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Carlile Litsey**

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\*\*\* START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK A MAID OF THE KENTUCKY HILLS \*\*\*

# **A MAID OF THE KENTUCKY HILLS**

**BY EDWIN CARLILE LITSEY**

**Author of "The Man from Jericho," etc.**

***ILLUSTRATED BY  
JOHN CASSEL***

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**TO  
SARA  
OF THE SUNNY HAIR**

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*I knelt on the tree, bent down, and took her upheld hand in mine.*

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## A MAID OF THE KENTUCKY HILLS

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### CHAPTER ONE

#### IN WHICH I GO TO 'CROMBIE

When a man of thirty who has been sound and well since boyhood suddenly realizes there is something radically wrong with him, it amounts almost to a tragedy.

It was mid-March when I became convinced that I was "wrong." Near the close of winter I had developed a hacking cough with occasional chest pains, but with masculine mulishness had refused to recognize any untoward symptoms. I was not a sissy, to let a common cold frighten me and send me trembling to the doctor. I began to lose flesh and grow pale, whereas I had been of fine frame, and decidedly athletic. Then I discovered a fleck of crimson on my handkerchief one day after a hard coughing spell. I got up from my desk with unsteady knees and a chilly feeling down my spine, and went to 'Crombie. He was generally known as Abercrombie Dane, M. D., but we grew up hand in hand, as it were, and so—I went to 'Crombie. He was a fine, big animal; head of a Hercules and strength of a jack and sense like Solon. A rare man.

I told him my tale shamefacedly, for I realized now I had acted a fool, and that maybe my day of grace had passed. He knew I was scared, for he was sensitive, in spite of his bulk and seeming brusqueness. There was pity in his eyes before I finished, and I had to grapple with myself to keep the moisture out of mine, his sympathy was so real.

Then I silently gave him the handkerchief, with the telltale stain.

He looked at it absently, and rubbed it gently with the tip of one big finger.

"My son," he said—it was an affectionate form of address which he nearly always employed—"you are starting a colony."

His deep voice was very steady.

"A *what?*" I demanded.

"Bugs," he replied, laconically, and looked me squarely in the eyes.

"*Bugs!*" I cried, feeling the cold hand of Fear at my heart.

He shut his lips tightly, and nodded three or four times.

For a few moments I was literally and positively paralyzed. I felt as if he had pronounced sentence of death. 'Crombie had dropped his eyes, and his broad, strong face was serious.

My nature is buoyant, and presently the reaction came.

"Are they crawlin' yet, Doc?" I asked, a smile struggling to my lips.

I cannot understand now why I asked that question. Perhaps it was a foolish attempt at bravado in the presence of a serious fact just discovered.

He did not answer. He recognized the query as flippant, and his nature was deep. He sat looking at the floor a long time, and I did not intrude again upon his thoughts. But I imagined I felt a tickling beneath my ribs, as of many tiny feet at work. *Bugs! Ugh!*

At last 'Crombie's shaggy head came up.

"There's a chance—a good chance," he said, and I felt courage spreading through me like wine, for 'Crombie never spoke hastily, nor at random.

"Sea voyages and high altitudes wouldn't hurt," he resumed, "but you haven't the money for them. Still you've got to hike from town, my son. Change is all right, but pure air and coarse, good food is your cue. The knob country is not far away. There you'll find all you'd find in New Mexico or Colorado or Arizona, and be in praying distance of the Almighty to boot. I know the spot for you, my son. It is a great knob which stands in the midst of a vast range, and it is belted with pine and cedar trees. Find or build you a shack on it half way up and stay there for a year. That's your prescription, my son."

"It's a devilish hard one to take!" I protested, in my ignorance.

"Condemned men are not usually so particular as to their method of escape," he admonished, with a half smile.

Then he fell to thinking again, with his finger on his eyebrow. It was a peculiar attitude, which I had never seen in anyone else. I sat still, hoping he was evolving some pleasanter plan for my redemption. He was trying to change me into a hillbilly, a savage! I looked at my white hands and carefully kept nails, at my neat business suit and shining shoes, and a slow rebellion awoke within me. I had about decided to ignore 'Crombie and seek more comforting advice, when his rumbling voice came again.

"It's mighty good authority which says you can't kick against the pricks. Don't try it, my son. Before we begin final arrangements I want to ask you a question. Have you ever heard of the life-plant?"

I gazed at him keenly, for the query did not savor of sanity. I knew that his researches in botany almost equalled his skill in medicine, but in some vague way I suspected a trick. His expression disarmed me. It not only was genuine, but yearning. I have never seen the same look in a man's eyes before or since.

"No; I never heard of it," I replied. "What is it?"

His answer was spoken slowly and meditatively.

"From the same source we get our hint regarding the pricks, we read of a tree whose leaves are for the healing of the nations. Nature is the mother of medicine. There is nothing in pharmaceuticals that has not a direct origin from vegetable, animal, or mineral life. It is my belief that there is a remedy for every human ill if we could only lay our hands on it. This brings us to your case, and the life-plant."

"Are you giving me straight goods, 'Crombie'?" I demanded, my suspicions rising again.

"It is half legend, my son, I'll admit, but I have strong reasons for believing it does exist. It's an Indian tale."

"Probably bosh," I muttered, my common sense at bay.

"I think not," he answered, calmly and soberly.

"Have you ever seen it?" I challenged.

"No, but that doesn't disprove it. Listen to me. The life-plant is the most peculiar growth in nature, and cannot be confounded with anything else. The principal accessories to its full development are pure air and sunshine, hence it is found only in the still places of the woods and valleys. It is exceedingly rare. You might spend a year searching for it under the most favorable conditions, and find only one specimen. Again, you might find none. So far as science has gone, it grows from neither seed, bulb, nor root. It seems to germinate from certain elemental conjunctions, attains maturity, flowers and dies. It may appear in the cleft of a rock, on the side of a mountain range, or in the rich mold of a valley. It claims no special season for its own, but may come in December as well as in June. It springs from snow as frequently as from summer grass. This is how it looks. It is about twelve inches high. Its stem is a most vivid green; its leaves are triangular, of a bright golden color, and the flower, which comes just at the top, is a collection of clear little globules, like the berries of the mistletoe. They are clearer and purer

than the mistletoe berry, however. In fact, they are all but transparent, and might readily be mistaken for a cluster of dewdrops. Therein lies the efficacy of this strange plant. Gather the bloom carefully, immerse it in a glass of water for twelve hours, then drink the decoction entire. It will rout your embryo colony, and make you sound and strong as I."

He leaned back and slapped his chest with his open hand.

"You're dopey, 'Crombie," I said, doubting, but longing to believe him.

He wheeled around to his desk.

"All right, my son. You came to me for advice, and got it. I consider that I've done my duty by you."

"Oh, come now!" I pleaded, ready to conciliate. "That's an awful cock-and-bull story you've handed me, and you mustn't get huffy if it doesn't go down without choking. I'll try to swallow it, 'Crombie. I do appreciate your advice, and I'm going to try and take it;—but tell me more about this infernal flower."

"Not infernal," he corrected, mollified; "but supernal. I don't think there's any more to tell. Your stunt is to search till you find it, then follow directions."

"You say it grows anywhere?" I continued, assuming interest.

"Where there's pure air and sunshine," he repeated.

"And grows out of *snow*, 'Crombie?"

"As well as out of warm soil," he averred, doggedly.

"It appears to me that you're looney, 'Crombie, but I hope you're not, and I'll hunt for your bloomin' life-plant. But the question now is: who is going with me into my hill of refuge?"

"Who's going with you? Nobody! Who would go with you? People nowadays have neither time nor inclination to burrow in the wilderness for a twelve-month!"

I groaned, for I knew that he was right. Martyrdom never has company.

"There's no other way?" I pleaded. "Couldn't I have a native look for this healing flower for me?"

He shook his head. "It withers soon after it is plucked. You had better carry a sealed jar of water with you on your tramps."

Resignation came to me with that speech. My own folly had brought me where I was, and my spirit suddenly rose up to meet the emergency.

"I'll go, 'Crombie," I said. "Thank you for your prescription."

---

## CHAPTER TWO

### IN WHICH I GO TO 'CROMBIE AGAIN

'Crombie had said with chilling frankness that I hadn't the money for a sea voyage, or for extended travel. The statement was distressingly true. Just at the time he and I finished our college careers, my father died. Contrary to general belief, and my own as well, he was almost a bankrupt. It was the old story of the frenzy for gain, great risks, and total loss. 'Crombie took up medicine, while I, lured by the promises of a fickle Fate, embraced literature. 'Crombie was wise; I was foolish. When people are sick they always want a doctor, but when they are idle they do not always read. If there is one road to the poorhouse which is freer from obstructions than all others, it is the road of the unknown author. I had a natural bent toward letters, had been editor-in-chief of the college magazine, and had sold two or three stories to middle-class periodicals. So, with the roseate illusions of youth at their flood, I pictured myself soon among the front rank of American writers, and equipped myself for a speedy conquest.

In six months I had sold a half dozen stories, for something approaching one hundred dollars, and had received enough rejection slips to paper one room. To this use I applied them, taking a doleful sort of pleasure in reading the punctilious printed messages with their eternal refrain of "We regret, etc." I wondered if the editors were as sorry as they pretended to be. And I thought, too, of the enormousness of their stationery bills.

But I persevered. The ten years which followed my embarkation upon this treacherous sea were not entirely barren of results. I managed to live frugally, which was something, and established gratifying relations with two or three magazines which bought my manuscripts with encouraging regularity. At last I placed a book with a reputable publishing house. The story fell flat from the press. The firm lost, and I did not receive a penny. The experience was bitter. I had spent a solid year writing that book, and I felt that if I could get a hearing my period of probation would be over. I got the hearing, and I was still in obscurity. That is the typical literary beginning, and he who finally succeeds deserves all he gets, for he has a heart of oak. My inherent optimism and

stubborn will bore me safely through the mists and shallows of defeat, and with the sunlight of hope once more flooding my soul, I went on. Then 'Crombie handed me my commuted death sentence.

It is wonderful how news of this sort gets abroad. But it spreads like uncorked ether. I had proof of this two days later when my minister, an aged and good man, called on a mission of condolence.

"God did it, my boy," he said, as he left, "and you must bear it."

I didn't believe him. I believed that the devil did it, and that God would help me get rid of it.

Since I had to go up into the wilderness, the sooner I went the sooner I would return, and I found my anxiety to be off increasing day by day. Spring was unusually early this year. March was a miracle month of plum blooms, and swelling buds, and flower-sprinkled grass. Little spears of bright green were beginning to show on the lilac bushes, and elusive bird notes came fitfully from orchard and fence-row—blown bubbles of sound bursting ere they were scarcely heard.

When I began to make my preparations, I realized how helpless I was. What should I take with me in the way of food, clothing, bedding, utensils, medicine? I had never camped out a night in my life. 'Crombie would have to tell me. He knew, for every year he hiked off to Canada and the Adirondacks for thirty days, and lived like a caveman every hour he was gone. I went to his office. He was engaged, with six people in the waiting-room. I went out and got him on the telephone. He promised to see me that night at nine in his apartments. It was then three o'clock in the afternoon, so I took a walk. I could do nothing more until I had talked to him.

Lexington is really nothing more than a great big country town, but we love it. I reached the suburbs in half an hour, then took the pike, and walked briskly. The day had been like one huge bloom of some tropical orchid. Contrasted with the biting winter only a few weeks back, it was something to exult the heart and uplift the soul. Rain had fallen the night before. Day came with a world-wide flare of yellow sunshine; her dress a tempered breeze. By noon a coat was uncomfortable, and the air was full of music; the droning, charming, ceaseless litany of the bees. At three in the afternoon, when some strange freak drove me to the open road, the miracle had not passed. Surely God's hands were spread over the face of the earth, and His eyes looked down between. A few cumulus clouds were piled in fantastic groups toward the west, as I stopped about two miles out, and gazed slowly around me. Overhead was infinity, and the presence of the Creator. Encompassing me were unnumbered acres of that soil of which every child of the bluegrass is proud. On the breast of the world the annual mystery was spread. Death had changed to life. Where the snow's warm blanket had lately lain uprose millions and millions of tiny spears; wheat which had been folded safely by nature's cover against the blighting cold. Billowing fields of richest brown, where the ploughshare had made ready a bed for the seed corn and the hemp. Near me were two trees. Their roots were intertwined, for their trunks were not over a foot apart, and their branches had overlapped and interwoven. Almost as one growth they seemed. They were the dogwood and the redbud, and each was in full bloom. At first the sight dazzled me. The pure white flowers, yellow-hearted, gleaming against the mass of crimson blooms which clung closely to twig and limb, produced a remarkable effect. The hardier trees remained bleak, barren, apparently lifeless. They required more embracing from the sun, more kissing from the rain, more sighs of entreaty from the wind before the transmutation of sap to leaf would be accomplished.

It chanced that I had halted at a spot where no homestead was visible, and I was absolutely alone. None passed, and no cattle or stock of any kind stood in the adjoining fields. It was a faint foretaste of the immediate future, and a peculiar peace came over me as I stood on the hard, oiled road, and felt myself becoming at one with the universal light and life of the earth and sky. My breast thrilled, and I drew in my breath quickly. Was it a message? An assurance from the mother-heart of Nature that she would care for me tenderly in exile?

I turned and went slowly, thoughtfully, back to town, reaching it just as the dusk began to be starred by the rayed arc lights.

"'Crombie," I said, lighting one of his choicest cigars and sitting facing him; "you've steered me into an awful mess."

You know I could fuss at 'Crombie. He was too big to take offense.

"How so, my son?" he replied, easily, his large face gently humorous.

"Well, I started to pack for this—er—trip, or outing, and I had no more idea how to go about it than a pig. What will I need, and what must I take? You've got me into this, and you've got to see me through it."

"The first thing you'll need will be a roof with good, stout, tight walls under it. Remember, you're not going there to bask in sunshine alone, but you're going to spend next winter there!"

I looked at him, and I imagine my expression was something like that of a dog when a youth badgers it, for 'Crombie laughed.

"I don't want to make it worse than it is," he apologized; "neither do I want you to be deceived in any way regarding conditions. But by the time winter comes, take my word for it, you can sleep in a snow-drift without hurt."

I smoked in silence. The thought was not encouraging.

"I believe you will find things pretty much to your hand there," he went on, in a ruminative voice. "You remember I came from that part of the country, and the locality is entirely familiar. I have been all over Bald Knob a dozen times. Eight years ago a shack stood just where you would want yours. I think a fellow who had a natural love for the woods built it some eighteen or nineteen years ago, lived there a while, and later moved to another State. It is made entirely of undressed logs, and has one room and a kitchen. It ought to be in good condition yet, because it is protected by the bulk of the knob. I should guess the room to be about sixteen feet square, and the kitchen is a box, but big enough. There is a spring near, considerably impregnated with sulphur. This water can have nothing but a good effect. If the shack still stands, you should consider yourself very lucky."

As he drew this picture, I could not help but gaze at the sumptuous furnishings of the room in which I sat.

"How close is the nearest town?" I asked.

"The nearest town is Cedarton, my old home, ten miles from Bald Knob, but there is a hamlet within three miles. This consists of a few cottages, a store, a blacksmith shop and a distillery. You will have occasion to visit neither place often. If you should happen to run short of provisions, go to the hamlet called Hebron."

"Then seclusion is as necessary as pure air and plain food?"

"It is to prevent you from forming the habit that I advise you not to seek people. Man is naturally gregarious. If you began going to the hamlet once a week you would soon be going every day, and you would deteriorate into a cracker box philosopher or a nail keg politician, spending your time in hump-shouldered inertia rather than in tramping through the health-giving open in quest of the life-plant. You are going forth with a purpose, my son; don't forget that."

I threw my head back against the cushioned leather, and in doing so my eyes lighted on a magnificent moose head over the mantel.

"You killed that fellow?" I asked, swerving suddenly from the subject without apology, as is permitted between old friends.

"Yes; in northern Maine. I trailed him ten days, went hungry for two, broke through some thin lake ice in zero weather, tramped five miles with my wet clothes frozen on me before I could get to a fire, and slept two nights under snow a foot deep. Then I killed him."

I stared at him curiously.

"I confess," I said, "that I have thought you were giving me a prescription you knew nothing about. I beg your pardon for my unbelief."

He smiled, and broke his cigar ash into the tray at his elbow.

"I wouldn't miss my annual trip into Eden for a year's income," he said. "It is during those thirty days I store up life and energy for the remaining three hundred and thirty-five."

Then we fell to discussing my departure, and there followed an hour's talk on ways and means. By eleven o'clock I had a list of everything I could possibly need which would contribute to my comfort or well being. But there was one thing more; one supreme thing. All that evening I had been trying to speak it, and couldn't. Now we were sitting side by side at the table where we had made my list, and suddenly courage came. I clasped the ham-like hand lying close to mine, and looking steadily and beseechingly into my friend's eyes, said:

"Crombie, go with me! I don't mean go to stay. I'm not such a miserable, snuffling coward as that. But companion me there—show me the way—help me get established. Two days—not longer. That country is new to me. Cedarton would take me for an escaped lunatic if I should apply at a livery stable for a wagon to take me and my effects to a shack which used to stand on the slope of Bald Knob. Don't you see? The people know you, and a word from you would fix it all right. I'm your patient. But more than that, 'Crombie, is having your good old self with me. Just come to the shack with me, help me place my things, hearten me up by your good man-talk, make me believe and *know* that I am on the right track. Just two days. Won't you do it, 'Crombie?"

I knew that I was asking a great deal, probably more than I should. It would seem that it was enough for one man to show another where bodily salvation lay, without taking him by the hand and leading him to it. And forty-eight hours from town now meant a monetary loss to the man beside me. But God made men like Abercrombie Dane for other purposes than money getting.

Now he gave me the sweetest smile I have ever seen on any face except my mother's, as he laid his other huge hand over mine.

"Yes, I'll go with you, my son," he said.

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## CHAPTER THREE

## IN WHICH I FIND A LODGE IN THE WILDERNESS

I am here.

'Crombie came with me to Cedarton, engaged two light, serviceable wagons to convey us and my effects, and then drove out here with me to help me get settled. We reached Bald Knob just as the sun was setting yesterday afternoon. The drive out from town was beautiful. Neither talked much on the trip. I couldn't, and 'Crombie seemed to be thinking. The main highway, which we traveled for a number of miles, was made of gravel, brought from a considerable stream which, I learn, runs somewhere nearabout. When we left the road, our way became quite rough. It was merely a succession of knob paths, which had been broadened enough for the passage of four-wheeled vehicles. As we went deeper and deeper into the wood, the scenery became wilder and grander. We saw vast ravines, where the earth shore straight down for many feet; tortuous channels where the fierce rains had plowed a passage to lower ground; trees of all description growing everywhere, while shrubs, creepers and vines interlaced and fought silently for supremacy. Once we passed for nearly half a mile along a broad, shallow stream with a slate bed, bordered on one side by a gigantic, leaden, serrated slate cliff whereon some patches of early moss gleamed greenly bright, fed by the moisture which filtered through the overlapping strata. This cliff was somber; it was almost like a shadow cast upon us. But when we had passed it the sunshine came sweeping gloriously through a gap in the hills, and I felt my spirit leap up gratefully to meet it.

We could see Bald Knob for miles before we reached it, and as we drove along, each smoking, neither talking, I found that my eyes wandered time and again to the bare, conical cap toward which we were creeping. I was wondering with all the soul of me if I could meet the test, now that it stared me in the face. It was one thing to sit in 'Crombie's leather chair and decide comfortably upon this course, and another thing to see myself approaching a hut in the midst of a primeval forest—and to think that I was going to live alone there for a twelve-month! I know my face would not have made a good model for a picture of Hope, as the two wagons drew up in the ravine which partially circled the enormous hill whereon 'Crombie had said a shack had at one time stood. At length we found a sort of road—it was more an opening through the dense undergrowth than anything else—and by dint of much urging from the drivers, and frequent rests, we came at last to a little plateau, perhaps a quarter of an acre in extent, not quite half way up the knob. On the farther side of the plateau was a small building, resting at the base of a sheer wall of stone and earth.

It was then 'Crombie shook off the quiet mood he had shared with me the greater part of the journey, and became hilarious. He hallooed, laughed, joked and capered about like a schoolboy on a frolic, and not to hurt the dear fellow I pretended to fall in with his mood. I really felt as if the world was rapidly drawing to an end.

Last night we could do nothing but make ourselves comfortable as possible, and go to bed early. To-day we have worked hard, and obtained results. I couldn't have got settled without 'Crombie. He has tact, ingenuity, invention, and did most of the hard work. He said it would be better for me not to exert myself too much, which sounds silly, considering that my bodily measurements would have almost equaled his own.

Now he and the drivers and the horses and the wagons are gone. A half-hour ago I caught my last glimpse of him between a scrub oak and a cedar. He was looking back, saw me, waved his arm prodigiously, sent up a hearty hail, and disappeared. I stood for thirty minutes without stirring from my tracks. Then from afar off, through the wonderfully still twilight air, I heard a voice singing. The words were lost because of the distance, but the tune was familiar. It was a rollicking, foolish thing we had sung at college. 'Crombie was sending it to me as a last message, to cheer me up. I inclined my ear desperately to the welcome sound. I held my breath as it fell fainter and fainter, now broken, now barely audible. At length, strain my ears as I would, it was lost.

But another sound had taken its place. The sun was down, and now, at twilight, the Harpist of the Wood awoke and touched his multitudinous strings. He was in gentle mood to-day; a mood of dreams and reverie. The melody was barely audible; just a stirring, a breath. But it stole upon my ears as something wonderful, and sweet, and holy. I had never heard anything at all similar. I stood entranced, listening to the ghostly gamut lightly plucked from the bare limbs and twigs of the hardy trees which had not yet responded to the season's call; from the slender green needles of the pine and the denser plumes which clothed the cedar, and offered to me. As I hearkened to the elfin harmony I became conscious of a certain peace. The boundless solitudes which stretched unbroken in every direction did not seem forbidding and oppressive as I had sensed them when traveling. A subtle kinship with the wind, and the trees, and the earth awoke in my mind, and in some vague way which brought a thrill with it I felt that I had come home. All these things which I had feared grew quite close at this twilight hour, and I imagined they came with pleading, welcoming hands, as to a long lost son or brother who was much beloved. Then as I raised my head a cool, soft breeze smote my face and rushed up my nostrils, and I smelt the elusive, invigorating tang of the evergreens. I smiled, and drew repeated draughts of the pure essence deep into my lungs, filling every cranny and corner again and again. When I finally turned and went back to the shack, I felt as if I had taken wine.

I lit a lamp, made a fire in my kitchen stove, prepared a frugal meal and ate it. Later I took a chair outside the door and sat for two hours, thinking. One very important thought came to me



during that time. My book of fiction did not sell; perhaps a book of facts would. So I have decided to write a history of my exile. To-night it promises to be very prosy and uneventful. I cannot see how anything could possibly transpire which would interest a reader. But the task will provide employment for me, at least. So every night before I go to bed I shall make a record of anything which happened that day. If nothing occurs, I shall wait for the incident worth relating. To-night I shall tell of my new home, and its surroundings.

I have named my place the Wilderness Lodge, thinking how the ill-starred Byron would have joyed in just such a spot. We found it much as 'Crombie said it would be: a substantial, square room built of oak logs, with a floor of undressed planks. It is covered with clapboards, and the roof is rain-proof. The front door is heavy, and may be secured on the inside with a large beam which drops into iron brackets. There is a second door in the rear which leads into the kitchen, a room highly meriting the proverbial expression—"Not big enough to whip a cat in." There are two opposing windows, which are small. Each is provided with a shutter, hinged at the top. They are propped up with sticks slant-wise to admit light and air, and to keep rain out. A nice arrangement, I think. Facing the front door is the fireplace; a huge, rough stone affair, large enough to sleep in if one were so inclined. It has a broad stone hearth, and is fitted with black, squat andirons. Already I am planning the joy I shall derive from this fireplace when next winter comes. To-night I have built a brisk fire for cheer, company, and precaution, for the place has been uninhabited for years, and last night's warming did not drive out all the damp. It is wonderful how satisfying the dancing flames are; they seem to impart their glow and warmth to me.

My furniture is very simple, but enough. I have a cot with plenty of bedding; a table, several chairs, including a rocker; two trunks and some grass rugs for the floor. Of course, there are hundreds of lesser things which I could not get along without, but while they have their places, they are not worth cataloguing. It is also needless to say that one of the trunks is half full of books. Some of these have already found their way to the table; Stevenson, Hearn, Rabelais, Villon, Borrow and some others.

When I come to tell of my demesne I don't know where to draw the line, for there are no boundary marks, and I can easily fancy "I am monarch of all I survey." I suppose I have a yard, for I shall think of the plateau in that way. Whoever built the Lodge cleared the level place in front, and around, of all trees and bushes. It is dry and barren now, and covered with dead leaves, but soon there will be a prying and a pushing of little green heads and I shall be kept busy if I don't want to be overrun and driven out. Beginning a short distance back of the Lodge, and continuing upward for perhaps a hundred feet, a thick band of pines and cedars belt the hill with a zone of perpetual green. Beyond this the vegetation dwindles, becomes scarcer, and finally ceases, leaving the apex of the knob absolutely bare. Below my plateau, and around, everywhere, as far as I can see, are trees, trees, trees. Trees of every size and every kind indigenous to the climate. Evergreens predominate. There are millions of them, but there are also wide expanses of oak, ash, beech, sycamore, elm, walnut, dogwood. Most of these have as yet not put forth the tiniest shoot. But here and there in the dun, brown stretches a dogwood has joyously flung out a thousand gleaming stars which shine, white and radiant, a pledge and a promise of the general resurrection nearhand.

A moment gone I laid down my pen and stepped outside. How vast! How still! How illimitable! I had never felt my insignificance so keenly before. I seemed a tiny atom of dust. But as I stood and heard again those muffled chords from the mighty Harp, and saw the patient planets overhead again on guard, I suddenly knew that I was truly part and parcel of the Whole, and in my heart Hope gave birth to prayer.

Now to bed, tired, but at peace, with both windows flung wide—it is 'Crombie's orders.

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## CHAPTER FOUR

### IN WHICH I MEET A DRYAD

A week has passed. Until to-day I had begun to fear that my proposed plan of making a book would come to naught. One would not care to read of a daily life consisting of getting up, eating, smoking, reading, strolling about and going to bed. That is all I have done until to-day, when something happened. But before I come to this, I must tell of the labor I undergo in procuring water.

I have spoken elsewhere of a sulphur spring. It is located in another ravine across the one lying at the foot of my knob. I have been drinking the water dutifully, because 'Crombie told me to, although to my mind it is vile stuff, and I can't see how anything with such a pronounced odor can be beneficial. I don't suppose I know. But I must have cooking and bath water as well, and this comes from the small stream which runs through the center of the nearest ravine. The distance would not be so great on a level, but to struggle up the steep slope with a bucket full of water in each hand is no fun. I have had to make two trips every day, much to my discomfort. This is a problem which I have to solve, or else go unwashed. Then, too, when the summer comes the stream below will most probably run dry, although 'Crombie assured me the sulphur water was plentiful the year round.

I have been getting located the last seven days; exploring my hill of refuge, and making little excursions into the neighboring fastnesses. Almost the last thing 'Crombie told me was to remember the life-plant, and the sooner I began the search the better it would be for me. I'm not altogether satisfied about this life-plant, although I know 'Crombie wouldn't joke with me about so serious a matter. I have at length decided to take his word implicitly, and begin a systematic hunt for this most peculiar growth. I am feeling suspiciously well. My cough has nearly gone, and it seems almost absurd that a strapping man of six foot two should be out chasing a chimera of this sort.

This morning I was up before the sun, an experience I have not known since childhood. I breakfasted bountifully on ham, eggs, bread, and coffee. Then, flushing foolishly, I filled a pint Mason jar with water—sweet water—screwed the top down tightly, thrust the jar hastily in my coat pocket, took my pipe and a stout staff I had cut several days before, and started on my first tramp for this life-plant.

I swung down the road—I will call it such—up which the wagons had come, crossed to the spring and drank of the cold, bad smelling water, and as I stood puffing my pipe I wondered which way I should go. It did not matter in the least, but it was human to consider, and I considered. Before me loomed the prodigious bulk of my home hill. Back of me rose another, not quite so imposing, but exceedingly steep. To right and left swept the ravine, silent, shadowy in the newborn morning. It was from the right we had come. I turned to the left, and presently the thick soles of my heavy walking shoes were crunching and clattering the loose shale as I skirted the shallow stream bed.

I went far that day, climbing ridge after ridge, traversing hollow after hollow, always with my eyes open for my rare treasure. Again and again I came upon farm land, small patches of tilled soil which the stubborn strength of man had wrested from the wilderness to supply his needs. These fields I went around. Once, from a high point, I saw a tiny hamlet, caught the cackle of geese, and heard the low of kine.

Noon came and went before I was aware. I had brought no lunch with me. It was past midafternoon when I again drew near home. There was never any danger of my getting lost. Far as I might walk in a single day, that towering peak would yet be visible, rearing itself in silent grandeur to guide me back. The thought was comforting.

I approached in a different direction from any I had ever taken before, coming almost from due west. I had swiftly descended a slight slope, hunger giving me haste, and had burst into a glade at the edge of one of the many creeks which threaded the country, when I stopped short.

A girl was standing on the further side of the glade. She had not heard me, for the leaf-sodden mold gave back no sound from my careless feet. She stood under a dogwood tree, and it chanced, the moment I beheld her, that the declining sun fell all about and over her. She had plucked a number of sprays from the tree, and as I stood with bated breath she began to weave the white and yellow blooms into her hair, which shone in my eyes like a reflection from burnished copper. She sang as she weaved, or rather crooned, for I caught no words. It was just an elfin little tune, with quavering minors strung on a listless monotone. She was garbed very, very simply; a one piece dress of faded blue, belted at the waist. A poke bonnet of the same color lay upon the ground near her feet. Her position in relation to mine was a semi-profile, so I could make little of her face, but her form was slim and straight, and her bowed arms displayed a natural grace as she thrust her fingers in and out of her shining hair, working the star-like blossoms into place.

As I stood wonder-struck, debating what to do, I saw a commotion in the tree by which she stood, a scuttling form darted out on the branch nearest the girl's head, then leaped to her shoulder, where it sat and nibbled a nut, its tail a graceful gray plume. I think my mouth went agape; if it didn't, it should have, for here was magic.

The girl—or dryad, for I was beginning to doubt if she was real—paid no immediate heed to the squirrel, but went on droning her song and toiling patiently at the flowers. I stood and watched her, leaning on my staff, my erstwhile hunger forgotten. Would she vanish into air, or would she disappear in the cleft of an oak? I determined to see.

In a few moments her crown was in place. She put her hands down, but almost at once raised one of her arms, and gave a small, thin, twittering call. She stood like a statue, apparently waiting, then repeated the sound, varying it only by a quick rising inflection at the end. Like an echo an answer filtered sweetly out from the forest to one side, and I saw a streak of brown cleave the air of the glade, as a small wood bird, of a species unknown to me, dipped to the outstretched arm and perched upon the girl's wrist. There it sat, its pert little tail at a sharp angle, and its head cocked to one side very knowingly.

"Good Lord!" I burst forth, involuntarily, then bit my lip for a fool.

The charm was rudely broken; I had spoiled the tableau.

With a whisk of his tail the squirrel dropped to the girl's hip, jumped to the ground, and headed toward the thicker growth with frightened leaps. The bird vanished as the ball does from between the conjuror's fingers—it just went, but I did not see it go—and the girl turned with a quiet movement to see who the idiot was.

"I—beg your pardon!" I said, advancing several steps and taking off my cap. "That—er—I have

never seen—you know—er—I'm really sorry I scared them off!"

She stood perfectly calm, her weight resting rather awkwardly upon one foot, her hands loosely clasped in front of her, as I made my stammering speech. I don't know why I should have been so confused, unless it was from her rare composure.

"They'll come back," she said, assuringly, and smiled.

I drew closer. I could not believe the evidence of my eyes. When I saw her joined hands I marveled; they were white, slender, smooth, entirely unmarked by toil. Now her face. It was fresh, sweet—not beautiful—and lighted by gray eyes, which brought a sensation to my spine. It was not a face I would have expected to meet in the Kentucky knob country. True, there was a superficial expression which reflected her environments, her associates, but this appeared to me even in that moment as a veil to be taken off, that the true nature might shine forth. Her voice was low, rich, and held a strangely haunting note which made for unrest in the heart of a man. She was totally wild; that I could not doubt. Illiterate, crude, a child of the locality, but when I first looked in her face, when I first heard her voice, I knew that I stood before one whom Fate had cheated. That she was not abashed, not even startled by the sudden appearance of a total stranger, I attributed rightly to her mode of life, which was untrammelled by convention, thoroughly natural, and free from the restraints artificiality begets.

"You—live near?" I said, never once thinking of passing on now that my apology was spoken.

"Uh-huh; at Lizard P'int. 'Tain't fur—up th' holler a bit."

The simple words struck me almost like a blow. The voice was sweet as a flute in its lowest tones, the lips were red and curving, but the speech was the uncouth vernacular of the hills. Fate had indeed cheated her.

As I nervously drew out my pipe, thinking what I should say next, she discovered a rent on her shoulder where the careless claws of the scared squirrel had torn the fabric of her dress. She gave a little exclamation of annoyance, thrust one finger in the torn place, pouted as a child might for an instant, then laughed and tossed her garlanded head.

"I don't keer! Granny'll fix it!"

It was my cue.

"Who is Granny?"

"Granny?... Oh! *my* granny. We live together."

"On Lizard Point," I supplemented. "Doesn't anyone else live with you?"

She nodded her head brightly.

"Yes, Grandf'er does, but he don't count."

Her ingenuousness was bewitching, and I essayed to prolong the interview.

"Aren't you afraid to wander around in the woods this way alone?"

"Me!... *Skeerd?*"

For a moment she looked at me with dropped chin and a tiny frown of wonder, then a glad stream of laughter came pouring from her upheld mouth, filling the forest with rippling, echoing cadences. I gazed on the round, gleaming column of her young throat, milk-white and firm, and a subtle, primal call stirred in my breast. When her boisterous merriment had subsided, I could see her teeth, like young corn when the husks are green, between the scarlet of her parted lips.

I came closer yet. I was bewildered, puzzled, but strangely attracted. I scarcely knew how to answer her.

"You see," I tried to explain, "it—that is, where I came from young women go nowhere without an escort, except in town."

"Oh!"

Her face was serious now, and she seemed trying to comprehend.

"Whur'd you come frum?" she demanded, with disconcerting abruptness.

"From Lexington."

"Whut's that?"

"A town—a little city."

"I don't like city people!"

The sentence sprang forth spontaneously, and she looked displeased.

"Why?"

I did not receive an answer. She was kicking a small bunch of moss with the toe of her ugly, coarse shoe, which was rusty, and laced with a string. But for all its shapelessness, the shoe was

very small.

"Why don't you like city people?"

"'Cause Buck says they're mean an' stuck up!"

She flashed the sentence at me with a rapid glance of defiance.

"Who's Buck?"

Now the girl's face took fire, and dire confusion gripped her. Hair and skin became indistinguishable. But she flung her head up bravely, and with burning eyes looked straight into mine.

"Buck Steele. He's th' blacksmith over to Hebron, an' he's—my frien'."

She had grit. I honored her for that speech.

"You know I'm a stranger," I ran on, easily, making a pretense to fill my pipe, and so help her over her embarrassment. "I came just about a week ago. I'm in the house up on Bald Knob yonder. The city didn't agree with me, and my doctor sent me out here to get well. I'm not mean and stuck up, believe me. I've got the poorest sort of an opinion of myself, although I've lived pretty clean. Now I want to be friends with you, and all the folks about here. You'll help me, won't you?"

Her self-possession had returned while I was talking. When I stopped, I smiled, and looked at her as frankly and honestly as I could.

"You don' 'pear puny!" was her startling rejoinder.

I took another tack.

"Pray tell me how it is the birds and the beasts obey you?"

"I love 'em!" she answered, promptly, and with warmth. "I know 'em, an' they know me."

She turned without warning, and walking to the bank of the creek, which at this point was raised several feet above the water, leaned over and peered down into the pool below. Could Eve have been more artless? She was looking at her reflection in the mirror of the stream!

I picked up her bonnet by one of the strings, then went and stood beside her. A compliment arose unbidden to my lips, but I stifled it. It would not have been fair.

"I mus' go," she said, straightening up, and twisting a hanging curl near her forehead back beneath her hair.

"Aren't you—"

I started to ask if she wasn't afraid, and if I mightn't go with her, but remembered in time.

"—and your granny very lonely?" I finished, lamely, but she did not appear to notice it.

"La! No! Th' Tollerses 's jis' t'other side o' th' ridge, 'n' they've got a pas'l o' kids. No time to git lonesome!"

My spirit writhed. Such language as this—from her!

She held out a hand for the bonnet.

I brought it forward slowly, still holding it by the string. Her hand rested against mine for an instant as she took it. At this juncture I made a—to me—significant discovery. *Her nails were pared and clean!* It seemed paradoxical, but it was true. I did not attempt to account for the phenomenon then, but I did later, with no results whatever.

"Where is Lizard Point—exactly?" I asked, my voice more serious than it had been during our talk.

She pointed her finger down the creek, as it flowed gently murmuring to the south.

"Th' crick 'll lead yo'. Nigh onto half mile frum here."

"I'm coming to see you and your granny some day soon. May I? You know it's lonesome for me out here. I'm not used to it. May I come?"

She gazed at me with steady gray eyes for a few moments.

"Ye-e-es; I s'pose so," she answered, reluctantly; "if yo' git lonesome.... Whut yo' keer'n' that jar fur?"

Her glance had just espied it, and now it was my turn to blush.

"I'll tell you—when I see you again," I compromised, laughing.

She started off, but stopped and turned.

"Live on Baldy, yo' say?"

"Yes; in the old log house there."

"I go thur sometimes. Maybe I'll come 'n' see you!"

"All right. You'll be mighty welcome."

"Good-by."

"Good-by."

She did not look back, and I stood with a distinct sensation enveloping me until her copper-gold head, crowned with the star-like dogwood, had passed from view.

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## CHAPTER FIVE

### IN WHICH I SAY WHAT I PLEASE

A prodigious miracle has happened.

It is not yet mid-April, but the Spirit of Life has stirred in every bole and bough; every twig and tendril. The awakening has been so gradual, so stealthy, so silent, that not until this afternoon did I notice that the far reaching brown world over which I daily looked, had changed.

I had been doing some rough carpentering—building a bench on either side of my doorway outside, using a broad plank I had found in the kitchen for the purpose. It is true I had chairs, and chairs are more comfortable, but it has struck me that the Lodge would look better with these benches in front; would have a more finished appearance. So I knocked them up quickly. Now on the further rim of my plateau grows a single pine; a tall, many-limbed, graceful tree. Somehow the thought was born that a bench under this pine would not be placed amiss, so I walked toward it to investigate the idea at close range. Its lowest branches shot out more than two feet over my head, and as I passed under them I obtained a fresh and unobstructed view of a tremendous reach of landscape. Instantly my mind received the impression that something had happened. The entire perspective was subtly transformed.

Before me was nothing but trees—a vast valley full; slopes clothed with them and peaks capped with them. And each tree was touched with mystery; the familiar, never to be understood transmutation of sap to bud and leaf. The effect from where I stood was not beautiful only; it awoke a positive awe in my heart. The immense area comprehended by my gaze was undergoing resurrection. Painless, soundless, without effort, the ancient forest was coming back to life; to green, vigorous, waving and dancing life. The process was as yet scarcely begun, but already it was a veracious promise of perfect fulfillment. A tenuous, lacey veil of pale, elusive green seemed stretched over all growth within the scope of my vision. A misty, unreal something it appeared; a gossamer covering which would vanish before the first breath of wind, or touch of sun. But well I knew the truth! It was the sun, and the wind, and the rain which had compassed the wonder. Beneath their united power the sluggish sap had first stirred in the hidden roots, and when the insistent summons became more and more powerful, had mysteriously arisen through successive cells of fiber, up and up, into every branch, into every limb, into the smallest and most insignificant twig, where Nature's final marvelous alchemy was performed, and moisture turned to bud, and bud turned to leaf. A leaf perfectly shaped and veined, each to its own tree.

Dusk came upon me as I gazed, enraptured. Softly the light stole away, and the shadows came. Now the horizon range was a wall of gloom, and then, like billows which made no sound, velvety waves of darkness overflowed all before me, blotting it out. But I know that to-morrow the lacey veil would have a deeper shade, and that soon, with millions upon millions of leaves astir, the Harpist of the Wood, when he touched his responsive strings, would draw yet a grander measure.

No bench went under the pine tree that night, but the next day I builded it well. It is a fine spot to sit and dream—a pastime I love.

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## CHAPTER SIX

### IN WHICH I MEET A SATYR

Two weeks have passed since I talked with the dryad in the glade.

I am getting along splendidly. That is, my appetite is good, I sleep the night through, and my trouble remains at a standstill. I'm not expecting this to leave me at once. I read some every night. The days I force myself to spend outdoors. If I do not go on a tramp, I prowl around my hill of refuge. Yesterday I found a creditable cave some score of rods from the Lodge, in about the same latitude. There is an irregular, outjutting ledge of rock here, and it was beneath a moss-splotched boulder I found a hole leading into the knob, its entrance large enough for me to stand erect in. I am not averse to a mild adventure, so I began a tentative exploration. I had proceeded

but a few steps, however, when I stopped. I heard something. I had my revolver with me—I make a habit of taking it with me wherever I go—so I drew this and advanced a little further. The sound was repeated, louder and more menacing. I would have thought it the hiss of a serpent, but for its remarkable volume. I looked, but could see nothing. The passage ended in darkness. The floor was littered with small stones, and pebbles mixed with fine sand. I picked up one of the stones and tossed it sharply into the darkness ahead. The response was instantaneous. The hissing was renewed, but now it was accompanied by a scuffling sound, and I became aware that some formless thing was approaching me. I could see the bulk of it making for me—but that was enough! I turned and ran, ignominiously, forgetting my weapon in my fright. As I made my exit from the cave at full speed I grasped a near-by sapling desperately, described an erratic and ungraceful arc, thus saving myself from tumbling down the steep declivity which faced me, and finally brought up some score of feet away. I turned to see if I was pursued, but there was only an anxious and solicitous mother buzzard in the cave-mouth, her ugly neck outstretched toward me, and her broad wings bowed in anger. I laughed. It was a little late for their nesting season, but this one doubtless had a pair of miserable little yellow goslings back in that hole.

I give this incident to show how quiet my life was up to this time, and how such a trifling occurrence really caused me much excitement.

I began my chronicle to-night by saying it had been two weeks since I talked with the dryad in the glade. Why should I reckon time from that? I wrote the sentence unconsciously. Now, when I come to think about it, I realize that the dryad has been in my mind a very great deal during the last fortnight. You must know there is to be no concealment in this narrative. It is to be a record of absolute truth. Not only what I do, but what I think and feel, shall be faithfully set down. She—I don't even know her name! I can't see why I should have parted from her without asking her name, since I shall in all likelihood see her many times during the coming year. Perhaps it was her eyes which made me forget such an important question. I have never seen eyes like hers—never. They are the Irish gray. That's a different gray from all others, as I suppose you know. Don't ask me how they are different, for I don't propose to attempt an explanation. But they are, and especially is this true in women's eyes. A woman with Irish gray eyes can be dangerous if she wants to. In addition to their remarkable color, the dryad's eyes have very white lids which droop the least bit, perpetually shading the iris. She is something of a paradox. She has small feet, smooth hands and carefully kept nails, but her language, while spoken in a peculiarly pleasing voice, is so ungrammatical and colloquial that it makes rigors creep over me. I told her that I was coming to see her and her granny, but I haven't gone. Why haven't I? I told her I was coming to see her because I got lonely. Have I been lonely? Yes; very. Three days ago I bravely started for the glade where I had found her, intending to follow the guiding creek on to Lizard Point. I turned off before I reached the creek and went ten miles in another direction. Why did I do that? I want to see the dryad again. She interests me; I feel that we shall be good friends. She has a bright and ready mind, and is absolutely natural. She says what she wants to, laughs when she wants to, does what she wants to. I verily think she would be incapable of deception or guile, but I may be wrong in this. I suspect I am. Such things are not conditions resultant from culture and refinement; they belong to the human organism, and so, by virtue of her being, the dryad must possess them.

To-morrow I am going to Lizard Point.

This afternoon I came in before sunset from a very leisurely tramp of about four hours. Whenever I stir abroad my pint Mason jar full of fresh water goes with me, for I have banished all doubt, and believe steadfastly in the life-plant. You may be sure I am always looking, always watching. That is my sole object in life just now. I feel that I will find the thing if it grows in this part of the world, for my search is to be most thorough. Thus far I have discovered nothing whatever to arouse hope or anticipation.

I came home early to-day because I am to have a garden. I decided upon this last night after I was abed. Just before I toppled over into sleep I remembered that the ground to the left of the Lodge was loamy, with few rocks, and not many stumps. So to-day I despatched an early supper, took a rake and began to clear the ground. It was nice, easy work, and I soon discovered that my garden would run sixty feet one way by forty-five or fifty the other. There was a heavy layer of decaying leaves to scrape away, a number of loose stones, and quantities of sticks fallen or blown from trees. I stopped in about fifteen minutes to refill my pipe, found that I had left my tobacco on one of the benches, and went and helped myself. As I touched match to bowl I heard a high, harsh voice singing in the most dolorous key imaginable the following doggerel couplet:

"Rabbit in th' log,  
Ain't got no rabbit dog."

I stopped drawing on the stem, and turned my head in the direction of the sound. The burning splinter of pine nipped my fingers, and I dropped it. The crazy tune came from down the road, which curved not a great distance away. Again, louder, and in a more positive tone, some one declared:

"Rabbit in th' log,  
Ain't got no rabbit dog.  
Chick'n on my back,  
Houn' on my track,  
I'm a-makin' fur my shanty—

God knows!"

The last word was carried through fluctuations which would almost have stood for a cadenza in a music score, and as it trailed off into silence the singer appeared from around the bend.

In the half light he presented a strange, almost a grotesque figure, as he toiled up the road repeating over and over his peculiar lines. I stood perfectly quiet, and watched his approach. There was a certain limp to his gait, coupled with a decided unsteadiness, which made his seeming yet more uncouth as he drew nearer and nearer through the gloaming. His head was bent, and he was unaware of my presence until he reached the plateau, and advanced some distance across it. Then he looked up, saw me, and came to a standstill with a jerky motion. He was perhaps twenty feet from me, as we stood and exchanged stares.

An exceedingly tall, loose-jointed individual faced me. His clothing was nondescript, mostly rags and tatters. His trousers, frayed at the ends, came to an abrupt stop several inches above the tops of his run-down, rusty shoes, and the spaces between showed a dust-begrimed skin. He wore a coat of the Prince Albert pattern, much too small. Beneath this was some sort of shirt which would not admit of description. His face was gaunt and hairy. I will not say he wore a beard; the term would be incorrect. The hair grew in patches; sickly, stringy strands, with an extra tuft on the chin which curved sideways. I was forcibly reminded of a goat when I saw this chin-tuft. He wore a colorless, conical felt hat, broad-brimmed and bandless. The brim continued the slope of the crown in an unbroken line, producing a startling effect. There came to my mind the headgear of Hendrik Hudson's crew as depicted in the play of Rip Van Winkle. This specter-like apparition might well have been a ghost, but for the recent evidence of a strong pair of lungs. Beneath one arm, hugged to his side, the figure carried a bundle covered with oilcloth.

For the length of a half-dozen breaths we stood motionless and speechless. Then the figure began to nod its head at me, slowly, soberly, up and down, up and down, and with each movement the curved chin-tuft would shake. This senseless action irritated me. I don't know why, for it might just as well have caused amusement. But for some reason I felt anger rising within me; not violent, but enough to barb my tongue.

"Who are you, and what do you want?"

My words were sharp, but that they did not cut I knew from the sprightly reply.

"I'm a fiddler, 'n' I don't want nothin'!"

Still the head bobbed, and the goat-tuft shook.

"You're nothing of the sort," I retorted; "you're a satyr, and you want a drink of whiskey!"

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## CHAPTER SEVEN

### IN WHICH THE SATYR AND I SIT CHEEK BY JOWL

He looked the first, and from his antic disposition I was convinced he was already more than half drunk. But I was entirely unprepared for the result which my statement brought about.

The angular figure became convulsed with immoderate laughter on the instant. He shouted and screamed with mirth, bending forward, thrusting backward, holding his ribs with one hand—the other was busy with the oilcloth bundle, which he never forgot—turning that repellent chin to the sky, and yelling his insane, cackling, demoniac merriment to the first stars. I thought he would surely have some sort of fit before my eyes, so overcome was he with glee. I stood erect and dignified, waiting for his stormy risibles to allay. After a full two minutes of noisy rapture, he calmed down somewhat, drew forth a bottle of remarkable size and tilted it with the neck between his lips. Making a smacking sound of satisfaction as he finished the draught, he half lurched, half walked toward me, extending the bottle as he came.

"Good fur rheumatiz," he said, stopping at arm's length, and good-naturedly leering his invitation for me to partake.

I shook my head.

"No.... Thank you."

There was an expression on his countenance which disarmed me of my wrath. At close range I searched his features. They were irregular, undecided. His nose was pug—another satyr touch—and his neck long, thin and ridged. I could not see his eyes. But something about him came out to me as an appeasing and soothing agent. Worse than useless for me to speculate as to what it was. A nameless something, probably, which acted upon my spirit, or nature, and charmed it in a way. I knew this thing before me was a fragment, a waif, a bit of flotsam on Life's sea. He could be nothing else. And yet—and yet, as he stood patiently with that enormous bottle stuck under my nose, and the genial, whole-hearted leer of invitation on his pagan face, I knew a sudden kinship; a quick, sympathetic rush of feeling, and as I waved the bottle aside with my left hand I thrust out my right and grasped his as it hung limply in front of the bundle he still pressed to his side

with his elbow.

"I don't want your liquor, Satyr," I said; "but you may sit down and talk to me if you want to."

"Don't want good liquor?" he repeated, batting his lids, and lowering the bottle as though puzzled beyond understanding.

"Not now; not often. Sometimes I do. But what sort of stuff is that?"

I had just noticed the contents of the bottle was clear.

"White lightnin'," he replied, carefully stowing it away in a pocket I could not see.

I knew then. It was moonshine whiskey.

Suddenly his cadaverousness struck me afresh.

"Have you had supper—or dinner—or breakfast?" I demanded, with such vim that he answered hurriedly:

"Naw; neither; nothin'."

The grammar was bad, but the meaning was good.

"Then let's eat—you and I—and become acquainted."

I did not tell him my supper was over, though this bit of tact was doubtless unnecessary. Neither did I invite him indoors. While it is true I had really warmed to his outcast condition, the sentiment did not embrace the hospitality of my roof. I felt a desire to cultivate him, but the acquaintance must grow in the open.

He grinned appreciatively at my suggestion, and I saw him lick his lips surreptitiously, after the manner of a starved animal which smells food.

"Get busy about a fire, and I'll find the grub," I continued, not waiting for the assent which I knew he would give.

With that I went in the house, took from my larder some bacon, eggs, bread and coffee, all of which, with a skillet, I carried out. Quickly as I had moved, I found the Satyr's fire ablaze when I returned. This he had made from dry leaves and sticks which I had already scraped into a pile from off my garden plot.

As host, I prepared the meal. While it was cooking, my strange guest sat just across from me in a most uncouth attitude. His shoulders and a portion of his back rested against a stump; the small of his back he sat upon. His long, spider legs were flexed in such a manner that his sharp knees shot up into the air above his head. He had placed his dust colored hat upon the ground, and I could see pale, lifeless strands of hair waving in the early night breeze on top of his partly bald head. The oilcloth bundle lay across his stomach. Neither spoke during the few minutes in which the eggs, meat and coffee were being prepared. One of his claw-like hands lay upon the bundle. Once I saw his other hand stray rather aimlessly under his coat, but it brought nothing out when withdrawn.

"Go to it!" I said, cheerily, when all was done, shoving the skillet toward him, and rising to find a cup for his coffee.

When I came back it was to see him with the skillet between his knees, devouring its contents with the voracity of a starved wolf. He was using a stick and his fingers to convey the hot food to his mouth, as I had forgotten to provide either knife or spoon. I watched him in amazement, for he bolted the bacon and eggs as a dog might. It was very plain he was badly in need of nourishment.

"Good, Satyr?" I asked, squatting down and pouring out a running-over cupful of steaming coffee.

He tried to reply, but the words were unintelligible because of the fullness of his mouth. So I wisely made no further effort at conversation until the skillet was clean—literally clean—for the hungry man took chunks of bread and sopped and swabbed until the black iron glowed spotless. Three cups of strong coffee he drank, three big cups; then, because, I suppose, there was nothing left, he drew his ragged sleeve across his mouth, sighed and voiced his thanks.

"Hell 'n' blazes!"

It meant more, from him, than the most polished bit of rhetoric from a scholar.

"Glad you liked it," I said. "Do you smoke?"

For reply, he began to search his garments silently, and directly produced a cob pipe, as remarkable in appearance as its owner. To begin with, it was made from a mammoth corncob. I verily believe it was two inches in diameter. Around its middle was a dark band, where the nicotine had soaked through. The reed stem was so short that it brought the pipe almost against the smoker's lips. He helped himself to the twist of tobacco I offered him, dexterously flipped out a red coal from the edge of the fire with a stick, then deliberately picked the live coal up between finger and thumb and laid it on top of the pipe. I had heard of this feat, but had never believed it true.



Now my guest sat Turk fashion, contentedly puffing away, so I followed his example on my side the fire, after tossing on a few more sticks to keep the blaze going. The red embers would have sufficed for heat, the night being warm, but I wanted to see more of this queer being. Above all, I wanted to see his eyes. This I could not do, because the firelight flickered, smoke arose from the burning sticks, and the man had bushy brows.

For several minutes there was no sound but the gentle crackling of wood-fiber, or the occasional sizzling of a little jet of steam escaping from its tiny prison. Then I heard a question which almost startled me.

"Whut mought a satyr be, no-how?"

I laughed low, and pressed the spewed-up ashes down into my pipe.

"A satyr?" I repeated, thinking swiftly, for really I did not want to cause affront. "Oh! A satyr is a fellow who runs loose in the woods. That's you, isn't it?"

He was looking in the fire, and presently he began to nod.

"I reck'n it air; yes, I reck'n it air."

"But you've another name," I went on; "what is that?"

"Jeff Angel."

"That doesn't suit," I made bold to answer. "Satyr is much nicer than Angel. Where do you live, pray?"

"Anywhur; nowhur. Jis' use 'roun' th' country, eat'n' 'n' sleep'n' fust one place 'n' 'nother."

Feeling cramped, I now reclined upon my elbow with my head away from the fire. In this position my companion was invisible.

"Why did you come here to-night?" I resumed, pulling leisurely on my briar-root, and noting idly that the stars had become much thicker.

"I's goin' to sleep in th' shack," was the prompt reply. "Lots 'n' lots o' times I've slep' thur."

"And now I've rooted you out. I'm sorry."

"'Tain't wuth worryin' 'bout. I'll go on to th' P'int d'reckly."

I twisted my head in his direction with a swift movement.

"The Point?... Lizard Point?"

"Lizard P'int."

He evinced no surprise that I knew the name.

"Who do you know there?" I demanded.

"All on 'em. Granny, Granfer, Lessie. They's my folks."

So her name was Lessie.

"Your folks! What do you mean?"

"Granny's my aunt."

That would make the Dryad and the Satyr cousins! Heavens! Could this be true? I sank back on my elbow, and slowly dragged the pipe stem over my lower lip into my mouth. Somehow I did not relish this news.

"Then you are some sort of cousin to Lessie," I murmured, confusedly, and I doubt if he heard. At least, he did not reply, and I lay and looked at the sky and the somber bulk of the forest below, pondering this strange news which I could not comprehend. Was it possible that bright creature's blood could flow in the veins of this derelict? The idea did not suit me, and yet I had no reason to doubt it. My interest flagged; I no longer felt the inclination to question, and a long silence fell. I could not order my guest away, especially after he had broken my bread, but I would not be sorry when he went. The minutes passed; the fire sank low. My pipe burned out: I could feel it cooling under my hand. A drowsiness stole over me. I must have been on the borderland of sleep when I became dreamily conscious of a strange, pervading harmony. Ethereal echoes seemed to wake within my brain, and the hushed night was suddenly tuned for a fairies' dance.

In stupefied amazement I swung my head around, and my mouth fell ajar and my brows knit when I saw from whence these heavenly strains proceeded. Jeff Angel was back against the stump. His knees were sticking up like the broken frame of a bicycle, and he had a violin under his chin. The goat-tuft was spread thinly out over the tail of the instrument. His peaked slouch hat was a dirt-colored cone on the ground at his side, and by it lay a crumpled piece of oilcloth. His eyes were closed, and there was an expression of deep peace upon his homely countenance. His long, big-knuckled, claw-like fingers moved over the strings with the apparent aimlessness of a daddy-long-legs in its perambulations, and they thrilled to the caress of his frayed bow as the lips of a chaste lover to the lips of his beloved. I did not speak, nor move, for I was dumfounded, and the night had been transformed into an elfin carnival of dulcet sounds. My imagination was

aroused, and I could almost see nymphs and naiads uprising from the dense growth all around, crooning as they came of woodland delights, and chanting the stories the low wind told them when the world was asleep. The quiet ravine was peopled with a ghostly company which made sad, eerie, but entrancingly sweet music, such as might have been heard in heaven when the morning stars sang together. The notes were liquid, living, colorful. Sometimes there were brief silences between them, which were filled with palpitating echoes. Suddenly a trembling flood of impassioned sound rushed forth on swallow wings into the star-filled night, and I sat up with a gasp.

"*Jeff Angel!*"

A downward crash of the bow which set all the strings to jangling horribly; then silence.

The man was abashed, confused, for he hastily reached for the cloth bag and thrust both violin and bow therein. He spoke as he fumbled nervously at the drawstring.

"I didn't know you'd keer!" he said, contritely.

He had misinterpreted my exclamation.

"Care? Care!" I burst forth, leaning forward with my palms on the ground. "I never heard such music in all my life, and I have heard men play who receive a thousand dollars a night! Where did you get it?... How do you do it?"

The satyr secured his worn coat across his chest with one button, then bent toward me and replied earnestly.

"I guess it's bornd with me. I've never ben no 'count frum a kid. Wuzn't wuth shucks—never. Jis' wouldn't work—I couldn't. They's no work in me. When they tried to make me I'd run off. I'd run fur off in th' woods 'n' lay 'roun' all day, a-lis'n'n'. I heerd thin's." He stretched out one gaunt arm and waved it with an uncertain, twisty motion. "I heerd thin's. More 'n' th' birds a-cheepin' 'n' a-twitt'r'n' 'n' th' squir'ls a-barkin' 'n' a-yappin' 'n' th' bees a-junin' in th' flowers. They's other thin's—lots o' thin's I heerd. Th' crick's got a song—it's *sich* a song—'bout th' purties' 't is' I reck'n, 'cus it's changeabler. 'N' they ain't no en' to th' chune th' win' sings. Sometimes it's lazy 'n' sleepy, 'n' yo' wan' to duck yo' head 'n' snooze, 'n' ag'n it's pow'ful strong 'n' loud 'n' almos' skeers yo' with its shoutin'. 'N' they's other thin's—thin's I can't tell yo' 'bout 'cus I don't know whut they air—but I hears 'em. I c'n jis' shet my eyes any day out in th' deep woods whur they ain't nothin' but woods, 'n' fus' thin' I know I'm a-floatin' on a cloud with music ever-whurs. When I's a kid I went hongry fur some 'n' to play on, so one day I foun' me a big reed, 'n' I made me a w'is'le with holes in it. I jes' mus' play."

He rose to his feet, put his pipe away without knocking the ashes out, and carefully tucked his oilcloth bundle under his arm.

"Pow'ful good supper, 'n' I wuz hongry *right!* 'Blige' to yo', sho. Good-by!"

He swung around and started across the plateau.

I leaped up quickly.

"Come back again soon, Satyr!" I called. "A supper any time for ten minutes fiddling!"

He waved his hand, but made no reply.

A few moments later, from down the road, growing fainter and fainter, I again heard that fantastic rhyme:

"Rabbit in th' log,  
Ain't got no rabbit dog."

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## CHAPTER EIGHT

### IN WHICH I PITCH MY TENT TOWARD HEBRON FOR THE SPACE OF AN AFTERNOON

I have been to Lizard Point.

Before sunrise this morning I was up, and out. I sleep with both windows open and the shutters up, so the first daybeams rouse me. Thereafter I do not attempt to sleep, but rise at once. This is another of 'Crombie's commands. He said the air was fresher and sweeter, and the distillations from the earth and vegetation purer and more efficacious. He said all this would do me good, and I am trying to follow out his wishes to the letter, because life is sweet to me, and I want to get well. (I must say that I never felt more vigorous than I do to-night.) It went hard with me at first—this rising with the lark—for, in common with most bookish folk, it had been my custom to sit up into the small hours, and sleep late the next morning. Now I am growing used to it, and I love it. I find that I feel better; stronger, more active and alert. There must be some tonic properties in the early morning air to affect me in this way.

The world is never so lovely as when she wakes from sleep. Not even when her old tirewoman, the sun, flings her golden coverlet over her just before nightfall, does she appear so bewitchingly beautiful. This morning, for instance, when I stepped without my door, I felt as if I had been transported by magic into some new and mystical land. Like a maiden whose virginal slumbers have been filled with peaceful dreams of her beloved, the earth was waking. Gently—so gently—she pushed the fleecy fog-billows from her breast. Afar the folds of night seemed yet to cling about her, as though loath to leave her form. Nearer, but way up the valley, grayish, shifting mists writhed slowly, uncoiling vaporous lengths before the ever increasing light. Nearhand, trees, bushes and stones showed dew-sweet and clean. And when, at length, the day had triumphed, and I beheld the rim of a gold ball topping the far eastern range, my breast throbbed with a quick elation, and a song burst from my lips.

I spent the morning working on my garden. It is my peculiarity that when I begin a thing I find no rest until it is finished. By ten o'clock I had cleared the surface of all the available area, and felt much pleased with my efforts. I had worked hard, for there were loose rocks to be got rid of, some of them large and difficult to handle, in addition to the leaves and sticks. But prospects seemed excellent for a fine crop. There was no doubt that this was virgin soil, and as it lay in sun for several hours each day, there was no valid reason why it should not produce abundantly. I must now let it dry out for a few days, then spade it up and plant my seed. Seed! Why, I hadn't so much as a pea or a bean on the place, except in cans! I had several sacks of potatoes, but I wanted a diversified garden. Almost immediately the solution came. I would go to Hebron and buy all the seed I wanted. Comforted by this thought, I set about an early dinner. I hummed contentedly as I bustled around in my small kitchen. It was not until I sat down to eat that I realized the song I had been persistently repeating was the absurd tune which had heralded Jeff Angel's coming and farewellled his departure.

Later, with the sun swinging exactly at meridian, I took my staff and headed down the road, intending for the Dryad's Glade. Ever since my brief talk with the girl there had been a slow, steady pulling within me toward that creek which flowed south. It didn't worry me especially; in fact, it didn't worry me at all—why should it? But it was there. When I was employed I was not aware of it, but whenever my mind rested there flowed into it, like the resurgence of a low, moon-touched wave, the picture of one standing on the brook's bank, with copper-red curls crowned with white stars. It was a pleasant picture, and I did not try to banish it.

Now, fairly started on my way, I wondered that I had not gone before. I moved with restive eagerness, and presently reached the spot where I had encountered the girl—Lessie. I did not like the name. It was empty, vapid, meaningless, ugly; just a sound by which one was known. She could not help it, of course. It might have been Mandy, or Seliny. Lessie did not seem so terrible when I thought of others much worse, but it did not fit her.

I tarried for a moment under the dogwood tree. Its blossoms were fading now. I saw the jagged ends of several low branches where she had broken off her coronal. But there was no sign of squirrel or bird. Passing on, I plunged into the undergrowth which lined the creek bank as far as I could see, and made my way along. There was something of a valley here, and it would have been easier going nearer the base of the knob several rods away, but the stream's course was erratic, so I clung to the bank and fought my way forward. It was a toilsome journey, and the half-mile was beginning to seem interminable when all at once I burst, perspiring, into an open, and found I had arrived.

Just before me the creek split on a tongue or wedge of land, which came sweeping gradually down from a vast spur in the background. Shaping itself to a sharp point represented by an enormous, deeply imbedded boulder, the formation broadened backward rapidly and generously, widely deflecting the halved stream. A quarter of a mile away I could see a house—or cabin—surrounded by a dilapidated rail fence, with sundry pens and outbuildings in miniature clustered in the rear. In the foreground, to the left, was an acre or two of tilled soil. Paralleling the left fork of the cloven creek, looping the point and fording the right fork, was a mountain road. In front of me, spanning the left fork, was the trunk of a huge beech tree, lopped of its branches, and that this was a bridge which some far-gone storm had placed I knew at once, for a crude ladder led up to its root-wadded butt.

For several minutes I stood, panting from my exertions, and conscious of a slight pain in my right side. This did not alarm me, for I was convinced it was nothing but what old people call a "stitch," caused by my recent strenuous walk. I had reached Lizard Point—a most insignificant name for such an impressive portion of country. There was but one dwelling visible; therefore there could be but one place for me to seek for Lessie. I came to the ladder, and had placed my foot upon the bottom-most cross-piece when I halted, and in secret manner, although there was no need of secrecy, drew the jar from my pocket and hid it under the tree's lowest roots. I had promised Lessie I would tell her why I carried it with me the next time I saw her, and this I did not want to do, for she would fail to understand, and I would only appear ridiculous. Queer how a man shuns being made ridiculous, but after all it is only natural, especially if one is inclined to sensitiveness.

I mounted to the tree, and saw that the bark along its top surface had been completely worn away. The tree had evidently been in use as a means of passage for a long time. I walked across, sure-footed and steady, and found a slight path winding up the easy ascent toward the house. This I followed, keeping my eyes on the log dwelling ahead. As I drew nearer, I made out a small porch, or stoop, and on this some one was sitting. There was no other sign of life, if I expect a bony, yellow dog which came slowly into sight from around the corner, and a string of white

ducks filing sedately down to the creek. I passed through a gap in the crazy fence and traversed the yard. I now saw that it was an old woman who sat on the porch. She was very fat, and she sat in a low rocking-chair with her knees apart. A ball of yarn lay in her lap, and she was knitting and rocking, knitting and rocking. Her great bulk completely hid her support, but I knew it was a rocking-chair from her motions.

As I stopped at the edge of the stoop and respectfully took my cap off, the dog gave a low growl, then lay down, keeping one topaz eye fastened upon me suspiciously. The fat old lady paid no more attention to me than if I had been a hen or a duck, but sent her needles flying the faster. I regarded her in silent wonder for a moment. Her dress was a plain one-piece garment of some dark, cheap stuff, utterly unrelieved from somberness except for a row of shiny white horn buttons down the front. Her feet were large and flat, and were encased in carpet slippers with a gaudy pattern of alternate crimson and green. She wore iron rimmed spectacles which rested so near the tip of her pudgy nose I wondered they didn't fall off. Her gray hair was parted very precisely in the middle and slicked back close to her head. Her mouth was thin and hard, and her face acrid looking.

"Uh-h-h—good morning," I said, hitching at my trousers; an unconsciously nervous action.

"*Marnin'!*"

I jumped—really I did—for it was as though she had let a gun off in my face. I had never heard such a voice. Vinegary? Well!

I curled my fingers around my chin and looked at the dog. His fiery eye had not wavered. Then I looked at the cat—for in that moment I was firmly convinced this old beldam *was* a cat. Her mouth had squared into yet firmer lines, and her brow had grown portentous. Still her needles fussed about the half-made sock in her yellowish hands, and her gaze was down, as before.

"Do the—"

I started to ask if people by their name lived here, but when I came to the name I could not supply it; I had never heard it. I stammered, coughed, then knew that a pair of fierce little green eyes were flashing at me.

"Air yo' a plum' fule? Whur air yo' wits 'n' yo' tongue 'n' yo' commin sinse? Can't yo' tell a body whut yo' want wi'out stam'rin' 'n' stutt'rin' 'n' takin' all th' day? Folks as has got work to do ain't got no time to waste on tramps 'n' sich! *Talk!*"

Like a cyclone this tirade enveloped me, bursting upon my ears in a high, rasping voice which dragged on my nerves after the manner of a file.

I became desperate. This old virago should not oust me. I thrust my body forward, and, chin out, replied with some heat:

"Is this where Granny, and Granf'er, and Lessie live? That's what I want to know?"

"Land sakes! Jony 'n' th' w'ale!... Air *you* him?"

Her hands dropped in her lap; she cocked her head and viewed me afresh.

During the momentary silence which followed I heard shuffling footsteps within, and an old man appeared in the open doorway in front of me. He wore a shirt made of bed ticking; his trousers were not visible, because of the coffee-sack which wrapped him from his waist to his shoes. He was bald, his white beard was a fringe about his face, his upper lip shaven. He was drying a white dinner plate of thick ironstone china with a cloth.

"S'firy!" he said, in a squeaky, timorous voice; "S'firy!"

He got no further.

Granny turned her head sideways, at right angle to the speaker, and promptly exploded.

"Jer'bome! Git right back to yo' work! Git! 'N' don't let me see nur hear yo' till them dishes is washed 'n' put away!"

Granf'er (it could be no one else) retreated obediently, without a word. Granny's face swung around to me again.

"If all men wuz as triflin' 'n' ornery as that air'n o' mine, Lord knows whut th' worl' 'd come to. *E-tern'l* perdition, I reck'n! He jes' lays 'roun' 'n' chaws terbacker, pertendin' he carries a ketch in 'is back. Plum' laziness, I tell yo'! But I don't 'low no vagrints 'roun' me. Jer'bome's got to work 's long 's he b'longs to me.... Now! I said, air you *him*?"

"I'm the stranger who lives in the shack on Bald Knob."

Granny resumed her knitting at this point. I noticed that her shining needles seemed to be fighting each other as she continued:

"Look whut I'm a-doin' fur 'im now! Slavin' to git somethin' to keep 'is feet warm 'gin winter comes. He's not wuth it! Lak as not he'll crack one o' them dishes 'fo' he gits 'em done. He's that keerless. Most do-less man I *ever* seen.... Yes, I've heerd 'bout yo'—twict."

"I hope you received a pleasant report?" I ventured.

"Jes' las' night he lef' th' dish tow'ls a-hangin' on th' lot fence 'n' th' calf et 'em up. 'N' th' day befo' he fed a gang o' day old chick'ns meal 'n' wadder 'n' they swelled up 'n' died. 'N' chick'ns wuth fifteen cents a poun' at th' store!... Lessie come home a fo'tn't ago with a tale o' meetin' some feller. I tol' 'er gels 'd better leave all tramps be."

"But I'm not a tramp!" I protested. "I'm usually considered a gentleman."

"That's whut Jeffy 'lowed. He's here last night—pore feller!—'n' tol' us 'bout eat'n' a snack with you on Baldy—whut in th' name o' the sevin plagues does a man in 'is right min' wan' to live thur fur?—tell me that!"

"I find it very pleasant—"

Then the light went out, soft hands were pressing hard over my closed lids, and a cool, ferny perfume drifted to my nostrils. I was conscious of warm wrists alongside my head, and a stifled giggle just behind me.

"Lessie!" I cried, remembering the childhood prank.

The blinding hands were at once withdrawn, and as she leaped back new vials of wrath were opened.

"Of all outlandish doin's!"

Granny had raised her head only at my exclamation, but she saw enough.

"Whut on airth air gels comin' to this day 'n' time?—tell me that! Never seen 'im but onct—mought be a redhanded 'sass'n—ur a thief—ur—ur—ur *anythin'*! 'N' all my teach'n' all these years. W'en I've *tol'* yo' that all men were 'ceptious, 'n' *tol'* yo' to b'lieve nothin' they say, 'n' *tol'* yo' to have no talk with 'em but 'Howdy' 'n' 'Good-by,' 'n' here yo' air a-huggin' a stranger—teetot'l stranger—'fo' my eyes!"

Granny's jelly-like body really trembled with rage, and I began to have fears for the outcome of the incident. Of course, it amounted to nothing at all so far as right or wrong was concerned. It was simply a natural expression of the primeval simplicity which marked all the Dryad's movements. She was a child, and she had played a child's trick.

She now stood a few feet to one side, looking at me in unfeigned amazement, apparently indifferent to the old woman's outburst. She was dressed nicer than when I saw her before. Her garment was pale green, with little wavy stripes of darker color. Her shoes, too, were a grade better, but still clumsy, and she had a ribbon on her hair, which hung, as before, down her shoulders. She seemed averse to wearing anything on her head, for she held her bonnet—a poke bonnet, like the one I had handed her in the glade—in her left hand.

As she looked fully and squarely at me with her peculiar Irish gray eyes, I felt the same sensation come as when I had first beheld her. It was a feeling I cannot adequately describe, because no definite word I can think of would do. If the word existed, and if I knew it, I would set it down. I should be just as glad to know what that feeling meant as you. Perhaps each of us shall find out later.

She gazed at me and I gazed at her, and Granny gazed at us both. Our eyes met for a full breath, and then somehow mine fell to her throat. When a woman's throat is beautiful it is altogether as attractive as a lovely face. The Dryad's throat was a poem. If John Keats could have seen it, another golden ode would have come down along with the famous seven. It was simply a perfect column of warm, white, vigorous young life. Not too slender, and swelling on to the shoulders in the gentlest, most marvelous contour. It was while I was engaged in fascinated contemplation of her throat she spoke.

"Land sakes!... How'd yo' know my name?"

"The Sa—Jeff Angel told me."

"Oh!"

Her face underwent a rapid change, and the next moment she had leaped lightly upon the porch, flung her arms around Granny's neck and snuggled her head against the old woman's bosom.

"Don't you bother 'bout me, Granny!" she said, in soothing tones, and again that indefinable haunting cadence smote my ears and caused me to stir uneasily as I stood watching the scene. What a creature of moods this girl was!

Now one hand patted Granny's fat cheek, and another smoothed the lusterless gray hair. The expression which stole over the truculent face made me think of the sunlight falling suddenly upon some forbidding cliff, and that moment I knew how deep and wonderful must be the love which beat in that old heart for Lessie.

"La! Now, chil'," said Granny, "have yo' way if yo' mus', but be keerful—always be keerful. 'Specially o' men folks, 'cus they's so full o' Sat'n 'n' mischief."

With that she sniffed resignedly, uplifted her brows, carefully freed herself from the caressing arms and picked up the sock and the ball of yarn, both of which had fallen to the floor under

Lessie's onslaught.

As the girl arose to her feet Granf'er appeared a second time. He had not removed the badge of domestic toil which had enveloped his nether half when I first saw him, and he was dragging a low, shuck-bottomed chair behind him. It came down the step leading from the porch into the house with a bump and a clatter, and Granny blazed out again.

"Jer' bome. Look at yo'! Tryin' to break that cheer to splinters! Ain't yo' got stren'th to carry ev'n a *cheer*? 'N' is thim dishes washed 'n' put in th' pantry, whur they should order be?"

Granf'er dumbly lifted the chair, conveyed it stiffly to the furthest front corner of the porch, and quietly placed it. Then he turned to me, and with a show of dignity said, in his thin voice—

"Set down!"

I at once stepped upon the porch, advanced and shook hands with the old man, then took the proffered seat with a word of thanks.

He turned and hurried indoors, returning immediately bearing two other chairs identical with the first. One of these he handed the Dryad, just across the porch entrance, and the other he brought around and gingerly lowered to the floor about a foot from mine. When we were all seated Granf'er stretched one leg out to its fullest length, in order to gain freer access to his pocket, and after some tugging produced a half twist of tobacco. This he silently extended to me with a comical facial contortion which plainly meant that I should take all I wanted. I shook my head, and smiled.

"Light Burley!" he explained. "Skace 's hen's teeth. Don't yo' chaw?"

"S'pec' ever' man yo' meet to *live* on terbacker?" snapped Granny, without looking up.

"No," I replied; "I smoke."

"Then smoke. Yo' come too later fur dinner, so now we'll hev to mix terbacker instid."

It dawned upon me that it was a sort of guest rite he was offering me, so I crumbled some of the light yellow leaf into my pipe and fired it. Then he gnawed off a satisfactory chew, and stowed the remainder away.

He crossed his legs—by this time I had discovered that he wore boots with his trousers legs stuck down in the tops—in that comfortable, sagging way all old men have, and with one hand in his lap holding his elbow, he plucked gently at the front of his fringe of whiskers while his jaw worked erratically as he slowly adjusted the savory particles in his mouth.

No one spoke now for two or three minutes. It certainly was a new experience for me. A swift glance showed me that the Dryad had weighed the situation and was amused. Imps of fun danced in her eyes, and there was a tightening about her mouth which told me that she was holding herself in check with much effort. She was speechless from choice; the other two from nature.

Without warning Granf'er twisted his neck and ejected a curving stream of amber. It came down with a splash on the back of a half-grown chicken loitering near. There was a squawk of alarm, a flutter, a scurry from danger.

"That's right!" shrilled the bundle of fat. "Ef yo' can't kill 'em no other way, drownd 'em with terbacker juice!"

"Granf'er didn't see it!" championed Lessie. "It's under th' aidge o' the po'ch, 'n' 'tain't hurt no-how."

Once more I saw her teeth, like two rows of young corn when the husks are green.

Granf'er paid no more heed to his helpmeet's words than if it had been the wind blowing down the chimney. Even his expression did not change. Already a real pity was creeping into my heart for Granf'er. It took neither seer nor mindreader to discern that he belonged to that most to be pitied class of all who live and breathe—a man who has become simply a woman's creature. A man who, for one or more of a hundred reasons, had abdicated his kingship in the home, suffering a reversal of rule contrary alike to all divine decrees and natural laws. Such a man deserves what he gets, it is true, live he in a mansion or a hovel. Man was created to rule, and woman knows it. It is by ruling only that he retains her love. When his reign ceases, then not only does her love cease, but her respect also. Look about you!

Granf'er drew the palm of his hand across his lips, mechanically—and with what seemed like a very natural motion—smoothed out some puckers in his coffee sack apron, and spoke. He was looking out upon the quiet majesty of the encircling hills, but I knew that he was addressing me.

"Y' see, Jeffy's S'firy's nevvv. He come wrong, we-all 'pine. Leas'ways, they's some'n' in 'is head that's somehow onbalanced 'im. No nat'r'l man 'd go tromp'n' thoo th' woods frum morn'n' till night 'ith nothin' but a fiddle fur comp'ny. S'firy's special'y sot ag'in a fiddle, holdin' 'ith lots o' folks that th' dev'l's in it—"

"I'd jes' love to smash it to smithereens over a stump!" interpolated Granny.

"—but ez fur me 'n' Lessie, we kind o' enj'y Jeffy's scrapin' 'n' sawin'. Lessie's re'ly plum' cracked 'bout it, 'n' 'd foller Jeffy over th' hull durn county if we didn't p'suade 'er pow'ful."

"Seems to me, Jer'bome, yo' c'n tell it 'ithout cussin'. Only las' Sunday I had to speak to Father John 'bout yo' increasin' wickedness!"

"The hull durn county!" repeated Granf'er, quietly and reflectively, his gaze still fixed on the high hills. "They has big times—thim two—though Jeffy's mos' unsartain in 'is visits. Sometimes it's a month w'en we don't ketch sight o' 'im, 'n' ag'in he lingers with us a day or so at a spell. We sets lots o' store by Jeffy, 'cus th' Lord in 'is wisdom has saw fit to 'flict 'im. Th' wus' thin' 'bout 'im is th' liquor—"

"I'd hev *some* pride, Jer'bome!"

"—n' w'en he gits holt o' that he goes plum' lunatic crazy sometimes. Y' see, it's th' shiners 's whur he gits th' mos.' Th' ryavines over yan air full o' the'r still-houses, 'n' Jeffy fiddles fur 'em fur 'is bottle full o' liquor. Puss'nly, I hol' that a little liquor is pow'ful he'pful, but S'firy 'lows it's no good fur nothin' 'cep' to make dev'lment 'twixt people—"

"Ef I had my way not another drap'd go into a bottle!"

"—n' I 'gree they's some sinse in her argyment, though it's my b'lief that a w'ite man 's got to drink some'n', 'n' 't' 's well be pyore whiskey as anythin'."

He stopped to relieve his overcrowded mouth, uncrossed his legs and recrossed them the other way, "to keep 'em frum goin' to sleep," and continued:

"Pears to me Lessie said yo' come frum Lets'nt'n—uh-huh—some little ways off. 'S never thur. Walked over to Ced'rt'n onct, but home 'n' Hebrin's good 'nough for weuns. We ain't th' wanderin' kin', yo' mought say, but live peaceful 'n' work our—"

"*Work!*"

"—work our lan', whut little we've got that's fit'n'. You's good to our Jeffy—to S'firy's Jeffy, that is, fur he ain't no kin to me (not that I'd be 'shamed o' Jeffy, onderstan', on 'count o' his not bein' jes' right in th' head)—so I says to yo' here 'n' now 'ith S'firy 'n' Lessie to witness, as head o' this house I says yo're welcome here to-day 'n' any day!"

Then, quite unexpectedly, he clamped his hand across my leg above the knee, and gave me a squeeze which hurt.

I spent the remainder of the afternoon on that small front porch. Granf'er entertained me in the manner I have outlined; a mixture of opinion, native philosophy, and local news, with occasional caustic interruptions from Granny's two-edged tongue. Lessie said very little—what chance had she in the face of Granf'er's garrulity?—and once she went in the house and stayed for half an hour. When she came back she had on yet another dress, pure white this time. There were some frills and tucks and a touch of imitation lace here and there. I'm sure it must have been her Sunday frock. She was showing off her wardrobe, after the manner of a tot of eight or ten.

The sun had halted for a moment in its downward course on the crest of a range as I arose to go.

Granf'er was voluminous in his invitation to "Come ag'in 'n' set a w'ile"; Granny tendered me a defiant nod in response to my polite good-by, and lo! as I turned to bid Lessie farewell last, she had already moved into the yard, and was waiting for me! Side by side we started down the narrow, hard-beaten path. That is, she took the path and I walked in the new grass which bordered it.

"I'll go to th' crick with yo'," she said, demurely; then, with characteristic irrelevance—"Ain't Granny tur'ble?"

"Granny's jealous of you, and I suppose she has nagged at Granf'er so long it has become a fixed habit. I'm really sorry for the old fellow, Dryad."

"Whut?"

She turned a quizzical, puzzled face.

I laughed, gently, and made known to her the meaning of the word.

"There are lots of things I'm going to tell you when I get a chance," I added. "Wouldn't you like to know about this big world, and about the many kinds of people who live in it? About the great cities, and about what people have done and are doing? Wouldn't you like to learn how the trees grow, and what makes the wind, the lightning, and the thunder? About all the birds and animals; streams, rocks and hills? Wouldn't you like to learn all these things, and lots more?"

Her eyes had widened as I talked, and now on her fresh, unlined face a wonder and a hunger grew. It seemed as if her fallow mind was struggling to emerge from some dark, concealing mist—to leap up and meet the knowledge I had promised. A look almost of distress, born of futile longing. We were moving very slowly. She spoke.

"I've—sometimes—w'en by myse'f—mos' often in the deep woods—I've felt some'n *crawlin'* in here"—she put her hand to her head—"some'n that 'peared to be want'n' to say some'n'. 'N' I's diff'ernt then. I didn't wan' to go home to Granny 'n' Granf'er. I wanted to go some'r's else—way off, maybe, 'n' I'd be mis'ble 'cause I couldn't tell—couldn't make out whut 'twuz, yo' know. 'N' after w'ile it'd go 'way 'n' leave me, 'n' I wouldn't git right fur a day or so. I ast Father John 'bout

it one day 'n' it looked lak it hurt 'im, 'n' he tol' me not to have them spells if I c'd he'p it. Said they wuzn't good fur me. 'N' jes' now, w'en yo' tol' me 'bout all them things you's goin' to learn me—it come back—come back lak th' crick comes down w'en it rains in th' hills—with a rush 'n' pour, 'n'—'n'—oh! I wan' to know!—I *do* wan' to know!"

She clasped her hands with something like a tragic gesture, and stared hard at the ground in front with forehead a-frown.

I did not answer her at once. How could I? A new facet of her many-sided nature had flashed upon me, and I was a little dazed. We reached the tree-bridge before I attempted a reply.

"I shall be here a year. Come to see me on Baldy. Or come to the place where I first found you, and I will meet you there. I'm going to give you the things for which you long. I can do it, but not with Granny or Granf'er. They would object; they would not understand."

She looked up at me—for I had climbed to the tree—dumbly, yearningly.

"I'll come," she said. It was scarcely more than a half-whisper.

I did not like to leave her in that mood.

"All right, Dryad!" I returned, cheerily. "Now tell me where that road goes."

My aim was to bring her mind back to its accustomed channel for the present. She brightened at my query.

"T' 'Ebron," she said.

"Oh! Yes! Some day soon I'm going there. I have a garden at home and I'm going there to buy seed."

She laughed at this, and I felt relieved.

"Good-by, Dryad."

I knelt on the tree, bent down and took her upheld hand in mine. It was warm, soft, and, that moment, clinging. Forerunners of dusk had come, and the gray pools of her clear eyes made me release her hand and get on my feet.

She moved away, and as I turned to set my face in the opposite direction, something halted me in the very act.

On the Hebron road, two hundred yards or more distant, I saw the figure of a man. A young, tall, bareheaded, roughly clad man, standing very straight and still. He saw me; he was looking at me. Of that I was sure. His position was by a great stone, which cast him in deeper shadow. There was something portentous in his attitude, natural though it was. I stopped and returned his inspection of me, but he made no sign, no gesture. He might have been a tree of the forest, for all of his immobility. A feeling, not of fear, but of premonition, swept over me as I went on across the tree.

I knew it was Buck Steele, the smith of Hebron.

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## CHAPTER NINE

### IN WHICH I SIT UPON A HILLTOP AND REFLECT TO NO ADVANTAGE

I did something to-day which I have had vaguely in mind ever since I took up my abode in the wilderness. I climbed to the very top of my hill of refuge.

The principal reason why I have never attempted it before was that I feared it would prove too much for me; would require too much exertion. And 'Crombie, while advising and insisting upon continuous exercise, had also warned me not to overdo it.

This morning I felt mighty as Tubal Cain. My walks, my regular hours, my wholesome diet, are having effect. I am beginning to brown. At seven o'clock, when I shaved, the path of my razor showed a firm, tanned skin. My eyes are clear, and I can feel life coming into me. Oh, what a glorious thing it is! Just simple, primitive, animal life! I don't know when I have coughed. I can inflate my lungs, and imagine the consternation of that "colony" at the inrushing flood of this ozone laden air. I am not deluding myself that I am sound. 'Crombie said it would take time, and 'Crombie knows. But I am better. My recent walks have not caused me to pant and blow. That is why, this morning, I felt the assurance within me that I could surmount old Baldy's peak, and feel no bad results.

Rain fell last night. It began just as I went to bed, and I lay and listened to it. There is something most fascinating about rain on the roof after you have gone to bed. Last night it dropped gently, a steady murmur. It came to my ears as a cradle song of Nature. I could hear it outside the window near which I sleep. The patter, patter, and after a while the gurgling of little streams over the clapboard eaves. I remember of thinking what a good soaking my garden spot would get, and of



the consequent delay waiting for it to dry out before I could spade it up, then I went to sleep.

This morning I was awakened by the orchestra of the birds. I had heard stray notes before about daybreak. Snatches of song, broken trills, single cries, and challenging calls. But this morning it was different. I don't know how to account for it. Whether the rain had something to do with it; whether they met by accident or appointment. The solution of that question is a minor thing, however. I received the full benefit of the gathering. I have never heard an exhibition which equaled that forest symphony. There must have been nearly a dozen varieties of birds. And each little fellow was singing with all the heart of him. I tell you they made music. Each had a different tune, and among humans this would have represented bedlam. But among the feathered kind—take my word for it if you have never heard it—the effect was wonderful. It was one great alleluia chorus, and the air throbbed with the sweetest music I ever heard. I recognized many of the vocalists by their songs. I knew that about my plateau were gathered the cardinal, the thrush, the oriole, the catbird, the jay and the mockingbird. And when I mention the jay, let no one rise up and point the finger of scorn, exclaiming on that blue-coated fellow's harsh and grating scream. Mr. Caviler, your voice is harsh and grating too when you get very angry, isn't it? But have you never heard the love-note of the jay? Have you never, in the dappled shade, when their half-fledged nestlings are flapping and hopping about and stretching cavernous yellow jaws for worms and moths—have you never heard the parent birds, watchful in the overhead branches, make love? There was never a sweeter, mellower, richer tone drawn from flute or harp than the love-note of the jay.

Many others were there that were strange to me, but the effect of the whole was so sweet that I had to drag myself from bed, so charmed was I by that chorus in the early dawn.

The sky was clear when I came out; a deep, rich, fathomless blue. Night had taken the rain-clouds with it when it left. A woodsy, wet, earthy odor, than which there was no perfume rarer, delighted my nostrils. Everything was washed clean. The leaves, the trunks of the trees, the very stones. It was then, as I stood and felt the might of the everlasting hills entering into me, that I decided on my task for the day. As yet it was too early. The ground was soft. It would be wet and slippery on the slope above, and perhaps muddy. I determined to wait an hour or two, so went down to my favorite seat under the pine tree, taking with me Spencer's "First Principles," which is a book calculated to make one use his mind, at least.

It was eleven o'clock before I looked at my watch—too late for mountain climbing that morning. Upon reflection, I saw that this was just as well. In fact, the afternoon would be a much better time to make the ascent. The sun had been shining generously for several hours, drying both the vegetation and the surface of the ground. So Mr. Spencer had really done me a good turn in carrying me through the forenoon. I left the book on the bench and went back to the Lodge, thinking to resume my reading after I returned from the peak. I did not expect to be gone over an hour and a half, allowing for plenty of time to rest.

After a leisurely dinner, I took my alpenstock, and imagining myself at the base of the Matterhorn to lend zest, bravely fronted the upward climb.

It was rather stiff work from the beginning. I flanked the Lodge for a score of yards, and started up where the ascent was comparatively gradual. This did not last long. Before I reached the encircling band of evergreens I had to force my way through bushes which insisted on rapping my nose, and vines which were equally determined to tie themselves into knots over my toes, and trip me. At length I came to the dark line of pines and cedars, where I stopped to investigate my condition. My breath was coming pretty heavy, but I was not really tired. So after a few moments' rest I went on. My going was tolerably easy now while the trees lasted. Beneath their shade the earth was barren. Some half dead moss and a plentiful sprinkling of pine cones was all. As I walked over the latter they yielded softly to my feet, and sent up a pungent odor. I heard no bird notes here, but once a brown-winged shape flitted soundlessly by in front of me, low to the ground. Everything was very still. There was no wind astir. The belt proved to be a somber spot, and I was not sorry when I had passed it. The dense shade had a depressing effect.

Then I came to open ground; open and bare. Two hundred and fifty feet above me rose old Baldy's head. For perhaps half the distance a scrub growth strove for existence in the rocky soil; beyond that the surface was absolutely denuded. The incline had grown much sharper, but the earth was knotty and uneven, in many places indented with excoriations, and I found I could go forward with much greater ease than I had anticipated. A quarter of an hour later found me facing the last ascent, which was all but perilous in its sheer rise. My staff was of no avail here; hands and feet must win. So I laid my alpenstock down, drew a deep breath and started up. Just how I got to the top I cannot say. But there is a big element of tenacity in my nature, and I fought on with squared jaws and set teeth, slipping, scrambling, sprawling, until I had won. I crawled over the crest on my hands and knees, and for quite ten minutes I lay prostrate, recovering my wind and my spent strength. Then I got onto my feet and looked about me.

It was a glorious prospect; even solemn and majestic. A prodigious sweep of country was laid bare before me. I hesitate to say how many miles I could see, for distance is most deceptive at great altitudes. But it was the topography, more than the far reaching view, which impressed me. I was standing in the midst of a world newly created, the only living creature. Leagues upon leagues of virgin forest flowed back from my point of vantage till the perspective ended in a misty blur. East and west stretched the mighty ranges, with constantly diverging spurs, each clothed with its own garment of green and glistening glory. Anon the ancient hills valleyed into troughs whose length had no visible limit, and it did not require the imagination of a poet to behold

beneath me the effect of an immense sea which had suddenly been frozen into permanent form. How illimitable! How overpowering! Slowly I turned to the different points of the compass. Far to the north a smudge of smoke fouled the tender bosom of the sky, and I quickly looked another way. Cedar-ton lay in that direction.

For a half-hour I stood and gazed, and wondered, and thought. Here was incentive for rumination, and when I at length withdrew my eyes from the bewildering panorama I felt infinitesimally puny, and weak, and small. What was I? A mote in a sunbeam; an atom of matter; no more.

The point upon which I stood was an irregular circle, approximating thirty feet in diameter. An imperfect stone formation marked its outer boundaries; the effect of some Titanic convulsion in forgotten time. In one place—toward the southwest—the rim of rock broke, and here the earth had sloughed away before the ages-long war of the elements, the result being a broad, flume-like chute leading downward. Instinctively I drew back from this place, for it suggested unknown terrors. A sort of sandy, granular deposit covered the top of the knob; the grinding caused by years upon years of wind and rain.

My inspection of the peak occupied scarcely a minute. Then I sat down in its exact center, lit my briar-root, hugged my knees, and allowed myself for the first time that day to think of yesterday's experience. You could never guess my first thought. It was that material would quickly accumulate now for my book. I sensed the approach of things—of many things, and not all of them were pleasant. In fact, some wore grisly aspects. I believe in premonitions. I don't know what they are, or what causes them, or anything about them except they exist. But one came to me as I sat on the tiptop of old Baldy this afternoon, smoking my pipe and hugging my knees, and feeling very much like a bird in its eyrie. I was troubled and elated in turn; a queer experience, but common to all. There was no reason in the world why I should have been either depressed or uplifted. But somehow the near future looked to me to be vibrant with incidents waiting their chance to happen, and in some unformed way I felt that, innocently enough, I had set in motion a train of events which would quickly envelope me in their workings. I say it was a premonition—a prescience—and I believe I am right.

I can make nothing yet of Lessie or her household. Gran'fer and Granny have their prototypes among those who call themselves ultra refined. Each is interesting to me, in his and her way. Granny has a suspicious nature. I cannot think she is as down-right mean and crusty as she pretends to be. Maybe Gran'fer is trifling, and trying, and Granny might have to lash him with her tongue to keep him in the traces. I am sure the old lady's dislike for me is real, though why this should be I cannot fathom just now. I have a strong suspicion that deep down in her heart Granny has a feeling of worship for the Dryad, and in everything which presents itself in masculine shape she sees a possible cause for Lessie leaving her. That seems the most plausible reason for her dislike. Lessie has plunged me into a quandary where I can see no light at all. Her personality is the most complex I have ever encountered. She is absolutely baffling. I can't understand the way she talked to me as we came down the path from the house scarcely twenty-four hours ago. What was it within her that suggested the things of which she spoke? If she had delivered an oration in Latin I could not have been more surprised. She—the product of many generations of hill dwellers, whose intelligence always remained at a minimum, among whom the stirrings of ambition were never felt and where knowledge had never gained the slightest foothold—she to suffer the travail of a fettered mind striving for light; of a shackled soul struggling for expression! What could it mean? And to make the enshrouding darkness yet more dense, *she was cousin to the Satyr!* The Satyr! That whimsical, hapless ne'er-do-well who strolled the woods day after day, drinking white whiskey, and bringing strains from his old fiddle which made one's flesh creep with their weird sweetness. Is it a wonder I was puzzled? I promised to help her, and I am going to do it. I know the task will be pleasant. I will escape monotony, and she will be improved, and in this way it will work good to both of us. I shall begin—but at this point in my cogitations there floated suddenly across the field of memory that tall, dark shadow standing on the Hebron road, still and stern.

I took the pipe from my mouth and stood up. The sun had more than half completed its journey from zenith to horizon. I made another detour, looking for the best place to descend. I found it a short distance from where I had come up; almost a path, surprisingly easy to traverse. I carefully noted its location with reference to the points of the compass, and went down with practically no labor. Already I knew I should come back, for the spot held a strong attraction for me. Not alone for the view, which in itself was sufficient compensation for the climb, but there was also a sense of such complete aloneness—and I have that peculiarity. At times I want to be where no one can see me, or talk to me. I want to be utterly alone, without the possibility of interruption. Such a place I knew I had found on the peak of Bald Knob.

When I reached the evergreens I realized that it must be almost twilight on the plateau. At least a cooling, grateful shade was there, and the philosophy of Spencer.

A few moments later I crashed through the bush in the rear of the Lodge, came around and flung my cap boy-like on one of the benches alongside the door, then hurried toward the lone pine. When I had taken a half-dozen steps I looked up, and halted abruptly.

Lessie was standing under the tree, holding "First Principles" open in her hands.

## CHAPTER TEN

### IN WHICH I SPEND A PLEASANT HOUR AND HEAR SOME NEWS

She saw me the same instant, and her eyes brightened with what seemed to me pleasure, while slow waves of color came into her cheeks. She smiled, and stood motionless, waiting for me to approach.

I lost no time in bidding her welcome. When I took her hand in greeting the contact was electrical—it may have been my imagination, I grant—but I'm sure I felt as if a charge of some kind had been projected into me.

"Whut's this book?" she asked, closing the volume but still holding it with a clinging touch. It was to me as if she wanted to make it a part of her, her hands and fingers were so enveloping in their grasp.

"That's heresy—rank heresy!" I laughed. "If Father John saw me reading that he would tell you to run from me as fast as you could."

She glanced up with a most attractive blending of alarm and amusement on her face.

"Then whut yo' read it fur?" she demanded.

"It was written by one of the smartest men the world has ever known, and I want to find out what he thinks. We don't have to believe all we read, you know. We can read for various reasons."

I saw she did not understand.

"Sit down," I continued. "Here, the bench is big enough for two. I'm so glad you have come to see me to-day. You almost missed me; I've been up on Baldy."

We sat side by side. There was barely room enough; as it was our hips came in contact. Then I told her of my little trip toward the clouds. I'm sure she was not at all interested. In fact, after the first brightening of her face at the moment of my appearance, a sort of shadow had come upon it, as though cast from a mind not at rest. I watched her as I talked, and I know she was paying no heed to my recital. She toyed with the book, pressing the pages together, bending them in her fingers, and allowing them to slip under her thumb with a rustle. Now I saw her hair at close range for the first time, and it was truly a crown of glory. Solomon's wisdom was not at fault. A woman's hair holds some mysterious power for a man fully as potent as any of her other charms. There is sorcery in it—and sometimes love-dreams—and sometimes oblivion—and sometimes madness! As I gazed at the Dryad's hair my voice unconsciously dropped to a lifeless monotone. Quickly I noted a fact which formed a fitting supplement to my former discoveries regarding the care of her person. By all legitimate courses of reasoning her hair should have been stringy, sleek, unkempt, and—dirty! But I beheld it the reverse in every particular. No boudoir bred Miss of any city could have produced better cared for tresses. Each silken strand lay separate from its fellows. The whole mass was shining clean, and fresh, and fluffy; the well-shaped ears were transparently spotless, and her neck, where the yet finer hair grew upward and where tiny rings of cobwebby gold fluttered, was immaculate. Fellowman, do you marvel that my tale of climbing the peak came to an end almost in drivel?

As I stopped, rather sheepishly, she lost her hold on the book, and it slipped from her knees to the ground. Each bent to recover it. I was the quicker, but in the forward and downward movement which she made the Dryad's hair tumbled over her shoulders onto my neck, head and face, in a subtly scented, smooth, tickly mesh. It lasted but a moment; I think the shortest moment of my life. We came up laughing, both our faces red. But as for that, one's face is always red when one bends to pick up something.

I opened the book at the front, found a big capital A, and pointing to it, asked Lessie what it was.

She shook her head.

"I don' know."

The pity of it! I could scarcely credit her reply.

"Would you like to know? Would you like to know all the letters in this book, big and little, so that you could read them at a glance?" I asked.

Again that hungry, helpless look came to her.

"Oh!... Yes!"

The first word was spoken with a sharply indrawn breath of eagerness. The last one fell softly a moment later.

"You shall, Dryad. It's a shame you can't do it now. Is there no school here—in the neighborhood—at Hebron? Why have you never been to school?"

"They wuz a school in Hebron. Granny wouldn't let me go."

She was fingering a ruffle on her dress just above her knees in an embarrassed way.

"Wouldn't let you go!" I exclaimed, indignantly ... "Why?"

"A man had it—a young man—'n' Granny hates men, 'specially young men."

"Why does she hate young men?"

"I don' know—you heard whut she said 'bout 'em. She's always preachin' that to me."

I thought my former reading of Granny's attitude correct now, but I did not speak of this to Lessie.

"Granny has done you a great injustice," I said, gravely; "however honest her intentions. I'm going to see that you have a chance, Dryad. But if I'm to help you, I must speak of things exactly as they are, and there shall have to be many corrections. You won't mind this, will you? I mean you will understand why it is done—that it is absolutely necessary for you to get along. You won't take offense—won't get mad, will you?"

She turned her eyes full into mine, her mobile face for the moment serious and calm.

"I'll do *anythin'* to learn—to know! Oh! I git so lonesome fur—fur *knowin'*! I'm all shet up, 'n' they's things in my head 'n' in here that's jes' bustin' to git out!"

She placed her hand on her breast. Her brows had drawn together and I knew each word was the exact truth.

"All right; it's a bargain," I answered. "We'll begin this very minute. Have you noticed that I talk differently from you, and Granf'er, and Granny'?"

Her mouth was set firmly as her chin moved up and down. I think she was a little scared at the beginning of her lessons.

"I talk correctly, and you talk incorrectly. That's hard to say, but we can't build without solid truth for a foundation. You should learn to speak correctly in a very short time, if you will be very careful, and try. It will take longer to learn to read, and write, but even that will not prove such a great task. Now, answer me—why did you come here to-day?"

"I come 'cause I wanted to!"

Quick as a flash her reply was out, and I could see she was watching me in a fascinated, apprehensive manner. I smiled to reassure her.

"You should say—'I *came be-cause* I wanted to.' Say it that way."

"I—came—*be-cause* I wanted to!"

There was something almost pitiful in her fearful earnestness. This was the beginning of the opening of a sealed door before which she had stood so long, with no one to break the fastenings for her. She had put one hand against the dark trunk of the tree, and now her finger tips were white around the nails from the pressure she had unconsciously brought to bear, and she was trembling the least bit. Poor little Dryad in her windowless house! It must have been an ordeal for her.

How queerly that simple sentence broke upon my ears. It was the first perfect one she had ever spoken, and she enunciated it with painful precision, breathing each word forth in trepidation.

"Good!" I exclaimed, clapping my hands, whereat her tenseness vanished, and her bearing became like one who is somewhat confused, but happy. "Don't forget that, now. Always say 'I came.' Many of your words are not words at all, but fearful corruptions which long use and carelessness have made worse. Then you drop your 'gs' outrageously, but that is a fault you'll overcome by practice."

Thus for an hour we sat on the narrow bench under the tall pine, while I made her answer question after question in her own way, then had her say them again the right way. Her aptness was amazing. Her mind seemed to seize and absorb the elemental instruction I gave her as a parched plant does moisture. She remained constantly intent, alert, ready; and when at length the slowly deepening shadows warned me that she should be going, and I told her the lesson for the day was over, I saw that she was agitated, excited, and her eyes shone as if brightened by wine.

"Oh, you're a capital pupil!" I complimented, warmly, as we arose and stood for a moment side by side. "Now how would you answer me, Dryad?"

She cast me a sidewise glance; partly mischievous, partly shy, partly earnest.

"I'm glad!" she said, quickly.

I knew that she had evaded my trap cleverly, and I did not lay another for her.

"Now you must go."

I spoke reluctantly, for the hour had been an unusually charming one for me. I had always maintained that I had rather be a roadmender than a school teacher, and generally speaking, I hold to the idea still. But I can think of no more delightfully pleasant experience that has ever come my way than when I gave Lessie her first instruction under the pine on the edge of the

plateau.

At my words the shadow sprang to her face again, more noticeable than before. It was almost a look of distress now.

"What is it, Dryad?" I asked, suddenly; "what worries you?"

She did not answer, but stood meditatively with the tips of her fingers resting upon her lower lip, and her eyes intently focussed downward.

"Come," I added; "I must get some water from the creek, and I'll go that far with you—farther, if you will let me, because it will be late before you get home."

"Oh, no!" she burst out, with what looked like unnecessary vehemence. Then her agile mind took a turn, and she added—"But why don't yo' git yo' water out o' the well?"

I forebore to correct her. The lesson was over, and I must not worry her.

"Well?" I repeated, open mouthed. "What well?"

"The well over yonder—the well the man dug!"

She pointed to a distant corner of the yard, overrun with a heterogeneous mass of greenery.

I almost gasped. A well had been here under my nose all these weeks, a well of cool, good water, and I had been slaving rebelliously to supply my needs from the creek below, which had lately become infested with tadpoles!

"Show it to me!" I cried.

With a hearty "All right!" she started running, and I followed at a smart walk. It was just like her to run. She was a creature of impulse. I watched her skimming over the ground, lightly leaping little obstacles, her wheat-gold hair all a-tremble. When I came up she had a stick, and was diligently prodding about in the weeds, vines and brambles.

"It's here," she muttered, intent on her business. "I've saw it, 'n' drunk out o' it. It's jes' as cold as the spring at home whur granny keeps 'er milk 'n' butter. W'en I—"

My eyes had been fastened on her face, and now she evidently remembered and checked herself purposely, for I saw her teeth clamp her lip for an instant. Then she went on, softer and more slowly, never looking up.

"When—I—came—las'—time—it's—*here!*"

With the last word she jabbed her stick down, and straightened up triumphantly.

I pressed forward to her side, and peered into the bush. The end of her stick rested upon a piece of wood. With a word to Lessie to wait a moment I hurried back to the lodge and procured a scythe from the store of miscellaneous things which had accompanied me when I came out to make friends with the wilderness. Directly I had uncovered the well's top, a surface of oaken planks four feet square. In the center of this lay a large, smooth stone, covering the hole which gave access to the water below.

"By Jove! Girl, how can I thank you?" I cried, elated at the discovery. "I've been drinking sulphur water and bathing with tadpoles, never dreaming this was here!"

"It'll be a big savin'," she agreed. "Tot'n' water's pow'ful hard work."

She turned to go. I dropped my scythe and said:

"You must let me go part of the way. I know you're not afraid, but won't you? I'd feel better."

She clasped her hands, wrung them once, and took two or three forward steps silently. Something was wrong with Lessie, but nothing like a true solution entered my thick masculine head until she stopped, halfway turned, and flung from tight lips—

"It's 'bout Buck!"

Buck! The ominous figure I had seen watching me in the deep twilight the day before. Buck! Of course, Buck! He had seen me part from Lessie; he had come to her immediately afterward, and had doubtless told her some things which were not good for her peace of mind. Is man really a savage, at rock bottom? In the moment following Lessie's intense announcement of the cause of her distress, what were my feelings? Simply these. There came to my mind the realization that I, too, was a man of physical might; that I, too, had immense muscles of thigh, and chest, and arm; that the trouble which had sent me here was surely checked as I felt my vigor growing day by day, and that if somebody wanted to fight I would give him his fill, rather than be hectored into forsaking Lessie's company—for I felt assured already that this was the burden of Buck Steele's demands.

Something of all this must have showed in my face as I stepped deliberately to Lessie's side and took one of her hands, for I saw traces of terror in the gray eyes.

"Yo'—yo' mustn't git together!" she exclaimed, tempestuously, her fingers closing around mine in a grip which caused me to wonder. "Oh! Yo' mustn't!—Yo' mustn't! Yo' don't know Buck; he c'n

ben' a horse-shoe!"

"Lessie," I said, returning her grasp and looking at her determinedly; "I'm not afraid of any man that lives and moves. I don't believe in violence, but there are times when it becomes necessary. And when the necessity arises in my life, I'm going to face it. You have said that you wanted me to help you, and if you still feel this way, nothing and no one is going to prevent me from carrying out my part of the agreement. I've a notion I know pretty much what took place last night, but you must tell me now, as we walk along. We must talk it over—come."

I kept her hand until I had faced her about and we had gone a short distance. Then I let it go.

"Yo' see," began Lessie, in a perplexed little voice, and without waiting for further urging, "Buck's ben comin' to see me fur mos' a year, off 'n' on. He's the only young feller Granny'll 'low on the place. He's ben pow'ful good to me, 'n'—'n' well, he's ast me to marry 'im. But I don't love Buck. I can't he'p lak'n' 'im, 'cause he's so good 'n' kin' 'n' 'd do anythin' on earth I'd ask 'im to. He don't pester me 'bout comin', neither, 'n' w'en I don't feel lak seein' 'im he'll go on 'way, meek lak 'n' not complainin'. 'N' after w'ile here he'll be back ag'in, tryin' to tell me thin's I don't wan' to lis'n' to. I jes' can't hurt 'is feelin's. Somehow 'r 'nother he heerd that you'd come out here 'n' had seen me by the dogwood tree that day—I s'pec' Granny tol' 'im 'bout it, 'cause I didn't tell nobody but the home folks. 'N' so las' night he come—he *came* out home to 'quire 'bout it, 'n' he saw you tell me good-by at the bridge. 'N' after you'd gone he came on—'n' I'd never seen 'im look lak he looked then. His eyes wuz black 'n' had fire in 'em 'n' his face wuz lak a piece o' gray rock 'n' his voice wuz diff'unt 'n' ever' now 'n' then he shuk all over."

Her words had gradually increased in velocity until, when she stopped, she was speaking so rapidly I could hardly understand what she said.

"Yes," I replied, but nothing more until we had come to the foot of the knob. Here, as we turned westward toward the creek leading to Lizard Point, I spoke again.

"He talked to you, Dryad, of course. Now you must tell me everything, and keep nothing back—nothing. Even though he said very ugly things—things which may have frightened you, you must tell me them, too."

She stooped to pluck a cluster of little wild flowers growing on a single stem, giving a low exclamation of pleasure as she did so. Then, as she twined the flowers in her hair over the ear away from me, she answered.

"Yes, he talked to me. I tried to make 'im hush, but he wouldn't. 'Twuz 'bout you, mos'ly. He said he knew city fellers 'n' they's all wicked 'n' dang'rous, 'n' that you's jes' tryin' to run with me to pass the time 'n' make a fool o' me—but I didn't b'lieve 'im!"

With the last words she turned toward me a frank and honest countenance.

"No, Dryad; you mustn't believe him when he talks that way. I'm sure that Buck is a good man naturally, but he was excited when he told you that. There are some bad men in the cities, and there are some bad men in the country. There are more bad men in the city because there are more people in the city. But he was wholly wrong when he spoke of my motive in going with you—go on."

"He said he wasn't goin' to have yo' comin' to see me, 'n' that I mus' promise 'im not to see you agin. I tol' 'im I couldn't do that, 'cause you's goin' to learn me. Then he went plum daffy crazy, 'n' cussed 'n' damned, 'n' bruk a great thick stick he had in 'is han's—bruk it 'n' kep' a-breakin' it till it wuz all in little pieces in 'is fis'—'n' then he flung 'em all on the groun' 'n' stood lookin' at me lak he's goin' to hit me, but he didn't. We's down at the en' o' the path nex' to the road, fur we hadn't gone up to the house. I's skeered fur a w'ile, he looked so big 'n' he's so mad. I didn't know a feller c'd git so crazy 'bout—'bout a girl;—did you?"

Her candor never ceased to amaze me. She seemed to be utterly unaware of anything existing within herself which might lead a man up the dangerous heights of Love, whither this brawny one had plainly gone.

"Ye-e-s," I answered, slowly. "When a man loves a girl, Dryad, he will do anything when the circumstance which calls for that thing exists." Then, realizing that I was talking riddles to her, I added: "I mean, that when a man's in love, especially if he be a strong man, he won't allow any one or anything to come in the way, if he can help it. And that's Buck's position, exactly. He thinks he can't live without you, and he's a big, husky animal whose feelings largely control him. When another man approaches you, he grows jealous, and jealousy is about the hardest headed, most unreasonable, meanest passion the human family has.... What else did Buck say?"

It was too dark now for me to see her expression, but when she replied her voice shook with apprehension, and that haunting note—like a rare minor chord in music—which so moved me when we first met had crept strangely into it, dominating the natural, lighter quality of her speech.

"Oh!"

An exclamation formed of a trembling sigh was her first word, but she went on almost at once.

"He—he said *awful* thin's! He said he couldn't *stan'* to see me 'n' you together no more, 'n' he said he's goin'—he's goin'—to *kill* yo' if—if—"

Here Lessie broke down and began to weep in little, spasmodic snuffles, as you have seen small children do.

I took her hand again and tried to assuage her fears as we went on under the big forest trees through the shadowy, dimly luminous atmosphere. I told her that Buck had spoken in the heat of anger, and that he did not really mean what he said, and that his passion had gotten away with his discretion, and had made him act very foolishly. I ended by laughing at the threats, and treating them in the nature of a joke, but my companion would not have it so.

"Yo' don't know 'im! Yo' don't know 'im!" she insisted, drawing the back of her free hand across her eyes. "He *did* mean it, 'n' he *will* do it—I know he will!"

"Don't you think I can take care of myself?" I asked.

"I don't know; maybe—but Buck's so strong!"

"I'm strong, too, Dryad."

She did not answer, and soon we came to the glade. Here Lessie stopped and faced me.

"Yo' *mustn't* come no fu'ther," she said, so emphatically that I almost blinked. "'N'—'n'—yo' mustn't come to the P'int no more 'n' I won't come to Baldy no more 'n'—"

"Why, Lessie!"

I dropped her hand, and put all the reproach I could summons into the words.

"Yo' know—w'y—"

"And give up all the things I am going to teach you just because—"

It was too much. She turned with a hurt, despairing cry which somehow cut me savagely, and ran swiftly from me across the open ground. I saw the misty fluttering of garments in the gloom, caught the dull glow from her flying hair, then knew that I was alone.

I have just written to 'Crombie. I did not tell him of any of the people I have met. I wrote a chatty letter describing my daily life, my improved condition, and telling of my inability, so far, to locate the life-plant. But on this point I had hopes. I'm sure he will scratch his head when he reads my postscript, and wonder if I have developed brain trouble. Here is my postscript:

"Kindly forward me by mail to Hebron, at once, a primer and a copybook."

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## CHAPTER ELEVEN

### IN WHICH OTHER CHARACTERS COME INTO OUR STORY

I went to Hebron to-day to mail my letter, and to lay in a supply of garden seed.

It was still early morning when I reached Lizard Point, and came upon the road leading to my destination. The sun had not yet topped the high knob range; the air was cool, balmy, moist with dew, and clear. I stood for a moment after I had crossed the bridge, and looked intently up to where Lessie lived. Had I seen her I would have sent her a hail, and told her where I was going. Light blue wood smoke was coming from the kitchen chimney, and spiraling straight up to a great height before it dissipated—a sure sign of fair weather, I have been informed. Soon I descried Gran'fer's stooped form plodding across the back yard. He still wore his coffee-sack apron, and was carrying a dishpan of water. This he emptied into a chicken trough, and trudged back to the house. But Lessie did not appear, so I faced about and went on.

The road paralleled this branch of the creek for nearly a mile, running along the base of a steadily curving knob. It was not a bad road, either, considering its location, and I found some pleasure in tramping through the yellow dust between the ruts which the wheels of passing vehicles had made. On the creek side was a rod-wide strip of verdure; flowering weeds choked with long, tough grass, bushes of many kinds, and an occasional tree. On the knob side the rise began at the very edge of the highway. Here was moss, dead leaves, many varieties of creepers, sumac, wild grapevine, and now and again eglantine, its flat, pink-white blossoms brightening the heavy shade. It was on this side the road my eyes dwelt oftener, for in my pocket was the jar of fresh water, and in my heart the hope of ultimate reward. It is true I had found nothing which resembled the life-plant in the least, and already I had traveled far. But I was prepared for disappointment, and schooled for patience. The prize was too valuable to be come at easily. I had already learned that great truth—the things worth while are the things you give your heart's blood in getting. Nothing you can grasp by merely stretching out your hand is worth even that slight effort. It is a law of nature and a law of life that hard work is the price of true success; that attainment means sacrifice; that the natural inclinations and desires of the flesh must be fettered and chained before we can reach any eminence whatsoever, or achieve any noble task. That unalterable decree of life applied to this case as well, and I bowed to it. I would wait and search; I would go on until the last day of my twelve months' exile had sped, believing that sooner or later my reward would come.

Now my mountain road debouched upon a county highway, made of gravel, well packed and smooth. For a moment I was surprised, wondering where all this gravel came from. Then I remembered that a river ran near, and the mystery was plain.

The sun came out as I started on again, pouring its quickening light in a wondrous cascade of shimmering beauty over the dark green sea of foliage. The leaves rustled a welcome, and a breeze which was like a sigh of gratitude from the Earth's big heart, arose. This greeting of nature unto nature that still morning stirred me deeply in some way; I could feel the answering thrill in my breast, and I stopped in my tracks, took my cap from my head, and faced the great golden ball with what I imagine was almost the ardor of a sun-worshiper. I was alone with my ancient mother; the mother from whence I came and unto whom I would return, and clearer than ever in my life before I felt the kinship of the sturdy trees, and knew that the sap and fiber of every growing thing about me was part and parcel of my being. Tiny waves of emotion began to tingle along my nerves as I stood bareheaded, at one with the universe, and then slowly the waves grew in magnitude until every vein and artery was inundated with a mighty surge of joy.

A puff of wind blew a spray of blackberry bush across my cheek, scratching it with a thorn. I started and looked, to find that I had unknowingly come to the edge of the road.

At a turn a quarter of a mile further on I saw the hamlet. Five or six houses, a railway station, the superstructure of an iron bridge, and to one side a formidable building of brick, which I correctly surmised to be the distillery. Between me and the hamlet lay a stretch of cleared bottom land, fenced off into fields. I saw an expanse of wheat, green and full eared; another of oats, not so tall, and having a peculiar bluish shade. Other fields were simply bare, brown reaches of freshly turned earth, prepared for corn or tobacco.

Now to my ears came a sound which has been heard since the world was young; the musical ring of iron against iron; the song of the forge. Across the lowland it drifted to me, losing all harshness in its coming, and falling in pleasing cadences upon the air. I knew it was no uncertain hand which held the hammer, for the strokes were vigorous and in time, interrupted now and again by the drum-like roll as the hammer danced upon the anvil. I went forward leisurely, crossed a stream on a suspension foot-bridge of native manufacture, then up a slight rise till I stood in the broad doorway of the smithy. The worker, intent upon his task, had neither seen nor heard my approach. I stood and looked at him silently.

He was a young man, near my own age. He was quite as tall as myself, and maybe a trifle heavier. He wore a short brown beard. His flannel shirt was open at the neck for two or three buttons, revealing his thick throat and corded chest. His sleeves were rolled above his elbows, and his fore-arms were knotted and ridged with muscles. His face was rather heavy, and not intelligent. He was welding an iron tire, and I watched his deft manipulations admiringly. Certainly he was no bungler. After a while he thrust the cooling irons back into the fire, and as he grasped the handle of his bellows with one grimy hand, I spoke.

"Good morning, Buck Steele."

He wheeled with the quick movement you have seen a cat display when surprised, his brown eyes widening perceptibly. He knew me. I saw his mouth set, and the outer corners of his eyes contract. In that first long look which he gave me he did not say a word, neither did he move. I could not help thinking what a splendid looking fellow he was, his posture one of natural grace and dignity, at the same time feeling and recognizing the antagonism which radiated from his entire person. I met his gaze unflinchingly, and with a straightforward look. I could see his eyes traveling from my head to my feet, and knew that he was taking stock of me. Then his uncompromising stare settled on my face, and instantly a bitterly hostile expression gathered on his own. For a few moments we stood thus, then his big chest rose over a deep long breath, his mouth went tighter still, his smutty fingers closed on the handle of the bellows and began a downward pull, then he calmly turned his back upon me and resumed his work. My greeting had remained unanswered.

I turned away. I was sorry, but there was nothing I could do. To have forced myself upon his notice would have resulted in violence, I was sure, with probable disaster to myself. I went on past a house or two until I reached the store, a low, narrow building beside a railroad track. A man, bareheaded and in his shirt sleeves, sat on a cracker-box on the small porch, his back against the wall, his hands folded peacefully in his lap.

"Got any garden seed?" I asked, stopping in front of him.

He lazily raised his bleary, red-rimmed eyes, and regarded me stolidly. Absolute vacancy sat upon his countenance. He batted his lids, and stared at me, his lower lip slightly pendulous. His silence became so protracted that I smiled, and repeated my query. A sort of grunt came from him, presently followed by—

"Whut kind o' gyard'n seed?"

I named the varieties I wanted.

Again he grunted—a louder grunt than the first, because now he was preparing to get up. This he presently accomplished, and went into the store, sliding his feet along over the planks of the porch. In process of time I got my seed.

"What's up there?" I asked, as we came out together, pointing to a hill across the railroad up



which the pike wound sinuously.

The storekeeper dropped upon the cracker-box and resumed the same position he had when I accosted him, before replying.

"Chu'ch 'n' pa's'nage; s'p'intend'nt's house. 'Stillery yonder; river under th' bridge."

Whereupon he immediately relapsed into his former inertia, and I forebore further questions.

I decided I would take a look at the river. Hebron lay beneath my gaze: small, ill-kept houses; small yards with some dismal attempts at floriculture; dirty children and work-worn women. These latter I glimpsed as I walked on to the railroad, at windows and on porches, staring apathetically at the stranger. I soon reached the bridge, which I found spanned a river of considerable size. It had a gravel bed, and its banks were heavily lined with trees. Its western sweep was particularly attractive from where I stood, and I at once determined upon a closer acquaintance, for the day was but begun, and there was no need for me to hasten home. After a brief search I found a path which conducted me to the side of the stream. The channel here was rather narrow and the water seemed deep, its flow being gentle and placid. Somewhat to my surprise, the path continued, running worm-like between the thick growth of willow and sycamore. I went forward, with no purpose whatsoever, merely yielding to an idling spirit, and the charm of an unfamiliar track through the woods by a river. I may have gone half a mile, never more than a dozen feet from the brink, when I espied a boat snugly beached, and tied to a scrubby oak whose roots were partly submerged. Why not take a ride? The thought was born instantaneously, and quickly took the shape of resolve. Here was a delightful diversion ready to my hand. I loved to pull an oar, and the gleaming, dark-green surface before me seemed to invite. I placed my bundle of seed on the ground, slipped off my coat and flung it across a limb, then laid hold of the painter. It was not locked, as I half feared it would be. The boat was a delicate, shapely affair, painted white, and I marveled that such a dainty craft should be moored here in the wilds about Hebron. The painter was loose, and one of my feet was in the boat as I prepared to shove off, when—

"I beg your pardon," I heard; "but may I have my boat a little while?"

I arose, holding the painter in my hand.

A young woman faced me. Low and slight, dressed in tan from her jaunty straw hat to her russet shoes; short walking skirt tailored to perfection; a laced bodice very low in the neck; a tin fish bucket in one hand. She had evidently taken me for one of the rustics in the neighborhood, for I could see that she was as much surprised as I. A glance sufficed to tell me her story. A jaded society woman, old and *blasé* at twenty, having nothing but a sniff for the world and all there was in it. She was pitifully young to wear those marks of experience upon her face. Her features were inclined to be peaked; her chin sharp, her blue eyes so weary, in spite of the momentary light which flashed up in them now. There were faint lines about her unstable mouth, and well defined crowsfeet at her eyes. She must have lived hard and furiously from her early teens to have acquired that indescribable expression which needs no interpreter. Whoever she was and whatever she was—and I was convinced she could boast the blood of gentle folks—she had seen some life in her score of years.

"I guess if there is any pardon to ask,—I should ask it," I replied, dragging my cap off as I spoke. "I didn't know it was yours. I'm a stranger. I was out walking, and ran up on the boat, and couldn't see any harm in using it for a half-hour. Shall—that is, may I assist you to get afloat?"

She had gotten rid of all tokens of surprise as I was speaking. Now, with the ready action of a woman of the world, she came forward and held out the bucket.

"You may stow that away.... I'm going to visit my lines."

"Lines?" I repeated, blankly.

"Trot lines," she explained, adjusting a pin in her hat when I was absolutely sure such a thing was unnecessary. "I set them yesterday afternoon."

"Oh! You're a fisherman!" I exclaimed. "Well, I hope you've had luck."

She stepped into the boat before I could offer assistance, got down and took the oars—then stopped. She appeared to be thinking. I stood ready to shove off at her word. Suddenly she looked up with a half smile.

"Would you like to go?"

I was not surprised. Poor little world-worn creature. How many men had she molded with that half smile! I answered without hesitation.

"Certainly!"

There could be no harm to either of us. It was unconventional, but conventionality is a terrible bugbear. She was lonely, I knew, and the echo from a civilized world which I would get in her company would be most welcome to me.

"Come on, then. Day before yesterday I caught a bass which almost wore me out before I could get him aboard. You see you could be of help on an occasion of that kind."

I offered to take the oars, but she declined, and subsequently displayed a degree of skill in rowing that surprised me. She took the middle of the stream and went with the sluggish current. From my position in the stern I faced her, and feeling that conversation was almost imperative, I said:

"Surely you don't live at Hebron?"

She smiled—a bright, winsome smile which somehow awakened a deeper pity in me. Her true nature seemed revealed in that expression. She was not wicked; not inherently bad, but was weak-willed, easily swayed, susceptible to association and environment. One who loved the smooth road of pleasure more than the stony highway of rectitude; one who had given gratis and unthinkingly the perfume of the fresh flower of her girlhood. Kind of heart, warm of sympathy, impulsive of temperament, irresponsible.

"Yes," she said, with a cheery nod; "I live at Hebron."

"But you don't *belong* there?" I insisted.

She laughed in a high, not unmusical key, and suddenly dipping her oars, began to propel the boat swiftly through the water. Rowing shows a graceful girl off to advantage, and my companion was richly endowed in this particular. Her little russet shoes were firmly braced, the short skirt revealing a few inches of tapering, tan-stockinged legs; her brown hands gripped the oars firmly, and as she swayed forward and backward with the rhythmic strokes I was conscious of a feeling of admiration for her prowess. In a few moments we had rounded a bend, and here I saw a line stretched across the river, with smaller lines depending from it into the stream. The girl glanced back over her shoulder, dipped one oar and adroitly piloted the boat toward a certain hook, before she spoke.

"I belong up yonder—for the summer," she said.

I followed her short gesture, and discovered upon a hill to my right what I took to be a brick church, with a brick dwelling near it.

As I turned to make reply I saw that something was happening. The girl was doing her best to haul in one of the sunken lines, but the hidden force beneath the surface was combatting her strength fiercely. Before I could offer assistance she had loosed her hold, and instantly the line shot out and tightened, swaying this way and that, cutting the water silently.

"I believe I have a whale!" she declared, in big-eyed seriousness, shifting her position and kneeling before taking up her task afresh. "No, don't help me yet"—as I made a forward movement—"it's lots more fun to land one's own fish!"

She bent again to the vibrating line, while I held the boat steady and eagerly awaited developments.

"I'm from Kansas City," she flung over her shoulder all at once, "and I'm spending the summer with my uncle, the Rev. Jean Dupré—Father John, the villagers call him. I am Beryl Drane."

The catastrophe cannot be told in detail. It may have been partly my fault, for my guard was lax at the moment. Before I realized what had happened Miss Drane was gone and I was in the water clinging to the upturned boat. A sucking, gurgling whirlpool was moving down the stream, and the cable line had disappeared. For a moment a cold horror crept to my vitals and chilled me so that I could not move. Then my duty swept over me with a swift rush, and, letting go the boat, I dived desperately. Madly I swept my arms to left, right, everywhere, grasping blindly for the touch of flesh or clothing. Dimly I seemed to realize that I was in a measure responsible for the accident, and that I must find the lost girl. Back and forth I fought through the water savagely, my lungs hurting, my head throbbing. I could not give up. I had to find her. She was there, somewhere in that silent, treacherous element. Into my chaotic mind leaped the thought that perhaps she had risen to the surface. Instantly I ceased my efforts and rose. Dashing the streaming drops from my eyes and mouth I gulped in a deep breath, and glared around despairingly. Silence; solitude; a shining, disc-like spot where the reflection of the sun lay, and a dozen feet off the glistening bottom of the boat. That was all. A man's length to the south I saw some bubbles rise and burst. There can be no bubbles without air. Maybe—

Resurgent hope filled my breast as I plunged downward again, striking out with all my might. I grasped a sodden something. I opened my eyes. The water was clear and the sunlight filtered dimly through it. A confused shadowy shape confronted me. I could get no outlines. An instant later I touched a hand, and knew it was Beryl Drane. A conception of the truth came then. When the fish, or whatever it was, had dragged her overboard, she had become entangled in the lines, and the thing which had power to pull her from the boat likewise had power to hold her below the surface while it struggled to escape. I clasped her in my arms, gave a tug, and together we shot upward. I looked at her as we reached light and air. She was limp, and to all appearance perfectly lifeless. Her lips had a bluish tinge, and were parted the least bit. Her eyes were half closed; she did not breathe.

Filled with foreboding which trembled on the verge of certainty, I swam for the shore. The distance was short, and presently I was struggling up the slippery mud bank with the senseless form of the girl. My mind had been busy while I was swimming. Should I stop on shore and attempt resuscitation, or should I hurry on to the priest's house, just up the hill? I decided on the latter course as the most expedient, as the delay would be practically nothing, and proper

restoratives could be had at the house. There probably was a road. Straight up the wooded slope I dashed. My exertions in the water had tired me, and now as I made my way through the dense undergrowth up the steep hill I was conscious of intense physical fatigue. But I pressed grimly on, with a dread in my heart which far outweighed any physical weakness.

At length I reached a rail fence. How I surmounted it with my burden, I do not know. Beyond the fence was a pasture lot with only a gentle incline, and across this I raced. Another fence, the back yard of the parsonage, wherein squalling chickens fled precipitately as I tore by, around the house to the front porch, where sat a little old man in a swinging chair, clad in a priest's robe. I knew it was Father John. He was quietly reading, and smoking a meerschaum pipe with a stem as long as my arm, but the sound of my feet aroused him, and he raised his head.

"*Mon Dieu!*" he exclaimed, jumping up, dropping his book, but holding to his pipe, which he waved wildly. "In ze name of heaven, m'sieu! What was it zat has happen?"

The front door stood open, and I rushed into the house without replying. A couch was in the hall, and on this I laid the form of the girl. Father John, his wrinkled face stamped with terror and anguish, was beside me in an instant.

"Madonna! Jesu!" he wailed. "My blessed Bereel!"

I began the treatment for the drowned, explaining hurriedly how the accident had occurred.

"Call your housekeeper!" I added. "Her clothes must be loosened. Quick! If no doctor is near there is no use sending. I know what should be done. Bring brandy, or whiskey—hurry!"

Father John ran from the hall crying at every step:

"Marie! Marie! Marie!"

His tremulous voice receded in the rear.

I unfastened the girl's belt, tore open her clothing at the waist, and as I worked feverishly, was conscious of a gaunt, austere woman of fifty-five or sixty suddenly falling on her knees at my side, and unhooking the tight corset which my rude haste had exposed. Thereafter we worked together, in silence, moving the arms up and down and striving for artificial respiration. Father John hovered just out of reach, an uncorked flask in one shaking hand; the long stemmed pipe, which he had never abandoned, in the other. In the stark silence which accompanied our efforts I could hear him whispering incoherent but fervent prayers in his native tongue.

Closely I watched the pallid face—the poor, peaked face which had looked upon so much that a woman ought not to know exists—but no signal flare came to the waxen cheeks. I took the flask and carefully poured some brandy between the parted lips—poor lips, which I knew had taken kisses not given by love. The fiery liquid trickled down her throat, but there was no movement, no attempt to swallow. I gave more, for this was the sovereign test for life. There came a rigor, so slight that I was not altogether sure of it. More brandy. A shiver passed over the limp form; a choking, gasping sound issued from her throat, followed by a moan of pain. I stood erect, looking down at her intently. Almost imperceptibly the faintest glow showed in the marble pallor of her skin. She was reviving. The danger was past. The gaunt woman crouched at my feet looked up at me mutely, interrogatively.

"Continue to rub her hands and feet," I said. "Keep all her clothing loose. Give her very small quantities of liquor from time to time. She had better not see me immediately on awaking."

Then I took the priest by the hand and silently led him out on the porch. A wooden settee was placed against the railing at one end. I conducted him here, and we sat down. My clothes were still wet, but I gave this no thought.

I proceeded first to assure Father John that his niece was practically out of danger, then recounted everything in detail pertaining to the accident in the river. He listened in eager silence, his expression still one of amazement and distress. I looked at him as I talked. He was a very small man. His skin was yellowish brown, like parchment. His brows projected; his eyes were black and keen; his nose was straight and thin, but quite large. His chin protruded into rather a sharp point, and his mouth was the most sensitive I have ever seen on a man. His lips were beautifully bowed, and had retained their color. They were never in perfect repose, but were constantly beset by what I am tempted to describe as "invisible" twitchings. As I spoke on, he gradually became calmer, after a while relighting his pipe. This seemed to act magically upon him, for soon after he began to smoke the wild expression vanished from his face.

"So you are ze stranger on ze Bal' Knob?" he queried, when I had finished my recital.

"Yes; I am out after health."

"Health?" he repeated, sweeping his keen eyes over my stalwart form in open astonishment.

"I don't appear to be an invalid, I'll admit," I hastened to add. "But something started up in here"—I touched my chest—"and the doctor sent me to the woods."

"Ah! Ze—ze—ze lungs.... You never struck me to have ze consumption. You are ze stron' man."

"It was just a beginning—a fear, rather than an actuality. I have been there a month, and I am already much better."

The housekeeper appeared in the doorway.

"Miss Bereel ees awake, and has asked for you both," she said.

When we again stood beside the couch, the girl made an effort to take my hand, but was too weak. Seeing her purpose, I grasped hers instead.

"Thank you," she said, in a thin, ghostly little voice. "It was not his fault, uncle; he saved me. Come to see me sometime, and we'll go—rowing again!"

She tried to smile, but was too exhausted.

"I shall certainly come to inquire about you," I replied, gently laying her hand down. "I fear I was somewhat to blame, and I hope you will be all right very soon."

She looked at me with a wan light of gratitude in her eyes, and a few moments later I was bidding Father John adieu on the porch step.

"Come again, m'sieu," he said, squeezing my hand warmly. "You shall have ze welcome!"

I thanked him, again expressed my hope and belief that his niece would be quite all right in a day or two, and struck out for Hebron.

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## CHAPTER TWELVE

### IN WHICH I ATTEND AN ORATORIO

It is one o'clock in the morning—and I have been going to bed at nine!

You will wonder what has happened to so outrageously disturb the rigorous routine governing my night hours, and I shall tell you, for that is the purpose of this chronicle.

It is now three days since I went to Hebron. After leaving the priest's house I came on down the hill, trudged back to the river to get my coat and garden seed, then turned homeward. The sun was hot by this time, my clothes quickly dried on me, and I have felt no bad effects since. Another sign, it seems to me, of my increasing physical sturdiness. These three days have passed without sight or sound of a soul. I have potted about my yard, mowing down the insistent heterogeneous growth which daily now threatens to take me; clearing a broad space about my precious well—whose water, by the way, is sparkling, clear and cold—and this morning spading in my garden for two hours or more.

I cannot explain that which follows, but a little before nine, as I was preparing to light my bedtime pipe and sit down for a chuckle with that old pagan monk, Rabelais, I felt the call to go up. As I said, I can offer no explanation. But all of us have been subject, many times in our lives, to sudden, inexplicable yearnings; silent longings as powerful and real as though a voice had spoken them. There is no need to specialize. You, if you have a spark of temperament, will understand, because you will have experienced something of the sort. You have felt that mysterious tugging toward a certain thing, when there was nothing on earth to incite it. What was it? I felt it to-night as I held my pipe in one hand and a lighted match in the other; felt it growing and expanding until it became a fierce desire. I tossed my half-burned match among the logs in the fireplace, put my filled pipe in my pocket, and with something akin to awe sobering my face, drew my cap on my head and walked softly outdoors.

It was a perfect moonless May night. I had never seen the stars brighter or nearer. I felt that by tiptoeing I might almost reach them. And their number amazed me. The sky was looking down at me with a million eyes, and each eye was a voice which said "Come up! Come up!" I went, not stopping to question, analyze, or combat. Something irresistible urged me to surmount the peak, and I bent to the climb. As I came out of the Stygian gloom of the belt of evergreens I knew that some subtle change had taken place. The atmosphere had a different feel; a different smell. There was no wind, but when I swept my gaze around I saw many horizon clouds; jagged, mountainous looking outlines, with floating fragments everywhere. Some of the cloud fragments would touch and merge even as I watched them. I did not know the significance, if there was any. I turned to the slope again. Before the last steep stretch I halted the second time. Far as I could see the perspective was bounded by a black, towering wall, which seemed to grow taller every moment. This wall was topped by fantastic turrets and towers which swayed, lengthened, expanded, or disappeared at will. Still there was no wind, even at the great height to which I had already come. The day had been suffering hot, and the perspiration was streaming from me. I breathed softly, and listened. No sound but the monotonous call of the night insects, except from a point far below, like the muffled cry of a lost soul pleading for grace, the ineffably sad tones of a whip-poor-will pulsed dimly through the dark. I turned my face upward. The calm stars still called, and I answered.

Presently I could go no further. I stood on the apex of my high hill, a jubilation of spirit making my breast to heave in deeper breaths than my exertion had caused. Then, ere I knew what I was about I had flung my arms out and up, toward the vast deeps from which had come the still summons I had felt in the quiet peace of the Lodge. I felt unreal; I was trembling. I knew not

what impended, but the air was charged with an electrical tenseness, and the pall of utter silence which hung over the world was pregnant with import. My arms dropped, and a sweet calm stole over me. Slowly I turned my gaze in every direction. That mammoth wall of blackness encircled the earth in an unbroken line, and was now quickly mounting to the zenith. How grand the sight! I bared my head before the majesty of it. How like battlements and ramparts the grim expanses appeared, crowned with their changing towers! And to make the comparison still more true, I now saw the flash of cannon through the jagged embrasures, and caught the distant thunder of their detonations. Quickly the conflict grew. North, south, east and west, and all between, the batteries of the sky unveiled. Not loud, as yet, but perpetual, and furious in the very absence of thunderous sound. There were constant growlings and incessant flashings, as back and forth over the aerial battleground the challenges were sent and answered. Now, a girdle of glory, the lightning zoned the middle sky, and ever upward, as though propelled by forces set in the earth beneath, the walls arose, blotting out stars by the thousands, and steadily converging toward a common meeting point directly overhead. Then, for the first time, I knew that the Harpist of the Wood had awakened.

The unnatural stillness was disturbed by motion which became a breath of music. I leaned forward involuntarily, my lips apart, my hands out-thrust from me in the attitude one unconsciously assumes when listening intently. From the thick darkness hundreds of feet below I caught the first faint pianissimo notes from a million strings, all attuned by the unerring touch of Nature. In gentle waftures of sound the vast prelude arose, filling my soul with an eerie delight, and causing me to draw a deep, shuddering breath. Then I crept to the rim of the peak and sat down, both humbled and exalted. Faintly now I sensed the reason of that imperious call to come up. Each succeeding measure struck by the invisible Harpist became louder, sweeter, and more stupendous. It seemed as if all creation was one mighty instrument, and a myriad-fingered master was sweeping the throbbing strings. The clouds were now a canopy without a rent. From a dozen points at once the lightning flashed and staggered and reeled in dazzling splendor across the sable field. There were no terrific thunder crashes. But, like the pedal bass of a pipe organ, there was the ever present subdued reverberation like far-off guns fired in unison. Then the strength and skill of the Harpist increased simultaneously, and waves of barbaric melody rushed upward. There was shriek and groan; there were living voices awfully mingled in one wild chorus, and in brief lulls trembling tones as sweet as a mother's good-night song to her babe. Flute-like and full of delicate color a cadenza breathing of sylvan joys rippled forth, and as its last bubbling notes yet fluttered like apple-blossoms of sound against my ravished ears, they were drowned and whelmed by a crashing diapason of majestic harmony which rushed on wide wings over leagues and leagues of forest; a thundering gamut fearfully blended into an oratorio inexpressibly sublime! Wild and shrill came a fife-like call from the west, whistling out of the gloom in a quivering cadence of victorious escape. Then it was blended with a multitudinous legion of loosened chords, and dashed over me as a surging, resplendent sea of mind-numbing melody.

So the oratorio advanced, and I sat enthralled.

The lightning increased. Not for the space of a single breath was darkness absolute. In the vivid flashes I could see the bending tree-tops far below, and the tossing, swaying, writhing branches. And ever in my ears was the awful roll of that supernatural music; so full, so deep, so filling all the universe with its changing rhythm! There was something of the ocean's voice in it all, when the wind whips it to fury. I sat dazed, imperfectly comprehending what was passing, but aware all the time of a physical sensation of exquisite pleasure. Music had always wrought upon me thus, but before the presence of this new and strange manifestation my sensibilities were quickened twentyfold. I did not know till later that I was on the peak three hours. I would have said it was only a few minutes.

When all was over, and the strings of the Harp were still again, or vibrating only as an echo, I got on my feet, dizzy and weak. All was dark. The lightning, too, had ceased. But as I turned my eyes upward, a rent showed in the cloud canopy, and through this a blood-red meteor fell burning toward the earth. So I knew that the Maestro was pleased with the performance, and from the blooming fields above had cast down a flower in token of His favor.

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## CHAPTER THIRTEEN

### IN WHICH I SUFFER FOUR SHOCKS, THREE OF THE EARTH AND ONE FROM THE SKY, AND FIND ANOTHER MAID A-FISHING

Now that has come to pass of which I had a premonition the first time I sat on the top of old Baldy and hugged my knees. In consequence thereof I write to-night with my left wrist rudely bandaged, from a hurt I took this morning. The day has been full of adventure and surprise, and I find it difficult to harness my leaping brain as I start about my record of events. Truly I have encountered enough to set my mind buzzing, and two long, full pipes since supper have failed to tranquilize and soothe. But the happenings of the day must be transcribed before I go to bed.

I went to the post-office soon after breakfast, to see if a reply had come from 'Crombie. A package and a letter awaited me. The thought came to me to run on up the hill and inquire about Beryl Drane, but I didn't. I can't say why I didn't. But I merely asked the sloth-like storekeeper

about her instead, and learned from him that she was "putty peart," and was up and about the house. When I passed the blacksmith shop I saw the door was open, but there was no one within. I started to ask the storekeeper where Buck was, but refrained on second thought, and betook myself up the railroad instead, intending to reach home by a circuitous route. By this time I was fairly familiar with the lay of the country, and I had a natural longing for exploration anyway. Then, too, deep in the bottom of my mind, I had laid a plan to come down the huge spur back of Lessie's house, and surprise her with a short visit.

I followed the railroad for perhaps a mile, made some calculations as to distance and location, then descended into a heavily wooded ravine and continued my way in a northeasterly course. I had never been in this part of the knobs before, and I found the country more rugged, if possible, than that to which I was accustomed. As I proceeded, I closely scanned the ground before me and on either side as far as my eyes would go. I had scant hope of finding the life-plant here, because one of its requisites was sunshine, and the shade was so dense that I walked in a sort of cool, green gloom, wonderfully attractive to the senses. Now and again a sun-shaft would come trembling and swaying down, brightening the brown forest floor with shining, shaking spots of pale yellow. But no green stemmed plant with golden leaves rose up from the mold to confront me. I have begun to think my quest is almost as elusive as that for the Holy Grail, but, like Sir Launfal, I shall persevere.

I became engrossed in the natural beauty of the hollow I was traversing, and forgot my secret determination to go by Granny's house. After a time the ravine opened and broadened into a little amphitheater, grass-set, jungle-like in its wildness. But few tall trees were here. Dozens of smaller ones grew on every side, and many of these were covered with the odorous green mantle of the wild grapevine. The birds had likewise sought out this spot, and the air was musical with chirp, and twitter, and song. I stopped to regale myself with Nature's prodigal loveliness, and as I drew a deep breath of satisfaction and appreciation I heard something which had come to my ears once before. A long-drawn bird note, shrill but sweet, and ending with a quick upward inflection. I started guiltily, and knew that my whole body was a-tingle. Then I stared about, trying to locate the sound. Again I heard it, and again I thrilled. Straight ahead, beyond that bosky wall of herbage. Eagerly I started forward, my pulse bounding. I reached the screening leaves and thrust out one hand to make a way, but a vagrant gust of wind at that moment formed a lane for my eyes, and the next instant I was staggering back, choking, muttering crazily, my face afire, my chest tight as though bound by constricting bands of steel. God above! Suppose I had crashed through, as I would have done a second later! With gritted teeth and set eyes I tiptoed away—away—anywhere, so that spot was left to Nature and to her!

She was there, bathing in a sheltered pool in the secluded heart of the everlasting hills. My one swift glance had showed me the Dryad in her haunts. The curling mass of her copper-gold hair she had piled regardlessly on top of her small, shapely head; she was almost entirely immersed; her back was toward me, and I saw only her head with its bewildering crown, one ivory shoulder upthrust from the water, gleaming like wet marble in the sunlight, and a naked, outheld arm whereon sat the tiny bird she had summoned. Small cause for wonder that I reeled, grew dizzy with the hard-pumped, hot blood which deluged my brain, and crept like a thief from that hidden pool—crept crouching, with rigid face and bated breath. Dear Christ! How thankful I was that the protecting water had covered her! Had it been otherwise; had my unwilling gaze dwelt upon her revealed beauty from head to foot, I think I could have taken my own life from shame. Certain it is I never again could have looked into those honest Irish gray eyes. It was what might have been, rather than what was, which planted the volcano in my breast, and sent me trembling and quaking through the bird-sung silence of that secret, sacred glen. As I went, I heard a bubbling laugh, and the tinkle of falling water drops.

Now I was speedily destined to another shock, almost as great. How far I had gone I cannot say, but all at once I knew that I was looking down upon a plant about a foot in height, with green stem and yellow leaves. I halted as though turned to stone, but I did not think. I couldn't think. My mind refused its office, and in the face of what I took to be a momentous discovery, stood still. Almost simultaneously with my finding this significant growth the third shock came, as important in its way as either of the other two, and far more ominous.

"Whut 'n' hell yo' doin' prowlin' 'roun' here?"

The voice was harsh and deep; indignation and rage ran through it.

The savage tones brought me to myself; they acted on my senses as a battery might on my flesh. I stood erect and threw my head up. The smith was not a dozen steps away. Where he had come from, how he had got there, and why he was there I could not guess. He was dressed as I had seen him at the forge on the occasion of my first visit to Hebron; plainly he had not come courting in that garb. One hand held a large club, in a position almost of menace. I brought a serious, determined expression to my face, and looked him squarely in the eyes. In that moment as we stood in silence, a darkness spread over the glen, and a cool breath as from a summer storm cloud blew upon us; I saw it lift and drop the brown hair on the forehead of the man facing me. He had me at a disadvantage. He had doubtless seen me coming from the direction of the pool, and weaker circumstantial evidence than this has condemned many a man. If he supposed for a moment that I had been spying upon the privacy of the girl he loved—and that this idea was in full possession of his mind I did not doubt—then mischief was brewing, and from his standpoint, justly so. Had our positions been reversed, had I seen him skulking away from that fringe of greenery, I doubt if I would have given him the chance he offered me. All this raced

swiftly through my brain in that short period following his hard question, and though my first feeling, a very human one, was of cold and haughty resentment, I quelled this immediately as both dangerous and unjust, and decided to speak him fairly and honestly. So I said:

"I might ask the same of you, Buck Steele."

I purposely pitched my voice low. Not that I feared she would hear it, for I realized the pool must be out of earshot from where we stood, but there is a certain low tone which permits of modulation and inflection carrying greater convincing power than when spoken in a higher key. I paused only long enough to take breath after my first sentence, then resumed.

"It's none of your business what I am doing here, but I am going to tell you, because, in a way, you have a right to know."

There flashed upon me the thought that I must play for time. If Lessie had not left the pool she would leave soon, for a storm impended. In what direction she would go to reach home I had no notion. She might come straight down the glen where we were. In any event, if blows were to be struck, and in my heart I believed they would come before we parted, it would be better if the girl was not in the neighborhood. This train of reasoning came and passed without interrupting my flow of speech.

"It's not my fault we're not friends. I came to these knobs a total stranger, intending to treat everybody right. But when I spoke to you in Hebron, you turned your back on me. Why did you do that? I know why, and in a measure I forgive it. But it was not a manly thing to do. I'm going to talk plainly to you, Buck. I'm glad of this chance to have it out right here in the woods. But before we go any further tell me this—what's that thing?"

I pointed at the plant before me.

My audacity stupefied him. He blinked at me with scowling forehead—at me and at the plant—probably deeming me crazy.

"I mean it," I insisted; "I'm not fooling with you. Tell me what that thing is, if you know, and then I'll tell you what I'm doing out here in the wilderness."

"That's a May apple," he said, suddenly and reluctantly.

"May apple!" I gasped, my high hopes shattered and gone. "I didn't know; I'm obliged to you."

Then I told him the object of my stay in the hills, not sparing words to prolong my story, and ended by asking him if he had ever seen the life-plant, ever heard of it, or ever heard of anybody that had heard of it. He shook his head to each question, then said, emphatically:

"They ain't no sich thing!"

I knew that the Dryad was safe and away by this time, so now I came back to the topic of the moment. Indeed, the smith had listened to my speech with ever increasing restlessness. I think he suspected I was trying to delay my explanation, but I doubt if he guessed the true reason for it.

"You asked me at the beginning what I was doing here, and I'm going to tell you, and tell you the *truth*; mind you that—the *truth*. I've never told a lie since I was old enough to know how base a thing it was." I took two steps toward him. "You suspect me, Buck Steele, of the lowest, most contemptible, hell-born, dastardly trick one who calls himself a man could commit. I'm not going to put it into words, because it's too damnably vile!"

The smith began to move forward as I spoke; short, hurried steps, like one takes when about to spring. But whatever his impulse he checked himself, and waited, his broad chest heaving in troubled breaths, his face contorted, his eyes veined and bulging. I knew that I fronted a deadly peril. I knew the man was surely insane that moment; that reason, argument or logic could find no place in his perceptions. He had grasped the idea that I had knowingly and willingly violated the sanctity of this secret place, and nothing that I could say would sweep that illusion from his disordered brain. He saw red. The blood-lust was on him in all its primal force; in every lineament of his twisted countenance was written the word—"kill."

A strong gust of wind tore down the glen, shuddering among the murmuring leaves, and with its coming the gloom deepened. The shape before me assumed a more formidable aspect in the lessened light, but I felt no fear. I thought of my revolver—and was ashamed. Still it might serve a purpose. It might help bring this madman to his senses. I drew it quickly from my pocket, and holding it out in the palm of my hand, said:

"I could kill you, man; I could shoot you down, and no one would ever guess I did it. You're bent on trouble; you're prepared not to believe anything I say. But for this revolver I am unarmed. I am not going to take an unfair advantage of you. See?" I broke the weapon, emptied its chambers, then put the cartridges and revolver in separate pockets.

The act had no apparent effect. It may be the look of ferocity deepened; certainly there was no recognition of my attempt to place our relations upon an equal basis. Now I knew that nothing short of physical violence would bring about a reaction to sanity, and for an instant I hesitated. The temptation to evade the whole truth assailed me wickedly. Something within told me that I could not cope with this giant in a personal encounter; that death or disablement awaited the

revelation I was contemplating. The something which gave this warning also suggested the remedy—the lie whereby I might pass Buck Steele with a whole skin and an outraged conscience. I believe I wavered. I believe that for the shortest time I came near to yielding, then my manhood asserted itself in a swift rush, before Buck's words stung my blood hot.

"Go on, yo' damn sneak'n' fox!—Whur'd yo' ben w'en I seen yo'?—Whur?—Whur?"

I stripped off my coat as I answered, for I knew there was work ahead. And Buck laughed as I cast the garment aside; a hoarse, growling laugh in which dwelt no note of mirth. It was simply an indication that he was pleased with the meaning of the act; that the pagan desire to give and take blows which possessed him would be satisfied.

"I'm going to tell you. I went to Hebron this morning, and started home by the railroad. I don't know this country as well as you, and as I was making my way back toward Lessie's house—for I wanted to have a word with her—I stumbled into this place."

A malevolent grin of disbelief greeted this speech. The fellow's insolence nettled me, but I went on.

"I heard a bird-call which I knew—which I had heard her give before. I went to look for her. I came to the line of bushes which fringe the pool; I was preparing to pass through them in my search for her, when the wind blew the leaves aside and I saw——"

With a roar like a wounded bull he was on me. He had been holding himself back for this confession. Too late I realized that I had blundered. I might have approached the denouement more circumspectly; I might have prepared him for things as they actually had been, instead of allowing him, by my extreme candor, to suppose that matters were worse than they really were. He swung his club as he rushed, and it hissed above me. I crouched and leaped aside, striking up blindly with all my might. I had flung my left arm out to balance myself, and the descending club caught my wrist a slanting blow. I am sure now it scarcely more than touched it, but an arrow of acute pain shot through my entire arm. The bludgeon hit the earth with a force which splintered it into a dozen pieces, and Buck wheeled more than half around, for my fist had found his ribs. Even as he turned with a harsh, bellowing, wordless oath, I was at him. I thrust deliberately, coolly, but with all my concentrated power, aiming over his shoulder at his neck. He saw the stroke coming, but, in the attitude where my former blow had forced him he could parry but ineffectually. His shoulder went up, off and over it my fist slid and with all the weight of my body behind it caught him on the ear. Then back he staggered, his windmill arms waving hugely, aimlessly, his knees wobbling, his feet slithering uncertainly over the short grass. Back and back he went, seeming to try to stop, but couldn't, till fifteen paces must have separated us. I did not follow him, though I suppose I should have done so. I think I was a trifle dazed at my success, and the spectacle of the great body of the smith moving crazily backward with wide arms threshing the air over his head, must have unconsciously served as a check for any further assault.

When nearly a score of yards lay between us Buck came to himself. His arms dropped, he shook his shoulders, felt his damaged ear, now covered with blood,—and saw me. Instantly he made ready to rush me. He possessed to the full that instinct held by all fighting animals which does not allow them to give up. As long as he could stand on his feet he would do battle. I squared myself and awaited his onslaught. My temporary advantage had not deceived me. I knew too well that chance had a hand in the operations just concluded, and that if I ultimately succeeded in whipping Buck Steele it would be a miraculous happening. I saw him bend his body to advance, then earth and sky and air became blended in one burning, blinding, deafening, fiery chaos. My eardrums vibrated under a volume of sound such as I would not have deemed possible; a white sword of dazzling brightness was laid across my eyes, searing the balls and scattering a myriad colored sparks dancing and ricocheting through my brain. Vaguely I seemed to see an oak tree back of Buck slough its bark as a snake does its skin—shake it out and away from its white trunk; saw it rip off its own limbs and cast them down; saw it take its leaves by vast bunches, strip them from their hold, and scatter them abroad like feathers. Accompanying this phenomenon I saw my enemy sink down in his tracks. It all happened within the fractional part of a second, for on the heels of the crash and the awful light, a great blackness and silence settled over me.

I awoke with a quivering, indrawn breath, and knew that the little fists of a heavy rain were pounding me in the face. Slowly my mind grasped the situation. Struggling to my hands and knees, my arms trembling under my weight, I looked at Buck. He lay perfectly still. He had been much nearer the tree which had received the bolt than I, and the fear that he was dead took hold of me. Painfully I dragged myself toward him over the wet grass, my head buzzing and swimming, and throbbing with queer, unnatural pains. I reached his side and grasped his wrist, sliding the tips of my fingers back of the small bone where the pulse manifests itself. I held my breath in fear, at once conscious of no perceptible movement. A few moments longer I waited, but the signal of life failed to come. Then I firmly seized the shirt where it opened at the neck, and ripped off the remaining buttons with a quick jerk. A big, deep chest, covered with black hair, was revealed. I know a moan came from me as I drew my body over his, and fell across him with my ear pressed to his heart. As I lay the pounding rain revived me more and more, the thrumming in my head ceased, and then, muffled, weak, but real, I heard the feeble beating of the engine of life. There was nothing I could do for him, but I sat there and waited his return to consciousness, knowing that it would be wrong to leave him absolutely helpless. My strength came back momentarily, and when Buck began to stir I was capable of standing erect. So presently I went away, realizing that his iron constitution would quickly right him.



I did not have the heart to get dinner, but ate what cold stuff I could find, then went to the seat under the tall pine, and thought. I was not scared. Fright did not enter into my feelings in the smallest way, although, when I reviewed the incident, I was confident Buck would have worsted me had it not been for the unexpected and startling intervention. He was unquestionably the stronger man, and had I defeated him, it would have been due to my skill in fisticuffs. I was not a stranger to the science of the ring, while abhorring prize-fighting. I believe it every man's duty to himself and those he loves to equip himself physically for life's battles. So I had trained, and kept myself in training. But the smith had been transformed into a raging demon of a man; his great natural power had been doubled, quadrupled, and had his clutching hands once found me I would have fared as Carver Doone fared at the hands of John Ridd.

I was sick at heart because of what these things which had just transpired foretold. Would Buck voice his hellish belief in my poltroonery to Lessie? A shiver shook me at the thought; it seemed as if a thousand-legged worm with feet of ice was laid along my spine. Then my neck and face burned, and my throat grew tight, so that my breath came hard. What ailed me? Never before had such a sensation possessed me. Why did it matter so very greatly what Buck told? I knew that I was entirely innocent of any wrong—what else mattered? I know the good opinion of our fellow creatures is worth striving for and maintaining, but why should I be so concerned as to what these hill people thought of me? A few months more and I would be gone, would never see them again in all my life. Why—then suddenly, in the midst of my reflections the Dryad's face swam before my mind, and I saw it as it would look when Buck, crudely but earnestly, told her what he believed to be true. I saw the expression on her face when she heard the hateful words; the swift, responsive blood bathing her cheeks into red peonies—the terror and shame in her eyes—the anguish of betrayed faith—and in that moment I knew that I cared more for what Buck should say to Lessie than for anything else in all the world. I got up, breathing fast, and looked out over the great valley of billowing trees. In former days this sight had a magical effect; it brought a sweet calm and content. This afternoon I did not feel the response to which I was accustomed. Instead, I knew that war was in my breast, and that every passing moment loosened a lurking devil with a shape of fear. Peace cannot come from without when there is strife within. Had Buck already told her? I found myself wondering. Had he gone direct to her after he recovered, and poured out the poisoned tale? He would do it, I felt assured. His passion had reached a stage which not only suggested, but declared this course, and he, rough, untrained, with no restraining leash of civilization and refinement to hold him back, would make instant capital of his supposed discovery to further his wooing. If I could see her first—

Down my hill of refuge I tore, bareheaded, coatless. Along the familiar route I ran, to Dryad's Glade, to the creek which flowed south, to the tree spanning the creek. Midway across the tree sat the object of my quest, fishing. A pool of some depth spread out beneath her, and here her hook was cast. Her rod was a slender hickory pole, while a rusty tin can at her side held her bait—the fishing-worms of our boyhood. As I appeared she drew up and at once became engaged in impaling a fat bait on the hook. With the greatest nonchalance she drew the wriggling thing over the barb, and sighted me just as the operation was concluded. She smiled, and the relief wave which swept over me threatened to inundate me root and branch. By this I knew I had reached her first. Then, as I climbed eagerly up, she deliberately pursed her lips and spat on that worm!

"Hello!" she said, and cast her line.

I did not say hello, nor anything else for a time—for an appreciable time. I felt foolish; light-headed, light-footed, light all over. Something inside my breast seemed spreading and spreading, and I wanted to sing—to shout insanely. This most candid confession will probably arouse grave suspicions in the mind of the reader, but that is so much in favor of a narrative which always sticks closely to the truth. Had I intended to practice any deception, just here is where I would have begun, for I realize, after writing the above, that I am laying myself liable to almost any charge one would care to bring along the line of general idiocy. Just why the ordinary sight of a girl on a log fishing—a back country girl at that—should make a man of the world who has long since left the adolescent stage behind feel like singing and dancing and yelling, is beyond my ability to explain. Let him who reads draw his own conclusions.

"You did that for luck, didn't you?" I asked, when I was seated tailor fashion beside her. It had been a boyhood belief of mine; I had simply outgrown it. She was still primitive.

She nodded, and put a finger on her lips, turning to me wide eyes of warning. She evidently harbored the other belief that fish won't bite if you talk. I turned to her cork—an old bottle stopper—and saw that it was bobbing; short little ducks sideways which suggested a minnow to me. But the Dryad was all engrossed with the prospects, and watched the stopper's movements intently. Presently it went under in a slanting sweep, and the pole came up promptly and vigorously. A sun perch the size of a small leaf glinted and leaped at the end of the line. Dexterously the girl swung her prize within reach, skilfully removed the hook from its hold in a gill, and dropped her catch in a tin milk bucket at her other side.

"I tol' you!" she said, triumphantly, referring to her treatment of the worm before committing it to the stream.

At once her tapering fingers began burrowing in the dirt which half filled the can, in search of more bait.

"Hold on, Dryad!" I whispered. "Let up on fishing a few minutes, unless you'll allow me to talk, too. I've something to tell you. Don't you know it seems an age since I saw you last?"

"I tol' you not to come no more," she said, eyeing me closely to see the effect of her words.

"But you didn't believe I would stay away!" I retorted, and her face instantly lighted with laughter. "You rogue!" I went on; "I have stayed longer than I should as it is."

One of the quick transitions which marked her now took place, and in a twinkling she was serious, and her eyes grew darker, as still water changes when a cloud hides the sun.

"If Buck sees you here there'll be trouble; you'd better 'a' kep' to Baldy."

"Buck saw me to-day, and there was trouble," I answered. "Now let me tell you all about it."

How frightened she was, although I endeavored to speak in a matter-of-fact way. She regarded me as though she found it difficult to believe that I really existed after "trouble" with Buck, and her face turned white, leaving her freckles oddly prominent. Her pole dipped, too, so that its further end went under the water. So she sat, her hands in her lap, her feet with the ugly, shapeless little shoes swinging, and listened to my story. I told it with absolute truthfulness, but very carefully, even condoning Buck's jealous frenzy. She remained very still while I was talking, but when I came to the place where I had inadvertently glimpsed her in the pool she dropped her head with a short, shuddering gasp, and grew crimson. I, too, looked away then, and tried to tell her how sorry I was of the incident, at the same time endeavoring to make it plain that I was the victim of an accident. I did not dwell upon the situation, but soon hurried on to my encounter with the smith.

"I wanted you to hear just how it was," I ended; "because Buck will tell you another story. You believe me, don't you, Dryad; and we are good friends still, aren't we?"

I did not get an immediate reply. Her head remained sunk, and I could not see much of her face. The portion which I saw was still flushed, but not violently. I waited, knowing that I had stated my case as well as I could, and believing that further argument would be dangerous. The spot where we sat was the natural abode of silence. Now I could hear only the gentle breath of the low wind rustling the leaves, the musical gurgle of water, and the sweet song of a thrush hidden in the foliage to my left. I grew restless as the silence continued: apprehensions arose, and the sinister form of fear cast its shadow over my heart. Was she offended past forgiveness? Had Fate prepared this trap for me to rob me of—what was I thinking? What was this girl to me that I should wait her next words with set teeth and softly drawn breath? That I should now behold the wonder of her hair and the marvel of her face with inward quaking, fearing that they might depart from me forever? That the echo of her voice became a mocking, maddening refrain to my consciousness, and the sorcery of her simple presence made my brain swim? This waif of the woods; this fragment from one of the lower stratas of civilization; this half wild, ignorant, nameless, plebeian creature—what was she to chill my blood with the dread thought that from this meeting we went as strangers? I cannot answer. Leave the solution to biologist or sociologist. I only know the fact as it existed. I had rather have seen those gray eyes flashed upon me in perfect trust that moment than to have seen the sun rise the next morning!

What was she thinking? No movement, no sound, no sign. Like an image fashioned of flame and snow and draped with a moss-green garment, there she sat by my side, so close—so close. Then I knew something of what Tantalus felt when the cool water arose just beneath his cracked and burning lips, and receded as he bent to drink. So close I could have drawn her to me with a sweep of my arm, but mute and changeless as though made of stone.

Presently I could stand it no longer. I placed my palms upon the tree on either side of me, and leaned forward.

"Dryad—Lessie—little girl! For God's sake—speak!"

Then came the miracle.

Again she started, as from a revery rudely interrupted. Her head was lifted quickly, gladly, and her big moist eyes gazed into mine glowing with tender faith. I know the dawn of an eternal Day will never thrill me as did this. I drew my face closer to hers.

"Then you—do forgive? Why were you silent so long, Dryad?"

"I's thinkin' 'bout—if Buck—ur th' light'n'—had killed you!"

"*Who-a-a-a—Lessie! Who-a-a-a—Lessie! Whur air yo'?*"

We jumped, and a revulsion of feeling which came near to suffocating me swelled in my throat. Granfer was coming down the winding path from the house. He had a brown jug in one hand. He had halted to give his hail, and an instant later Lessie was on her feet, waving her sunbonnet and sending back a lusty yell.

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## CHAPTER FOURTEEN

IN WHICH YET A FIFTH SHOCK ARRIVES, AND ROUNDS OUT THE DAY

This certainly has been a big day, the first one which has required two chapters of my story. I could have put it all in one, it is true, but I believe there exists a general preference for frequent "stopping places," and I shall defer to this opinion, partly, perhaps, because I heartily endorse it myself. Granf'er sighted Lessie at once, brought his jug up and down twice at arm's length by way of recognition, and resumed his way with the shuffling, elbow-lifting gait which usually attaches to men advanced in years when in a hurry.

How straight the girl's young body was! Uncorseted though I knew she must be, the lines of her figure conformed to the demands of physical beauty. From her naturally slender waist, belted only with the band made in her one piece frock, her back tapered up to shoulders which were shapely even under the poorly fitting dress. Her head, held more than ordinarily high now, as she watched Granf'er, was nobly poised on a firm, round neck, which I am most happy to record was not at all swan-like. I should like to add, in passing, that I have never seen a girl with a swan-like neck. If such exist, their natural place is in a dime museum, or a zoo. Such a monstrosity would, from the nature of her affliction, look like either a snake or a goose, neither of which have come down in humanity's annals as types of beauty. I must say it to the credit of most moderns, however, that the swan-necked lady is seldom paraded for us to admire. There were no crooks or loops in the Dryad's neck. Like a section of column it was; smooth, perfect, swelling to breast and shoulder.

I clambered to my feet behind her, cursing mentally the harmless, hospitable, doddering old fellow approaching, and singing a pæan of rejoicing in my soul at the same time. Such things can be. The breeze freshened, and began sporting with the dazzling, home-made coiffure on the Dryad's head. She had not loosened it since she came from her bath, and that is why I saw so plainly the classic outlines of her head and throat. The madcap wind caught her dress, too, as she stood exposed to its sweep down the ravine, and cunningly smoothed it over her hip and thigh; tightly, snugly smoothed it, then took the fullness remaining and flapped and shook it out like a flag. So I knew, again through no fault of mine, that this girl who had never even heard of a modiste—of her skill to make limb or bust to order—had grown up with a form which Aphrodite might have owned. She did not know the breeze had played a trick upon her; or knowing, thought nothing of it. The seeds of our grosser nature sprout more readily in the hotbed of a drawing-room of "cultured" society, than in the windsweet, sun-disinfected acres of the out-of-doors.

She spoke.

"Granny's picklin' to-day. She's run out o' vinegar 'n' has sent Granf'er to fin' me to go to town 'n' git some more."

"Let me go with you!" I urged.

"No," she answered, promptly; "'t wouldn't do. Don't you see?"

"I see what's in your mind," I replied, knowing that she was thinking I would likely meet the smith again; "but I should be glad to go anyway."

"No; you mus' stay here."

Firmly she said it, and my saner judgment told me she was right. It would have been a fool's errand for me to undertake.

"I know it is best," I assented reluctantly, "but *why* did Granny have to run out of vinegar this afternoon?"

Lessie threw me an amused glance over her shoulder, burst into a peal of laughter, and began waving her pole over her head in wide circles, taking this method to wind her line. When this was in place, she grasped the hook between finger and thumb, and imbedded it in the stopper.

"You bring th' fish 'n' th' bait," she said, and ran along the tree, sure-footed and nimble as a squirrel.

I picked up the can and bucket and followed. I looked at her catch as I went, and saw that it represented some half-dozen minnows only. Granf'er was waiting for us in the road. He had already transferred the jug to Lessie and given her instructions when I came up and cordially shook hands.

"How are you getting along?" was my greeting, as I wisely smothered the impatience I felt.

"Oh! fust rate;—'cep'n' th' ketch."

He put his left hand to his side and drew a wheezy breath.

Lessie gave her fishing-pole into Granf'er's care, smiled a farewell and started toward Hebron. It wrenched me for her to begin that lovely walk alone. She was twenty steps away when the old man suddenly turned.

"Don't go trapes'n' in th' woods fur flow'rs 'n' sich! Granny's wait'n' fur that air vinegyar!"

She waved her hand as a sign that she heard, but made no reply.

"A quare gal!" mused Granf'er, beginning to delve in his trousers pocket for his twist. "Fust 'n' las', they ain't no onderstand'n' 'er. She washes in th' woods lak a wil' Injun 'n' plays 'ith th' birds 'n' th' beastes. Oncommin quare, by gosh!"

He opened his mouth and allowed to roll therefrom his chewed-out quid, ran his crooked and cracked forefinger around his gums to dislodge any particle of the leaf which might still remain in hiding, and took another chew.

"But she is a most attractive young lady, nevertheless," I ventured, tentatively, putting one hand in my pocket for my pipe and holding the other out in dumb request. I remembered the guest-rite of my first visit, and shrewdly suspected this move of mine would please the old man. It did.

"Lak it, don't ye?" he grinned, his wrinkled face lighting with pleasure as he eagerly thrust the tobacco into my palm. "Light Burley 't is, 'n' skace 's' hen's teeth. Mos' craps plum' failed las' year, but I growed a plenty fur you 'n' me—yes, fur you 'n' me!"

The expression tickled him into a creaky, croaky sort of laugh.

"It's good stuff, Gran'fer," I agreed, compromising with my conscience by supposing that it was good to chew, although to smoke, it bit my tongue abominably and had a green flavor. "I've been intending to come back to see you and Granny and Lessie ever since I was here last, but one thing and another has prevented. I hope you are all well?"

I turned toward the path and moved forward a few steps, as though assuming we would now go on up to the house. But Gran'fer's thoughts did not run with mine.

"Well? Yes; that is to say, tol'ble." His manner was somewhat excited. "Granny, y' know, 's pickl'n' to-day, 'n' w'en she's pickl'n' she's turble busy, 'n' turble—turbles techous.... Fine terbacker, ain't it?" as he saw the pale blue smoke beginning to come from my lips. "Yes, we're putty well, but Granny's ben kind o' contrairy these fo' days pas', 'n' bein' she's pickl'n' I 'low you 'n' me 'd jes' as well set down right here 'n' hev our chat."

He tried to speak in an ordinary way, but simulation did not abide in his honest, open soul, and I knew he felt he was breaking hospitality's rules in suggesting that we remain away from the house. The thought worried him, and he could not hide it.

"All right!" I answered, heartily, donning the hypocrite's cloak with perfect ease. (This is one of the advantages of our ultra civilized state.) "Women are different from men, anyhow, and take notions and ideas which we have to humor. And some people are so constituted by nature that they must be let alone when they are busy."

"Yes! Yes! That's it! Notions 'n' ideas!" Gran'fer eagerly approved. "I don't see how yo' kin know so much 'bout wimmin if yo' 've never ben married.... Notions 'n' ideas!" He chuckled with a dry sort of rattling sound, rubbed his leg, and thumped the ground with the butt of the Dryad's fishing-pole. "By gosh! Notions 'n' ideas!" he repeated, for the third time, his eyes narrowed and his face broadened in a fixed expression of unalloyed pleasure.

"Suppose we sit on the big rock here?" I said, with a gesture toward the immense stone which formed the tip of the Point.

I walked out upon it as I spoke, and the old fellow dragged after, doubtless still caressing in his mind that chance phrase which had caught his fancy. The stone was a dozen yards across, and its creek side arose perpendicularly from the water, its top being five feet or more from the stream's surface. Here we sat, hanging our legs over as boys would. I smoked, and Gran'fer chewed. He really didn't chew much, because I am sure he was inherently opposed to the slightest exertion which was unnecessary, but now and then he would defile the limpid purity below, a fact which convinced me he was enjoying his marvelous tobacco far more than I was.

"Wimmin *is* curi's," began Gran'fer, when we had arranged ourselves comfortably. He twirled his stubby, funny looking thumbs contentedly and leisurely. The end of each was overhung with a remarkable length of nail, black and thick. "I s'pose they's nec'sary ur th' Lord wouldn't 'a' put 'em here, but it's a plum' fac' they's no read'n' 'em, 'n' no tell'n' whut they gunta do. S'firy 'n' me, come November twinty-fust, nex', hev ben married forty-two year. Right there in Hebrin wuz we married, forty-two year ago come November twinty-fust, nex'. At th' Cath'lic chu'ch on th' hill, th' same whut's now Father John's. He wuzn't here them days. 'Nother pries' married us. S'firy's a Cath'lic 'n' I wuz n't nothin', but I wuz bornd o' Prot'st'nt parints. 'N' I made th' fust mistake right there. Onless two people hev th' same b'lief, they oughtn't to jine in wedlock, 'cus trouble's comin' shore 's sin."

He took off his worn, soiled, and shapeless straw hat to scratch his head.

"I suspect you are entirely right about that. I know of a number of unhappy marriages for that reason."

Gran'fer grunted, twice.

"S'firy's a buxom gal, ez th' sayin' goes," he continued, reminiscently. "Purties' gal hereabout she wuz, ef I do say it, but they's allus fire on her tongue. Jes' lak a patch o' powder her min' wuz, 'n' th' leas' thin' 'd set it off. 'Tain't in th' natur o' young people to look ahead, ur I never 'd 'a' tried life with S'firy. A young feller in love is th' out 'n' out damndes' fool on airth. I'se sich.... I couldn't stan' ag'in 'er."

He shook his head slowly, and fell to combing his straggling fringe of whiskers with his bent fingers.

I did not reply. I was not much interested in the old man's recital. I had guessed already practically all that he was telling me. My mind was full of other things; my thoughts were back on the Hebron road, following the footsteps of the girl with the jug.

"I fit, though; I fit to be boss o' my own house,"—the querulous, cracked voice broke in upon my reflections. "See here?" He drew his palm down over his long, shaven upper lip, and looked at me craftily with his little blue eyes. "I knowed a man onct, in them days, whut wore his beard jes' that way, 'n' he's the w'eelhoss o' the fam'ly. Th' wimmin wuz skeered uv 'im es a chick'n is uv a hawk. Whut he said they *done*, 'n' done 'ithout argyment. 'N' I took th' notion that if I shaved my lip, too, 'n' looked kind o' fierce 'n' hard lak, that I c'd manage S'firy. So one mornin' I gits my razor 'n' fixes that lip, 'n' w'en I saw myseff I felt I c'd boss anybody, I looked that mean. So in I comes to S'firy, 'n' tol' 'er, kind o' brash, that I wanted sich 'n' sich a thin' done, 'n' kind o' squared myseff 'n' put my han's on my hip j'int's, same 's I saw that other feller do, y' know.... Chris' Jesus!... Whut happ'n'd? 'S ben a long time ago 'n' I can't ricollec' all th' doin's. But she called me a baboon fust, 'n' then she lit into me.... Well, I kep' on shavin' my lip, 'cus I 'proved o' th' style, but I didn't order S'firy no more, bein' 's I'm nat'rly a man o' peace."

"How many children did you have, Gran'fer?" I asked, presently.

"Jes' two. Th' fust 'n' wuz a boy whut died o' fits w'en he 's two weeks ol'. Th' nex' 'n' wuz Ar'minty, Lessie's mammy. She died w'en Lessie 's skacely more 'n a baby."

"What was the matter with her?" I asked.

Quick as a flash Gran'fer turned on me, an expression of alarm and anger mingled showing on his face. What had I done? Surely my question was simple and natural enough. He saw my surprise and astonishment, and his feelings softened instantly.

"She jes' pined 'way lak," he replied, dropping his eyes and smoothing the back of one hand with the palm of the other. "Didn't hev no fevers, nur nothin'. Jes' drooped, lak a tomater plant does w'en it's fust sot out 'n' don't git no rain. Got weaker 'n' weaker. Wouldn't eat nothin'. Didn't try to live. Couldn't do nothin' with 'er. So she jes' wilted up 'n' died, lak a tomater plant in th' sun.... Ar'minty."

The plain, brief recital stirred me, and awoke within me a wondering interest. Gran'fer's head was low now, so low that the hair on his chin spread out fanlike over his faded, checked shirt. His hand had ceased its caressing movement, and lay above the other. I could see that each had a slight palsied motion. The little bent figure at my side struck me as infinitely pathetic just then. Dull indeed must I have been not to have sensed the shadow of some dire tragedy occurring in the years he had mentioned. For a number of days past vague imaginings and sundry conjectures had come to vex my mind with their unsatisfying presence. I had known for some time that Lessie was not all she seemed, and now, this moment, I stood on the borderland of enlightenment. Unfamiliar thrills shot through me, flame tipped and eager. My heart pounded oddly, and my eyelids were hot against the balls. Instantly a thought had sprung full-born into existence, and it was the acceptance of this thought which sent that tingling, vibrating current shooting throughout my entire being. Where did Lessie get her refined features? Where the instinct to care scrupulously for her person? Where that mute, painful longing for something she could not name? From generation after generation of ox-minded hill folk? Impossible! From them came her wonderful simplicity, her extreme naturalness, her kinship with the wild places and the things which dwelt there. But—I felt now as if a force pump was connected with my chest, and that any moment it might burst asunder. Dare I ask Gran'fer? Dare I, almost a total stranger, intrude here, and seek to pry behind the veil these old people had drawn between their grandchild and the world? I resolved to make the effort, but with great caution, feeling my way with carefully chosen words. I did not want to offend, but the desire to know the truth about the Dryad was all but overpowering. It was not vulgar, idle curiosity. For I knew the deeps were stirred; that underlying all else was the strange, full throbbing of a new force.

So I put a hand on the old man's sagging shoulder in friendly way, and said, speaking softly—

"And is Lessie's father—"

I got no further.

It was as though I had put him in contact with a live wire. His drooping body straightened, his boot heels clicked against the face of the stone, and his stiffened arms shot over his head.

"Damn 'im! *Damn 'im! Damn 'im!*" he exclaimed shrilly, each expletive more forceful than the one which went before. He tossed his clenched fists skyward, and followed such a lurid stream of malediction, in consideration of some lily-minded reader, I will not set it down. I was almost alarmed at the storm my luckless speech had loosened; it seemed for a short time as if Gran'fer would really go into a spasm. His lip curled back brute-like till his teeth showed, while his face was grooved, seamed and twisted uglily. The evil memories which gripped him tore him roughly for several moments, and then his passion was spent, leaving him with eyes red and blazing, chest heaving and arms trembling. I learned nothing from his volcanic, torrential downpour of curses which in any way lightened the mystery I was burning to solve. It was merely a meaningless jumble of heated invective, delivered with deadly earnestness and the most emphatic inflections.

At first I was dumb. His violence came on him so suddenly and quickly. From the little I had seen

of him I had set him down as a rather meek character, what manhood he may formerly have had henpecked out of him; an entity, forsooth, but nothing more. When the shock had passed I did not essay to soothe him. My judgment told me this would not have been wise. There are some people, especially rural ones and others of no education, who will not take soothing. In fact, it acts as oil, rather than water, to flames. I believed Gran'fer to be of this sort, and while I had no doubt his rage was both righteous and genuine, I let it wear out before I spoke again.

"I beg your pardon, sir; but I did not know."

He swallowed twice; I could see his hairy Adam's apple rise and fall.

"We don't—talk 'bout him. 'N'—yo' mustn't ast!"

The tones were trembling and weak now, but there was dignity in them. A feeling of true respect came to me for Gran'fer. There was something sterling in him. A man may crawl on his belly before a sharp-tongued shrew, and yet hold that within him which will arise at the command of necessity; stunned and brow-beaten worth quickened by chance, opportunity, or need.

Now there surged within me another wish—a wild desire to know one other thing. It would harm no one to tell me, and to me it meant much.

"Gran'fer," I said; "I'm your friend—your true friend. Perhaps I should put it that I am Lessie's friend. I apologize for what I said; I didn't intend any harm. I promise not to mention the subject again to you. But I pray that you will tell me this—does Lessie know—know about her father—who he was—and all?"

I waited for his answer, trembling inwardly. He seemed to be thinking. The cloud had come again to his face, and he began cracking his knuckles, a succession of vicious little snaps. Then one word burst from him, hard as a pellet of lead.

"No!"

"Thank you," I said.

Then there fell a silence between us. Gran'fer's mind was back in the past, and I was groping blindly in the mists of wonder and supposition. There was a reason, then, for the complex, warring nature of the Dryad. How I longed to know the whole truth! But I could go no further here. It was a painful subject, a guarded secret to the old man sitting humped over by my side, and for the time I must hold my curiosity in check. The revelation would come. I was determined to learn the story, one way or another, though from what source I could not remotely guess.

Gran'fer's customary garrulity had deserted him; he even forgot to spit in the water. When my pipe burned out I did not refill. I know both of us were oppressed, were quieted by the thought of this great wrong which had been inflicted nearly a score of years ago. So the creeping shadows came upon us, and beyond the high western spur the sky glowed salmon, and gold, and mauve. I heard a screech-owl's sudden chatter, and a crazy bat wheeled in a wide curve just in front of us. The surface of the creek grew leaden hued, and the mighty Harp of the Ancient Wood thrilled gently in response to the low twilight breeze. Gran'fer stirred, and got stiffly to his feet. I did the same. Somehow I felt awed. Out here creation seemed so immense, so *recent*, that it was hard to believe the trail of the serpent had passed over this spot, too. We turned in silence and went back to the road.

From down Hebron way came the sound of singing. Not blatantly loud and shrill, but very mellow and rich-toned. It was a woman's voice. A change had come over me, and I did not want to meet her again just then. She would have marked the difference. I turned and held out my hand. Gran'fer took it and gave it a mighty squeeze. His eyes were wet, and his face looked pained. As I came down the ladder at the other end of the bridge I glanced across at him. He was standing where I left him, gazing down the road up which the girl was coming, with that song of light-hearted, carefree youth upon her lips.

I moved away, quickly.

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## CHAPTER FIFTEEN

### IN WHICH THE HISTORIAN UNBLUSHINGLY SHOWS HIMSELF TO BE A HUMAN

I have spent all of this day on the bench under the lone pine.

Last night when I came away from Lizard Point without waiting for Lessie, I knew that I loved her. That was why I did not stay. I have sensed the coming of this affection for some time, and I have not set it down before because I wanted to be sure. To-night I am sure. Last night I was sure, but I wanted a little time in which to analyze this feeling, and be positive of it. My sleep was peculiarly sweet and peaceful after the day of trial. I do not know that I dreamed, but soothing waves of rest permeated me entirely, and a number of times I was conscious just enough to know that this unusual sensation possessed me. To-day I have not touched a book—the first day in

years! Think of it. Was not that alone a portent? I got breakfast mechanically. The kitchen utensils looked almost strange, and I would pick up a dish and turn it over, and view it as though I had never seen such a thing before. Queer, wasn't it? I wonder if any other man in his senses has acted this way. If he has, I venture to declare he wouldn't set it down for the world to read. But why not? We are all children, playing our little games, which are the same world-old games in different hands. And so, when I stopped and stared at my skillet this morning as I was washing it—stared till it turned to a beautiful, laughing, freckled face framed in gold, it was nothing to shame me. I recall the fact now with the full assurance that the big majority of my fellow men will not ascribe the action to lunacy.

When I stood in the front door the yard looked the same, but different, too. The area which I had cleared for the garden was dry, and invited my spade. Not now, Mr. Earth! You shall have another day's rest before I drive the steel tines again into you! I walked about, this way and that; thinking, not thinking. Sometimes I hummed; sometimes I smiled; sometimes I stood still with open eyes which did not see. All the time I was aware of some lack, but it was nine o'clock before I realized that I had not tasted a whiff of smoke. The thought did not make me blush, nor abash me. I went quietly in and found my pipe on the shelf where I kept it. It did not stay alight more than two minutes. I was standing at the place where the road went down when I realized that I was drawing the atmosphere alone through the stem between my teeth. Then I walked down to the bench under the pine, thrust my hands in my trousers pockets, sat down and crossed my legs.

I have been a sane man all my life, except the day when I embraced the business of literature for a living. I am not nervous; sudden events do not startle me. I have taken life honestly and bravely, and I believe I have faced all the conditions which mere living brings, with courage. But to-night I have to relate that I sat on that hard bench without changing my position until two in the afternoon, when I just happened to drag my watch out. The mere position of the hands brought about a mental reaction, or I should say served as a powerful mental stimulant, for up to that hour I am not conscious of a single coherent thought. I had been sitting all that time in mindless apathy. Then I began to think. My first gleam of intelligence informed me that my watch must be wrong. Then I gained sense enough to look at the sun, to find that it had passed the meridian considerably. Followed at once a keen introspective query, to which no answer was forthcoming. Then I am sure I breathed gently, "You damn fool!" and became a man again.

I did not eat any dinner—punishing the body for a fault of the mind—but smoked instead. My pipe did not go out a second time. Hour after hour the black briar bowl stayed burning hot, and hour after hour I drove my mind, now thoroughly aroused and under control, along the various byways of thought, action and incident which had a common meeting point at the feet of the Dryad. It required an effort for me to do this—a great effort. Had I followed my inclination I would simply have brought her before my eyes in retrospection, and gazed upon the picture throughout the day. But she had ceased to be an incident. She was a reality—an abiding reality—a concrete fact impinging sharply upon the horizon of my life. I was not alarmed to know that I loved her, and I wondered at this. Perhaps there really was no occasion for alarm, but there were plenty of disturbing elements attending such a state of feeling; a number of persons and things to be weighed and considered, to be classified and given their relative places.

When all was summed up I was confronted with the result: Did I love her well enough to marry her? I was of good family and had the highest social standing. She was almost nameless. And here a sinister, insinuating thought came stealing along a lower corridor in my brain; a creeping, skulking, devilish thought which I caught and choked as I would have a mad dog on my threshold. When I had killed the noxious thing I knew that I did love her well enough to marry her.

What were her feelings toward me? She liked me, but I could not bring to mind a single word or expression which would lead me to infer her heart was touched, unless it was the incident on the log bridge, when she had remained silent for such a long time, and her words when she finally spoke. Surely her interest was more than casual to dictate a speech like that. If Gran'fer had not come I think now I would have told her then, for the simple sentence had set light to a powder train in my breast.

I believe in caste. I am something of a democrat, and much of a socialist. While the dream of universal brotherhood in its broadest meaning is Utopian from its very nature, yet all humankind has a claim upon us, for the body of Socrates and the body of Lazarus were wrought from the same material. Yet caste, if correctly applied, instead of offensively and arrogantly, as it more often is, is almost indispensable to society. You would not have your daughter marry a drayman, nor your son marry a waiting-maid. That is what I mean when I say I believe in caste. But while we draw and maintain the line of distinction, we can still display a proper and becoming degree of courtesy.

I have said that I love Lessie well enough to marry her, but I have not said that I love her well enough to marry her as she is. I know that would be a mistake which I would regret were she to remain as she is. But she does not belong in her present environment. I am as sure of that as I am that I live. Fate has cheated her, has imposed upon her, has grossly taken advantage of her helplessness. At the foundation of her being are lying inert, but real, many wonderful and beautiful and mysterious attributes and traits which go to make up the perfect, polished character of refinement. This also I know, because I have witnessed her pitiful strugglings against the degrading bonds of ignorance which Life has tightened about her. She feels this better part, which is unquestionably her true self, but she does not know what it is; to her it is simply a hidden, powerful, inner force which torments her with intangible, wordless protest and

rebellion. She tries to obey—she has told me so—but she does not know what to do, or say. Poor little Dryad! How should she?

When I wrote to 'Crombie for the primer and the copybook I was moved only by a sincere interest in a pretty ignoramus, seeing at the same time an opportunity to relieve the tedium of long hours alone here. Now that they have come, I know that I shall begin at once to loosen the prisoned thoughts and emotions in my pupil for a different purpose. Will she learn quickly? No fear of that. I think I shall write for the first three readers when I have done my journal to-night. A long, loyal, heart-felt letter came along with the books. I shall not transcribe it, for it would fill up my pages without furthering my story, and this is the reverse of craftsmanship, I am told. But I must say that 'Crombie conceived the idea that I was going to open a school of two or three pupils—a natural idea, by the way—and earnestly advised me not to, as it would mean a degree of confinement which would work against me. He also gave various instructions and suggestions, and insisted in underscored lines that I pursue diligently my quest of the life-plant.

Who was Lessie's father? I do not doubt that this is the key to the whole mystery of her paradoxical personality. He was not a dweller in the wilderness of Hebron. He was a man of mental power; a man from the higher world of action, advancement and achievement. Assuredly, he was likewise a conscienceless knave. He had betrayed Araminta—Gran'fer's Ar'minty; Lessie's mother. A man who would do that is the best qualified candidate for hell imaginable. I am no hypocritical moralist, awaiting my own opportunity to despoil. Very frequently it is one of this breed of skunks who cries out the loudest against things of this sort. But I trust I do recognize humanity's rights.

Does Lessie's unknown parentage present a barrier to the progress of my love? No. That does not worry nor concern me in the least. It is true she is—she must be, the fruit of a brief union unblest by preacher or priest. That does not make her the less charming, the less human, the less lovable. She is as blameless, as natural, as inevitable, as any other pure and stainless growth arising from baser elements. The fact that Lessie would be unable to produce the marriage certificate of her parents proved not the slightest obstacle to the current of my affections. Indeed, when I dwelt upon this, I became aware of an added tenderness; a desire to spread over her sunny head the shielding strength of my arms. The world is so ready to mock at infirmities and to reproach frailties. But I must discover her father's name, and what became of him. I cannot present this subject to the two old people with whom she lives.

Perhaps Father John would know. How long has he held this parish, I wonder? Most likely for many years. In remote country places priests, especially old ones, do not often change their field of labor. To-morrow I shall go to the priest's house again, and ask him. I do not know that he will tell me, but he holds the secret. If it came to him under seal of the confessional, of course he will not reveal it. But I've a notion it was countryside gossip at the time it occurred, and I will not be asking Father John to betray any confidence when I seek him for this information. Then, too, I have waited longer than I should to go and inquire about Beryl Drane, the girl with a face of twenty and the experience of a lifetime. Perhaps it would be better to see her first, before accosting her uncle on the subject. I am not sure that I can do this without arousing suspicion, for I am convinced Beryl Drane has a mind capable of keen and clear deductions, and I have no desire that my love for Lessie should become generally known yet. But I will try.

My love for Lessie! I look at that sentence written down on this white paper with my own hand, and something goes radiating through every cranny of me. I am in love—in love with an untamed Dryad of the oak glade, the deep, clear pool, the sun-dappled spaces of the whispering wood. Why do I love her? I ask myself. Why fares the bee to the flower, the bird to his nest, the squirrel to his tree? I love her; let that suffice. Alone here in my lodge on the lap of Old Baldy, beside my table, I write these words in a mood which never before possessed me. I am recklessly happy. I have—shall I write it—I have stayed my pen just now long enough to sit dreamy eyed for a quarter of an hour; to imagine that warm young body tight in my arms; those Irish gray eyes looking long and deep into mine; those, red, red lips against my own, and the blinding shimmer of her hair around and about my face and neck. God! My pulses leap and thrum in my temples at the thought, and my throat feels full and thick. My brother, have you never felt this way? Then you are missing a large portion of your human heritage.

When shall I tell her? Not at once, I think. It will be better to school her some first. And—Buck! By some strange chance I have not reckoned with Buck to-day. Buck must be reckoned with. He will not efface himself, and I respect him the more that he will not. Diplomacy and arbitration and plain reason are all out of the question with Buck. When I come to reckon with him it will be by the might of my good right arm. It is the old, old method of medieval times of settling a difficulty where the favor of a lady is involved, but it is an honorable one, if conducted fairly, and I suspect as good as any. I must begin a system of physical training, so that I may be fit for the final bout. That will be some fight, my masters!

Eight weeks ago I dreaded the weary monotony which awaited me in this forsaken spot!

Well, events yet unborn are on the knees of the gods. I intend to go as straight to my destination as my judgment and will can carry me. I have but written that I shall not tell the Dryad of my love yet. Now I should like to modify that statement and say that I shall not tell her if I can help it. For a sudden sense that my passion is broadening and intensifying has come to me, and I shall make no promises—no, not one. Now, this moment, I quiver at the recollection of her cadenced laugh; I tremble as I see again the eyes which might craze a man of wood. Ah! Dryad, if you were here to-night—if you were here—if you were here—



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## CHAPTER SIXTEEN

### IN WHICH MUCH ADDED LIGHT IS SHED UPON MISS BERYL DRANE, BUT ONLY A GLIMMER UPON MY PROBLEM

"This is a beautiful day."

Such was my exceedingly original and extremely interesting greeting to Beryl Drane this morning. I arrived at the house at eight o'clock, found, as I thought, no one astir, and was preparing to knock when I discovered the young lady diligently clipping roses from a hedge near the back. It is not often that I descend to sheer banality, but I can offer no excuse for my opening remark as I came up over the grass behind her. She was a little startled. She turned quickly with a short "Oh!" and looked at me curiously. Somehow I did not like the look. It was possessive, in a way; intimate, as though we shared a secret, or something like that. She was dressed in a polka dot brown gingham, and had on an old bonnet whose projecting hood softened those lines which seemed to shriek of the things which made them. A low collar encircled her firm neck snugly. She wore leather half mitts, had a pair of shears in one hand, and from the elbow of her other arm hung a wicker basket over half filled with voluptuously red, dew-bright roses. She regarded me with that subtly smiling, upward glance which coquettes have, and in that morning air, with the flowers, under the shielding bonnet, she was pretty. She was too adroit to overdo the pose. It lasted scarcely two ticks from a grandfather's clock, then she smiled frankly, deftly looped the shears on a finger of her left hand, and held out her arm.

"I'm *so* glad to see you!" she said, winningly, and for the soul of me I could not help but feel my heart grow warmer in response to her tone. Ah, little sibyl! You have conjured more than one man's mind into deadly rashness, but you have paid, little moth with the soot-spotted wings!

"Are you?" I replied, surprisedly, as I grasped her grippy, slender hand and uncovered.

"Sure!... Don't you suppose Hebron is a trifle monotonous to me after the fleshpots of Egypt?"

"I had thought you would be—not angry, but displeased and disgusted with me that I had not come sooner."

"Oh! I have learned to make allowances for men!" she retorted, airily, with a toss of her head and a half pout; "and I'd have no respect for a man who'd have to be kicked away from a woman's feet. I've seen that kind. I supposed you would come when it suited your inclination."

She deliberately turned to the hedge again and tiptoed to grasp a heavy-headed bloom which seemed to have dropped asleep, drugged by its own perfume. She could not reach it.

"Let me," I said, and stepping forward, caught the thorn-set spray and pulled it toward her. The action made a little shower of water drops to patter on her upturned face, and a single rich-hued petal became displaced, drifted gently down, and actually lodged in the crevice of her slightly parted lips. Both laughed at the incident, for it was unusual.

"You shall have this one," she said, when she had clipped it, "from me."

I felt foolish, in a way, as she came close to me, fumbling here and there about her waist and the bosom of her dress.

"Have you a pin?" she queried, archly, and before I could answer her swift white fingers were searching the lapels of my coat. "Here's one," she added, on the instant, and tugged it out.

Then she secured that rose to my coat, standing so close to me that the bottom of her spreading skirt brushed my legs.

"You are very forgiving and very kind," I assured her, "and I thank you for the favor. I'm sure I do not deserve it."

"Do men ever deserve what they receive from women?" was her startling reply, and she did not look me in the eyes then, but instead fingered the jumble of Jaqueminots in the basket with head averted. Surely this niece of the Rev. Jean Dupré's who had journeyed to Hebron to rest was not conventional. Equally true it was that she possessed an unusual degree of intelligence, and was accustomed to speaking her mind.

I hesitated briefly. Not that I was in doubt what to say, but among us men of the South that old chivalry toward women which is always stubborn and often reasonless, still struggles mightily. And it is a goodly thing, forsooth, this same chivalry; but truth is better.

"I think so," was my steady answer, and I held my eyes ready to meet hers, but she did not move her head. Only the white fingertips with their whiter nails yet burrowed among the fragrant mass of green and red.

"You do?... How can you say that? Uncle says it, too—but he's a priest."

"I say it because I think it true. I'm sure you would not have me tell a lie merely to please you."

Your viewpoint must be restricted, circumscribed, for I know you are in earnest. The question is really too comprehensive to actually admit of a specific answer. Many women give all and get nothing; many men give all and get nothing. Many give and receive on an equable basis, and they are the ones who are happy. It depends simply upon one's experience or observation how he answers your question. My life leads me to believe in all sincerity men will do their part fuller and far more justly than a woman will. Perhaps yours has convinced you that just the reverse is true.... But for mercy's sake, let's not drift into a sociological argument this morning."

"By no means. I just wanted to know what you thought.... Now I must apologize for keeping you. You have come to see uncle?"

She started toward the house as though to call him, but I caught her arm and she halted.

"I came to see you, primarily. First, to assure myself that you had really quite recovered from drowning—I have asked of you down at the store—and second, to discuss a mighty secret with you."

"You have really—asked about me?" she returned with lifted eyebrows. "You knew when you left that day I would recover, thanks to your skill. Was not that enough?"

I felt annoyed. It appeared as if she was trying to make me confess a deeper interest than I truly owned.

"A common sense of decency would have impelled me to assure myself you were suffering no bad after effects," I replied.

"Oh, that was it?" she responded, I thought a bit coolly. Then—"You mentioned a secret. How on earth could a secret exist in this lonesome-ridden place? But of course I'm all curiosity now to hear it. Let's go to the summerhouse. Uncle rises late, and is now in the midst of his breakfast."

She moved toward a conical shaped piece of greenery, and I put myself at her side. It proved to be some trellis work built in the form of a square, with a peaked top, the whole completely covered by some luxuriant vine. Even the doorway was so thickly hung that we had to draw the festoons aside to enter. Within the light was tempered to a gray-green tone. A hammock was swung across the center of the place, and on all sides except the entrance one were placed benches. Miss Drane set her basket down and promptly dropped into the hammock, where she twisted about into a comfortable attitude. She apparently took no notice of the fact that her dress had become drawn up six or eight inches above her shapely ankles, but quietly loosened the strings under her chin and cast the bonnet on the floor, then threw her arms above her head, laced her fingers, and turned to me with a smile which was half humorous and half pathetic.

"Now I'm fixed. Settle yourself the best you can, and let's hear the mystery."

"May I smoke?" I asked, dodging under one of the ropes, and coming around so that I might sit facing her.

"Certainly."

"A pipe?"

"Oh, yes! I'm thoroughly smoke-cured."

I dropped upon a bench and drew forth my materials, while she lay and eyed me with her inscrutable stare.

"You're a funny man!" she declared, presently, her flexible lips twisting into an odd smile.

I chuckled, and jammed the tobacco in the bowl.

"How do you get that?" I ventured.

"Why didn't you ask to share the hammock with me?"

Now though I knew something of woman's ways and woman's wiles, I felt a blush rising, and to hide it I dropped the match I held and bent over to pick it up. Clearly his reverence's niece was bent on a flirtation wherewith to while away the days of her exile. It is needless to say that in my present state of mind I had no heart for dalliance of this sort, but I realized that I must not offend her, so I struck the match on the sole of my shoe and slowly lighted my pipe, thinking hard all the time of what I should say.

"You looked so very comfortable," I replied jocularly, between puffs, "that I could not bring myself to make the request. And—you lay down, you know, as though you wanted it all to yourself."

With a quick, lithe movement she turned on her side, rested her cheek on her hand, and retorted:

"Was that idea really in your mind before I spoke? The truth, mind you!"

I was thoroughly uncomfortable. Just what Beryl Drane was driving at I could not guess, but I knew the simple talk which I had come to have with her had suddenly assumed the proportions of a task. It would be silly and egotistic to think this little body was in love with me, and yet as she lay curled kitten-like within arm's length there was a seriousness in her face and manner which troubled me far more than what my answer to her last question would be.

"No, it was not," I replied, meeting her eyes steadily.

"All men don't tell the truth," was her unexpected rejoinder; "but you do.... Don't you think I am worth sitting by?"

Heavens! Why did she persevere in this strain? Why? God pity her, I knew. I knew her birthright of womanliness and unsullied purity had been bartered long ago for the pottage of faithlessness and sham pleasures, and that now the exceeding bitter cry rang in her soul day in and day out. She had made sacrifice of the substantial, the real, the true, and the good, on the shadowy altar of indulgence. She had flung aside the fruit to devour the husk, and the penalty was an insatiable gnawing of the evil teeth which she had first guided with her own hand to her being's core. I shivered inwardly as these thoughts darted lightning-like through my mind, and my face shaped itself into lines of gravity.

"Little girl," I said, gently; "I should be glad to sit by you, but what's the use in this instance? We are as two birds passing in mid-air. Soon you will go; soon I will go. Let's be good, honest friends while we stay."

I leaned toward her and spoke earnestly, trying to keep any note of rebuke from my tones. She did not reply, but colored slightly, turned her head partly away, and lowered her lashes. I smoked in silence for a few moments to give her a chance to speak, but she remained silent, and directly I said, throwing my voice into a cheerier key:

"If you're to help me with my secret we must hurry. Our few minutes on the river did not last long enough for us to get very well acquainted, but probably Father John has told you that I am roughing it for a few months on a certain big knob back in the woods. I've met a few people, and —"

Poor, hopelessly stupid mind of man! In my agitation caused by the attitude Beryl Drane had seen fit to adopt toward me, I had forgotten that the confidence I had purposed bestowing involved another girl—a beautiful girl! Now it was too late to hold back. Two slits of eyes were viewing me cynically, and a low laugh bubbled up from her throat.

"Who is she?" mocked Beryl Drane, who lived in the world.

"I don't know!" I answered, boldly. "That's what I want you to help me find out."

"What's her name?"

How cold the words were; like little sharp icicles. Ah! Womankind! Velvet soft, iron hard; dove merciful, tiger cruel; heaven breasted, hell armed; honey lipped, gall tongued!

"They call her Lessie."

Her sweetly bowed mouth had turned to a straight line of scarlet as she shook her head.

"I don't mix with the rabble here."

She spoke to cut, and she succeeded. The insolent words bit sharply, and a flame-like resentment set a hot reply on my tongue, but I withheld it. I waited a while, that my speech might not betray my agitation.

"She lives with her granny and gran'fer on Lizard Point. Surely you have seen her at church? Granny is very conscientious, I'm sure, in the performance of her church du——"

"I never go to church!" interrupted Father John's niece. "But I think I know the people to whom you refer," she added, at once. "I cannot recall the name of the family, however.... You must be extraordinarily stupid not to have learned her surname, being in love with her."

Evidently Miss Drane was ignorant of the circumstances surrounding the Dryad's birth, and a great wave of relief rolled up in my breast when I was assured of this.

"A man doesn't love a girl's name," I thought. Then I said:

"It would seem so, indeed."

I can't imagine what there was in that innocent sentence to cause affront, but instantly the girl in the hammock swung her feet to the ground, arose, and picked up her bonnet and basket.

"I don't think you are at all nice!" she said. "Go on and love your little cabin minx if you want to! She'll be sadly wiser when your love is over and you have gone back where you came from. I know you men—all alike!... If you want to see uncle you'll find him in the library at this hour."

Then out she switched with never so much as a "Good-day," leaving me staring amazedly at the clustering viney mass which swayed behind her vanished form. I had known many kinds of women: petulant, spoiled, mean; gracious, charming, good. I knew the majority of them were not amenable to logic, and would sometimes take offense at a smile or a wrong inflection. But when Beryl Drane flung this low insinuation in my face, I was nettled. It was utterly without foundation or reason. It bore out strikingly the opinion I had previously formed of her, and as I sat and turned the matter over in my mind, I knew presently that I was pitying her. For there is no sadder sight on the world's broad breast than a woman with a spotted soul. This poor child's perceptions were all awry, her affections wrenched and twisted, and in that moment I almost cursed the fate which would permit such a sacrilege. My resentment was gone, or was directed

against the nonunderstandable forces, powers—call them what you will—which so often, in their workings, flung the spotless lily under the filthy snout of a hog, and dashed the white soul of a girl into a pit of smut and slime! Give me the reasons, ye gray-bearded savants! You are children fumbling in the dark. You do not know.

I got up and passed without the leafy curtain. Miss Drane had disappeared. I walked to the porch, found the front door open, and entered the hall without knocking. I judged the library to be on the right, and at that door I tapped. The old priest's voice bade me "Come!" I went in, and when he saw me cross the threshold, Father John leaped up with a nervous agility which was incongruous when associated with his many years, and hastened forward.

"Ah-h-h! Ze pleasure! W'ere have you bene, m'sieu?"

He smiled cordially, and led me to an easy chair by the table, holding my hand until I was fairly seated.

"Roaming the woods, principally," I replied, easily, noting the extremely comfortable furnishings of the apartment. "I have been here a half-hour, I should say. I found Miss Drane cutting roses, and stopped for a chat with her. She seems perfectly well?"

Father John made a grimace, and spread his hands.

"Zat chil'! I love 'er m'sieu, but she try me. She plague me wiz 'er pranks, zen she come wiz 'er arms aroun' my neck—so—an' fix eversing."

He obligingly essayed to hug himself by way of illustration, and I nodded my comprehension.

"You will doubtless miss her when she leaves you?"

He twisted his features as from a sudden pain.

"I can't sink of zat, m'sieu. She have bene wiz me t'ree—four—five weeks; she is one—headstron' chil', but she make me vair happy—*oui*."

He sank a little deeper in his soft chair, and pulled contentedly at his long-stemmed pipe.

It was hard for me to broach the subject uppermost in my mind. Twice my lips parted to open the discussion, but each time the sentence which followed related to an entirely different matter. So for quite a while we talked of the weather, the crops, the parish, and it was while we were discussing the neighborhood that I knew my opportunity had arrived.

"I have become very much interested in the family at Lizard Point. You know them well?"

"Vair well. Madame is vair releegious; a good woman. M'sieu is—is—indeef'rent; ma'm'selle—ah, ze young ma'm'selle!"

Again his spread hands went out expressively, and he shook his head with wrinkled forehead.

Inwardly I smiled, but outwardly my face was set to decorous lines.

"Does not the granddaughter belong to your fold?" I asked.

"Ah! m'sieu; we try. We try all her life lon' to make her ze Christian. But she wil'—she wil' as ze bird in ze wood. She an' ze half crazy Jeff—ze fiddle player—zey heazen, m'sieu. Zey never dark ze door of ze church. Zey run in ze fores', fiddlin' an' dancin', an' ze devil he laugh an' skip by zey side!"

He put his hands between his knees, palm to palm, and rocked to and fro in genuine distress. I could think of no suitable reply on the moment, so remained silent.

"I have ze pity for ze chil', poor sing!" he resumed, presently. "Ze chance she has not had, like ozzer ones. Maybe ze curse of ze broke' law follow her; I don' know—I don' know!"

He sighed, and let his narrow shoulders droop forward in an attitude both sad and pensive.

"Tell me about that if you can, Father John," I said, placing my elbows on the table's edge and leaning toward him. "I will say to you in strictest confidence that I am deeply interested in Lessie; it is not idle curiosity which prompts me to ask this. I know her father betrayed and deserted her mother; Gran'fer has practically admitted this to me, but he will go no further. You must know the man's name—what was it?"

Father John lifted his head and looked at me.

"Zat, m'sieu, I cannot tell you."

"Why?"

I kept my eyes fastened on his persistently, but respectfully.

"Because m'sieu has not ze right to as'."

I felt rebuked. Knowing as little of me and of my feelings for the Dryad as he did, he was right. Should I tell him more? My words would be safe with this gentle old man.

"Suppose I love the girl, Father John? Would I not then have the right to know everything about

her parentage?"

A pale smile passed over his thin lips.

"M'sieu—jokes wiz me. You, ze gen'leman, ze areest'crat—to love ze little wil' ma'm'selle? *Je crois que non!*"

"It may seem incredible to you, but I do love her. I feel I can trust you with the secret, for even she does not know it yet. Believe me, I beg you. I am very much in earnest."

The doubting look faded from the priest's face, to be succeeded by one of amazement.

"Probably you do not understand this," I hastened to add; "and I should not blame you. But you, in holy orders from young manhood, with your mind and time engrossed in spiritual things, have no intimate knowledge of the powerful call of man to woman, and woman to man. It has come to me unexpectedly, swiftly, surely; here in the wilderness. In the city it passed me by. But I truly love the little wild ma'm'selle. Listen to my plan. I intend to take her far along the road to education and refinement; I intend to develop the great good which lurks smothered in her mind and soul; then, if she will, I shall marry her. That is my reason for asking you to tell me of that man."

Father John was convinced that I spoke the truth. I could see it before he replied.

"Ze—ze *aieul*, ze *aieule*; has m'sieu tol' zem?"

I stared at him bewilderedly.

"Ze madame an' ze m'sieu she live wiz!" he burst out, desperately. "How call you zem?"

"Granny and Gran'fer—her grandparents!" I exclaimed.

"*Bien!*... Well zen?"

"I have not told them. I have not told Lessie. I did not know it myself until last night."

"*Soit*. But ze secret, m'sieu, is zeirs."

"Is not the girl concerned, my good sir?" I demanded.

"Celeste?"

"Celeste!"

"Ze wil' ma'm'selle you call Lessie. I chris'en 'er myself, m'sieu; her name Celeste."

"And these boors have corrupted it to Lessie!" I almost shouted.

"Zey couldn't 'member Celeste," smiled Father John.

For a time I was silent, gazing at that vision in my mind which bore the sweet name of Celeste instead of the meaningless one of Lessie.

"Has she, then, no rights in the matter?" I persisted, and at the words I knew my voice had changed. Father John's candid and matter-of-fact revelation had filled me all up, somehow. I am aware there was no good reason why this should be, but people deeply in love have a constant abhorrence of anything and everything remotely bordering on reason.

"Should she, m'sieu, seek ze inf'mation, I sink I should tell 'er."

Sweetly grave and courteous were the words, and even in my impatience I recognized their justness.

"Very well, father. But I must ask you another question which I trust you can answer without offense to your conscience. Was Lessie's—was Celeste's father a man of learning; a man who moved along the higher walks of life, or was he simply a countryman?"

Only for a moment he hesitated.

"He was ze gran' gen'leman in manner—ze scholar—ze sinker. His heart was black!"

"It must have been," I breathed, as I rose.

My host again followed me to the low stone step at the porch entrance, protesting against my departure and begging me to stay for dinner, which came at noon. I told him I would come again, and I meant it.

"You have been very kind," I said, in farewell, "and I want to thank you for the things you told me. In time Celeste will come with her demands, trust me for that."

"Vair well, m'sieu!" he cried, twisting his face into a maze of goodhumored wrinkles.

At the gate I turned and waved to him again, sweeping the premises with my eyes as I did so for a sign of Beryl Drane.

That most peculiar young woman was nowhere visible.

## CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

### IN WHICH I ENTERTAIN SERIOUSLY A CHIVALROUS NOTION TO MY GREAT DETRIMENT

"A, B, C, D, E, F,—H?"

We sat side by side on the edge of the porch, with our feet on the low stone step. For fifteen minutes I had been drilling Celeste in the alphabet.

But little explanation is necessary to make clear my position in the hostile camp. To-day is Sunday. When I first arose I began planning a way to reach Celeste—Lessie no longer for me!—without any unpleasant attending circumstances. I had recently been assured by the parish priest that Granny was "a vair releegious woman," and it was upon this fact that I presently laid my schemes. It was probable that Granny attended mass twice on Sunday; beyond doubt she went once. Early mass was over by the time my idea began to crystalize, but the chances were that Granny would go to the later services, because there was a deal of housework to be done at the beginning of each day. Then Granny's large body moved slowly, and the road to Hebron was long. I was vastly comforted when I reached this conclusion, and about ten o'clock I armed myself with primer and copybook and hit the trail for heaven.

I wish the reader—gentle or otherwise—could have taken that trip with me, and felt as I did. I wish everybody in the world could feel, all the time, as I did on that leisurely walk to Lizard Point. There would be no more sin or sorrow, my brothers! It was my first pilgrimage to the shrine of my recognized affection, and my feet trod not upon the good earth, but upon separate little pillows of compressed air. The day left nothing for the most critical to wish for. It was a great, perfumed bloom of light and color, glowing like a jewel in the Master's hand. And in the midst of all this perfection I was the one man seeking the one woman.

Reaching the bridge, I skulked about in the woods like a wild Indian, viewing the house with gradually increasing impatience. But I was rewarded in what my watch declared to be a very few minutes. Granny's ample shape bustled out upon the porch, and she came waddling down the path like an over-fattened goose. She had on her Sunday fixin's; a shiny bombazine black dress and a tiny black bonnet which looked small indeed atop her big head. A palm leaf fan in one hand, a rosary and a handkerchief in the other; thus did S'firy sally forth that morning, while I stood hidden in the shade and grinned, tickled as any schoolboy would be who sees a guard desert a watermelon patch. I could hear her puffing as she reached the road and took up her march south—poor old woman! A long, hot time lay before her, going and coming, and I was convinced she deserved the blessing she hoped to receive.

So that is the way I crept into the hostile lines this morning and began teaching the little wild ma'm'selle.

She was surprised but glad when she saw me. You may be sure I searched her face anxiously, and her welcoming smile and warm, strong handclasp set my heart a-throbbing. I told her at once what I had come for, and asked how long Granny would be away. Three hours, at least, I learned. She was ready and eager to begin her lessons. I inquired about Gran'fer, too, as we sat down together on the porch's edge, and heard that the dinner had been left in his charge, and he was consequently on duty in the kitchen, whence he would scarcely dare emerge until relief came. The fire was to be kept up, and certain vessels holding cooking vegetables were to be kept full of water. Gran'fer would hardly dare run the risk of permitting the beans or potatoes to scorch, and the chance for a happy three hours looked good indeed.

Celeste wore a white shirt waist, brown skirt, leather belt—and *slippers*! I could barely credit the last fact when my eyes noted it. Where on earth did she get slippers which buttoned across the instep with a strap? She had on black stockings (and right here I want to say, parenthetically, that I think black hose the most becoming color a woman can wear) and altogether presented a far more civilized appearance than she had ever done before. I placed the primer upon her knees, and while she held it open I began teaching her the letters, using my forefinger as an index. Her sunny head bent eagerly to the task, and looking at her face I saw each freckle had become a tiny island in a sea of crimson. She was blushing hotly, probably from the simple fact that she had at last started upon that unknown road which would lead her up and out of the gloomy valley of ignorance where she had always dwelt. I know an answering color came to my cheeks, for they began to burn. Had I been sure Gran'fer would remain faithful to his vegetables I would have told her that moment, for never had mortal woman seemed so lovely and alluring, and never had my heart hammered and pounded so loudly on the stubborn door of my will. I realized that my resolve to hold my tongue until she had become tutored in some degree was an idiotic determination, and that I would prove it so the first time I could catch Celeste where we would be safe from interruption.

Through the twenty-six capitals we went again and again. Then I took the book and asked her to say the alphabet. She fell down on G, but if every failure was accompanied by the doubting, anxious, piteous, altogether captivating expression which distinguished this one, no culprit would ever hear a word of censure.

I hope I am not tiresome. Truth is not always interesting, and you must not question my veracity. To-night I will not avow that my hitherto well balanced mind is perfectly plumb. Since I confessed

to my journal I found I have shot into the rapids, and this girl with hair like a potpourri of sunbeams and Irish gray eyes which starts some trembly mechanism to going inside me, is going to be the biggest and most important thing in my life.

Of course I laughed when she said H instead of G, but it was not a laugh that hurt. It was the one which soothes and condones. She laughed, too, and again I saw an upper row of teeth—white as young corn, and as even. In half an hour she had turned the trick, and in addition could name any letter which I might choose on sight. Yes, I was proud of her then, and—yes, I told her so; wouldn't you? We then went through the small letters once or twice, but I did not ask her to learn any of them this morning. Celeste couldn't understand why the big letters and the little letters were not alike, and I couldn't either, so no explanation was forthcoming. Presently the primer was laid aside, and I produced the copybook. The Dryad's interest was just as intense when this branch of her education was brought to her notice.

"Is this writin'?" she queried, suspiciously, indicating the line in script at the top of the page.

"Yes, that's writ-*ing*," I said, but my eyes were kind.

"—*ing*, then!" she retorted, with some force, but I knew she was aggravated with herself, and not with me. Then she sat up very straight, and defiantly checked off each word of her next sentence on her palm, using an absurd fist as a checker.

"It—don't—look—like—Gran'fer's—writ-*ing*!"

I roared mightily at this, for her belligerency was irresistible.

At first she was amazed at my outburst, for her earnestness had prevented her from seeing how truly attractive her little speech had been. But as I kept on laughing she presently joined me, and together we raised such a disturbance that Gran'fer hurried out to investigate. I jumped up and took his hand, and managed to control myself enough to tell him the cause.

"B' gosh! 'S a good thing S'firy's not here!" he exclaimed, leering from one to the other with his good-natured eyes twinkling. "She'd 'low you 's bust'n' th' Sabbath, 'n' like 's not 'd 'vite *you* back to Baldy!"

He poked a crooked finger in my ribs, thrust his middle out and his shoulders back and gave a series of piercing screeches which I judged was his way of expressing superlative mirth.

I put my arm around his shoulder chum-fashion, and drew him aside.

"I hid and watched her leave," I whispered.

Again he screeched.

"You're a durned wise 'n'!" he said, presently. "S'firy's sot ag'in yo' somehow, but I's jok'n' w'en I said I'd 'low she'd 'vite yo' back to Baldy. She wouldn't do sich a vi'lent thin' as that, see'n' as how she's got no airthly complaint ag'in yo', 'cep'n' you're a young man 'n' good-look'n', 'n'"—lowering his voice and nodding toward the Dryad, who sat apparently absorbed in her copybook—"she don't 'low to ever let no man make love to that gal, 'n' she's skeerd o' yo' on that 'count—see?"

"Gran'fer, I smell some'n' burnin'!" called Celeste.

The old man turned with a trembling, low-voiced "Good God!" and bolted into the house, and instantly I heard a tin cover clatter on the kitchen floor.

"Whut'd you tell Gran'fer w'en you took 'im over there?" asked Eve, when I was again beside her.

"The truth," I replied, not altogether relishing a like confession to her.

"Tell me, too!" she demanded, at once.

"Suppose I won't?" I parried, grasping the opportunity offered to weigh her character in different scales.

She thought a moment, with a queer little squinting of the eyes.

"Well, if you won't—I don't keer!"

It was not pique, but perfect candor.

"I told him that I waited down yonder in the woods until Granny went to church," I said.

She smiled, and spread the copybook out afresh.

"You needn't 'a' done that. I've had a talk with Granny, 'n' she's goin' to let you come, same as she does Buck ... I p'suaded 'er."

"Bless your heart, Dryad! How did you manage it?"

"Granny'll do mos' anything for me," she answered, simply. "I tol' 'er that you jes' wanted to learn me, 'n' that I wanted to learn—so bad; 'n' that it wouldn't cost nothin'. So she ast Father John, 'n' he said it'd be all right. He said he knowed you."

"Yes, I've met Father John—and his niece."

"I don't like her," said Celeste, turning the leaves idly.

"Why don't you like her, Dryad?"

"'Cause—'cause—oh, jes' 'cause!"

She pouted her lips slightly, and shook her head.

So she, too, had that unanswerable reason which all women can claim.

"I feel sorry for her, because I don't think she has been happy. She has lived in cities all her life, and the cities have taken something from her they can never give back."

"Whut?"

"All things which you, living here in the hills, possess, and which are a woman's most precious gifts; purity, innocence, womanhood."

"I don't know 'zackly whut you mean."

"I shan't try to put it into simpler words just now, Dryad. But in the eyes of all true people you are worth more than a thousand Beryl Dranes."

She pursed her lips and gave a whistle of astonishment.

"Has Buck been here lately?" I asked.

"Not since I seen—I saw you on the log bridge."

Then for a time we remained silent. The day was intensely hot. The encroaching sun burned the yellow dog which had been lying in the yard, and he arose reluctantly and slouched over into the deeper shade by the foundation of the house—into a dusty hole which no doubt he had previously dug in a search for coolness. There, after gnawing his ribs, his black nose wrinkling oddly as he did so, he dropped his chin upon the ground and slowly closed his eyes. A rigor passed over the side where the uncaptured flea still lingered, then, with a sigh, the dog slept. A brown hen, wings outheld from her body and bill agape, strolled dazedly through the shimmering air, singing that dolorous, unmusical, droning song begotten by the temperature. I have never heard that song from a hen's throat with the thermometer under ninety. It must have been an effect of the heat. Beyond, the green vastitudes stretched endlessly—away to where the big wicked world throbbed and seethed and strove. All these externals passed before my vision in a twinkling, and then my gaze was back on the girl sitting quietly by me, looking with eyes which sent no message to her brain upon the curving lines which meant knowledge. Her hair was up again to-day—for bodily comfort, I judge—and damp, curled strands clung flat to her milk-white neck. Below these, tiny drops of moisture stood, like baby pearls upon porcelain. I could not grow accustomed to the dazzling effect produced by her piled-up tresses. I could see neither comb, barette, nor pins, but no doubt a number of the "invisible" variety of the last were tucked away somewhere in the intricacies of that matchless coronet.

I asked if there were pen and ink on the place. She thought there was, and directly returned with both. Then the need arose for something suitable to hold the copybook while she traced her first letters. I knew there must be a table in the dining room, but I much preferred to remain where we were.

How I ever thought of such a thing I cannot guess, but I suggested the ironing board, and in another minute it was across each of our knees, and I was twisting the pen-staff about in Celeste's warm fingers to the proper angle. Her forefinger persisted in bending in at the first joint, and I as diligently straightened the contrary digit, not minding the task at all, for some occult reason. Naturally a huge blot was the first result, and the Dryad was for licking it off, as she had seen Gran'fer do once upon a time. I told her that wasn't nice, and laid the ink in the sun to dry, no blotting paper being available. When she finally got a start the girl did remarkably well. It was quite plain she had talent in this direction. I permitted her to rewrite the model line half way down the page, then told her lessons were over for the day. Nor did I neglect to bestow some well deserved compliments upon her aptness.

Granny may have been gone three hours, but I was nevertheless amazed when I saw her toiling up the winding path a short time later. Surely I had not been there over thirty minutes, all told! Far off as she was when I first sighted her, there seemed to be something menacing in the very way she got over the ground. As she drew quickly nearer, I observed that her round, red face was set in lines of furious anger, and she opened and closed her mouth in gasps, as a fish does on land. In spite of the assurance the Dryad had given me, a subtle sense told me that I was the object of her rage. I turned to Celeste, to find wonder and astonishment depicted on her countenance.

"Whut on earth ails Granny?" she whispered.

"God knows!—and we will too, now"; for the old lady had halted a man's length away, a truly formidable spectacle.

Her emotion for the moment was actually so intense that she could not speak. Her throat rolled red and fat over the collar of her dress, and she was shaking visibly. I knew the storm would break presently, though I was totally in the dark as to what I had done to arouse such a tempest, so I gently lifted the ironing board from our laps, propped it carefully against a post, and got up,



that I might take the blast standing. I gave no greeting, nor made any attempt at pacification. But the breath almost left my body when the first vial was uncorked.

"*You sneak'n' fur'ner! Mak'n' love to Father John's niece, then try'n' to fool 'n' ruin my Lessie!*"

I fell back a step and threw up my hand, a deadly, numbing horror spreading through me. Before I could recover enough for speech Granny's needle-sharp tongue was going again.

"I know yo'! I've knowed yo' all 'long, but that daffy Jer-bome 'n' that pore fool gal 'lowed I's wrong 'n' too hard on yo', I tol' 'em way back yan whut yo' 's hang'n' 'bout fur—yo' *scamp!* W'en a w'ite-faced, slick-tongued city feller comes spark'n' a gal whut lives whur this 'n' does, yo' c'n put it down he 's a-doin' th' dev'l's work. I knowed it, I tell yo', 'n' yo' didn't pull no wool over *my* eyes! I've had 'sper'ence 'ith sich, 'n' onct in a lifetime 's 'nough, heav'n knows! Now take yo' seff off, yo' hyp—hyp—yo' 'ceiv'n', 'ceptious vilyun, 'n' never so much as lay eyes on my gal—my precious lam'—ag'in, ur I'll *scratch* 'em out o' yo' head!"

I paid little heed to this lurid denunciation. After the astounding revelation of her first speech, I strove to get my mind in working order, for it had suffered temporary paralysis. Before the voluble, bitter flow of words had ceased, I knew what had happened, and my face crimsoned with shame and anger. I dared not look at the girl at my feet yet, to see how this harsh accusation had affected her. Granny saw the red in my cheeks, and blazed out afresh.

"Yo' mought well blush, yo' blaggard; a-comin' 'ith yo' hellish notions to do hurt 'n' harm to this motherless chil'! Yo'—"

"Hush!" I cried, drawing nearer the angered old woman in my deep earnestness. "Don't say those things again in the presence of—her! They are lies! Everything you have said is a black, cowardly lie!"

"Do yo' *dare* to tell me that his rev'rence, that holy pries', lied to me? Yo'—yo'—"

She thrust her hands toward my throat with her fingers working convulsively.

I controlled myself, grasped her wrists and brought her arms down, then looked hard into her eyes as I answered:

"No, Father John did not lie, but Beryl Drane did. I have never spoken a word of love to her. I have seen her only twice. Once when I got her out of the river when her boat upset, and a second time when I went to see Father John. I believe I offended her, unintentionally, at that time, but I have never made love to her for the best of reasons—I have no feeling for her but that of pity. She told a dangerous, dastardly falsehood when she declared to her uncle that I had spoken of love to her. All of this I swear to be the truth; on the cross, on the Bible, on my mother's sacred honor! And I respect and honor Lessie as I would my own sister!"

Truth alone is a powerful weapon, and I could see that Granny was impressed, though not convinced. She still viewed me in truculence and disgust, but there was a subtle change in her demeanor. I could feel it more than I could see it. I waited, knowing that I must not be too eager in my disclaimers. Granny stood, plainly taken aback, and when she spoke her voice had sunk to its natural compass.

"I dunno. It don't 'pear right to me.... Whut cause has a gal to make up sich a yarn as this?—tell me that!"

She flung the question at me with a triumphant flare.

I hesitated. Should I tell the true reason? Should I tell how this girl had tried to flirt with me, and then, when I had refused, had concocted this devilish scheme which only a bad woman could have thought of? I owed her nothing, not even consideration now, and she had made a bold stroke to blacken me irretrievably in the eyes of Celeste. But something held my tongue. I could not betray her baseness except as a last resort. I stood with eyes down, thinking. The old beldam facing me deemed it was from shame, and my inability to answer her question. I remained silent.

"Yo' 've lied to me!" came her voice, shrill again, and carrying a victorious note. "Whut cause has she, I say? Yo' dunno. Cause 'nough, I 'low! 'N' yo' can't answer, git yo' gone from these premises, 'n' never sot yo' foot on 'em ag'in!"

I lifted my head at this, and replied in low, even words.

"I know, but I cannot tell you. But believe me, I am innocent of this charge."

Mingled with Granny's vindictive scream of derision was a heart-broken moan from the door-step. I turned quickly, to see my Celeste, hands over her eyes, run weeping in the house.

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## CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

### IN WHICH I DESCEND INTO HELL

I have descended into hell.

I had no idea of the intensity of my own nature until the deeps were stirred. Few of us ever come to a full realization of what we are, or may become. I have always thought with some degree of pride that my acquaintance with myself was perfect. More than that, I was positive that my ego was entirely subservient to my will. So it always has been until now. But the reason for this is that I have lived upon the crust of life, have walked calmly and confidently upon the tops of things. It is indeed a poor sort of fool who does not know himself in his relations to the superficialities of his daily existence. How satisfied I was! How willing to meet emergencies and demands, in the full faith that I could cope with all such. I do not think I am an exception to my fellow creatures in this. All men whose natures are well rounded and adjusted have this same idea. It is essential to their progress. We must perforce believe in our own abilities before we can perform any achievements. So I am not ashamed to write these words. I have never been conceited, nor puffed up. I have had no cause to be, but I don't believe I would have been had I reasons—or what silly people give as reasons, for really there is never any justification for such a mental attitude.

Neither am I ashamed to say that I have descended into hell. At first sight it may seem weakness, but upon investigation it will be found the reverse is true. I did not take the plunge voluntarily, although my perhaps foolish adherence to a Quixotic theory undoubtedly had a deal to do with precipitating me downward. From the fact that my feet have strayed along the gloomy, thorn-set paths of hell for the past week, I have awakened to a newer and truer knowledge of myself. Had my feelings been on the surface only, the past seven days would have found me philosophically plodding through the forest recesses in search of my mystical life-plant, or busily engaged in my garden, or curled up in an easy chair reading one of my favorites. Not one of these natural things have I done, for the simple reason that I have been a dweller in hell instead, and in this grim demesne there is neither life-plant, garden nor books. But there is torture, in exquisite variety. The world-worn and cynical may sniff and declare that a man beyond thirty should have passed this sentimental, simpering age. I don't know how that may be. I cannot answer. I can only set down that which befell me, and I choose to regard as strength, rather than weakness, that quality which has enabled me to suffer like unto a damned soul. Surely if any doubt ever flickered on the horizon of my conscience, that doubt has been swept away and annihilated utterly. I am possessed by a legion of devils which escort me hourly on my way; grinning, fiendish, sleepless devils which leap about my feet with gibe and curse, and dance upon my pillow in a fiery saraband when I fain would forget in sleep. Sleep! When did I sleep? Sunday night? No, God's mercy! Sunday night I wandered bareheaded, coatless, for miles and miles, hour after hour. I did not choose my way. I did not even take the road leading down from the plateau. I think I must have eaten something mechanically, then came out of the Lodge whose walls were shutting off my breath, and made straight for the closest point of descent. It was near the lone pine, between cedar bushes which ruthlessly scratched my unheeding face. Here the declivity was steep and rough. Had I been moving in the world I never would have taken it, but in hell one cannot choose his path. I went down. I fell. I collided roughly with the trunks of trees. I tripped, I stumbled, I cursed, and went on. I came to a cliff. It sank sheer, and below was darkness. I lay down, rolled my body over, hung by my hands, and dropped. I knew not, neither cared, where I might alight. I splashed into a shallow pool not over six feet beneath. Then came leagues after leagues of tireless walking. I noted neither distance nor time. At last I burst out upon a huge, flat rock, overhanging a valley of majestic length and breadth. A gibbous moon brightened the sky and silvered the slopes about me. Then for a few moments I was on earth again, brought back by the magical beauty of the scene. But my respite was indeed brief. The black gulf of perdition closed over me again as the merciless hand of Fate twisted anew the iron in my soul, and I turned away from that glimpse of the earth with my teeth chattering. How far had I strayed? Heaven knows. But it was past midday when I again sighted that sentinel-like peak beneath which I shelter.

The next night I sat face to face with the devil through the long, lonely, hideous hours. Ah! but he is a specious rogue! There never was a tongue on earth like unto his. But I met his arguments with a sort of bulldog, mean combativeness. So we talked back and forth, out there, in front of the Lodge. I occupied one bench, he the other, and our meeting was gruesome. How full he was of guile, sleek insinuation, plausible persuasion. At first his method was violent—but I shall tell first of how the encounter happened.

After a pretense at supper I clutched my cold pipe for company and crept out to the seat. I did not light up. Burning tobacco makes for solace at most times, but I knew my erstwhile cherished weed would be an affront to my taste and a stench in my nostrils that night. And as I sat, humped over and almost a-shiver because of the powerful emotions which had been racking me for forty-eight hours, and more, thinking of all I had lost, the Prince of Demons leaped full armed upon me, all unexpectedly, and his assault was fierce. At first I crouched under it sinisterly, as a man will when an evil takes him unawares. But another moment my heart and mind and soul had arisen simultaneously to my rescue, and together we fought a good fight. I doubt me if many unwritten battles were harder contested. Thus, beneath the stubborn resistance of my staunch and faithful allies, the Enemy's violence abated. But presently I knew that he had changed his tactics only, and had not withdrawn. For there he crouched on the bench just across from me, apparently unhurt, while I realized with much sadness and shame that each of my champions bore marks of the conflict. I remained silent, hoping my unwelcome visitor would depart, but instead he began now to leer and smirk at me ingratiatingly.

"What do you want?" I asked, surlily enough, for my spirit was sore within me, and this presence was most distasteful.

Said the Devil: "What do *you* want?"

Thereat he grinned ghastly, and wagged his head, while I felt my heart turn sick, and my bowels tremble. But I answered:

"I want that which is as far removed from you and your accursed power as God and his angels—a real woman's love!"

Now he laughed in raucous glee.

"And that's what you have lost—by playing the fool! Is it not so?"

"That's what I have lost—perhaps by playing the fool," I replied.

Said the Devil to me:

"And that very day you went back about sunset, driven by the barbs of your passion, to tell the old woman the truth. You could not gain admittance to the house. You saw no one. You have been back twice. You have laid in wait. But you have failed to get speech with any in the house. Is it not so?"

I nodded assent.

"Then what?" continued the Devil.

"Hell—and you!" I retorted, in desperation.

Then the Devil edged closer to me along the plank; he seemed to writhe across it like something with a hurt back. It made my flesh creep to see him. He leaned toward me through the intervening space, and stretching out his ugly, snake-like neck, hissed:

"Honor and virtue are lies! Pleasure is truth. Take her—"

Up I sprang, fist at shoulder, and lunged at that fiendish visage with all the power of my body. I hit nothing, the impetus of the stroke wheeled me entirely around, and there stood mine Enemy, hands on hips, shaking with silent laughter.

I stood and glared at him in angry helplessness.

"Easy—easy!" he chuckled. "You are not the first to shrink at giving up a cherished chimera. You see I am much older than you, and know all of humanity's foibles and make-believes. I am your friend. In your mind you have created an angel out of a piece of ignoble clay. Listen, while I prove to you that I am your friend, and show you a way to success."

Thereupon his vileness became so bold and horrible that I will not soil this white paper with a transcript of it, and I sank upon a bench, elbows on knees and face in hands, listening to the damnable rigmarole because I could not help it. My visitor was beyond personal violence—witness my recent fruitless attempt to strike him—or time and again I would have closed with him and slain him, or been slain. Shudders of shame and rage swept me from head to foot, and my cheeks grew so hot they burned my palms. Hours passed. At times the Devil relaxed, and a sort of armistice prevailed, then he would renew his merciless planning for my destruction, and how smooth and easy the road appeared under the magic of his voice! Throughout the entire night I remained humped over, shaking at intervals as some especially diabolical sentence fell upon my unwilling but helpless ears; holding my tongue, because I knew that no words of mine would avail to move the monster at my elbow.

Hast ever sat up o' night with the Devil, my brothers? It comes to me that every one who lives, or has lived must have had this experience. 'Tis a blood chilling one, forsooth; at least when resistance is offered. Only when daylight stole ghost-wise through the still aisles of the immemorial wood did mine Enemy depart, and I got to my feet, trembling as one risen from a bed of grievous sickness, groped my way within, and fell with a groan across my cot.

Throughout that day I slept, and arose in the late afternoon feeling refreshed. My trouble was mental, and this long rest for my brain was most beneficial. I put as firm a check upon my thoughts as I could bring to bear, and methodically set about preparing my supper. Looking back as I write to-night, I know that my movements were erratic and strained. I built my fire in the kitchen stove calmly, but soon thereafter memory made a breach in the flimsy wall of reserve which I had upreared, and havoc began afresh. I burned my food. I broke two dishes. I blistered my fingers on the hot oven. Then I ate voraciously, almost viciously, and leaving the things unwashed, tore out to the companionship of my vast host of faithful trees. Read? I could no more have held my eyes to printed lines that night than I could measure the sun's diameter. The Book says there is a time for everything. This week has been my time to visit the nether world, while yet alive; to become almost insane, while retaining a degree of sense. It may be I shall omit this chapter entire when the end of my story is reached. I am writing it to-night, because in doing so I open a safety valve. I have been fearfully surcharged with the intensest sort of feelings, and I find that it gives me some relief to pour them out upon the pages of my journal. When I grow again to be the reasoning man I was last Sunday—if I ever do—I shall read these lines again. If they seem perfervid, unnatural, overdrawn, I shall wipe them out, in deference to the gentle critic who never saw a red-haired Dryad, and consequently cannot have the least understanding of what I have been driving at in this night's record. I know I have already penned thoughts and emotions which will cause the phlegmatic cynic to damn my story as unreal and banal. In like manner I

know there are others—scarcely will they be found in the critic class, I fear—whose hearts will warm to me in kindest sympathy. These, mayhap, will be those of like excessive temperaments, who have looked on Beauty to their cost. Yea, like Priam, and Menelaus, and that old war-dog, Ulysses himself, and the hosts of others whose eyes beheld the ruinous loveliness of Argive Helen. On her pylon tower she sang, and men died, demented and hopeless, struggling for a single smile! Why were all famous beauties in history and mythology red-haired? Who can answer? From echoless time it seems to have stood as a type of perfection. I know what it has meant to me—dear Christ!—since that spring day when I saw it intertwined with dogwood blossoms. To-night—I am writing in desperation, that I may perchance get some sleep when I have worn myself out at the table by which I sit—I say to-night that I would rather live here on Baldy's lap forever with Celeste for my wife; here, in the Lodge, alone with her, than to be the consort of the mightiest queen of earth!

I rushed out to the sheltering arms of my faithful trees, and stood among them. I had nothing on my head. The moon was larger, and in its light I seemed in some enchanted place. Then the craze to move—to walk, drove me down to the ravine. Unthinkingly I turned toward the Dryad's Glade. After a while I halted, overcome all at once by the supernatural radiance which permeated every cranny of that spreading wilderness. Just where I stood the trees were not so dense. Twenty and thirty feet apart some of them grew, and though many lateral branches thrust far out to intermingle, the myriad moon rays found numerous paths and peepholes to the earth below. It also chanced that I had stopped in a spot where the spiring trunks rose naked of boughs to a considerable height. This peculiarity was a great aid to the diffusion of the blue-white, misty atmosphere which was all about me. I seemed to stand in a ghost land; everything was shadowy; even the rough boles appeared tenuous, ready to dissolve and disappear at a breath of wind. But there was no wind. I stared all about me, marveling at this common mystery of moonshine which was yet so unfathomable; feeling it sink into my soul in peace giving waves, comforting my tired breast. So I folded my arms and leaned against a near-by oak, determining to stay just there. It was the first moment of waking calm I had known since—How blissful it was! How peaceful! How past all poor words of mine to describe! Picture primeval creation. No hewn-down trees, no unsightly stumps, no chips from the relentless ax. Merely a mighty forest which had been such always. Solitude, silence. An all-enveloping, blue-white night, and one lone man striving for ease of mind and soul in the midst of these eternal realities. How good it was to feel my tight breast loosen; to feel that awful clamp dropping away from my temples, where it had been pressing and fretting me almost to madness. I breathed deep of that clear, sweet air; huge, delightful respirations which made me feel light-headed. And even as a smile of appreciation crept to my lips, and my eyes half closed under the weird spell of the place, I knew that I was not alone. Down a winding vista, far off, something was moving. The distance was too great and the light too poor for me to tell what it was. A gray shape was disturbing the nebulous perspective; a shape which at moments almost assumed proportions, to become at once as something almost of the imagination. I did not change my attitude, for as yet only a mild curiosity was present. It might be anything from a stray cow to a moonshiner on his way to work. Be it what it might, I hoped it would not disturb me, but wend its way. It was coming toward me; I could not doubt it directly. It would pass me at a right angle, perhaps thirty feet off. I did not care to be seen if it was human; I was in no mood to sacrifice a portion of this wonder-night to rustic inanities. I slipped quietly around into the shadow of my oak. There came a sound, like a silvery laugh wedded to a harsh cackle, and this was followed by the swift patter of running feet, tapping in a muffled tread the moss- and leaf-strewn ground. I thrust out my head to see what these strange sounds meant. God above! The Dryad and the Satyr, hand in hand, dashed by my hiding-place like a hurricane. She was next to me. What she wore I cannot say. It was something all white, girded at the waist with a vine, for I saw leaves and tendrils hanging from it. She had shaken her hair down. The Satyr was without his hat, and his ragged coat streamed out as he tore along. I glimpsed his face, and it reflected honest merriment only. Just opposite me they laughed again, without apparent reason, as children do in a frolic, and how incongruous it sounded; Celeste's musical bell tones, and Jeff Angel's cracked and jarring voice. So, hand in hand, in perfect understanding and good-fellowship, these two Children of Nature romped through the moonlit lanes of their beloved woods, happy in their very wildness and unrestraint.

Before I could recover from my profound astonishment they had disappeared down a misty aisle hung with trembling, diaphanous, luminous shadows; had merged with the pearl-gray gloom of the middle distance, and a wild, eerie strain of something which might well have been borrowed from a barbaric chant drifted back to my stunned sensibilities. I caught the notes only, but they drove through to my brain like fire-barbed arrows, and stung it into action. She had passed almost within reach of my arm! She! The one because of whom this awful abyss had opened up for me. She had passed, and I had stood like a dolt and let her go! "Lessie! Lessie!" I sprang forward, goaded by love and despair, and ran after them with all the swiftness I could command. "Dryad! Dryad!" I called, at the top of my voice, but no answer came. I stopped, and with hand against a tree held my breath to listen. Not a sound but my own blood hammering in my ears. Then as a full realization came to me of the opportunity which had been offered, and which I had stupidly missed, a feeling of mad recklessness seized me, and I bounded forward again, blindly, knowing only that somewhere ahead of me was Celeste. Once I saw something white, and rushed toward it with outheld arms and a strangled cry of gladness. It was a portion of a projecting earth-bank, covered with a growth bearing tiny white blossoms. The moon struck it full, and had worked the cruel deception. I fell upon the pure little flowers and tore them savagely; flung them down and ground my feet upon them, then took up my search once more. Rage filled my breast. Rage at myself, at Fate, at Granny, at Beryl Drane, and this animal emotion must have blinded my

eyes, for in my headlong, methodless pursuit I at length ran full force into a huge beech, and dropped senseless at its feet.

I don't think it could have been long before I roused, for there was no lessening of the brilliant light, such as happens when the moon declines. It was well for me that I was unconscious but a short time, I suspect, for as my eyes came open I at once became aware of another pair above me. A pair which seemed made of sulphur, marked with alternate red and green rings, glowing wickedly. Then I made out the contour of a dim body perhaps three feet in length stretched upon a low limb just over me. It was a gigantic wild-cat, and he was stalking me. I doubt not he would have dropped within another five minutes, for even as I watched, his back began to arch and the claws of his hind feet to rustle along the bark. With that suggestive motion his head also drooped below the limb, and it came to me he was gauging the distance for his spring. I was no hunter, but 'Crombie was, and from him I had learned that wild-cats will not attack a man unless driven by hunger, or brought to bay in a corner. So I sat up incontinently; threw out my arms and shouted. With the agility of his tribe he turned promptly, and another second was scuttling up the tree.

I found I had a painful welt across the top of my forehead, but no other injury was apparent. My heart turned sick as recollection came back on swallow wings. There was nothing left but to go home. I had myself to thank for my predicament. But where was home? Whither my flight had led me I possessed no idea. I had tried to follow the elusive wake of two night-roamers, and they had proven will-o'-the-wisps. Why had not the Dryad stopped at my call? I wondered, as I moved doggedly away from the spot. Surely she had heard. Surely she knew who it was, for no one else called her by that name. Could it be that Granny had perverted her mind? Or was it that she did not care? That I was only an incident, and had been cast from her life as quickly and suddenly as I had entered it? I would not believe this; I could not believe it. The blow which I had so recently sustained wrought a radical change in my mental condition, and while my breast still burned with implacable resentment toward the nameless something which had caused me to miss catching Celeste, I found that my thoughts were freer, and comparatively lucid. I could not believe that she had thrust me below her life's horizon, and gone singing through the woods as though nothing had happened. The idea was monstrous, appalling, revolting. It was wholly unacceptable. That my two visits to her home bore no fruit I laid at Granny's door. The old beldam had managed it in some way. Had kept the girl hidden, and had prevented anyone within the house from answering my summons. Why had the Dryad burst out weeping and run indoors when Granny thought she had convicted me of duplicity, and ordered me from the place? Ah! my soul! there was comfort in that! Celeste did not cry from fright; she was used to Granny's tantrums. She cried because for the moment she saw things in the same light and from the same angle as that old termagant—may her bones lie unburied! She did care for me—she *did* care for me—she DID care for me, and I knew it. I could not solve her frolicking in the forest with her half crazy cousin. I could not unriddle her laughing and singing. Such things do not go with a heavy heart in the world I know, but it may be she sought relief in following her beloved habit of running, untamed and free, wherever her hoyden steps led her. I will see her yet, and I will find out. I will make her see the truth, and outwit that old she-devil who has cast me into torment with her meddling.

Moonset found me laboring up the road to the Lodge. I had stumbled upon my hill. Sleep came at once, and how doubly sweet was that deep, soundless, shoreless sea when I slipped out upon it in my Barque o' Dreams!

Next day was Wednesday. All the bulldog in my nature unleashed—and a major part of my nature is represented by the hybrid breed of bulldog and mule—I went to Lizard Point, with the determination to have speech with some one before I came away. I was no schoolboy, or callow youth, to be trifled with in this manner. I had certain rights as a gentleman, and these rights I intended to demand. But alas for human hopes—and determinations! I could not demand aught of an empty porch, or a closed and locked door, or blind-drawn, nailed down windows. I suppose they were nailed down, for my peculiar nature caused me to try and raise two of them, when repeated calls and much banging on the door did not bring any results. The sashes did not even tremble under my hands. I saw a broken rail lying near one corner of the house. I looked at it, and at the blank window. That would get me in, or get somebody out. Either would serve. I was so wrought up that I actually started toward that piece of wood before I realized what I intended doing. It would be house-breaking; malicious destruction of property—both of which were jail offenses. I must forego the execution of this project, much as it appealed to me at the moment. Nothing would suit Granny better. She would have the law on me in a trice, and be rid of me for good and all.

I went home.

It is not my purpose to recount in detail my wanderings the remainder of this week. Some of it would prove a repetition, and other of it uninteresting. If my sojourn in the Inferno was not as gruesome as the hero's of Ithaca, nor filled with majestic horrors like the immortal Dante's, yet it was undeniably true. One night I climbed the peak thrice between nightfall and daydawn. The last ascent found me so exhausted that I lay prone upon the table-like top, and watched the miraculous mystery of morning. It was the first time I had ever seen it from a great height, and the impression cannot be put into words. I am tempted to try—oh! the untold glory of the magical metamorphosis!—but no, I will withstand the inclination. The result would be akin to that a three-year-old child would obtain if given the necessary pigments and told to paint a sunset. There are times when even fools will not rush in; this is one of them.

Sunday night again as I pen these words. Seven days! Seven æons! My watch tells me it is twelve o'clock. As I pause for a moment a sound floats through my open window. It is not any night bird's trilling, for I know my singers of the dark, every one. Now it comes plainer. A sort of whistle, I should say, though it is a kind I have not heard for a long time. Its impression is fuzzy, as though done carelessly. I have heard boys whistle so, between their teeth. What is happening without my door, I wonder? No one bent on mischief, for such do not advertise their approach. The whistling has stopped. I declare I hear feet, and they draw nearer. I am not one bit alarmed. I think I prove this by continuing my task as the unknown footsteps steadily come closer. They stop. I look up. Arms crossed on my window-sill, head bobbing in greeting and goat tuft wagging, stands the Satyr. Before I can speak he loosens this tipsy stave:

"Say, Mr. Rabbit, you're look'n' mighty slim!"  
"Yes, by gosh! ben a-spit'n' up phlim!"

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## CHAPTER NINETEEN

### IN WHICH THE SATYR AND THE NARRATOR BECOME VERY DRUNK AND THE LATTER IS LIFTED TO EARTH AGAIN

"Come in here, Jeff Angel!" I cried, joy at sight of him mounting, and brightening my face with a smile of welcome. I dropped my pen and beckoned eagerly.

His grin broadened as he accepted my invitation forthwith, through the window. I meant that he should enter by the door, naturally, but instead he gave a leap, and came squirming and wriggling in like a great caterpillar. I was up and had him by the hand as soon as his feet touched the floor.

"Where's Lessie? How is she? How does she feel toward me? Why didn't you stop when I called you the other night? Talk, man! Hurry!"

The Satyr's grin seemed fixed.

"Whur 'n hell yo' ben?" he drawled, disengaging my clasp and sliding around the table to a seat on a box.

I rattled my chair on the floor impatiently and begged him to take that, but he demurred.

"Ain't used to 'em," he explained. Then, once more, in genuine and open curiosity—"Whur 'n hell yo' ben?"

"You've said it—in hell!" I answered, savagely, slipping my papers to one side and sitting upon the table's edge. "And Granny, your blessed aunt, is the one who shoved me in—good and deep!"

"Haw! Haw! Haw! Haw!" roared Jeff Angel, with an intonation indescribably ludicrous had I been in the humor to enjoy it. His head went back and his curving whisker shook at me like a bent forefinger.

"Damn it, man!" I gritted, worn irascible by that week's awful experiences; "don't laugh and joke the night away! Tell me about Lessie—then we'll make merry till morning if you wish!"

"We'll drink, till we sink, in th' middle o' th' road,  
But we won't go home till mawn—'n'!"

Thus caroled this irrepressible Antic, and drew from some recess in his rags the bottle which I had seen before.

I glared at him helplessly. Perhaps he was a trifle drunker than he was that other time, when I gave him his supper. There he sat swaying his head from side to side, peering mischievously at me with his watery blue eyes, irresponsible as an infant. Then I recognized the futility of anger, or importunity. This queer being would speak when he got ready, and not before. I made a great effort, and threw off the impetuosity which desired to know everything at once. I would humor this half civilized, half crazy person.

"Let us drink, then!" I agreed, bending forward with outstretched arm. "I need a bracer, anyway."

At this the Satyr sat up with distended lids and mouth ajar, holding himself to a rigid perpendicular by planting his hands on either side of him and putting his weight upon them.

"Shore 'nough?" he burst out.

"Shore 'nough!" I answered, with a positive nod. "Give me some of your white lightning; I've grown used to fire."

He picked up the bottle haltingly, as though constrained to unbelief in spite of my words and my waiting hand, and placing his thumb over the cob stopper, began to shake the contents furiously.

"What's that for?" I asked.

"Shakin' th' fusic off!" he enlightened me, and it was a moment or two before I figured out what he meant. Fusil oil in whisky rises; Jeff's vigorous action was to diffuse it. His corruption of the word told me that he was totally ignorant of what he really was doing.

He drew the stopper with his teeth, and handed me the bottle. I think I have said elsewhere in this narrative that drinking whisky is not one of my weaknesses. That is to say, it is not a habit. I can scarcely conceive of a man living thirty years in Kentucky without drinking a little whisky. I knew the stuff I held was vile, but I put it to my lips for two reasons. I was dead tired, and I wanted to set this contrary creature's tongue to going on topics which would interest me. I took a big mouthful, swallowed, and thought my time had come. Hot? My throat closed up, tight, and for a time I could not breathe. My mouth burned as though it had been cauterized. I slid from the table, choked, coughing, my eyes running water. Back to the kitchen I tore for a draught from the bucket on the shelf—for something that would unstop my windpipe. Pelting my ears as I ran were the high-pitched, cackling notes of the Satyr, volley after volley, as he hugged his knees and rocked and weaved in unrestrained delight.

"Whut's the matter?" he queried, in mock surprise, as I reappeared with my handkerchief busy about my eyes and mouth.

"No more o' that junk, Jeffy!" I replied, thrusting my hand into the medicine chest on the wall and producing a quart of ten-year-old rye whisky. "If I make merry with you I'll choose my beverage."

"That's spring wadder!" he returned, contemptuously. "We feed that to babies out here."

"Spring water it may be, but it's stout enough for your uncle."

I drew the cork as I spoke, placed my private brand upon the table, found my pipe and sat down facing my strange guest.

He proceeded to shame me by indulging in a very liberal potation, smacking his lips with greatest zest at its conclusion, and winking across at me in a manner intended to indicate his superiority.

"Where's your fiddle?" I asked; not that I cared especially, but it was incumbent upon me to be agreeable.

The Satyr jerked a grimy thumb toward the window which had just admitted him.

"Out thur on th' binch. 'S wropped up 'n' th' jew won't hurt it."

In the short silence which followed, we got our pipes to going.

"Was that you whistling a while ago?" I continued, after waiting vainly for my visitor to say something voluntarily.

"That's me a-play'n'."

"Playing?"

"Yes, play'n' a reed. Fus' thing ever I got music out o'."

Again his hand was hidden in his tatters for a moment, and came out with what appeared to be a long, slender stick. This he placed to his mouth after the manner of a clarinet player, and blew a pure, flute-like note. Then I saw the instrument was hollow, with little round holes along its length.

"Pipes o' Pan, by Jove!" I breathed. "Make me some music, Satyr."

Already I was aware of the effect of that mouthful of white lightning. A slow but sure elation was beginning to buoy me up unnaturally, and I felt the ebullience of spirit such as follows the knowledge of some great joy.

"Pipe for me, you heathen minstrel!" I added, smiling at him with narrowed eyes. "Draw from that piece of wood the things the birds, and the trees, and the brooks, and the flowers have told you. Trill me a moonlight roundelay, such as inspires the feet of fairies; make me see the wood violets nodding in the warm dusk, and let me hear the drone of bees in the tiger-lily's cup. Sound for me the dream-song of the runlet, as it whispers and babbles over its pebbly bed and between its moss-draped banks in the silver starlight. Bring me the low love-message of the dove when the breeze is but a sigh, and the witch-light from a sun just sunk fills all the forest with a chastened radiance, and makes it one vast sanctuary upheld by a million pillars. It is there your patron lives—the great god Pan! Tell me not you've never heard him by the river bank o' quiet days, when the squirrels sleep, and the chipmunks drowse, and the birds forget their tunes. Belike you've never seen him, for to mortals he remains ever invisible; but you, O Satyr, are most surely a cousin, if not nearer kin, and it may be you and he have danced many a bacchanalian revel together. Dost know him—the great god Pan? Goat-legged, horn-headed, pleasure-loving, with his pipes to while the time?"

I did not stop to consider that this outburst was jargon pure and simple to the ears which received it. My mind had suddenly become gorged with poetic thoughts, and I poured them out upon the helpless head of Jeff Angel.

"Fur Gawd's sake!—air yo' plum' gone?" he exclaimed, in unfeigned alarm, casting a rapid glance around as though meditating flight.

"That's what your juice did for me," I explained, laughing to reassure him of my sanity. "One more swallow, then we'll have a tune!"

We pledged each other from our respective bottles, and the Satyr played.

Again I find myself hampered, for I cannot translate that performance through the medium of words. It was the most astounding exhibition I have ever listened to. His work on the violin had been entirely beyond the range of my comprehension, but then the dormant possibilities were in the violin. What was there in this slender reed? Unguessed miracles of sound! I sat and stared at the grotesque form on the box, wondering at first if I really was so intoxicated that my imagination was acting the ally for this vagabond artist. No, the ability of this uncouth musician was real, and my appreciation was only heightened by the subtle power of the draught of mountain dew. As I sat and puffed in lazy contentment, many a woodland pageant passed before my eyes. I saw all the things for which I had asked, and more. Beneath his hands the dumb reed became a sentient power; became a living, speaking force. Nature's infinite secrets dropped from it in purest pearls of sound. I heard the twitter of birds; the love-call, the anger-cry, the alarm-shriek, the mother-croon. I heard the wailing sweep of the wind when the storm gathers and hurls its invisible battalions upon the countless army of trees. I heard the wordless lisp of the matin zephyr when a new, fresh breath moves across the world at dawn. I heard the vesper sigh like a prayer from tired lips. I heard the whistle of the dove's wing in its startled flight, and the quail's liquid call. I heard the holy hymn of midnight when the moon hangs big and yellow, and the numberless strings of the Ancient Harp vibrate softly to her summons. I heard the sweet purling of running water, and the barely audible echo of an insect's hum.

I had no word of praise or compliment when Jeff took the pipe from his lips and carelessly laid it aside. What I had just given ear to was beyond platitude or fervent adjective; beyond comment. Silence was the only true meed which might be accorded it, and this I gave.

Jeff sighed, twisted his shoulders as though to rid himself of a cramp, ran his tongue over his lips, and picked up his bottle.

"Wuz that whut yo' wanted w'en yo' 's talk'n' out o' yo' head?" he ventured, with a coy, sideways movement of his chin.

I nodded. Here was a combination worthy of profound study. Totally unlearned, depraved but not debased, with a soul so full of music that even his besotted state had no power against it. I failed to understand.

For an hour thereafter I strove with all the skill at my command, used every artifice, to draw the Satyr out, and make him tell what he knew. In vain. He saw through each device; he avoided each veiled trap. He drank often, and good-naturedly insisted that I should imbibe every time he did. There was no help for it, but presently I was taking no more than a thimbleful at a time, for I realized that my condition was becoming most uncertain. Jeff seemed proof against the stuff, for he poured it down recklessly, without any noticeable effect. But when he arose to his feet after a while to feel in his trousers pocket for a match, I saw results. He giggled, swayed, and quite suddenly sat down again. I hospitably got up to supply his needs from a box on the mantel, when to my dismay and great surprise I discovered that the room was beginning to turn around and the furniture to do a silent jig. I drew my face down sternly to rebuke myself for this hallucination, and started determinedly toward the mantel. Where was the mantel? As I sat it was to my left. When I stood it was in front. Now it was to my *back*! I whirled angrily, and bumped into Jeff Angel, who had risen to renew the investigation of his trousers—I mean pants. Jeff didn't wear trousers; he wore pants—and that's too dignified a name for them. We bumped, instinctively grappled, and naturally came to the floor. Jeff fell on top; I felt that abominable chin-tuft tickling my neck. I pushed him off, and in a few moments we had gained what I shall term an oblique perpendicular. That is, both his feet and mine were on the floor, but his were some distance away from mine, and we were mutually supported by our intertwined arms. He regarded me with a watery leer, and one eyebrow tilted, while I endeavored to look very dignified; with what success I of course cannot say.

"Y's damn good feller!" averred my cup companion, blinking laboredly.

I managed to move my feet forward a little, and to straighten my leaning body correspondingly. Then I bethought me that I was host, and my guest wanted a match. I looked for the mantel; it was not in sight. I turned gravely to my *vis-a-vis*.

"Whersh man'l?" I asked, when a weakening of my waist muscles caused me to bend forward and then back in a most awkward manner.

Instead of replying to my question, the Satyr, with eyes glassily set on vacancy, began some more of his infernal doggerel.

"Possum live in a holler tree,  
Raccoon any ol' place;  
Rabbit takes a drink o' booze  
'N' spits in a bulldog's face!"

This classic quatrain was delivered after repeated efforts, and I bowed my approval as the silly sing-song came to an end.



Just how it was managed I cannot say to-night, as I sit with aching head and write the story of my shame, but in some way we found our original seats.

"Hongry, ain't yo'?" asked Jeff, with what I thought a sardonic look.

"No 'm not 'ung'y."

"Yes yo' air—hongry fur news! Huh? He! He! He!"

I swallowed, and fixed on him a stony stare. He was going to relent.

"I's hongry onct—belly hongry—'n' yo' give me good grub. Now yo're hongry—heart hongry—'n' I'm a-goin' to fill yo' plum' up!"

I essayed to cross my knees to assure myself that I was actually all right, but something went wrong with my lifted leg. It fell short, slid down my other shin, and lodged on the instep in a most unique twist. I let it remain. Bemused as I was almost to the point of helplessness, I yet knew that the Satyr had far greater control of his faculties than myself, despite the enormous quantity of poison he had consumed. I could listen acutely, however, if my speech was difficult.

"Go on," I encouraged, doing the two monosyllables without a hitch.

"Th' gal lied to th' pries' 'n' th' pries' tol' Granny, didn't he?"

This abrupt and startling declaration almost dazed me.

"Howje know?"

"I's to th' P'int t'other day; jes' drapped 'roun' 'n' heerd d'rec'ly thur'd ben a tur'ble stew. Granny tol' me 'bout it, 'n' how she'd druv yo' off on 'count o' whut th' pries's niece tol' 'im. She lied, though, sho!"

"Howje know?"

"Granny 'lowed yo' said so, but I knowed it w'en it hap'n'd, 'cus I'm al'ays perk'n' 'roun' in onexpected places. I wander consid'ble."

"Whurruz zhe?"

"That vine-house ain't fur frum th' hedge, 'n' I jes' hap'n'd to be layin' 'long t'other side 'n' heerd all yo' said. So I ups 'n' 'lows to Granny 'n' Lessie that you tol' th' truth 'n' th' gal lied, 'cus I heerd ever'thin'."

"Whusshe do?"

"She sot thur lak a mud woman, a-wink'n' 'n' a-swaller'n', her mouth hung open lak a dead fish's \_"

"Whus *she* do?—Lesshe?"

"She hugged Granny, 'n' she hugged Gran'fer, 'n' she hugged me, 'n' ez she's hugg'n' me she tol' me we'd go runnin' that night, jes' on 'count o' th' good news I'd brung."

"I shaw you."

"Huh?"

"I shaw you—called—wouldn't stop. Why didn't yo' stop?"

"Never heerd yo'; we's runnin'."

The Satyr's recital was not given with the lucidity of my transcription. It was halting, stammering, uncertain in places, but it imparted a glorious truth which rolled a stone from my breast. Even in the depths of my state of inebriety I was uplifted. I saw the light of day once more, who had been following paths of gloom and horror. I remember that I arose with the intention of grasping his hand to thank him, then a veil dropped before my eyes and my mind went blank.

I awoke this morning with my head splitting and every joint stiff. I had spent the remaining hours of night upon the floor. My first thought was of my visitor. I sat up and looked around, but he was gone. All of this day I have been trying to get myself together. I was never drunk before—beastly drunk. I never shall be again. It is not the physical discomfort which causes me to make this declaration. That is bad enough, but I am no cringing coward, and am ready to pay the penalty for any conscious misdemeanor. It is the shame of it which makes me say it.

When a man sets out to tell the whole truth about himself he has a task before him. Willingly would I have omitted this scandalous episode; not willingly, but gladly. I feel humiliated; I feel unworthy of that great joy which surely will be mine as soon as I can see my Dryad. True, it was for her I did it. I had to humor that antic creature to worm his secret from him. My soul is at peace to-night despite the misery of my mistreated body. Now I must go to bed, and I believe I can sleep. To-morrow—to-morrow—oh, my brothers! did you ever go to bed in the firm belief that to-morrow heaven's gate would open for you?

## CHAPTER TWENTY

### IN WHICH I VIEW AN EMPTY WORLD, ACT A HYPOCRITE, AND HEAR A CONFESSION OF LOVE

I sometimes wonder why it is that troubles pile up. Why they are not scattered along through our lives, instead of being accumulated, and then dumped upon our heads all at once. It doesn't seem like a fair game to me. It seems as if something was taking advantage of our helplessness. You see a fellow can rally under one or two back licks of Fate, if they are not too hard, and if there's any sort of fighting stuff in him. But when they come often, and come big and strong, his knees get wobbly and his spirit sickens. Is he to blame?

I find myself in some such strait to-night, for the open door of heaven which I went to sleep thinking about is not open, at all. It might be—I believe it would be if I could see Celeste, but she is gone. I marvel at the steady hand with which I trace these words. It is not because I do not feel. There are invisible fingers at my throat, and a spiked hand about my heart. Each spasmodic throb seems to thrust the cardiac walls against nettles. If my journal had not progressed so far I think I would end it right here. It appears as if this is to be the logical end anyway. Perhaps when I rise from my work to-night I shall gather up the written sheets and toss them, so much scrap paper, into the black jaws of the old fireplace. I don't know. I have come to look forward to my night's writing. It is not a diary, you see. It is—well, it must be a story, in a way, but how could we call such simple and homely things as I have jotted down a story? I'm sure it is not like the other story I wrote; the book which was published, and which no one would read. I made that up out of the whole cloth. I wonder if people knew—and I wonder if they will believe my word that this is the truth. But if I stop writing to-night I won't have a story. Things have gone on and on, and here I am mortally in love with Celeste Somebody, and elsewhere are the others I have met who have touched my life in various ways. All in suspense, as it were, awaiting developments. I can't end my journal to-night. That is, I can't end it and expect any sane people to put it between book covers. Wouldn't it be an innovation! The thought amuses me in the midst of my heartsickness. But Celeste is gone, and with her gone there is nothing more to say. I could offer little else than Mark Twain's memorable diary on shipboard: "Got up, washed, and went to bed." She must come back, that is all. I don't know where she is, nor how long she will be away. These things I will find out. Here I have wandered on much like a maundering old man, without first setting down the adventure of the day, and then commenting, if so inclined. I beg pardon. To-night I really am not fit, and should not attempt to write. But I have begun; inaction would be galling, so I will continue.

Was I astir early this morning? The first gray arrow, barbed with silver and feathered with gloom, had not found my small window ere I was up with a snatch of song welling from my throat, and hurrying for the big washtub back of the kitchen which does the duty of a bathtub in civilization. I had never been so completely happy since I was a boy on my grandad's farm. I even wanted to whistle while I was shaving, I was so full of song and laughter. Cooking breakfast was a jolly lark; eating it a delicious pastime. Then I was gone like a deer breaking cover, the door to the Lodge open to its fullest extent. She knew the truth, and I might even meet her coming to me.

As I ran easily through the forest on the now familiar way, I noticed that my exuberant spirits began to decline. A foreboding of some disaster crept stealthily and steadily upon me, until I actually had a chilly sensation down my spine, and a woeful sinking in my breast. This phenomenon, in common with many others attendant upon our daily life, cannot be explained. I really suffered until I came in sight of the roof which sheltered my beloved; then, as I mounted to the tree-bridge with feet suddenly grown leaden, a numb calm gripped me. I stood and leaned against the section of the root-wadded disk which projected above the butt of the oak, little spiders of feeling scurrying out all over my chest from a center above my heart. No signs of morning activity greeted my despairing gaze. The house was silent and lifeless as the trunk beneath my feet. No blue wood smoke curled up from the kitchen chimney. Not even the dog was visible. Only from the comb of the chicken house a lonesome guinea fowl squawked harshly. I dragged myself forward. When I reached the house I went in a mechanical way to each door and window in turn. They were fastened, but I discovered the dining room window was without a shade or curtain, and to a pane of glass here I pressed my face, shielding my eyes from the light with my hands. Slowly the interior took shape. A table covered with oilcloth; a few low-backed, shuck-bottomed chairs; a smaller table against the wall holding what appeared to be a jar of honey; a safe with tin paneled doors stuck full of holes in some kind of design; a fly-brush in the corner made of newspaper slit into strips and fastened to the end of a piece of bamboo fishing-pole. A bare floor, well scrubbed. I saw no one; I heard nothing, though I listened for several minutes with parted lips. They were gone. Everybody was gone. Where? Maybe just to spend the day with a neighbor. I knew this was a rural custom. Hope flared up with a quick rush to welcome this idea. Where were those neighbors? Ah, yes! The Tollers! Celeste had told me of them the first time I had talked with her. She had said they lived over the hill. So over the hill I fared in a bee-line, ignoring the road below which in all probability would conduct me to my destination. It was a hard climb, for the spur rose up rugged and forbidding, but I was growing inured to such things and scarcely noticed the exertion. When I reached the valley upon the other side I came upon the road. Following this for a short distance I discovered a log cabin, set dangerously near the bank of a creek. To one side a huge black kettle was a-boil over a faggot fire, and by it stood a woman stirring with a long stick the clothes she was getting ready for the wash. Children were everywhere, like squirrels in a hickory tree in nutting time. There must have

been fourteen, and the oldest was far from grown. At sight of me one gave a shrill little yelp, then there began a mighty scuttling for hiding places. The majority made for the door of the cabin, several found refuge behind convenient trees, while one of the boys shinned up an ash as though in mortal fright. Two or three more dropped over the shelving bank of the stream, and holding to the sod with tenacious, grimy paws, thrust their heads up and watched me with brilliant, dancing eyes. The smallest sought the protection of their mother's bedraggled skirts, which they pulled over their faces, thus stifling in a measure the piercing wails which had marked their progress to her side. The woman turned impatiently at the hubbub, brushed the smoke from her eyes, and peered at me with puckered face.

I came boldly toward her. Already I knew she whom I sought was not here, but I had to make my errand known.

"I'm looking for—a person," I began, conscious that I was stating my mission very lamely.

A look of mingled craft and truculence spread over the seamed, sallow face of the woman. What a pitiful appearance she made! I was assured she was not over thirty, but she seemed nearer fifty. Hipless, flat-breasted, stringy-necked; her hands and wrists red and rough. Her scanty hair was pale straw in color, showed dirt, and was slicked back and screwed into a knot about the size of a walnut on the crown of her head. Her dress was—simply a protection against nakedness.

"I 'low yo' 'd better git!" presently exclaimed this mother of many, with painful directness.

"Yes," I assented; "I'll git in a minute. Have you seen Lessie this morning? It is she I want!"

"Oh!"

The washed-out blue, almost vacant eyes popped open wider in instant relief. Then I knew. Her man was a 'shiner, and she, seeing at a glance that I was not of the vicinity, had visions of revenue officers and penitentiaries when I vaguely declared I was looking for a person.

"Air you him?" she resumed, squinting one eye and giving a little jerk of her head.

From which I judged that my fame had gone abroad throughout all the region round about, and that her ambiguous query related to the unhappy dweller on old Baldy's lap.

"I'm him," I acquiesced, a dull misery making me careless of speech. "Have you seen Lessie this morning?" I repeated, listlessly.

The woman drew a deep breath of visible comfort.

"Naw. She 's gone a-visit'n'. Th' hull kit 'n' bil'n' uv 'em tuk train this morn'n' at peep o' day. I's over to Granny's yistiddy to borry a chunk o' soap. She 's tur'ble worrit, 'n' tol' me she 's go'n' 'way fur a spell."

"Where have they gone?"

"Snack Holler."

"Where 's that?"

"Lard knows! T' other en' o' th' worl', some'r's, lak 's not. Granny's got folks thur."

She turned to the kettle again and began to stir the clothes.

"You say they left on the train from Hebron?"

"I never said Hebrin, but that's whur they tuk train.... I wouldn't git on one o' th' murder'n' thin's fur a sheer in th' railroad," she confided, almost instantly.

"Then they must be going on a long trip?"

"To Snack Holler, I tol' yo'. Granny's got folks thur."

"You don't know whether or not Snack Hollow is in Kentucky?"

A doggedness born of desperation was goading me to find out all I could about the destination of the fugitives, for I had no doubt this was a move on Granny's part to elude me utterly and permanently.

"'Pears to me yo' 've axed questions 'nough fur a plum' stranger, 'n' I'm too busy to be pestered no mo'. 'T ain't none o' my business whur Snack Holler's at, 'n' thin's whut ain't none o' my business I let 'lone. That's a mort'l good thin' to 'member, stranger—don't bother 'bout other people's business!"

The unkempt brood among whom my approach had wrought such consternation was beginning to make itself manifest again. Those who had fled creekward now squatted on the verge of the bank; those who had rushed indoors had inched out and lined up by the cabin wall; those who had hastened to place the thickness of a tree between themselves and the deadly danger which emanated from my simple presence now stalked boldly in the open, while the infants had forsaken the folds of their mother's dress and, on hands and knees, were diligently pursuing the erratic journey of a spotted toad, punching him in the rear with their fingers when he fain would rest. The tree climber was still wary; I could see his slim brown legs and knotty knees dangling below a limb where he sat astride.

I had a prescience that this hill woman knew more than she had told me, but how was I to get it from her after that last speech? It was safe to assume the Tollers were good friends to Granny, and confidences were just as essential to these people as to those more civilized. I determined to employ strategy. Would it hurt my conscience? Bah! For Celeste I would lie, or steal, or kill!

"Mrs. Toller," I began, as though I had at that moment made a discovery. "I declare you have a fine, handsome lot of children. All of them yours?"

I turned smiling from one group to the other. When my eyes came back to the woman I saw with joy that her features had relaxed, and something resembling a grin played about her bloodless lips. She quit work, and beamed upon her frowzy, tatterdemalion progeny, proud as if each had been a world conqueror instead of a dirt-enameled midgit of ignorance. Ah! the simplicity and the beauty of motherhood!

"Ever' chick 'n' chil' 's mine 'n' th' ol' man's." How her voice had changed; a silver thread had crept into it where before iron had rung. "Fo'teen uv 'em, sir, 'n' we've marrit fifteen year come th' fust o' Jinnywary!"

"Fine, healthy lot!"

I rubbed my chin and took a fresh view of the spindle-shanked, pinched-cheeked, tallow-faced little creatures, salving my conscience as best as I could by bringing to mind that faulty old saw that the end justifies the means. But I knew I was lying, and I wasn't used to it. True this lie would do good. It would give happiness unalloyed to Mrs. Toller, and I felt that I had put in a wedge with which I might prize out the information I coveted.

Mrs. Toller relinquished her grasp on the stick, turned her back on the clothes, and folded her arms contentedly.

"They *air* a likely look'n' set o' young-uns, since yo' 're kind 'nough to say so. Co'se it ain't fur me to brag, seein' 's I'm they mammy"—she could hardly speak that sentence because of the pride which tightened her throat—"but they ain't none here-'bout, not ev'n over to Hebrin way, whut's nice 'n' man'erly 'n' *ree*-specb'l, sho!"

The peregrinations of the persecuted toad, after describing an irregular semi-circle, had now led him near the spot where I stood. After the patient reptile toiled the three infants; two of the same size and apparently the same age, and one who had but recently reached the crawling period. This one, by the way, was perpetually in the rear of the procession, its single garment hampering its knee action and making any sort of speed out of the question. The frog had become tired of his enforced journey, and was getting harder to move after each diminishing leap. Now it sat with palpitating sides, stubbornly refusing another jump, while the finger of the lead tormentor prodded with dull persistence at its posterior.

Up to this time Mrs. Toller had paid no heed to the unique pastime of her three youngest, such pursuits possibly having lost interest from their commonness. Now, however, she bent suddenly forward, exclaiming shrilly:

"You Stephen Alec! Don't tech that varmint ag'in! Yo' wan' to hev warts all over yo'?"

Stephen Alec promptly drew back and thrust the hand which stood in jeopardy behind him. He turned a loose-lipped visage to his angry parent, then began a series of extraordinarily piercing yells.

Behold my chance! I stepped forward and gathered Stephen Alec up in my arms and sat him upon my shoulder. Then I tossed him gently. Next I was sitting on the ground with my watch out against his ear. The yells ceased, and presently brothers and sisters were crowding around me. I told them a story—one of the old, old favorites which our grandmothers used to quiet their children with, and before it was done a little girl had slid up so close to me over the bare ground that, still talking, I put out my arm and curled it around her and pulled her up onto my knee. At that another came voluntarily and crouched against my leg. Presently the whole ragged, unwashed crew were squeezing about me as close as they could get, and I was digging in the unused recesses of my mind for the most correct version of Red Riding Hood and Three Little Pigs. Poor Mrs. Toller! Happy Mrs. Toller! She fluttered from the black kettle to my group, back and forth, listening in silence, like one of the children, then hastening back to the clothes. I must have acted entertainer for a full hour, although I found it interesting, and did not tire. When I signified my intention of going I encountered a vociferous denial, and perforce must relate a number of the tales a second time. But at length I was on my feet, and with urchins clinging to every available hold about me, advanced to bid Mrs. Toller good-by.

"I'm awfully glad to have seen you and all these bright little people!" (I should have been ashamed; I know it.) "I must be getting on now."

Mrs. Toller was actually embarrassed.

"I mought 'a' spoke a bit mo' ceev'ly to yo' ef I'd 'a' knowed yo' 's sich a nice man. A pus'n can't be too partic'ler, yo' know, 'specially w'en th' man's 'way mos' o' th' time. Since th' chil'n' hev took to yo' so I don't mind sayin' that Granny 'lowed to me she's tak'n' Lessie 'way from th' neighborhood 'count uv a man, but she nev'r named 'im 'cus people don't tell names 'n' tales too, ez a gin'r'l thin'."

"Much obliged to you, indeed. Glad to have seen you. Good-day."

"Good marn'n'. Come back ag'in ef yo' git lonesome."

A half-hour later I was sitting in the porch entrance of the deserted house at Lizard Point. Right there we had sat such a short time before, and she had learned her A B C's. Down that winding path we had strolled the first time I came to call, and she had struggled so to tell me of the darkened house in which she dwelt. And I was going to help her. Already I had helped her, and now—I ground my teeth in sudden rage and leaped up. Where was Jeff Angel? Gone with them? Where was anybody who could point me a way out? Father John! He might know something of this remote spot with the classic name where Granny "had folks." I wanted to see Beryl Drane, anyway. I had not gone to her before because I knew well no good would come of it. To-day I wanted to stand before her face in the presence of her uncle, and ask her why she had told that vicious lie which had wrought such evil. I wanted to confront her with her baseness, and demand an explanation of her wanton wickedness. The sense of chivalry which was born in my blood and which had caused me to shield her once at the sacrifice of myself, was gone. It was consumed in the hot furnace of my wrath and indignation. I wanted Celeste—Celeste—Celeste! I would move heaven and earth to get her, for the wonder and mystery of her rare beauty and the hypnotic effect of her sweet personality had combined fearfully to work havoc within me. The elemental peace which brooded like a living presence over the earth this sunny, summer morning became to me a disturbing, harrowing force by very contrast with the awful tumult which boiled within my breast. I was lonely—lonely and desperate. I had borne all I could. That terrible week wherein I never saw the sun, nor heard a bird voice, nor felt the soothing benediction of a breeze, had well-nigh worn me out, bodily and spiritually. This crowning calamity I would not accept meekly. I would fight it; I would disclaim its existence. It was unjust, unfair, treacherous and cowardly. I had been honest from the beginning, and when a man plays the game of life fairly and squarely, not even Providence, or whatever Great Power there be, has the right to take advantage of him, and seek to overwhelm him. I would dare everything—heaven and hell, if need be—for the sake of this golden haired Dryad with the lips of flame. She had been removed by force. Even a lover's mind is acute when the object of his adoration is concerned, and I knew—I knew that Celeste loved me! What else mattered? This compulsory separation? A great surge of triumph heaved up within me, and the light of victory came to my eyes. What poor, ignorant puppets these were, who had tried to rob me of my rare jewel? The beacon of her bright coronal would guide me to the furthest corner of the earth, and if need had been I would have followed across sea and plain and mountain and desert; followed with a fire-wrapped heart of deathless devotion, even as Three of old followed a certain Star.

Filled with mingled emotions, all primal, all superlative, so that my head seemed encircled with a close fitting metal band, I took up my march to Hebron along the dusty road. My mood was reckless. I wanted to see that little she-cat whose low vindictiveness was at the bottom of my present luckless plight. I would neither spare nor choose my words. There was no gallantry lurking in my soul now to temper the accusations born of an outraged and agonized spirit. I felt sorry for the little priest, for he loved her well. But innocent suffer with and for the guilty daily. It is part of that plan we are told to accept blindly, and when we question it, however meekly and with the true and earnest desire for light, we are haled forth with a rope around our necks as heretics and atheists. Father John would have to witness the destruction of an idol, for I was merciless, and knew the power was within me to beat down any brazen denial this creature might utter. A mighty strange thing is love, my masters!

Across the home-made bridge I tramped, striding heavily. A figure stood in the door of the smithy, leather-aproned, tall and strong. I strode up the slope with bent head, and reached a point opposite him before I looked at Buck. Arms akimbo, sturdy legs apart, a grin on his face which broke into a low, deep chuckle as he caught my eye. I almost stopped, while my fists knotted with the instinct of a savage. But I went on, that rumbling, mocking laugh echoing in my ears. He knew she was gone. Perhaps he had something to do with her leaving. That insulting, gloating chuckle could easily give rise to a suspicion of the sort, or it may have been he was in equally bad case, and had simply adopted that method of tormenting me.

I gained the priest's house with a feeling such as I imagine a tiger possesses when it gathers itself together to spring upon its prey. It was entirely alien to my nature, but it had been born of circumstance, not of my will, and I made no effort to remove or curb it. The front door was closed, probably against the heat. I pounded upon a panel with my fist, ignoring the gentler and more refined summons it is customary to give with the knuckles. As I stood waiting, restlessly turning from side to side, I observed that the shades to the two windows visible were drawn to within a foot of their respective sills. At this discovery a wild and reasonless alarm seized me. I renewed my hammering on the door, and even seized the knob, shaking it vigorously. A key grated and the door was opened, revealing the gaunt face and bony form of Marie, the housekeeper. Wonder and a sort of terror shone in her bright black eyes.

"Father John!... Miss Drane!" I exclaimed roughly, brushing past her into the hall. "Where are they? In the library? I must see them both at once—together!"

I stopped and glared at the woman with a menacing forehead.

"His rev'rence an' Mees Bereel ees not here!" she said, simply and calmly.

"Not here! *Not here!*... Where are they?"

"Gone. Mees Bereel goes home yest'day. His rev'rence go to Lou-ees-ville wiz her, an' have not return'; *oui*."

I made no reply, but left the house and mechanically turned back toward the little hamlet. Gone! Was that the monotonous and deadly refrain to which the world had been set running? All gone. Everybody gone. Wherever I turned—gone. With sagging shoulders I plodded on, trying to think of something else. Where was Snack Hollow? Where was Snack Hollow? Where was Snack Hollow? This sentence raced through my brain with the regularity of a pendulum's swing. Why, the station agent would know! I had reached the foot of the steep hill, where the track ran, when this illuminating idea was conceived. To my right was the small depot, fronted by a platform of a height to unload freight upon from a car door. Looking up suddenly under the force of my discovery, I saw Jeff Angel seated upon this platform, his thin legs hanging from it, an oilcloth-covered bundle at his side. He was leisurely eating cheese and crackers from a yellow paper sack. What a glad sight he was to me in the midst of an empty world!

"O you blessed old Satyr!" I yelled, and ran toward him forthwith.

"Whut's th' furse 'bout?" he asked, quietly, trying to smile a welcome, but only succeeding in showing some imperfect teeth caked with cheese and dough.

"Why, damn your dirty, good old hide, I'm glad to see you!" I continued, jumping to a seat at his left and squeezing his disengaged hand. "I'm about two-thirds crazy, you know, and I need somebody to hold me when the other third slips over. Think you can?"

I nudged his skinny ribs jocularly. My mental condition truly was not up to standard that moment.

"Huh!" grunted Jeff, casting me a quick, amused glance.

"Why didn't you wait and have breakfast?" I asked, drawing a breath which flooded the deepest cell in my lungs.

I tell you it was good to sit by the side of that ragged piece of flotsam. I felt hope coming back, for I knew he was my friend.

"Woke up—thirsty 's 'ell. Your'n gone; mine gone. Had to hev some liquor, so I lit out, easy, so 's not to wake you up. Had some muster, didn't we?—Huh?"

I nodded. I didn't care to review that night's doings.

"See here, Satyr," I said, abruptly; "where's Lessie?"

"She's 'ith Granny 'n' Gran'fer, I reck'n," he replied, with a naturalness which for a moment caused me to wonder if he knew of their departure. "Leas'ways, they lef' together," he added, after a brief interval.

"Where have they gone?—what did they go for?—when are they coming back?"

My companion tossed the last bit of cheese, rind and all, into his mouth; inverted the sack and allowed all the crumbs to go the same way; blew the sack up and burst it on his knee, and began to feel for his pipe before he replied.

"I don' know whur they gone. They went to git Lessie 'way frum you. They 's com'n' back putty durn soon."

"I know where they've gone! It's to Snack Hollow!"

"Who tol' yo'?"

The look he bent upon me was a mixture of pity and contempt.

"Mrs. Toller. I've just come from there. She was uncivil at first, but I made up with the children, then she said Granny had told her she was going to Snack Hollow, where she had some folks. Where is this place, Satyr? I'm going, too, next train."

"No ust, pardner."

He scratched the dirty stub of a match on a plank, and lit up.

"Granny—'n' Gran'fer—'n' Lessie—ain't a-nigh Snack Holler!"

The fateful sentence came out in jerks, between puffs. I thought he was trying to scare me.

"You can't fool me, Jeff," I retorted, but my voice lacked assurance. "How far is this Snack Hollow, and how soon can I get there?"

With the greatest air of insouciance the vagabond fiddler chanted, in the same sing-song with which I had grown familiar:

"Raccoon got a ring-a-roun' tail,  
Possum tail am bar';  
Rabbit got no tail at all,  
Jes' a little bunch o' ha'r!"

It was plainly immaterial to Jeff whether I believed him or not. Equally plain it was that he knew

what he was talking about.

"I believe you, Satyr. But who told you?"

He was instantly placated.

"Nobody to' me noth'n', but I ain't no plum' ejit."

"But Mrs. Toller—"

"Look-y-here, pardner!" Jeff squirmed around and thrust his goat-tuft forward. "Granny tuk Lessie 'way frum these here parts on 'count o' you. She 'peared to b'lieve whut I tol' 'er 'bout th' gel lyin' on yo', but they ain't no manner o' 'pen'ence to be put in Granny's notions. She's made up o' contrair'ness, anyhow. She jes' got to mull'n' 'n' a-brood'n', 'n' whut 'ith her trouble 'ith Ar'minty 'n' all she jes' 'lowed it's well 's not to light out fur a spell. 'N' hev yo' got little 'nough sinse to 'low fur a minute she 'd tell that long-tongued Ab'gail Toller whur she's a-goin'? Yes, she tol' Ab'gail Toller she's a-goin' to Snack Holler—'n' fur why? 'Cus she knowed yo'd come a-nosin' 'roun' axin' questions, 'n' th' fust place you'd go 'd be right thur."

I felt the water closing over me afresh at these words of doom.

"But don't you know?" I urged, desperately. "Didn't you ask Granny?"

"Yes, I axed 'er, 'n' she 'lowed it's none o' my 'fair."

"But you said they would be back soon. How do you know?"

A sly grin crept to his thinly bearded lips.

"Look-y-here, pardner. Me 'n' you's frien's. I've et yo' grub 'n' drunk yo' liquor 'n' slep' on yo' floor. I know yo 're lovin' Lessie 'n' lovin' her hones'. I 'm a-gunta bring 'er back to yo'. I said I didn't know whur they went, 'n' I don't, but I've got my s'picions. It mought be a week, 'n' it mought be a mont', 'n' it mought be longer. But I 'm a-gunta do it. Never yo' min' jes' how I'll manage. Th' day I fin' 'em that day they start home, 'n' I don't 'low they 's so tur'ble fur, neither."

I felt my throat choke up at this totally unexpected act of generous devotion. I know my eyes grew moist, and it was several moments before I could say anything.

"Satyr, I—I—you don't know how much I appreciate this. I don't deserve it. But—can't I go with you on the search?"

Jeff Angel laughed his mirthless, jackass laugh before answering.

"Lord, no! This here pleasure trip 's all fur me. You jes' hang 'roun' 'n' wait fur nooze!"

"You'll need money—how much?"

My hand started toward an inner pocket, but instantly Jeff's long, wiry fingers had gripped it, and dragged it down.

"Naw yo' don't, pardner!"

There was a peculiar earnestness to his voice and an exalted look in his bleary eyes as, holding my hand hard down on the platform, he resumed:

"I wen' to hear Father John preach onct—jes' out o' cur'os'ty. He tol' a tale 'bout a Feller whut some heath'ns nailed on a cross, 'n' that Feller c'd a-he'p' Hissself if He'd a-wanted to, but He let 'em kill 'im so 's a pas'l o' other fellows c'd live. Father John said 't wuz fur you 'n' me, too, 'n' ever'body, but I 'low he kin' o' got that part o' the story crooked, 'cus that ain't natch'l. Anyhow, he 'lowed that whut that Feller done saved th' worl', 'n' He done it 'ithout money 'n' 'ithout price. That's whut stuck in my craw. Jes' think uv it! 'Ithout money 'n' 'ithout price! I ain't no sort o' eddicated, but it 'pears to me that w'en a feller c'n do some'n' fur another feller 'ithout no sort o' pay—some'n' that's shore 'nough, yo' know—that it'd make 'im holler'n' 'n' shout'n' happy fur quite a spell. That's whut I mean, pardner; 'n' that's whut I 'low to do fur you—fur, b' gosh! I love yo'!"

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## CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

### IN WHICH, STRANGE TO SAY, TIME PASSES. ALSO I RECEIVE THREE WARNINGS, AND WITNESS AN UNPARALLELED EPISODE IN THE SMITHY

Four weeks have passed since Jeff Angel departed on his quest. Until to-night I have not had the heart to face my journal. But to-day a premonition came to me that my period of waiting was drawing to a close, and pinning my faith to this invisible, silent herald which has spoken to me before with prophetic voice, I take up my pen again.

Jeff's loyal, true declaration almost stunned me. It was entirely unexpected. I could not conceive of such self-sacrificing nobility in him. I had given him no serious thought, accepting him for what

he appeared to be on the surface; a harmless, almost half-witted wanderer in the wilderness about Hebron, cursed with an inordinate love for strong drink, and blessed with the pure soul of music. And here, when my case seemed all but hopeless, he had gladly and willingly volunteered for a task which could be no light one.

I pressed him to take some money—even a little; enough to insure him against hunger, but he refused. He said he never had any trouble getting food, and he was going to tramp. He needed nothing. He was going to start at once—that afternoon. I made him come to the Lodge with me for dinner, wished him quick success, and bade him God-speed with a strong handclasp. He strode away chanting one of his absurd couplets.

With his going a great sense of loneliness descended upon me. I felt the cold hand of despair feeling at my throat. With an effort of will I flung the deadening weight from me, and began to pace my plateau vigorously, my hands behind me, my head bent in thought. I must not prove a weakling or a craven now. Celeste would return. Jeff would find her—or if he did not, I would. The world was not big enough to hide her from me. A kind of mad joy flared out in my breast at the thought, and I smiled fiercely. Jeff had said positively that they would start home the day he found them. How did he know this? I had urged him to tell me, but he had only laughed, and repeated his statement. I could not clear this point, but I would not let it depress me. I was convinced the Satyr was genuine, and that he knew what he was talking about.

His time of absence was indefinite. That was the hardest of all to bear. Had there been a fixed day in the future toward which I could walk with the assurance that on that day I should greet my beloved again, I could have gone laughing through the hours. But the uncertain waiting—the rising of sun after sun and the falling of night after night, and the still, empty minutes which must be lived! I strove to comfort myself in those first few hours after my self-appointed messenger had left. He knew these knobs intimately. He had been born in them, he had roamed them all his life, he knew every nook and hiding place in them for miles. He had also expressed his belief that the fugitives had not gone far. Perhaps a few days would bring about our reunion; surely it would not be longer than a week, or a fortnight at the farthest. There was solace in this thought. And as I hugged this phantom belief to me my furious pace slackened, and I continued my walking at a soberer gait, still too perturbed to sit down and think quietly.

How my heart ached for my vanished Dryad that afternoon! Let another opportunity come! Nay, let her but come, and I would make the opportunity. I had dallied. I had not listened to the promptings of my heart early enough, and now a jealous old woman who did not understand had snatched her from me. Then came the distracting thought that perhaps Jeff would fail! Perhaps Granny's plan was deeper than it seemed, and it might be that she had hurried away to some far and obscure part of the Commonwealth, or even to another State. The fact that they were poor presented no foil to this theory. People like her and Gran'fer were not as poor as they seemed. They never spent except for the absolute necessities, and during their long life together they had doubtless saved and pinched until a goodly hoard was stored away in some nook or hole. I believe I knew Granny's mind. It could never entertain but one idea at a time, and it was an utter impossibility for her to view both sides of a question. I pitied her even in my vexation. She had had ample cause for the course she had adopted, and I was being made to suffer for the sin of a cultured renegade from the higher world. Granny had decided that all relations of whatsoever nature must cease between her granddaughter and myself. She mistrusted me, in spite of the evidences she had had of my sincerity and honesty. Since I would not go away, then she would take Celeste away. To carry out her idea, I am sure she would have sacrificed the savings of years. This was the thought which burned hotly in my breast now. Then to my mind came the vision of Jeff Angel, coming dejectedly up the road to my plateau, with the news that the lost ones could not be found. Oh, it is a terrible thing, my brothers! To be suddenly and swiftly swept into the maelstrom of a mighty love, and then to be confronted by the possible loss of the girl who aroused this feeling.

That night I climbed the peak; climbed it by the soft light of the stars alone, for the moon was young, and I saw it only after I had reached the top—a crescent thread of silver cradled on the tops of the trees on the furthest western range. Up there, between creation and infinity, as it were, I applied all the philosophy I could bring to bear upon my case. I got results, too, thank goodness! Had I not been able to persuade my mind into a certain channel of common sense, I can't say what would have become of me, for I was idiotically in love. Howbeit, I leaved on the very bases of my reason for strength and guidance, and deep down where the fundamentals of character perpetually abide, I found that which saved me.

It was thus my sane self argued with my insane self:

*Insane Self:* If Celeste is not restored to me within a short time, I shall go wild.

*Sane Self:* What's the good of going wild? Then you will be in no condition to greet her when she does come, and may lose her forever.

*Insane Self:* I cannot rest, or sleep, until I see her again.

*Sane Self:* A suicidal attitude. Be sensible instead. Take the best care of yourself, and so be fit in every way to welcome her back.

*Insane Self:* But, I must see her; I *must* see her soon!

*Sane Self:* Perhaps. Be calm. Nothing is to be gained by rashness. You will only succeed in



wearing yourself out.

*Insane Self:* I am on this peak to-night because of a racked mind. I may climb it again before morning.

*Sane Self:* What of Buck Steele?

*Insane Self:* Ah!

*Sane Self:* What of Buck Steele? His love is just as great as yours—perhaps greater, for he has not the restraining leash of a cultivated mind. He is your rival. Is he sapping his strength by doing without food, straying through the forest, and climbing mountains? No; he is making those iron muscles harder every day at his forge, and when the time comes when you and he face each other—as come it inevitably must—he will twist you in two like a winter-rotted weed! He is sensible; you are a fool!

My insane self made no reply to this last speech, because it no longer existed. I was effectually sobered. What Buck's laugh that morning may have meant did not really matter. All day he had been on the outskirts of my mind, but I had been too busy with other subjects to admit him for intimate inspection and consideration. Now my sane self proceeded to shove him forward relentlessly, and I accepted his presence as something quite necessary, but undesired. Whether or not he sensed the approaching encounter as plainly as I, of course I could not say. But I knew that a bulldog resolve had lodged in his mind to have Celeste for his wife, and it took no seer to declare that he would use every weapon in his reach to prevent me from taking her. He had only one weapon—his superb physical strength—and I knew he would arrange or provoke a meeting, if none arose naturally. What would become of me then? Instinctively I flexed my right arm and grasped the bulging biceps. Like rock. Not as large as the smith's, I was sure, but might dwell there. I felt my other arm, my legs, and thumped my chest with my fist. Yes; I, too, was some man. I was hard as nails all over, but I was fearfully tired. All I needed was rest; good, sound, eight hours a day sleep, and presently I would be fit. I must adopt a rigid system of living, and hold to it faithfully until these parlous times were over.

For perhaps two hours then my mind worked along rational lines, and when I left my perch to carefully descend the perilous declivity, I realized with intense satisfaction that I had myself admirably well in hand.

The door to the Lodge stood open. I remembered distinctly drawing it to after me when I came out, although I never locked it. The night was calm. It could not have been blown wide by the wind. Not alarmed, but vaguely uneasy, I entered and walked to the table. I knew a box of matches was here, and I thrust out my hand. It encountered something upright in the darkness; something which did not belong there, for the object yielded to the force of my touch, to fly back in place when I removed my hand. Nervously I fumbled about until I grasped the matches. Swiftly I struck one, and in the light of its tiny flare I saw what the foreign thing was. But I lighted my lamp very calmly, in spite of the disturbing nature of my discovery. Then I thrust my hands in my pockets and stood staring at the long hunting knife which had been driven through the orderly pile of manuscript composing my journal, deep into the oak top of the table. There it was, horn-handled, hafted, with a murderous blade six inches long.

I could not doubt its meaning, were I so inclined, any more than I could doubt the big brown hand which had planted that steel blade so deeply and firmly in the wood. It was a warning; a warning such as was given in the middle ages, but the man who had delivered it belonged by right just there. He dwelt in the same mental and moral atmosphere as did his forebears hundreds of years ago. And his declaration of war was assuredly convincing. Nothing could be more real, more significant, more productive of contemplation, than that bit of imbedded steel, shining threateningly in the lamplight. I gathered one comforting fact from this sinister messenger. All was not well between Buck and Celeste. He, too, was in the dark as to her whereabouts, and he, too, failed to nurse in his heart any reassuring message given before she went away. Plainly this man had reached a stage in his infatuation where he would employ any means to rid himself of me. Doubtless he had come to square accounts that night. He had found me out, had very likely waited, and when I had not come his wild hate and mad rage had found expression in the savage act whose result now confronted me. I remained for a long time looking at that knife, and my thoughts were many. Grave, too, they grew to be, as I traced the near future to a climax as fixed as Fate. There were two ways, as there always are, but no third consistent with honor. I must give up the Dryad, or I must kill or be killed. Neither alternative bore rosy tints. The thought of taking a human life filled me with a rebellious horror, but the thought of resigning Celeste—my golden-haired, gray-eyed Dryad—to the uncouth caresses of the smith of Hebron charged my inmost soul with a white-hot denial. I would not do it. I could not do it. The decision had passed from my control. I would wait for her; I would yearn for her sweet presence with all the power of my spirit, and I would fight for her unto the death! Strange that not once did the thought come that I might be vanquished.

I put out my finger and rocked the weapon to and fro. It had been planted well. Then I grasped the handle and strove to draw it out. What a hold it had! In the end I had to get on the table with my knees and take both hands to force the blade loose. A silly and jealous anger now seized me at the power here shown. I took some unused paper, and made a bundle as near the size of my manuscript as I could, and placed it on the table. Then I set my teeth, gripped the knife, and lifting my arm drove downward furiously. The stroke fully equaled Buck Steele's, as a quick investigation showed, and brought a warm glow of animal satisfaction.

For the first time since I began life at the Lodge, before I went to bed I dropped the heavy bar of wood into the brackets on either side the door, thus making it absolutely secure. The windows remained open, as usual, but I placed my revolver under my pillow.

The next ten days would have been idyllic had I been entirely at peace. As it was, I managed to absorb a great deal from them which strengthened and comforted. Each was a miraculous procession of perfect hours. I had laid down some simple rules of conduct which I followed strictly. I arose early, bathed, breakfasted, took a course in calisthenics which brought muscles into action mere tramping would not reach except faintly, and did some garden work. The rush of recent events had interfered with my horticultural notions lamentably, and now it was too late for anything except corn and beans. I rested an hour after dinner, and then walked until dusk. The quest of the life-plant had long ago become mechanical, and I never stirred abroad without the consciousness that I might find it this time. But I had come to believe of late that I had no need for it now. Perhaps 'Crombie had diagnosed my case wrong—had taken too much for granted, and had banished a man with an ulcerated throat, or a bleeding gum. For the first time I remembered my throat *was* sore at that interview! Could it be possible? I had never felt better than at present, when the longest walks and the hardest pulls over the steep knobsides were play. I was abed every night by nine o'clock.

My poise was speedily regained under this regimen. Vigor seemed to flow into me, and I must confess to a certain pride in my superb physical condition.

Then one pearl-gray morning which promised a flawless day, I flung open the door to find a piece of paper fluttering in my face. Right on a level with my eyes it hung and writhed in the twilight breeze, as if it was a live thing suffering from the bright new horse-shoe nail which impaled it. With finger and thumb I disengaged the soiled, flimsy sheet. It was a torn portion of wrapping paper, and bore a brief message; a formless scrawl traced with a blunt lead pencil.

"THES HERE HOLERS AINT HELTHY  
FOR SITY FELLRS PLANE TALK  
IS BES UNDERSTUD"

It was Buck's second warning for me to leave. Could he have known my mental condition when I read the ignorant, threatening lines, I believe even he would have hesitated before attempting any radical move to be rid of me. I was not alarmed; I was not even annoyed. I am sure my heart action was not accelerated at all. It may be surmised that I did not comprehend the full significance of the words. But I did. They meant, differently presented: "If you don't get away from here I'm going to kill you." I knew what he meant to say, and I knew what he meant to do. It must have been the consciousness of my bodily power which prevented even the slightest tremor as I labored through the misspelled, scarcely intelligible missive. I looked at it almost disinterestedly a moment after I had mastered it, then crumpled it into a wad and tossed it aside. At various times during the day I thought of it, but only as one's mind naturally reverts to an incident. I did not suppose the smith would ambush me. Apart from assassination, the belief was strong within me that I could hold my own, and more, with him.

The third Saturday after the disappearance of the family at Lizard Point, I went to Hebron in the afternoon. A sense of supreme loneliness assailed me that day, and I realized more than I had ever done that mankind is by nature gregarious. In common with other animals, he must have the fellowship of his kind. That Saturday morning the billowing ranges seemed types of eternal loneliness, and the old walks which heretofore had charmed were alive with the echo of dead voices. I suddenly became aware that I wanted to see somebody, to hear a human voice, however rough and untaught. I wanted to look into somebody's eyes, to talk to somebody, to sit down by somebody, cross my legs and smoke. The longing grew, until, at noon, I knew that I must see some of my fellow creatures. Should I go to the priest? He was kind, cultured, hospitable. No; I didn't want kindness and culture. I just wanted to rub shoulders with mere *humans*. Besides, I would have been more or less constrained with Father John. It was not in the nature of a mere man to forget that Beryl Drane was at the bottom of all this miserable condition of things, and had I gone to chat with his reverence, I should have had to listen to fulsome praises of that—person, and should also have been expected to add my little word of appreciation and compliment, since I had had the rare pleasure of a brief acquaintance with the paragon.

I went to Hebron, with a fine large twist of tobacco in my pocket, and an aching desire just to be with people.

It was Hebron's busy day—or busy half-day, of all the week. Not until I hove in sight of the little settlement and saw a row of horses hitched to the pole near the store, and at least eight or ten persons in plain view, did I realize the truth. In nearly all rural communities, all farm work is knocked off at noon Saturday. Then dissipation follows in going to the store. There is nothing else to do, unless one sneaks off to the barn and goes to sleep on the hay, or slips down to the river and goes seining. But seining was unlawful, and this was the wrong time of year, anyway. It was early in the afternoon—not past two o'clock—and only the advance guard had arrived. But the sight made me glad. I wanted to mix, move and talk with the yeomanry that day. So I sauntered up the road toward the store, paying no heed to the open-doored smithy as I strolled by. Buck was one who could not let up this day, for more than one horse's hoof had grown sore going barefoot a portion of that week, waiting for this afternoon. Though I did not turn my head, I knew there were a number of horses standing under the shed in front of the shop. I had barely passed it when I heard a harsh, prolonged—

"*Who-oo!* Durn ye! Can't ye stan' still a *minute?*"

This was accompanied by the sound of scuffling within. I turned to see a couple of urchins make their escape through the broad doorway, and I could discern fright on their faces as their bare feet patted the hot yellow dust of the road. They were headed toward the creek over which hung the home-made bridge, and they did not stop nor lessen their speed until they splashed into the shallow water. It was not sham terror, either, for now they stood holding each other by the arms, and gazing back at the shop.

I wheeled in my tracks, and walked under the shed.

I did not enter the smithy because there was no need. It was light as day in there, and I would have been in the way then. I saw three people and a mule, evidently young, and evidently fractious. It was a fine yearling; fat, sleek, shapely. Buck Steele, with a small, elongated iron shoe in his left hand, stood in a semi-profile position, facing the man who had brought the animal in. A negro boy lolled by the forge, his hand on the handle of the bellows.

"Whut's th' matter 'ith th' fool critter?" Buck was saying, as I halted under the shed. He had not seen my approach.

"Fus' time, yo' know," returned the man, in a wheedling kind of voice, thrusting his thumb under his bedticking suspender, and chasing it over his shoulder with that member. "Yo' 'll hev to be kind o' durn keerful, Buck"—he shifted his hold from the rope of the halter to the halter itself—"cus he didn't miss yo' an inch las' time."

The mule was scared. It trembled at every move Buck made, and its eyes were distended and rolling.

"Nothin' 's ever passed out o' this here shop bar'-footed that a man wants shoes on!" maintained the smith. "If yo' want this animile shod, I'll shoe 'im!"

"I shore want 'im shod!"

The speaker took a fresh grasp on the halter, and his hairy visage became contorted in an expression impossible to translate, as Buck stepped forward and put his hand on the smooth withers of the young mule. It shrank down under his touch, and blew short, gusty breaths. Buck waited, patiently, until the animal became quiet, then, gently patting the reddish-brown skin, he gradually moved his hand along its side until he reached its flank. There he stooped, with low, soothing words, and a great admiration for his courage found birth within me as I saw him bend beside that sinewy thigh corded and bunched with muscles. Gently his big brown fingers slid down the slender hock, then like the rebound of a crossbow the satiny limb shot out in a paroxysm of untamed fear. It was a lightning stroke, delivered so swiftly my eyes could not follow it. Buck saw it start, infinitesimal as the time must have been from its inception to its execution—perhaps he felt the steel thews hardening under his hand—for he leaped backward simultaneously. This action saved his life. As it was, the edge of the small hoof slashed his forehead like a razor, leaving a crimson, dripping gap. It went just below the surface, and did not even stun the smith. He staggered, it is true, but from his own recoil, and was erect an instant later. Then I witnessed a sight I shall never forget though I round out a century.

The sting of the hurt and the treachery of the brute took all of Buck's sense and judgment for the time. He was as much animal as the four-legged one in front of him that moment. His bearded face became convulsed horribly, his eyes shot fire, and with that red gash in his forehead from which tiny streams trickled unheeded, he advanced one step, drew back his arm, and struck that mule a blow which stretched it dead before our eyes!

I write the culmination of this incident with reluctance. Not from its brutal and somewhat harrowing complexion, but from the fear that many will be tempted to smile tolerantly, and in the kindness of their hearts forgive this one most palpable fiction in a book of fact. But it is true, nevertheless, and I venture to declare it will be a tale in the knob country long after later and lesser things have been forgotten.

As the mule fell the negro boy screeched and climbed out the nearest window. A minute later the shop was full of an excited, noisy, inquiring crowd. Some one led Buck to the tub of water in which he cooled hot iron, and bathed his wound, never worrying as to whether this especial water would be entirely sanitary. The carcass quickly became the center of a circle of amazed countrymen, and I, the only silent one present, leaned against the jamb of the door and slowly filled my pipe. The demonstration which I had just witnessed was not particularly comforting.

A youth of about nineteen stood near the mule's head. He was barefooted, and the sum total of his apparel consisted of two garments; a shirt with only one button, which was at the throat, and a pair of pants (not trousers) which came to an abrupt conclusion several inches above his big ankle bones. He wore no hat of any description. Had he possessed one when the alarm was given, it had disappeared in the hurried rush which followed. This youth was powerfully impressed.

"Daid!... Plum' daid!" I heard him exclaim, in an awed undertone, withdrawing for a moment the fixed gaze with which he had regarded the mule ever since he came, to give a sweeping glance of incredulity around.

"Daid ez a nit he is, fur sho!" agreed another, a merry-faced fellow with a rotund paunch, over which the band to his pants refused to meet. "A hunnerd 'n' fifty dollars' wuth o' live meat turned

to cyarn in a secint.... Who's gunta pay fur it? Whut 's th' law, 'Squar?"

He looked at a big, full-whiskered man with his back to me.

The 'Squire cleared his throat and felt for his tobacco.

The mule's owner thrust forward in the interim, and brought up just in front of the magistrate.

"Yes, I wan' to know th' damn law on th' subjic', too!" he bellowed, making no apparent effort to curb his feelings. "Wuth a hunnerd 'n' sev'nty-five—wuth two hunnerd wuz that mule! Six foot 'n' 'n inch—thar he is! Measure 'im if yo' don't b'lieve me! Th' bes' yearlin' in my barn—mealy-nosed, to boot! So much good cash to be drug out to th' buzzards—*damn!*"

He spat on the ground and twisted his booted heel in rage.

"This is a onusual case—I mought say a on-pre-ce-dinted case," drawled the 'Squire, in a conciliatory voice. "We'll settle it right here 'n' now, a'cordin' to th' test'munny 'n' my readin' o' th' law, ever'body bein' 'gree'ble. Yo' c'n take it to th' cote, sholy, but th' lawyers 'll eat yo' up. Bes' settle am-am-am'c'ble, right here 'n' now."

At this juncture Buck's tall form arose from beside the tub, where he had been sitting on a nail keg while a motherly Hebron matron had put balsam to the hurt, and bound it with a white cloth. He came slowly forward, his leathern apron still about him, and pushed his way through the ring.

"Whut yo' mouth'n' 'bout, Bart Crawley?" he demanded. The fire in his eyes had died to a smoldering gleam, but his mood was ugly.

The man addressed looked at him, then immediately shuffled back a little.

"That's th' bes' hoss mule in these parts—"

"Yo' mean he *wuz* th' bes' hoss mule!" interrupted Buck, in a spirit of reckless deviltry.

Crawley flushed, paled, clenched his fists and glared hate at the speaker.

"Here now, men," spoke up the 'Squire, laying a knotty hand upon the shoulder of the owner. "Leas' said's soones' mended. They's no manner o' ust carry'n' hard feelin's any fu'ther.... Buck, shet up!... Bart, keep *yo'* trap shet till I git th' straight o' this. Whur's th' witnesses'? Who saw th' killin' o' this here mule?"

His head went up, and his eyes roved over the packed interior of the shop.

Just then I wished myself away. Could I have foreseen the public inquiry now afoot, I certainly would have put myself beyond reach, for Buck was to blame in this affair, and my testimony would necessarily show it. Naturally I did not want to arouse any ill-feeling I could avoid. Perhaps even now I might slip away unobserved. But the thought was doomed even as it flashed into my mind. Bart Crawley promptly made answer.

"Me 'n' th' nigger 'n' Buck—'n' him!" pointing triumphantly at me.

Instantly every eye was turned upon me. I looked straight at Buck, calmly and steadily. His return stare was ominous, and during the brief time we held each other's eyes, I believed I read in his the message that he had waited as long as he was going to—or could.

The voice of the 'Squire, speaking in slurring accents, broke upon the silence which had fallen. He plainly was making an effort to uphold the dignity of his high office, from the painstaking way in which he delivered himself.

"Bart, ez owner o' th' defunc' animile, I 'low yo've got fus' say. Tell jes' how, 'n' w'y, this here yearlin' hoss mule wuz struck'n down daid by Buck Steele."

Mr. Crawley, holding that the relation of any incident would be imperfect shorn of the minutest circumstance preceding, as well as accompanying it, began thus:

"Well, 'Squar, this mawn'n' at feed'n' time, 'long 'bout sunup, I s'pose, ur it mought 'a' ben a bit before, I tol' my boy Tommy—my secint boy, th' one 'ith th' harelip, yo' know 'im—that I 'tended to hev shoes—"

"They 's no ust o' tellin' whut yo' et fur breakfus', Bart," broke in the magistrate, with unconscious irony. "Begin at th' time w'en yo' entered into this here shop with yo' mule."

"Well," resumed Mr. Crawley, "I rid up to th' do' 'n' slid off o' my mule, 'n' said, 'Mawn'n', Buck, how's yo' corp'ros'ty?' kind o' churf'l lak, 'cus yo' know I don't hate nobody. Buck 's foolin' 'ith a wag'n tar, 'n' 'peared kind o' grumpy as if he had n't slep' good ur else some'n' he et had n't sot well with 'im. He grunted, sort o', by way o' answer, 'n' I led my hoss mule in 'n' tol' 'im whut I wanted. They's a couple o' Hir'm Toddler's kids in here then, scratch'n' 'roun' in th' hoof-shav'n's hunt'n' hoss-shoe nails, lak young-uns 'll do. Well, Buck didn't 'pear overanxious 'bout th' job, so to sweet'n his sperit a little I tol' 'im a joke 'bout—"

"I objec' to th' joke, Bart," interrupted the 'Squire again, in a very judicial manner, clearing his throat as he had heard the judge do in Cedarton.

"All right, 'Squar, we'll pass th' joke but it's a durn good 'n'. Well, then I tol' Buck that th' mule wuz green 'n' had never saw inside a blacksmith's shop befo', 'n' Buck 'lowed kind o' vicious lak:

'Damn th' mule, he'd shoe 'im green ur broke!' My joke didn't 'pear to sof'n 'im one bit, but it's wuth lis'n'n' to, 'Squar. We've tol' it in our section off 'n' on fur a matter o' two year, I reck'n, 'n' ever' time it's good, sho! Well, Buck stayed grumpy 'n' got th' shoes, 'n' spite o' whut I tol' 'im he marched right up to that animile's hind parts 'n' rech down 'n' grabbed a hock same 'twuz a ol' plow-hoss. Then th' critter let drive, b'gosh! 'n' it come blame near bein' th' end o' Buck, I'm here to tell yo'! Right then Hir'm's kids skedaddled same as if a skunk 'd let loose 'n' d'rec'ly *he* come sa'nter'n' 'long 'n' leaned ag'in th' door." The speaker's toil-twisted forefinger again pointed straight at me. "Then I tol' Buck to be keerful, 'cus I saw he's in a' ugly way, 'n' I tried to w'eedle 'im, kin' o' lak yo' would a spoilt kid. 'N' he did go after that hin' foot some keerfuller th' nex' time, but fus' thin' yo' know that hin' leg riz same as a snare-saplin' 'n' th' aidge o' that hoof plowed a furrer plum' 'crost Buck's head. My guts went all trimbly w'en I seen it, 'n' my knees got weak. 'Fo' God I thought he's killed! But no, sir! Up he riz frum whur he'd jumped back 'n' scrooched down, 'n' he paid no more min' to th' blood in 'is eyes than if it'd 'a' ben sweat. He retch back 'is fis', gen'lemen, same 't wuz a sledge-hammer, 'n' he slewed that mule! Same as Sam's'n killed th' 'Malekites in Holy Scriptur 'ith th' jaw-bone uv a jinny! Down he fell, quiv'r'n' 'n' daid! Didn't even bresh 'is tail onct, nur snort, nur bat a' eye! That yearlin' hoss mule whut I say is wuth two hunnerd 'n' fifty dollars uv any man's money, black ur w'ite. 'N' now he's buzzard-food, not wuth haul'n' out o' this here shop. Gen'lemen, I want jestic!"

Mr. Crawley had managed to work himself up into rather a fine frenzy as he talked, and he gave a dramatic and telling illustration of how the mule met his end. When he concluded with a sweeping gesture entirely devoid of meaning, a quick survey of his audience showed me plainly that public sentiment was on his side. A few moments of absolute silence prevailed, broken at length by the rustling of the 'Squire's horny hand as he shoved it into his pants pocket for another chew. The occasion was one which required plenty of tobacco. He gnawed off a generous portion of the plug after much head-twisting, but as he prepared to resume the investigation something happened.

The smith had remained quiet and silent during Bart's elaborate recital, but his somber eyes had never left the other man's face. With the impassioned, if crude, harangue with which Bart concluded his testimony, I noted portents of a storm. The dominant elements in Buck's nature were purely barbarian. He had suffered much of late, and self-control was something which he did not know, even remotely. Later he probably would be ashamed of the blow he had dealt the harmless thing at his feet which had been obeying its instinct in offering resistance to something which it feared. But that moment such reason as Buck habitually possessed was submerged in a black wave of hate. I saw it coming, from my position by the door. I saw flashes beneath the down-drawn lids, restrained heaving of the big, hairy chest, hands which were fists and hands alternately, and on the heavy features an expression nothing short of devilish. He waited a while after Bart finished—waited until the 'Squire had succeeded with his chew, then he took two swift steps and faced the mule owner.

"Yo' damn dog!" he hissed. "I c'd th'ow yo' thoo that winder! I c'd wring yo' naik lak a chick'n! I c'd lay yo' 'crost that anv'l 'n' break yo' back lak a splinter o' pine, 'n' yo' know it! But yo're not wuth it! Damn yo' 'n' yo' mule! Damn th' 'Squar! All o' yo'—to hell with yo'!"

Accurately, deliberately, he spat a mouthful of ambier on Bart Crawley's nose, then turned and left the shop, people falling back in fright before him.

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Two hours later I turned my face toward Bald Knob. The investigation was never finished, partly because it was unanimously conceded Buck was in the wrong from the manner in which he had behaved, and partly because Bart struck out at once for Cedarton to prefer charges against the smith and swear out a warrant for his arrest. The unexpected and startling denouement wrought consternation in the shop, and the opinion was given freely that Buck must be "off." Certain it is he left Hebron at once, going up the railroad, and no one followed him. The crowd instantly gathered around me with many honest, well-intentioned questions, and I told them frankly that as far as I knew Bart had told the truth. Many and divers were the comments anent Buck's queer actions, but a simmering down resulted in the generally accepted opinion that he surely was "off." I thought this, too, in a measure, although I did not speak it, for I knew things which the people of Hebron did not.

But I tarried among them for the space of two hours, listening to their uncouth colloquialisms and provincial sayings; and when, finally, a game of horse-shoes started in the middle of the road just in front of the store, and a self-appointed committee of two began to ascend the hill to acquaint Father John with the only real event of the year, I started home.

I was not at ease. One of the reasons I had lingered was in the hope that Buck would return. But he didn't. The man was desperate. I could doubt it no longer. He was half crazy. Ordinarily he would have compromised with Bart. He was now simply an unchained devil, loose and bent on mischief.

My feelings were not soothed when I reached the Lodge. Pinned to the door with the same nail which had held the message was a sheet of my writing paper, and on it was a large, rude cross, traced with a finger which had been dipped in blood.

It was the third and last warning.

## CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

### IN WHICH I SPAR WITH DEATH

The past week, culminating on the night in which I sit and write with barred door and shuttered windows, has been a hard and dangerous one for me. Three times have I escaped death so narrowly it would seem Providence had a hand in the game. On no occasion was the would-be assassin visible, but I knew well chance had not aimed these well directed blows at my life. I can't understand Buck's tactics. They are hidden, merciless, savage in their deadly intention. I had not thought he would stoop to this. I had eliminated this contingency when considering my plan of action. It was incredible, but no doubt lingers in my heart to-night. Buck Steele is trying to murder me secretly, and in such a way that it would seem the result of an accident. His plots suggest the cunning of an unsettled mind, but, while it certainly is strained under the force of his mad passion, I do not believe Buck's brain is unbalanced. He wants me out of the way, but at the same time he wants to avoid any odium, and be free to live his life here at Hebron. He knows that if he kills me openly it will mean, at the least, exile. I have thought long and often over the problem, and I am sure I have come upon the right solution. That he does not compel a meeting which could result in a fair fight, from which no especial blame would revert to him should he prove the victor, is simply because he is afraid to undergo the risk—to accept the possibility of being killed instead of killing. I do not mean by this that he is a coward, but his desire for Celeste has so wrought upon him that he is casting aside all chances for defeat, though his sense of honor and fair play, if he had any, goes with them. He has become a scheming machine, and a most formidable one, I must confess. Now I will make a brief record of what has taken place the last seven days.

Saturday night, at bedtime, I debated the question of closing the Lodge, following the discovery of the final, crimson warning. I hesitated to confess to myself that I had begun to feel fear, but something had waked within me that whispered I must be careful from that hour. I don't think I would have known this feeling had my enemy been open and fair in his movements. But it is human nature to dread the invisible terror which lurks in the dark, and I knew that I was doing the sensible thing when I barred my door and dropped the shutter of the window next my cot. I made this shutter secure by a long hook which fitted into a large staple. Before I blew out the lamp, I looked at the other window for a long time. At last I decided that Buck could not squeeze his bulk through the opening, and went to bed.

I fell asleep quickly, although my mind was not at ease. This mental condition must have led to my waking about midnight, which was an unprecedented thing. I lay and listened. I heard something, and it was not the wind; for, though a breeze was souging in the pines without, the sound of footsteps was distinctly audible. They paused at the door, passed on to the closed window, paused again, then went around to the open window. Quietly I slid my hand under my pillow and drew out my revolver. Luckily, I lay facing the small opening. Otherwise I would have feared to turn, on account of the noise the act would have involved. The square aperture was barely discernible, and I judged from this the night was cloudy. Fixing my gaze on the window with the utmost intensity, I raised my weapon and waited, determining at the same time not to fire until I saw that my life was in danger. A formless shape blotted the square of less dense gloom, and for a time there was silence. I think the prowler was trying to locate me, and I breathed softly, making no sound. The wait was interminable to me, though in reality I suppose it was not over a minute. Then the shape at the window swayed from side to side, noiselessly, sank down, to reappear at once. I heard a rustling, a muffled tattoo like a dry bean pod makes in an autumn gust, and while my mind was yet filled with wonder as to what was going to happen, the shape twisted grotesquely and I heard a slithering as of one body over another. The next instant something cold and crawly struck my upheld wrist, slid across it, and dropped with a fleshy thud on the floor. Horror gripped me then. Horror supreme and terrible. I could have shrieked had my voice not been shut in my breast. I trembled from head to foot, and icy waves swept me all over. What was that? What could it have been but—At that moment one of the most appalling and nerve-racking sounds arose that ever turned a mortal's blood to water, and his brave courage into craven cowardice. It was the hair-raising warning of an angered rattlesnake! With a snarling cry of sheer terror I sprang up in bed and fired at the window—three times before I could control my forefinger, which was acting automatically. The act was spontaneous. I did not shoot with the desire to hit anybody. None of the bullets passed through the window, as I discovered the next morning. Following the reports was the sound of some one running, accompanied by a second whirring rattle. Could that thing see in the dark? Was it preparing to leap upon me? When the rattling ceased this time I knew it would spring. Dashing the cover from me I threw myself toward the foot of the bed, a clammy perspiration bursting out upon me as I did so. I reached the floor. As I stretched a shaking hand toward the spot where I knew the table was, to my ears came the evil sound of the impact of the reptile's body against the edge of the cot, and its subsequent fall to the planks beneath. In the stark stillness followed the sibilant sliding of fold over fold as the monster coiled afresh—whispers of a hideous doom. My palsied fingers touched the table, and presently I was on top of it, crouching among my books and manuscripts, feeling feebly for the lamp and the matches. Before I could make a light it sprang again, again failed to surmount the cot, and dropped back. Four matches broke in my clumsy grip, but the fifth struck. I got the lamp alight before I turned. The sight was awesome enough, but far better the visible menace than the death-dealing thing which moved in darkness. It was coiled there, just at the edge of my

bed. Great, thick, fleshy, splotched folds interwoven into a sinister spiral, from the center of which arose the rattle-capped tail, now vibrating with the rapidity of an alarm bell. In front was reared the repulsive head; flat, gem-eyed. When I looked upon this world-old emblem of treachery and guile, my normal being became reestablished with a suddenness almost amounting to a wrench. Now that I saw, and knew; now that my brain could comprehend the exact situation, and handle it, I became a man once more. But I would offer no apology for my conduct the few preceding minutes. If it appears contemptible, it must remain so. But I was never nearer dead from plain, simple fright than I was during that time.

I grew calm almost at once. The snake was dazed by the light, and made no third assault, though still retaining his fighting posture, and sending out that indescribable alarm now and then. I had dropped my revolver when I threw myself from the cot, and now saw the weapon lying among the bedclothes near the foot. I was master of myself again. Quietly stepping down, I secured the revolver, and ten seconds later it was all over. Then I opened the door and flung the carcass outside, came in and barricaded the entrance again. No longer did I hesitate about the open window, but went and fastened it in the same manner I had the other. My foot struck some object. It was a pasteboard shoe box of extraordinary size. I picked it up and walked nearer the lamp. One end was slit down at the corners so that when the top was lifted it would fall, as on a hinge.

I placed the box on the table, took a stiff drink of whisky, found my pipe, and lit up. I needed bracing, for when I grasped the full significance of this foul and devilish attack, a physical nausea came. The liquor brought a reaction, and I sat down in my nightshirt, puffing vigorously and regarding the big shoe box in a fascinated way. There were rattlesnakes about—plenty of them. I had heard them and seen them on my many journeys through the wilderness, but I had always given them undisputed possession of the especial territory they happened to be occupying when we met. Buck had caught one; a patriarch from his size. The capture was not difficult. These reptiles' lidless eyes have a very short range of vision. A careful man with a forked stick can scotch one whenever he wishes. The transfer to a box was also simple. All of this he had done, and had then come in the middle of the night with the fell intent of dropping that thing on me, asleep. I don't think I have ever heard or read of a project equally as dastardly and devoid of all feeling. It was something the very devil would shudder to confess.

The second attempt to remove me in an apparently natural manner came Tuesday.

Sunday and Monday I kept to the plateau. I did not believe the smith had reached that point of desperation where he would shoot me down openly, and it was out of the question for me to remain a prisoner in the Lodge. I had no doubt that I was watched, although I neither saw nor heard anything to confirm this suspicion.

I measured the rattler before burying it, and found it five feet long and four and a half inches thick at the largest part. It was of mammoth proportions for the Kentucky knobs, where they seldom exceeded three feet in length. I was glad when the noisome thing was out of sight.

Tuesday morning the thought came to me that perhaps Buck had fallen in the clutches of the law. I was aware of a sensation of relief at the probability, and the fact that two days and nights had passed without any untoward manifestation would appear to render the idea altogether reasonable. Bart Crawley, furious and revengeful, had started hotfoot for the county seat Saturday to issue a warrant. It was the duty of the sheriff or a deputy to serve it at once, and take the offender into custody. I resolved to go to Hebron and find out. I knew I was taking a great risk, for the road was lonely and secluded, and there was the thick forest to traverse before reaching Lizard Point. No man could wish for better surroundings in which to commit a hidden crime. And, however watchful I might be, I would stand no chance whatever with my life should an effort be made against it. There was not a rod of ground along the entire route where an ambush could not have been successfully laid. The outlook was depressing, but I decided upon the venture anyway, for could I know the smith was lodged in jail, a grievous burden would be lifted from my mind.

There were no precautions I could take before starting forth. I simply bore my stout stick in my left hand, and kept my right in the side pocket of my coat, clasping the handle of my revolver. That was all I could do. A sense of foolhardiness enveloped me as I strode down from the plateau along the tree-bordered, vine-grown way. Would a truly well balanced person thus jeopardize his life? Most likely he would not. But a certain recklessness of spirit had come upon me, begotten of the Dryad's cruel absence, my long wait, and the abrupt aggressiveness of Buck. When a man's temperament becomes surcharged with a sentiment of this color, you may look for him to do things which had not even bordered his existence in saner moods. As I proceeded without molestation, a sort of dogged defiance gained ascendancy and my head went higher, while my face became set in a mask of determination.

I saw no one. I heard nothing but the peaceful sounds of Nature and her creatures. Surely Buck was in the toils, or he never would have let this golden opportunity go by unemployed. When I came to the tree-bridge my apprehensions had vanished; I did not dread the remainder of the journey. I was conscious of a sharp shock of pain when I looked at the still empty house where Celeste lived. Had I yielded to the importunity of the eager voices which began to clamor in my soul at the sight, I speedily would have become undone. I have not written of the terrific fight I have had since my sane self conquered that night on the peak, but the reason for this is that I do not want to appear absolutely silly in the eyes of those who may read these words. But it took all that was in me to hold to the hard path of sanity and common sense. My love for her of the

wheat-gold hair—

Quickly I crossed the bridge and turned toward Hebron, setting my teeth on my lower lip in firm resolve, and walking rapidly.

When I came within view of the hamlet I halted and listened. No ringing sound floated across to me from the shop; the forge was still. I went on, more slowly. Everything seemed to support the theory that my enemy had been arrested. The smithy was open, but empty; the fire was dead. I pushed forward to the store. Mr. Todler (I had learned his name only the Saturday before) was not sitting on the porch this morning, and for good reason. The sun was blazing hot, and fell squarely upon the cracker box where the storekeeper was wont to rest. It is true he might have removed the box to the other side of the door, where the sun did not reach, but this would have involved some effort. I went in. At first I thought the place vacant, and stood listening to some green flies buzzing and butting their foolish heads against the window panes—panes so dirty that they looked like mica. Then I saw Mr. Todler. He was stretched upon the dry goods counter in a space about seven feet clear, his head resting upon a thick bolt of unbleached cotton, a newspaper over his face. Back of him were other bolts of different kinds, piled one upon another, and on top of the whole lay a tortoise-shell cat, slumbering peacefully. Mr. Todler was slumbering, too, but not peacefully. The store was taking care of itself.

Assuming that this singular person went to sleep with the expectation of being aroused should a customer perchance arrive, I removed the newspaper, hoping thus to waken him. But the sweet bonds which held him were not to be loosened so lightly. He snored on, and I found myself regarding his grimy collar, his frayed, soiled, green-and-yellow necktie—one of the ready-made kind, where you stick a band through a hole and it catches on a pin. I grasped his shoulder and shook him, for the information I sought was of the first importance. He uttered a sound which was the mingling of a grunt and a groan, and began to bat his heavy lids slowly.

"Whut yo' want?" he muttered, thick-tongued because of sleep which still pressed upon him.

"Is Buck Steele in jail?" I asked, quickly, for I saw symptoms which pointed toward another period of unconsciousness.

"Buck?" he said, faintly, and in a way which led me to believe that he had not comprehended my question. His eyes had shut again.

"Yes, Buck!" I cried, shaking him a second time, and lifting my voice to a hard key. "Bart Crawley went for a warrant Saturday. Has the sheriff got him yet? Answer yes or no, and I won't bother you any more!"

Mr. Todler neither rose nor stirred under my vehement words, but his eyes came open listlessly, he blinked at me for a few seconds, and replied:

"He wa'nt tuk w'en I we'n to sleep. Whut's more, he ain't a-goin' to git tuk—not Buck!"

This lengthy speech must have been exhausting, for Mr. Todler sighed wearily at its conclusion, turned his head with a grimace, and slowly dragged the newspaper over his face again.

I did not thank him. The news had been too hard to win, and was too unsatisfactory.

The man was right. I saw clearly on the instant that Buck would never submit to incarceration. He had graver business on hand than simply obeying the law's behest.

I began the return tramp with my spirit cast down and troubled. If Jeff Angel only would come, and bring the Dryad! I would not—I could not leave before her home-coming. Though a bloodthirsty blacksmith lurked behind every tree in the locality, yet would I stay. If the next few days found her back, I might manage to elude Buck, and get us away safely. *Us!* Yes, she should go with me. Although I had made no declaration, some intuition told me that all would be well could I once more stand in her presence. Enough had come to my knowledge to merit this assurance.

I turned from the highway and took the knob road going past Lizard Point. About a half-mile from the pike, the dirt road ran under a cliff for a number of rods; a sheer limestone precipice fifty or sixty feet high. It was here, although introspectively engrossed almost to the point of abstraction, that I suddenly knew a danger threatened me. I was striding swiftly along, and when the thought came I stopped abruptly. Two more steps would have stretched me dead. For instantly I heard a low whistling sound which gathered volume, something whizzed downward before my face, so close that I felt the air from its passage and jumped back. A huge stone, large as a half-bushel, struck the soft earth almost at my feet, rebounded, and rolled over into a patch of fennel ten feet distant.

I looked up, rage giving me a daring which mocked at risk. Where I stood I made yet an excellent target, but I did not think of this then. A harsh laugh drifted down; I saw the thick foliage on the lip of the precipice become violently agitated, and I fancied I heard the cracking of dry twigs, as under a heavy, careless step. I could not follow, though in my heart that moment I had the fierce desire to slay. I had never known this before. It was awful—but it was also sweet! I could have killed that creeping coward above me and laughed in joy. Something became unfettered within me which I never knew I possessed. Something which for the moment I could not have restrained had the object of my wrath stood before me. In that instant centuries were bridged, and my forebears of the stone age had a fitting representative in my being. This wave of primal, mindless



passion which bade me destroy ruthlessly did not subside at once, and it was only after I had pursued my way for some time that I experienced the resurgent flow of my normal self.

I did not anticipate a second attack before I reached home. Each of these cowardly efforts had been planned in advance, and had either succeeded no one could have pointed at Buck Steele as my slayer. I was safe for another day, at least, so, gaining a temporary relief from this fact, I trudged on moodily to the Lodge.

Next day at noon, as I turned from the well with a bucket of water in my hand, I saw a belted and booted figure coming toward me from the spot where the road led up. The stranger had an athletic bearing, wore a cheap straw hat much out of shape, and carried a rifle in the hollow of his arm. I advanced to meet him, for I guessed his mission at once.

"You're the sheriff of this county?" I asked pleasantly, setting my bucket down, and shaking hands.

The man took his hat off and drew his shirt sleeve across his streaming face. The imprint of his hatband showed a red bar across his white forehead.

"Nope; deputy. Been huntin' a blacksmith fur the las' four days, 'n' it's worse 'n huntin' four-leaf clover."

He chuckled, as though the task was not as onerous as his words implied, and hitched his trousers.

"Plenty of room to hide out here," I agreed. "Come over to the house and have a drink. You seem hot."

"Well, I reck'n. Bad time o' year fur a manhunt."

He walked beside me to a bench, and when he had greedily swallowed three cups of water I asked him to sit down and rest a while. The invitation pleased him, and presently we had launched into an animated conversation. I soon learned that he had been in and about Hebron most of his time; that he had not even caught a glimpse of his quarry, and that someone in the hamlet had suggested that he come to see me. A moment's reflection showed me that I could not make a confidant of the officer, much as I wished to, for an explanation of Buck's animosity would be in order. This I could not give without bringing in the name of a third party, and exposing to a chance acquaintance the cherished secret in my heart. No, Buck and I must settle this affair alone, and in silence. So I told the deputy instead that I was present when the mule was killed, and that it actually was accomplished with a single blow from the fist. Whereupon, he declared that he was glad to have Bart Crawley's statement verified, as most of the citizens of Cedarton had taken it with a grain of salt, but personally he believed it true. Then he became quite chatty, and proceeded to relate some of the exploits of Buck's father, a giant who for girth and stature had surpassed his son. I listened politely to the rambling narrative, taking much comfort in the simple presence of my caller.

"Th' ol' man finally went crazy," concluded the deputy; "yellin', whoopin' crazy, 'n' jumped off a bluff in the river one winter night."

"Went crazy?"

My lips repeated the two words involuntarily, and I turned to the man as though I had not heard aright. The statement formed a portent of dread to my mind.

"Yep; whoopin' crazy," confirmed the cheery voice. "He got crossed some way with somebody 'n' worried hisself wild. Ol' people tell me it's a fam'ly failin'—that mos' of 'em end that way.... This Buck, now, hidin' out this-a-way. 'Tain't nat'r'l, is it?... I dunno."

He shook his head and gazed out over the wide forest with drawn brows.

I did not reply, but slowly reached for my pipe.

"When a feller's in office 'n' 's give a war'int, he's got to serve it, or go yeller. I didn't hanker fur this here 'p'intment, I'm free to say, 'n' if I'd a-knowed Buck's a-hidin' out, be durned if I b'lieve I'd 'a' come! Some'n' 's eatin' on Buck 'sides killin' that mule—you can't tell me!... Well, I mus' be scoutin' on." He got on his feet, drank another cup of water, and stood for a moment gripping the muzzle of his rifle with both hands, its stock grounded between his feet. "Don't s'pose you've laid eyes on 'im'?" he added, in a softer, musing tone.

"No; not since he walked out of the shop that day."

Suddenly the deputy wheeled and faced me.

"Pardner," he said, seriously enough considering the almost bantering note he had formerly employed; "I b'lieve Buck's goin' the same way his pappy did!"

"Why?"

I tried to hold my voice to a brave level, but the monosyllable rang hollow.

"The signs ain't right," came the instantaneous reply. "Buck'd never'd 'a' laid out that mule if he'd been hisseff, in the firs' place. He's shoed young mules by the dozen. In the nex' place he'd 'a' settled with Bart instead o' spittin' in 'is face 'n' damnin' ever'body 'n' the law, too. I've got a

notion to lose this pesky war'int 'n' go back to where people live!"

He moodily pressed his hand to a pocket in his shirt, and I caught the rustle of paper. Then he laughed softly, said good-by rather abruptly, and strode away.

I shall not attempt to make a record of the thoughts which assailed me after the deputy had gone.

Yesterday came the third attempt on my life.

Believing now that my rival's mind was affected, and that he had received the fixed and determined idea of making away with me in some manner which would appear wholly natural, I no longer remained within the Lodge, or kept to the restricted limits of the plateau. I walked abroad, always careful and watchful, it is true, and keeping my feet from suspicious paths. My longing for the Dryad had become a sort of mania, and each morning I arose with the fervent hope that that day would bring her back home. How I looked for the ragged, uncouth shape of Jeff Angel! But his grotesque figure remained absent, and I was left to unfruitful contemplation, a prey to dread.

Yesterday I chose a new route. Inaction was past endurance, and my daily rambles were all that sustained me. It was midafternoon when I found myself on the flank of a precipitous knob, several miles from home. I had proceeded cautiously for quite a distance, as my aimless steps had led me to what really was a perilous position. A massive ledge of stone cropped out of the knob at the place where I traversed it, and below was an unbroken fall of many feet, into a valley thickly grown with trees. I stopped to enjoy the scene, for even in my present mental turmoil the sight demanded recognition and appreciation. I leaned forward and out, retaining my balance by a careful exercise of certain muscles. The verdant glory of the all-embracing hills, the limitless sweep of the tree-clad ranges and valleys, and the bosky tangle of the spot beneath me, combined to work keenly upon my sensibilities. I loved Nature. I worshiped in the vine-draped, bloom-lit courts of the untamed wild; in the temple not made by hands whereof each towering tree was a column, and each moss-hung boulder an altar. It was here my soul exulted, where the tinkle of a hidden rivulet made dulcet music, and the attar from many a flower's chalice spread abroad its peerless incense—Nature's undefiled offering to Nature's God. I was uplifted in that moment, as I leaned forward and drank in the manifold delights displayed freely for my hungry eyes.

In the midst of this elation of spirit, a fiendish shout of triumph rang in my ears, and I felt a heavy hand upon my back shoving me violently forward—to destruction. Too late I realized my indiscretion. I had allowed sentiment to usurp the place of judgment. While I was reveling in the matchless scene Nature had prepared for my delectation, and had offered without reserve, Buck had stolen cat-footed upon me. I wrenched my body about in a furious effort to retain my foothold, but the next moment I was falling through space. Like a stone I fell, down—down. I crashed through the top of an oak, struck a limb, passed it in some way, fell, struck another, slid along it, and brought up against the trunk with a fearful jar.

For a moment I did not attempt to move. Then slowly I got astride the limb and made an investigation. But for a pain in my side, where the contact with the first limb had bruised it, I had escaped as by a miracle. Thinking that Buck might make a detour, and come to see if I really had perished, I descended to the ground as quickly as possible, and returned to the Lodge in a roundabout way.

Most of to-day I have spent under roof, brooding over the somber problem which hourly grows more threatening. Matters have about reached a climax. I cannot veil the truth from myself. If the smith is insane there is no telling what move he will make next. An unbalanced mind is never steadfast, and any minute he may abandon the tactics thus far employed, and adopt safer and surer means to compass my destruction.

It is fearfully hot in here, because the room is shut tight. I would not think once now of lying down to sleep with a window open. A few more days will tell the story. I am unnaturally calm, I believe, considering all that has occurred this week. I am not frightened, but I am anxious. I don't want to mar these peaceful pages with the narration of a tragedy. I don't want to confess to them how I slew a fellow creature. I am a man of peace. But it comes to me to-night that forces beyond my control are at work. That, unless Celeste comes soon, the concluding act in the drama will be played. It may be that I shall not be alive to chronicle its end. It may be that I shall go down to death with my love-dream unfinished. But I do not believe this. If worse comes to worse, I believe that I shall be the conqueror. I have no reason for this, other than the supreme faith I have in my ability to cope with the smith of Hebron.

I pray it all may end speedily, for I have borne as much as mortal can.

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## CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

### IN WHICH, THOUGH THE WORLD IS STILL A VOID, THERE IS THE SHINING OF A GREAT LIGHT

Two days have passed.

Sunday was one long monotony, made up of vain watching and restless contemplation. To-day something really stupendous happened. Something so truly great and vital that, even though Celeste has not returned, and, for aught I know, my death hides in the next minute, I am deliriously happy. I'll tell the glorious news as quickly as I can.

This morning, bright and early, a messenger arrived from Father John. He bore no written communication, but stated in a nervous, jerky, breathless way that his reverence desired my presence at the earliest possible moment, on a matter of the gravest importance. These were not his words, but this is the way his halting vernacular translated into English. I questioned the shabby, awkward rustic. He knew nothing but that I was wanted, and wanted quickly, and that he who sent this word was "tarnation fidgety." Unable to form any sort of conjecture as to the nature of this peculiarly urgent business, I departed at once in company with the half grown youth, not sorry of his presence upon this occasion, as I probably would have been upon any other.

The old priest met me at the door, and I saw at once that he was powerfully impressed, for some reason. His long-stemmed pipe was in his hand, but unlighted. He decorously led me to the chair where I had sat upon a former visit, and took a seat opposite. The library table was between us, as before. I saw two letters upon the table in front of him, side by side. One was almost square, pale blue, and a glance told me the superscription was a woman's. The other was of the regular business size, had a card in the corner which I could not make out, and the address was typewritten. I waited in silence.

"M'sieu—"

He stopped, and I saw that his emotion was pressing hard upon him. His sensitive lips quivered and twitched, and the muscles of his face were agitated. A sympathetic pity took the place of wonder within me, and I had the desire to do or say something which would help him. But there was nothing I could do or say. I was completely in the dark, and could only give him respectful, but silent attention.

"M'sieu," he began again, after a brief interval during which I knew he was struggling manfully with his feelings; "I have somezing to say—much to say. Never was I so shock—so hurt, m'sieu. Never more s'prise'." His voice grew to a surer tone now. "I have here two letter. Zis is from Bereel." He put the tip of one yellow finger upon the pale blue envelope. "In it she confess she tol' ze—ze—ze lie on you. She say now it was ze joke, an' for me to correc'; zat she made ze love to you, an' not you to her. O ze shame, m'sieu—ze shame!" He put one hand across his eyes and shook his head sorrowfully. "I belief her w'en she tol' me zat firs' tale, for she is my blood, an' I love her, an' I was anger wiz you, m'sieu. If Bereel an' I have cause' you to suffer an' to loose ze li'l wil' ma'm'selle—I shall never forgive us! Ah! m'sieu, I am 'shame' to as for pardon—but she was my blood—my Bereel, an' I b'lief her."

"Don't be too grieved, father," I broke in here. "I won't deny that much harm has befallen because of this strange and unprovoked falsehood Miss Drane saw fit to tell you. I was driven from the home at Lizard Point in consequence of it, and soon thereafter Granny disappeared, taking Gran'fer and Celeste with her. Of my own sufferings I will not speak. I forgive Miss Drane, freely, now that she attempts to set matters right; as for yourself, dear sir, there is nothing to forgive. You only acted in good faith, and as you should have acted upon receipt of the information which you did not once doubt was genuine."

He hastily seized my hand in gratitude which was real as it was affecting, and his bright eyes shone with feeling as he answered:

"You are noble, m'sieu; mag—magnan'mous. I cannot sank you—I can only say, God bless you!"

He released my hand and dropped back in his chair, beginning to puff absently at his cold pipe.

Beryl Drane's belated confession, startling as it was in a way, and of a nature to ordinarily work in a most gratifying manner upon my spirit, did not long remain paramount in my thoughts. Father John seemed to have lapsed into a sort of revery, and as the silence lengthened I found my eyes going back again and again to the second envelope. What was in it? Father John had included it almost in his first sentence. It could not be from any of the vanished family, because of the typed address, and yet it evidently contained something of interest to me. Directly I purposely changed my position, and coughed slightly. The effort succeeded. The priest started, lifted his head with a smile and an indistinguishable murmur, and picked up the second envelope.

"Zis, m'sieu," he said, in a voice tinged with awe, as he drew out the enclosure, "is won'erful. It is ze han' of God shapin' human affairs."

Slowly, with an expression almost beatific on his sweet old face, suddenly glorified by some triumphant inner flame of supreme faith, he put out his arm and placed the folded sheets in my hand.

"Read it—all," he said, simply, then cast himself back in his chair, closed his eyes, and intertwined his fingers under his chin.

"NOTRE DAME, INDIANA,  
"August 1st, 19—"

"*Rt. Rev. Jean Dupré,*  
"*Hebron, Ky.*"

"DEAR FR. DUPRÉ: I write you at the instance and request of one Hannibal Ellsworth, with whose geological researches in the shape of valuable contributions to periodical literature you are doubtless familiar. At any rate you know, or did know the man, for he died last night.

"Late yesterday evening word came from a hospital that a patient dangerously ill wanted to see a priest. I went. I soon found that it was not for the purpose of spiritual confession and preparation for death that I was wanted, for the man was not only non-Catholic, but an unbeliever as well, but for a confession of another sort. I shall put his story in my own words, for I recall well everything he said, though I cannot attempt to give it in his language.

"He said his name was Hannibal Ellsworth—a name with which I was quite familiar, though I had never seen the man before—that he was fifty-five years old, and that twenty years ago he was guilty of a deadly sin. In pursuit of his work, he had gone into the knobs about Hebron, and finding the field so rich, he erected a house, or cabin, about half way up the slope of a certain high knob having a bald, conical peak. Here he lived for more than a year. Here he won the love of a neighborhood girl—her first name was Araminta—and in his mad passion because of her physical beauty, he married her secretly. When the first flush of possession had passed, he realized what he had done. Then, a little while before the baby came he left her, at night; stole away without a word to her, and without leaving anything for the maintenance of his wife and the child which was expected. Such depth of villainy is almost incomprehensible. The man said she had parents living near, who would care for her; that people out in those hills needed only a little to eat and a little to wear. He told of his heartless conduct in the most matter-of-fact way, as though it was nothing extraordinary. He said he did not believe there was a life beyond this, though the persistent Christian propaganda had worried him, as it does all intelligent humans. In case the church was right, and he should pass to judgment, he wanted to make such reparation as he could to those he had wronged. He gave me your name, and asked that I should communicate with you, as you were acquainted with the parties concerned—or at least knew his forsaken wife.

"It seems he was a man of some means, and prior to my arrival he had been in lengthy consultation with a lawyer here, who was his friend. He has arranged to pass all of his money to his wife, should she still live. If she is dead, it is to go to the child—whether son or daughter he does not know. The attorney who has his secular affairs in charge is Rehoboam Justin, at 21 Eighth Street. You may address him there with the necessary proofs concerning the validity of the wife's or child's claim. I tried to interest Mr. Ellsworth in his soul's salvation, but so firmly had the adversary become entrenched that nothing I could say had the slightest effect. He thanked me for my interest, though, courteously.

"He said that his marriage was perfectly legal; that he took the young woman by night to a town called Cedarton, near by, and the ceremony was performed by a Protestant minister, before witnesses. The license, together with the marriage certificate, he says may be found in a small tin box under the stone at the front right-hand corner of the hearth in the cabin, if it still stands. Why he secreted these papers, instead of destroying them, as one would naturally think from his infamous action, he did not explain.

"I trust that wife and child are both living, and that you will speedily bear to them this tardy restitution. Truly, this world is the abode of sin and sorrow.

"Commending you to the care of God, and His holy Saints, believe me,

"Sincerely yours in Christ,

"ALPHONSUS REMY, C.S.C."

Ten minutes after I had finished reading this letter—ten minutes during which I sat silent with buzzing brain and elated soul, I raised my head and looked at Father John. His eyes were open now, and he was regarding me with an expression I could not translate. Gladness, humility, compassion, sorrow and love were all blended in his lineaments. Carefully, as though it were a fragile something easily broken, I laid the letter back upon the table.

"Keep it," said Father John in a low voice, making a slight upward gesture. "In itself it is ze ev'dence, in case ze papers be not foun'."

A swift alarm struck at my heart.

"But—" I began.

With his rare, sunshiny smile the priest interrupted.

Then all at once a look of weary melancholy spread over his features, and I knew he was thinking again of the perfidy of his beloved niece. Every muscle in my body was pulling me toward the Lodge, and I now arose.

"I can't thank you as I would for sending for me and confiding in me as you have," I said, my

words shaky, because I had been strangely wrought upon by all that had passed.

He made a deprecatory, characteristic gesture with both hands.

"Zey came zis mornin', m'sieu," he replied, sadly, glancing at the table. "I sen' for you w'en I read zem."

He sighed, shook his head, and reached for his tobacco jar.

"I sink zey will be zere, but—sings hap'n, m'sieu, an' we can never tell. It has been ze twenty year'."

"But a tin box, father—that will hold them safely!" I exclaimed, and he beamed tolerantly at my boyish eagerness.

"Yes; zey should be zere."

"You have not heard from Granny—and them?" I ventured, for the wish to see Celeste had grown within the last quarter of an hour into an irresistible force. I waited his reply with bated breath.

"No," he answered, almost at once. "Zey lef' w'ile I was gone. I have heard nuzzin'."

Once again I tried to speak my gratitude, but the gentle old man stopped me. This time he did not press me to stay, for he knew the magnet which was drawing me back to the hut on Bald Knob.

"I sink ze li'l wil' ma'm'selle will come soon," he said, as he held my hand at parting; "zen we tell her, an' she be made vair happy."

Forgotten was Buck and his fell purpose, forgotten was the lost Jeff Angel as, passing through Hebron at a swift walk, I presently broke into a run. Was this the same road, the same forest, the same sky, the same earth? Beautiful as it always had been, it was transfigured now. My Dryad! My lovely, innocent Dryad was free from the stigma which hypercritical moralists would have thrust upon her! I was hastening toward the proof with every breath I drew—toward the proof which had lain within reach of my hand all these weeks! My heart exulted with each onward spring, and I seemed light as air, so magically did my joy act upon me. Swiftly I ran, but the way had never been so long. I reached the Point. Scorning the bridge which heretofore had been a welcome aid in crossing the creek, I dashed into the water at a place where I knew it to be shallow, and a moment later was headed for the Dryad's Glade. Very soon thereafter I was kneeling before the rude hearth in the Lodge, gazing with flushed face and fascinated eyes at the front right-hand corner stone.

It differed in no way from all the others. A rough-surfaced, imperfect square with an average width of ten or twelve inches, the irregular interstices between it and its neighbors being filled with earth. It was on a level with the others. There was nothing to indicate that it hid a secret which meant so much. Now that I had come; now that any moment I could prove the truth or falsity of Hannibal Ellsworth's statement, I hesitated. Perhaps he had lied even at the last. A man capable of the fiendish act he had committed would likewise be capable of this sardonic jest. If this were true—if, when I lifted the stone, nothing was revealed, what then? This torturing thought decided me. I leaped up, took from the table the knife which Buck Steele had driven through my journal, and with its point began to pick away the dirt between the crevices. I worked feverishly, and presently, dropping the knife, I gripped the stone and heaved. It moved. Again I strained backward, and now the rock turned partly in its bed, where it had lain secure for a score of years. Regardless of the jagged edges, I forced my fingers down the rough sides through the loosened dirt, clawed and burrowed until I had secured another and a stronger hold. Again I tugged, and up came my burden bodily—up and out. I flung it rolling on the plank floor, and trembling with anxiety gazed into the cavity it had left. I saw nothing. Nothing but the brown earth sides and the brown earth bottom. I sank backward with a groan. Ah! Hannibal Ellsworth! If you were alive, and these hands were at your throat! You trickster even in death! You chosen of Satan! You—A new thought came. Seizing the knife, I plunged it desperately into the hole, just as I would have thrust it in the black heart of Hannibal Ellsworth had he stood before me then. The point met with partial resistance, then went on. I drew the knife out, and impaled upon it was a small tin box—a tobacco box, nothing more. It had been wrapped around and tied with a string of some kind, for the moldering remnants still clung to it. It opened at the end. Now I was shaking with the violence of one palsied, and presently the top fell down. I sat upon the floor, drew the box from the knife point, and thrust in my finger and thumb. Something was inside—something closely folded which so filled the small space that I could not grasp it. I desisted long enough to hold the opening to the light and peer within. I saw what appeared to be many folds of yellowish-white paper, fitting snugly in the narrow confines. A degree of calmness came now, and once more taking the knife, I managed to extract the contents of the box. What the priest in Notre Dame had written Father John was true. I held in my hand the attested certificate of the marriage of Hannibal Ellsworth and Araminta Kittredge, together with the license issued by the clerk of the county. The papers were dry and crackled in my grasp; they were disfigured by yellow splotches, and bore that peculiar odor which old parchments always acquire.

All afternoon I sat in the same spot, with those priceless documents before me. I read each of them an hundred times, and examined every letter of every written word. They were the passports of my wife to enter into my world. Only when it grew too dark to see did I put them back in the box, put the box in the hole, and replace the stone upon the treasure. It would be safer right there until I could take it away.

After supper I went out to one of the benches in front, and smoked. The moon came up soon; a great, big, yellow moon, hoisting itself majestically over the forest sea. It seemed as big as the end of a sugar barrel, and the face of the lady etched upon it was a cameo of Celeste Ellsworth. I wonder if any other man anywhere in the world has ever dared to imagine this moon-lady bore a resemblance to someone in whom he was interested? He was very silly and presumptuous if he did, for the profile of this lunar enchantress reflects line for line that of my Dryad!

The soft, soundless, midsummer night wrought upon me in a wonderfully peaceful way. Yet a positive, adamant resolve grew within me ere I came in. I shall wait one more day—one only. If Celeste does not return to-morrow, then the day after I take up the search. There is nothing to be gained by staying here longer, and all to lose, even life. When I find her—when I find her—my God! At the very thought my love surges through me so that my chest hurts and my eyelids are hot upon the balls. I write no more to-night. I am lonely, and I am starving—for her! I want to see her golden hair tremble in the breeze, hear her laugh, look into the deeps of her eyes, hold her to me and tell her that I love her—love her!

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## CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

### IN WHICH I VANQUISH A DEMONIAIC, AND ENTER INTO GLORY

This is written a month later.

The next day passed eventless. I kept to the plateau, for now I had even greater cause not to incur needless risks. After supper I sought my seat of the night before, my mind made up. Again I saw the moon creep up the sky, and it was full that night; its immense disk was a perfect circle. I sat watching the grotesque, ever-changing shapes evolved from my pipe smoke, silvery luminous in the moonshine, and wondering just how and where I would begin my search in the morning. Then my unchecked thoughts drifted to Celeste, and as the minutes glided by I felt the restraint which I had placed upon myself slipping more and more. I made no effort to stay my imaginings, or to turn their trend. The hour was made delicious by this mental revel; by sublime visions of what the future would be. Most rigidly had I held myself in check since that night on the peak, when I woke to a sense of my condition, and whither it was leading me. Now I would relax, and suffer my feelings to assume predominance again, for I was weary of the constant battle to banish this girl from my brain, and anyway, the game was about played. Unless Buck came upon me that night, I would speedily be beyond his reach.

As my unleashed emotions mastered me more and more, a keen restlessness seized me, the natural result of unsatisfied longing. The bench where I had passed contented hours the night before became at length unendurable and I arose, my face set hungrily toward the whispering woods. Sweetly it lured me with its breath of odorous greenness; strongly it drew me by its very mystery of being, and I responded. I would go to the Dryad's Glade.

I was without coat or hat. My shirt was open at the throat and the sleeves were rolled above my elbows, for the day had been one of the hottest I had ever known, and in the early night the heat had not yet been conquered by the dew and the shadows. How well and strong I was! I tarried for a moment before the unlighted Lodge to enjoy a full conception of my superb physical vigor. It is something to make a man rejoice—this mere knowledge of brute power. I had it in perfection that night, and flooding my maligned lungs with a deep-drawn breath of Nature's exquisite attar, I moved away.

I had always loved to roam by night; I had always loved to tread the wild; I had always loved the face of old earth best when kissed by moonlight. These three conditions became important accessories to my mood that evening, a mood both tender and fierce. I reached the base of my hill of refuge, mechanically turned toward the west, and with bowed head and leisurely steps went forward where all was vast and dim and holy, to receive the benediction of the trees. I scarcely noticed my surroundings, although my perceptions received and appreciated the enveloping silence, and the pearl-gray gloom. The subtle scents of moss, and dew-soaked earth, and the indescribable tang from bark and leaf refreshed my nostrils with their blended odors. I felt that I was in the first sanctuary the world had ever known; a spot where Creator and creation were all but one; a place undefiled by the feet of grasping, sordid men. If a prayer were born in this temple it were born of the spirit, and not of mumbling lips more used to the shaping of lies and hypocrisies.

A sound came to me, threading the silence like a note from a flute; elfin, elusive, wild. For a moment I thought I was deceived. I stopped and listened. Piercing the continuous sigh which is never absent from a vast forest, even in times of greatest calm, the note came again, followed by a series of quirks and trills. Eerie enough was the sound. Was the jest which I had offered the Satyr, while under the influence of liquor, coming true? Did the great god Pan yet live, in truth, and did he make merry o' summer nights in sylvan court and viney bower? My spine grew chilly at the thought, and for an instant I was tempted to believe. Would I see him if I pressed forward cautiously, without noise? Would I find him dancing a drunken reel to his own music? For the nonce I cast logic and common sense aside, and determined to stalk this heathen deity. Bending forward, I advanced with the utmost care, walking on the balls of my feet. At intervals I heard the pagan fantasy—jumbled measures of the most fascinating, tuneless music that was ever set

afloat. From familiar signs I knew I was approaching my objective point. My eagerness became intense as the pipe-notes sounded louder and louder, and then, suddenly, the scale fell a full octave, or more, and the liquid tones which now sifted through the motionless air were laden with a burden I knew. I stopped, grasped a tree, and threw my left hand to my forehead. I was listening to Jeff Angel's magic reed! He was playing the Song of the Brook, as he had played it for me that memorable night. Was the last vestige of his mind gone? Had he succeeded? Why was he dallying here when he must have known that my heart was aching and breaking for the news which he would bring? These thoughts and a dozen more congested my brain during the fleeting second I leaned against the tree. Then I was erect and dashing forward. It was a sort of natural lane down which I rushed, whose other end debouched into the Dryad's Glade. Fast and heedless as I sped, I saw that which checked me ere I dashed into the open; which drove me to one side, softly and breathlessly, where I could see without chance of discovery.

The Dryad had come home. I know that I can but poorly describe the scene to-night, but had I possessed pen and paper at that moment my plight would have been the same, or worse. About half of the little woodland court was whitened by the radiance from above, and the other portion was in alternate light and shadow. But even in this portion—which was next to me—a moving form could be plainly seen. The wildest, most bizarre, most graceful dance was in progress. Celeste was all in white; a loose, flowing robe with wing-like sleeves which waved and fluttered from her outstretched arms. Upon her head was a wreath of great, bell-shaped, snowy flowers, and draped loosely about her waist was a garland similarly wrought. They were the exquisite blooms of the jimson weed, that humble plant which grows undisturbed in every country barn lot in Kentucky. Back and forth and around she sped, in the intricate steps of a dance which made me dizzy to behold. Once she passed near my hiding-place—so near that I heard the quick intake of her breath and caught the gleam of her teeth back of her parted lips. I saw the expression on her face, too, as she whirled by, and it was one of purest enjoyment. The Satyr was piping and dancing, too. Weird and fantastic he was, with the tails of his long coat flapping behind, and the sugar-loaf hat atop his head. Time and again he measured the diameter of the glade, turning when he had crossed it to retrace his route. His movements were very much like those of a cake walker on parade. His middle was thrust out, his shoulders back, and his face was turned squarely to the sky. The goat-tuft bobbed and shook with each prancing step, and ever came that wonderful music, which he had taken from music's source.

Charmed into passiveness for the time, I crouched and stared at this strange sight. Then all at once the dancers abandoned the separate figures they had been treading, joined hands, his left in her right, and the Satyr, playing with one hand only, began a flute-like, dreamy movement, to whose bewitching melody they started afresh, an entirely different measure. This continued for a minute or more, not without a degree of stateliness, then, abruptly as a lightning flash, the Satyr sprang away from his partner with a burst of yelling laughter wholly uncivilized, and furiously began the Song of the Storm Wind. I had heard it before, but not as now. As if inspired to newer effort, each began to run. It was half race, half dance now, for even in the seeming carelessness of this rout I detected certain steps executed with regard to time and rhythm. Never had I seen such an extraordinary performance! The very contrast of the participants rendered it unique, but this unconscious revival of rites which had passed away centuries ago lent a deeper and more enigmatical significance to it all. There was nothing unseemly in this revel, if I may call it such. It was simply an expression of their love for the forest which had cradled and nurtured them. In everything but this common affection they were far apart, but in worshiping at Nature's shrine they were one. Each felt the call to the still places, and if we, whom life has cruelly thrust among brick walls and stone streets and steel towers pine for such things until our very souls cry out, how much more should they slip out alone to take their joy of them. That was all it amounted to, and even my jealous eye could find naught at which to carp. Two children had come forth to gambol, nothing more.

The pace set by the Song of the Storm Wind was too furious to continue long. Presently the climax was reached, and Jeff flung himself upon the ground like a tired boy, his thin legs outstretched, his body inclined backward and supported by his arms thrust out behind him. Celeste stopped near me, almost in the center of the moonlighted space, and throwing her arms high she bent her head sideways and gave a deep, happy sigh. I knew it was happy, for her countenance was tenderly aglow. Quickly I advanced and stood before her, both hands outheld.

"Dryad! O little Dryad! I have missed you so!"

A startled look came to her face, but it passed on the instant, and with a low, inarticulate cry she took one step and put her palms on mine.

Another instant both my arms were around her and I was pressing her closer, closer, closer, calling her all the precious names which only lovers know, kissing her face, her warm, sweet lips, her tumbled hair. Her arms went about my neck, her soft young body sank trembling upon my breast. She was mine! What we said the next fifteen minutes does not need transcription. Her words formed the most divine speech which ever fell from mortal lips, but there are fools abroad in the world who would not understand, so I forbear. Then, her arm in mine, we walked toward the Satyr, still in his unconventional attitude of rest. As we drew nearer, I saw that his ugly face bore an expression which indicated that he was scandalized beyond measure at the meeting he had witnessed. I was preparing to hail him jocularly, for my heart beat high with happiness which almost made me dizzy, when his features became convulsed in a look of mortal terror, and I knew that he was gazing at something behind me. I had heard no sound, but intuition now flashed me the needed warning. With the arm linked in hers I flung Celeste forward and from me as far as I

could and wheeled at the same instant with the agility and ferocity of a tiger. I knew what I would see, but I was totally unprepared for the truly horrible spectacle which confronted me.

The smith was almost upon us. Bareheaded he came, stark naked to the waist. Barefooted, too, he was. His huge, hairy chest and arms, his bearded face and neck, and the long, unkempt hair of his head, invested him with a certain hideousness which might well have sent a tremor of fear to the stoutest heart. He was gnashing his teeth like a wolf—I could hear them click plainly—and muttering throaty, guttural sounds of wrath. He checked his rush short when I turned and faced him, and stood ten feet away, glaring insanely from me to Celeste, from Celeste to me. His mind was gone; I knew it then. As I waited his attack, he gave vent to a yell which was a fearful mingling of screech and laugh, stooped as though about to charge me, then, with motions so swift I could not comprehend his hellish purpose, he swung a short, thick club which he held and cast it with all his might—at Celeste! It sang fiendishly by my ear, I heard a scream, and there my Dryad was lying on the ground, a crumpled bit of white in the shadow-flecked glade. For a moment the night grew black. The darkness passed. I looked again. Jeff Angel was bending over her. I could not go to her yet. Time to bury my dead when her murderer—A new sound dispelled the numbing lethargy which this devil's blow had thrown upon me. It was Buck laughing. He was bending over, his hands on his knees, and his insane merriment was grating and mechanical. I sprang for him then; silent, grim. He jumped aside with a gibing croak, and, yielding to some reasonless vagary, whirled and ran. I was after him ere he had measured his first leap, for now I was harried by the hounds of Despair and Hate, and my life had been shorn of all aim and purpose but one. That one I knew I would accomplish—knew I must accomplish, or be a curse unto myself forever.

Buck ran with the speed of a greyhound, leaping now and then into the air like a demoniac, and striking out with his fists as he did so. He was never silent. Now he was shrieking his blood-chilling laugh, now shouting disjointed sentences in a voice which had ceased to be human, now singing something which might have been a war-chant of the Huns for all its consonantal slurring and meager scope. Neither did he ever look behind. He had taken the natural lane down which I had come, and down which he had doubtless followed me on unshod, noiseless feet. I put forth my strongest efforts and tried to overtake him. Though I ran steadily and with scientific care, and he expended strength and sacrificed distance during his numerous upward bounds, I could not gain an inch. I doubt if such a pursuit was ever undertaken before. A half-naked, hairy, maniac-giant leading, and a sane man well-nigh as big, whose holiest feelings had been outraged, following. On we swept through the checkered spaces of the forest, our progress accompanied by that rumbling chant suggestive of forgotten ages. I do not know how such things are, but it may have been that the slumbering strain transmitted through many generations from some ancient warrior ancestor who lived and fought when the world was young, had been quickened in the primitive brain when reason left it. He had ceased laughing and mouthing indistinguishable words now, but with every breath there rolled out the sonorous staves of this chant of a remote past.

We reached the base of Bald Knob, and here, instead of holding to the ravine which led around it, Buck swerved into the road leading up. He was going to the Lodge. Well and good. I would as soon end it on the plateau as elsewhere. Through the weeds and vines which choked the ascent we crashed, and as I gained the level in front of the Lodge I saw with joy that I had lessened the distance between us. Buck sped straight toward the open door, and I flew to overtake him, for that which had to be had best occur in the open. In vain. I could not catch this Mercury-footed Vulcan. As I looked to see him disappear within the house, he made a dextrous flank movement and circled it. Instantly I was on his track again. Now he had set his face toward the belt of evergreens which loomed blackly above us in the brilliant moonshine. A dread seized me. Was it his sly intention to reach this shelter first, and hide ere I could come up? I harbored this idea only a second. This being did not fear me. That he had run when I sought to attack him was due solely to some antic twist of his unaccountable mind. Any moment his mood might change. The dense gloom swallowed him, but still, a guide through the darkness, floated back the chant. How he could keep it up under such fearful exertion I could not understand. He must have been made of iron and steel. I pressed on. Bursting through the furthest edge of the encircling band of trees, I saw him once more. He had quit running, as this was practically impossible here, and was toiling up the steep slope silently, for his song had at last ceased. I stood a moment, legs apart, my chest heaving laboredly, for I felt the hard chase. Up went the great figure, grisly in its seeming now—up toward the peak.

A remembrance of that white, crumpled form lying in the glade assailed me poignantly, and starting beneath it as under the touch of white-hot iron, I shouted a frightful curse, and threw myself at the acclivity. I must reach there when he did. I must top the crest at the same time, so that he would have no chance to make a descent on the other side. For a while I ran, though the task was Herculean, goaded as I was into temporary madness by the stinging thought of my lost love. So it was I came within my own length of the climbing demoniac, who never yet had cast a glance behind him, and who even now, though he must have heard my progress, went directly on, without a sign. It was gruesome. In the midst of the inferno wherein my soul burned I recognized the uncanny strangeness of the scene. Night. A wilderness. A towering gray-white peak of earth, and on its slope two crawling specks, one bent on—God knows what!—the other intent on revenge. The law of Moses reigned supreme in my mind that night: forgotten was the law of Christ. Forgotten, or ignored. I knew no law. I was reduced to that simple plane where I was going to claim a life—a base and worthless life in exchange for the pure and priceless one he had taken. The united logic of all the united churches in Christendom or out could not have convinced



me that I was wrong.

We reached the last ascent, almost perpendicular, and here I expected the smith to hesitate, or halt. He did neither. He put himself at it immediately, and I imitated him. His going here was swifter than mine. It must have been because of his bare feet, which allowed him to grasp, cling and thrust with his sinewy toes. As we slowly neared the top he had drawn away from me for an appreciable distance. I increased my efforts. If I lost him now I probably never would see him again. I saw his huge arms, looking like moss-draped limbs, shoot up, and his fingers grip the top of the peak. I shut my teeth and my eyes and put out all there was in me. Now I was up, and yonder—yonder was Buck, crouched just across from me at the further rim, preparing evidently to descend, for one leg was over the rather abrupt edge. I could not reach him; he would slip down and be gone before I could make the passage, brief though it was. My hand rested upon a small stone. Impelled by impulse more than by reason, I threw the stone at him. It struck him a smarting blow on one arm, and he turned with a snarl, half squatting, half sitting.

"Murderer!" I gasped; "come back and fight!" I cannot say if he understood. I doubt it, but my voice acted as a supplementary irritant to the cast stone. I heard the infuriate grinding of his teeth as he rose up, and came plunging toward me with the intention to hug. I had no wish for these tactics, and dodged just enough to escape him. Thereat he sent forth a roar, wheeled, and struck at me. The blow was not gauged at all, and I had no trouble warding it. Then for a little while we stood face to face, not over five feet between us, while our heavy respirations were the only sounds. Closely as I watched him, his subtlety exceeded my caution. He feigned to draw back, as if to circle, and the next moment was speeding toward me through the air in a prodigious leap. I might have avoided his onset; I do not know. But even as I saw him in mid-air the desperate resolve was born within me to end the score, and that quickly. So, instead of attempting any action which would mean delay, I gathered my strength and leaped to meet him! We crashed together both from earth, and locked with such holds as we could find. We came to our knees from the terrific force of the impact, and there for a while we stayed, chest to chest, and cheek to cheek. The deep, strained breath of the smith hissed by my ear in heavy gusts, and I was in no better strait, for my lungs seemed on fire and my inhalations brought no respite from the torture. It could not have been long that we remained thus, and while the lull lasted our embrace was so intense that we were as one body. Buck made the first move, for I was content to continue as we were for a time, and so recover in a measure from the exhaustion caused by the run and the steep climb. All at once I was aware that the steel-like bands which encircled me were pressing deeper into my flesh, with a suddenness and a violence which was terrifying. For a second I writhed, then the muscles of my back responded, and I felt them ridging and swelling in resistance. Now my body was wrapped and swathed in rigid folds of strength, and I strove to force my adversary backward. My brain was veiled in a bloody mist, and angry seas dashed and thundered in my ears, but I knew that he was yielding! Teeth set, eyes bulging, I called again upon myself, but now the shaggy head dropped forward, and the fiend bit me savagely between shoulder and neck. The shock of the pain caused me to relax, and moved by a common impulse we arose to our feet. Then I saw his face, and had I not been well-nigh as crazy as he, the sight would have shaken every nerve. His curled-back lips were wet and red with my blood, his face expressed the insane rage which filled him, and his eyes—his eyes will haunt me to my last day, for there was no meaning in them whatever! Just two glassy, protruding orbs shining vacantly in the peaceful moonlight. Then he laughed; hollow, hoarse and rattling, and caught up again that devilish, rune-like battle-chant. It was only a momentary respite which came after we were up. This time I took the initiative, and at once closed with him silently. New strength had come to the smith, and during the next minute I was off my feet more than once, dragged bodily from the ground by his superb might. The spot where we fought was perhaps ten yards across, was almost perfectly flat, and was covered with a sort of granular deposit which prevented us from slipping. Over this narrow area we tugged and strove, sometimes approaching dangerously near the edge, but eventually working back to safer ground. If he had only ceased that brain-racking, heathenish litany! But after a time it came in gasps, and jerks, for despite his marvelous stamina, my enemy began at last to feel the strain. How long we battled upon the peak I do not know, but there came a time when I felt that I had been fighting Buck Steele since the dawn of creation. I was sore from head to foot; dizzy, and growing weak, but I was assured that his case was no better. So, locked like two stags which war to the death, we staggered and sprawled hither and yonder. Then our efforts became automatic, for each had reached the point where he was incapable of intelligent action. Suddenly the moon fell from heaven, straight down to the top of the forest. Then it rebounded back into the sky, and began a series of most erratic movements. At this the glimmer of sense which I yet retained made me grow afraid. I knew that my limit had been reached. Then was projected upon that spark of conscious mentality the picture of my stricken Dryad—and now I laughed! Yea, laughed wildly and mirthlessly, as I slid one arm under the smith's huge hams, and in a resistless access of frenzied power lifted his vast bulk as I would have raised an infant. If he struggled I did not know it, for in that supreme moment a Titan had come to earth. To the flume-like chute I bore him and cast him down it—down to darkness and to hell!

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How I got back to the Lodge I do not know. But as I tottered to the open door, behold! there stood 'Crombie before the fireplace, the Satyr crouched on a box, and sitting near the table was my Dryad!

I fell forward at the sight, senseless.

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My wife sits near me reading in the first reader as I pen these final lines of my journal. 'Crombie's presence at the Lodge is easily explained. The time had come for his annual trip to the great north woods, and he determined to run down and surprise me before he left, and see how I was getting along. He drove out from Cedarton, and arrived just as Jeff Angel was leading Celeste up to the Lodge. Buck's club had not struck her. When she saw his intention she had fainted from fright. 'Crombie's coming was opportune, for he has told me I would have died without his ready help. I was in a pretty bad way.

I am happy to relate that I did not kill Buck Steele. Just how he escaped destruction I cannot say, but the morning succeeding our awful combat 'Crombie made a thorough search at the base of the peak, at my suggestion, but found nothing. In some miraculous way the smith's life was preserved, although this was contrary to my intent and purpose at the time. But now, with my golden-haired Dryad here safe in my home, I am glad. I had some trouble persuading Granny that this arrangement was best, but Gran'fer stood by me valiantly and Father John also lent his aid, so the matter was arranged peaceably. I asked the Satyr how he managed to induce the runaways to come back, and the graceless rascal informed me that he told them I had gone back home! A blessed lie, dear Satyr!

I also questioned 'Crombie about the life-plant, for I had never been quite easy on the subject.

"You found it and did not know it, my son," he said, his good, honest face beaming. "Do you remember my description of it? Well, the vivid green stem is the universal green of Nature's dress; the golden leaves is the healing sunlight, and the flower—the cluster of clear little globules, is the crystalline air and water of the untainted wild. I deceived you in a way, my son, for it was all symbolical, but it was for your good. Now I think I was hasty in my diagnosis, and that nothing was wrong with you. Do you forgive me?"

He smiled upon me almost in a pathetic way.

"It was the best thing that could have happened to me!" I replied, thinking that by it I had gained Celeste.

Now it comes to me that I have told my story and have never told my name. Which goes to show that a name amounts to very little. But there may be some curious readers who would be glad to know it, and for such I do not mind declaring it.

It is Nicholas Jard.

## THE END

\*\*\* END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK A MAID OF THE KENTUCKY HILLS \*\*\*

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