looked dangerous. The struggle that occupied the next few minutes was a determined and strenuous one, and the spectators watched it with frank delight. Mappin was powerful and could use his strength, but he had lived indulgently, a prey to his appetites. Carnally lived for the most part in the wilds, and hard toil and plain fare had toughened him. Moreover, as a matter of necessity, he frequently taxed his endurance to the limit, and this stood him in good stead now. He was quicker than his enemy, and recovered sooner; when they broke away from a grapple he was the fresher.

Mappin began to show distress. He panted hard, his face grew suffused, the perspiration dripped from him. His collar had burst open, and his torn sleeve hung loose about his arm; he looked strangely brutish and his eyes had a murderous expression. By comparison, Carnally seemed cool. His thin, brown face was quietly intent, resolute without passion; he fought cautiously, avoiding his antagonist's furious rushes, breaking away from an occasional grapple. Endurance was his strongest point, and he meant to tire his man. Mappin, guessing this, saw the advisability of bringing the struggle to a speedy conclusion. He clinched again, trying to throw his agile opponent by sheer force, and for a moment or two Carnally seemed helpless in his grasp. He could not get free and Mappin drove him backward across the narrow floor, while the spectators, who had increased in number, looked on in tense excitement.

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In the West personal combat is hampered by few of the rules of the boxing ring; but there is a rough notion of fair play and there are limits which may not be exceeded. Thus when Carnally, driven hard against the edge of the table, seemed to grow limp, there was a shout of protest as Mappin, reaching out with free right arm, seized a heavy poker from the wood-box. He was ready to strike when Carnally, realizing his peril, rallied his strength for a decisive effort. The poker struck the table with a resounding crash. Carnally secured a firm hold before Mappin recovered his shaken balance, and lifted him from his feet. He lurched forward, while the spectators scattered, and reeling through the doorway plunged down the stairs.

Mappin was undermost. He struck the steps half-way down, but it did not stop them. They rolled into the store amid a confused outcry. None of those who watched could tell whether Mappin scrambled up or Carnally lifted him from the floor, but in a moment they were on their feet, Carnally driving the other toward the door. With a last effort he hurled him backward, and Mappin went down headlong into the snow.

He got up in a half-dazed manner and Carnally leaned against the doorpost, breathing hard and regarding him with a grim smile.

"You can do what you like about it, but if you're wise, you'll keep out of my sight," he said. "It won't hurt me to let people know what made the trouble."

Carnally turned back into the store and sat down on a barrel, hot, disheveled, and generally the worse for wear.

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"It's a long while since I felt so good, boys," he grinned.

Mappin slunk away to his hotel, knowing that a grave misfortune had befallen him. He was a hard master and accustomed to get more than the full equivalent of their wages out of his men, but in this his overbearing manner had assisted his cunning. In logging camps and on new roads, courage and muscular strength command respect; but now that he had been ignominiously thrown out of the store before a derisive crowd, his prestige had gone. Henceforward there would be serious risk of his mutinous subordinates following Carnally's example.

The man, however, was far from a coward. It would be pleasanter to leave the town, where he was not held in much esteem, until the matter blew over, and he had work going on in other places; but he did not mean to run away from Allinson. The latter, of course, now understood that he had been tricked over the location of the food caches, and Mappin wondered what he would do. It was, however, obvious that there was no really effective course open to Allinson. Carnally had been shrewd enough to take the only possible means of obtaining redress, but his primitive methods were not likely to be adopted by his employer.

After removing the signs of battle, so far as he could, from his clothes and person, Mappin returned to his office and spent the day there, waiting for a visit from his rival. Allinson, however, did not come; it looked as though he meant to do nothing, and this caused Mappin some uneasiness. The man was cleverer and perhaps, more to be feared than he had thought.

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## CHAPTER XXII

### FRESH PLANS

Geraldine Frobisher, sitting by the hearth in her drawing-room, glanced compassionately at Andrew. He looked gaunt and very weary, and she noticed a significant slackness in his pose. There was no one else in the room; the lamps were lighted and a log fire diffused a pleasant glow and an aromatic odor.

"You are quiet to-night," she said.

Andrew looked up with a deprecatory smile.

"I fear I'm disgracefully dull; but I don't seem able to think of anything except that it's very pleasant to be here again."

"You consider that a good excuse?"

"I can't judge; I felt that I needed one. In fact, I don't know what is the matter with me since I came down-river."

Geraldine had some idea; a glance at the man supplied an explanation.

"You are worn out, for one thing," she answered sympathetically.

He mused for a few moments, and the girl was not displeased. From the first she had felt on curiously confidential terms with him. He was direct and sincere and, though by no means shallow, he seldom puzzled her.

"No," he said, "it's not altogether that. We had a rather bad time before the relief party arrived, but I felt up to my work—anxious, of course, but not troubled by the slackness that has since got hold of me. All this, however, isn't of much consequence. I'm very grateful to you and your father for sending help—we were in a very tight place when it came. But I don't understand how you knew we needed it."

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Geraldine looked down, to hide her confusion.

"I wonder why you associate me with my father?"

"I can't tell you clearly, but I feel that you had something to do with the matter. Indeed, it made the relief more welcome. But you haven't given me an explanation."

"Do you understand why you failed to find the food?"

"Yes," said Andrew grimly. "I've a suspicion that you know as much about it as I do, though it's hard to see how you came by the knowledge."

Geraldine looked up with a forced smile. He must not guess how she had led Mappin to betray himself.

"It is rather astonishing, isn't it? The search gave you trouble, and you have some respect for your thinking powers."

"I've more respect for Carnally's; he found the clue. But he was on the spot."

"And I was handicapped by being at home? Do you know I sometimes think I'm not altogether stupid?"

"You're exceptionally clever," said Andrew warmly. "You have a gift for seizing on the truth and sticking to it. I think it's because the truth is in you that you recognize it. That's different from smartness."

She checked him with a gesture of mocking rebuke.

"You should have learned that I don't expect you to pay me labored compliments."

"It wasn't labored; I believe it was a flash of insight," Andrew declared. He glanced at her face and laughed, looking baffled.

There was silence for the next few moments. Geraldine knew what the man thought of her, but she approved of the respectful diffidence he generally displayed. Now that he was safe, she preferred that they remain on a purely friendly footing for a time; he was hers, but she shrank with a fluttering timidity from an open surrender. It was not difficult to repulse him gently when he grew too bold. Nevertheless his wan and downcast appearance roused a deep and tender pity. She longed to hear his troubles and comfort him.

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"You suddenly changed the subject we began," she said. "Were you not going to tell me why you feel depressed?"

"Something of the kind," replied Andrew. "It didn't seem a very happy topic."

"That was a mistake," declared Geraldine reproachfully. "You shouldn't have doubted my interest, and it lightens one's troubles to confide in a friend."

Andrew, in his dejected mood, felt a longing for sympathy and encouragement.

"Well," he said, "failure is hard to bear, and I've a strong suspicion that I've undertaken more than I'm able to carry out. So far, I've made a deplorable mess of things. We reached the neighborhood of the lode with no time to search the ground, and, for all the results we got, we might as well have stayed at home."

"But it's something to have proved that the lode exists."

"I'm not sure it's worth proving. The value of the ore is the most important point, because a mine could not be worked up there unless it was very rich. Then there's a risk of Graham's being lamed for life. Mappin has beaten us badly at the beginning of the fight."

"It's only a small reverse. You would not use the means he employed. They were infamous!"

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"The trouble is that other opponents I shall have to meet may use similar methods, and unless I do the same, I'll be further handicapped. As it happens, I'm carrying weight enough already."

Geraldine looked thoughtful.

"In a way, you're right. I've learned something about the situation."

"If we had proved the lode to be rich, I should have had something to fall back on; but I've failed. Now I must attack strong vested interests, with the whole influence of my conservative relatives against me. My chief antagonist enjoys a high prestige, and has made an excellent profit on the money handed him." Andrew laughed in a rueful manner. "And I'm the fool of the family, who has lately taken to upsetting a very satisfactory state of affairs. Can you imagine the surprise and disgust of everybody concerned?"

"But your people are upright, aren't they?"

"Oh, yes; there's no doubt of that. But, with one or two unimportant exceptions, they're conventional and prejudiced. They believe in what they see; the prosperity of Allinson's, the dividends coming in. They distrust anything that seems out of the usual course, and they couldn't bring themselves to think there should be anything wrong with the firm. I, whom they good-naturedly look down on, have to convince them to the contrary."

"It will be hard; one can understand that. But the feeling of helplessness that troubles you now will pass. You must remember that you have borne enough to exhaust you."

"My body's tired," Andrew admitted. "One can get over that. The real difficulty is that my mind feels sick."

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"Is there no connection between the two?" Geraldine smiled at him. "You make me think it's the first time you have had any serious difficulties."

"That's true. It looks as if there were some benefit in being dull. You're saved a good deal of trouble if you don't notice things."

"I didn't mean that," Geraldine objected. "You're not really dull, you know."

"Then I'm something like it. But you don't think I've been foolish in starting on this campaign?"

"No!" said Geraldine promptly. "I think you are doing what is fine! You must go on; I want you to win. The difficulties won't look so serious if you attack them one by one, and it must be worth something to have the right on your side. There is so much injustice everywhere and few people seem to mind. No doubt it's dangerous to interfere, but it's encouraging to find a man here and there who is not afraid."

She looked up at a sound and saw her father standing in the doorway.

"One here and there?" smiled Frobisher. "You're not exacting. In France, they once asked for a hundred men who knew how to die, and found them in one southern town."

Geraldine's color was higher than usual, but she laughed.

"I suppose I am a bit of a sentimentalist; but you're too cynical. I don't see why you should be proud of your detached and critical attitude. You look on as if the sight of people struggling amused you."

"I don't think I really am proud of it, but perhaps there's something to be said for the intelligent spectator who knows his limitations and is content with trying to see fair play. However, I came to take Allinson away for a smoke. If I leave him to you, you'll be sending him off on some new chivalrous adventure."

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Seeing that his host was waiting for him, Andrew rose, but as he reached the door Geraldine looked at him with a smile.

"What I said was rather crude, but I meant it."

"She generally does mean things; it's a habit that has its drawbacks," Frobisher said, as he led Andrew to his smoking-room, where he gave him a cigar and pointed to an easy-chair.

"What are you going to do about Mappin?" the American asked bluntly.

"Nothing. As he has only to deny what I told him to clear himself, there's no means of punishing him. I can't see any use in making a fuss that can have no result. It would simply show I was the weaker party."

"You're wise," Frobisher agreed. Then his eyes twinkled. "Carnally, however, seems to have seen a way out of the difficulty. You haven't heard what happened at the settlement?"

"No; I hired a sleigh and went for a drive. After that I slept until I came here. I tried to keep out of people's way."

"You missed a dramatic scene at the store. I'm told Carnally threw Mappin downstairs and out into the snow."

Andrew shook his head dubiously.

"It's a pity, but I might have been prepared for something of the kind. I can hardly grudge him any satisfaction he derived from it."

"It was a good stroke; Mappin will find it damaging."

"But I understood he was a friend of yours," Andrew said with some awkwardness.

"He came to my house. I put up with him, which I think describes it best, though I fail to see much reason for doing so any longer. But what are you going to do about the lode?"

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"Go back and investigate it thoroughly. We'll wait until the spring."

"Then you mean to proceed with your scheme? I see trouble, but I mustn't discourage you. Now I guess the situation warrants some candor. Has it struck you that Mappin is working hand in hand with your brother-in-law?"

"I'm afraid it's true." Andrew's face was grave. "You can see how it complicates things."

"But you mean to go on?"

"I must," said Andrew simply.

Frobisher leaned forward and touched his arm.

"You have grit, Allinson. It will be a tough fight, but I feel that you'll make good."

He changed the subject abruptly, and they talked of other matters until they went back to the drawing-room. Some time afterward there was a knock at the door, and Geraldine, opening it, held out a telegram to Andrew.

"It's from the assayer; I left word at the settlement for the message to be sent on," he explained. "You will excuse my opening it?"

"Of course," said Geraldine. "May it bring you good news!"

Andrew tore open the envelope, and there was an exultant tone in his voice as he read out:

*"Specimens unpromising."*

Frobisher and Geraldine looked puzzled.

"But you seem satisfied," the girl said.

"I am. I asked the man to let me have his general opinion as soon as he could; he's to send a regular analysis later. He has been quick, but perhaps he has some rough preliminary test."

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"But he tells you they're unpromising!"

"I'm beginning to think Mr. Allinson is a bit of a genius," Frobisher observed. "No doubt he'll explain his mysterious proceedings."

"I gave the man a three-word code, reversing the meaning, and his answer puts the quality of the ore, so to speak, in the comparative degree. It shows that we have struck the edge of the lode, and careful prospecting should give us better results."

He broke off, standing still, the message in his hand and a look of marked relief in his face, and Frobisher turned to his daughter.

"It was a maxim of Napoleon's that one should use every means of misleading the enemy, and Mr. Allinson seems to know that telegrams are handled rather casually in these small places. A mineral claim doesn't belong to its discoverer until it's duly staked off and recorded; and if all the formalities are not complied with it can be jumped."

He was called away a few minutes later, and Andrew took his place by the hearth with Geraldine sitting opposite him.

"I'm very glad you got such good news," she said, with a curious softness in her voice.

"Thank you. It was you who brought it to me; but that wasn't all you did. I came here dejected, and now I'm cheerful again."



"But that isn't surprising, after the message."

"It wasn't the message. I was bracing up before it came; you and your father made me feel that I needn't despair. In fact, I was getting ashamed of being downcast, after the confidence you seemed to have in me."

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Geraldine smiled at him.

"Ah!" she said. "It must need a good deal of courage to lead a forlorn hope, and one could imagine that your undertaking looked like that. It must be much pleasanter to feel that you have some chance of winning. But what will you do next?"

"Go home, I think. I want to see how I stand there."

"For long?" Geraldine asked quietly.

"No; for a month or so. I shall be eager to get back." Andrew paused and asked with a hint of tension in his voice: "Will I be missed?"

"Of course!" Geraldine looked up with friendly candor. "But will you be able to make the double journey and do all that's needful in a few weeks?"

Andrew felt gently rebuffed. Geraldine had a way of checking him when he tried to draw closer to her, and her unembarrassed frankness was deterring.

"I'll try," he said doggedly.

Frobisher came in then, and they chatted about various matters until Andrew took his leave. When he reached his hotel he wrote a letter home, announcing his return, and the next morning he had a long talk with Carnally, whom he empowered to act as his deputy while he was in England. Then he went to Graham's and found the Winnipeg surgeon leaving. His report was favorable: Graham's foot could be saved, though it would be some time before he recovered the use of it.

Andrew was shown into a room where his comrade lay on a couch.

"I've heard the news and I'm very glad," he said. "I was troubled about you."

"You couldn't hide it." Graham smiled at him. "It wasn't your fault I got frost-bitten, anyway. But have you heard about the specimens?"

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"Yes; the first report's encouraging. Of course, I haven't learned the full results yet."

Graham's eyes glistened, and he moved into a comfortable pose with a look of deep content.

"That's good. Now I must try to get about again as soon as possible."

"There's no hurry. As you know, you needn't go back to the mill until you're able. Then as Carnally and I know where the lode is, it isn't strictly necessary that you should come with us."

"Isn't it! I've been thinking about that lode for twenty years, and do you suppose I could let another man locate it? Besides, we must stake three claims on the best frontage."

"That would be better; but what about Mrs. Graham? Haven't you given her enough anxiety?"

Graham looked disturbed.

"I can't predict what line she'll take, but I venture to believe she'll let me go, knowing I'll be satisfied for good when I have finished my work."

Andrew told him about his trip home and the arrangements he had made with Carnally, and left soon afterward. During the next week he came in daily and spent two evenings with the Frobishers, and then he left the Landing early one morning by the Montreal express.

The Atlantic passage was short and uneventful, and late one afternoon he alighted from a local train at a wayside station among the English hills. Wannop and Hilda were waiting on the platform, and after the first greetings were over, the girl regarded her brother critically.

"Andrew," she exclaimed, "you haven't come back the same! How did you get those lines on your forehead?"

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"Are there some?" Andrew asked with a smile. "I suppose I was anxious now and then. Not knowing whether you'll get enough to eat makes one think."

Hilda shook her head.

"No; that's not it. My dear boy, you have been *developing* since you went to Canada."

"If you're right," laughed Andrew, "it was getting time I did; but you're standing in the way of the baggage truck."

They moved on, and when they drove off in Wannop's trap Andrew sat silent for a while, looking about delightedly. It was open weather; by comparison with the Canadian cold, the air was soft and mild. A gray sky hung above the hills, but there was a glimmer of pale red and saffron low in the west, and the rugged slopes, clothed with withered fern, shone a rich, warm brown. Then

they dipped into a valley which struck Andrew, accustomed to the monotonous snow-glare, as wonderfully green. The shining riband of a river wound through its midst; clover growing among the stubble and broad strips of raw-red soil where sheep, netted in, stood about the turnip-cutters, checkered the pasture land. They passed climbing woods where the leafless branches formed blurs of blue and gray; and here and there a white thread of foaming water streaked the heights above.

It was a countryside that Andrew loved, but now, while softly beautiful, it looked strangely small—a narrow green strip, shut in by lofty moors. Then there were many tall hedgerows and big stone walls; one could not wander there at will. The wide horizons and the limitless stretch of trackless woods were missing. It was curious, Andrew thought, with what content he had once searched stubble and turnips for partridges, and stood with gun ready outside the woods from which the pheasants broke on clattering wings. Now all that seemed tame; he had lost his zest for it in a sterner chase.

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Hilda broke in upon his reflections.

"You haven't spared me much attention yet," she said. "How do you think I'm looking?"

"Now that I think of it, you're growing rather pretty; though that is what I expected."

"I'm aware of it." Hilda made him the best curtsey that space allowed. "But don't you notice that I'm looking more mature and intellectual?"

"Steady!" Wannop cautioned. "You nearly knocked the whip out of my hand. Keep that kind of thing for the ballroom—it's wasted on your brother."

"The maturity didn't strike me; but you used to show signs of intelligence now and then," Andrew answered.

"Perhaps it's better to be pretty. Cleverness is open to any one who is willing to study. But did you see any girl as nice-looking as I am while you were in Canada?"

"Even at the risk of giving offense, I can think of one—though of course beauty is largely a matter of taste."

"Ah!" exclaimed Hilda delightedly. "I had my suspicions! I suppose you mean the girl who wrote to Ethel about you?"

Andrew started and Wannop laughed.

"I knew she was up to something. That is what she has been leading you on to."

"How did you hear about her?" Andrew asked. "Did Ethel tell you?"

"As a matter of fact, she wasn't very communicative, but I elicited a few scraps of information. It's surprising how one can follow up a clue."

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"I suppose so," said Andrew. "Whether it leads you right or not is another matter. I'm thankful I haven't your fervid imagination."

"How he puts it off!" Hilda said to Wannop. "He's been learning diplomacy in Canada."

Wannop chuckled.

"I always knew he wasn't a fool. But I wish you would keep still. The horse is fresh and this is a steep bit of road."

Hilda changed the subject, for she had learned enough from her brother's start to give her food for thought.

"Leonard will be down to-morrow with Florence," Wannop said when they approached the house. "I suppose you'll have something to tell us. I needn't remind you that if there's any difficulty you can count on me."

Andrew gave him a grateful nod, and a few minutes later they drove up to Ghyllside.

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## **CHAPTER XXIII**

### **UNEXPECTED SUPPORT**

The day after Andrew's return he was sitting in the library at Ghyllside, waiting for dinner. Though a fire burned on the hearth by which he lounged, cigarette in hand, two of the tall windows were open and the air that flowed in was soft and muggy. He had spent most of the day in shooting, and after a long walk across wet meadows and a boggy moor he now felt very comfortable and somewhat drowsy. He would have to bestir himself when the guests he expected arrived, and he was enjoying a few minutes' rest. His cigarette was, however, only half smoked when Wannop walked in.

"As I didn't see you downstairs I came up to look for you; Gertrude's with Hilda. Haven't Florence and Leonard arrived yet?"

"Train seems to be late," Andrew replied. "I suppose I should have gone to meet them, but I felt lazy."

"Was that all?"

"It wasn't my only reason. To tell the truth, I shirked the drive home with Leonard. I'm a poor dissembler and our relations are rather strained. It will be easier to meet him when there are others about."

"They'll be on his side."

"I expect so; but I'm not afraid of direct opposition. It's beating about a delicate subject and trying to keep on safe ground that bothers me."

"I know; it's embarrassing. You won't be able to broach matters of any importance to-night."

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"No. We'll have one or two outside people here and I want my homecoming to be harmonious. We'll let things stand over till to-morrow."

"Feeling nervous about it?" Wannop suggested with a grin.

"I'll confess that I do. It's the preliminary tussle, and I haven't many backers."

"You needn't be downhearted. I don't know that your people are remarkably broad-minded, but they're straight—I'll say that even for Robert. They'll come round if they think you're right. But don't be apologetic; take a firm tone. Manner goes a long way and, after all, you are the head of Allinson's."

"The trouble is that I've allowed Leonard to usurp my place and he'll be hard to depose."

Andrew rose, for there were voices and footsteps below, and they went down to meet the arriving guests. The hall was large and square, with seats in recesses and one or two small tables and comfortable chairs scattered about. Mrs. Fenwood had come with Robert Allinson, who shook hands with Andrew heartily, though there was a hint of constraint in his manner afterward. He was not quite satisfied with Andrew's conduct before leaving England, and could not forget that his interference in the matter of Mrs. Olcott's house had been thwarted. He regarded Wannop, who was saying something humorous to Mrs. Fenwood, with a suspicious eye.

Then there was a rattle of wheels outside and Florence Hathersage came in with Leonard. He expressed his pleasure at Andrew's safe return and after a few friendly words hurried off to his room. When he came down again three more guests arrived, and Andrew went eagerly to meet them. Ethel Hillyard and Mrs. Olcott were foremost, and after welcoming them Andrew turned toward a man with a lined, brown face, bearing the stamp of the soldier. It was with marked cordiality that they shook hands.

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"It's good to see you, Tom," Andrew said. "I heard you had just got home, and though it's an unhealthy country, you're looking very fit."

"A little fever now and then, though I escaped fairly well," rejoined the other with a friendly smile. "I have a good deal to say to you when we get a chance." He lowered his voice as he added: "I'm deeply grateful."

The meeting had a dramatic interest to the onlookers. Every eye had been fixed on the stranger. As he had come with Mrs. Olcott his identity was obvious; and the good-will both men had shown had its significance. Then Andrew led the Olcotts forward and presented them to the elderly unmarried relative who managed his household and looked after Hilda. Mrs. Olcott's color was slightly heightened, though she smiled, for she understood the interest she had aroused and this was her triumph. She had produced the husband whose absence had excited comment and whose existence some had ventured to doubt. Moreover, he was a man to be proud of, and nobody who had witnessed their meeting could doubt that he was Andrew's trusted friend. Robert Allinson looked at him earnestly and then turned to Leonard with a frown. He was narrow and censorious, but he was just, and he felt that he had been mistaken, or perhaps misled.

They went in to dinner and Andrew sat at the head of his table, saying enough to keep conversation going, but content to give Leonard the lead. Considering how he stood toward his host, Hathersage showed admirable tact. He skilfully turned every topic which might prove difficult and kept the others on safe ground; he was witty in a polished manner, but if anything a little too obviously at ease. For the first time it struck one or two of the party with surprise that there was something in Andrew's bearing which his more brilliant brother-in-law lacked. The soldier from tropical Africa bore the same elusive stamp of command, sincerity and steadfastness. Ethel Hillyard, studying them carefully, decided that Leonard was, by comparison, cheap and superficial.

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Still, it was largely due to his efforts that dinner was a pleasant function without an awkward pause in it; and afterward the guests dispersed through several rooms to amuse themselves. When Andrew found a place by Ethel Hillyard in a recess in the hall, she surveyed him with smiling scrutiny.

"I think you did well in going to Canada," she said. "Though I can't quite express what I mean,

you look bigger."

"As a matter of fact, I'm a good deal lighter."

Ethel laughed.

"Oh, well, I don't want to make you embarrassed! I believe you had a trying time. Looking after the silver mine didn't prove as easy as you expected?"

"I don't remember what I expected, but I found it very difficult."

"So I gathered. Antony Wannop seems to think the reforms you have in view won't be popular. I suppose you have been summoned home to explain?"

"No," said Andrew; "I came. There's a difference."

"It's marked," Ethel answered. "But we are old friends, Andrew; follow your own bent, stick to your guns. Whatever plans you have determined on will be fair. Once before I told you not to be daunted; but it strikes me that you need less encouragement now."

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"Thank you," said Andrew. "I'm sorry I can't tell you much about the matter. You see——"

"It's a family affair, and after all I have my ideas. But you made some new friends by the Lake of Shadows, didn't you?"

"Yes; staunch ones. They showed their friendship in a very practical way. That's something I owe to you; I suspect that you have been prejudicing them in my favor."

"Then you have a good opinion of Geraldine?"

Andrew colored as he met her inquiring glance.

"Yes," he said simply, "the highest I'm capable of forming."

Ethel smiled rather curiously. Two or three years earlier she had contemplated the possibility of Andrew's seeking her for his wife, but her feelings had not been deeply stirred, and when she saw that she had taken too much for granted she quietly submitted and retained a very friendly interest in him. Now, however, there was something grimly amusing in the thought that she had given him to Geraldine.

"Well," she said, "I'm sure she merits it. But to speak of something else, I'm glad you asked the Olcotts here."

"That's another matter in which I'm indebted to you. What do you think of Olcott? He sat next to you."

"A delightful man." Ethel, who was direct and fearless, looked up at her companion. "No one could doubt Mrs. Olcott's devotion to him, and I think it's warranted." Then she rose. "You must have a good deal to say to the others and I mustn't monopolize you."

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Andrew went to the smoking-room, which proved to be unoccupied, but as he was leaving it Olcott came in.

"I stole away and followed you," he said. "Sit down a minute and light up."

"Cigars in that drawer," said Andrew, lighting a cigarette. "Drinks in the cupboard below."

Olcott took out two glasses and filled them.

"It's your house, but I feel at home."

"So you ought!"

Olcott raised his glass.

"Here's to you, old friend, and may you get with full measure, as you give! I can't wish you anything better." He put down his glass and continued: "And now we'll proceed to business. As soon as I'd had a talk with Clare I paid a check into your bank."

"Sure it's convenient?"

"Quite: I had my duties increased and, what was much less usual, a corresponding increase of pay. I'd rather have come over when you were alone, and I only got home yesterday, but Clare insisted on my appearing to-night. Can you guess the reason?"

"Yes." Andrew flushed but looked at his friend with steady eyes. "I got very savage about the matter, and wondered whether I'd been in any way to blame. Still, you left things pretty mixed when you went away—your wife needed somebody to straighten them out, and I'm not a tactful person."

"I'd only a day or two's notice, and there wasn't time to arrange matters properly. But it's hard to imagine that people who knew you could be such credulous fools. I mustn't say anything stronger of your relatives."

"I don't think being my relatives makes them any brighter," Andrew replied with a grin. "My father was the last genius in the family; talent often skips a generation. But we'll let the matter

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drop."

"If you find gratitude hard to put up with. It seems that your sister Hilda has told Clare something about your adventures. You had some rough experiences in Canada?"

"One or two. I shouldn't imagine they were uncommon in West Africa."

"You're right," returned Olcott grimly. "We must have a long talk; but here's the clergyman coming in search of you and he looks as if he had something important to say."

He withdrew and Robert Allinson sat down with a confused but resolute air.

"Andrew," he said, "I have come to express my regret at having wronged you by suspicions which I am now ashamed of."

"After all, perhaps you had some excuse. I wasn't as careful as I should have been; but I'm getting tired of the subject."

"It's painful, but I must go on. I knew what a mistake I had made as soon as I saw Olcott come in; but you don't understand yet how far my suspicions led me. I felt it my duty to see Judson about Mrs. Olcott's lease."

"Ah! You mean you put the screw on him? I'm glad your plot seems to have failed."

"So am I," said Robert. "I'll confess that I was disappointed at first and suspected Wannop of interfering. As you know, he's lax in his views."

"It's unfortunate the laxity you complain of isn't more common." Andrew broke into a smile. "No doubt Wannop was too clever for you; but I don't bear you any grudge. I believe you meant well, and good intentions seem to excuse a good deal of harshness." [Pg 242]

"I did what I thought was my duty," Robert said with dignity, and moved away.

Shortly afterward Andrew entered the drawing-room, where he was surprised to see Robert talking to Mrs. Olcott. The clergyman looked unusually solemn and Mrs. Olcott's expression was resigned. Hilda, joining her brother, glanced toward the other two.

"Isn't he amusing?" she said with a soft laugh. "He's doing penance and feeling as awkward as he deserves. No doubt Mrs. Olcott feels horribly bored."

"What do you know about the matter?" Andrew asked sharply.

"More than you think. Robert believes he's making full amends by countenancing Mrs. Olcott as he's doing. After this, of course, nobody need fight shy of her."

Andrew knew that reproof would be useless; Hilda would laugh at him.

"Well," he said, "I've a higher opinion of Robert now than I've had for some time."

"He's pompous and silly," Hilda declared. "Sometimes I feel sorry for him, sometimes he makes me positively wicked; but after all he has his good points. For one thing, he's not afraid."

She went away when Andrew joined his elder sisters, and the evening passed pleasantly. When the party broke up Andrew strolled out to the terrace and leaned on the low wall. There was no moon, but the night was clear and mild. Bare trees rose in shadowy masses across the dark stretch of lawn; the ghyll beyond it was filled with mist, out of which there rose the gurgle of running water. In the distance a ridge of moor cut darkly against the sky. The lights in the house went out one by one; the stillness was soothing and Andrew became lost in thought. [Pg 243]

He knew and loved every wood and field in the dim countryside he looked out upon. He had spent happy, healthful days on the purple moors when the grouse came flitting across the heather; among the turnips and yellow stubble in the valley where the partridge coveys lay; and by deep pools in the ghyll where the silver sea-trout gleamed through the brown peat water. It was a harmless life he had led there, but he felt that it had been a wasted one. Its peaceful sounds had dulled his ears to the clamor of the busy world where the work he had neglected badly needed doing. He was not a prig and felt no call to be a general reformer, but the Allinson honor was tainted and it was his business to remove the stain. He might fail, but he must concentrate upon the task all the power he possessed.

Then he began to consider ways and means. A good deal depended on his relatives' attitude. They could hamper him by their resistance and he wanted their support, though he was prepared to go on without it. To-night they had obviously acquitted him of a supposititious folly, which was something to the good; indeed, he had been especially pleased by Robert's frank expression of regret. He had looked for determined opposition from the clergyman, but now he did not despair of winning him. Though prejudiced and conventional, Robert was sincere, and that was a great thing.

To-morrow evening the family council must be held. He imagined that Leonard was clever enough to have put him in the wrong beforehand. He would, no doubt, be called on to explain his rash interference with the company's Canadian affairs, and he must make the best defense he could. Indeed, he must bear with a good deal, if needful, to make his defense effective; but, if this could not be done, there was another line he meant to take. He would let those who misjudged him know that he was the head of Allinson's and would go on as he had begun. [Pg 244]

## CHAPTER XXIV

### THE TRUTH ABOUT RAIN BLUFF

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Dinner was a solemn function the next evening. Andrew, who had been shooting with Wannop and Olcott all day, was quietly thoughtful, and the rest of the party felt a sense of constraint. Conversation dragged; once or twice it nearly died away and Leonard prevented an awkward pause by his polished wit. Between whiles, however, Wannop jested bravely and Hilda seconded him, occasionally at Robert's and Leonard's expense. The others talked without much point when they could think of anything to say; but, preoccupied as they were, it was a relief to all when they dispersed for half an hour before meeting Andrew in the library. He spent the interval in his smoking-room, thinking hard, but he looked up when Hilda came in and sat down on the lounge beside him.

"Feeling very bad, old boy?" she said.

"I have spent more cheerful moments," Andrew replied.

Hilda nodded.

"It must be trying—the pause before the battle! But you'll shake off the sinking feeling when you get into action. Don't let them bully you, Andrew. They can look very wise, but there's none of them you need be afraid of, unless it's Leonard. Antony, of course, will back you all he can."

"Thanks for the encouragement; but I'm not sure you have any right to talk about these things."

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"Oh, don't be silly! Can't you realize that I've grown up? And if I hadn't as much sense as Robert and Mrs. Fenwood, I'd feel very sorry for myself. But we had better be practical—I suppose you see what you ought to do?"

"No," Andrew admitted, "not as clearly as I could wish."

"Then what troubles the others is that they can't think for themselves. They must have a lead, as Leonard knows, and he has cleverly given them one. So far, they have followed him docilely; now you must make them follow you."

"Can you tell me how it should be done?"

"I'll admit that it's easier to sketch out a general plan than to fit in the details; but that's your business," said Hilda. Then her tone changed and grew tinged with haughtiness. "First of all, remember that you're fighting for Allinson's! I'm glad the others are nearly as proud of the name as we are. It's unthinkable that Leonard should drag it down and sell it for what he can gain. You stand for what we hold precious; you must beat him."

"I'll try," Andrew promised soberly; and Hilda kissed him and went hastily from the room.

Andrew remained for a few minutes, feeling cheered. Geraldine, Ethel, and now Hilda had urged him on. They thought he was right, and it looked as if all had some confidence in his ability. He was not sure that it was well founded, for he knew his limitations, the worst of which was ignorance. Still, he must try not to discredit his supporters, and his task could not be shirked. He went to the library, where his relatives were waiting, and gravely asked them to be seated. Though two pillar lamps were lighted, the large room was shadowy. A silver stand with candles burning occupied the middle of the great oak table round which the party gathered, flinging a clear illumination on their faces.

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Andrew took the head of the table, and there was something the others had not expected in his quiet manner. He did not look as if he had come to make excuses or ask their forbearance. Leonard, sitting opposite, eyed him sharply; Florence and Gertrude did not seem at ease. Mrs. Fenwood and Robert Allinson were heavily serious; Wannop waited with amused expectancy.

"I asked you to meet me here because you all have a large interest in Allinson's and the Rain Bluff mine," Andrew began. "I thought it fit that you should hear why I have made some changes in our Canadian plans."

"It would be better not to confuse Allinson's with the mine," Leonard interposed. "The Rain Bluff is, of course, an independent company."

"No," said Andrew sternly; "in a very real sense that is not correct. The two must stand together. The Rain Bluff shares were largely taken up by the family and our customers. The mine cannot prove a failure without discrediting the firm which launched and tacitly guaranteed it. A pledge given by Allinson's must be redeemed."

"That is obvious," Robert solemnly agreed.

"Andrew is begging the question in speaking of the mine as being guaranteed by the firm," Leonard persisted. "The shares were offered to the public on the inducements stated in the prospectus."

"They were subscribed for because it was an Allinson venture; but we'll leave that point for a while. I feel justified in asking your attention as Rain Bluff shareholders—though I have learned that Leonard has lately reduced his holding."

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Several of the others showed surprise and Leonard looked disconcerted, but Wannop broke into a deep chuckle.

"I felt tempted to do the same, after what I learned at the Lake of Shadows," he remarked. "However, when I'd had a few words with Andrew I decided to hold on. Though he's carrying a good bit of my money, I felt he was worth backing."

"Well," said Andrew, "I was sent out to look into Canadian matters, and I have done so. The discoveries I made are by no means reassuring."

He paused with a dry smile, and his listeners felt uncomfortable. He had not been sent out to investigate the mining operations, but to keep him out of harm. Leonard was conscious that he had made a mistake; Andrew had developed unsuspected capabilities.

"A large proportion of the company's work is done by contract, and I found that newly arrived immigrants, ignorant of their rights, were mainly employed. They were badly fed, though in Canada the rudest laborers are given a generous diet, worse housed, paid less than standard wages, and cheated of part of their due. It is not by such means that Allinson's should make money."

"It is not," Robert firmly declared.

He was the last ally Andrew had looked for; but Robert had been thinking to some purpose. Leonard had deceived him about Mrs. Olcott; he had been led into conduct which savored of cruelty and which he regretted. Leonard having played false in one matter, might do so in another. Robert's faith in him had been rudely shaken and he felt that the man must be watched. [Pg 249]

"After all, we are not responsible for the evils Andrew mentions," Mrs. Fenwood broke in. "It must be the contractor's fault."

"Responsibility," said Robert, "cannot be shuffled off, though what one may call the impersonal nature of a public company seems to make it easier. The money is yours and you expect to draw the dividends. It is a pernicious idea that one may make a profit by investing in a company whose business is harmful, and go free from blame. I may say that I was once urged to apply for shares in a new brewery a little before they were put on the market, and I felt that I had done right in declining, though they went to a handsome premium shortly afterward."

The tone in which he concluded suggested keen regret, and Wannop laughed.

"Andrew is probably mistaken in what he alleges," Leonard said.

"I'll give you a few figures." Andrew read from a notebook particulars of the wages paid by Mappin as compared with other contractors. "I have seen the rest of the things; there can be no doubt about them. I presume Leonard was ignorant of the contractor's character and the methods he employs."

Andrew stopped, having scored a point. Leonard could not profess a knowledge of Mappin's doings, although to admit his ignorance of them was to acknowledge his antagonist's superiority.

"It seems that I have been somewhat mistaken about the man," he said.

"Now that you have been informed, you cannot feel that we ought still to entrust our work to him?"

Wannop gave Andrew an approving smile, recognizing that he had taken a very judicious line. Leonard must respect the opinions of the others, and he knew that they would not sanction anything flagrantly unjust and discreditable. [Pg 250]

"No," he conceded; "not in a general way. At the same time, sudden and severe changes should be avoided. The man is carrying out his duties efficiently and economically."

"I think not," said Andrew. "I'll have to tax your patience with some more figures. They show that we could do the work cheaper without wronging anybody we employ."

Opening his notebook, he supported his claim, and there was a brief silence when he had finished. Then Florence broke in angrily.

"As a shareholder in my own right, I am entitled to speak. Leonard was satisfied with the arrangements, and you all know his long experience and business ability. It's absurd that Andrew should presume to question what Leonard has done. His judgment cannot be as good."

"That is obvious," Mrs. Fenwood said.

Andrew realized that his relatives' prejudices had still to be reckoned with. In their eyes he was a rash beginner, liable to be misled.

"I spent some time on the spot, investigating things," he reminded them. "You have heard our contractor's charges, and I have given you the cost of cutting rock and supplying props at regulation wages. Is Leonard inclined to challenge the figures?"

"After all," said Leonard, "the subject is not of the first importance. It is more serious that you have taken upon yourself to reduce the output of the mine."

"It is undoubtedly a grave matter. Unfortunately, there seems to be no prospect of the mine's paying."

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The announcement caused some sensation, but while the others looked at him in surprise and concern, Leonard flushed.

"There is a risk in jumping to conclusions!" he said. "The all-round quality of the ore can only be proved by extensive working, and you must be aware that to increase the quantity of the output reduces the cost per ton!"

"That is a maxim which requires some thinking over," Wannop observed. "To begin with, I don't see how you can cut down the cost when you have a good deal of the work done by a contractor at a fixed price. Then if there's a loss on every ton, it puzzles an outsider like myself to understand how you expect to make a profit by producing a very large quantity."

"I'm afraid it would take me some time and trouble to explain the thing," Leonard said with a polished sneer.

"There's no doubt you'd find it difficult," Wannop retorted.

"Are we to understand that there will be no dividends?" Mrs. Fenwood interposed, in alarm. "If so, I feel that I have been cruelly deceived. I was promised a handsome profit in the prospectus."

"I have much the same feeling," said Robert Allinson. "The matter is one of importance to me. My stipend is not large; the expenses which my work in this parish entails are heavy. I bought the shares because I expected they would pay."

"It's the usual reason for buying shares; but investors are disappointed now and then," Wannop said genially.

"You took a business hazard, Robert, as did Mrs. Fenwood," Leonard contended. "Even if our Canadian prospects were as bad as Andrew imagines, which I do not admit, you would have no grievance."

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"You're mistaken!" exclaimed Mrs. Fenwood. "I have heard that mining shares are risky, but I had every reason to believe that Allinson's never took up anything that was not perfectly sound."

"That was true, until recently," Andrew said quietly, looking steadily at his brother-in-law. "I think I may say that it will again be the rule in the future."

Leonard smiled and turned to the others.

"I agree with Andrew, but I must suggest more caution on his part. After careful investigations in Canada, I made arrangements for the working of the new company. Everything promised well, there was no prospect of any difficulty, and I must confess to some astonishment when Andrew told me we were threatened by serious trouble. If he is right, I feel that he is to some extent responsible. In his inexperience, he has, I fear, acted with more zeal than discretion."

"It's the only conclusion one can come to," Mrs. Fenwood remarked severely.

"Is it seriously suggested that Andrew's inexperience has had some effect on the nature of the rock we are working?" Wannop inquired.

"After all," continued Leonard, "I think I may say that there is no cause for alarm. If the mining is proceeded with on the lines I laid down and no rash experiments are made, we shall no doubt presently reach excellent ore. I must deprecate the undertaking of any new ventures such as Andrew seems to have in view."

The listeners showed relief. One or two questions were asked, and Leonard, feeling that he was getting the better of the situation, went on gravely.

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"His favorite scheme, I understand, is the exploitation of a lode far to the north, which was discovered by a sawmill clerk twenty years ago; though in the place where he lives the thing is looked on as a delusion of the man's. Indeed, it is said that he is crazy on the subject. It strikes me as highly injudicious that the Company's capital should be wasted upon a search for imaginary minerals."

"I will engage that not a penny shall be unprofitably spent," said Andrew. "If the thing prove a failure, I will bear the expense."

No one spoke for a few moments, and then Robert looked up.

"I feel that we are entitled to ask for a few particulars," he said.

"There we must disagree," Andrew replied. "If I am right about the lode, you and the other shareholders will be told all you wish to know; if I am wrong, the loss will be mine."

They were puzzled by his resolute air. He was placing himself at a disadvantage by refusing an explanation, but this did not seem to trouble him. He had all along adopted a strangely masterful tone, without a hint of doubt or hesitation.

"I hardly think you are treating us fairly by keeping us in the dark," Robert protested.

Andrew smiled.



"Then I must ask your forbearance. I was given full authority as a director when I went to Canada, and I must try to use it as I think best for the shareholders' benefit. Moreover, it cannot be rescinded until the next general meeting of the Company. When that is held, I shall be ready to give an account of what I have done."

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"Then it looks as if we had been brought here for nothing," Mrs. Fenwood complained.

"Hardly so. You have learned that the mine cannot be profitably worked on the present system and that I am making changes which may improve the Company's prospects. You have had an opportunity for condemning my policy, which you have not done. I venture to believe you are reserving your judgment, which is all I can ask."

There was a pause for the next few moments. Andrew had changed his tone to one of grave appeal, and as he leaned back, waiting, with the light of the candles on his face, it struck one or two of them that he looked very much like his father, who had retrieved and added to the fortunes of the firm. Robert glanced at him in frank sympathy, which touched Andrew, for he had not expected it. Then Leonard broke the silence.

"Andrew is asking you to trust him with extensive powers; in fact, he demands something of the nature of a blank check, without explaining what use he means to make of it. I willingly admit that the position he holds by right is a strong one, and we have no direct means of restraining him; his interest in the firm gives him more authority than any of us individually holds. For all that, it must be remembered that he could not stand against the unanimous family vote, and I have no doubt he will agree that you are now called upon to act as a kind of informal jury. Whatever course you decide on the directors must adopt. Your position is accordingly a serious and important one. Andrew is young and inexperienced; the affairs of a Company like the Rain Bluff demand careful and skilful handling."

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"Leonard has stated the situation fairly. I have nothing to add," Andrew said quietly.

His relatives hesitated, looking irresolute, with the exception of Florence and Mrs. Fenwood, who regarded Andrew with distrustful severity. After a few moments Wannop addressed them.

"My suggestion is that we do nothing at present, but wait, as Andrew asks, until a meeting of the shareholders is held, when he must give a full account of his plans. Then we will see our course more clearly; but if he finds he can take us into his confidence sooner, so much the better."

Florence and Mrs. Fenwood dissented, but the others acquiesced, including Leonard, who knew how far it was prudent to go, and the party broke up. Andrew, however, remained in his place, and Leonard lingered to light a cigarette.

"I must congratulate you," he said. "You handled the thing better than one could have anticipated. I suppose you are going back shortly, to look for the lode?"

"I am going back. I cannot tell you what I shall do until I arrive."

Leonard winced.

"You're not disposed to be confidential, but I won't complain of that." He added quietly: "Be careful, Andrew; it's easy to make trouble, and hard to put it right. You haven't accomplished much yet, and there are serious difficulties ahead."

"That's true," admitted Andrew with a direct glance. "I am, however, not making trouble. It's all round me and must be grappled with."

"Then I wish you luck," said Leonard, and went out.

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Andrew lighted a cigar; he deeply distrusted Leonard, whose confederate, perhaps with his knowledge, had plotted to starve him to death; it was irksome that he should be forced to treat the man as an honored guest. Of late he had been subject to fits of savage anger as he remembered how his attempt to find the lode was thwarted. So far as it was possible, he must play out the game correctly in accordance with conventional rules. His relatives would insist on this; an outbreak would shock them and cost him their support. Nevertheless, it was hard to dissemble and treat Leonard courteously.

Flinging his cigar into the grate, Andrew rose with a frown. His brother-in-law was right: there was trouble ahead. He had not only Leonard but the unscrupulous Mappin to grapple with.

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## CHAPTER XXV

### A DELICATE POINT

The afternoon was drawing to a close when Andrew, Olcott, and a friend of the latter's, carrying guns and spread out in line, entered a stretch of rough, boggy pasture near the river. Clumps of reeds and rushes grew along the open drains, water gleamed among the grass, and the bare trees on the high bank across the stream stood out sharp and black against a glow of saffron

light. The men were wet to the knees, and a white setter, splashed with mire, trotted in front of them. Murray, Olcott's friend, who was on Andrew's right, sprang across a broad drain and laughed when he alighted.

"Over my boots, but my feet can't get any wetter," he remarked. "I don't know that this is a judicious amusement after being invalidated home from the tropics; but it looks a likely place for a mallard."

Allinson had met Murray for the first time that morning, and noticed that the man, a government official in a West African colony, looked at him rather intently when they were introduced. They had, however, spent a pleasant day, and Andrew was going to Olcott's to dinner.

"I'm afraid the plover will put up any ducks there are about," he said. "They're a nuisance and you're not allowed to shoot them here. It will be bad to keep our line over this rough ground."

Four or five lapwings, screaming shrilly, wheeled in wide circles overhead, showing sharply black and white as the light struck them, and fading into indistinct gray patches as they turned in erratic flight. The men advanced cautiously, searching the ground with eager eyes, and keeping their positions as closely as possible. This was needful for the safety of the party in case a bird got up and crossed their line of march, when the right to first shot would be determined by the code of shooting etiquette. [Pg 258]

Andrew was plodding through a belt of rush with a plover circling close above his head when the setter, after creeping slowly forward for a few paces, suddenly stopped. Then a small gray object sprang up from a drain and Andrew threw his gun to his shoulder. He dropped it the next moment, with a low call to Murray:

"Your bird!"

The snipe had swung a little to the right in its swift flight, swerving in sharp corkscrew twists, and Murray's gun twice flashed. The bird, however, held on and faded against the dusky background of the river bank. Murray stopped and turned to Andrew with a laugh.

"I'm afraid I'm hardly up to snipe," he said. "It's a pity you were generous enough to give me the shot."

"It was yours by right."

"That," Murray disputed, "is an open point. If I had been in your place and could have hit the bird, I wouldn't have let it go. However, if the firing hasn't made them wild, you may get another chance."

The sun had sunk behind the tall bank and the pale yellow light that lingered was confusing when the setter flushed a second snipe, which went away at long range in front of Andrew. During a part of each quick gyration he could not see it, but when it was outlined for a second, black against the light, his gun flashed and the bird fell among the reeds. When the setter had found it Murray looked surprised. [Pg 259]

"Considering the bad light and the distance, it was a remarkably clean shot," he said. "I expected to see that you had hit it with only a stray pellet or two."

"I used the left barrel," Andrew explained, smiling. "It's a half-choke; an old gun. That accounts for the charge hanging together."

"It doesn't account for your killing your bird at a long range with shot which wouldn't spread. But it's getting dark and we've had enough."

They turned back to the nearest road, and an hour or two after reaching home Andrew walked across to Olcott's. Ethel Hillyard was there, and when they went into dinner Murray, sitting next to her, glanced at Andrew near the other end of the table.

"I was out with Mr. Allinson to-day," he said. "As he's a neighbor of yours, I've no doubt you know him pretty well. He struck me as a particularly straight man."

"He is so," declared Ethel warmly. "I don't know a straighter. Still, I don't see how you came to that conclusion by watching his shooting."

"It doesn't seem very obvious," Murray responded with a smile. "However, so far as my experience goes, a man who's scrupulous in one thing is very apt to prove the same in another. When we were out this afternoon, a snipe got up in front of him and he let me have the shot."

"But how does that prove his general honesty?"

"I'm not sure I was entitled to the shot, though as the bird headed slightly toward me there was some doubt about the matter. Allinson gave me the full benefit, though I think he must have known that I would miss." [Pg 260]

"Is it a great sacrifice to give up a shot?"

"A snipe," said Murray, "is very hard to hit, though Allinson showed us afterward that he is capable of bringing one down. Now when you know you can do a difficult thing neatly, it's not easy to refrain."

"Perhaps that's true," Ethel agreed. "No doubt the temptation's stronger when you have an appreciative audience."

"Mine," said Murray, "was too polite to laugh."

Mrs. Olcott asked him a question and they changed the subject, but after dinner Murray found an opportunity for a word with Andrew, whom Olcott had left alone in his smoking-room.

"Perhaps it's hardly correct to talk to you on business here, and I won't press you, but there's some information you may be able to give me," he said.

Andrew looked at the man more carefully than he had hitherto done. Murray's face was thin and rather haggard, but it bore the stamp of authority. His manner was grave but pleasant.

"I am at your service," he replied.

"Then I want to ask about the Rain Bluff mine. A little time ago a stock-jobbing friend told me it ought to turn out a good thing. He said that whatever Allinson's took up could be relied on, and it was clear that he had a high opinion of your house. On the strength of it, I put some money into the venture." He paused with a smile. "Now, you are wondering why a man with means enough to speculate should go to West Africa?"

"Something like that was in my mind."

"Well, I learned that I'd the knack of getting on with primitive peoples; in fact, it's my only talent, and I felt that I had to make use of it. Then it's a mysterious country, that gets hold of one, and perhaps is hardly so bad as it's painted. As a rule, I don't have fever more than half a dozen times a year. What's more to the purpose, part of the money was lately left to me. But I'm getting away from the point."

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Andrew was favorably impressed by the man. They had something in common, for both were imbued with a sense of responsibility. Murray had lightly indicated this, and Andrew knew that West Africa is far from a desirable place to live.

"You have a reason for feeling anxious about those shares?"

"Yes. In my district, the risk of getting permanently disabled by the climate or shot by an ambushed nigger has to be considered. Stipend and pension are small, and I felt that I needed something to fall back on. That was why I bought the Rain Bluff stock. Now my friend tells me that the shares are being quietly sold in small lots, which he seems to think ominous. If you can tell me anything about the matter, I'll be grateful."

Andrew was silent for a minute or two, feeling troubled. He did not pity the regular stock-jobbers and speculators who had bought Rain Bluff stock, for they were accustomed to playing a risky game. It was, however, different with such investors as Murray—men of small means, who had carefully saved something to provide for old age, and women left with just enough to keep them from want. These, he thought, formed a numerous class and demanded his sympathy. They had, no doubt, avoiding ventures which offered a larger return, been influenced by a desire for security, which would seem to be promised by Allinson's connection with the mine.

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"Well," he said at last, "I believe it is true that shares have been parted with by a man who has a say in the management of the company."

"That sounds discouraging. If I sell out, I'll lose three or four shillings on every share."

"Yes; and if others follow your example, it will weaken the Company's position. However, I think you can venture to keep your stock."

"You can't expect me to take the risk of holding, in order to support a concern in which I'm badly disappointed. I must ask you frankly what is wrong at the mine?"

"In strict confidence, I may say that the ore we are working does not promise well."

Murray looked at him in astonishment.

"You are remarkably candid; but you give me a curious reason for holding on to my shares."

"Here's a better one," said Andrew. "We have another mine in view; but whether it turns out rich or not, no holder of Rain Bluff stock shall lose a penny by his confidence in Allinson's."

"Though I don't know much about stock-jobbing, that strikes me as an extraordinary promise."

"I dare say it is," Andrew replied. "I offer you no guarantee; you must use your judgment."

Murray looked up sharply.

"I believe your word is good enough. You have taken a load off my mind, Mr. Allinson. I'll hold those shares. May I add that if my proxy is likely to be of any value at your meetings, you may count on it?"

"Thanks! And now, did I tell you that Olcott promised to bring you out again to-morrow? There's a cover I want to beat and the pheasants ought to be plentiful."

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They went down together and Murray joined Ethel Hillyard in the drawing-room.

"I've had a talk with Mr. Allinson which confirms your opinion of him," he said. "But I must say that he doesn't fit in with my idea of a Company director."

Ethel laughed.

"Andrew's new to the business, and undertook it with reluctance from a sense of duty. For all that, though his ignorance of commercial matters must be a handicap, I expect him to make a success of it."

"One would imagine that a desire to make money is the more usual object, but I think you're right. In fact, you have touched upon a pet idea of mine."

The girl turned and studied him. There was a trace of gravity in his manner, and she understood that he had done with credit difficult and dangerous work.

"What is the idea?" she asked.

"To put it roughly, something like this—more depends on character than specialized training; determination and strong sincerity often carry one farther than a knowledge of the rules of the game. One sees people who rely on the latter come to grief."

"Even in Company floating?"

"That," said Murray, smiling, "is a subject about which I'm ignorant. I was speaking of the general principle."

"Do you mean that right must prevail?"

"I'm sanguine enough to believe it often does in the end."

"One would like to think so. But as we seem to be getting serious, isn't the question whether it prevails or not another matter from an altruistic point of view?"

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Murray pondered this and then looked up with a twinkle.

"So long as I'm not priggish, I don't mind being serious. You see, I'm fresh from the shadowy bush, where life is solemn enough, and when I came home not long ago after a three years' absence I felt strangely out of place. You're at a disadvantage when you can't talk about the latest musical comedy or popular dancer, and it's as bad not to know the favorite for an approaching steeplechase. However, to stick to our subject, I see what you mean. One must do one's work and not worry about the result?"

Olcott was passing and he stopped beside them.

"Murray seems to be moralizing," he laughed. "I must warn you that he spends his evenings in Africa sitting behind a mosquito-netting studying the early Victorian philosophers. It's some excuse for him that when the niggers are quiet he has nothing else to do and nobody to talk to except a colored official."

"Don't you get any newspapers?" Ethel asked.

"They're often too wet and pulpy to read, and now and then the sporting natives bag the mail-carrier. I've known them try to stalk the white officer responsible for too drastic reforms."

Ethel regarded Murray with heightened interest. There was something that both amused and touched her in the thought of the lonely man, shut in by the black, steamy forest, spending his evenings reading philosophy.

"I wonder," she said, "whether you find any practical application of the great thinkers' theories?"

"One old favorite of mine strikes me as rather grim and singularly hard to please; but so far as I can judge, he hits the mark now and then. It's a pet theme of his that only that which stands on justice, and is better than what it displaces, can endure. You see that worked out in a primitive country like West Africa."

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"But isn't the progress of civilization assisted by machine-guns and followed by gin?"

"A fair shot!" laughed Olcott. "Our rule's often faulty, but it's a good deal better than the natives had before. Murray knows a creek that mutilated corpses used to drift down after each big palaver and celebration of Ju-Ju rites."

"I suppose he had some trouble in putting a stop to it?"

Olcott broke into a grim smile.

"One would imagine so, from what I heard of the matter. An army of savages with flintlocks took the bush on the other side; there were about two dozen colored Mohammedan soldiers, a white lieutenant, carried in a hammock because he was too ill to walk, and a civil officer who wasn't authorized to fight, to carry out the reforms. Though it didn't look encouraging at the start, they were effected."

"Ah," said Ethel, "one could be proud of things like that! After all, Mr. Murray's philosopher may be right. It's cheering to find a man ready to put his belief in justice to the test."

"There's one," said Olcott, indicating Andrew. "I shouldn't wonder if it costs him something."

The group broke up and some time later Andrew walked home with Ethel. The distance was not great, the road was dry, and a half moon threw down a silvery light. Thin mist filled the hollows, the murmur of the river rose from a deep valley, and the air was soft.

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"It's very open weather," Ethel remarked. "I suppose it's different in Canada?"

"In the part I'm best acquainted with the thermometer is now registering forty degrees below zero, and it would need a charge of dynamite to break the ice on the lakes."

"Prospecting must be stern work," said Ethel speculatively. "It's curious that you haven't thought it worth while to give me an account of your adventures. Won't you do so?"

"Well, you mustn't blame me if you find them tedious. As a matter of fact, I haven't said much about them to anybody yet."

He began with a few rather involved explanations, but his style became clearer as he followed up the main thread of the tale, and Ethel listened with close interest.

"So it was the Frobishers who saved you by sending off a rescue party!" she exclaimed when he had finished. "But how did they know you were in danger?"

"That's more than I can tell. Of course, we were behind our time, but that doesn't account for all. I've a suspicion that Miss Frobisher had some means of finding out the most serious risk we ran."

Ethel thought this indicated that Geraldine took a marked interest in the man. She wondered if it had occurred to him.

"And you believe the fellow really meant to starve you?" she said.

"He didn't intend us to find the food. It comes to the same thing."

"But his conduct seems so inhuman! Surely, he would not have let you die of hunger with no better reason than to prevent you from interfering with his contract?"

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Andrew hesitated. He could not tell her that Mappin might have been actuated by jealousy; modesty prevented his doing so.

"The fellow is greedy and unscrupulous enough for anything," he replied evasively.

"But you hinted that he was clever," Ethel persisted. "Only a fool would commit a serious crime for a small advantage."

"It's certainly puzzling," Andrew admitted.

Then he was surprised and disconcerted when Ethel turned on him a searching glance.

"Andrew," she said, "the man must have been given a hint by some one more powerful. His is not the strongest interest you are opposed to."

The color crept into Andrew's face. He suspected Leonard, but it was unthinkable that he should declare his brother-in-law's infamy. This was a matter that lay between the culprit and himself.

"It's an unpleasant topic and the fellow's a rascal," he answered. "It's hard to say what might influence such men. They're not quite normal; you can't account for them."

"But you're going back to look for the lode, aren't you?" Ethel laid her hand on his arm. "Be careful; you have had a warning. I suppose you must do what you have fixed your mind on and, knowing you are right, I dare not dissuade you."

"I'll run no risks that can be avoided and, in particular, trust no outsider to look after the supplies for our next trip," Andrew said grimly. "One experience like the last is enough."

For a few minutes they walked on in silence. Ethel knew her companion's character and admired it; and now she had met Murray, who in some respects resembled him, as did Olcott. All were men of action, and there was the same indefinite but recognizable stamp on them. They were direct, simple in a sense which did not imply foolishness, free from petty assumption and incapable of suave diplomacy; but one could rely on them in time of stress. Leonard was a good example of the opposite type; but she found the other more pleasant to think about. When she reached the gate she gave Andrew her hand.

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"You know you have my good wishes," she said.

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## CHAPTER XXVI

### A SUSPICIOUS STRANGER

Andrew returned to Canada satisfied with his English visit. He had not convinced his relatives that his judgment was entirely to be trusted, but he knew that he stood higher in their esteem

than he had done; and that was something to be thankful for. Leonard, he thought, would find it more difficult to prejudice them against his plans. On reaching the Lake of Shadows, he found Graham recovering and learned that the Frobishers had left for their home in Denver. After remaining a few days at the Landing he went up to the mine, where the ore showed no sign of improvement. For all that, he spent a month there, waiting until the thaw came and maturing his plans for his second journey to Dream Mine.

At last the rotting ice began to yield, and Andrew sat outside Watson's shack one day, watching an impressive spectacle. The river broke up with violence, the ice ripping and rending with a sound like the roar of artillery, and as the great torn masses swept away, the water pent up in the higher reaches poured into the gorge, swollen with melting snow. It rolled by in savage flood, laden with tremendous blocks of ice, some of which, cemented together near falls and rapids, were the size of small frame houses. Among them drove huge floes into which the floating cakes had solidified during the earlier frosts. Here and there one stranded upon a point, or swung in an eddy, until another crashed into it and both were shattered amid a bewildering uproar. Then, for a while, the stream was filled with massive, driving sheets of ice, which ground the banks with a tremendous din and scored the tops of projecting boulders, while waterlogged pines and stumps sunk in the river-bed were crushed to pulp.

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Andrew had never seen any display of natural forces to equal this, and when he went into the shack for supper he found that he could not get the recollection of it out of his mind. The lonely North is a savage country, very grim and terrible in some of its moods. Andrew, however, had carefully considered and endeavored to guard against its dangers, and when a canoe which had been especially built for him in Toronto arrived, he set out on his journey with Carnally and Graham. There was now no risk of frostbite and the gray trout would help out their food supply, but they knew the trip would cost them much exhausting labor.

For some days they poled and paddled up the swollen river, spending hours in dragging the canoe and provisions across rocky portages to avoid furious rapids, and often wading waist-deep in icy water with the tracking line. At night they slept, generally wet through, among the stones, though there was often sharp frost and the slack along the bank was covered with fresh ice in the morning; but they made steady progress until the stream broke up into small forks and they must cross the height of land. This was singularly toilsome work. In some places they were forced to hew a path through scrub spruce bush; in others there were slippery rocks to be scrambled across, while two in turn carried the canoe, borne upside-down upon the shoulders. Then there were the provisions to be brought up, and in relaying them each difficult stage had to be traversed several times, so that once or twice, when they had made only a mile or two in an exhausting day, Andrew almost despaired of getting any farther.

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At last, however, they found a creek rushing tumultuously down the back of the divide. They followed it, one of them checking the canoe by the tracking line while the others kept her off the rocks with pole and paddle. Their provisions were secured, so far as possible, from damage by water, but there was danger of losing them in a capsize, and boiling eddies and roaring rapids made caution needful. For a while the creek led them roughly where they wished to go, and then turned off, and they crossed a high ridge in search of another. Lakes and rivers abound in those wilds, which are almost impassable on foot during the short summer. As they worked north the sun grew warmer, but the temperature fell sharply at night, and now and then the waste was swept by piercing winds.

One of these was raging when they scudded down a lake on a cold and lowering evening. Gray vapor blurred the rocky shore, but here and there a few dark pines stood out, harshly distinct. The water was leaden-colored between the lines of foam, and short, slashing seas broke angrily about the canoe, which ran before them with a small lugsail set. Carnally knelt astern, holding the steering paddle; Andrew lay down amidships, out of the wind; and Graham, crouching forward, fixed his eyes ahead.

"There seems to be a creek abreast of us," Carnally said. "We're in shoaling water; watch out for snags."

A violent gust struck them and the canoe drove on furiously, lifting her bows on a foaming ridge while the water lapped level with her stern.

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"Shoot her up!" Graham called out sharply. "Log right ahead!"

Andrew seized the sheet and Carnally plied the paddle; but the warning had come too late. While the canoe slanted over until her lee side was under water as she altered her course, there was a sharp crash. Her speed slackened for a moment or two. Then she lifted as a white wave surged by; and when she drove on again the water poured in through a rent in her side.

"Can't be kept under by baling," Carnally remarked. "We'll have to put her on the wind and make the beach."

He hauled the sheet, but she would not bear the pressure when she brought the wind abeam, and seeing the water pouring in over her lowered side, Carnally let her fall off again.

"Looks as if we had to keep her running," he said.

"The end of the lake can't be far off and the water's too rough to do much with the paddle."

They scudded on, Andrew and Graham baling as fast as possible, while the rising water gained on

them, until blurred trees and rocks began to grow out of the haze ahead. Then as a strip of beach became distinguishable they lowered the sail, and soon afterward jumped over and carried her out across the jagged driftwood that hammered on the pebbles. There was a small promontory near at hand, and Carnally walked across it while the others made camp. Supper was ready when he returned, and after the meal was finished he lay down near the fire.

"The canoe wants a patch on her bilge," he said. "Could you sew on a bit of the thin cedar with the copper wire, Graham? There's some caulking gum in the green can."

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"It would take me a day to make a neat job."

"No hurry," replied Carnally. "The outlet from the lake's just beyond that rise and it looks pretty good. When you have finished the canoe, you and Andrew could take her down and wait for me where the creek runs into the river we're looking for."

"It would be hard work at the portages. But why aren't you coming with us?" Andrew asked.

"I ought to make the creek where Mappin cached the first lot of stores for our other trip in about two days' march."

"We have enough without them."

"That's so. Anyhow, I want to look at the cache. Stores are a consideration on a trip like this; the less you have to pack over the portages, the quicker you can travel. Though we didn't find it, Mappin knows where the cache was made."

"I don't see the drift of this," Andrew said.

Carnally smiled.

"Hasn't it struck you that we might be followed? Sending up the canoe and camp truck would show the people at the Landing that we were ready to start, and Mappin knows our line roughly as far as the cache. You can't make camp and haul across brush portages without leaving a trail."

"Ah! That makes one think. Of course, we would have no legal claim to the lode unless we got our stakes in before anybody else."

"It's not enough. You have to get back to a government office and file your record before you're safe. Well, considering everything, I guess I'll start for the cache at sun-up."

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The others agreed to this and after he left the next morning they set to work on the canoe and repaired her satisfactorily. Then they launched her on the outflowing stream and a few days later made camp on the bank of a larger river, where they sat beside their fire late at night. The gorge was filled with the clamor of rushing water, but the night was very still, and they could hear sounds in the bush through the deep-toned roar of the flood. Outside the glow of the fire, which fell on the straight spruce trunks, there was nothing to be seen; but they sat listening, for Carnally had been longer than he expected and Andrew was anxious.

At last, Graham raised his hand.

"I heard something!"

Andrew turned his head, but for a while could hear only the hoarse turmoil of the river. Then he started as a faint crackle came out of the shadows. It rose again, more clearly, and presently a man's dark shape emerged from the gloom. A few moments later Carnally threw off his pack and sat down by the fire, his boots badly ripped and his clothing tattered.

"I struck some pretty rough country," he explained. "The creek winds a lot and I came across the range."

"Did you find the cache?" Andrew asked.

"Sure! It had been opened not long before and provisions taken out."

Graham moved abruptly.

"I suppose the things couldn't have been taken by Indians?"

"No, sir! Indians would have cleaned out the whole lot. Whoever found the cache left some food to pick up when coming back. There were three or four white men in the party; I learned that when I struck their empty camp. Looks as if the hog was still getting after us."

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"I'm afraid so," said Andrew, frowning. "What's to be done to shake off his men?"

"The fellows were heading down-stream, and I guess they'd hold on until they struck this river, where they'd make a base camp and look for our trail. Well, instead of keeping to the water, as they'd expect, we'll strike across the divide, though it will be an awkward traverse."

His companions approved the plan, and the next day they found a spot where smooth rocky slabs dropped gently to the water. Here they took off their boots, to avoid leaving tell-tale scratches, and then they hauled out the canoe. They were able to carry her some distance before they met with much brush, and when they had brought up the provisions, Carnally looked about with a satisfied air.

"This wouldn't strike one as an easy place to portage across, and the stream runs smartly past the stones we landed on," he chuckled. "I guess Mappin's boys will go straight on, and it may be some time before they get suspicious."

His opinion was reassuring, as far as it went, but Andrew felt daunted as he studied the rise ahead. The ravines were filled with brushwood, the spurs clothed with spruce, and he failed to see how the canoe was to be conveyed to the top. It must, however, be tried, and they set to work, laboriously carrying her up the steep slopes, a few yards at a time, until they reached a gully choked with brush, where progress became almost impossible. They were forced to drag her through thick bushes, stopping every two or three minutes for breath, while on the steeper pitches they buried knees and toes in the gravel as they passed her from hand to hand. The light was fading when they reached the crest, exhausted, and it cost Andrew a determined effort to go back some distance with Carnally for the provisions. Indeed, it was only hunger forced him to do so.

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The nights had been getting lighter rapidly, but the soft dimness was puzzling when the two men faced the ascent. They could not judge the steepness of the slope; they plunged into bushes they had not noticed, and there were spots where they narrowly escaped dangerous falls. Slipping, scrambling, floundering, Andrew struggled up with his load, and sank down, worn out and aching, beside Graham's fire.

"You'll have to cook; I can't make another move," he said. "It strikes me that the man who finds a mine in this country deserves all he gets. That raises the question—how is it that Mappin can trust the rascals he has sent after us? Suppose they found the lode, why couldn't they stick to it?"

"A mineral vein is of little use to a man without money," Graham explained. "It would cost him a good deal in transport of provisions and tools before he got his legal development work done; and then he wouldn't be much farther on, because he'd have to put up expensive plant and clear a trail to bring the ore out. As a matter of fact, the fortunate prospector is forced to look for a capitalist."

"That," remarked Carnally, "is how we are fixed. You needn't worry about our going back on you."

"Rot!" said Andrew. "You know I'd trust either of you with my last penny!"

"It's your trouble that you're a confiding man. But I guess you have learned that it doesn't pay to take any chances when you deal with Mappin."

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"I'm convinced of it. One experience of his tricks is enough."

"I'll confess it wasn't enough for me. When I'd fired him out of the store I felt so good that I set up drinks for all the thirsty slouches in the hotel; but I made a mistake I've been sorry for ever since. Instead of letting him walk off, I ought to have punched the hog until they had to take him to a Winnipeg hospital. For one thing, it would have saved us portaging over this blamed divide."

The others laughed, and though Andrew admitted that Carnally's methods were primitive, he thought there was some excuse for them. Mappin might be considered an outlaw, against whom any weapons could be used.

They went to sleep soon after supper, and resuming the march the next morning, they spent two arduous days transporting the canoe to the nearest water, and paddled down it, seeing nothing of Mappin's men. The canoe received some damage when running a rapid into a lake and it cost them a day to repair her, though Carnally showed much impatience at the detention. When dusk fell they sat smoking by the fire, for the night was cold. The wild cry of a loon rang at intervals across the palely gleaming water; the resinous smell of the spruces was in the air; and the soft splash of ripples upon the shingle accentuated the stillness.

The loon's call suddenly broke off in the middle, and Carnally got up sharply. A little later he pointed to a dark speck which appeared out on the lake.

"The loon," he commented. "It was in the shadow by the big stone and must have swum a good piece under water. Somebody scared the bird; now it's gone again!"

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The black spot vanished and Carnally stood still in fixed attention while Andrew's heart began to beat quickly. He could hear nothing, but he knew that Carnally was seldom mistaken in matters of this kind. Some minutes passed, and then as footsteps broke the silence, Carnally beckoned Graham to give him a rifle they had brought.

"Come out of the bush so we can see you!" he cried.

A shadowy form appeared against the gleaming water and stopped.

"What do you want?" Carnally asked. "Are you alone?"

"Something to eat," said the stranger. "There's nobody with me."

"One of the Mappin crowd, I guess. Where's the rest of you?"

"I don't know. It's three or four days since I left them."

"Then you can come along. I see you have a gun. If you're wise, you'll keep it at the trail."

"Don't be scared," said the other, advancing, "I'm not looking for trouble."



In a few moments he entered the firelight and stopped at a motion from Carnally—a ragged and very weary man, with a pinched and eager look in his face.

"Now," said Carnally, "what brought you here?"

"I'm starving," the man replied; and Andrew thought his appearance bore it out.

He sat down, with the rifle he had carried across his arm, and Carnally indicated the frying-pan.

"There's a bannock and some pork yonder. It won't take long to warm up, but before you get any, we must have a talk. Why did you leave the rest of Mappin's hobos?" [Pg 279]

"We wrecked our canoe in a rapid and lost all the grub. There was some trouble about it, and when the others turned back to make the cache I allowed I'd follow you. Missed your trail once or twice, but I figured on the line you'd take and picked it up again."

Andrew thought the tale was plausible, and a bruise on the man's face seemed to corroborate it, as it hinted at the reason for his leaving his comrades.

"Will they follow us up?" he asked.

"Can't tell," said the stranger. "They'd be mighty hungry when they made the cache. Anyhow, I'd had enough of them."

"Give him some supper," said Andrew.

Graham put on the frying-pan, and in a few minutes the man fell upon the food ravenously. When he had finished he felt for his pipe and ruefully put it back. Andrew laughed and threw him a pouch of cut tobacco.

"You're white," said the stranger with a curious look.

While he lighted his pipe Carnally, leaning quickly forward, picked up his rifle and flung it into the lake.

"Why did you do that?" the fellow asked in anger.

"You'll have something else to carry and one gun's enough for this crowd," Carnally significantly replied.

"Then you don't mean to fire me out?"

"Oh, no! I guess we'll engage you as packer, but I must speak to the boss first," and Carnally led Andrew a short distance back into the shadow.

"Is it wise to take the rascal with us?" Andrew asked.

"It seems the only thing to do. You don't want him to starve?" [Pg 280]

"Certainly not; but couldn't we give him a few provisions and let him go?"

"If he had a little grub to go on with, he might catch a trout in the shallows or snare something that he could eat. Then he'd either follow us or join his friends and put them on our track. I prefer to have him under our eye."

"But he'll see where the lode is!"

"Sure! I'll take care he does no prospecting. Three claims on the best of the vein will give you all you want to work, and as soon as your record's filed you'll have prospectors coming up by dozens."

"Well," concluded Andrew, "you must do what you think fit."

They went back to the fire, and Carnally turned to the stranger.

"Your engagement begins to-morrow. If you do your work, you'll get your grub, and nothing else." Then he added: "If that doesn't seem good enough, you can quit when you like."

It was, as both recognized, an impossible alternative, because if the fellow left their service he must starve.

"Call it a deal," he said. "You have got me safe."

"That's so," said Carnally. "You want to remember that the moment you give us any cause for suspicion you get fired. Now what about your partners? How long would it take them to make the cache?"

"Two or three days."

"Then they'd have to come back and find our trail. I reckon we're six days ahead, and that ought to be enough. You have a blanket; you can choose your place and sleep when you like."

The man, who was obviously worn out, gathered some spruce twigs and lay down on them, but the others sat a while beside the fire before they followed his example. [Pg 281]

## CHAPTER XXVII

### ANDREW STAKES HIS CLAIM

Soon after daybreak they launched the canoe, and though she was now rather deeply loaded they made good progress down the outflowing creek. When it was necessary for one to wade and check her with the tracking line, their new companion was allotted the task, and at the portages Carnally took care to give him the heaviest load. Though it was obvious that he had not recovered from his long, forced march, he seemed a good-humored rascal and resigned himself to the situation philosophically.

In the afternoon they came to a rapid and spent some time hauling the canoe round it, and then they went back for the stores. Turner, as the newcomer was called, was first despatched with a load which contained nothing eatable, and Andrew was the last to set off. Dark spruces on the high bank cut off the wind, the sun was very hot, and the perspiration dripped from Andrew as he floundered across the stones. They were large and uneven, and he had to proceed cautiously to save himself from falling into the hollows between. Graham and Carnally were some distance ahead, but after a while he overtook Turner, who was moving slowly. Shortly before Andrew came up the man dropped the things he carried and turned with signs of distress in his hot face.

"I'm not trying to kick," he said. "Guess you've got a pull on me and I have to work, but I'm a bit played out yet, and your partner piled more weight on me than I can stand." [Pg 283]

"Stop and take a smoke," said Andrew, handing him his tobacco pouch. "I don't feel very fresh, but I could carry those blankets. Let me have them."

"I'll have to do that or leave them. It was a tough march I made with nothing to eat." He filled his pipe before he resumed: "There's no meanness in you."

"Never mind that. What was Mappin to give you for this job?"

"Three dollars a day while I was out on it. Four hundred dollars when I'd staked the claim, if the specimens assayed right."

"But how could he tell whether you would do the square thing by him?"

Turner grinned.

"It wouldn't be safe to do anything else. Supposing I'd gone round, looking for another buyer, he'd have had me doped or sandbagged before I'd made the sale. You can't fool Mappin. You have to put your job through when you deal with him."

"It seems to me that you haven't made a success of this particular business," Andrew remarked.

"I certainly haven't," the other admitted with a rueful air. "Your partner has me fixed—he's a smart man. There'll be no three dollars a day for mine when I go home."

"You have struck bad luck," said Andrew with a smile. "I'm not sure you don't deserve it, but that's another matter. And now give me the blankets: we'll take the things along."

They went on, and when they reached the next wild stream where tracking was necessary Andrew got into the water. Turner gave him a grateful glance, but he afterward did his share of the heaviest work, and when they made camp in the evening he soon went to sleep. When the firelight, leaping up, fell on his shadowy form, Carnally chuckled. [Pg 284]

"A handy man; he's going to save us a lot of trouble, and we got him cheap."

"He's a bit of a rogue, and claim-jumping isn't a creditable profession," Andrew replied. "Still, I don't think we ought to take too much advantage of the fellow's necessity. After all, he's only a tool. It's his employer who's really responsible."

"Just so," Graham agreed. "The pity is that he should find men willing to do his dirty work on very moderate pay; but there's no lack of them. There are men you can only dynamite out of the mire, because if you pull them out by gentler means they crawl straight back again. It's unfortunate, because you meet some with a few likable qualities; I think our new packer is one of these."

"Their trouble generally begins when they get into the clutches of such a hog as we're up against," Carnally said. "He knows how to handle them and it needs some grit to break away from him. We'll get Turner to tell us some of his claim-jumping experiences to-morrow night. You'll find them interesting."

Supper was finished and they were sitting in camp after a hard day's toil when Carnally cleverly drew the packer out. He was not unwilling and, warming to his subject, recounted incidents that filled Andrew with surprise and disgust. Sitting in the shadow with his eyes fixed on the ragged adventurer, he heard how small sawmill owners had been jockeyed out of the timber leases they were not rich enough to defend; how dams and flumes had been tampered with until their harassed proprietor sold out his water rights; and the means by which impecunious owners of minerals had been robbed of their claims. Turner occasionally chuckled over the memory of some roguish trick, but, for the most part, his manner was impressively matter-of-fact. Andrew did not think he was drawing much upon his imagination; but it seemed incredible that such things should be done without the men who plotted them and reaped the benefit incurring general [Pg 285]

odium. After Turner had strolled away, he said something of the kind to Graham.

"The point is," Graham explained, "the low-down rascals who are used as tools aren't talk where they'll be heard, and nobody attaches much importance to what is said in third-rate saloons. Respectable people don't ask too many questions when they see a prospect of dividends; there may be something not quite straight, but so long as it's well hidden, they don't want to know. Still, I'll say this: if you put the ugly facts square before them, they'll quite often act, even if they have to make some sacrifice to set matters right."

"Yes," assented Andrew; "I believe that's true. There's a reason why I find it encouraging."

"Now we'll talk of something else," Carnally interposed. "It's my opinion that we ought to leave the water soon, perhaps to-morrow, and push straight across the last height of land for the lode. We want to keep well ahead of the Mappin boys."

They discussed it until they went to sleep, and the next day they carried the canoe some distance back from the river and carefully hid her in the brush. Farther on they cached part of their stores, and then plunged into a desolate, stony waste. Their journey across it proved uneventful, and at length they came down into the hollow where the lode lay. As it was noon, they ate a meal before anything was said; and then Carnally gave Turner a fishing-line with a trolling bait on it.

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"You go back to the last creek we crossed and catch some trout," he ordered. "Stay there until supper, whether you get any or not."

Turner winked.

"If I catch one with this outfit, it will be a mighty silly trout; the thing's made for spinning behind a canoe on a lake. Don't you want help with your prospecting? I know something about minerals."

"So do we," Carnally replied. "I'd rather hear that you were fond of fishing, because you're going to get a good deal of it. Every day we're here you'll light out after breakfast and not come back till dark. If we see you from the camp, we'll fire you on the spot."

"I understand," said Turner. "Guess I'll stay out. I've no use for taking the trail without any grub."

He left them and Carnally turned to Graham.

"We must get our prospecting done before the Mappin gang arrives, and the sooner we start the better. We'll begin where we fired the shot last time, and follow up the vein."

It proved to be fairly well defined when they set to work with the light tools they had brought, and their task was rendered easier because the small but rapid creek had exposed the strata in scouring out its channel. In some places they picked a hole, in others they fired a charge of giant-powder, carefully separating the specimens they obtained; and when evening came they sat in camp, examining several heaps of stones.

"They're promising," said Graham. "The weight is a good rough test, and though it doesn't tell us much about the proportion of lead to silver, I can find out something about that to-morrow. Jake, you might pound this handful of stuff as fine as you can."

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He opened a small box which he had taken great care of during the journey, and Andrew was surprised to see it contained a delicate balance and several phials.

"I didn't know you were an assayer," he said.

"I'm not," Graham answered, smiling. "But you must remember that for twenty years I've clung to the idea that I might find the lode, and perhaps it isn't astonishing that I should try to learn something about minerals and chemistry. In fact, it's been my only recreation; but I didn't bring this outfit last trip because the frost would have prevented my making much use of it."

There was something that touched Andrew in the thought of the sawmill clerk, patiently discharging his monotonous duties year after year and preparing himself for the search which was the great object of his life, though he knew he might never be able to make it. It was, however, obvious that he had studied to some purpose, because he had shown skill in tracing the vein, and Andrew had noticed that Carnally, who knew a good deal about minerals, deferred to him.

"I was lucky in getting hold of you and Jake," he said.

Soon afterward Turner appeared with one trout, which he confessed he had caught with his hands, and Graham carefully put away the box and specimens.

They began again at sunrise and worked with determined activity. Before noon it grew very hot; there was no wind in the sheltered basin, and the smell of the scattered spruces filled the listless air. By degrees the men stripped off most of their clothing, and the strong sun burned Andrew's bare arms and neck as he swung the pick. They stopped only a few minutes for dinner, and continued with no slackening of exertion until the shadows of the rocks covered the hollow. Then Andrew, throwing down his tools, glanced with a curious satisfaction at the pile of stones which marked the course of the vein. He had accomplished something that day; the result of his toil could be seen.

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"You look pleased," Carnally commented.

"I feel so," declared Andrew. "We haven't improved the appearance of the place from an artistic point of view; but I don't know when I felt so content with what I've done. I used to feel proud when I'd helped to fill the game cart at home; but this is different. Somehow it's more bracing."

"I understand; though I'm not much of a sport and when I work it isn't for fun."

Andrew slept as soon as he lay down on his bed of spruce twigs, and awakened, fresh and sanguine, ready for another day's determined toil. There was something strangely exhilarating in the resin-scented air; Andrew felt vigorous and cheerful. Graham had expressed his satisfaction with the rough tests he had made, and the more they exposed the reef the better the ore looked. It would undoubtedly pay for working and might yield a handsome profit, and Andrew felt that the first half of the battle had been won. The other half would no doubt entail some stubborn fighting, but he looked forward to it with new courage. He had proved his ability and gained confidence in himself; it was no longer a forlorn hope he was leading. He would meet his cunning antagonist on fairly equal terms. [Pg 289]

Apart from all this, he found a keen pleasure in his work. It was good to get up in the bracing cold of dawn and smell the aromatic wood smoke as he renewed the fire. He had never enjoyed his breakfast as he did in the desolate North; there was satisfaction in using the drill with a dexterity he had painfully acquired. He could bring down the hammer squarely upon the head of the tool, and swing the pick all day with delight in the strength of his muscles instead of exhaustion. It was gratifying to find that he had chosen the right line of cleavage in the stone when the great fragments leaped up through the vapor of the exploding charge. Judgment as well as strength was needed in these things—all were worth doing and made for health and tranquillity of mind.

Turner seemed to recognize that Carnally was not to be trifled with. He gave them no trouble, remaining away until the day's work was done. Then as they lounged about the fire in the sharp cold of the evening, he told stories, amusing and grim, and Andrew listened, divided between admiration of the man's ingenuity and daring, and disgust at his frank rascality.

When the claims had been carefully staked and the last evening came, Andrew was sensible of a keen regret. He had been happy in the wilderness, and it was hardly probable that he would use the pick and drill again. Henceforward his duty would lie in a different sphere; it was the last time he would lie down in soil-stained clothes, healthily tired after a day of bodily labor. The air was wonderfully clear; scattered spruces and towering rocks stood out with sharp distinctness against a glow of transcendental green. The smoke of the fire rose straight up; the splash of the creek came musically out of the shadow. [Pg 290]

"I think we're all ready to start south at sunrise," Graham said presently, and looked at Turner. "Can you guess why your partners haven't turned up?"

"No," answered the man. "I'll allow that I've been expecting them the last day or two. Perhaps they couldn't strike your trail, and there's a chance that when they made the cache, starving, they found there wouldn't be grub enough to take them up and down."

"It's possible," said Andrew, and looked at the others. "Though I think we've staked off the best of the vein, it seems a pity that you couldn't secure some of the rest."

"It can't well be done," Carnally explained. "A man can locate only one claim on the same lode; but if the ore pans out as good as it looks, I'll be content with the terms you promised me."

"I'm the one who's got left," Turner broke in. "I've packed your truck and done your hardest work, and don't get five cents for it. It wouldn't rob you if you let me stake a claim."

"The difficulty is that you'd have to sell it to Mappin," Andrew reminded him.

"That's so," Turner admitted. "If I tried to go back on that man, it would be the worse for me. The way I'm fixed is mighty rough."

"You got your grub," said Graham; "you ran a big risk of being left to starve; and you might have got shot. It strikes me you had better quit Mappin's service and try how honesty pays."

They left camp at sunrise and met with no misadventures on their journey south. It was nearly completed and they expected to reach the mine in a few more days when Carnally called Turner as he was loading the canoe one morning. [Pg 291]

"You can let up on that job. We won't want you any more," he said bluntly.

Turner looked at him dismally.

"Are you going to fire me here?"

"You've hit it," said Carnally. "We'll give you grub for two meals, and if you hustle you ought to make the camp back at the awkward portage by noon to-morrow. You'll find a cache with provisions that should last you to the mine by the water's edge. As I'll give Watson orders you're not to have a canoe, we should be down at the settlement a week before you get there."

"Well," Turner acquiesced, "I guess it's no use grumbling."

He was leaving the camp when Andrew called to him.

"Though I suppose you would have jumped our claim without hesitation, I don't want to be too hard, and we have found you a useful help. If you will call on me at the Landing, I think I can promise you three dollars for every day you have been with us. But it's conditional on your playing no tricks!"

"Your partner doesn't leave me many chances," Turner grinned.

They launched the canoe and were paddling down-stream when Carnally alluded to the matter.

"I don't know that the fellow could make trouble for us; but he's safer up here until we get our records filed," he said.

Then he swung his paddle and the canoe drove faster toward a rapid.

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## CHAPTER XXVIII

### GERALDINE

On reaching the Landing Andrew learned that Frobisher had returned and he rowed across to visit him. It was evening when he disembarked at the little pier. Geraldine came down across the lawn, and Andrew's heart beat fast as he watched her. She was wonderfully graceful, he thought, her white summer dress and light hat became her, there was a tinge of color in her face, and she was obviously eager to hear his news. She gave him a quick glance before they met, and then smiled in cordial welcome, for the man's expression was suggestive. He had lost his strained and anxious look, there was now an assured tranquillity in his bearing; he had not come back disappointed, and, for his sake, she rejoiced at this. Then as she gave him her hand and noticed the eager light in his eyes she grew suddenly disturbed.

"You have been successful; I'm very glad," she said.

"Yes," responded Andrew, holding her hand; "things have gone well with us, but except for the mineral recorder you are the first person I've told the good news to. That strikes me as particularly appropriate."

"Why?"

"I don't suppose I'd ever have found the lode if you hadn't encouraged me. I felt daunted once or twice. Then I ventured to think that you'd be interested."

"I am interested," Geraldine assured him, gently withdrawing her hand. "You needn't doubt that. But won't you come up to the house?"

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Andrew laughed with a trace of awkwardness as he realized that he had been standing at the top of the uncomfortably narrow steps by which one reached the pier.

"It might be better, if you and Mr. Frobisher are not engaged."

"He's writing letters, though I think he'll have finished soon. Wherever he is, he's generally busy; but I can answer for his being glad to see you."

"That's good to hear. I'm heavily in your father's debt; but I'd like to think he's not the only one in the family to feel the pleasure."

Geraldine smiled at him mockingly.

"How delightfully formal, Mr. Allinson! Besides, you seem to need a good deal of assuring."

"A fair shot," Andrew laughed. "I'm afraid, when I'm really in earnest, I'm apt to be stilted; but perhaps it isn't an altogether unusual fault. The correct light touch seems hard to acquire."

"Not stilted; that's too harsh. Now and then you're rather too serious."

Looking at her steadily, he saw amusement in her eyes, but he had not wit enough to read all it covered and he felt slightly chilled. The girl knew his love for her and had thought of him often and anxiously in his absence; but now that he had come back safe and successful she was seized by a strange timidity. She shrank from the drastic change in their relations which his attitude threatened; he must be kept at a distance until she had become more used to the situation.

"It's very possible. Wouldn't it be pleasanter here?" he hinted, as they approached a seat which stood in the shadow of the firs. "We might disturb your father by going in."

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"Yes," Geraldine assented, somewhat dubiously, though the house, which faced the west, was uncomfortably hot.

They sat down and she glanced at him unobtrusively. She was now very cool and free from embarrassment, while the man seemed to be suffering from constraint. Moreover, he looked disappointed, and she felt sorry for him.

"So you found the lode and recorded your claims?" she said. "That must have been a great relief;

but what will you do next?"

Andrew grew impatient. He would have preferred to discuss something more personal than his mining affairs.

"Oh," he exclaimed, "you must have heard enough about the lode to make you tired of it! However, I expect I shall have to go back to England before long."

Geraldine wondered whether the curt announcement was meant to alarm her, and decided that it was not. The man was too modest to make sure of her affection for him. Nevertheless it caused her some concern.

"Will it be a visit, or do you think of staying there?" she asked.

"I can't tell," said Andrew moodily. "If I can get things straightened up, I may come back to the new mine; but I shall not know until I arrive."

"Do you wish to come back?"

"Yes," he answered emphatically, "very much indeed."

"Then you will no doubt find an excuse for doing so. It shouldn't be difficult to a fertile mind."

"Unfortunately, mine often seems to suffer from sterility. It has been subjected to stimulating influences here, and I'll miss them on the other side."

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"If needful, couldn't you take Carnally with you?" Geraldine spoke with a touch of raillery.

"Carnally's useful, as far as he goes, but I'm not sure that he'd be much help in England; and he's not the only person I've, so to speak, come to lean on."

Geraldine regarded him with faint amusement.

"Then perhaps it's better that all outside support should be withdrawn and you learned to stand on your own feet. Don't you think you could do so, if you made an effort?"

"It's possible; I've no doubt I'll have to try. But when it's been generously given, one gets into a habit of looking for help and applause."

"That's unfortunate. Criticism's much more bracing. I'm afraid you haven't had enough of it."

"Haven't I?" said Andrew. "I got nothing else at home, and it's damping to have somebody always ready to point out how much better you might have managed things. If I do any good when I get back it will be because of the encouragement I've had here."

"That's a very poor reason. You ought to do what you intend because you feel it's right."

"No doubt," said Andrew with a stern smile. "Still, you see, it needs a good deal of nerve."

Geraldine mused for a few moments. He had played up to her, as she thought of it, but in his half-humorous manner there had been a touch of gravity, and she knew what her commendation had been worth to him. She was glad that he valued it, but she could not have him guess this, and she shrank from showing too much earnestness.

"Well," she said, "the mail must be sent across to the Landing soon; I'd better tell my father."

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She got up, and a few minutes afterward Frobisher appeared and took Andrew to his smoking-room. When they had talked for a while, Andrew took out a few specimens.

"So far as we were able," he said, "we picked out the best of the lode, but I believe much of the ore is of excellent quality. I brought you these specimens to look at, and the assayer's report on those we sent him after the first trip."

Frobisher examined them with care.

"A good business proposition; this stuff should pay for smelting. I suppose you realize that your knowledge of the locality is valuable?"

"That's what I am coming to. If the thing's in your line, any information I can give you is at your service."

"Ah!" said Frobisher. "Let us understand each other. Do you want to sell?"

"Not to you. We have staked three claims, which is all we can legally hold, and our records were only filed an hour and a half ago. By using my map of our route and a sketch of the vein, you or anybody you may send could reach the spot and have some days for prospecting before anybody else could find it."

"Then you're offering me this out of friendship?"

"Not altogether. I don't forget that you saved us from starving; but apart from that, I'd rather have somebody I know as owner of an adjacent claim. You'll excuse my saying that I can't tolerate Mappin there. I understand it isn't difficult to get up disputes over boundaries and water-rights, and he'd find some means of attacking us."

"You're wise, and I appreciate your generosity. There's every reason to believe you have put me

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on to a good thing. But I'm getting too old to make the journey, and there's no time to be lost. The trouble is to fix on the right men to send, because they'll have to be reliable. I know two or three boys in Colorado who would see the thing through, but it would take a week to bring them here and only a British subject can file a record."

He broke off and sat silent a few moments. "I have it!" he exclaimed. "There's a fellow at the Landing who, I think, would deal honestly; but he must get off with some packers to-morrow. If you'll excuse me, I'll go across."

Andrew went to a writing-table and hastily filled up a sheet of paper; then took a map from his pocket and wrote some directions on the back of it.

"Here's an order on Watson at the mine for any provisions and tools he can supply. It will save your men some transport and that means a quicker journey. Now listen carefully for a minute."

"Thanks," said Frobisher, when he had finished, and left him on the word.

Andrew laughed as he sat down to finish his cigar. The American's promptness was characteristic, and he was glad to feel that he had been of some service to him.

When he went out he found Geraldine on the lawn.

"What have you told my father?" she asked. "He ran past me without speaking and nearly fell into the water as he jumped on board the launch. I can't remember having seen him go so fast."

"Perhaps it's not surprising. I told Mr. Frobisher about the lode and where the best locations were."

"The information ought to be valuable. The ore is rich, isn't it?"

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"I think so, but of course it isn't mine to give away. All I did was to give your father some information which should help him to find it before anybody else. He means to send up a prospecting party at once."

Geraldine pondered this. The man was too modest to make much of the affair, but her father's eager haste had its significance. His judgment on business matters was unusually good, and she had no doubt that the minerals were worth locating. It was, however, more important that Andrew had been able to place him under an obligation, because, in a sense, his power to confer a favor proved his value. She had believed in him from the first, but it was pleasant to feel that others must recognize his merits.

"Well," she said, smiling, "you have made some progress in his esteem. He's inclined to judge people by what they have done, and you have found a rich mine."

"Wouldn't it be fairer to judge them by what they would like to do? It's often better than the other."

"Oh, no! Liking's easy; one often gets no farther. Accomplishment is hard, but it counts."

Strolling to the beach, they found a seat on the pier. There was not a breath of wind and the languid ripples splashed softly on the shingle. Near the land the dark shadow of the pines floated on the glassy water, but farther out it gleamed with silvery light. To the west the black rocks and ragged trees cut sharp against a glow of vivid green. Andrew was silent for a while. Geraldine had quietly checked him whenever he bordered on the sentimental, and it was disconcerting, though he felt that it would be wiser to make no effort to come to closer quarters until she tacitly gave him encouragement.

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"What a beautiful country this is!" he said at length, feeling that the topic was safe.

"Yes," answered Geraldine, "it is beautiful and rugged, very different from your well-cared-for England, and I suppose it gets wilder as you travel north."

"It's the wildness that gets hold of one. I don't know when I was so happy as I was when hauling the canoe over portages, tracking her up rapids, and blowing rocks to bits. There must be a primitive strain in us that shows itself in the waste."

"It may be useful now and then, but indulging it doesn't make for progress. Even our Indians have found that out, and those who still cling to their primitive customs live miserably in skin tepees by catching fish. I dare say any of them could take a canoe up a rapid better than you."

"There's no doubt of that," Andrew responded. "But I don't see your drift."

"One gets impatient now and then with the cult of the physical, which they're so proud of here. It's good in a way, but it doesn't lead to much. For example, you can't continue finding valuable claims, and there must be something for you to do besides drilling holes for dynamite."

"Shooting pheasants is easier," Andrew smiled; "I can't say it's more useful."

"And is there nothing else?"

Andrew grew suddenly thoughtful.

"I'll confess to a hazy idea that if I succeeded in straightening up the Allinson affairs, I'd retire from the business while my laurels were fresh, and turn miner. The claims will need attention,

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and it would be more in my line than the management of the firm."

"You mean you would like it better?"

"I'm beginning to understand." Andrew looked at her gravely. "If anybody else had hinted as much, I'd have felt it was exacting and I was being driven too hard. With you it's different. Once or twice already you have given me the impetus I needed, and you're right now. But if I'm not required by Allinson's why shouldn't I attend to the claims?"

Looking up he saw the launch, which had rounded a neighboring islet, heading for the pier, and shortly afterward Frobisher joined them.

"I've got everything fixed," he said jubilantly. "Three men will start at sunrise. But you look as if you had been discussing something important. What's it all about?"

"Give us your opinion, Father. Mr. Allinson seems to think he can make a few drastic reforms in his firm, and then leave such matters alone. My idea is that he will find it harder than he expected."

Frobisher laughed with quiet amusement.

"Mr. Allinson has still a good deal to learn and I'm afraid he's much mistaken in this matter." He turned to Andrew. "Once you take an active interest in a big business you'll find you can't let go. Instead of your directing the concern, it will come to own and drive you unmercifully hard. For the last ten years I've been trying to take life easier and escape from the pressure of affairs, but I'm still a long way from doing so. In fact, in spite of my good resolutions, it's only an hour since I launched out on another new venture."

"Isn't it largely a matter of temperament?" Andrew asked.

"No doubt; but not quite in the way you think—that is, it's not always a question of making money. If a man has what we'll call the constructive genius, he can't stand and look on when he sees anything that needs to be done. He feels that he must take his coat off and get to work."

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Andrew had an uncomfortable feeling that Geraldine and her father were right. One thing led to another, and he might be drawn irresistibly into a long series of business complications, which was by no means what he had at first contemplated. Nevertheless, if his services were of any value, Allinson's had the first claim on them. He dismissed the matter when Frobisher suggested that they go in to supper. Frobisher was witty, Geraldine charmingly cordial, and it was with regret that Andrew took his leave. Geraldine walked to the pier with him and he noticed a gentleness in her face that set his heart to beating. He thought the soft dusk emphasized her beauty by etherealizing it. When they reached the steps she turned to him with a smile.

"I feel as if I'd presumed too far," she said. "After all, I'm only a girl and younger than you are, which doesn't seem to justify my imposing my half-formed views on you."

"I don't think that matters," returned Andrew. "I believe those views are right."

"Then, though you had better test them thoroughly, you don't feel offended?"

"I am grateful; but there's one point that disturbs me. I shouldn't like to think you were reconciled to the idea of getting rid of me."

Geraldine smiled at him.

"That would be a wrong conclusion. If it's any comfort, we shall miss you; but it isn't such a very long journey from England to the Lake of Shadows. You will find it needful to come over and see how the mines are working now and then."

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"Whether the mines need me or not, I shall come."

She gave him her hand.

"We'll consider it a promise; but you're not going yet, and you needn't neglect us before you start."

When she turned away Andrew got into his canoe and paddled back to the Landing. He had, he felt, been firmly held off at arm's length, but for all that he had noticed faint hints of tenderness in the girl's manner which were highly encouraging, and she undoubtedly took a strong interest in him. He must proceed cautiously and avoid alarming her by being precipitate. That, after all, was the course he preferred, for he was strangely diffident in love.

A day or two later he saw Turner in the bar at the hotel, where several others were lounging; but the man gave him a careless greeting. Andrew went into the lobby and Turner presently sauntered in.

"Can you come down to the beach behind the sawmill dump in a few minutes?" he asked.

Andrew nodded, and when Turner went out he put some bills into his wallet and made for the beach. It was a quiet place, hidden between a rocky head and a bank of sawdust, and Turner was waiting for him.

"I suppose you have come for the money I promised you?" Andrew said.



"That's not the only thing, though I'd be glad to have it."

Andrew counted out several bills.

"I didn't want to be seen talking to you at the hotel," Turner explained. "It mightn't have been safe for me if Mappin got to hear of it. But there's something you ought to know. The boys he sent after you heard about the strike you made when they came down here for grub, and are on the trail again."

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"I don't see how that matters. When Mappin's rascals reach the lode they'll find we have staked off the best, and it looks as if every man about the settlement who can get away is going up to prospect."

"Those fellows," persisted Turner, "are old hands at the game. I don't know their plans, but there's one thing you can depend on—they mean to make trouble. They might shift some of your stakes and then claim that your record wasn't correct, which would give Mappin a chance of getting after you. It takes a smart surveyor to lay out boundaries and frontage in such a way that they can't be questioned. I want to warn you to be on the lookout."

Andrew considered. He knew there was sometimes litigation over mineral claims, and he had to deal with a clever and unscrupulous man.

"I wonder why you told me this?"

"You treated me like a white man," Turner answered with a trace of awkwardness, and then broke into a grin. "Besides, I was getting tired of the business, anyhow; there wasn't a dollar in it for me. Now I guess I'll light out before somebody comes along."

Andrew thanked him, and then went off in search of Carnally, feeling glad that he had treated Turner leniently. The man was a rogue, but he had the virtue of gratitude.

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## CHAPTER XXIX

### THE JUMPERS

The sun was rising when Joe Thorpe made a hasty breakfast with his two companions in their camp beside the lode. He was a logger by profession, though he had an extensive experience in prospecting for timber-rights and minerals. Big Joe was known as an honest man; that was why Frobisher had selected him to stake off a claim, and he had arrived late on the previous night after a forced march.

"We ought to have a clear day or two before the first of the crowd that's following us comes in, but that's all," he said. "We want to get our prospecting done and the best locations picked before the rush begins, and we'll start as soon as you've finished."

"I'll be through in a minute," said one of the others with his mouth full. "It's a pretty fair deal Frobisher made with us and he's not the man to go back on one."

"That's more than I'd say of Mappin," remarked the third of the party. "He's in this somehow, isn't he? What was it Carnally said to you when we were getting ready to start, Joe?"

"Told me to watch out for the Mappin crowd. It seems Mappin's put Scaith, who made the trouble over the Newark timber-rights, on to the job. The fellow's a crook, and two of the others have been mixed up in jumping rows. Now we like Carnally, and he allowed he was on to a good thing in the Allinson claims. Anyhow, Watkins, you've had enough for one man. Let up on the pork and bring along the drill."

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They set to work, and it was late in the afternoon when, stripped to shirt and trousers and dripping with perspiration, Joe stopped for a few moments to look about. Thirty feet behind him the creek swirled furiously around a rocky head, the steep face of which was fumed and scarred by giant-powder. A stake was driven into the crest of the promontory, another could be seen a short distance back, and straggling jack-pines and spruces followed the edge of the bank. The ground had been disturbed all round and was strewn with piles of soil and stones.

"I guess the Allinson outfit know their business," he observed. "It looks a curious way to pitch a claim, but if you come to figure out the thing, it gives them the best frontage they could get. This corner post's just where I'd have put it. If they'd located it a bit to the right, it would have swung their line off the richest stuff. There's no room for us here on pay dirt: we'll move higher up."

He took a few steps forward but stopped suddenly at a sharp crash followed by a puff of vapor that curled up among the rocks ahead. Great fragments leaped out of it, and Joe ran for his life as one large piece that turned over as it sped came toward him. It fell short with a heavy thud and he swung around angrily.

"What in thunder are you firing two sticks for where you weren't told?" he cried.

"Watkins likes a big charge," grinned his companion. "He's surely rough on giant-powder."

The third man came toward them and explained.

"That blamed Allinson corner post shoves us back, and I wanted to see if we could squeeze in a block beside them and keep on the ore, though I guess there's not much use in it. If I was a jumper, I'd shift that stake."

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"You can't do it!" Joe replied promptly. "We're acting square! But when the fumes have cleared, we'll look at what you've got."

The examination confirmed his opinion that they were shut out by the Allinson claim, which must be respected, and they moved farther up the lode. It was dusk when they stopped work, and they spent the following morning digging holes and firing shots before deciding on their locations. These they roughly marked with piles of stones, but there were distances to be carefully measured and bearings verified before their stakes were driven, and while they were getting dinner another party arrived. The men were ragged and weary, and the appearance of several was far from prepossessing.

"There's Scaith and Nepigon Jim," Watkins exclaimed. "Brought four other fellows with them. They're a tough-looking crowd."

The newcomers lighted a fire, and while they prepared a meal their leader strolled across to the other camp. He was a short, wiry man, with keen eyes.

"Well, Joe," he said, "you've been over the ground; what's it like?"

"Pretty good," Joe answered. "The Allinson gang got first pick and we've had the next, but there's plenty pay dirt left. I suppose you're up here for Mappin? You want to keep off our blocks."

"Sure we will," said the other genially. "We'll take a look round after grub and see where we can begin. You got away from the Landing mighty smart."

"We wanted to keep ahead of the crowd. I suppose the boys were getting ready when you left?"

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"They were quitting work all round the settlement; one or two outfits would get off soon after us. We made pretty good time over the Allinson trail. But I guess our dinner's ready."

He moved away and Joe turned to his companions with a meaning glance.

"That's a man who'll want some watching," he warned them.

During the afternoon he and the others drove in their stakes, and there was apparently nothing to prevent their return to record the claims, but Joe declared that he was tired and they would not get far enough before dark to make it worth while to start. Accordingly, they lounged in camp while the newcomers wandered about the neighborhood, testing the ground. It struck Joe as suspicious that they seemed to find it necessary to cross the Allinson claims very frequently. Toward evening the sky grew overcast and rain began to fall, but Joe's camp was sheltered, and when it grew cold after supper they made a bigger fire.

"Some of the boys from the settlement should get through by morning, and they're a straight crowd," Joe said. "We'll take the trail first thing after breakfast."

A raw wind sprang up, the rain got heavier, and dusk fell early; but when the others went to sleep Joe sat up a while. He had done what he had been sent to do and would receive a good reward for it, besides retaining an interest in the claims when Frobisher took them over after the development work had been done. The thought of it excited him, but after a while he laid his blanket in a hollow and went to sleep.

It was, however, not sound sleep, for every now and then he opened his eyes, and at last raised himself to a sitting position and looked about. The fire had burned very low, so that its light did not dazzle him, and he could see the shadowy trunks that ran up into the gloom. Heavy drops fell among the red embers, the wind wailed dolefully about the branches, and he could hear the rain beat upon the stones. Though it was darker than usual, the sky was visible and rocks and trees stood out black against the surrounding obscurity. Knowing that he had a long march before him, Joe felt irritated because of his restlessness; but as he did not feel at all sleepy he lighted his pipe and began to think of his return journey.

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Presently Scaith's camp-fire caught his eye. It was burning brightly, which seemed to indicate that the party had sat up very late or that somebody had risen and thrown on fresh fuel. This struck him as curious, and he watched the flickering glow. Before he had smoked out his pipe he imagined that he saw a blurred figure among the smoke. It vanished, though he did not think the fellow had left the camp. He sat for a few minutes, pondering the matter. Although they had given him no reason for doing so, he suspected Scaith's party and felt uneasy, wishing that the night were clearer. Large objects were faintly distinguishable, but Joe did not think he could see a man except at a very short distance, and the wind among the spruce tops would prevent his hearing footsteps. It was raining very hard, trickles of water ran down the trunks, and cold draughts eddied about him. He would be more comfortable lying down under his blanket but he was troubled by vague suspicions and felt that he must keep watch.

At last he got up and picked his way toward the newly staked claims. The ground was rough and he fell over a heap of stones, but he reflected that the darkness which prevented his seeing anything would also prevent his being seen. He had flung his blanket over his shoulders, and

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though it impeded his movements it kept him drier. He wandered about for some time before he could find the first stake, but it was easier afterward because he knew the line and had only to count his paces. The other posts were all in their proper positions; it looked as if he had wasted his pains, for no attempt had been made to tamper with the boundaries.

This was satisfactory, but Joe did not feel quite at ease. He wished that some of the other parties from the Landing had arrived, because he knew the men, and knew that they would keep a keen lookout for any trickery. Claim-jumping is sternly discountenanced by honest miners, who are apt to deal with the jumpers in a drastic manner. Joe, however, could not delay his departure. The filing of an application form in the recorder's office is the first proof a discoverer of minerals can advance of his right to them.

He stopped a few moments by the last stake, feeling that he could now return to camp, but still irresolute. It would be dark for some time yet and mischief might be on foot. Then it dawned on him that the Allinson claims would be better worth attacking than his, and he moved toward the corner post, which was the key to their position. Their safety was no direct concern of his, and he was getting wet; but Carnally was his friend and Allinson was held in much esteem at the Landing as a just and considerate employer. With difficulty he found the post, which seemed to have been undisturbed; but he felt suspicious and reluctant to leave the spot. Finding a hollow to lee of a rock, he sat down. [Pg 310]

For a while nothing disturbed him. He could hear the creek roaring among the stones below, for the steep edge of the bank was only a few yards away. Scaith's fire glowed in the distance, and the rain blew in sheets past the edge of his shelter. Joe thought he was foolish for waiting, but he stayed. Then all at once a dim figure was outlined against the sky only a few paces from him.

Joe had heard nobody approach and he was startled; but the next moment he became cool and intent. A man was moving toward the Allinson corner post. He had his hands on it when Joe sprang forward. But he was too late to surprise the fellow. Joe closed with him in a savage grapple; but he could not throw him, and glancing sideways at a sound, he saw that he would shortly have to deal with a second enemy. Another man was running hard toward them.

It was obvious that he would be overpowered unless he could disable the fellow he had seized before his confederate arrived; and with a tense effort he drove him backward. Clutching each other, they staggered a few yards through the darkness, until Joe felt the ground slant sharply beneath his feet. Then, using all his force, he flung off his adversary. The man disappeared and there was a splash in the creek below. Then Joe turned breathlessly to meet the other man.

He was near at hand, but, instead of attacking him, the fellow stopped and cried out. This, however, did not trouble Joe, because the shout would bring his companions upon the scene as well as the other party. Moving cautiously in search of clearer ground on which to meet the rush he expected, his foot caught in his blanket, which had fallen off, and he swiftly picked it up. He had hardly done so when the fellow ran at him, and Joe, meeting him with a staggering blow, flung the heavy blanket over his head. He stumbled, unable to see, and Joe, leaping upon him, bore him to the ground. There he had the advantage of being uppermost; and, getting his knee on the other's chest, managed to hold him down. This was satisfactory, so far as it went, but he did not know what to do with his captive, and shouts now broke out in the darkness. The rest of Scaith's friends were evidently coming to the rescue, but he could hear Watkins' voice, and wondered anxiously which would arrive first. [Pg 311]

He spent a minute or two holding the fellow down and thumping him as a hint to keep still, while hurrying footsteps rapidly drew nearer. A voice he did not know reached him, and he remembered that although there was a rifle in camp he was unarmed and, if he stuck to his prisoner, there would be two of his friends to four of Scaith's. That was long odds; it looked as if he must be driven off the field, but he determined to give the other side all the trouble he could.

A moment or two later a man appeared.

"Scaith!" he called, and the fellow under the blanket struggled as if he had heard.

"Quit it!" warned Joe, striking him hard; and then shouted: "Stand off before you get hurt!"

The newcomer stopped, no doubt trying to make out the meaning of what he indistinctly saw, and Joe, hearing two or three more running, did not get up. If the fellow attacked him, he would resist, but he wished to keep his captive out of action as long as possible. They waited, both expecting help, until Watkins and the third of Joe's party came upon the scene. Behind them appeared three others, and both parties paused. In the darkness it was difficult to discover what was going on. [Pg 312]

"Where's our boss?" the first of the strangers asked.

"I can't say," Joe answered. "One of your crowd's in the gulch, and I've another here who'll sure get damaged if he don't keep still. I don't know which is which."

Scaith's friends seemed disconcerted at the news.

"What's to be done about it, Joe?" Watkins broke in.

"Well," said Joe coolly, "I guess we'll give them a chance to quit." He addressed the opposite party. "You had better look for your partner, boys. There'll be no stakes pulled up to-night."

"We can wipe you out!" was the answer. "We've got a gun!"

"So've we," replied Watkins. "I've got something else that will fix you as quick. Get a hustle on; we've no use for jumpers!"

Nobody stirred. Joe knew that he must confine himself to a defensive course; Scaith's was the stronger party, but they were apparently daunted by the loss of their leader.

"You want to be reasonable," argued one. "What we're out for has nothing to do with you. This isn't your claim."

"We're going to watch it," Joe said.

"Run them off!" cried one of the others. "We've talked enough!"

They seemed ready for a rush, and Watkins quickly struck a match in the shelter of his jacket. The next moment a slight hissing became audible and he held up something which emitted small red sparks. [Pg 313]

"I guess you know what this is," he remarked. "The fuse is pretty short and there's a stick of giant-powder at the end of it. You had better quit before I pitch it into the midst of you." He added sharply: "Get up, Joe!"

They were startled by his cold-blooded daring, and though it may have been discharged by accident, a pistol flashed. Then, as Joe sprang to his feet, Watkins yelled in mockery and flung the dynamite cartridge into the air. A train of sparks marked its flight, but the others did not wait, and while Joe and his comrades ran off there was a flash and a detonation.

It was followed by a shout some distance off and a sound of men running hard. Joe called his friends back. It was not Scaith's party he heard: the footsteps were too numerous.

"What's the trouble?" somebody shouted.

"Jumpers!" Joe answered, and turned to his companions. "It's the first of the boys up from the settlement."

In a minute or two the newcomers arrived and Joe explained the matter.

"We were making for your fire when we heard the shot and hastened on our fastest hustle," said one. "Now we'll go along and bounce the blamed jumpers out."

Dawn was breaking when they reached Scaith's camp. They found several men very busy, but they stopped a moment when the party came up.

"You have to get off the ground!" ordered one of the men from the Landing. "The sooner you quit the better for you!"

"We're going," was the sullen answer. "I reckon we know when you've got the best of us." [Pg 314]

"Then," said the other man, "we'll wait till you start—and we won't wait long!"

Shortly afterward Scaith's party took the trail to the south, and as there were six of them Joe concluded that his first assailant had not been seriously damaged by his fall into the ravine. When they had gone, one of the new arrivals turned to Joe.

"Carnally and Graham should be here before night," he said. "They were getting ready to come up when we left. Jake allowed he wanted to be on the ground."

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## **CHAPTER XXX**

### **THE EVE OF BATTLE**

It was evening when the big liner which had left Montreal at daybreak steamed slowly past the ramparts of Quebec, the roar of her whistle echoing among the rocks. The tide which had floated her across the shoals of Lake St. Peter was running low, the great river was unruffled, and Andrew leaned on her saloon-deck rails, watching the city open up as she swung inshore with the slack stream. Behind the wharves and warehouses at the waterside old buildings and loftier modern ones, stores, banks and churches, rose in picturesque confusion, tier above tier, to the heights girdled by Dufferin Avenue, and the huge Frontenac Hotel. It struck him as a beautiful city, viewed from the river, but it bore an exotic stamp. In spite of the sooty smoke of the locomotives and the rattle of steamboat winches, it had a stronger resemblance to the old romantic towns of France than the business centers of essentially modern Canada.

A feeble scream answered the sonorous whistle, and the engines stopped for a few minutes as a tug steamed out from the wharf. She brought a dozen passengers besides a number of mailbags, and when she cast off the screw throbbed again and the liner forged ahead. It was with mixed feelings that Andrew watched the city drop behind and the white thread of Montmorency Falls disappear behind a long green island. Beyond it the river widened, the shores were falling back, [Pg 316]

and dusk was creeping across the oily water. Open sea was still far away, but Andrew felt that he had parted from Canada, and though he was going home with his work successfully done, the thought filled him with wistful regret. In spite of many hardships and difficulties, he had been happy in the northern wilds, and happier with Geraldine by the Lake of Shadows. He meant to come back when he had finished his fight for Allinson's and he thrilled as he wondered how Geraldine would welcome him. She had given him a gracious farewell and her sincere good wishes; but she had with gentle firmness prevented his making any direct appeal. This he determined should not be the same again. When he returned she should hear him out; but there was still much to be done before he could prove his right to claim her, for the possibility of ignominious failure confronted him.

Before the next few weeks had passed he might be beaten and discredited—jeered at as a rash fool who, undertaking a task beyond his powers, had brought disaster upon those he meant to benefit and wrecked an honored firm. But apart from such considerations, he knew that he had turned his back upon the strenuous life of the wilderness. Even if he returned to the lode for a month or two, he would travel by well-marked roads, surrounded by some degree of civilized comfort. There would be no more of the zest of the unknown trail; the charm of the lonely North would be broken by the crash of machinery and the voices of busy men.

The dinner bugle broke his reverie, and when he was leaving the saloon a steward gave him a letter the tender had brought. Recognizing Carnally's writing, he opened it eagerly in a quiet corner of the smoking-room, and as he read it he felt a faint envy of his comrade who was using pick and powder in the wilds. This, however, gave place to more practical considerations. Carnally related the jumpers' defeat, which he described as Mappin's last attempt to trouble them. The claims, he said, were safe from any fresh attack, and there was a marked improvement in the ore as they opened up the lode. He thought Andrew could devote himself to his English business with undisturbed confidence.

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Andrew realized that the latter would need all his attention, and during the short voyage he had little to say to his fellow-passengers. Revolving schemes in his mind, he found weak points in all of them, for it was a serious problem he had to attack. He could see several ways of regulating the Rain Bluff Company's affairs, if Leonard would agree, and he could bring charges against his brother-in-law which would cost him his relatives' support; but this course was not admissible. Leonard must be deprived of all control over Allinson's but it must be done without suspicion being cast upon the integrity of the firm. That would be difficult. Then Florence's position required thought. Andrew wished the unraveling of the matter had been left to somebody else with more tact and acuteness, but it was his duty and he must do the best he could.

On landing he traveled straight to London, and after taking a room at a hotel went on foot to the Allinson offices. It was a sultry day with rain at intervals; the streets were miry, and smoke thickened the listless air. As he walked eastward along the Strand the roar of traffic jarred on his ears and he noticed the streaky grime on the wet buildings; but it was the intent, pallid faces of the passers-by that impressed him most when he approached the city. Some were pinched and hungrily eager, some were gross and fleshy, but the steady, direct frankness of the Canadian glance was missing, and there was a more marked difference in the movements of Andrew's city countrymen. All were in a hurry, bolting into and out of dingy offices, but they had not the free virile grace of the men who followed the lonely Canadian trails. Nor had they, so far as their expressions hinted, the optimistic cheerfulness that is common in the West.

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Though he was glad to be at home, Andrew was sensible of a faint depression. The people he saw about him were those he would henceforward work among; he must change the drill and canoe paddle for the pen, and breathe the close air of offices instead of the fragrance of the pines. Had the option been his, he would have turned away from the city; but, as the head of Allinson's, he was not free to choose. Doggedly, as when he had followed the frozen trail on a morsel of food, he held on eastward past the Law Courts.

At the office he learned that Leonard was away at a German health resort, but would be back in a few days, and that Florence was staying at Ghyllside. Andrew was sorry for Florence and felt guilty when he thought of her. Though she had always taken her husband's view and refused to consider him a person of any importance, she was his eldest sister. Had she been less prejudiced, she might have helped him to come to some understanding with Leonard which would have prevented a direct conflict, but he feared he could look only for opposition and bitterness. Next he learned that the Rain Bluff shareholders' meeting, which he had suggested, had been fixed for an unexpectedly early date. He surmised that Leonard, having his plans ready, meant to get them adopted before his own were prepared.

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Summoning Sharpe, the elderly chief accountant who had served his father, Andrew spent some hours with him, mastering so far as possible the state of the firm's affairs. With a few exceptions, they were prospering; there was no doubt that, in a sense, Leonard had done his work well. In particular, the returns from foreign ventures were excellent, and though Sharpe could not tell him precisely how the profits had been made, Andrew with wider knowledge on some points could guess. He feared that a full explanation would not redound to the honor of the firm. He knew of lands to which Allinson's money had been sent, where the high interest was wrung out of subject races with fiendish cruelty.

At last, when the electric lights were burning in the lavishly-decorated office, Sharpe closed his books.

"I think that is all I can tell you, Mr. Allinson," he said. "On the whole, I venture to believe you must find our position eminently satisfactory. The one weak point, if I may say so, is the Rain Bluff mine. You will have seen that the shares are quoted down."

"I've noticed it. What's the reason? The directors wouldn't let any information that might have a depressing effect leak out."

"There has been some selling," Sharpe answered with a shrug. "It's possible that things have been kept too close. A little encouraging news given to the press now and then goes a long way, but silence tends to uneasiness." He hesitated. "I suppose I must not ask about the Company's prospects until you have met the Board?"

"You have been investing?"

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Sharpe admitted it.

"I bought in the open market, with no favor shown. The firm has treated me liberally, but I may have to make room for a younger man by and by, and I had two boys to start. One at law, the other as surgeon; but they are only beginning to stand on their own feet, and it was a drain. What was left went into the Rain Bluff. I felt I was safe in a venture organized by us."

He looked at Andrew eagerly, but for a few moments the latter mused. It was, he thought, such men as this old servant, patient, highly trained toilers, who would have been hardest hit by the failure of the mine. When he answered, his expression was unusually grave.

"I think I can say that you have no cause for anxiety."

"Thank you," said Sharpe. "Your assurance is a great relief. I wonder whether I may mention that you have your father's manner; it was his habit to make a curt statement without an explanation, but it always carried weight. You remind me of him strongly, though I never noticed the resemblance until to-day."

"You have paid me a sincere compliment," said Andrew quietly.

He spent the evening studying figures in his hotel, with no thought of the attractions the city had to offer, and the next day he proceeded to call on as many of the Rain Bluff directors as he could find in their offices. They were city men, ignorant of any but the financial side of mining, and he saw that the first two regarded him as an inexperienced meddler. These, he thought, had been given a hint by Leonard, though he did not question their honesty. Another insisted on talking about Canadian sport, with the fixed impression that he had really gone out to shoot and fish, and Andrew abandoned the attempt to undeceive him. The fourth, however, heard what he had to say with close attention.

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"To divulge this news would bring about a dangerous crisis," he warned Andrew. "I must strongly urge you to consult with Hathersage and defer any mention of new arrangements until after the meeting."

"Then I should have you gentlemen united against me."

"You do us injustice," Rahway protested. "On some of the points involved our judgment is necessarily better than yours, and we would no doubt insist on following it, but you will not find us neglectful of the real interests of the Company."

"They can be served only by a radical change of plans. As it stands, the Company is rotten!"

"Grave language, Mr. Allinson."

"It's warranted. You must submit a report to the shareholders. Is it prepared?"

The director handed him some sheets of paper which Andrew studied with rising indignation.

"I recognize Hathersage's work!" he exclaimed. "There's no hint of the difficulties that confront us. He wrote this?"

"It's a draft I have just received from him."

"And after what I've told you about the mine, you think it should stand?"

Rahway looked disturbed. "With a few exceptions, I must say that I do. You are new to these matters, and don't realize how undesirable it is that we should make our troubles public. Give us time to consider and mature fresh schemes, and, if matters are really so serious as they seem to you, we may find some judicious remedy. Undue haste can only have disastrous results."

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Andrew lost his patience.

"You want to tinker with the situation, to keep the shareholders in the dark, while you try to patch up a tottering concern? It's an impossible course! The truth must be faced boldly and the Company reorganized from the start!"

"If that is so, it must be done by the directors, with great caution. I must beg you not to force our hands."

"Well," replied Andrew, "I have nothing more to say. I shall attend the meeting and do what seems advisable."

He left the office, convinced that he could take only a bold, independent course, for no help could be expected from the men he had called on. Leonard's influence over them could not be combated. He thought they might honestly doubt that the state of affairs was as serious as he had represented; but if they were convinced of this, their chief desire would be to keep the mine going long enough to save their credit, and to make disclosure gradually. He was glad he had told them nothing about the richness of the Graham lode and that the claims on it were held under his personal control. On reaching his hotel, he wrote to the directors he had not been able to see, though he did not expect much result from this, and the next morning he left for his home.

Though he had a cordial welcome, he did not explain his plans to his relatives, and Florence seemed to regard him with suspicion. A week later Leonard came down to take her home, and asked for a private interview after dinner on the night of his arrival. Andrew went with him to the library and waited calmly until he began. [Pg 323]

"We must understand each other," Leonard said. "I hear you have found the lode. Will you tell me your plans?"

"Not to begin with. I want some information about yours first. No doubt Mappin cabled you news of our discovery?"

"He did. I might retort that you have seen my colleagues and tried to gain them over, in my absence, instead of waiting for my return; but that is not an important matter. What is it you wish to know?"

Andrew's voice was quietly steady as he asked the test question upon which their future relations turned:

"Do you mean to submit the report to the Rain Bluff shareholders as it stands?"

"Yes," Leonard answered curtly, and Andrew knew that there could be no compromise. It was now a trial of strength; one of them must be driven off the field.

"Knowing it to be misleading?" he said. "Very well; I can't prevent its issue. I suppose you have heard that your confederate has been beaten in what must be his last attempt to thwart me?"

"I heard that an attempt had been made to jump the Company's claims."

"My claims," said Andrew.

"The Company's, I think. You were our representative when you found them."

"We'll let that go; it's not a point that's likely to be raised."

As the question of the ownership of the claims seemed to be of importance, Leonard looked puzzled.

"Oh, well," he said, "I've told you that, if needful, Mappin must be sacrificed."

"That is not what you told him. You must have meant to trick one of us or play false to both." [Pg 324]

"I can't tolerate such words!"

Leonard lost the indulgent air he had so far assumed, and Andrew, leaning forward with elbows on the table, fixed his eyes on him.

"We'll drop all disguises. You have plotted against me ever since I went to Canada, and I'm showing you more consideration than you deserve in speaking of these things in private instead of before the family. It is for Florence's sake I'm doing so." He raised his hand. "Let me finish! You would have ruined the Rain Bluff Company sooner than allow me to reorganize it; you conspired with Mappin to starve me and my friends to death."

Leonard sat back in his chair with a harsh laugh.

"That is ridiculous! If we are to talk the matter out, try to be calm. I'll admit that I would have been glad to prevent your wasting the Company's time and money on an absurd adventure, and gave Mappin a hint to that effect. If he went farther, for his own ends, I'm not responsible."

"I'd like to believe that you speak the truth. Apart from this, you have persuaded the directors that my suggestions are not to be considered seriously and what's worse, you have from the beginning prejudiced my relatives against me. It's your doing that they think me a fool."

A smile crept into Leonard's eyes.

"It looks as if you mean to force a quarrel," he said.

"In a sense, you're right. We can't go on as we have been doing."

"Very well. What do you suggest?"

"In the first place, I ask for your resignation from the Rain Bluff Board. That shouldn't be difficult; you have been selling your shares." [Pg 325]

Leonard considered for a minute.

"I might agree. Three of the directors must retire, and the Company isn't likely to prosper if you

get control."

"I understand your reasons. The concern has got into trouble, for which I'm to be held responsible, and you clear out because you find it impossible to curb my recklessness. You expect to save your credit in that way."

"Have it so, if you like," said Leonard coolly.

His answer convinced Andrew that Leonard did not know of the richness of the lode. Andrew thought he had honestly disbelieved in it, and Mappin, who had informed him of its discovery, which had not yet been widely mentioned in the Canadian papers, might not have made him understand its importance. Indeed, it was possible that Mappin meant to throw over his English confederate.

"I have another demand to make. I want your consent to a dissolution of your partnership in Allinson's."

Leonard started and his face grew hard; though it seemed impossible that Andrew, whom he had genuinely looked down on, should urge the matter.

"This is too much!" he exclaimed. "Have you lost your senses?"

"I think not. You have betrayed the trust my father had in you; you have started Allinson's on a downward course. That you have, with the exception of the Rain Bluff speculation, so far made money for the firm does not count, because you can't continue doing so. There's a code of business morality; they are not fools in the city, and your methods would be found out. Then the reputation we trade upon would be gone. But enough of this. Put your price on your position and I'll pay it if possible."

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Leonard clenched his hands.

"No!" he answered. "I hold my place! You cannot get rid of me!"

"Is that your last word?"

"Yes! I've tried to be forbearing, but you push me too hard. It has come to an open fight, which may as well begin at the shareholders' meeting. I shall not resign from the Board."

"It was bound to come," said Andrew. "We know how we stand."

Leonard rose.

"Florence and I leave to-morrow! There is no train to-night."

"That must be as you wish," responded Andrew, as he went out.

Half an hour later Florence found him on the terrace. Her face was flushed and her eyes were angry.

"Andrew," she cried, "do you mean to persist in this madness? Shall I try to make peace with Leonard before it is too late?"

"I'm sorry it's too late already. I can't think he sent you."

"No; I came because I felt I must. Can't you see that you are bent on ruining yourself and bringing discredit on the firm?"

"I think not; but it's a point on which we can't agree. I can't blame you for taking Leonard's side."

"Oh," she cried, "try to be sensible! Think how Leonard has developed the business and earned the money that you have spent. Try to remember all you owe to him."

A queer smile crept into Andrew's eyes. He knew what he owed to Leonard, but Florence must not guess. She should keep her faith in her husband, if she could.

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"At the worst, he would leave the firm with a very much larger capital than when he joined it, and there are, no doubt, other firms which would welcome him."

Florence turned upon him with a mocking laugh.

"But Leonard is not going to leave the firm! Tell me, for one thing, why you wish him to?"

It was far from Andrew's intention that she should ever learn.

"Well," he said slowly, "our views are so different on almost every point that it's impossible we should get on. I'm very sorry, Florence, but you can't mend the matter. The split was inevitable."

"And you venture to set your immature judgment against Leonard's?"

"I'm forced to. Don't say any more, Florence. I suppose the thing must trouble you. Forgive me, if you can."

"I'll try, when you have found out your folly," she said, and left him.

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## CHAPTER XXXI

### ALLINSON'S MAKES GOOD

It was with a strange sense of detachment that Andrew attended the first meeting of the shareholders in the Rain Bluff mine. He had thought of the event with great anxiety, made numerous plans and abandoned them, and now he had come, in a sense, unprepared, determined to submit two general propositions and let the shareholders decide for themselves. Ignorant of the usual mode of procedure at such meetings, he had consulted nobody better informed, and realized that he might be ruled out of order or shouted down; but he was sensible of a coolness that somewhat surprised him.

The room hired for the occasion was large and handsome, with a floor of inlaid hardwood, frescoed walls and lofty roof. It had something of the look of a chapel. At one end a group of well-groomed frock-coated directors were seated at a fine oak table, with the Company's secretary behind an array of books and papers. All that the eye rested on suggested stable prosperity, for Leonard knew the effect that imposing surroundings had on the small provincial investor. It would be difficult for inexperienced and unorganized malcontents to disregard the air of severe formality which he meant to cast over the proceedings.

Andrew missed nothing as he entered. To face a crisis had a steadying effect on him, and his manner was very tranquil as he walked up the long room.

Carefully scanning the assembled shareholders, he surmised from their dress and appearance that a number of them were people of small means from country towns. There were a few women, who looked nervous, as if they felt themselves out of place. He was surprised to see Gertrude and Mrs. Fenwood; and then as his glance roved farther he caught sight of Wannop, who gave him an encouraging grin. Robert Allinson was nearby, looking unusually grave; but Murray caught Andrew's eye and smiled. On the whole, he was glad that he had made no attempt to win over his relatives since his return: it was better that they should judge and vote like the rest of the shareholders. Then as he took his place he looked at his fellow-directors, whom he had not seen since his futile interviews. They wore an air of staid formality, and he suspected that before the meeting was finished they would regard him as a traitor to his class; but that did not matter. He had given them their opportunity and they would not seize it. Leonard, dressed with fastidious taste, looked, as usual, suave and well-bred, but the quick glance he gave Andrew seemed to hint at anxiety.

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He made a short speech, calculated to reassure, but containing very little definite information. His audience listened in an apathetic manner, and it struck Andrew that a curious, matter-of-fact dullness characterized the proceedings. Leonard stated that the business of the meeting was to adopt the report and elect new members of the Board in place of those who retired, though they were, he added, eligible for re-election. Then there was a discordant note, for a short man in badly cut clothes, with spectacles and upstanding red hair, rose in the body of the hall.

"I take it that our chairman has made an error," he said. "Our business is to consider the report; not necessarily to adopt it."

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"That is correct," said Leonard, smiling. "We invite your best consideration. I will now ask the secretary to read the document."

The secretary did so in a monotonous voice, as if it were a matter which must be got through with out of respect to custom, and Andrew felt that it would be a bold shareholder who ventured to disturb the tranquillity of the meeting. Moreover, he recognized the cleverness of the report. It said a good deal that was not to the point and avoided every loophole for adverse criticism. There was only one weak spot—no dividend was declared, though it was hinted that a satisfactory profit might be anticipated when the Company's property had been further developed.

Somebody proposed that it be adopted, a seconder appeared; and then, while Andrew felt that his time to speak had come, the short man with the red hair got up again.

"I move as an amendment that the report be held over until we are supplied with more details," he said. "What I want to know is—why there is no dividend, and when we may expect one?"

One or two of the directors looked supercilious, the others amused, and Leonard smiled indulgently. He was used to dealing with objectors.

"The question," he explained, "is complicated, but I think we have answered it already. I may add that it is unreasonable to expect a dividend on the first year's operations. Preliminary expenses are large, and a mine is not like a factory. The ground must, so to speak, be cleared before you can get to work. Headings must be driven and timbered, pumps and machines of various kinds have to be put up."

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"Were you ever in a mine?" the red-haired man interrupted amid some laughter.

"I hardly think that is to the point," Leonard answered lightly. "Though I must admit that I have not been down a shaft, I have a knowledge of the commercial side of the subject, which is all that concerns me."

"So I thought!" exclaimed the other. "You can't know much about your work unless you have put up pitprops and used the pick. Now the chairman of a mining company ought——"

He was interrupted by cries of "Sit down!" and some ironical encouragement, and Leonard frowned. It might be dangerous to allow the meeting to get out of hand, and this troublesome fellow was giving Andrew, of whom he was half afraid, his opportunity.

"May I inquire whether the gentleman is a practical miner himself?" one of the directors interposed.

"I was, when I was young. Now I keep a shop and deal with pitmen. But I came here expecting to be told about a dividend. I put three hundred pounds into the Company, because lawyer Jesmond said one could rely on anything that was started by Allinson's. The money wasn't easily saved, but there was no opening in my business—what with the co-operatives cutting into a small man's trade——"

"That's enough!" said somebody; and there was a shout of "Don't waste our time!" But the shopkeeper sturdily stood his ground.

"I'm not here for myself alone," he resumed. "I came up, by excursion, to speak for other people in our town. Jesmond did their business, and he said——"

There was loud interruption. The meeting was getting unruly, but Wannop's voice broke through the uproar: [Pg 332]

"Go on, man!"

"I mean to," replied the speaker calmly. "What's more, I have signed proxies in my pocket to be filled up as I think fit."

"It's doubtful how far that's in order," the secretary objected.

"Let him fill them up by all means!" exclaimed a stockjobber ironically. "If all his friends gave him proxies, they wouldn't count for much! There are individual holders present whose votes——"

He broke off at a touch from a neighbor, and Andrew cast a keen glance at the quieter portion of the audience. It was composed of city men who seemed inclined to support the directors. They were, perhaps, not satisfied with the report, for several had been whispering together; but Andrew thought they would prefer to avoid a disturbance and disclosures that might injure the Company. If the meeting could be got through safely, they could afterward sell out at once and cut their loss. Andrew's sympathies, however, were strongly with such investors as the determined shopkeeper. He could imagine the patient drudgery and careful frugality which had enabled them to buy their shares.

"I must ask the gentleman to find a seconder for his motion," Leonard broke in.

There was a pause and the shopkeeper looked eagerly round the hall, where he seemed to have no friends. Then Andrew got up and quietly faced the assembly.

"I second the amendment," he said.

A murmur of astonishment greeted the speech.

"A director!" exclaimed somebody, and a whisper ran through the hall. "Mr. Allinson—the company's agent in Canada!" [Pg 333]

Deep silence followed, and Andrew saw that every eye was fixed on him. He was acting against all precedent—opposing his colleagues on the Board, who were, in a manner, entitled to his support.

"I suppose I'm taking an unusual line in offering the gentleman who has been speaking information which the chairman has refused him," he said. "He asked when he might expect a dividend. The answer is—never, unless a radical change is made in the Company's policy."

The plain words made a sensation, and after an impressive pause an uproar began.

"What about the prospectus with your name on it?"

"What changes would you make?"

"Keep quiet and let him speak!"

"No, it's a case of collusion; there's some trick in it!"

The meeting raged confusedly until Leonard got up. He looked shaken by the storm of indignation.

"Order, gentlemen! There is a motion before you."

"The amendment first!" somebody shouted.

"The amendment," said Leonard. "A show of hands will serve. 'That the report be held over, pending the furnishing of further details.'"

The audience appeared to be unanimous as the hands went up, and Leonard sought to turn the matter to his advantage.

"Carried," he said. "We will now adjourn the meeting until the information which is asked for can

be supplied."

"That," Andrew stated firmly, "is not needful. I can give now an accurate outline of the Company's position."

The secretary protested that this was informal and one of the directors requested Leonard to rule it out of order; but the meeting had got beyond the chairman's control. There were poor men present who thought they had lost their all, as well as rich men who believed they had been deceived, and Leonard's words were greeted with angry clamor. [Pg 334]

Murray jumped to his feet.

"I suggest that we hear Mr. Allinson. We will learn the truth from him!" he said.

"Let him speak!" shouted some one.

Andrew, standing very still and intent of face, raised his hand and the turmoil ceased.

"I ask your attention. First, I must show you the worst of things, as I learned it on the spot in Canada. The mine is threatened with inundation, which can be prevented only by the use of powerful pumping machinery; the rock is unusually broken up and faulty, which necessitates expensive timbering and impedes the work. These difficulties, however, need not be enlarged upon, because, if the quality of the ore justified it, they could be overcome. Instead, I will tell you roughly how much capital we have expended, the quantity of ore raised, the cost of its extraction, and the value of the yield in refined metal."

He quoted from his notebook, and there was a strange quietness as he proceeded:

"Though the figures might be challenged and slightly modified by experts, the conclusion is inevitable—the ore turned out at the Rain Bluff can pay only a small interest on the cost of labor. The capital spent in acquiring the mine has irretrievably gone."

Then the storm broke. Questions, reproaches and insulting epithets were hurled at the directors, some of whom tried to smile forbearingly, while others grew red, and Leonard sat grim and silent with his hand clenched. Andrew waited unmoved, and seized on a pause to continue: [Pg 335]

"There is every reason to believe that your directors acted, as they thought, in your interests, but they have been misled."

"So have we!" exclaimed a furious investor.

"I'm afraid that's true," Andrew agreed. "It's an important point, but I must ask you to consider the remedies. In the first place, I will, if necessary, redeem every Rain Bluff share which has been allotted; that is, my brokers will buy up all that are brought to them."

He was heard with astonishment. Some of those present knew a good deal about commercial companies, but that a director of one should make such an offer was unprecedented in their experience. On the surface, it was surprisingly fair, but they suspected a trick.

"At what price?" cried one. "The shares will fall to a few shillings as soon as the truth about the mine is known."

"At par," said Andrew. "You will be returned every penny you have paid in."

It was obvious that the greater part of his audience did not know what to make of this. That he should be in earnest scarcely seemed possible, as his offer seemed the extremity of rashness. No one spoke for a moment or two; and then Robert Allinson rose.

"If any guarantee is needed, I shall be glad to supply it, so far as my means allow. My name is Allinson, a member of the family controlling the firm which promoted this Company. I may perhaps remark without undue pride that it is a point of honor with Allinson's to keep its promises." [Pg 336]

"Bravo, Bob!" cried a loud, hearty voice.

"I think," said Robert, in a tone of grave rebuke, "that is not altogether seemly at a public meeting."

Wannop got up with a laugh in which a number of the listeners joined.

"And I am prepared to back my relative, Andrew Allinson, to my last shilling—in which Mrs. Wannop joins me. Between us we hold a good deal of stock."

There was applause mixed with expressions of relief, but some still suspected knavery.

"What is Mr. Allinson's object?" a man blurted out. "What does he expect to gain?"

Andrew flushed, but answered quietly.

"If you close with my offer, I shall undoubtedly benefit; but I do not urge you to do so. Listen to the alternative, and then decide. But I must ask for patience while I tell you the story of another mine."

"As chairman, I must raise a point of order," Leonard objected; but they silenced him with shouts, and he sat down, baffled, knowing that the game was up.

"Go on!" they ordered Andrew, and with a steady voice he began to tell them of Graham's discovery of the lode.

He paused once or twice, but they encouraged him, and as he proceeded nobody felt that the narrative was out of place. A few, indeed, forgot what they had come for and listened with a sense of romance and high adventure, while he told them of the sawmill clerk's steadfast, long-deferred purpose. Here and there women who had been keenly anxious a few minutes earlier watched him with fixed, sympathizing eyes, and Andrew, cheered by the close attention, was conscious of a new power. He could hold these people, and take them with him into the frozen wilds.

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They followed the march of the starving men across the Northern snow, saw them blasting icy rocks, and searching with desperate eagerness for the food caches. Then, as he told of the hard-won triumph, when the vein was at last disclosed, a hoarse murmur that had something of a cheer in it filled the room. It was forced upon those who had doubted him that they were listening to an exceptional man, who had borne and done things that needed the staunchest courage, for honor and not for gain.

"Now," he said with an abrupt change of tone, "I have told you how we found the Graham Lode, on which three of the richest claims have been contracted to me. Let me read you the reports of different assayers to whom I submitted specimens." He did so, and added: "The original documents are here; you may examine and pass them round. But I must get on. These claims are mine, though my right to them might be contested by the directors of this Company—the cost of finding and proving them has been borne by myself—but, if you agree to their development and the abandoning of the Rain Bluff, I propose to hand them over as your property."

There was confused applause, in the midst of which Leonard rose.

"In face of the want of confidence you have shown in us and the extraordinary course Mr. Allinson has taken, my colleagues and I feel compelled to resign in a body."

"Let them go! We're well rid of them!" exclaimed the shopkeeper. "You don't join them?" he said anxiously to Andrew.

"I had better do so and offer myself for re-election."

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"Then I have much pleasure in proposing Mr. Allinson," said Murray. "I should like to mention that I remained a shareholder in this Company because I preferred his bare word to the strong recommendations of experienced stockjobbing friends."

Several men rose to second him, and when every hand went up amidst a burst of applause, Andrew said with some emotion:

"Thank you for this mark of trust. My first offer stands—anybody anxious to have his shares redeemed at par need only apply to my brokers, whose address is here." He laid an envelope on the table in sight of all.

"We'll go on with the election," resumed the shopkeeper. "With the permission of the meeting, I'll ask Mr. Allinson whom he'd like to have on the Board."

Andrew smiled.

"You're giving up your rights and offering me a very unusual privilege."

"Never mind that," rejoined a stockjobber dryly. "These proceedings have been remarkably unusual from the start. In fact, I imagine we have reached the limit of irregularity for a company meeting. For all that, I support our spokesman's plucky offer."

"Very well," said Andrew. "I would suggest the nomination of three of your previous directors. I believe they would serve you well, and their appointment might act as a judicious check on me."

The gentlemen he named looked irresolute and somewhat embarrassed, but after a word or two with him they expressed their willingness to serve. They were elected without dissent, and then Robert Allinson stood up.

"I have pleasure in proposing Mr. Antony Wannop, who is a large shareholder and Mr. Allinson's brother-in-law. Though I may be prejudiced, I feel that I may say that your interest may safely be trusted to the Allinson family."

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"After what we have heard here, that is an opinion with which I heartily agree," a man at the back declared. "None of us can doubt that Allinson is a justly respected name."

Wannop was chosen and several more; and then a man got up.

"If it's necessary to hold an adjourned meeting, it will be attended as a matter of form," he said. "I propose that we instruct Mr. Allinson to push on with the development of the new lode as fast as possible, giving him, with confidence, full authority to do what he thinks fit."

Though the secretary tried to point out that the Board must act as a body, the proposal was carried with acclamation, and as the meeting broke up Andrew leaned forward rather heavily on the big oak table. He was filled with confused emotions and the strain had told on him. When he looked up the room was almost empty and Leonard had gone, but the reappointed directors

whom he had suggested remained.

"We have something to regret," said one awkwardly. "It's unfortunate we didn't quite grasp your intentions. We feel that although you took us unprepared, you have treated us with exceptional fairness."

"You may remember that you wouldn't listen when I tried to explain matters," Andrew answered with a twinkle in his eyes. "However, your greater experience should be valuable to me and I've no doubt we'll get on well in future."

After a few cordial words they withdrew, and one of them turned to his companion.

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"Though I'm glad we rejoined, I dare say you noticed the personal tone he took. It's clear that he expects us to play second fiddle."

"Well, after all, Allinson has shown that he's capable of leading the tune."

When they had gone Wannop came up to Andrew.

"It's a compliment when I tell you I wasn't a bit surprised," he said. "I'd expected something of the kind from you. The Allinson strain showed up well to-day. You got hold of them and swept them off their feet. Robert, too, proved himself a brick; but he's waiting in the passage and we must try to shunt him. He'll lecture me on my new duties and I want a big, long drink. In fact, half a dozen would be better."

Andrew laughed, and they went out, Wannop talking excitedly.

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## **CHAPTER XXXII**

### **THE HEAD OF THE HOUSE**

On the day after the meeting Andrew returned to Ghyllside, and Hilda met him at the station, her eyes sparkling with delight.

"You have won!" she cried. "Antony came down last night and brought us the news. Then Gertrude was over this morning and could talk of nothing else. She said you were splendid, and she got quite vexed when I told her she needn't speak as if she hadn't expected it."

"After all, my position was a strong one," Andrew said. "It doesn't need much skill to win the game when you hold the best cards, and of course Dream Mine was the ace of trumps. Leonard could only throw down his hand when I brought it out."

"Ah! but how did you get the ace? It wasn't by chance; you searched for it, starving, in the snow. But it's a silly metaphor—one isn't allowed to choose one's cards."

"That's true," Andrew replied with a trace of gravity. "It was dealt to me—I think not by accident. Without it, I should not have won the game."

Hilda's manner changed, for she was seldom serious long.

"Well," she said, when he had helped her into the waiting trap, "in the future you'll be called on to play a different one. You can't reasonably expect to find another mine, and you'll have no excuse for tramping through the wilds on snow-shoes, after this. Instead of furs and moccasins, you'll have to wear a silk hat and a Bond street coat, and write things in ledgers instead of firing off dynamite. How will you like it?"

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"I don't know. However, I suppose it will have to be done; though I might, perhaps, hire somebody to do the writing for me."

"That would be better," Hilda laughed; "your writing isn't good. But I'm afraid there's a bit of a trial in store for you to-night. All your friends and relatives in the neighborhood are coming to dinner and of course they'll congratulate you and try to look as if you hadn't astonished them. In a way, the situation is distinctly humorous."

"How so?"

Hilda broke into a delighted laugh.

"Can't you see it's the triumph of the foolish and looked-down-upon members of the family? You're a popular hero; Antony's a director; and I'm no longer a person who needn't be considered!"

"But what had you to do with it?" Andrew asked with unflattering frankness.

"I believe I pulled some strings in a humble way. You know you're not really brilliant, Andrew, and I'm afraid you never will be. Perhaps that's why you can't see the large part we women had in your triumph. Of course, you can walk a long distance in snow-shoes and use a pickax; but who led you to think of putting the snow-shoes on?"

"Graham, I believe."

"Try to use some imagination! Go back a little farther. Who made you see that Allinson's had a claim on you, encouraged you to go to Canada, and prompted you to right that horrid contractor? Can you deny that I, and Ethel, and the girl in Canada, now and then gave you the push you needed? Indeed, I think Miss Frobisher must have been very firm with you."

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"You're right," Andrew admitted. "Am I to understand that you propose to continue your supervision and assistance in my duties as the company's manager?"

"You might do worse than consult me sometimes; but you must get a good partner who knows the things you haven't learned, when Leonard leaves." Hilda looked up anxiously. "I suppose he is going to leave?"

"I'm inclined to think so," Andrew replied with some severity. "Still, I haven't seen him since the meeting. It's fortunate I know of a partner who'll make up for my deficiencies—I mean our old accountant, Sharpe."

"But surely he has no money!"

"No. You may have heard that money can be valued too highly, and I believe it's true."

Hilda chatted on general topics during the remainder of the drive, and soon after he got home Andrew went down to receive his guests. Ethel Hillyard was the first to arrive, and she smiled at him as she gave him her hand.

"I have heard the news and am very glad," she said. "But it was only what I had confidently looked forward to."

"Then you had a narrow escape of being badly disappointed. As a matter of fact, I owe a great deal to the staunchness of my friends. I should hardly have pulled through if they hadn't cheered me on."

"That's an easy task. It was you who made the fight."

"I had no choice," said Andrew humorously. "There was no retreat. Then I was well supported—by Olcott's friend, upon whom I had no claim, among others."

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"Mr. Murray? I don't suppose you know that you won him over by letting him miss a snipe you could have shot. It's a curious reason for giving you his confidence, isn't it? But it has struck me that in many ways you and he are alike."

"After that, I can hardly say that Murray's a good sort," Andrew laughed. "However, we must drop the subject, for here he comes."

He saw that Murray had not noticed him but was advancing straight toward Ethel, and that a faint tinge of color showed in her face. Then after a word of welcome to the man he turned away.

Mrs. Fenwood appeared next and greeted him with more cordiality than he could remember her displaying.

"It's a gratification to see you following in your father's steps at last, though I must say that for a long time we doubted your ever doing so. One recognized that you were influenced by a very proper sense of your responsibility yesterday, and though I thought you were, perhaps, somewhat rash, Robert assures me that you showed signs of business acumen."

"The trouble is that I may not be able to keep on doing so. If Robert's capable of judging on such a matter, I'm afraid you'll have to be patient with me and make allowance for my wasted years."

"Don't be flippant. It isn't becoming," Mrs. Fenwood rebuked him. "You have begun well, and it would be a grief to all of us if you relapsed again."

Mrs. Olcott came to his rescue and soon afterward they went in to dinner. Andrew was quiet during the meal, though he felt content. The strain he had long borne had told on him, and a mild reaction, which brought a sense of fatigue, had set in. He wanted to rest and he had not finished with Leonard yet.

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It was a calm, warm evening, and though a few shaded candles threw a soft light over the table, the windows were wide open and the smoky red of the dying sunset gleamed above the shadowy hills. Wannop was in a boisterous mood and Hilda abetted him, apparently to Robert's irritation. Ethel talked to Murray, who seemed gravely interested; Mrs. Olcott was patiently listening to Mrs. Fenwood; Gertrude now and then made furtive attempts to check her husband. Andrew looked on with languid satisfaction, and joined in only when it was necessary. Presently, to his annoyance, Wannop filled his glass and got up.

"You have all heard what happened in London yesterday," he said. "Now that we are here together and those who have joined us are our host's good friends, it seems opportune to wish a long and useful career to the Head of the House."

They rose with lifted glasses, and Andrew felt a thrill as he read the good-will in their faces and knew his victory over his relatives' prejudices was complete. The toast they drank with hearty sincerity was, in a sense, an act of homage—a recognition of his authority. Instead of bearing with and trying to guide him, they would henceforward follow where he led. There was a

moment's silence after they sat down, and then he thanked them awkwardly.

As they left the table Mrs. Fenwood remarked to Hilda, who was nearest her.

"It's your brother's rightful place, but he was a long time claiming it; and, after all, I don't see what Leonard can have done that he should be deposed."

"That lies between him and Andrew," Hilda replied. "I think he's the only one who knows and he will never tell." [Pg 346]

"I'm afraid I haven't appreciated Andrew as he deserves," Mrs. Fenwood observed with a thoughtful air.

The remainder of the evening passed pleasantly, and the next day Andrew received a telegram, requesting him to call on Leonard at the Company's offices. He declined to do so, feeling that if Leonard wished to make terms, he must come to him; and he smiled when another message stated that his brother-in-law would arrive that evening. It was getting dark when Leonard reached Ghylside and was shown into the library, where Andrew was waiting for him.

"If you will let your man keep the horse ready I could catch the new night train back from the junction," he said. "That would, perhaps, suit both of us best."

"As you wish," responded Andrew.

Leonard laid some papers on the table.

"You made me an offer a little while ago."

"Which you refused," said Andrew.

"I did; things have changed since then."

"They have. Though I told the secretary to take care that only a very brief notice of the meeting was sent to the papers, news of what took place has, no doubt, leaked out. It was impossible to prevent this from happening, and it must have had some effect in the city. You are afraid it will damage your prestige and weaken your position."

"I'm not prepared to admit that altogether."

"It can't be denied. You no longer command public confidence as you did. You'll find it has been rudely shaken."

"We'll let that subject drop. I must remind you that your father's will and the partnership deed prevent your getting rid of me unless I'm willing to go." [Pg 347]

Andrew regarded him with amusement.

"I can't deny it, but I think you will be willing. However, I'd better say that I don't wish to take an undue advantage of the situation. What do you propose?"

"That you buy me out, as you offered. I've sketched out the terms—you'll find them here, with an estimate of my average profits and what my interest in the firm is worth."

He pushed the papers across the table and Andrew carefully studied them before he looked up.

"The fairest way would be to submit these figures to an outside accountant. As soon as he has made up a statement, I'll meet you at Carter & Roding's office and get them to draw up any documents that are needed to annul our partnership. Are you agreeable?"

"Yes; we'll consider the thing decided." Leonard hesitated for a moment. "I don't see," he added, "that you will gain anything by letting Florence and the others know exactly what we differed about."

"I quite agree with you. There are reasons enough to account for the split—the incompatibility of our views on business matters, your objection to taking a subordinate place. Even at the cost of allowing Florence to blame me, the truth must be kept from her."

"Thank you!" said Leonard. "I believe I've said all that's needful, and I may as well be off. It's a long drive to the junction."

Andrew let him go. He had accomplished all that he had laid himself out to do: gained his relatives' confidence, reorganized the mining company, and got rid of Leonard, who had been a menace to the good name of Allinson's. It had been easier than he expected; the task he had shrunk from had become less formidable when boldly attacked, though he admitted that fortune had favored him. Henceforward he was his own master, the acknowledged head of Allinson's, and that brought with it a deep sense of responsibility. Nevertheless, he no longer felt daunted, for he had gained self-confidence. There were many things of which he was ignorant; but they could be learned. Then he remembered that he must go back to Canada for a while after he had arranged matters with Leonard and had thoroughly informed himself about Allinson's affairs. [Pg 348]

It was a month before he could get away, and Wannop drove to the station with him. When he shook hands as the train came in he smiled.

"Bring her back with you. Then the credit of the Allinson family will be in safe hands."

"I'll try," Andrew promised. "I wish I felt more sure of succeeding; but I wasn't thinking of the credit of the family."

"That's the proper line to take," Wannop answered, smiling, as he stood with his hand on the carriage door. "Don't be timid. I'm inclined to think you have done more difficult things."

He made room for Hilda and pulled her back as the train started, and they stood waving their hands until the last carriage vanished into a tunnel.

"Andrew needs some encouraging," he remarked. "When there's anything to be gained for himself, he's too diffident; but perhaps it's a good fault, and by no means common."

"Though he talked a good deal about the mine, we all know why he's going back," said Hilda. "I suppose you are satisfied about this Miss Frobisher?"

[Pg 349]

"So far as my opinion goes, she's what you might call eminently suitable. If I had any doubt on the matter Andrew's firm conviction would decide me. Though it was a long time before the family realized it, his judgment is to be relied on."

"Yes," agreed Hilda; "in some things, he is really very sensible."

When Andrew reached the Lake of Shadows he found Carnally awaiting him with a satisfactory account of the progress of development work on the lode, and they spent some time talking over it in Andrew's room at the hotel.

"Jake, are you willing to take the post of our general manager in Canada?" Andrew asked.

"Under Hathersage, as boss director?"

"No, under me. Hathersage has left the firm for good."

"Then I'll be proud to take it," said Carnally quietly.

"It's yours. You haven't asked about the stipend."

"That's so," Carnally drawled. "I guess I can leave you to do the square thing." Then his eyes twinkled. "I've kept you here some time talking business, and it strikes me you're anxious to get away. You'll find a skiff ready, and I'd like to wish you good luck."

"Thanks," responded Andrew soberly. "Perhaps you had better wait until I come back."

He hurried to the beach and rowed across the lake with steady, determined strokes, and it happened, but not by accident, that Geraldine was waiting on the lawn. She had seen a trail of engine smoke drift across the pines an hour earlier, and at last a skiff shoot out across the sparkling water. As it drew near the landing she felt tempted to retreat to the house, but she waited, and the color crept into her face when Andrew took her hand in a masterful grasp.

[Pg 350]

"I think you know why I have come," he said at once.

"No doubt you had mining matters to arrange," she answered with an attempt at light raillery, though her heart was beating fast.

"I had; they have kept me since the train came in, and I never grudged loss of time so much; but I felt that I required something to steady me before I rowed across. The fact is, I felt extremely anxious."

"Anxious? You knew you would be welcome."

"To be welcomed as I was sent away didn't seem enough." Andrew held fast the hand she had given him. "You were very gracious and I knew what I owed to you, but you kept something back, and it was that I wanted. I told you how I had got on in England, but I'm afraid I haven't learned to stand on my own feet yet. You know how you have helped me so far; won't you do so altogether?"

"If I remember, I said it was criticism you needed," Geraldine answered softly, looking down.

"That or censure; whatever it is, it will be right if it comes from you." Andrew's voice grew tense as he drew her nearer. "I ask for the greatest gift; I need you, Geraldine."

She yielded, looking up at him swiftly with eyes that shone, and then turned her head, which sank until it rested on his shoulder. It was getting dusk; the scent of the pines stole out of the shadows and the call of a loon came ringing to them over the water, as if in blessing.

THE END



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Transcriber's Note: The following typographical errors, present in the original edition, have been corrected.

In Chapter I, a period was added after "firing as they got a chance".

In Chapter III, a missing period was added after "*I think you should stay here and fight it out until he comes back*, he said".

In Chapter VII, "a man siezing it swung him across" was changed to "a man seizing it swung him across".

In Chapter VIII, a comma was changed to a period after "I'd feel less diffident", and "be busied himself" was changed to "he busied himself".

In Chapter IX, "the hangings where of harmonious hue" was changed to "the hangings were of harmonious hue".

In Chapter X, "from a neighboring stack" was changed to "from a neighboring stack".

In Chapter XI, a missing quotation mark was added after "it would be too late".

In Chapter XII, "its wiser to let one's friends have them" was changed to "it's wiser to let one's friends have them".

In Chapter XVI, "The blasted, hog" was changed to "The blasted hog", and a missing quotation mark was added after "before dark".

In Chapter XVII, a quotation mark was removed before "We'll have mighty keen appetites".

In Chapter XIX, a missing period was added after "the prospectors might turn up in the next few days".

In Chapter XXI, a missing quotation mark was added after "what the trouble's about".

In Chapter XXIV, a missing quotation mark was added after "right to talk about these things".

In Chapter XXV, "I am at your sevice" was changed to "I am at your service", and "actuated by jealousy" was changed to "actuated by jealousy".

In Chapter XXVII, "some stubborn fight, ing" was changed to "some stubborn fighting".

In Chapter XXVII, "*Oh*, he exclaimed *you must have heard enough*" was changed to "*Oh*, he exclaimed, *you must have heard enough*", and "Mr Allinson" was changed to "Mr. Allinson" in two places.

In Chapter XXVII, a comma was changed to a period after "another new venture".

In Chapter XXVI, "coppber wire" was changed to "copper wire".

In Chapter XXX, "the Company is rotton" was changed to "the Company is rotten".

In Chapter XXXII, a missing quotation mark was added after "a long and useful career to the Head of the House", and "he said a once" was changed to "he said at once".

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