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Title: *Scarlett of the Mounted*

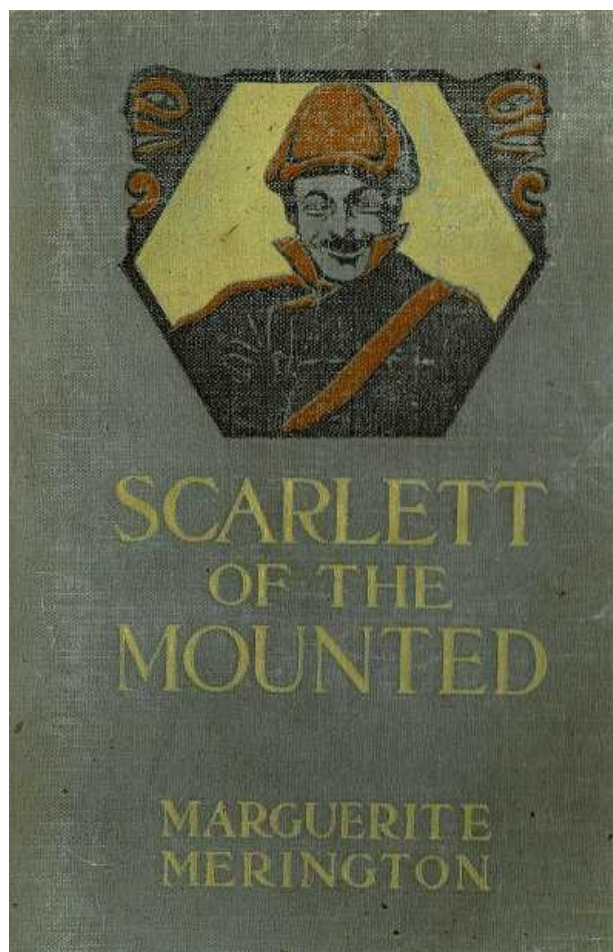
Author: Marguerite Merington

Release date: November 7, 2011 [EBook #37949]

Language: English

*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK SCARLETT OF THE MOUNTED ***

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Scarlett Of The Mounted
MARGUERITE MERINGTON



SHE STUCK A PIN IN THE HANDKERCHIEF.

SCARLETT *of the* MOUNTED

BY

MARGUERITE MERINGTON

ILLUSTRATED

**NEW YORK
MOFFAT, YARD & COMPANY
1906**

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MOFFAT, YARD & COMPANY
NEW YORK**

Published, August, 1906

**J. F. TAPLEY CO.
PRINTERS AND BINDERS
NEW YORK**

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SCARLETT *of the* MOUNTED

[11]

I

LOST SHOE CREEK

Parson MacLane came running along the rough trail, his dogs, Telegraph and Wrangel, named after former mission charges, following. As he paused at the crest of a hill to take breath and wipe the grime from his face he smiled, for over the thicket of scrub willow that lay between him and Lost Shoe Creek rose the voices of the "boys" he had traveled far to reach. Then he sighed, because the jest and song, as he heard them, were ribald; the laughter thick with drink. Finally, reflecting that in no human heart had he ever found evil so strong but that the good was stronger, he smiled again, and stooping to pluck from a low-growing bush the deep crimson wild rose of the north, he set this in his buttonhole, and squaring his shoulders for a fresh bout with his old adversary of horns and cloven hoof, trotted cheerily down the steep incline.

With an expiring wheeze the concertina dropped from the singer's hand. One of the group

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playing Black Jack, looked up. "Go on, Bill! Thar's other verses—an' each more decorative than the last!"

Lighting a pipe, Bill shook his head. "Grand opera sore throat! Left my music at home—and home," he added, under his ragged mustache, "is so cursed far away!"

Mops' remonstrance was cut short by a disparaging comment on his methods of card-playing from a raw-boned Scotchman who had lost an inconsiderable amount. "You accuse me o' cheatin'?"

"Aweel!" Sandy scratched his head. "While it's na' to say cheating it's na' to say fair playing neither!"

"You liar!" kicking over the barrel that served for a table, with a volley of oaths Mops sprang at him, and a free fight would have ensued but for the intervention of the more cautious, who, pointing to a squalid bundle from which lusty snores were issuing, reminded the belligerents that if Bully Nick were roused from his innocent slumbers some indiscriminate gun-play might be looked for, transmuting every mother's son into cold meat. This argument prevailed; peace was restored and celebrated in the dire wassail of the district, served in the open by Ikey, bartender of the dilapidated refreshment-tent nearby, and by general consent charged to the protesting but helpless Sandy.

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It was at this auspicious moment that, followed by his dogs, rose in buttonhole, and with smiling countenance, Parson Maclane made his entrance into the camp on Lost Shoe Creek.

Hailing the newcomer as dude and tenderfoot, with winks and nudges among themselves the men prepared to "have fun" with him. Raising their glasses in derisive welcome, "Hello, stranger!" they chorused. "Drink your health!"

"Thanks, friends, but I fear you are not drinking your own!"

"By gum," cried Mops, delightedly, "if he ain't a blamed teetotaller!"

"The Laird kens we hae need o' sic," hiccoughed Sandy. "Hoots, but we're a sinfu' crew! Ikey, lad, mair whuskey!"

While glasses were being refilled, this time at Mops' expense, Maclane went toward the tent, over whose entrance hung the sign KLONDIKE DELMONICO'S. GUMBOOT ANNIE. Addressing the plump female in jersey and culottes, who lolled beneath, picking her teeth skilfully: "Good day, madam," he began, baring his head. "I should like to speak with the proprietor."

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Gumboot Annie took time to spit before replying, "I am the lady."

"I want to hold a prayer-meeting. Will you lend me your tent?"

"Lend! Me lend anything! Now wouldn't that pa'alyze yer!" she demanded of the listening prospectors. "I ain't up here fer me health," she then explained to Maclane, "but I'll sell or rent anything in sight. Twenty dollars is the price for a Gospel show!"

"Agreed!"

"Thar's a bar in thar, y'know!"

"Oh, the bar's no hindrance!" The minister already was unstrapping his pack of hymnals. "But I warn you I shall preach against the evils of drink."

"That's all right. The boys ull be jest as thirsty! Say, fer five dollars you kin convert Ikey. He's useter it. He gives his experiences real cute. Water is two bits a bucket, but fer a baptism attraction I'll throw it in!"

Refusing with a gesture, the minister seized the dinner-bell from its nail and rang it vigorously. "Prayer-meeting and service of song. All are cordially welcome!"

"Wouldn't it be slick ter dump him in the creek," suggested one.

"No, no! Lay low till Bully Nick wakes up! Nick ull fix him," said Mops, to which the rest agreed, "Betcherlife!"

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"Come, boys," urged Maclane, "who'll lead the way?"

After a chilly silence, "Don't all speak at once," jeered Mops. "Don't crowd the mourners," echoed Bill.

"You have mothers, sweethearts, wives, who never cease to pray for you. Won't you spare a few minutes from Black Jack to put up a prayer for them?"

A pause followed, during which Bill swallowed a lump in his throat and tried not to think of the mother in Montreal, whose last letter he had been carrying about for eleven months, unanswered. Mops sent Ikey for more drinks.

"'Twull be a saving i' the lang run!" Foreseeing that he might again be called upon to pay, Sandy stumbled toward the tent, falling over rows of jocosely outstretched feet. "I misdoot my gait is na sae steady as it micht be! A touch o' scurvy!"

"Oh, we're all liable to trip!" Maclane helped him up. "Who'll be next?"

"Count me in, Dominie!" An elderly man, gaunt and ill-clad, gold-pan under his arm, climbed the banks of the creek and entered the tent. [16]

"Old Lucky's down on his luck, but he gen'ly knows whar the gold is!" A boyish-looking prospector, who had been wanting an excuse, joined him.

Several followed the example, till at last only Nick and his bodyguard remained outside. When a rousing chorus of "Onward, Christian Soldiers," pealed forth from the tent, Mops chuckled joyously. "Look out fer fireworks! Nick's wakin'!"

After preliminary grunts and stretchings the Bully sat up in his ugliest mood. "Wot th' hell— Is this Judgment Day?"

"Naw! Only some blasted holy windmill come for to save our souls," Bill informed him.

"The cursed stiff!" Nick sprang toward the tent. "I'll teach him ter meddle with my anatomy!" He cocked his pistol. "One, two——"

"Bully Nick! He never misses the bull's-eye!" shouted his delighted followers.

At this juncture a fresh-skinned young giant in blouse and overalls, who had been chopping kindlings by Gumbo Annie's woodpile, dropped his hatchet and strolled up with a casual air wholly at variance with the keen, hawk-like glance of his gray-blue eyes. As Nick told off the last minutes of Parson Maclane's earthly span, the newcomer pinioned him in a grasp of iron from behind. "Not this time, Bully Nick!" [17]

"Eh? Who the mischief are ye to stop me?" is the polite, free rendering of Nick's impolite free speech. "I don't think I hev the pleasure of your acquaintance, my lad!"

"I've been wanting for some time to make yours!" The young man seemed quite unconcerned that the toughest gang in the district had forcibly detached him from their chief and were holding him prisoner.

"It's just a looney Irishman that's been hanging 'round all day! Ain't worth a bullet, Nick!" At heart, Bill disliked human targets for sport.

"Powerful strong! His muscles ud be wuth more ter ye than his darned hide, Nick," supplemented Mops, who, while without prejudices as to bloodshed, sometimes was called on to exert himself unduly.

"I'll assay him," decreed the Bully. "Fust he shall drink my health! Mops, you hold the booze ter the stiff's mouth! Bill, you got a ticker; you keep time. Now, sonny, I give yer jest two minutes fer mamma's little baby boy ter say his prayers in, or ter git good an' drunk, like me. See?"

The young man yawned, with a bored expression. "Excuse my not putting my hand before my mouth, gentlemen!" [18]

"One minute gone, pard!" admonished Bill.

"Phew!" The prisoner spat out the liquid Mops forced between his lips. "That filthy stuff! I only drink the best! Besides, 'tis smuggled, and, living or dead, I should incur a fine with contraband goods on, or in, my person!"

"You all-fired nateral, do yer *want* ter be a angel?" growled the Bully.

"Faith, I wasn't aspiring to such promotion," admitted the stranger. "But I'd look prettier that way than making myself a drunken beast like you, Nick!"

The insult had its effect; the Bully's pistol hand quavered, and he was lost. "Say, young feller, you got grit! You're game! Boys, the Irishman goes, see!"

"Sorry I can't return the favor, Nick! You go—but to gaol!" With an adroit movement the young man had whisked out a pair of handcuffs and was fitting them to the astonished Bully's wrists. "Best take it quietly, men. As they say in story-books, reinforcements are at hand! And till they come, get in there, all of you, and say your own prayers!" He lifted the tent flap. "Fall into line. Um, left. Left!—Left! March!"

"Who in blazes air ye?" gasped Nick, as he obeyed. [19]

The answer came in awe-stricken tones from Mops, who, beneath the stranger's rough externals had suddenly suspected the insignia of a dreaded authority. "The hell! It's Scarlett of the Mounted!"

II

THE WOMENKIND OF LOST SHOE CREEK

Dandy Raish swaggered up to the tent where he had an appointment with old Blenksoe, relating to a little matter of holding up the stage, but finding services in progress, he scattered a few flowers of profanity, and turned on his heel.

Scarlett, pacing to and fro while awaiting aid, caught sight of him. "Now, that's a gentleman whose company I'd fancy most in his absence, I'm thinking!" To escape the other's observation while making his own, he returned to his kindlings.

Developments came soon, first in the person of a woman wrapped in a red cloak, young and comely, but at the moment repulsive from the effects of a debauch. Reeling from the shelter of a ruined cabin, "Gumboot Annie!" she cried, "Gumboot Annie, for the love of heaven, trust me with the price of a drink!"

[21]

Finding the source of refreshments temporarily inaccessible, she threw herself on a bench, cursing religion, even as Raish had done.

"Furs for sale; snow-shoes, moccasins, furs, velly damn fine!" An Indian trader coming by recognized the girl, and accosted her. "Hello, Gelly! Shake!"

The girl complied good-naturedly. "Hello, Chilkat Jo!"

"Gelly, I love you!" stated Jo, in unimpassioned monotone. "Love you like hell-you-betyerlife! Say, Gelly, you mally me?"

"Say, Jo, that's a proposal, even if you ain't nothin' but a Siwash!"

"Me no Siwash!" Chilkat Jo drew himself up. "Me chew, swear, gamble, dlink like hell, plenty wives, all same as Clistian white man!"

"My, but you do give us a character," laughed the girl, "and I guess we've earned it all right, all right! But, no, Jo! I ain't sunk so low I'd marry you without I cared fer yer! Thar's only one man in the world fer me!" With a sigh she looked over at Dandy Raish, who, leaning against a Douglas spruce, was dressing his waxed mustache by the aid of a pocket looking-glass.

The Indian took his rejection with outward stoicism. "That's all light. Some day I kill him, cally you off, beat you, smash yer face, make you goddam' bad husband, all same as Clistian white man!" Then off he stalked, crying: "Furs for sale. Moccasins. Hair dye! Sacled images! Velly dam good sacled images!"

[22]

Gelly rose and timidly approached the object of her affections. "Raish! Dear Dandy, won't you speak to me?"

"Gelly!" The man turned on her with an oath. "Taggin' on as usual!"

"Raish, pop's turned me out, along of you, and I don't know whar ter go!"

"Such as you needn't look far! There, there, Gelly, don't get mad! I'm sorry for you; indeed I am!"

"Then marry me!"

"Me marry you! With my social gifts! Ha, ha! You're crazy! But I'll tell you what I will do: I'll help you out of this place; I'll get you a berth in a swell saloon at Skagway, with a big rake-off on every bottle that's uncorked and every bird that's plucked through you!"

"And me tryin' to be decent! Curse it all, I *will* be decent! You *shall* marry me!"

"I'll strangle you first!"

"Take your hands off that woman!"

Turning, Raish confronted a young giant, and being a coward he obeyed. "I can't spoil her!" he sneered.

[23]

"What is the trouble?" Scarlett asked of Gelly.

"None of your business," she replied, with feminine ingratitude.

"Is this your husband?"

"Sure!" At Raish's threatening gesture she modified the assertion. "In a sort of way!"

"The only sort of way he ever will be, you bet your boots," Raish flung back as, hands in pockets, he swaggered off.

"What is your name?" Scarlett asked the girl.

"Gelly!"

"Your full name? Gelly what?"

"Ah, now you're gettin' too familiar!" Sidling closer she remarked, approvingly: "Say, you're an

awful pretty boy!"

"Stand off!" As the girl shrank back, cowering, he added more gently: "Go home to your parents!"

"My home! My parents! Aw, that's a good un! Ma sloped with a faro dealer from 'Frisco, and pop's turned me out!"

"Poor child! You must get away from this district! I will send you down to a mission, where good women will care for you!"

[24]

"A mission? No, sirree! Too slow fer me!" Gelly moved away, humming a ditty popular in low-class music-halls of the locality.

"Stop!" Scarlett sharply reprimanded. "Sing if you will! Sing all you can! The world has need of singing—but sing decent songs!" As a stirring hymn, accompanied by Bill's concertina, just then sounded from the tent, he went on: "Go in and help them! They need a woman's voice."

"What!" Gelly was genuinely astonished. "Such as me—in church!"

"My poor girl, churches are for such as you."

Gelly looked in, uncertainly, then hurriedly drew back. "I can't, mister. Pop's in thar—and pop has sworn ter kill me on sight! Pop's the bully of the district," she added, proudly.

"Hm!" Scarlett considered a moment, then felt in his pocket. "Here's needle and thread. Go mend your clothes!"

Gelly stared at him as she took the proffered housewife. "Say, you're a real white man. I never before—" Breaking into sudden sobbing, she went back to her cabin.

Sergeant Scarlett gave a comprehensive glance at the scenery, nature's magnificent setting for this squalid drama.

[25]

"This district has the name of being the hottest proposition this side of Hades," he reflected. "It contains an unsurveyed number of square miles and crooked inhabitants. And it needs just three things to clean it out. First, godliness, which only gets this way for a flying visit once a year. Next—and it's only modesty prevented my putting it first—law, which is just myself; and last, but foremost, women! And all the womenkind we can muster are a travesty of the name—sketches the Lord seems to have blotted in the making and thrown away." With tender impatience he touched a cluster of wild roses with the toe of his military boot. "Oh, why can't ye stop running to flowers and blossom girls instead! Hello! Is this an answer to prayer, or a deceiving dream?" Sure enough, among the crimson petals a girl's face laughed, sparkling back at him. "By the St. Colmcille, a young lady at me feet! Permit me to reverse the positions, miss!" Picking up the miniature, he scanned the features closely. "Young? Yes, the right age, just; still in her teens, but not too teeny! Pretty? Verdict unanimous, without leaving the jury-box; guilty of wholesale manslaughter wherever those eyes set foot! Good? As good as virgin gold! Perhaps a trifle too well pleased with herself. Here, young lady, give an account of yourself! What are you doing in my district? Are you visiting father, brother, sweetheart, or do you intend to stake a claim on some poor wretch's unprospected heart? Oh, here's a bit of writing on the back. 'For dear daddy, from Evelyn,' Evelyn. A pretty name. Sounds like Eve with a little flounce on. Daddy. I'm glad it's a mere father ye belong to. Now since ye've dropped like manna from heaven to the wilderness, will ye think it a liberty if I—" He approached the picture to his lips, then put it resolutely aside. "No! I'm not the coward to kiss a girl anyway but to her face!" In his absorption he had failed to observe a uniformed rider coming at full gallop along the trail, and he had barely time to conceal the miniature in his breast as Barney, his assistant and devoted personal follower, dismounted a few paces from him.

[26]

Instead of greeting his chief with the proper military salute, Barney pushed him arrogantly aside.

"Out av the shadow av your suparions, ye hulking son av a tiligraph pole!"

"Back into your own skin, you jackass, you!" Scarlett returned the push with interest.

[27]

Recognizing the other through his disguise, "Bejabers," exclaimed Barney, "'tis Himself!"

"You're late in coming up to time," remarked Scarlett, absently, his thoughts still on the portrait.

"Sure, sorr, an' 'twas the word from yourself I've been delaying for! Ivery moment av the last four-an'-twenty hours I've slept at attintion with me boots on and nary a wink on me! As me own flesh is livin' witness, I've never moved me hindquarters from the saddle!"

"I wish you'd learn to keep your headquarters in the saddle," returned Scarlett. "Didn't I instruct ye if ye hadn't heard from me by the day appointed to start the day before?"

Barney scratched a puzzled head. He could interpret his own Irish bulls readily enough, defending them, if needful, with his fists to a jury of his peers, but those of his chief often passed him. Tactfully, he changed the conversation. "The mail arrived, Sergeant, and was distributed impartially. Only this remains unclaimed; a registhry package, with duty to pay on it."

Sergeant Scarlett examined the address on the parcel. "From E. Durant, New York City, to Matthew Durant, owner of the Rainbow Mine— Where under the shining heavens is the Rainbow Mine, Barney?" he broke off to ask.

[28]

"In the clouds, for aught I know, sorr. I searched the books, but in all the disthricht there's not even a claim recorded by the name, far less a mine."

"H'm! Well, the man, if not his mine, may be sojourning in our bally. Step inside the tent, Barney, and when the parson pauses for breath, whisper to him to inquire for one Matthew Durant!"

When Barney had gone on his errand, Scarlett performed the official act of unfastening the dainty package to appraise its contents. "White neckties, doubtless," he soliloquized. "That is what folk on the outside are by way of sending their kin to pull them through a Klondike winter. No, but almost as bad: an embroidered cigar-case, with jeweled clasp. Now I'm wondering if the fellow it's intended for can always muster up a pipeful of tobacco! Well, Barney, what success?"

"Just at this present, sorr, the howly man has got his teeth well into the Evil Wan, but he tipped me the wink he'd find our man the moment he darst let go. Oh, by the way—I hate to decompose ye, Sergeant—but here's a letter for yourself!"

[29]

"A letter for me, is it? Now, who the mischief would be writing to me?"

"The mischief it is, indade, sorr! 'Tis a lawyer!"

"A lawyer!" Scarlett scrutinized the name of the Dublin firm on the missive Barney handed him. "Now I'd give something to know what that means! I've always lived within the law, and without a lawyer!"

"Sure, that's your offence, Sergeant. Depind on ut, that's phwat they're afther charging ye for!"

"'Tis their inflated cheek, then!" Resentfully, Scarlett tore open the envelope. "If 'tis a bill they're sending me they can go to the divvle!"

"Faith, sorr, that's exactly where they'll have ye! That's phwat they're afther counting on!"

Barney watched his chief with affectionate solicitude while the latter read, and, crossing himself, began a prayer in which pious invocations mingled strangely with unflattering estimates of legal lights. "Howly Mary, full av grace— The dirthy blackguards, I wish I'd lost the letter for the lad! Blessed art thou among— Bad cess to yez, ye black limbs av an onreputable body, if 'tis only nearer ye were, or meself less far away, rest aisy 'tis outwitted ye'd be intoirely, if there's anny diplomacy in the fists av this Mick at all. Name av the Father, Son an' Howly—"

[30]

"Phew!" At last Scarlett broke through the stupor with which the perusal of his letter seemed to have encompassed him. "Is it I standing here in my five senses, or the fool of a deceiving dream? Barney, man, listen to this and pronounce on it. 'By the demise of your uncle'—that's my uncle, you understand?"

"Sure, sorr, your uncle is my uncle; and many's the accommodation we've had off him, thanks be!"

"Oh, this doesn't refer to that impartial relative of all impoverished humanity! This is, or was, the man who prevented my father from being the eldest son and only child of his parents! By his demise—"

"Precisely, sorr. And which av his qualifications may his demise be?"

"The final one. Demise means death. Oh, not the commonplace, every-day occurrence as we up here experience it; it is applied to those who have something of value besides life to leave behind."

"Faith, then, sergeant, it's ourselves will be immune."

[31]

"That's what I'm doubting. Five minutes since, I was nobody of nowhere. Now I suddenly find myself gazetted Sir Gerald Scarlett of Dunshinannon, owner of a picturesque, if ruined, castle; three acres that might be profitable under cultivation, and a cow!"

Barney shook his head. "A grand dream, Sergeant. May the blissed saints soften the awakening to ye," he added, with commiseration.

"But, man—here, look at this, will ye?" Before his astonished eyes Scarlett held a draft for a substantial sum. "A luck-slice from the rent-roll. Oh, that proves it no dream, since money talks, but never in its sleep!"

Barney removed his regimental hat. "Hurrah for Sir Gerald, the castle, including the ruins, the acres, and ivery blissed pertaty, past, present and to come, adorning them!"

"And the cow, God bless her!" Scarlett also bared his head.

"Amen!" Barney supplemented, fervently. "I'm wid ye, sorr, in prosperity, as in adversity! How soon do we quit the service, me lordship?"

"Not till we've finished out our term, you lazy vagabond! Meanwhile, sink the title. I travel on my soldiership, and you're in the same boat!"

[32]

"Amen! if it has to be," acquiesced Barney, with philosophic resignation, saluting meekly. "And phwat's the next orders, me lord—Sergeant, I should say?"

"For the present you can take charge and administer the law, unless anything demanding a

judicial mind comes up, while I wander on incog., and do a little prospecting to identify the toughs and crooks that give this the name of the blackest district in all the great Northwest! I've begun rather well; I've just rounded up Bully Nick and his sharp-shooting gang!"

"Ye have?" Barney's jaw dropped with amazement. "Single-handed?"

"Aye; but forewarned is four-armed, you know!"

"Even so. Mother of Grace——"

"Tut, tut, man; that's but a flea bite in the ocean, as one of our Irish philosophers remarked. There's a regularly organized band of thieves—aye, who don't stick at murder, either—that hold up stages, terrorize the whole community, and play the dickens generally. The scum of all nationalities, their headquarters are across the boundary in Uncle Sam's domain, while their field of operations is the whole Northwest. The thing is to identify them, catch them redhanded in our precincts."

[33]

"A Herculeaneum task, me lordship—Sergeant, I should say—and more, since that gintleman had only twelve impossibilities to conquer!"

"Och, Hercules! I'd sooner any day be a whole man than just half a god like Hercules! Any able-bodied son of Erin should be able to match Hercules, except in the snake-strangling trick, since divvle an example did Saint Patrick leave us to practice on."

"Thru," assented Barney. "Many's the dhrink I've laid on it that the only snakes an Irishman is capable of behoulding is all in his own eye."

"Don't ye be looking for them that way on duty. Keep your vision for two-legged crawlers. There was a fellow here, just now, who, if faces are incriminating testimony, stands twenty times convicted in the dark, or I'm a duffer in face-palmistry."

"Why not begin with the rope's end, Sergeant?"

"No, no, man! We must even make haste slowly, as some old Roman of an Irishman remarked. I'll just wander on, as if looking for a job, and if any one inquires about me, give me what character ye please!"

"Faith, sorr, since fair play demands reciprocity on both sides, I'll damn ye for a blockhead!"

[34]

"Go ahead," laughed Scarlett. Breaking off, he inquired: "Now who's this chee-charka coming up the trail?"

III

[35]

LUCKY DURANT

The lagging pace of the young man who was approaching, his weary stoop under a light pack he carried, miner-wise, upon his shoulders, confessed him all too surely the tenderfoot Scarlett had described him.

With a bewildered stare at the congeries of squalid tents and cabins that comprised the camp, he accosted Barney.

"Surely this can't be Lost Shoe Creek?" "Maybe it can't be, but that's phwat it does be, me lad!"

"It's so different from what I expected."

"Ye were anticipating skyscrapers? In these parts we build downwards for gold—and both ways lead equally far from heaven, I'm thinking."

"Well, though not skyscrapers, I certainly had looked for something more imposing. Can you direct me to the office, or residence, of Mr. Matthew Durant?"

[36]

"Durant!" Involuntarily, Barney and Scarlett exchanged a glance of surprise.

"Office or residence, indade! 'Tis myself would like to be directed to the man," replied the former.

"Oh, but surely you know him!" cried the newcomer. "I mean Matthew Durant, owner of the wonderful Rainbow Mine!"

At this juncture the elderly man who had been spoken of by one of his brother prospectors as Lucky, came hurrying toward them from the tent, and addressed himself to Barney. "The Dominie has just announced that you have mail for one Matthew Durant, officer. I am he."

Before Barney could reply the young tenderfoot had darted forward with a threatening gesture.

"You Durant, indeed, you miserable fraud! I know Mr. Durant well," he turned to Barney to explain. "I was employed in the New York bank where he keeps his daughter's account, and many is the chat I've had with him. Why, I've resigned my position and spent every penny I'd saved to come out here to beg him to put me in the way of making my fortune, as he has done, scooping gold out of the earth. The idea of this beggarly imposter pretending to be Durant, owner of the Rainbow Mine!"

[37]

A sad smile crossed the worn features of the claimant. "I must indeed be changed if Walter Pierce does not know me."

At the sound of his voice the young man started, but gazed at the unshorn face, the poverty-stricken figure, unconvinced.

"Ye have some means of identification, perhaps?" suggested Barney, in all good faith. "A strawberry mark, or a lock of your sainted mother's hair?"

Durant thought a moment. "No one here knows me by the name. But, wait! I have a picture of my daughter Evelyn, whom Walter will recognize. Evelyn will bear witness that I'm her own dear daddy." He felt in his breast, but not finding what he sought, gave a smothered cry. "Lost—my little Evie, have I lost you?"

"This is herself, I'm thinking!" Scarlett held out the miniature. "I found her on this spot, putting the wild roses to the blush."

"Thank you—thank you! Evie!" Durant covered the portrait with kisses.

"Which was to be proved," remarked Barney, conclusively, handing Durant his mail. "There's a thrifle av duty to pay on it, sorr."

Durant's expectant hand dropped to his side. "I—I'm rather down on my luck just now," he faltered.

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While Barney hesitated between conscience and good will, Scarlett whispered in his ear. "Good!" he then exclaimed. "The Sergeant will settle it, Misther Durant. I mean," he corrected himself as Scarlett kicked his leg, "it is already settled. Me man here," he indicated his superior, "a great blockhead ordinarily, but with lucid intervals, reminds me that the duty was prepaid beforehand in advance."

When the soldiers had moved away, Walter Pierce found his voice. "Then you are Durant. But where, where, where is the wonderful Rainbow Mine?"

"Where it always has been—in the clouds!"

"Good heavens, do you mean to say it is all a fraud?"

"Less than a fiction," amended the older man. "Sit here and I'll tell you all about it." He sank wearily on the ground, leaning against a huge pine tree, and when Walter had placed himself beside him, began his strange tale. "Oh, the money has been no fraud, as your bank can testify. I'm an old miner—a born prospector, with a nose for gold—and I've always had streaks of luck; I've always made my pile, in California, Colorado, and up here in Canada. But it has only been a rich pocket here and there. I've never managed to develop a proposition into a paying claim, or a paying claim into an exhaustless mine. But whenever I've had a big clean-up I've blown it all in, as your born miner invariably does, trusting to luck for the morrow. Some miners blow it in on cards, drink—on worthless properties—but I've had only one extravagance—my daughter. My wife always had vast ambitions, and when the wife died she passed them on to me for our only child. To educate Evelyn, to have her brought up a flower of civilization, that always has been my dream, as I have roughed it in camps or tramped over glaciers, through forests, sleeping under the stars. And so I sent the little one to school in 'Frisco, Chicago, New York, with a European polishing off. And somehow, the further East she traveled the grander her notions grew—and as for myself, on my flying visits to her I took pride in seeing my girl hold her own with the daughters of oil, beef and railways trusts, and then with the daughters of princes of the Old World. And the luck held out. However grand Evie's whims, I always had the stuff to back her—and I always lived in hopes that any turn of the pick and shovel would yield me, not merely a rich clean-up, but the inexhaustible fortune that is every miner's dream. And so, between what Evie took for granted and what I told her, half in jest, there grew up this fable of the Rainbow Mine. But this season—I suppose it is my punishment for my deception—the luck has turned clean against me. The gold is here in the earth, as it always has been—but I've lost my knack of finding it. The old earth no longer trusts me with her secrets." He groaned, covering his face with his rough, knotted hands for a minute, during which young Pierce exclaimed, bitterly:

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"Then what is to become of me?"

"Ah, well!" Recovering composure, Durant rose. "It won't do to loaf. I'm sorry for your disappointment, Walter. And the worst is, I can't do much for you; can't show you any hospitality. In order to maintain life till the luck turns, I am sharing the outfit of a chap named Blenksoe. That's he, yon." He indicated a man of evil aspect, who was lounging at the entrance of a rude hut nearby. "Blenksoe is grub-staking me through a superstition about my luck. But Blenksoe is a bad lot. You must not have anything to do with him."

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"But what in the world am I to do?" cried Pierce. "I tell you, I am penniless—penniless!"

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"You must work," Durant admonished. "You must get employment on a lay—that is, you must induce some one to let you help work his claim on shares. I'll teach you the trick of panning gold."

"But if gold-dust can be taken out by the dish-pan," cried Walter, with bulging eyes, "why should any one go poor?"

"You young fool! First you have to find in which patch out of desert areas of mud and cobblestone the gold-dust hides. And then you have to pay the Government for the privilege of staking, working it. Look along the banks of this creek. As far as eye can see every inch of pay-dirt is claimed, staked, defended, not only by law, but by miners' justice, with a shooting-iron. In a mining camp human life ain't worth a damn, as you'll find if you trespass on another man's claim, or if he should take a fancy to yours. Just be content if, for the present, by working eighteen hours of daylight during the twenty-four, during the short summer, you can pay your way."

"Good heavens!" again cried Pierce. "Then are the stories of gold all a fable? Surely many fortunes are made up here?"

"Surely," replied Durant, "and lost here, too. Every Klondike camp is the garden for a score of fortunes, and the graveyard of a thousand hopes. Well, I must go get pick and shovel." He moved toward his tent. "I must go out on the hills, prospecting. Thank God, I left my girl a tidy sum in the bank—and before that is spent her daddy will have found her Rainbow Mine—or will die like a trail-dog in the traces!"

"I ought to tell you——" Walter detained him. "That money—Miss Durant has drawn it, every penny."

"Eh!" exclaimed Durant. "Are you sure?"

"It was that which set me thinking about coming up here myself. I heard her telling the cashier. You haven't paid her a visit for three years; accordingly, she intends coming to visit you as a surprise."

"A surprise! My God!" gasped the unhappy man.

"She has invested in the most costly outfit," continued Walter. "She is traveling with a princely retinue. You see, she thinks you live in regal style—palaces and all that."

"And when——" Durant moistened his dry lips. "How soon——?"

Pierce shrugged his shoulders. "I fell in with her party to-day, though as I was stone broke and hoofing it I didn't care to make myself known to her. She was inquiring your whereabouts. She is coming by the stage. She'll be here any minute now."

The tooting of a horn echoed through the hills, mingled with bursts of girlish laughter, as, with a crack of the driver's whip and the jingling of bells, in a cloud of dust the stage was seen approaching. With a groan Durant buried his face in his hands. "My God!" he muttered. "Evelyn!"

IV

THE PICTURE GIRL

"Let your light so shine——" At this cue the much-converted Ikey passed Gumboot Annie's frying-pan about among the men. Instead of organ-voluntary, or tenor solo, such as obtains during the offertory in conventional places of worship, the Bully, at his own request, rose to make a few appropriate remarks. "I ain't converted," he frankly announced. "Heaven ain't in it with a hot old hell of a whoop-up time in this here life, d'ye see? Even if ye hang fer it! But say, parson, you're all right. You're a sure square proposition! Boys, the collection goes, d'ye see?"

"You betcherlife!" with cordial emphasis acquiesced the boys, even as the orthodox respond Amen, while pouring gold-dust from their pokes into the frying-pan.

"Oh, I don't despair of you, Nicholas! I shall yet see you a pillar of the church!" The minister now was mingling with his congregation, shaking hands, hearty if not invariably spotless, right and left. "Thank you, lads, thank you! This will go toward the maintenance of a hospital, where you shall be cared for when disabled by accident, or laid up with a er—touch of—ahem!—scurvy."

"Booze," corrected Bully Nick, scorning the well-meant euphemism.

After a second, informal benediction from Maclane, Barney, considering that the execution of justice temporal had been waived quite long enough in favor of things pertaining to the soul, tapped Nick on the shoulder with cheerful authority. "Now, me man, put your best fut forward

and step prattily to jail! The rest av yez"—he looked round on the group with impartial invitation—"can accompany us on giniral lack av principles!"

"Oh, but say—the stage is a-comin' in," remonstrated Bill, as the tooting of a distant horn echoed musically among the mountain passes. "There's like to be ladies aboard her. Can't we wait for to look upon the ladies?"

The suggestion obviously was popular, even to the extent of suggesting mutiny if not complied with, and Barney himself had some difficulty in delaying his consent in order to add value to it before permitting his mug to relax into a grin. "As a man in line av promotion to be nominated an officer and a gintleman, 'tis no less than me duty."

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"Boys, boys!" Mops, who had been reconnoitering, ran back, breathless and excited. "There's gals aboard!"

"The hell thar is!" exclaimed the boys, delighted, and meaning no disrespect.

"A hull outfit o' gals," expatiated Mops. "And one, perched up by the driver, jest the swellest, jim-dandiest little female proposition you ever seen in all your life! Say, I wisht I hadn't left my dress-suit in cold storage!"

"Any one lend me a comb?" Any one being unable to oblige him, Bill ran a corkscrew through his curly hair. "Well, anyway, my face is clean!"

"All ye can see av it, for the dhirt that's on it," Barney encouraged him.

The horn blew a gay fanfare; the driver's whip cracked with more than wonted smartness; the bells on its four horses jingled merrily as the cumbersome old stage rattled into Lost Shoe Creek, and drew up before Gumboot Annie's hostelry to an enthusiastic ovation of hurrahs, cap-tossings, and gun-firings from the male populace.

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A handsome girl, wearing her modish clothes with a too conscious effect of style, from her place on the box bowed pleased acknowledgments in all directions for the cheering, but at the volley of shots gave a little startled cry, which was taken up in louder note by her companions.

Doffing his hat, Parson Maclane came forward, with a reassuring smile. "Only a Klondike welcome, young ladies," he explained.

"That's what!" the men confirmed him. "A Klondike welcome!"

"How quite too utterly charming!" exclaimed the young lady. "Girls! Sarah!" she appealed to the others of the party. "Aren't they too dear and picturesque for anything!" That "they" were human beings and not part of the brilliant panorama seemed hardly to occur to her.

A score of pairs of rough but willing hands stretched up to help the speaker from her high throne, but the honor fell to Scarlett, or rather was appropriated by that masterful young man as, putting the other aspirants aside, he lifted her over the wheel and swung her lightly to the ground. Without waiting for her thanks he returned to his wood-chopping with a sense of one of life's minor miracles upon him. "By St. Bridget!" he was thinking, "but that's my picture-girl!"

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When all the passengers had alighted safely the boys pushed their leader to the front. "Speech! Speech! Bully Nick!" they insisted. "Speech!"

"Take my hat off fer me," in an undertone commanded the champion shot and orator. When one of his lieutenants had hastened to comply, the Bully stood forth and cleared his throat. "Ladies, in the name of the district—and never mind jest at these presents what name the district bears—I regret I can't give ye the glad hand, through bein' a-wearin' of th' Government bracelets."

"The Government bracelets," repeated the beautiful young lady, puzzled, under cover of the guffaws with which his followers received Nick's initial witticism.

"Mary, love——" She appealed to the tallest of the girls who stood about her. "You are up in political economy?"

"I think he must mean some official decoration," glibly prompted Mary.

"That's it," corroborated Nick, unashamed, amid the shame-faced laughter of his followers. "Official decoration fer proficiency in gun-play!" He held up his handcuffed hands.

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"Oh!" The girl and her companions recoiled instinctively.

"My dears!" The minister stepped into the breach. "I assure you, Nicholas here has the warmest heart, though at times he is a trifle—er—impulsive."

"Aye!" Nick nodded. "Impulsive, under the influence of bad liquor. Shot a chap recent when drunk, me and him alike. Not but what he desarved it all right, though the blamed Government won't see it in that light. But never mind them little personal details. Let me present the boys. Step up, lads. This here is Mops, our masher. Only hez ter look at a mess of pertatoes to rejuce 'em. Tuk a prize once at a beauty show, there bein' no other contestants, and the judge havin' been struck blind."

"Oh, stop yer joshin'!" growled Mops, as, with a red face, he nearly lost his balance in a bow.

"And Bill. Bill's our dude," explained the Bully. "Won't use nothin' but fashion-plates ter patch his breeches. Now, Bill, don't turn yer back on the ladies, else they'll see that what I say is true. And this here solemn guy is Sandy, who keeps everything that comes his way, except the Commandments, and takes whatever he can lay hands on, except a joke." A few more introductions having been achieved in the same style, "Well, well, I guess we're a rough, tough lot," concluded Nick.

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"Nature's noblemen, my dear," interpolated the minister. "The dearest souls, except for an occasional regrettable—ahem—"

"Spree!" shouted the Bully. "But that, take it all in all, is a good sign. When bedrock's too smooth you won't find gold. Gawd knows we're tough—but when women comes among us—good women—" He broke off to pass a ragged sleeve across his eyes and gulp. "They're welcome as pay-dirt, and honored as queens."

"That's what! You betcherlife!" emphatically assented the throng.

"Thank you! thank you!" replied the beautiful young lady. "I must introduce myself. I come from New York. My name is Evelyn Durant—"

"Rah, 'rah, for Evelyn!" shouted Mops, to his own surprise and the general admiration.

"And these young friends of mine"—Miss Durant indicated the six plainly dressed little maids who were drinking in these wonderful happenings, like children in a fairy dream—"their names are Mary, Ruth, Ethel, Kate, Effie and Gertrude, They have come with me for a holiday from the institution where they live. They are orphans."

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A round of cheers was thereupon called for, for Mary, Ruth, Ethel, Kate, Effie and Gertrude, and clinched with Barney's flattering assertion, "An' sure this is the idayal asoilum for thim, and may they prosper and multiply galeor, for divvle a family in the disthric can brag av an orphan of its own at all, more shame to us!"

"And this," Evelyn tapped a stout, middle-aged woman kindly on the shoulder, "is my faithful maid, Sarah."

Sarah having been duly cheered, "Sarah is nae bonny, but she might be sonsy and of a savin' disposeetion," commended Sandy, cautiously, for which encomium, however, he was only rewarded by an angry shake of Sarah's stout umbrella, with a counsel to keep his cheek to himself or she'd know the reason why.

These graceful amenities concluded, "We have come all this way to visit my father," explained Miss Durant. "But it is far harder to find him than I should have expected, considering how well known he is. But I'm sure you can help me."

"Sure!" cried her hearers. "You betcher-boots on that!"

"And who may be your dad, lady?" inquired one. "Some crackerjack swell capitalist, I reckon."

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At this, a gaunt, elderly man, who had kept in the background, leaning against a tree, and taking no part in the proceedings, shifted his position, uneasily.

"Well," said the young lady, with a conscious laugh, and the condescension of one who might boast descent from Santa Claus, "I suppose every one in these parts is familiar with the name of Matthew Durant."

"Matthew Durant!" The owner of the name did not claim it, and Scarlett and Barney, who, of the onlookers, alone could have identified him, recognizing the tragedy that was being enacted before them, also were silent. Meanwhile the prospectors, after scratching perplexed heads and ransacking memories in vain, denied all knowledge of the man.

"Maybe he warks his proposeetion as a company, leddy," suggested Sandy.

"Oh, dear, no!" Miss Durant flouted the notion. "My father is It!"

The man leaning against the Douglas spruce, his ragged cap drawn down over his eyes, groaned slightly, and turning away, looked toward the distant mountains, while overhead a bird trilled blithely.

"Let me see if I can describe him," his daughter was saying, in her sweet, assured young voice. "He is tall, erect—"

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Durant's bowed shoulders bowed themselves still lower.

"He is clean-shaven—"

Durant felt his unkempt beard.

"He always dresses in the height of fashion. He's quite a dude, I tell him."

Durant laughed outright.

"And I think him extremely handsome!"

"Sure; judging by his darter!" cried Mops, gallantly. "Oh, I don't mean that!" he hastened to add,

fearful of having been too free.

"Oh, but I don't mind your meaning it," laughed Evelyn. "But come, if you've never met my father surely you all know his mine—the wonderful Rainbow Mine."

There was a pregnant pause, and then the Bully spoke, slowly, impressively. "I never knowed an out-an'-out prospector that didn't own the wonderfulest mine goin'—only waiting fer a triflin' circumstance like capital ter come along from the East and open it up and put it on a payin' basis. Why, every man Jack of us owns a placer claim, or hydraulicking concession, a silver or a copper mountain or a glut of gold or summat that entitles him to be It. Why, this here little beggar," he jerked his head toward Bill, "he claims he owns an antimony proposition that if developed ull make J. Peerpunt Morgan take a back seat and Hetty Green look like thirty cents——"

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"No 'if' about it. You betcherlife it will!" cried Bill, with warmth.

"Aye!" The Bully nodded his head, condoningly. "And Sandy here claims ter have an option on a ___"

"A copper proposeetion, pure boanite," elucidated Sandy.

"Aye! Something that's a-goin' ter make Clark of Montana bust with envy some day," assented Nick, "and knock Newhouse of Salt Lake City inter a cocked hat. Why, tho' by nacher conservative an' shrinking I myself am calkilatin' on stackin' up the chips—I mean the books, ag'in Andy Carnegie, and pourin' oil on the troubled waters of John D. Rockefeller's poverty, unless he's run in fust! Take my word fer it, missy, every man within range of them bright eyes of yourn is a millionaire—ter-morrer! A stun-broke millionaire!"

"But, you see, my father is a millionaire to-day," explained Miss Durant, with amused tolerance. "A multi-millionaire."

Nick shrugged his shoulders. "Lucky father!"

"Why, that's his camp name," Evelyn exclaimed. "Lucky! He has often told me. Surely you all know Lucky?"

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MINGLED WITH THE TRAVELLERS AT GUMBOOT ANNIE'S BOARD.

There was a dead silence, broken only by the fly-catcher's mocking refrain, every man with wonderful restraint and delicacy avoiding so much as a glance toward Durant.

Then, again, Nick rose to the occasion, manfully. "Why, ter be sure! Everybody knows Lucky, and Lucky's Rainbow Mine, eh, boys? Blast yer, can't yer *say* yer does?" he demanded, in an undertone that would have been backed up with a shooting-iron had his hands been free.

But of their own accord the boys, their presence of mind recovered, all were loyally assuring Miss Durant that Lucky and Lucky's mine were synonyms for boundless wealth at Lost Shoe Creek and throughout the golden northland. "The mere mention of it brings better fortin' than touchin' a hunchback, or spittin' on your money at new moon," one summed up.

"Too bad, but Lucky ain't here just now," the Bully went on to state, with an authority that, handcuffed though he was, not even the most audacious would have dared dispute. "An' what's more, tain't so easy ter locate him. Like as not he's off, attendin' ter them vast interests of his'n somewhar out among them hills!" He nodded, toward the hoary-bearded mountains as if defying their granitic silence to gainsay him.

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"Sure he is!" corroborated the prospectors, in a chorus, covering up the long-drawn sigh of relief that nearly betrayed Durant.

"Prospectors is here ter-day, and gone ter-morrer, like the snow, d'ye see?" concluded Nick. "But he'll turn up in time all right, fer fair, with a pokeful of dust in his corjeroy, and a train of mules loaded down with nuggets fer his gal!"

"Sure! That's what! Betchersweetlife!" cried the boys, who lacked their leader's skill in improvising lies, but knew a good one when they heard it.

"Oh, thank you, thank you so much!" Evelyn had begun to feel real uneasiness at the continued postponements in arriving at her journey's end or obtaining definite intelligence of her father. "And when I join him I shall tell him what a welcome you have given me. And I promise you he shall back everybody's proposition. I promise every one of you a substantial slice of our good fortune in the Rainbow Mine."

Comment on this generous pledge was headed off by Ikey's vigorous ringing of the supper-bell, coupled with an announcement from Gumboot Annie that for a dollar within the tent might be obtained a meal calculated to turn the mother of the Delmonicos the colors of a lettuce and tomato salad from professional jealousy, on which, at Evelyn's invitation and with Barney's willing concurrence, the execution of justice temporal again was stayed, while Nick and his followers, with their custodian, mingled with the travelers at Gumboot Annie's board. There the Bully's manacled efforts to devour bacon and flapjacks particularly delighted the young ladies, who took turns in cutting up his food for him, while he himself was moved almost to tears that his last victim could not be present to share the joy their late unpleasantness was procuring for himself as the survivor.

Durant followed them to the entrance of the tent where, unnoticed, he lingered a few minutes, listening to the hum of merry voices, and feasting his sad eyes upon his girl, then turned despairingly away.

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EVELYN ENGAGES A COURIER

While, as he knew, his identity was suspected by Nick and Nick's gang, yet, so long as these were at supper his disguise enabled Scarlett to wander through the camp, as if seeking employment, and reconnoitre in order to ascertain what were the most flagrant examples of law-breaking industries with which, officially, he would have to deal. Meanwhile, his thoughts kept straying toward the picture-girl with pleasure in the thought of her fascinating proximity, not unmingled with criticism of her large assumption of little dignities, softened, however, with pity for the bitter disappointment in store for her when she should learn the true state of her father's affairs.

As it would be manifestly impossible for her to continue under the delusion that hers was the purse of Fortunatus to draw on, the obviously wisest plan would be for Durant to disclose himself to her without delay, confess the truth, and either arrange for her to remain with him, sharing his rough lot, should she have the grit so to do, or take up a collection to send her back to any friends who might be willing to give her a home until, if ever, his luck should turn again. For his own part, however, both as official and man, Sergeant Scarlett was strongly of opinion that it would be an unholy act to allow a bevy of girls to leave a district so sorely needing them, above all when among their number was the girl of girls whom no young man can fail to recognize the moment he sets eyes on her; or, as in his case, even on her portrait. Accordingly, a thousand schemes passed through his head for making the wilderness, in spite of straitened means and harsh conditions, an acceptable habitation to the newcomers. The first step was to take counsel with Evelyn's father, but when, after making his duty rounds of inspection, he returned to the neighborhood of Gumboot Annie's hostelry, Durant had disappeared, nor did inquiry reveal the slightest trace of him.

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Scarlett's next idea was formally to present himself to Miss Durant and proffer his services in finding her party suitable accommodations till her father could be reached. Just as he arrived at this decision the travelers came from the tent. Approaching Evelyn, with a military salute less effectively seconded than he could have desired by the battered apology for a hat that he was wearing, he was about to accost her, when, to his surprise, she waved him imperiously aside.

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"Out of the way, my good man. I wish to speak with the officer."

At this, Barney, who was engaged in lining up his prisoners for the march to headquarters, came forward, with a flattered grin. "Out av the way, ye hulkin' vagabone!" he ordered his superior, with a rough shove that filled Scarlett with wrath, and sent Nick and his men, who every moment were becoming surer of the equivoque, into loud guffaws.

"I tell you, I never give indiscriminately to beggars," stated Miss Durant, as the young man seemed inclined to persist. "Kate, love," she beckoned a serious-looking young girl, "investigate

his case."

Kate wrinkled up her conscientious eyebrows. "His face is very red," she whispered Evelyn, "but somehow I don't think it's drink."

"Let him wait, then," ordained Evelyn, "and I'll see about him myself. Meanwhile—oh, officer, I want your help! I'm in such a pickle for lack of a man servant," she went on to confide in Barney. "The French courier I brought out with me deserted the moment we set foot in Skagway, taking my camera, automobile, and I don't know what besides. Of course, my father will see to it that he's found and punished—and the things don't matter, because, till my own are recovered, they can be replaced. But the difficulty is to replace Alphonse. I never before saw so many idle and poverty-stricken men in all my life; yet—it's the strangest thing—no matter what inducements I offer, no one is willing to take service with me."

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"Myself, I don't think it much loss, miss," Evelyn's maid struck in. "That Alphonse was too tight-laced to be of any good use. And, anyway, for my part I don't think it respectable for a man to wear corsets any more than for a woman to go without 'em."

"Oh, it's not Alphonse's usefulness I mourn for," admitted Miss Durant. "It's the appearance of the thing; the *chic*. My father always likes me to have the best of everything; and I owe it to his position no less than to my own dignity to travel in the best style. Officer," again she appealed to Barney, "can't you recommend me a courier?"

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Barney looked his bewilderment. "Is it a currier for the horses av your automeboiler ye do be wanting, miss?"

Perceiving in this breach his opportunity, Scarlett stepped boldly into it. "May I apply for the position? I'm looking for work."

"Lookin' for throuble, more like," muttered Barney, with solicitude. "Wid all thim lasses! Begorra, I know the sect."

Evelyn turned about and surveyed the speaker critically. "Ah, I'm glad it's employment and not alms you want," she commended the busiest, most hardworked official in the district. "But—I wonder—are you qualified?" Into her pretty eyes there crept a look of doubt.

"I know something about horses," with truth the Mounted Policeman assured her.

"But not about lasses," Barney anxiously tugged at his sleeve. "'Tis them as leads ye the divvle av a ride, and is like as not to run away wid ye."

"H'm!" Evelyn considered the matter. The shaggy picturesqueness of the prospectors in colored flannel shirts, top boots and corduroys, with hands ever on gun or pistol, their odd phrase and lurid expletive, touched the silly streak of romanticism in her as had they been chorus of an opera in which she found herself enacting the star rôle, but this clean-skinned young man, with unadorned speech, in commonplace, work-a-day clothes, at first failed to interest her.

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"H'm! Well," she conceded finally, "I'm something of a judge of people. Step into the light where we can take a good look at you."

As Scarlett obeyed, "There!" cried little Kate, triumphantly. "The nice, modest way he changes color, I'm sure he doesn't drink!"

Evelyn also noticed, as who could fail to do, the ingenuous blush that overspread the white crescent of the young giant's brow, and it flattered her woman's love of power. "Well, girls," she demanded, in an audible aside, "and what do you think of him?"

The verdict of the orphans was unanimous; they thought him fine, Gertrude, who would have been frivolous and slangy had her institution permitted it, pronouncing him "a peach." Sarah alone challenged him.

"He's a sassy piece," she informed Evelyn. "Look at him now, fit to burst with laughter at us! I never heard of a decent man-servant that couldn't keep his face straight."

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"But if I'm not straight-faced and strait-laced like Alphonse," urged Scarlett, "at least ye can count on me never to take French leave of ye."

Sarah shook her head ominously. "He's too young, miss," she warned Evelyn. "Far too young."

"But I'm growing older every day," pleaded the postulant, "and up here the days are so long, one grows old twice as fast."

"He has too much command of language for a man-servant, miss," insisted Sarah. "That kind is apt to put on airs above their station. And—look at him now!—there's something altogether too masterful about the way he walks."

"Ah, that comes from soldiering," the young man explained. "Me legs are always under arms, as it were."

Evelyn laughed with a distinct prepossession. "What is your name?" she inquired.

"Scarlett."

"Scarlett what?"

"It's what Scarlett."

"Eh? What do you sign yourself—that is, can you write?"

"Oh, I manage to make me mark with my fist on any human document that gets in my way. I sign myself J. Scarlett."

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"Oh! And what does J stand for?"

"Gerald."

"Gerald! How do you spell it?"

"The usual way. G-e-r-a-l-d."

"Then, why do you sign it J?"

"Oh, that's just a mistake other people make in the pronunciation," the owner of the name elucidated, to his own if not to his hearer's satisfaction. "It once nearly cost me a lawsuit to establish it."

Sarah groaned: "He talks for all the world like an Irishman."

"Murther will out," Barney proclaimed, with pride.

Evelyn turned on the owner of Dunshinnanon. "Are you Irish?"

"It's the best excuse my parents could make for me," admitted Scarlett.

"I am more than half inclined to take him on trial," Evelyn stated. "But first," she again consulted Barney, "officer, can you give the young man a character?"

"A character? Faith, but that's phwat he does be needing some ginerously minded person to bestow on him, for niver a wan av his own has he to show at all, at all!" cried Barney, mindful of his chief's earlier injunctions to depict him in unflattered lights. "Glory be! If I was to begin to tell yez phwat I don't know about the lad he'd be afther breaking my skull for me, an' not for the first toime."

[66]

"Nor the last, either, you idiot!" growled Scarlett.

"That's rather vague," commented Evelyn. "Tell me, is he honest?"

"Gosh! th' Irish is no thieves," Barney answered handsomely for his race, "though now and thin maybe wan might snap at something in your hand. It takes a dhirty Hollander to do the stealin'!"

"Oh! And—is he sober?"

"Sober! A pure-blooded Celt like himself!" Wishing still to carry out Scarlett's first orders, Barney hotly repudiated the charge of damaging sobriety on his behalf, but warned by a surreptitious kick that he was exceeding instructions, he softened it by asking, generally: "Wid a felly like himself, that dhrunk or sober is aqually an omadhaun, phwat the divvle is the differ?" And Scarlett also pleaded his own cause by admitting that he was frequently quite sober, though, thanks be! never to an intemperate degree.

Sarah groaned portentously, but the missionary spirit was awakening in Evelyn. "I can put up with a good deal," she asserted, "if I feel I am giving employment where it is really needed. But I must first know where I stand. Is this young person reliable, to be depended on in an emergency?"

[67]

"You betcherlife on that!" yelled the prospectors, in delighted chorus. As outlaws, the mounted policeman was their natural enemy, but for the time he had downed them, as in the long run, they, by instinct, realized he always would down them, and they respected him.

"You stake yer bottom plunk on it, d'ye see? He's the only man ever got me skinned forty ways from the Jack," in a generous climax conceded Bully Nick.

Evelyn's pretty face was clouded with perplexity. Categorically there was no specific charge against the applicant; moreover, the longer she looked at him the more was she impressed with the promise of strength in his splendid proportions, the resolute chin, clear, friendly eyes, even though the corners of a mobile mouth did curl as if with perpetual laughter in an outlook on life too original to be seemly in a wearer of livery—yet, evidently, something was being withheld from her. Urged, however, by all the little orphans, who by this time were in love with Scarlett, she remarked: "Yes, we must remember that we came up here not only for our own pleasure, but also to do good. I am tempted to take the young man on a month's trial, and at least endeavor to reform him. That is, if— Officer," she again consulted Barney, "is he really the best protector you can find for us?"

[68]

Pushing his hat back from a brow heated by such unwonted drafts upon its thinking powers, Barney scratched his head while regarding his superior with disparagement. Finally, "well, yis, he is," he admitted, as if it were the last damnatory word to be spoken of the man.

Having ascertained that something over a dollar a day and his keep was as much as he was used

to in the way of wage, Miss Durant instructed her new courier in his duties—"to look after our trunks, bicycles, banjos, pianola, mandolins—"

"And the pets, dear," put in Ruth, who was rather tired of trying to keep the peace between an Angora cat and a canary, a parrot that looked as if it had a wicked past and a bull pup who wished to include the parrot, past and all, in his present rampageous scheme of life.

"Oh, of course the menagerie! Then you must go ahead to engage the best suites for us at the hotels, and—"

"And follow ye to pick up the articles ye leave behind," Scarlett nodded, understandingly. "But till we get fairly started, I'll just accompany ye." [69]

"Very well," assented Evelyn. "Sarah, I hope you won't mind having the young man eat with you while we are traveling?"

"I suppose it can't be helped, miss," gloomily replied the maid. "I only hope the young man will have the grace to improve the opportunity."

"Oh, I'll improve it fast enough," promised Scarlett, with a twinkling eye on Sarah, "so long as ye don't expect me to embrace it."

Evelyn cut short the maid's angry reproof. "Now, Gerald, you must keep your place. Conduct us to the nearest large city. We must telegraph my father to join us there. Meanwhile, we want to do a lot of shopping. We want, oh, ever so many things! Girls, which of you has my list?"

"I put down prizes for our bridge parties," cried Effie, her eyes snapping at the thought of the unhallowed joys in store for her.

"And materials for making fudge," whispered Ethel, who had thirty-two sweet teeth.

"Yes," assented Evelyn. "And we must buy presents: neckties and things for the poor dear miners who have been so kind to us. Also cotillion favors. As soon as we are settled I mean to give a ball." [70]

"But, miss, how about money?" Sarah reminded her. "We have only fifty-odd dollars left."

"Oh, we can have things charged!" cried Evelyn, airily. "My father's name will be letter of credit to any amount."

Scarlett looked about with a growing uneasiness. The day was fast subsiding into the long twilight that precedes the short northern summer night. Barney had departed with his captives on the long march that was the most effective object-lesson conceivable in what could be accomplished in policing a district by but two men, with the might of a Government behind; and here was he, practically alone, save for the minister, to guard these women, since, as he shrewdly guessed, in an emergency the courage of the other passengers traveling by the coach would prove of negligible quality. The horses had been put into harness some time before, yet the driver kept delaying their departure on the most trivial pretexts. On this Gumboot Annie, when appealed to, threw a lurid local color. "Guess Logan is timin' things fer the hold-up."

"The hold-up!" in alarm, exclaimed the passengers, who enjoyed these things better on billboards forthsetting Bowery melodrama. "You don't mean to say they really have hold-ups in these parts?" [71]

Gumboot Annie spat deliberately before replying, "Why, that's our specialty."

"But the driver—does not the driver defend his passengers?"

"The driver! Now wouldn't that jostle yer!" demanded Gumboot Annie of the mountains. "Logan hes ter stand in with the gang ter save his own skin. And, mind you folks don't make no fuss. Pass in yer checks an' no jawin', and the boys won't hurt yer none. But if yer squeal—well, it's none of my funeral."

Great consternation prevailed among the passengers who had booked to Camp Perdu, the stage's next destination, and elaborate were the preparations they made to conceal their valuables. The bills and gold-dust Maclane had collected for his hospital he skilfully packed into his moccasin, while, to the general amusement, Sarah bestowed Evelyn's ready money in the fauna and flora of her own bonnet.

"It's my belief the woman only said that to frighten us," decided Evelyn as, with a flourish of his horn, the driver shouted, "All aboard!" And as the stage rumbled peacefully along she added: "In any case, our party is safe. Our courier will protect us!" In no respect, however, were her predictions justified. Hardly was Lost Shoe Creek left behind when from the bushes by the wayside sprang a band of men, with hats drawn over their faces, pistols in hand, bidding the driver halt. [72]

It was the most systematic proceeding in the world, reducing the bandits to the level of petty tradesmen, and their victims to that of unwilling contributors to a recognized if oppressive impost. Not one of the former offered to spare the fair sex on condition its fairest representative should tread with him the stately measure of a minuet; not one of the latter invoked the memory of the former's spotless childhood hallowed by a mother's caresses beneath an old oaken bucket or spreading chestnut tree. Instead, Logan wound the reins about the whip as this stood in its socket, and held up his hands, though without ceasing to chew the straw in his mouth, while the

passengers under invitation apparently no more coercive than that of the average trolley car conductor to step lively or move up, dismounted and stood with uplifted arms while methodically relieved of purses, watches and the like. Terror tied the women's tongues, while the men, knowing the futility of remonstrance, were silent. Only Scarlett, while submitting with the rest, ventured on a lively sally or so that called down on him a few curses or served to provoke a laugh that later helped him in identifying the malefactors. But not a word of importance was uttered on either side till the leader of the gang, surveying the pile of loot, muttered, discontentedly: "Well, this is a blamed mean crowd! Go over 'em again!"

[73]

It was then Scarlett took a quick decision. Little as passivity suited his fighting manhood; much as, in his own phrase, it pained him to Evelyn's appealing glances to turn a deaf ear, he knew that to offer the slightest resistance would be to forfeit his own life and leave the womenkind to a fate one dared not think of calmly. Nevertheless, when at the second overhauling he saw her jeweled belt and studs torn rudely from her he could not forbear a movement of impatience that drew to himself the serious attention of the robbers.

"Say, young feller"—one pressed the cold muzzle of a pistol to his forehead—"air you in an all-fired hurry ter see yer affairs wound up?"

"Oh, as to that," he answered, "ye can wind up me affairs and welcome if ye'll take the time. They're just the Waterbury watch inside me pocket."

[74]

The ruffian laughed, and told him he could keep his worthless timepiece for his wit, but Evelyn shuddered with a disgust that gave her voice. "The pitiful coward! When I took it for granted you would risk your life for me!"

"Faith, but I'm not dying to be corpse at me own wake," jeered Scarlett. "For a lady I might risk my life, but not for the dust the reverend gentleman is treading under foot, nor for the greenbacks sprouting from yonder good woman's botanical headpiece!"

Shrieks from the women, groans and reproaches from the men, denounced this treachery, as the bonnet of the protesting Sarah yielded up its riches and the minister in heartbroken silence suffered himself, perforce, to be despoiled, while old Blenksoe, taken off his guard, in his natural tones cried, approvingly, "Ah, thet's somethin' like!"

As they hurriedly packed their loot, "Rustle, boys," in undertones, warned the leader, "else we shall have that blasted M. P. of a Scarlett on our backs!" His caution came none too soon. At Scarlett's instigation, Barney had contrived to get word to Perdu, and just as the robbers had cleared into the jungle with their booty an armed delegation of citizens appeared upon the scene. As the victims were left penniless, Dave Hastie, proprietor of the Grand Hotel, offered them gratuitous hospitality for the approaching night, a kindness that was accepted only too gladly.

[75]

"But before we start," cried Evelyn, amid general acclamation, "I wish to denounce a coward, a poltroon, a traitor! A contemptible being whose betrayal of those who trusted him should not go unscathed. Creature," she turned on her smiling courier, "have you no sense of shame?"

"Sure, but I have," he answered. "Never a day passes that I don't blush for human nature in the lump!"

Evelyn sighed, and again addressed the delegation of Perdu's Law and Order League, who, having missed the robbers, were fairly spoiling with eagerness to kill the next best man. "He never so much as lifted a finger to defend us," she explained.

"Oh, but I did! All ten of them," he defended himself, in injured tones.

"It's only what one might expect," Sarah harangued the throng, "taking on a scallywag without character or references. Practically robbing miss here of every penny of ready money she possesses, and damaging this bunnet that I got at a reduction off of a lady friend as has set up a swell millinery establishment in Sixth Avenue."

[76]

"He delivered us to our enemies!" There were tears in Maclane's voice. "He stripped the sick, the suffering; turned into channels of vice the contributions for my hospital."

All agreed that hanging was too good for the culprit, and some were in favor of lynching. One consideration alone deterred them from extreme measures, even while a rope was being hunted for among the skunk willows, sage and wild lupin by the road: namely, the unpopularity of such punitive proceedings with the Mounted Policeman newly appointed to the district.

"Times is sadly changed, boys," the leader reminded the delegation. "The gentlemanly way with us has allus bin ter choke off a traitor's last prayers with a hempen Amen. But this blamed M. P. is as apt ter pinch the gentlemen as acts impulsive in a little lynchin' matter as quick as he'd pinch a criminal. Thar's only two of 'em," he explained to the travelers, "the Sergeant and his man—but the way the feller covers distances—his horse has seven-leagued boots for sure! Now, as president of Perdu's Peace Committee and Law and Order League, I'd claim it my proud privilege ter fit the noose ter this young rascal's neck—but as husband to a good woman and father to her kids I don't want ter run up contrary-wise agin Scarlett of the Mounted!"

[77]

"Very well," decided Evelyn. "I myself am in favor of government. I belong to several ladies' associations for upholding clean streets and economy in the Mayor's office and things like that. From what you say, this—I didn't catch the Mounted Policeman's name, but he obviously must be

an officer; and though with us, in New York, policemen, even mounted ones, have no standing in Society, yet, in his way, he must be a gentleman. Then let this miserable fellow be bound and taken before him for sentence. I myself will press the charge against him."

"Good business," applauded the delegation, heartily.

But as they were about to bind the prisoner with a rope taken from the skeleton of a wretched horse that some inferior brute of a human being had put to purposes of transportation under conditions for which nature had never intended it, the Irishman put them lightly aside.

"One moment, please. Now that ye've wisely decided to postpone suspending the judged, also, as a famous American in a crisis once remarked, suspend judgment. All the accusations brought against me are dead true, which is why ye are alive to make them. I assisted in the despoiling of ye, on business principles, sacrificing small sums to one ten times their combined amounts. For under my own right foot I carry a sum that will not only replace Sarah's bonnet, greenbacks and all, but also reimburse the hospital with a little contribution of my own to boot."

[78]

As he spoke, he drew a roll of ready money from its hiding place and handed some bills over to the astonished maid and the no less astonished minister. "The rest, a draft, I am commissioned to deposit in the bank on account of one Durant, now absent on a prospecting trip, for the maintenance, till he returns, of his daughter——"

A loud chorus of surprise, admiration, gratitude interrupted the young man who was now hero of the hour.

The League enrolled him an honorary member on the spot. To his terror, three depressed women with bundles wanted to kiss him for his mother, while Maclane, on behalf of all the disabled people in the district, nearly wrung his hand off. As breaking away he started to make his escape, Evelyn detained him. "My preserver," she cried, in impassioned tones, "let me reward you!"

[79]

And when Scarlett, laughing, shook his head, refusing a moiety of his own ready money that, at Evelyn's direction, Sarah was proffering him, "Then at least tell me your name—for in the excitement I am ashamed to say I have clean forgotten it."

"Yes, yes," insisted the group, "your name!"

"'Tis the same as it has always been," he answered, blithely, turning on his heel. "I haven't changed it yet. Any time ye want me just ask at headquarters for Himself, for Scarlett of the Mounted."

VI

[80]

EVELYN SEEKS COUNSEL

A few days later Evelyn, accompanied by Sarah, knocked at the door of St. Andrew's Mission, near Perdu. An Indian woman opened to her, and on her asking for Mr. Maclane, the minister came forward with a cordial welcome.

"I won't invite you in, since just at present my study is in requisition as a hospital, and in any case you will doubtless prefer the veranda with its vista of the mountains."

"And your lovely garden," added Evelyn, glancing at the beds in which vegetables and ornamental plants were growing in orderly profusion. "I never supposed that cultivation was possible so far north."

"That is a common mistake," replied the minister. "But it is the same with plants as with people: wherever it is possible for them to grow it is intended that they should be cultivated; by which I do not mean that we should take the nature out of them, teaching them tricks and artificial ways; I mean that we should improve the conditions surrounding them, in order that their natural tendencies and activities may have the widest scope for beneficent purposes."

[81]

"And yet"—Evelyn looked up and down the road—"you seem to be almost the only one who recognizes these possibilities. All the cabins seem to have been dropped in uncompromising rows along the highways, as if they were so many children's toys taken out of cardboard boxes labeled 'Made in Germany'."

"Ah, most of the folk who come here are so busily engrossed in spading up the soil for treasure they have no time to till and sow. Yet our short summer of long days is capable of harvests that would yield pure gold in a land of canned supplies, where men get to long for green food as for water in the desert. Metz, the pioneer baker of Perdu, a far-sighted German, is raking in the gold-dust that other men laboriously pan out, by the sackful, simply by adding a fresh lettuce leaf, or radish, to every plate of fried eggs and bacon that he serves. Brackett of Atlin is famous for the

beauty of his poppy patch that blazes like a banner on a dusty mountainside, no less than for the succulence of the turnips with which he regales his friends, all grown on a tiny corner of an auriferous claim that overhangs the sluiceboxes. Dr. Milne of Dawson received a prize for the tomatoes and celery he took down from his far-north home to the exposition in Victoria, on the occasion of the visit of the Prince and Princess of Wales. Indeed, there was a story going the rounds that on the third day of the exposition, when the good doctor wanted to substitute fresh produce for his own, which, by that time had wilted, he could find none in Victoria to match their size. And I myself am not a little proud of my own sweet-peas." He handed Evelyn the fragrant blossoms he had been cutting as he talked.

[82]

"Thank you. They are indeed lovely. But I must not detain you too long. I have come to you for that which I rarely seek—advice."

"I am wholly at your service." Maclane installed her in a steamer-chair and placed himself on a bench beside her. "Some ethical question?"

"Oh, dear, no! I am an Episcopalian," answered Evelyn, loftily. "Not but what I am very liberal," she hastened to add. "I subscribe to worthy charities of all denominations."

[83]

There was charity without resentment on Maclane's good brow as he merely said: "Then in what way can I help you?"

"My troubles are all of a practical nature."

"In that respect, perhaps, I am not the best adviser."

"But there's no one else in whom I can confide. People up here treat me in the strangest way. I never had such an experience."

"Well, well, I'll do my best."

"In the first place I don't know how to manage about money. Sergeant Scarlett has deposited several hundred dollars to my account in the Canadian Bank of Commerce, and as much more in the Bank of British North America, yet this morning, when I went to draw some, the managers of each informed me, apparently on their own responsibility, that I am put on a weekly allowance; that I may only draw so much, at stated times, and not a penny more. When I threatened to withdraw my patronage, they said that would be impossible till the account was closed. I went to three lawyers in succession to get out injunctions and things against them—but not a man would undertake the case. Oh, evidently all the officials are leagued in some sort of a ring or another, for when I went to the office of the *Perdu Claim* and asked the editor to help me expose them, he only laughed. In New York, one or the other of the ten-cent magazines would have jumped at such an opportunity. However, that wouldn't matter so much if I could buy things from the stores on credit, but I find not a merchant will allow me to run up a bill. 'Cash down; spot cash for everything.' I never was so insulted in all my life."

[84]

"I am sorry people have seemed inhospitable," began Maclane, "but——"

"Oh, when it comes to that," Evelyn interrupted, "every one has been hospitality itself. Even the bank people, while officially they were insulting me, in the name of their wives and sisters offered to put up my party in some sort of fashion till we get settled. Hastie refuses to charge one penny for accommodating us till we find permanent quarters, though he had the impertinence—I'm sure he didn't mean to be impertinent—to suggest that we could stay indefinitely if we liked to work our way as chambermaids and waitresses and dishwashers and things. Even that impudent editor offered to turn out of the wretched cupboard of a room at the back of his office where he lives, and sleep on a printing press if we liked to go stay there. At least a dozen families have invited us to bunk in their stuffy little cabins till my father's return. But that isn't my way of doing things at all. I'm accustomed to having the best and paying for it. Yet not a soul will accept my note or give me one pennyworth of credit. Just wait till my father hears how I am being treated!"

[85]

"Ah, your father!" Maclane caught at the idea. "A talk with your father would clear things up immediately."

"Yes, of course. But where is my father? how to get at him? I ask, ask, ask. Everyone has seen him quite recently. Every one assures me he is in his usual perfect health. Yet when I insist on knowing definitely which path he took, every one points vaguely north, south, east, west, toward the mountains."

"Then, for the present, why not accept that view of it?" the minister suggested. "It seems to be a matter of general knowledge that he is well, and off on a prospecting tour—and to a born prospector, such as is your father, there seem to be no limitations in the way of time, space, endurance, when searching for treasure. Only one thing can be predicated with certainty: sooner or later a man must turn up at some base of supplies to renew his outfit. And then, knowing your anxiety, the whole district will see to it that he and you are put into communication with each other."

[86]

Miss Durant moved her daintily shod feet impatiently. "I'm not accustomed to waiting for anything that money can procure me. Why can't I send messengers flying to recall him, in every direction where there is a trail? One would think that hordes of these out-at-elbow camp hangers-on would be on their knees to me, begging for the chance—yet, though I have notices posted up everywhere offering a liberal salary and a thousand dollar bonus, I have had not one single

application, not though I offer for security the Rainbow Mine."

"Poor child!" Maclane looked at her compassionately, wondering in what way the bitter truth might be most gently broken to her, and examining his own honest conscience to know if his should be the task. Before this was clear to him, however, to his infinite relief he saw the handsome person of the Sergeant, now clad in full uniform, coming up the garden path. "Why not take our friend Scarlett into our counsels?" he hastened to suggest.

"What! That insolent young man who pretended to take service with me!" Miss Durant ignored the soldier's military salute. [87]

"My dear," remonstrated the good Maclane, "our friend is greeting you."

"Ah, Sergeant," cried Evelyn, with hauteur, "I did not see you! That is to say, in my world a lady does not see a gentleman until she recognizes him."

"Faith, then, I'd best make myself invisible, lest when recognized I mayn't be seen." Scarlett turned to go.

"Oh, please remain," pleaded Maclane, "and help me advise with Miss Durant. Pending her father's arrival, she finds herself, er—financially embarrassed—or rather at a loss to proportion her finances to her wants in the style to which she is accustomed. Now what do you suggest?"

"The first word lies with you, Dominie." His back toward the two, Scarlett had seated himself on the veranda steps and was playing with Telegraph and Wrangel, who, after a series of critical sniffings, had taken him unreservedly into their favor.

"Oh, not with me; not with any son of man," hastily disclaimed Maclane, who quite forgot that he had tried to throw the responsibility on Scarlett. "First always comes prayer. Take your troubles, my daughter, to the Divine Footstool." [88]

"Oh, of course," replied Evelyn, petulantly, "I always say my prayers, and make the responses in church. But just now I'm asking you how I am to pay for daily bread."

"Well," Scarlett considered, "I should advise—to begin with—well—"

"You've said well twice," Evelyn sharply pulled him up. "Best let well alone."

"Pardon," retorted Scarlett. "Truth lies at the bottom of my well."

In spite of herself Evelyn smiled, and perceiving his advantage he went on: "After all, well is the best beginning when you can't find a better. Why not for the present—just for a lark, you know—try roughing it?"

"Roughing it!" echoed Evelyn, in dismay. "Wouldn't that be a bit rough?"

"That's where the lark comes in," Scarlett assured her. "And we'd all make it as smooth as we know how."

"A capital idea!" Maclane slapped his knee and looked toward the sweet-pea vines as if calling on them to agree with him. "So—er—original. Think what letters you can write to your friends at home, Miss Durant. And then that is the only way to get the full—er—bouquet of a country, so to speak; not from the tourist standpoint, but by living the life of the people of any class who, by their work, are making it." [89]

Miss Durant frowned, pondered a little, then smiled. "I rather like the notion. We came here largely to do good, and it will make the inhabitants feel more at ease; bridge over the social difference, as it were, if I adopt their mode of life. I really am very democratic."

"Then that's where ye'll feel out of place," Scarlett remarked. "Wherever the surface is flat as a billiard table, as regards conditions, all class distinctions being wiped out, it's there that aristocracy begins. The democrats insist on it!"

"Perhaps I can accommodate myself even to your idea of aristocracy," Evelyn remarked, ironically. "The first question is, can we find a suitable dwelling?"

"I've been investigating," answered Scarlett, "and I find at Lost Shoe Creek there is an abandoned cabin ye can have rent free; a really very decent affair 'twill be with a little patching, which the boys will be only too proud to lend a hand with."

Evelyn gasped. "And you call that suitable for *me*!"

Scarlett shrugged his shoulders. "This is the wilderness, my lady."

"My dear," interposed Maclane, "you must remember that building is a costly matter. Even unskilled labor, when you can obtain it, commands five dollars a day. Talk of democracy; no man here is looking for a day's wage at carpentering, when any turn of the pick and shovel may make him a Croesus! Make up your mind to it that the Sergeant is offering you the equivalent of New York's most costly hostelry." [90]

"Oh, very well!" Miss Durant condescended to the cabin. "I suppose we can have tents for the servants? I shall need two women besides Sarah."

"Pardon, miss." At her name, the maid's stout form appeared from behind the angle of the

veranda, where she had been conducting a discreet flirtation with the waterman, who with a bucket supported by a frame on wheels and drawn by eight frisky little huskies, supplied Perdu with water from the lake at five cents the pail. "Do not count on me, miss. When my month is up I am looking to settle down on my own account."

"You are going to desert me? You are planning to set up in business, Sarah?" asked Evelyn, dismayed.

"Business!" Sarah laughed, scornfully. "With men growing on the bushes, as one might say." [91]

"You don't mean to say you are going to get married?"

"Why not me as well as the next lady, miss, and sooner than some, in a place where ladies is valued far more for their practical abilities than for mere youth and skin-deep beauty. I am told that two French-Canadian gentlemen, who are starting rival laundries, came to blows about me in the Pioneer Bakery last night; this gentleman with the waterworks concession has just passed some extremely gratifying remarks about me—though my own preference is for a Scotch gentleman with religious views and a copper proposition. Dear knows one needs something stable to tie up to in this outlandish place, where day and night get all mixed up!"

"But, Sarah," Evelyn laughed, "you know you haven't changed your watch hands since we left the Grand Central Station."

"Time is time, miss," stated Sarah, "and twisting the hands of a watch don't affect it. I've always heard that mining camps was immoral places, and I'll answer for it this monkeying-with-the-clock business was invented by some scapegrace that wanted to deceive his poor wife about the hour he got home at night. But my choice, whichever I decide on, won't take me in that way!" She shook her umbrella with a mixture of coquetry and warning in the direction of the waterman. [92]

Again Evelyn laughed, rather helplessly. "And I have been so indulgent with you, allowing you to gratify your crude taste for colors, where any other mistress would have insisted on black, serge or alpaca, with at most for your bonnet a quill or wing. However, I mustn't stand in your light, Sarah."

"You can't, miss," the maid informed her, respectfully, but with finality. "As for deserting you, as a married lady I shall only be too happy to chaperon you till your father gets back or till you settle down on your own account. And to start with, though my month isn't up, let me give you a bit of advice as from one lady to another. Policemen," she eyed Scarlett with disparagement, "are all very well in their way, but as from my own experience I know they are apt to be triflers, particularly on promotion. Measured by a New York figure of speech among us below-stairs ladies, miss, I myself wouldn't think of permitting an arm with fewer than three stripes on it round my waist."

On this Scarlett assured Sarah, to her great indignation, that she, at any rate, would be safe from his advances, his arm not being long enough to meet her figure-of-speech's measurements. When she had returned to the waterman, Evelyn, recovering from the indignant embarrassment into which Sarah's advice had thrown her, sighed: "Such an admirable maid! However will my hair get dressed?" [93]

"Do it yourself," suggested Scarlett. "I always do mine." A girl in a red cloak just then happening to pass by he beckoned her. "I think after all I can find some one to do your work. Come here, Gelly. Miss Durant wants to talk with you."

Evelyn surveyed the girl's unkempt, though now sober comeliness dubiously. "She doesn't look very— However, is she willing, clean and honest?"

"No, I ain't," snapped out Gelly, irritated by the inspection. "Not one of 'em. I'm as bad as they make 'em!"

"Do you mean to tell me——" Evelyn's voice dropped to a shocked whisper. "Sergeant, have you dared recommend me a young person who is not—not virtuous?"

"But she has so many other virtues," pleaded Scarlett for his protégée, "I thought ye might give her a chance." He appealed to Sarah, who had drawn near. "Perhaps ye'll let me explain to you as being the older woman." [94]

Sarah pursed her lips primly. "There's some things I'll never be old enough to hear."

"I beg your pardon, heartily," Scarlett was heard quietly to say.

"I am by no means sure that I shall grant it," replied Miss Durant, with a haughty toss of the head.

"Oh, I was addressing Gelly here," he hastened to set her straight. "I had no right to let her be present at her own dissection."

"Wait!" Evelyn had an inspiration. "I spend a week every Lent in a Settlement, and we came up here to do good, so why not——"

"Now, look here!" Confronting her, arms akimbo, Gelly let loose the coarsely expressed, though not wholly unjustifiable, anger that in deference to Maclane and Scarlett she had been trying to restrain. "You better just dry up on that good-doin' proposition, else it ull be the worse fer yer

round these diggin's! I know yer kind. I was in a Home oncet, and they came and sang to us, sometimes in fine duds ter show thet they regarded us like as their equals, which is lies! And sometimes dressed, oh my! so goody-goody plain, ter show thet rich folk don't reely care fer silk and sealskin—which is lies! And then they sent me to a convent, and the Sisters, they meant all right, but they cheated the doctor about the medicines they put in his prescriptions to save money fer the Church, and kidded to the saints about their souls. Souls! Shucks! Thar was a missioner oncet who thought she'd got a holt of me all right, all right. She were a-prospectin' ter launder my soul and show it tied up with baby-blue ribbons and sashayed with sanctity as a prize sample to the Lord. Want ter know what I done ter her? Not a thing, you betcherlife! Only smashed her face with a sody-water bottle! Soft drinks, cos thet kind puts most heft in the bottle and least ter the booze. See? Now you better get busy and earn your own salt, virtuous ef you're so plumb struck on virtue, and ef not, anyway—"

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A firm hand on her shoulder cut her short, as, wheeling her right-about-face, Scarlett sternly bade her, "Come!" And, like a little cowering dog about to be whipped for a victory in which, while half ashamed of it, it wholly glories, Gelly meekly followed him.

The color which the girl's attack had driven from Evelyn's face came flooding back as she turned reproachfully upon Maclane: "And you never said a word to stop her!"

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"Ah," replied the minister, "I have learned that I always gain so much from listening to the other fellow's point of view."

"But surely"—for Miss Durant was not a little proud of her capacity for "emanating gracious influences," as the dilettanti of her kind were apt to phrase it—"surely you believe in missionary work; in doing good?"

Before replying, Maclane stooped forward and drew back a spray of vine that was spreading itself obtrusively over a little pink-faced daisy making a sturdy effort to look up to the god of light. "The best we can do is to try to give created things their chance. And in the end, my dear," he patted Evelyn's hand kindly, "it's the missionaries, the good-doers, to whom the good is done."

"Gelly," Scarlett meanwhile was admonishing his stubborn charge, "in all this lowdown district there isn't a man so mean he could be hired to tell that poor girl yonder the truth about her father till we've made her feel at home among us and somehow fitted her to bear it. Now, Gelly, are you, a girl that has known trouble, going to be meaner than the men?"

Gelly looked at him. "Better hev yer uniform let out fer the wings ter sprout," she advised him, with unfeigned homage, if with mocking tongue. "As fer thet thar stuck-up piece—" A rude grimace completed her estimate of Evelyn, but in the midst of it she paused suddenly, her ill-bred thumb dropping from her saucy nose. "I'm jiggered ef I don't b'lieve yer gone on her!"

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"That's neither here nor there," answered the young soldier. "I'll lock up your tongue in jail if it disturbs the peace, but I'd so much sooner put you on your honor, Gelly."

"Till next time," promised Gelly, "yer kin let it go at that!" Then, as she went down the road, she burst into loud sobbing: "And I cud be decent ef some decent woman ud believe in me!"

Maclane, who had been considering, had a new idea. "I wonder if Chilkat Jo couldn't be persuaded to help you, Miss Durant; that is, if you feel you must have service."

"Of course I must," said Evelyn. "The orphans have been brought up to work, and make themselves useful, but they are my guests, my partners in this expedition; and naturally I cannot expect them to do things that I should not do myself."

"Naturally," Maclane agreed with her, more readily than she deemed politeness required. Going to the door he opened it, and called to some one within. "O Joseph! Chilkat Jo!"

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The trader, who had been enjoying the hospitality of the mission, came forth with alacrity. Seeing Maclane, "Godam you! what do you want?" he asked, in tones at once amiable and fraught with high respect.

"Oh, Joseph, what expressions!" The minister shook his head. "You see," he explained to Evelyn, "like all the Indians, he learned bad habits from the white traders before the missionaries came his way. I sometimes wonder, if any Indians survive civilization, whether morally they will recover from contact with the whites. But, come, Joseph, our friends here are looking for a handy man to ___"

"Mally them, eh?" inquired the Indian, nimbly. After a quick glance at Evelyn he shook his head disparagingly. "Damn pletty gal, but not good business ploposition!" He then turned a considering attention upon Sarah, and nodded his head approvingly. "She all light. Fat squaw! Skukum squaw. Not lightfoot gadabout! Damfine cook, eh?" he inquired of the maid. "Squat by fire, fly venison, leady chiefs leturn flom hunting? Shake!" He held out a covenanting hand.

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"What, me become the bride of a heathen!" shrieked Sarah, horrified.

"Me no heathen," indignantly protested Chilkat Jo. "Me swear, gamble, dlink like hell, plenty wives, laise Cain, all same as white man."

"Joseph, my son, I will revise your code later," Maclane told him. "Meanwhile, this is not a marriage proposition. Are you willing to help Miss Durant here with her household chores—as a

favor, you know," he hastened to add.

"Not as a favor at all," broke in Evelyn, in a high, hard voice. "I wish to engage a man-servant, at good wages; one who knows his place and can take orders, and——"

Her voice died before the Indian's fixed regard. "No squaw say to me, Mush! Get up, there! like dog. Mush! Lie down like dog. Me damn high muckamuck Skukum chief!" Wrapping more closely about him the blanket that, with a boiled shirt and store trousers, formed his costume, he re-entered the mission with the unsurpassable dignity of his race.

Evelyn rose without a glance in the direction of Scarlett, who had rejoined them. "Come, Sarah. Thank you very much for all your good offices, Mr. Maclane. I anticipate the suggestion you and the Sergeant are obviously about to make: that I cook, wash, scrub, sew for myself." [100]

"Considering the conditions of camp life, my dear, it might be wise," acquiesced the minister, as he shook hands.

"Just for a lark, ye know," murmured Scarlett, pacifically, saluting. But though her pretty lip trembled, Evelyn held her head high and passed him without a sign.

VII

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PEACE, PERFECT PEACE

Feeling that on her father's return she could requite the obligation a thousandfold, Evelyn consented to remain with her party as guests of Perdu's Grand Hotel while the shack at Lost Shoe Creek was being made ready for their tenancy.

Perdu, lying on a large lake of the same name, is port of entry, and base of supplies, to the goldfields beyond. Being at that time in the third year of its existence it had a highly developed social and commercial life. For in its initial season a camp is likely to be a bedlam of frenzied maniacs shrieking, Gold, gold, gold! The second season witnesses a slump proportioned to the inflated values of its predecessor. But if it weathers to a third, then some sort of poise is attained, as steady industries develop and existence seeks a normal plane. The fancy-women who flock wherever the nuggets are thickest, now segregate themselves in a secluded quarter of the township; married men send for their families, while the unblessed bachelor whistles "The Girl I Left Behind Me," or pays attention to the schoolteacher. On all sides one sees the effort, sometimes pitiful, always human and worthy, from the harsh matrix of the wilderness to wrest a home. And then follow the petty complexities of a miscalled civilization. To Evelyn's surprise, after the first warm tender of hospitality, she encountered the same restricted social conditions in Perdu that obtain in villages on the "outside," as the world beyond the mountains in northern latitudes is termed. Women left cards on her; heads of rival cliques warned her one against the other; the wife of the principal grocer planned a tea in her honor. [102]

On a brilliant summer morning, without cloud or shadow, mountains and valleys alike lying exposed to a broadside of sun that had been warming to its work since four hours after midnight, Evelyn set out to return the visit of the town surveyor's wife. A short cut through the clustered willow bushes brought her to the back door of their cabin, where she came upon the hostess at her washtubs, while from the doorstep the town surveyor was cleaning his teeth publicly. Wholly unembarrassed, the good people greeted their visitor with cordiality, and conducted her into the living-room, where babies, cot beds and cooking commingled with such observances of decency and taste as a woman of refinement, no matter how overworked, seems somehow generally able to contrive. In point of cultivation, so Evelyn soon discovered, her new acquaintances were fully her equal. Delighted as they professed themselves to be that her stay would be of long duration, yet to the plans she outlined for her projected improvement of the district they showed an almost marked indifference. When she dropped hints about the free library she intended to establish, Mr. Grayson began quite inappositely to brag of having made more money the previous winter by lumbering than in the way of his profession, owing to the fact that "up here, thank God! no one, man or woman, loses caste by honest labor of any sort." When she alluded to the art furniture she thought of importing for her domicile, Mrs. Grayson cautioned her to be very careful of her lamp chimneys, the commonest kind costing fifty cents at local stores, because, so the storekeepers said, of the exorbitant freight rates that prevailed. Also she advised Evelyn to start right in and do her own washing, as the local laundries charged something over four dollars for a dozen simple pieces. When Miss Durant mentioned the theatre she was arranging to have built, the opera troupe with which she already was negotiating for a series of performances to beguile the long Klondike winter, the Graysons merely said, almost with sarcasm, "How nice!" adding that the camp contrived to get up some fair entertainments of its own in the hall over the truckman's stable. Coming to the conclusion that they were jealous lest her advent should undermine the social prestige which, so Hastie had informed her, they enjoyed, Evelyn rose to take her leave [103]

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and, kindly wishful to put them at their ease, admired the babies, the bearskin rugs, the horns of mountain sheep and goat upon the wall, the view, the two geraniums in pots upon the window-sill; accepted an invitation to a wild-strawberry picnic, offered to teach them bridge, and departed in a glow of self-gratulation at her tact in dealing with the envious and small-minded.

On the hotel piazza she found the minister waiting for her, and with him Scarlett. To the latter she had not spoken since the day of their difference, for such she chose to consider it, in regard to Gelly. True, more than once she had caught sight of him galloping down the road or striding by on some official errand, but never had she lifted a finger to delay him, nor he appeared conscious of her presence.

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DEPARTED IN A GLOW OF SELF CONGRATULATION AT HER TACT.

Ignoring his greeting, in high good humor with herself and all the world, Evelyn opened fire. "Mr. Maclane, I wish you would tell that young man he owes me an apology."

Scarlett suppressed a gratified smile. "Mr. Maclane, will ye convey to the speaker that she'll have to prove the debt for me to pay it?"

"Tell him the last time we met he put me in the wrong," said Evelyn, prettily, the glow of her goodness toward the envious Graysons still upon her. "He behaved as though he thought me narrow, contemptible—and the worst is, the shoe pinches, because in a tiny degree I fear it may have been true."

She waited with a charming air of penitence for contradiction, but, to her astonishment, none came.

Instead, "I'm a brute, just," Scarlett remorsefully described himself. "Who am I to hold ye up the looking-glass? I'll never be so rude again."

"Oh"—Miss Durant stiffened perceptibly—"I do not usually find the reflection unbearable to contemplate."

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"I've lived so long in the open, in primitive conditions," Scarlett, unmindful of her interruption, went on, "I always blurt out whatever pops into my mind. Well, there's precedent. In Eden, Adam must have called a spade a spade."

"Ah, my young friend, but there's no record of his having called Eve a spade," observed Maclane, with a twinkle in his eye.

"Faith, I'll drop the spade, then," laughed the Irishman, "if she'll let me call her Eve!"

"Tell him," laughed Miss Durant, with heightened color, "that he goes too far."

"Tell her I'd go farther—to any lengths, for her, so long as it didn't take me from her side."

"Tell him he's kissed the blarney-stone."

"Tell her I only practiced on it to keep my hand in till she should come."

"How dare you!" cried Evelyn, feeling that she ought to be very angry.

"Come, come, my children, peace," prescribed Maclane. "Miss Durant, I am here as a petitioner. One of my dear Indians, in fact the sister-in-law of Chilkat Jo, has a baby——"

"Velly damfine Clistian baby!" interpolated the trader, who was sitting on the step near by,

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whittling out a toy canoe.

"Oh, Joseph!" the minister protested, "when will you learn that a damn baby cannot be a Christian baby—nor a Christian baby a damn baby. We are to baptize the little one this morning," he told Evelyn. "And I am asked to beg you to stand godmother."

"For a heathen unregenerate, miss!" Sarah put her head out of the window just behind the group. "Don't you mix yourself up with that truck!"

"I'm a bit of a heathen nowadays myself." Maclane stopped Chilkat Jo's angry outburst. "My dear Indians have converted me."

"I wonder you aren't afraid of being tried for heresy, sir," commented Sarah, "talking that loose way."

"Perhaps I should be," agreed Maclane, "in the cities across yon mountains. But here they hold us in a charmed circle, and who can escape their spell?" He pointed to the lake, brilliantly ablaze, like a vessel holding wondrous depths of color, in which the snow-capped peaks with their V-shaped crevasses lay mirrored like cameos in turquoise relief. "My Indians—in my civilized days I used to preach hell-fire to them, till they scorned me for it, crying, 'Our children when they die become birds of song. Why, then, should we give them to you Christians to be burned?' Then, again, though I knew him to be a saint, dedicated in Christ's name to the service of his fellow-men, I used to avoid my brother, the Catholic priest, because his doctrines on the surface differed from my own! Again, my Indians taught me, scoffing, 'If Christianity makes enemies of her ministers, why, we want none of it.' Yes, all that I have given the heathen have they requited me a hundredfold, making me a Christian through the Christ I try to show to them!"

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"I will do what you ask me only too gladly, Mr. Machine!" cried Evelyn, understanding that this was the good minister's way of making peace between herself and Chilkat Jo. "I shall be proud of my godchild; and I promise it the finest cup from Tiffany's—"

"No, no! No presents, please," enjoined Maclane. "Only kindness, neighborliness, and an appreciation of the heathen virtues. The Sergeant here has consented to be godfather."

"The Sergeant!" involuntarily exclaimed Evelyn.

"Aye! In the short time he has been in charge, he has completely won the hearts of the tribe of Raven and Frog. No baptism complete without him."

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"Oh, as a sponsor, I'm painting the town red," admitted the Irishman. "And the Claim has a regular column of feeble-minded puns upon the epidemic. Well, I only hope the Scarlett creepers won't turn to Scarlett runners, in time of battle."

"I will tell Lallah that you consent. Be ready, both, please, when you hear the chapel bell," directed the minister, going to the mission.

Scarlett lingered, but as Evelyn took no notice of him, "Thankee for the pressing invitation," he remarked, drawing up a chair and seating himself beside her. "And are ye beginning to feel acclimated among us savages?"

"Oh, you are doing your best!" Evelyn assured him. "Though I must say, even for the wilderness, the ideas of social distinction seem curiously lax. Why, as his head waiter is off on a spree, Mr. Hastie has offered me the place—three hundred dollars a month and tips!"

"Good pay," commented Scarlett. "Why don't ye take it? I'd ask no better for my own sister, if I had one."

Evelyn tossed her head. "To pass dishes to unwashed barbarians in corduroys who gobble off their knives and drink from their saucers. Even for your own sister," she could not forbear asking, "wouldn't you consider the situation rather primitive?"

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"I should, and that's the situation's saving grace," he promptly replied, "since primitive man is woman's best friend, once she makes him realize she will not let him be her enemy."

Against her will, Evelyn looked at the speaker with reluctant admiration, forced to recognize that however ignorant of class distinctions the poor young man might be, his was certainly no ordinary mentality. Accordingly, woman-like, she harked back to personalities, hoping in shallow waters to take him, through his very superiority, at a disadvantage. "Oh, we have nothing to complain of on the score of friendliness," she laughed. "Our matrimonial opportunities seem limited only by the number of single men within proposing radius. No, Sergeant, I am not the belle. That proud position is disputed by Sarah and the plainest orphan, who also is the most muscular, because they frankly tell us, in a land where hired labor is not to be had a man must marry to get some one to cook and wash for him. However, such few score of proposals as have come my way, I honestly can brag, are for myself, since I am not considered a specially useful 'household proposition,' and oddly enough my great wealth seems not to impress these poverty-stricken millionaires in the least degree."

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"Oh, I tell ye, in a mining camp one gets down to first principles, or lack of them," commented the soldier. "It's chaos, till man and woman together evolve a paradise."

Evelyn waited, hoping he also would propose to her in order that she might refuse him, not kindly, with the consideration she had shown the other poor victims who had laid their hearts at

her feet, but with scathing denunciation of his insolence. Instead of improving his opportunity, however, the soldier rose. "Ye'll bid me to the wedding, Miss Durant?"

"In what capacity—officially, or as a guest?"

"Not as a mourner, that I swear."

"I may decide to elope."

"Impossible! In my bally those that want a marriage license have to come to me."

"I've always had a leaning toward the nobility," remarked Evelyn, rather maliciously. "Are there no men of title in the camp?"

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"A handful or so of younger sons," Scarlett informed her, "and a pathetic lot in the main they are. 'Remittance Men,' we call them, because they are on allowance to stay away from home, avowedly that in a new country they may turn over a new leaf, but in reality that their families may be spared the shame of witnessing their final disintegration. Be good to such when ye come across them, Miss Durant, for the sake of what they ought to be, but don't marry them, for the whole lot of them together wouldn't make one decent man."

Evelyn laughed, but her face crimsoned. "Dear, dear! And suppose, after all, you disapprove my choice?"

"Faith, I'll exercise my official prerogative and take ye in charge myself! Meanwhile, I must turn my attention toward yonder suspect." He indicated a person with the deportment of a personage, who, dressed in the height of fashion, was strolling, tourist-wise, kodak in hand, down the village street.

"Why, who can that be?" Evelyn leaned forward with interest.

"That's my own question. He travels under the name of the Count St. Hilaire."

"There's something very familiar about his appearance. I wonder if I mayn't have met him at Newport, or Washington. If so, bring him here that I may renew the acquaintance, Sergeant, please."

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"I'll search his title first." Scarlett ran down the veranda steps. "Now look out for trouble," he muttered to himself, seeing the stranger pause opposite a cottage in the Indian quarter, and level his camera at the totem-pole in front of it.

A crowd of angry Indians who had been squatting on mats in the sunshine, making moccasins and weaving baskets, instantly rose and swarmed about him, vehemently protesting in Chinook against this insult to their sacred emblems, Chilkat Jo acting as interpreter.

"Shame, shame, cursed shame to photoglyph the Laven and the Flog!" he cried, alluding to the totem's tribal device. "Velly godam Clistian shame!"

"Hold on!" cried Scarlett, impartially, interposing his tall form between the evidently frightened foreigner and the avenging group.

"Mais—ze Klondike barber-pole—I no steal him; je vous jure, gendarme! I make ze photographie!"

"Yes, but unless you pay them for it to show your good will, the Indians think you are marking them for death," the Sergeant instructed him. "All right, honest Injun," he in turn assured the crowd. "Only sun-picture. Big man pay you big money."

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"Why," exclaimed Evelyn's astonished voice at Scarlett's elbow, "it is my courier, Alphonse—he has let his beard grow! That is the kodak he stole from me!"

"Sacré papier, ze mademoiselle!" shrieked the man, recognizing her; and off he set as fast as his trembling limbs could carry him, Scarlett, reinforced by the children of the Raven and the Frog, in hot pursuit.

"It's only what you might have expected, miss," remarked Sarah, consolingly, as in mortified silence Evelyn returned to the veranda. "The French is a deceitful nation. They always have to talk in a foreign language so you can't understand 'em."

"It's all right!" Flushed and breathless, Scarlett came up. "He ran plump into Barney's arms. Here's your camera, Miss Durant. Later I'll get you to appear against the Count—just a formality, you know."

"I shall do nothing of the sort!" declared Evelyn loftily. "Instead, you can fine me any amount you please for contempt of court. You doubtless will enjoy doing it! As for the kodak, you can give it back to Alphonse. I shall never touch it again!"

"Miss, you are ungrateful," Sarah reproved her, "and the young man wounded in the fracas!"

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"Wounded!" cried Evelyn, in dismay.

"Oh," disclaimed Scarlett, who was shaking his fingers as if to cast a pain from them, "it's nothing. Only in protecting the Count's beauty from an irate populace I gave my wrist a twist."

"Oh, a sprained wrist is nothing to boast of," derided Miss Durant.

"That's why I wasn't boasting of it." Scarlett turned to go.

"Nevertheless"—Evelyn put a detaining hand lightly on his arm—"I took a course in First Aid to the Injured to fit myself for this life, and I know that a sprain ought to be treated with something, for fear something or other should set in. Sarah," she asked in a whisper, "what treatment does one give a sprain?"

"Fermentation," prompted the maid, sagaciously.

"That's it: fomentation! Please, Sarah, go fetch me—whatever one needs for fomentation."

"Believe me, it is not necessary." Scarlett gave his hand another shake. "It soon will be all right."

"Sit here!" Evelyn motioned him, peremptorily, to a chair beside her. "No, on this side. A soldier's first duty should be to obey." [116]

"Ah, well, my arms are ever at your service, even in times of peace." Scarlet leaned back, luxuriously, as she rolled up his sleeve.

"Of course, you understand I should do this for anybody," observed Evelyn, sponging his wrist with the warm water Sarah had provided.

"Of course, ye understand I should fight in defence of anybody's property," he matched her. "'Tis for that I draw my pay."

"Is it tender?" inquired Evelyn, pillowing his hand upon her lap and dabbing it softly with a towel.

"Tender's not half the word for it." The patient turned his face aside. "It's the limit of tenderness, and has to be treated on the homeopathic principle."

"Miss, he makes light of it!" cried Sarah, who, under a harsh exterior, was, by nature, kind. "But his poor brow is simply wrung with anguish." She mopped the beads of perspiration that stifled mirth had brought upon the Sergeant's comely forehead.

"Let us talk of other things to distract him," ordained Evelyn. "Come, Sergeant, tell us all about yourself. Begin at the very beginning." [117]

"Faith, like most babies," he complied, "I began by being the child of my parents."

"Poor but honest folk, no doubt. Go on!"

"They died before my remembrance of them. I infer the honesty and inherit the poverty. I was brought up by an aunt and uncle, who didn't want me. One time when I came home from school for the holidays my aunt just looked up from her novel and remarked, 'Oh, Jerry, how dirty you are!' So I ran away to make my fortune."

"Which consists of something over a dollar a day and your keep."

"And the prospect of a pension for my widow."

"Your widow!" Evelyn dropped the hand she was engaged in bandaging. "I didn't know—"

"Oh, I haven't got one yet," Scarlett hastened to assure her. "But I shall, please God, if I live long enough."

"Sergeant, you are talking nonsense," said Evelyn. "Pain has made you flighty."

"Way up in the seventh heaven," assented Scarlett. "Don't be so cruel as to call me down."

"There!" Having stuck a final pin in the handkerchief she had bound about the wrist, Evelyn folded the soldier's arm across his breast. "Sarah, go fetch me another sash, will you? I'm going to use this one for a sling." [118]

"Which color shall I get you, miss?" asked the maid, preparing to obey.

Evelyn shrugged her shoulders with indifference. "I don't care—though I should think your own taste would lead you to see that blue goes best with this frock. There, Sergeant"—having made a creditable cradle of the ribbon for the soldier's arm and knotted it behind his neck, she came in front of him and surveyed her work admiringly—"that will do, I think. Now, remember, it must not be unbound for four and twenty hours. Promise! I wish you would stop laughing in that silly way and tell me if it feels all right, really."

"Joyous, beyond words," Scarlett affirmed. "I only wish I were that chap in the mythology with a hundred hands—and every blessed one of them in need of fomentation."

"I suppose you say these inane things to me because you think me incapable of appreciating sense," commented Miss Durant. "Just because all my poor little efforts to do good up here have seemed superfluous. Oh, yes"—she checked the protest that rose to his lips—"you all have been kindness personified, but I do not think you quite understand me," she complained, with the injured quaver of one who at heart knows herself to be understood only too well. "I'm really not such an overbearing, ill-natured girl; only, I acknowledge, a wee bit spoiled. You see, after my mother died, when I was still a very small child, in Colorado, my father sent me to a fashionable school in San Francisco, and there I began to feel that in Colorado we had been quite savage. Then, in my early 'teens I was put at another still more fashionable school in Chicago, where I [119]

was made to feel that in San Francisco I had been hopelessly Western. Next, I moved on to an ultra-fashionable school in New York, where it was tacitly impressed on me that in Chicago we had been positively vulgar. After this came a course of Dresden, Vienna, London, Paris, by which I realized that in New York I had been provincial, crude. On my return I felt myself cosmopolitan, a finished product. Yet, in this short space up here you all have made me wonder if, after all, all the time, I have not been a bit of a snob. Yes, you can't contradict me. I know. A thoroughbred would have taken things as she found them—would be at home anywhere, while I—" Having amazed herself far more even than her hearer by this unexpected burst of confidence, Miss Durant amazed herself still more by an unexpected burst of tears.

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"Poor child!" Scarlett compassionated her, while liking her thoroughly for her candor. "Dear, dear little Evelyn, it's libelling yourself you are, although it's true, and that's the sweetest part of it. Here, take mine!" As she was hunting, between inconsolable sniffs, for the handkerchief with which she herself had bandaged him, he tendered her his own.

"Oh, the sprain—your wrist!" cried Evelyn, in alarm.

"That's all right," Scarlett reassured her, while drying her eyes with the hand he had removed for the purpose from the sling. "It was the other one that got the twist."

Evelyn drew back. "You mean you dared let me bind up the wrong one?"

"Ye made your own selection," Scarlett reminded her, in tones he vainly tried to render penitent.

"That you did, miss," corroborated Sarah, coming from the hotel with the blue sash and tying it about Evelyn's slender waist.

"Give me back my ribbon, my handkerchief!" demanded Evelyn of Scarlett, furiously.

"Not for four and twenty hours," he answered. "Not even for you would I break a promise to a lady."

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"Never, never, never will I speak to you again!" cried Miss Durant.

Just then the chapel bell began to ring merrily, and at the same moment Maclane hurried toward them from the mission, an open hymnal in hand. "Come, my children, we march in, singing," he explained, pointing toward the Indians, who were forming in a procession by the chapel door. "As I am short of hymnals, you and the Sergeant will have to share one, Miss Durant. Hymn 674. 'Peace, Perfect Peace.'"

Evelyn stood still. "I absolutely decline to be associated in any way whatever with Sergeant Scarlett."

"Oh, my children!" remonstrated the minister. "How can we talk of missionizing the heathen when the Gentiles so wrangle among themselves! Ready, please! Fall into line!" Striking up the tune, he led the way.

And, somehow, in despite of her protest, Miss Durant found herself following, side by side with the hated young soldier, sharing the same hymnal, moreover, and joining her sweet voice with his manly one in praise of "Peace, Perfect Peace."

VIII.

[122]

AT THE SIGN OF THE TEMPERANCE SALOON.

"One sandwich, pie an' corfee, three-fifty! One ham an' eggs, pie, corfee, five! One whiskey on a doctor's prescription, two bits!" Thus Gumboot Annie scored off their reckonings to a party of prospectors who had patronized her lunch-tent, whereupon the prospectors meekly handed their pokes across the counter for her to weigh out the dust, according to her own liberal interpretation.

"Halt!" Barney's rich brogue rang out upon the trail. "Twinty minutes for refreshmints by request, for man and baste!"

"What's up now?" Gumboot Annie put her head out to reconnoitre. "Why, who's thet blamed cop runnin' in?"

"Why, it's pop!" in dismay, cried Gelly, who was assisting the mother of Klondike Delmonicos in the capacity of bean-slinger. "My pop!" She began to cry.

"Aye, it's Bully Nick, all right," corroborated a prospector, selecting a wooden toothpick with nicety. "They're fixin' ter extrydite him. Charge of murder. Oh, he'll be hanged this time fer sure!" he added, with relish.

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"Now, wouldn't that jostle yer!" exclaimed Gumboot Annie, generally. "But didn't the stiff he peppered get well some?"

"Yep, and they let off th' Bully on parole. But ef th' all-fired fool didn't celebrate his freedom by gittin' crazy drunk and shootin' at a United States Deputy Marshal fer targit! The marshal was a mean man an' deserved ter die—but Nick should 'a' left it to a meaner man to shoot him."

"A United States Marshal!" exclaimed Gumboot Annie, scornfully. "Shucks! Drunk or sober, I thought Nick had more sense."

"Nick shoots blind when"—her informant considerably lowered his voice—"when he's on the rampage for Dandy Raish. Nick has sworn ter kill Raish on sight along of Gelly."

"Gumboot Annie! Gumboot Annie!" Bill's eager voice rang out on the clear air, as he came running toward the tent.

"We're planning for to give Bully Nick a handsome send-off. Rustle, won't you? and get us up an A1, gilt-edged blow-out!"

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"Betcherboots I will," promised Gumboot Annie, cordially, adding that the Bully would be a great loss, socially, if hanged.

"'Twas the drink done it—and I cud ha' kept him from it," moaned Gelly, rocking and wringing her hands.

"Here, stop whining and make the sandwiches. Better git down behind the stove whar yer pop can't see yer!" Gumboot Annie gave the girl an ungentle but not unkindly push, and thrusting a carving-knife into her hand, bade her, as it might be the old man's last square feed upon this planet, not to spare the butter.

"Gents, I thankee hearty for these here evidences of popularity," cried the Bully, as they placed him at the head of the well-filled board inside the lunch-tent. "Gents, go thou an' do likewise, but don't git pinched! Ah, well, ef I'd got my deserts I guess I'd'a' bin strung up twenty years ago."

"Better late than nivver," politely remarked Barney, who, as an honored guest, by his gift of repartee was contributing greatly to the meal's hilarity.

"Mush, get up, there! Godam you, Teleglaph and Langel. Mush!" Thus Chilkat Jo might have been heard profanely to encourage to increase of speed on a pious errand the parson's dogs that now were drawing a sled beside which the parson and the trader were running on their snow-shoes toward Gumboot Annie's tent. For all this took place many miles from Perdu and Lost Shoe Creek, on the heights where the snow still lingered in heavy, frozen masses, though the valleys below were abloom with summer flowers. "Him velly damn sick," he pityingly added, indicating the bundle wrapped in furs, strapped to the sled.

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"Very sick, indeed, I fear, my son; but not damn sick," the minister corrected. "Perhaps we can get succor here. Whoa, Telegraph, Wrangle, lads, whoa!" Halting opposite the tent, he read its legend with surprise, "TEMPERANCE SALOON. GUMBOOT ANNIE, PROPRIETOR."

"Why, my daughter," he accosted the hostess, who, hearing sleigh-bells and scenting custom, had come forth, "does this indicate a happy change of heart and saving grace? You are taking thought to save your soul?"

"Save my skin," retorted the Gumbooted one, spitting with an accurate estimate of distances. "That blamed Scarlett was making things hot for me, so I jest wheeled the hull outfit acrost the boundary!" She pointed to an old Russian landmark, protruding like a tiny headstone from the snow, and followed by a line of rude pickets, the records of a surveying party, that straggled, single file, downhill, dividing the United States from British North America. "Lasky's a prohibition proposition, y'know."

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"Whatever the motive, the action is most praiseworthy," Maclane commended her, "since your income must be greatly decreased by foregoing the sale of intoxicants."

"Now wouldn't that jar yer!" demanded Gumboot Annie, humorously, of the landscape. "I ain't up here fer me health," she then reminded the minister. "Fines or license, it's all one ter me. And prohibition, or wide open, you betcherlife the boys has jest the same old thirst."

"H'm! Well, for the present I will waive the ethical aspect of the argument," replied Maclane, "and will beg you to sell me some stimulant for medicinal purposes. We have a lad here whom we found in trouble by the wayside; he is very low——"

"What's it a case of?" Gumboot Annie leaned across the counter to inspect the bundle on the sled, from which Jo was now unharnessing the dogs. "Drink or scurvy?"

"Neither," replied Maclane, raising the patient's head; "but, I fear, foul play."

"Now don't that pa'alyze yer!"



"WHY, MY DAUGHTER, DOES THIS DENOTE A HAPPY CHANGE OF HEART AND SAVING GRACE? YOU ARE TAKING THOUGHT TO SAVE YOUR SOUL?"

From a bottle she took from its hiding-place, Gumboot Annie poured out a generous dose. "Here, Ikey, take that ter the kid." [127]

"Whiskey, two bits!" cried Ikey, from sheer force of habit, as he obeyed.

"Stop thet, yer little skin!" Leaning far over the counter, to the endangerment of her balance, his employer gave him a smart cuff. "I'm as close as they make 'em when I'm dealing with the healthy, but I've yet ter see myself take money from a dyin' man."

"He told me to meet him here to-day," gasped Walter Pierce, as Maclane bent over him with skilful ministry.

"Who, my son?"

"Hush! Wait—it is a secret! I have a confession to make."

When Gumboot Annie and her assistant had withdrawn, and the Indian had gone to a distance to feed the dogs, Walter tried to speak.

"It was the drink!"

"It generally is," commented the parson, mournfully.

"I had an errand for another man—one of the greatest importance. He trusted me. Some men suspected his secret and dogged my footsteps, entered into conversation with me—pretended to take a fancy to me—to show themselves my friends—good fellows. They made me drink with them. Then I, in my turn, stood treat to keep my end up and show myself a good fellow." [128]

"Alas!" whispered the minister, as Walter paused for breath, "how many lads have I seen go down to the lowest depths, under that banner bearing the devil's own device: To show one's self a good fellow!"

"Then, when they had got me where they wanted me, drunk," continued the sick man, "they robbed me. Oh, not of money—for though they made me play, they let me win—but of my honor ___"

"Oh, no, my son! It was you who threw away your own honor."

"If only I had thought of that at the time! Now they have his secret—his samples. They'll know about his mine! Tell him—"

The minister worked over the fainting form with tender skill. At last, when a glimmer of consciousness returned, "Now, my son," he said, "you owe it to the man you have wronged to make restitution. Tell me who he is, and what I am to say to him."

Walter gathered his strength for a supreme effort. "Durant," at last he managed to gasp. "Tell his daughter——" He fell back in the stupor that precedes death. [129]

"O Joseph! Chilkat Jo!" called Maclane. And when the Indian, obeying with alacrity, replied, "Godam you, what you want?" he did not stay to reprove him, only bade him, "Run hot-foot to Lost Shoe Creek and fetch Miss Durant. Tell her I have a message from her father!"

When the trader had set off, the speed of his winged-footed race redoubled by good will, Maclane, having drawn the sled to a spot where a clump of evergreens would act as wind-brake, went to the Customs Office on the crest of the hill in search of remedies.

Seeing the coast clear, old Blenksoe, who for some time past had been hovering about the place, now came to the lunch counter, where he soon was joined by his arch-accomplice in villainy,

Dandy Raish. "Hello, old tortoise!" was the hitter's salutation as his partner sauntered up. "I've been waiting for you this ever so long."

"Thet you hev'n't," contradicted Blenksoe. "Not that it matters—but you allus were a fust-class liar!"

"Some folks have not enough imagination to lie," retorted the Dandy, paring his nails. "But chuck all that and get to business!"

"Business! Hully gee! Anythin' doin'? Am I in it?"

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"Sure—if you can deliver the goods! Order the drinks, won't you?"

"Say, you got a tocter's brescription for liquor?" queried Ikey, when old Blenksoe did as he was bidden.

"I'll sure hev an undertaker's stiff-ticket ef I don't get it," replied Blenksoe, as he carried the medicinal doses over to the bench where the Dandy had ensconced himself.

"Best stay out here where no one can hear us," explained the latter.

"That suits me all right," agreed Blenksoe, lighting a pipe and settling himself on the Canadian side. "Thar's a warrant out fer my arrest in 'Lasky."

"I thought you were *persona non grata* in the Dominion also, since that hold-up of the stage near Lost Shoe Creek."

"Thet hold-up you put me up to, while you sneaked in the bushes. You'd orter be pinched yerself fer takin' a rake-off. Ain't the receiver as bad as the thief?"

"Piano, pianissimo," advised Raish. "One never knows who's within earshot." He glanced about him fearfully.

"Thet's so," admitted Blenksoe. "I declar, what between Kennedy on the one hand and Uncle Sam on t'other, and both a-gittin' so all-fired pertikeler, every day makes it harder for a crook ter make an honest livin'." He lighted an ill-smelling pipe. "Well, Dandy, fire away."

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"Have you seen Durant lately?"

"Durant? Who th' hell's Durant?"

"Your partner, Lucky. Durant is his outside name."

"You don't say! Oh, Lucky, he ain't no good no more. Lucky's off his nut. Went stark, ravin' mad the day his gal came inter camp. I've shuk Lucky."

"More fool you. He's found a mine!"

"I dessay. As usual, a pocket, or a pot of gold eagles at th' fut of a rainbow."

"Not a bit of it. A bona-fide mine. What d'you make of these samples?"

Through his prospector's glass, Blenksoe examined the small clods of earth Raish held out to him, then uttered the profanest expletive at his command.

"Free gold, assayin' sixty ter th' ton!"

"You'd better believe it is!" The Dandy pocketed the samples which Blenksoe was eyeing hungrily.

"Say, I'd like a sample ter test. Oh, well, as you say! How'd you come by 'em?"

"I got them with the information from a kid whom Lucky has taken in on the ground floor."

"You mean ter tell me the stiff hes shuk me, his pard an' dearest friend?" Blenksoe seized his gun. "I'll fix Lucky!"

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"Keep quiet, you old fool! Durant don't owe you a bean, and you know it. And the way you've always grafted on him he is not likely to run after you to put you wise."

"Thet's so. Whar is the mine?"

"Ah, that's just where my information stops short. If I knew I shouldn't need you."

"Well, I s'pose the game is ter lay low, rubber round till we locate the claim, and jump it."

"And have that blasted Scarlett butting in? Guess again! Claim-jumping don't go, now the M. P. are in charge. We have to do something far cleverer. I'll tell you what. I've thought it all out. We have to kidnap Durant, and kidnap his daughter."

"Why the hell——"

"Blenksoe, a cow could give you cards and spades. We'll play them off, one against the other, till he signs over a half interest in his mine for ransom."

"Dandy, you're a wonder!" Blenksoe regarded the brains of the concern with admiration. "I'll get the gang on to it to oncet. It ull be no trick at all ter kidnap Lucky. Lucky's dead easy! But the gal

—gals is scarce, and conspicuous accordin', in a mining camp. How the hell are we to handle the gal?"

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"Leave her to me. I have already struck up a traveling acquaintance with her; managed to do her some little service en route. That's why I was careful to keep in the background during the hold-up. I sent her a private message to meet me here to-day, telling her I had a confidential message from her father. We must act like a flash, for that blasted Scarlett is sweet on her. By Jove! that's an idea!" The Dandy slapped his knee. "I owe him a bad turn. I'll cut him out! I'll marry her myself!"

"You, you son of a camp cook!" sneered Blenksoe.

Raish shrugged his shapely shoulders. "The camp cooks of to-day are the swells of to-morrow. I'm ambitious. I've always qualified myself for the toniest society. I spend as much for perfumery as for liquor, and I never sleep between sheets but I wear pink silk pyjamas."

"By gum, I b'lieve you'll git thar!" cried Blenksoe, overcome by these evidences of culture. Going to the counter, before Raish could stop him, he ordered: "Set up th' drinks, Ikey! Here's ter Dandy an' his bride!"

"Haow's that? Raish a-goin' ter git married?" inquired Gumboot Annie, who was bustling about for more provender for the banqueters inside the tent. "And who's the lady?"

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"Oh, jest a little silk-stockin' proposition from the States," replied old Blenksoe, unmindful of the Dandy's warning signs. "One of the Noo York smarties, and jes' fitted fer Raish."

"Eh?" shrieked Gelly, starting up from her corner behind the stove. "She is, is she! And what about me?"

"Gelly! Tagging on as usual!" exclaimed Raish, in disgust.

"Thar, thar, Gelly! I was only joshin'," Blenksoe tried to soothe the girl.

"Dandy, you're a wonder!" Blenksoe re^[1] him, pleading. "Pop is run in, and mebbe goin' ter be hanged. Raish, make an honest woman of me that I may go bid him good-by!"

[1] Transcriber's Note: One or more lines are missing in the original.

The Dandy drew back. "What! Me, with my prospects, take up with the daughter of a murderer!"

"You, you——" Gelly flew at him with the carving-knife she held.

"Here, quit that!" Gumboot Annie adroitly snatched away the weapon. "My sandwich-knife! Now wouldn't thet stick yer?" in aggrieved tones she appealed to an imaginary audience on the horizon line. Bystanders joined in the discussion, and, attracted by the noise, some of the diners came running from the tent, the Japanese paper napkins, that the high character of the occasion had warranted, in hand, ready for a scrap or any other fun that might be going; accordingly, the Dandy saw the wisdom of adopting a conciliating policy. "Gelly"—he led the girl aside—"I do mean to do the square thing by you, but no man likes to be coerced, you know; and after what has gone between us I don't want to be laughed at publicly for a fool—and if you love me, you don't want to render me publicly ridiculous. Just go back, quietly, like a good girl and wait for me at Lost Shoe Creek. When I have one or two tangles straightened out I'll come back and marry you, honest! But remember, on the quiet, if you blab—well, I'll see you somewhere before I ever speak to you again. Now, good-by and go!"

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And for the last time, though not the first, poor Gelly trusted him.

Looking after the red-cloaked and hooded figure, as on snow-shoes she sped lightly down the trail, the Dandy laughed. "Women are easy, dead easy!" he exclaimed; and then he laughed still louder, as winding in and out through mountain passes the sound of approaching sleigh-bells and girls' merry voices floated through the crystal air. "Dead, dead easy," he reiterated, with the unction of enjoyment in his sapient superiority. "Here comes Evelyn now!"

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IX.

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THE PROVISIONAL BOUNDARY.

"Miss Durant! This is a delightfull surprise!" Dismounting from her sled drawn by eight frisky little huskies, Miss Durant encountered not the Mr. Horatio Travers who had written, begging for a private interview near Gumboot Annie's, on a confidential mission from her father, but the handsome and genial presence of Sergeant Scarlett.

"The surprise at least is not all on one side," laughed Evelyn, giving him her hand. "What are you

doing so far from headquarters?"

"My jurisdiction extends to the boundary line. Just now it is my painful duty to meet a United States Representative in yonder Customs building, and formally make over to him the person of Bully Nick."

"Ah, the poor Bully!" Evelyn sighed. "He has this incorrigible habit of shooting the wrong people. But I'm in hopes of getting him off. I shall spare no expense. I've wired to Sitka, in my father's name, for the ablest counsel to defend him."

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"And, confidence for confidence," said Scarlett, "what are you doing here?"

"Oh, just keeping an appointment—I mean, mushing it with Sarah and the girls for a day's outing," Evelyn hurriedly corrected herself, recalling that Travers' note enjoined the strictest secrecy. "And, pardon me, I must go to their rescue now." To conceal a slight embarrassment caused by her prevarication, she sped toward her party on whom the Customs' officials of two nations had pounced down, assuming that they intended to cross the boundary and must be treated like malefactors accordingly.

Picking up the muff that Evelyn in her haste had dropped, Scarlett buried his face in the soft fur. "I'm another," he confided to it.

"'Tis himself!" Barney hurried toward him from the tent, but as Scarlett, in his abstraction, did not notice him, he inquired, with solicitude: "Are ye here, sorr?"

"Faith, no, man. I'm wandering."

"Is ut impty ye do be feeling yourself inside, sorr?"

"Empty is it, with the appetite that's there! Bring me rations out here. Bring a double share." His eye strayed toward Evelyn.

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"H'm! 'Tis a case of wan plate and two spoons, or I'm a blind man!" commented Barney, hastening to obey.

"Miss," cried Sarah, in shocked accents, as Evelyn drew near, "them orphans are flirting outrageously with the Customs gentlemen of both nations, and feeding them with fudge."

"Dear, dear," mocked Evelyn, "we must put a stop to that at all costs, Sarah. Take the girls into the tent and give them their dinner—or there will be international complications."

"Internal ones, more likely," put in Scarlett, who had followed her. "Sweet things don't often come our way. And speaking of sweet things, Miss Durant, won't you yourself mess with me out here in the open? Just for the experience, ye know. It isn't really cold. The snow is left over from the winter, but it's a summer sun overhead."

"It does look tempting," confessed Evelyn, as Barney appeared, bringing with him provender, with its equipments, for two, deftly arranging it on a table by the bench. "I'm early for my appointment—I mean, I have plenty of time, and Sarah can chaperon the girls."

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"Have ye room enough?" with solicitude inquired the soldier, placing himself beside her.

"Plenty, thanks. Have you?"

"Too much," he protested, "on the wrong side." The bench having no back, he gallantly supplied the lack. "Allow me to make ye an arm-chair."

Evelyn properly edged away. "Sergeant, are these your company manners?"

"Surely, since two's company."

"Come, come, I can't permit you so much latitude!"

"If you knew your map ye'd know that the further north ye go the closer the lines of latitude are drawn."

"Speaking of maps, I wish you'd tell me exactly where we are?"

"Faith, where I am is exactly what I'm trying to find out—how far I've gone with you."

"Do be sensible, if you can, and tell me where we are sitting, geographically speaking."

"Geographically speaking, we are sitting on the provisional boundary between our respective nations."

"Oh! Please don't add it is called provisional because one stops here for provisions."

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"At any rate, provisions don't stop here long. Here, I've saved ye the last bean."

"Thanks. I take my bean wherever I find it."

"Good! Now will ye poach on my preserves?"

"With pleasure!" Evelyn held out her tin plate. "I love peaches."

"Ah, I'm more exclusive. I only love a peach!"

"One at a time, no doubt, you mean. And for the sake of your taste, I hope, fresh ones, not canned. By the way, you, I believe, would write them tinned?"

"But we both pronounce them excellent." Scarlett divided with her the last spoonful of the fruit.

"A century ago you taxed my tea." Leaning over, Evelyn took the extra lump of sugar from the young man's saucer. "So now, to even things, I steal your sugar."

"Quite right," he acquiesced, "since revenge is sweet."

"How silly this climate makes one, though I wish all international differences could be so bloodlessly adjusted," remarked Evelyn. "Suppose, instead of war, we had spelling matches! That, indeed, would bring peace with honor."

"Sure and there'd be fighting over peace," the soldier told her, "since you would spell it H-O-N-O-R, while I should insert a U." [142]

"Naturally," replied Evelyn. "Your nation's honor always will include U."

"A pretty compliment," conceded Scarlett, "but I feel as if I had been spelling for it." As they had finished he put aside the dinner-tray. "I wonder if I shall ever persuade you to cross the line in earnest?"

"And pray, why should I do the crossing? Why should not you be the one to come over to the enemy?"

"Ah, I'm a soldier! And I could not love thee, dear, so much, loved I not HONOUR more!"

"All very fine, sir, but, like England, somehow you have advanced imperceptibly across the boundary."

"Oh, no!" Scarlett moved closer to her. "Like England, when I make advances I push the line ahead of me."

"Remember the old commination," Evelyn exhorted him, "'Cursed be he that moveth his neighbor's landmark.'"

"That was ancient law," Scarlett reminded her. "The modern dispensation bids thee love thy neighbor as thyself. And up here, where both nations work side by side, common hardship makes us truly neighbors, next of kin. Look yonder!" He pointed to the summit of the watershed, the ridge-pole of the mountain range, where, sheltered under one roof, were the Customs offices of two nations, while from lofty flag-poles floated, side by side, the Union Jack and the Stars and Stripes. "The snow, as it melts, parts into two rivers, one running down into the Dominion, the other into the States, each bearing greetings from the sister flags. And, listen! In the tent, to the same tune the two national anthems are being sung——" Rising, he bared his head, Evelyn standing beside him, while in perfect attune the banqueters sang, according to their allegiance: "My Country, 'Tis of Thee," or "God Save the King." [143]

"After all," commented Scarlett, "peace is spelled without a difference, both sides of the boundary; and, lip to lip, our views will be identical on the way of spelling love."

"And how may that be?" inquired Evelyn, gathering up her furs and moving away. "In love-letters?" As Scarlett caught up with her she quickened her pace, remarking, "I must go now. Really, Sergeant, you ought some day to give us a lecture on these theories of yours, for I have always wondered how an Irishman makes love."

"Like a lover, sure," promptly retorted Scarlett, catching her in his arms and stooping his head to hers. [144]

To her surprise, Evelyn found herself more than half consenting to his kiss even while trying to rebuke it. Before, however, she had found breath to protest, Scarlett released her hurriedly in silence, for at the moment Nick, with his custodian, and followed by his faithful henchmen, came from the tent, escorting Sarah and the orphans in an aura of national and personal good will, while a messenger came to inform the Sergeant that the United States representative, to whom the prisoner's person was to be delivered, had arrived.

Evelyn, for her part, overcome with an embarrassment mingled with another feeling that was wholly new to her, ran in the opposite direction down the trail, and over a patch of frozen snow to a secluded spot sheltered by a thicket of scrub firs, where, even as she broke from her lover's embrace, she had seen her former traveling acquaintance and present correspondent, Horatio Travers, awaiting her.

Scarlett went up immediately to the Customs building, there to transact the formalities incident to the extradition of Bully Nick. These concluded, and the official courtesies having been duly proffered and accepted, he at last felt free to continue his interrupted wooing. Coming out into the open, he was going to seek Evelyn in a merry group where the orphans were being taught the art of keeping erect on snow-shoes, when he was accosted by Maclane. [145]

"Oh, Sergeant! I am called upon to marry a couple under circumstances of a peculiar nature, involving exceptional haste. There is no Gold Commissioner, I find, nor Justice of the Peace, in the district, nor within a day's journey, from whom to obtain a license; but I have consented to accept a copy of the Dominion Marriage Act, or rather a specified clause thereof, signed by

yourself as Mounted Policeman in charge. Will that arrangement satisfy you, judicially speaking?"

"Surely," replied Scarlett, "any marriage that you can, with conscience, solemnize I can sanction without a conscience, sir."

"I never was called upon to perform a duty that I liked so ill," the minister acknowledged, as he followed the soldier to the Customs building. "In fact, I have exceeded my prerogative, through my personal interest in one of the contracting parties, in counseling, beseeching, delay. Yet what can I do? The young lady is of age; she is determined on the step; moreover, she has her father's consent, while I have not one single argument to urge against it, merely a feeling of dislike, distrust, for the gentleman of her choice." [146]

"In primitive regions I have found it unwise to oppose too many obstacles to marriages," remarked the soldier, who, by this time, was busily copying the required clause from a sheepskin-covered tome, "since there is always a popular tendency to forego the ceremony, if it involves the slightest trouble. Oh, I'm used to this! Also, I have had not a few applications for divorces."

"Eh?" exclaimed the minister. "Surely you do not grant them, my young friend?"

"I have no power to," Scarlett told him. "The best I can do under such circumstances is to give the applicants a bill of Dissolution of Partnership, to minimize the squabbling over the division of the outfit. These present protégés of yours may be my next candidates. There." He handed Maclane the paper. "Now it is ready for the signatures—yours and mine. But, first, these blanks must be filled in with the names of bride and groom."

"They shall write them for themselves," replied the minister, who was visibly agitated. "Not by a pen stroke will I further them beyond what is forced upon me." Going to the door he beckoned two persons waiting without, and to Scarlett's amazement summoned by name, "Horatio Travers! Evelyn Durant!" [147]

X.

 [148]

LUCKY'S LUCK.

Cheerful, erect, recreated in body and spirit, Durant came to Gumboot Annie's hostelry, where he had made an appointment to meet Walter Pierce. Not seeing the young man, and having his own reasons for not letting it be known that there was anything of a business nature between them, he refrained from making inquiries; ordered a cup of coffee, and, lighting a pipe, seated himself in a sheltered nook outside the tent to wait.

He had not been there long when the altercation between Dandy Raish and Gelly interrupted the banquet then in progress, bringing the diners from the tent, Nick, closely guarded by Barney, in the van.

Gelly, acting on Raish's instructions, had gone speeding down the trail, but the Dandy still lingered, to keep his secret tryst with Evelyn.

Catching sight of him, the Bully, handcuffed as he was, made a furious lunge at him. "Thet thar's the snake I've swore ter kill!" he shouted. "Let me free!" [149]

"No, sorr!" Barney restrained him. "No cheatin' av the extry-edition, if ye please."

Every one began to talk at once, his followers urging the Bully to vengeance or forgiveness, according to their natural dispositions, at present heightened by conviviality, while Raish, fearing lest the former policy should prevail, held up a hand for truce. "It's all right, Nick. You don't understand. Stand back, you fellows, can't you, and give me a word alone with Nick."

"Aye!" acquiesced the Bully. "I don't need help to curse ye, Raish. When I'm through with him, lads, I'll leave him to you ter skin him fer the skunk he is, d'ye see?"

"Can't you leave us?" inquired Raish of Barney, who still stood his ground by Nick.

"No, sorr, I cannot."

"But it's a private matter."

"Bedad, thin, that takes me in all right, since I'm a private meself till promoted."

"Oh, very well! Only I didn't like to drag in a woman's name before a third person," explained the Dandy. "What I want to say, Nick, is this: I'm awfully sorry for all the trouble I've brought on you. It's not entirely my fault, the way women do pursue a fellow. But never mind all that," he hastened to add as the Bully began to growl ominously. "I want you to know that I intend to do the square thing. I'm going to marry Gelly." [150]

"Eh?" cried Nick, unable to believe his ears. "You'll right my gal! Honest, Raish?"

"On my honor as a gentleman—that is, if she'll have me. Now, don't get angry, Nick, till I explain. Something has turned her against me of late. Suppose you write her a little note, advising her to do it."

"Advisin' her! I'll skin her if she kicks!" threatened Nick. "Here, boy," he turned to Barney, "get me quit of these bracelets while I write ter my darter."

"No, sorr, I wull not!"

"I tell ye it's my last words—good-by—to my darter."

"First or last, sure ye can dictate your autography."

"Oh, hang!" ejaculated the Bully.

"Sure, thin, that's for what I'm saving ye!"

"Thar ain't no word profane enough ter describe ye, d'ye see?" Nick told his keeper. "Here, boys, which one of ye kin write?" he called over to his followers.

"Don't make her name common with that gang," cautioned the Dandy, whose alert mind was actively evolving a new piece of villainy as the situation developed. "Ask an older man; a gentleman." [151]

"You've never done a thing ter her name, hev yer?" inquired the Bully, wrathfully, yet not wholly rejecting the advice. "Here, Sandy, man, come write a message for me. You've had schoolin'."

"Ou, aye!" assented the Scotchman, "ower muckle schoolin'. Mon, mon, when I reflect on a' this sma' head contains! I'll e'en gie ye a selection fra' Marmion—or a wee bit o' Rabbit Burrans." Being, however, far gone in conviviality, he maundered off into protestations of undying affection for his leader, assuring him he'd e'en gie his proper coppersation to see him hangit decently.

Disgusted, Nick shoved Sandy aside, and in so doing caught a glimpse of Durant in his corner, smoking peaceably. "Thar's old man Lucky!" he exclaimed, even as Raish had foreseen. "Might ask him ter help us out. Hi, Lucky! Want ter do me a good turn?"

"Willingly." Rising, Durant joined him. "What is it, Nick?"

"Waal, the government thinks so much of me these days I hev to employ a secretary fer me correspondence, d'ye see? Say, will you write down a message fer me to my gal?" [152]

"With all the pleasure in the world," assented Durant, heartily.

"Babper an' envelope, two bits. Ben an' ink, two bits. Plotter, two bits, bostache-shtamp, two bits!" At Nick's order, Ikey set writing materials before them on the counter.

"Say, Nick," Raish prompted, in an undertone, while Durant was removing his snow-spectacles and chafing his stiff fingers, "best not enter into details. Best let bygones be bygones. Best just say you want your daughter to let me bring her as my wife to pay you a visit during your enforced captivity—perhaps to say good-by."

"You let me choose my own words, and be damned to yer."

"Oh, very well! Only I don't see why you should be in a hurry to shame me and Gelly before an outsider."

"My gal has shamed herself, and thar ain't no shamin' you!" Nick, however, acted on the advice. "Ready, Lucky? Say, I don't know how to start it. I kin jaw her fluent ter her face, but I never wrote her afore." He hesitated, embarrassed.

Smiling reassuringly, Durant pointed to the words he already had mechanically set down. "My dear daughter—that's how I begin to my own girl." [153]

"Darter don't look as if it was spelled right," criticized the Bully. "But you know best, Lucky. Fire away! Make it affectionate, but firm, d'ye see? Tell her I'll cuss her in this life and skin her in the next ef she don't let Raish bring her ter me as his wife ter say good-by. No trimmin's, mind! Blow the signature! She'll know fast enough it comes from me."

"Your loving dad," Durant concluded. "That's how I end off when I'm writing to Evelyn."

"Pop ud 'a' sounded more nateral," remarked the Bully. "But mebbe dad is dockimentary. So let her go."

"Add a postscript," in a hurried whisper Raish enjoined Durant. "Tell her this is just a matter of form, and that I promise on my honor not to hold her to the arrangement permanently, if it is distasteful to her. Tell her——"

Durant looked up, surprised. "Surely all that lies wholly between you and the young woman."

"True," admitted Raish, "but as I don't mind confiding in you that the young woman is tired of me, I want her to feel secure that in satisfying her father's scruples I don't intend to take an unfair advantage of her. Suppose I set that down myself." He did so, writing rapidly, but clearly. "Now, Mr. Durant," he handed the other the pen, "you will add to your kindness to me more than you [154]

dream by placing your signature as witness to my pledge."

Durant did as he was asked, feeling that, little as he understood the matter, he was probably serving the best interests of the unfortunate Gelly.

"As witness only," he, however, stated. "It is an arrangement in which I take no moral responsibility."

"Thanks. I understand your scruples and respect them. The responsibility is mine entirely. Just at present I cannot explain, but later the whole position will be made clear."

"What's all them goin's-on?" suddenly demanded Nick, whose attention had been momentarily distracted by an argument between Mops and Sandy on the poetic merits of Rabbit Burruns. "No monkeyin' with dockiments over thar."

"I'm only directing it," explained the Dandy, who had folded the letter and inclosed it in an envelope.

Nick looked over his shoulder, breathing heavily with interest. "By gum," he ejaculated, wrathfully, "ef ye hev'n't blotted my gal's name, Raish, and not fer the fust time!"

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"DARTER DON'T LOOK AS IF IT WAS SPELLED RIGHT," CRITICIZED BULLY.

"Oh, I'll make that all right!" The Dandy put the letter in his breast and walked away.

"Ef yer don't may yer sizzle!" Nick called after him. Turning to Durant: "Pard, I'm grateful," he declared, with feeling. "Pard, the best wish I kin give ye is, may ye never need no one ter do the same by you."

"Thanks, Nick. That's all right." Durant looked about him, and seeing that Raish was out of earshot and Blenksoe not in sight, went closer to the Bully and his followers. "Friends, there's something I want to say to you," he began. "It's just this: You've all done me a kindness to my dying day I shan't forget. A fortnight ago, when my girl came into camp expecting to find me living in a diamond-encrusted palace, and I stood there so forlorn she didn't recognize me, a broken-hearted beggar, you who by one word might have pricked the bubble and humiliated me before her and her before the world, by your silence protected her and me. It was the noblest thing——" His voice broke; he wiped his eyes.

"That's all right, Lucky! Brace up, old man!" came from one and another of the group.

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"Aye, but now I want you all to hear my good news!" cried Durant, detaining them as they were preparing to go back into the dining-tent to resume their interrupted feast. "*It has all come true!* With so many grafters and claim-jumpers round I daren't be explicit, but I want you to know that my luck has turned for good and all. Oh, this time it's no pocket; it's the big strike of which I've always dreamed. I don't deserve it, some may think, after playing with my girl's credulity, yet for her sake I thank God with all my heart that I've won out! Till it's staked and recorded I know you'll all keep my secret—but, boys, every one of you is in it, the Rainbow Mine!"

The same wonderful delicacy that had marked their treatment of Evelyn did not fail her father. The Bully and his gang listened to this speech in respectful silence, at its conclusion crying, "Great! Good for you, old man! You done grand! Allus knew you'd git thar fer keeps! Sure! Betcherlife! That's what!" with every evidence of conviction and spontaneous joy. But as he walked off, Durant laughed. He did not need to look back to know that fingers were being pointed after him, winks interchanged and foreheads tapped significantly, with comment that found food for mirth, even while it deplored: "Off his nut fer fair. Balmly on the crumpet. Bats in his belfry. Qualifying for Queer Street. Plumb crazy. Poor old Lucky!"

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Well, let them think so, bless them, since another day would set them right and prove him all he claimed to be. And then nothing gold could procure would be too good for them, nothing—this

rough crew, more beast than man, that had yet behaved like more than man to his deceived, defenceless girl.

That hour—its memory was seared upon his very soul—the hour of Evelyn's arrival in camp that had witnessed the deepest degradation, followed immediately by the crowning justification and triumph of his career. He visualized it now, as he walked: In the Klondike Delmonico's, in her rôle of Lady Bountiful, Evelyn was dispensing hospitality right and left. He alone, her father, dared not enter in. Crushed, crazed, he walked back to the spot where he had left young Pierce. Him he found still brooding beneath the huge pine, dazed, amid the ruin of his own air castles. Then for one bad moment Durant went really mad. Picking up the gun he had dropped when an irresistible force drew him to go watch the incoming stage, he turned its deadly charge against his fevered brain.

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With a cry, Walter sprang forward, but not before old Blenksoe, who had been watching his associate's actions curiously, seized him, capturing the gun. "No yer don't, blast yer!"

"Give it to me, Blenksoe! Of what use is my life to you?"

"Lucky you've been afore, and lucky you may be yet, and when the luck turns I'm in it, see?"

"Give it to me!" With a madman's fury, Durant leaped at the other's throat, only to be met by a blow that sent him reeling to the ground with such force that a young willow bush he clutched at was partially uprooted. For a few seconds he lay prone, foaming at the mouth and clawing the soil with frenzied impotency. Then of a sudden he paused, raised himself, face still downturned, and burst into insane laughter that made Pierce's blood run cold.

"Mad! Stark, starin' mad!" Blenksoe turned on his heel.

"There's a squirrel on yonder tree I could bring down for the dogs' supper if you'd give me back my gun, Blenksoe," his laughter spent, Durant meekly suggested as he scrambled to a sitting posture.

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"Fetch her with a stun," was the succinct reply, as, retaining his partner's weapon, Blenksoe re-entered the tent.

Acting on the suggestion, Durant gathered up a handful of clots, selecting them carefully, and with deliberate aim took long shots at the chattering creature on the bough.

"Sit here, beside me, close, Walter," in an undertone he bade the young clerk, who still was gazing at him in horrified bewilderment. "But don't start or show the slightest surprise at what I am going to say. Oh, tut, tut, lad, never fear!" For Pierce seemed disinclined to comply with his command. "I am not mad. That is all over, thank God! with all the struggle, the heartbreak. *The luck has turned*, do you hear? Yes, turned for good and all! Every clot that I am throwing contains gold!—careful!" For involuntarily Walter had given vent to an ejaculation of amazed incredulity. "Oh, I'm an old prospector, and I see indications, and read signs where these grafters pass them by. I've always believed in this locality, and now I'm justified. In uprooting that willow I unearthed a bonanza!" Pausing in his speech, he renewed his attempts on the squirrel's life, and then went on: "Yes, each dull handful of earth I throw is a priceless witness that beneath us, on this spot, lies the Rainbow Mine—" Breaking off, as he observed old Blenksoe watching him narrowly, he rose as if discouraged, with a sigh. "My hand shakes. I'm no match to-day even for a squirrel. I'll have to give it up." Then, cleverly simulating the foolishly detailed actions of one who, having lost his grasp on the great things of life, clutches at the trivialities, he set about replanting the willow, stamping down the disordered earth about its roots, meanwhile in a pregnant undertone continuing his conversation with Walter.

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The latter, so between them it was arranged, was to hang about the locality, watching for a chance, unobserved, to pick up the valuable clots, and these he was to have exchanged for their cash value, for current expenses, at a bank so distant that their source could not be predicated with any degree of accuracy—a precaution that Durant deemed essential in a district where even officialdom was likely to be corrupted by the lust for gold. He himself, meanwhile, would watch his opportunity, and disappear, without leaving a trace, from Lost Shoe Creek, as if madness had indeed possessed him, in order to throw Blenksoe off the scent and cause him also to move on, since, as Durant rightly conjectured, the pastmaster of graft would not be likely to remain in any spot which he thought Lucky had turned down. To-day Walter was to meet him here, return with him to the scene of his discovery, aid him in staking it, by stealth; journey to the nearest office where recording-books were opened, to file the claim with the necessary fee, while Durant himself would remain, defending the stakes, if need be, with his life. Once his rights legally safeguarded, all the world might know. Again Durant laughed in joyful anticipation of his meeting with Evelyn, when confession and revelation would come in the same breath. Then, impatiently, he looked up and down the trail, wondering at Pierce's delay on this day of days, when he heard a low moan among the bushes, and, turning, beheld the young man on whose co-operation such high hopes depended, lying, bedded in furs, upon a sled, swathed in bandages, pallid—a dying man.

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"My God! Walter, my poor lad, what does this mean?" exclaimed Durant, in horrified accents.

Another moan was the only answer, but reading in the glazing eyes a wish to speak, Durant knelt down and bent so that his ear touched the stiff lips.

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"What is it, Walter?"

"The samples," the young man at last managed to articulate. "The mine——"

"Aye, the mine—the samples!" cried Durant, with frantic eagerness. But Walter's confession never reached the man he had betrayed. A sudden darkness came over Durant. He struggled, but his grasp was pinioned from behind. He tried to cry aloud, but his voice was muffled. Swift, treacherous hands seized him, gagged him, bound him fast, bore him off, blind, mute, a prisoner!

XI

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AN INTERNATIONAL EPISODE

With an effort regaining the composure unwontedly ruffled by Scarlett's audacious response to her challenge as to an Irishman's method of love-making, while adjusting hat and hair, whose order, as she blushingly was conscious, had suffered from the same cause, Evelyn hurried toward the fir-encircled spot where she saw Dandy Raish awaiting her.

A fellow-passenger aboard the boat that had brought her party up the Alaskan coast, Travers had lost no chance to ingratiate himself with Evelyn by rendering her all manner of unobtrusive service, so that his letter, requesting this appointment, at an out-of-the-way place under conditions of absolute secrecy, while exciting her curiosity, caused her no alarm. The matter to which he had mysteriously alluded, as of supreme importance to herself and her father, she had assumed to refer to Durant's vast mining interests. She took it for granted that the obliging Mr. Travers was bearer of a remittance that would enable her to defy Scarlett's absurd advice in favor of roughing it, and enable her to resume her wonted style of luxurious living.

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To escape awkward questions, she had decided to turn the expedition into a day's outing that should include Sarah and her young companions, thus giving her meeting with Travers the appearance of chance. Scarlett's unforeseen presence on the scene only added a piquancy to the occasion, in her eyes, since she thought it might furnish her with an opportunity to put down that estimable but altogether too masterful young man. That the opportunity would land her in the young man's arms was something she had not reckoned with.

As Travers watched her speeding toward him with glowing cheeks and eyes, a lovely picture of blossoming young womanhood between the wintry ground and summer sky, something leaped to life in the Dandy's breast that made it a hard task for him to greet her with the grave impersonal politeness it was his policy to assume, and determined him more than ever to cut out "that blasted Scarlett."

After formal salutations had been exchanged, he remarked: "I think I saw you speaking with some one in uniform, Miss Durant. I trust it was not a member of the Mounted Police?"

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"It was Sergeant Scarlett."

"Good heavens! Scarlett, of all men! May I hope you did not mention our appointment to him?"

"My appointments are my own affair, Mr. Travers. Please let us get to the matter in hand without delay. What is it you have to say to me?"

"I am more anxious than you possibly can be for haste, since to you the matter is but one of temporary inconvenience, while to carry it through I am risking my very life. But before we go any further I must have your sacred promise that what I say is in inviolable confidence."

"Confidences between you and me, Mr. Travers! Aren't you making too much of what is probably some ordinary business matter; taking rather an undue advantage of my complaisance in granting you this interview?"

"Miss Durant, you wrong me. I tell you that in seeking you I have nothing to gain, everything to lose; life, honor, everything! I am running this tremendous risk—not, as you think, because you are a woman, young, rich, beautiful; but because I owe a debt of gratitude, that only life could pay, to your dear father."

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"My dear father! You come from him? Then he knows of my arrival! Why isn't he here himself to welcome me?" Evelyn's questions came rushing eagerly.

"Miss Durant, he cannot come. He is a prisoner."

"A prisoner! What do you mean?" she faltered.

"A captive, rather; held by a gang of desperados for ransom."

"God in heaven!" Evelyn went white. "My daddy!"

"You are faint!" Raish went to her side, supporting her.

"No, no! Thanks, I am all right." Evelyn drew away. "But your pledge of secrecy—why, it is preposterous! Every one should be told. The alarm given—rewards offered—the country roused!" She moved forward as she spoke.

"No, no! Not as you value his life!" Raish held her back. "Listen. One incautious word, and your father is a dead man. There are spies about us—everywhere. That is why I got you to meet me here—Miss Durant, believe me, by raising the hue and cry you will sound your father's death-knell."

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Evelyn shuddered. "I can't believe—" she began, however, incredulously.

"I will explain. Miss Durant, you have been in the district over two weeks—the district in which you know your father's interests to lie. Yet have you been able to locate him, to obtain one satisfactory answer as to his goings and comings, his present whereabouts? Have you not invariably been put off with specious generalities—sugar-plums to soothe a wayward child? Admit that no man has said to you in definite terms, 'Yonder, on such and such a hill, is the camp of Matthew Durant. By such and such a trail can you reach him.'"

"Yes, that is true," admitted Evelyn. "Every one puts me off. Still—"

"The reason is," Raish interrupted her, "that no one knows where, among those mountains, his prison lies. But that he is a prisoner is public property, though not a soul has had the heart to break it to you."

"How cruel to have deceived me!" Evelyn burst into a flood of tears. "And all the time he is wondering why I don't rescue him. But with his resources what is the difficulty? Why has not he himself bought his freedom?"

"Because their price is high—it is your entire fortune—the Rainbow Mine—and your father loves you too well to subject you to poverty."

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"It is like my father to put me first," sobbed Evelyn, "but doesn't he know me better? Does he for a moment think I would weigh any consideration on this earth against his safety?"

"Ah!" cried Raish, triumphantly, "I knew you were true blue. That is what I told my old friend Durant—but captivity has so preyed on his spirits that he is ill—unable to judge—"

"My father ill!" Evelyn clenched her little hands and moaned: "Oh, oh, oh! If only I could go to him!"

"Have you the courage?" questioned Raish.

"The courage!" She looked at him, amazed. "If you know how to reach him take me to him instantly!"

Raish almost laughed aloud. "Women are dead easy," he mentally reiterated, before replying: "Very good." He drew Evelyn's furs closer about her neck, protectingly. "I take you at your word. But we must invent some excuse for our going off together. We must elude pursuit. Above all, we must get rid of your friend, the Irishman."

"I trust Sergeant Scarlett," said Evelyn.

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"And so do I!" cried Raish, with assumed cordiality. "I trust that excellent young man to do his duty and win promotion at all costs. The Sergeant makes love like an Irishman, Miss Durant. Ah, I saw!" he checked her protest. "But believe me, not even for your bright eyes will he sacrifice his loyalty to the government he serves by countenancing a dicker with the thieves, its enemies."

"Let us leave the Sergeant out of the discussion," cried Evelyn, with blazing cheeks. "What do you propose?—for by your manner I see you have some plan."

"The plan is not mine. I never should have ventured to suggest it," answered Raish. "It is your father's, entirely. He and I were taken prisoners together. I, as the unimportant man, financially, am used as intermediary, being sent here, on parole, to treat with you for his release. Spies are dogging my footsteps. Meanwhile, his life is hostage, until I return with you in my charge. Your father, ever scrupulous, fearing compromising comment, were you to travel with me alone, day and night, as we shall have to do, advised—" He paused, as if delicacy made the words difficult. "Miss Durant, he wishes you to go through a form of marriage with me first."

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"I marry you!" gasped Evelyn.

"As a matter of form only; to be dissolved when your father's freedom is secured."

"Never—never! It is impossible!"

"Very good. I will carry back that answer." Raish turned to go. "You send your love to him, I suppose, Miss Durant, and as he is a very sick man, good-by?"

"Stop," she commanded him. "Give me a few moments. You are *sure* my father said that—about a marriage ceremony?"

"Aye, furthermore, he wrote it," Raish assured her. "Though to clear myself from any suspicion of interested motives I begged him to send the letter by another messenger. You should already have received it from the hand of Walter Pierce."

"Miss Durant! Where is Miss Durant? Oh, Miss Durant!" At the moment Maclane's agitated voice came toward them. As Evelyn, responding, emerged from the thicket he met her, breathlessly. Chilkat Jo, whom he had despatched to Lost Shoe Creek for Evelyn, had returned some time before to announce that he had met her by the way, but the minister, not expecting her for hours, had to be hunted up among the cabins further on, whither he had gone on some errand of mercy. "I only just heard of your arrival. How providential that you should have chosen this of all days for your expedition! A poor lad—Chilkat Joseph and I found him by the wayside—the victim, I fear, of foul play, has brought you tidings of your father." As he spoke he was hurrying her toward the spot where young Pierce lay.

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"Walter Pierce—my father!" Evelyn almost shrieked in her excitement, but at a warning sign from Travers, who had followed her, controlled herself. "I have been expecting him."

"After all I fear it is too late." Maclane touched pulse and brow. "He is beyond human help. He will not speak again." Kneeling by the sled he began prayers for the passing soul, when he was interrupted by a cry from Evelyn, as Walter's arm, which had rested loosely across his breast, fell stiffly by his side, disclosing an open letter which, as she saw immediately, was in her father's hand.

"Women are dead easy—women and parsons," chuckled Raish, who had adroitly placed the missive where Evelyn found it. Going to her where she stood, apart, reading her father's transcription of Nick's behest to Gelly, "Well," he asked, "now are you convinced?"

"One moment, please!" Without explanation to him, Evelyn ran up the hill where, international formalities complied with, under the two flags the Bully was bidding his followers farewell.

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"Dear, dear Nick"—she clasped his handcuffed fists in her soft, warm palms—"you welcomed me to the district; you are my oldest friend. Tell me, when did you last see my father?"

"Lucky? Why, now come ter think of it, Lucky were here not an hour since. Fit as a fiddle, now warn't he, boys? Grand reports of the Rainbow Mine. Shovelin' out pay-dirt like greased lightnin'! Ain't thet so, boys? Sent love, of course, and he'd be in ter see yer ter-morrer. His own words, d'ye see? Eh, boys?"

To which the boys, challenged by Nick's fiery eye, loyally responded: "Sure! Thet's what! Betcherlife!"

Evelyn looked from face to face and read that, beneath a clumsy mask, through heroic but mistaken kindness, ill news was being held back from her. "Thank you all so much," she replied, and, turning, ran downhill to rejoin Raish.

Sarah intercepted her. "Miss, I think we had ought to be getting back to camp. The orphans are behaving scandalous, getting themselves engaged three deep. I don't know as you can blame 'em, miss. I suppose it's a microbe. I myself have just refused three marriages and two guilty loves."

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"I shall have to leave you to manage the orphans, Sarah." Evelyn smiled an odd smile. "I myself am going to be married and start off on a honeymoon immediately."

"You don't say, miss!" The maid raised her eyebrows. "Well, a common soldier is hardly in the same social class as my own Scotch intended, with a literary turn and a copper proposition, but I will say that Sergeant Scarlett looks and acts quite the gentleman."

"Oh, it's not Sergeant Scarlett! It is the Mr. Travers who looked after us so civilly aboard the Skagway boat."

Sarah's eyebrow's went up further still. "Indeed, miss! He's very smart in his dress, yet—however, I suppose everything goes in a country where no one minds the clocks."

Meanwhile, with the assistance of Ikey, Maclane, having covered the funereal sled with the Stars and Stripes loaned by Gumboot Annie, drew it across to poor Walter's own side of the dividing line, that his mortal remains might rest in their native soil.

When he came to seek Evelyn, to consult her about the last rites, she met him with a strange request, to the effect that first he should unite her with all despatch and secrecy to one Mr. Horatio Travers, whom she then and there presented to him.

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"My dear young lady!" The minister stared at her. "Isn't this decision very sudden? Forgive my interference, but you being alone up here, and so young—"

"I'm twenty-two," Evelyn assured him, "and that's middle-aged for a New York girl."

In spite of the bravado of her manner, her tone so wholly lacked all bridal joyousness that Maclane was impelled to draw her aside and ask: "Is this act of your own free will?"

"Heavens, yes!" she asserted, confidently. "No one on earth could make me do anything I didn't choose to."

"Nevertheless," the minister demurred, "let me entreat you to defer so important a step till you can consult your father."

"It is my father's desire, expressed with an emphasis that makes it almost a command," averred Evelyn, solemnly. "And conveyed to me at the price of that poor lad's life."

Still dissatisfied, but without sufficing reason for refusing, Maclane put the usual questions to the prospective groom. As witness, Travers introduced old Blenksoe, who, having disposed of Durant, had ambled up, calling him a dear old family retainer—a lifelong friend.

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"That's me," corroborated the old sinner. "Rough an' ready, but allus in it with Raish. Not only is Raish by nature and eddication fitted to adorn the proudest spear, but he's a square proposition. Ye kin safely leave it ter Raish, every time."

"Well," reluctantly the minister consented, "where is your license?"

"A license!" exclaimed Travers. "What for?"

"To legalize the marriage," Maclane instructed him. "You must get one from the Gold Commissioner or Justice of the Peace."

"Then that queers the show," stated old Blenksoe, "sence thar ain't no gold round these here diggings, nor no justice, nor no peace."

"Is there no way of dispensing with it, under exceptional circumstances?" Evelyn asked, anxiously. "If you knew how imperative my reason for desiring haste——"

"In lieu of it, then," the minister conceded, "I will accept a copy of the appropriate clause of the Dominion Marriage Act, signed by the Mounted Policeman in charge of the district where Miss Durant resides."

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And before Raish, who sprang forward, with an oath, could stop him, he had entered the Customs building, calling for Sergeant Scarlett.

XII

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NORTHERN LIGHTS

Scarlett looked from Evelyn to Travers and back again, in bewilderment, dismay. "Miss Durant," he at last found voice to say, "surely there is some mistake! Surely there's no love lost between ye and this—gentleman!"

"My private affairs, my feelings, seem to cause a great deal of unnecessary comment," remarked Evelyn, hiding her emotion under a mask of irony. "May I beg you to refrain from criticism, and to give us the requisite authority?"

Scarlett looked at her fixedly, and seeing her control weaken, her color change, and her eyes fill and falter beneath his penetrating gaze, shook his head. "That I must absolutely decline to do!"

"And why, pray?" she commanded herself to ask.

"Oh, the reason is plain!" Raish sneeringly interposed. "Every one knows the Sergeant's own matrimonial aspirations. Every one has heard of the cheap device by which on the very day of her arrival he tried to worm himself into the favor of my fiancée. If he did but know it, her father's chief reason for insisting on the immediate celebration of our marriage is to protect her from the persecutions of adventurers!"

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"I beg," cried Evelyn, checking Scarlett's furious retort, "that there may be no such personalities! Mr. Travers, pray understand that I do not, in the least, assent to your characterization of the Sergeant, who, up to this moment, has treated me and my friends with the utmost delicate consideration and chivalry!"

"Forgive me, dearest"—Raish took her hand. "I spoke too warmly! Yet who could blame me? Come, come, my good Sergeant, put your name to that paper without further ado, unless you wish to suffer under the imputation of sacrificing official honor to personal revenge."

Not deigning to heed the taunt, Scarlett turned to the minister. "I can't sign, because down in yonder valley is a lass in a red cloak who has a prior claim upon this man."

Raish forced a contemptuous laugh. "The red-cloak, who should not even be mentioned in this presence, may stay in the valley for me. My acquaintance with the red-cloak belongs to a day before I knew Evelyn. She condones the past, accepts the dedication of my future life." Drawing Evelyn aside, he whispered, "Don't be alarmed. My pledge holds good. This is all bluff, my doing the devoted, to throw them off the track." Stooping suddenly he kissed her.

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"My young friend," Maclane restrained and admonished Scarlett, "my sympathies are yours wholly. But are you not exceeding your authority?"

"Aye," confessed the Irishman, "I'm stretching it a bit, maybe, to fit me intuitions. Dominie, I tell

ye 'tis a fishy business. Not an hour since, the girl was in these arms of mine, lip to lip, and liking it. And now, look at her shudder at that fellow's touch."

"Sergeant Scarlett"—breaking from Raish, Evelyn came to him and laid a coaxing hand upon his arm—"I know that in your heart you are despising me for a cheap coquette. And I deserve it. I have given you cause to think the worst of me. I can't explain. But if you could only read my heart—could only know what this means to me—it's the happiness of my life! It will be misery to the end of my days if I fail him at this supreme test. You're magnanimous, above all pettiness, I know. You simply want to save me, as you think, from making a mistake. But believe me, trust me, I know what I'm about. Now, will you do me the greatest favor one human being ever entreated of another, by signing your name to that document?"

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Scarlett looked tenderly down on her, and, swayed against his judgment by her earnestness, he might have yielded, had not the Dandy inopportunely added the word too much.

"Sergeant Scarlett will hardly dare take the consequences of refusing when I tell him that without the protection of my name Miss Durant will be irretrievably compromised!"

Scarlett checked an almost overwhelming impulse to kick the speaker. Instead, he took Evelyn's cold fingers into his honest grasp. "I'd give my name to shield ye, my life to serve ye, and now I'm going to risk my official honor, to—as I think, to save ye." He tore up the paper.

Above the general outcry that ensued, Sarah's tones were heard. "A pretty country where you can't marry whom you please! America's good enough for me!"

"America!" exclaimed Evelyn, struck by a sudden thought. "Are there such restrictions with us in America?"

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"Unfortunately not, my dear," replied Maclane, who had once occupied a Chicago pastorate. "In the States the sacred tie is made and broken far more easily."

"Then, quick," she cried, "across the boundary!" And seizing Travers' hand she ran, the others following breathlessly, not halting till she reached the tall mast from which proudly floated the emblem of the free.

"God in Heaven!" Scarlett looked after her, his personal grief swallowed up in anxiety. "Is there no power above, below, to stop a wilful woman from cutting her own throat with a wedding-ring?" He cast about for aid. Barney, who might have thrown some light on the plot, had returned to duties at headquarters, but Nick and Gelly might yet be reached in time, and for them he sent messengers flying. Meanwhile, he bethought himself of Chilkat Jo. Sheltered by the Customs water-butt, he found the trader squatting peaceably, whittling a mimic totem-pole. On his shoulder Scarlett laid a gauntleted hand. "Chilkat Jo, man, look what devil's work is going on forinst ye! Can't ye say the word to stop it?"

There was an appreciable pause while, with a silken sound, the soft shavings curled, fell, under the skilful knife. Then without looking up, the Siwash gently replied, "Me no such godam-hellan-blazes Clistian fool! Laish mally Missy Dulant! I mally Gelly!"

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In desperation Scarlett strode toward the bridal group, reaching it just as the minister's solemn tones rolled forth, challenging the wilderness to show just cause or impediment why these two persons might not lawfully be joined together.

"Just or unjust," he shouted, "sure it's myself will furnish the impediment"—as, collaring the bridegroom, with a series of violent jerks he sent him flying back into precincts that rendered him amenable to Dominion law, where he neatly knocked him down, and sat on him. "Now, I've got ye in my own jurisdiction, I'll detain ye as a suspicious person till evidence for or against ye is forthcoming!" Maclane's protests, Evelyn's tears, Sarah's shrieks and taunts, and old Blenksoe's curses were as unavailing as Raish's struggles; the young giant held the position by main force till Nick, who had been easily overtaken, by courtesy of his custodians arrived in response to the recall.

"There, there," Scarlett soothed the squirming Dandy. "If I find I'm mistaken; if that damned incriminating face of yours belies ye, sure I'll apologize in sackcloth and give ye the satisfaction of a gentleman." Jerking Travers to his feet, he confronted him with Gelly's father. "Nick," he inquired, "what is your unvarnished opinion of this fellow?"

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"Wa'al, thar's things in his past," admitted the Bully, "same as in most men's, thet you wouldn't hold up as a shinin' example to a Sunday-school, d'ye see? But bygones is bygones. Arter wot he projected ter-day, I've nought but good words fer Dandy Raish."

"Not another syllable, Nick, I beg," Travers hastened to cut short the Bully's eulogium at a period so favorable to his plans. "Now, Sergeant, we accept your apology for your ill-directed zeal, and dispense with your further company."

"Say, Scarlett," wrathfully demanded Nick, "I kin cheek yer now I'm goin' ter be hanged by U. S. law! Take yer hands off'n Raish! Wot the hell d'ye mean by damagin' my son-in-law?"

"Your son-in-law?" in one breath cried Evelyn, Sarah and Maclane.

"I sent my gal a letter," elucidated Nick. "Your pop Lucky put it in writin' fer me, Missy. That's it you got in your hand."

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"This letter! And that villain made me believe— Oh, oh, oh!" Evelyn burst into a flood of humiliated tears.

"You black scoundrel; you'd 'a' deceived her as you deceived my gal!" Nick made a blind rush at Raish, but was held back by his custodians. "Sure as thar's a God in Heaven, Raish," he vowed, as they restrained him, "I'll live ter kill ye yet!"

Vain threat! A sharp sound cleft the crystal air and, echoing, died away in soft detonations among the hills. The Dandy threw up his hands as he had forced so many luckless travelers to do in his career of highway robbery, and fell, gracefully, as he did everything, face downward, with a little trickle of blood, upon the snow. With a shriek of anguish a girl in a red cloak, who had been speeding up the hill, threw herself beside him, calling his name with all the loving epithets that even the lowest of the low seems able to win from some woman's heart.

Tears wrung from his being's depths for baffled retribution coursing down his rough cheeks, the Bully lifted pinioned hands to Heaven and uttered the one prayer of his life: "O Almighty Gawd, with all respect, why did You butt in? O Gawd! I've made cold meat of a score o' men on end from fust ter last! But they was jes' accident or playfulness, d'ye see? This here skunk were the only livin' thing I ever hankered fer ter kill! And Thou hast called my bluff, and took the wind outen my sails by puttin' the shootin'-iron of my vengeance inter another's hand! Thar ain't no four-flushin' Thee, O Gawd! Thou hast plumb squared the reckonin' fer all my sins, past and ter come, world without end. Amen." [185]

Whose the hand that shot Dandy Raish no one ever knew, though many a young fool, in his cups, boasted of the high distinction. In the case of a man so universally detested perhaps official enquiry thought it policy to rest. But, possessed at the moment by a literal interpretation of duty, with a heavy heart the good minister sought his favorite Indian proselyte.

Sitting beside him, where he found him whittling peaceably in the shelter of the Customs water-butt, "O Joseph, Chilkat Jo," sighing, he began. "My son, if on your hands there be blood-guiltiness, you must repent, confess!"

The soft shavings slithered, curled and fell, as the emblem of the Raven and the Frog grew beneath the skilful knife. Then, in unimpassioned monotone, the Indian remarked, "Some day, when I velly old, old chief, I lepent, confess, make godam-hellan-blazes Clistian deathbed. But now—" He paused to twist the weird features of his tribal god into an inscrutable smile. "Now, I mally Gelly." [186]

It was the cool of the evening. From behind the mountains northern lights shot up in streamers of living green and rose. There was a sound of bells, and "mushing," as the drivers harnessed up their dog-teams to carry the picnickers back to camp. Scarlett looked over at Evelyn with an odd contraction of the heart, where the bud of hope was trembling for life under the icy hand of circumstance, but as she did not appear to notice him he turned and went on his own road without farewell.

Then Evelyn went to Gelly where, the violence of her grief spent, she still crouched beside her lover's stiffening form. Putting an arm about her, "Come. Come home with me to live," she said. "Yes." For Gelly looked up with resentment changing to incredulity. "Please. As a favor to me. I have so much to learn. I need you."

XIII

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A YEAR AFTER

Winter had come and gone; spring had passed into a new summer. In the prosperous township of Lost Shoe Creek no one would have recognized the god-forsaken camp of the year before. While the locality was generally condemned as an auriferous proposition, its situation fitted it admirably for base of supplies to other creeks: Abe Lincoln, Jubilee, Old Glory and Princess May, where hydraulic machinery had been established and placer claims were being worked with profitable, if not phenomenal, results.

Some critics attributed the marvelous transformation that had taken place to the presence of women, dating from the arrival of Evelyn and her party; others to the gospel tidings of good-will brought by Parson Maclane, when, wild rose in buttonhole, and followed by his dogs, Telegraph and Wrangel, he came running on the trail. A third faction was for giving the credit to law and order, personified by the ubiquitous young soldier, Sergeant Scarlett, and his right-hand man, Barney. But the wise set it down to the trinity of saving influences. [188]

For Evelyn the time had been one of unusual happiness. Learning early that the boundless wealth of which she supposed herself possessor was not a popular subject among folk to whom daily

bread came hardly, she wisely decided to omit mention of it from her conversation. Also, finding herself likely to be embarrassed for ready money, since credit was denied her, she followed Scarlett's excellent advice to try roughing it, with excellent results. Moreover, at the suggestion of the good Graysons, whose neighborliness she soon learned to value, and loyally backed by the "boys," she opened a real-estate office at Lost Shoe Creek, with a branch at Perdu, showing herself an admirable business woman. Amateur theatricals, concerts, and ice-carnivals had brightened the dark season, when mining-camps in the North are as desert islands, cut off from all communication with the outside; and for the first time in her life Evelyn tasted the unalloyed pleasure that springs from giving pleasure and helpfulness that money cannot buy. One sorrow only dimmed her sky: the continued absence of her father. No one told her that, far and wide, official search was being made for Matthew Durant, nicknamed Lucky, who, on a fateful day of the previous summer had disappeared as utterly as had the earth in which he worked opened to engulf him; she still believed, uncontradicted, that his vast interests were detaining him somewhere among the baffling distances of snow-capped hills, and that any hour that suited him would bring him back to her.

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THE UBIQUITOUS YOUNG SOLDIER, SERGEANT SCARLETT.

It was the day when, by the most lovable of paradoxes, in that region, two festivals—one of independence declared, one of allegiance covenanted—are celebrated, with crossed flags: Dominion Day and the Fourth of July, in one.

On this particular anniversary gala preparations of extra splendor were afoot in honor of the return of Bully Nick, once more a free man, not because in equity he was held worthy to be at large, so much as through a technical slip by which but six jurors had been requisitioned to sit on his case, whereas, as his backers claimed, he was territorially entitled to be adjudged guilty by a full dozen good men and true.

"Well, I'm dazzled fer fair," announced the hero, as, amid cheers from his friends and followers, he alighted from the stage. "This here bloomin' Paradise ain't never Lost Shoe Creek."

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"Sure, 'tis! Betcherboots! That's what!" he was assured.

Nick rubbed astonished eyes. "By gum, a Gospel-mill!"

"Aye, and filled to overflowing every Sabbath, Nicholas," proudly stated good Maclane.

"Wa'al, y' see," Mops hastened to apologize to his leader for this hated concession to religion, "the gals like piousness."

The neat jail next the church was described by Barney as "just an impty forrum intoirely, owing to the ladies' distaste for the species of bird such cages are controived for, begorra!"

The decorative touch to the personal appearance of his followers, in honor of the holiday, naturally came in for the Bully's quizzical attention: their shorn faces; the soap "with the tony smell" in vogue; the paper collars with jeweled studs in which, all day, Ikey had been doing a rushing trade, were noted by him categorically till Bill silenced him by stating that "style was like for to fetch the girls."

Gumboot Annie, to whose hostelry he was conducted to drink his own health, had been allowed to reopen, he was informed, under close restriction and surveillance from "that blamed Scarlett." Nevertheless, as she told Nick, spitting with deliberation, not being in business for salubrious ends merely, she was making great profit out of "moderate drinkin' and no drunks," through the girls' preference for sober cavaliers. Or, as she phrased it, "the gals won't swaller the booze."

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This was too much for the Bully's equanimity. "The gals, indeed!" Slapping his knee, he chuckled. "The hell!"

"Eh, Nicholas?" the minister challenged him. "Did I understand you to say 'the hell?'"

"The hell you did, Parson!" The Bully turned on him truculently. "And what the hell hev you agin it?"

"If no better argument, Nicholas," smiled Maclane, "the girls won't stand for hell."

"Parson," Nick acknowledged his defeat, "the drinks is on me." Later he took occasion to state, "I ain't convarted. But, say, Parson, you're jes' the squarest proposition Gawd ever grub-staked ter prospect fer human souls, and, say—I won't oppose you none. And when I pass in my checks jes' you stand by my grave, and put up a little prayer fer my epitaffy, 'He done his level damndest, angels cud no more. Amen.'" Then he took from Gelly's arms the fine infant she had brought to show him, described by its fond father as "a velly godam skukum Clistian baby." Dandling it tenderly, "See here, son," he adjured it, "ef I find indications of you takin' arter me—gamblin', cussin', drinkin',—why, grandpop 'ull spankee, d'ye see?"

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His mind thus freed, his future pacific course outlined, Nick inquired, circumstantially for "the girls." Sarah, he learned, was the great lady of the place, making a large income as a "lady-barber," her firm hand, unshaken as her masculine competitors were apt to be by sprees, making her a peculiarly safe artist to be trusted to operate with a razor in the region of the jugular, and her husband's copper proposition still remaining an undeveloped asset, she was forcing him to work for regular wage as a teamster. In spite of which, on his occasional lapses Sandy was wont to boast that at heart he was "a mon for a' that."

The orphans all had settled down; Mary, having discovered a new violet at the foot of a glacier, had paired off with the young botanist who had been sent out from Ottawa to report on the flora of the region. Ruth was running postoffice and postmaster. Ethel and the town doctor had made a match. Kate's lot was cast with Bill, now doing assessment work and writing to his mother regularly. Effie had pre-empted the young editor of the weekly *Claim*, helping both to write his editorials and set them up in type. Gertrude had struck it rich with the bank manager. All would be on hand at the ball to-night. No, Evelyn had not made a choice. Rumor assigned her to Scarlett, yet how matters stood between them no man could say with certainty.

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At this the Bully's eye took on a fiery glow. "Ef thet thar uniformed cuss is a-playin' fast an' loose with Lucky's gal, d'ye see, it's up ter me to set it straight!" And, forthwith, he led the way to Evelyn's bower.

Evelyn was found, outside her cabin, superintending the arrangements for a grand display of fireworks in honor of the double holiday; the crowning piece to show the two flags crossed beneath a wondrous rainbow. By a coincidence that exactly suited the Bully's plans, Scarlett was, at the minute, seen approaching. After greetings had been interchanged with all heartiness, suddenly the young soldier found himself surrounded by the men—Nick, in the center, pointing a gun at his heart. Evelyn shrieked, and would have interposed, but was forced back by hands roughly tender, tenderly peremptory.

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"Well, boys," asked Scarlett, calmly, "is this some new kind of game?"

"Thet's as mebbe," answered Nick. "See here, Missy Durant, it ain't human natur fer a gal ter stay single in a minin'-camp."

"That's what!" the boys interrupted him to say.

"And I reckon you've had your pick of every miner an' prospector in the district—aye, and loafer, worthy of the name!"

"Sure! Betcherlife!" the boys confirmed him.

"Now," concluded the Bully, magnificently, "the question we're debatin' is jes' this: Hev you give this here blamed Scarlett the mitten, or hev you not?"

Evelyn laughed merrily. "To tell the truth, Nick, he hasn't given the opportunity—as yet."

"And I wouldn't take it if she gave it me," added the soldier, referring to the mitten.

The Bully looked from one to the other, and, in spite of their enigmatic replies, reading in the glances they exchanged some happy understanding, surrendered for good and all.

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"Boys," he announced, "the drinks, as usual, is on us when we run up agin the church, perlice, and gals—Here, Parson." He handed his weapon to Maclane who, fearing trouble, had hurried to the spot. "Keep this here shootin'-iron. I ain't fit ter be trusted with it, d'ye see? When I want a shot at moose or ptarmigan I'll borrow the loan of it from you."

"That's what! Betcherlife!" applauded the boys.

When, at last, they found themselves left together, Evelyn held up a mocking finger at her lover. "To think you had to be coerced! For shame!"

"I wanted to give ye time," he explained, "to feel surer of yourself and me."

"I knew it," she exclaimed. "You feared I might suspect you of interested motives. But the surest proof of my love for you has been my certainty that you care for me for myself alone, not for what I bring."

"That's the sweetest thing that ever has come from your lips," announced the soldier. "Not

another word till I taste a sweeter."

He was about to illustrate his meaning when Barney's voice was heard, discreetly inquiring of the landscape for "himself."

Affecting, for the first time, to perceive his superior, "Och, are ye there, sorr?" saluting, he inquired. [196]

"Here or there, I'm beside myself with joy," remarked Scarlett *sotto voce*. "Well, Barney, what's that you bring?"

"If appearances are not desaying, sorr, I'm thinking 'tis a letther. Our rint-roll, I'm thinking." He stood by with an air of partnership while Scarlett opened the envelope.

"Your rent-roll!" Puzzled, Evelyn looked at the address. "'Sir Gerald Scarlett.' Is that some joke?"

"A hereditary wan, begorra," Barney hastened to assure her. "It runs in our family."

"More roll than rent, though." Scarlett held out to her a long, legally drawn-up document.

"Not to mintion the castle," remarked Barney.

"Just a ruin in a bit of a potato patch," Scarlett hastened to apologize for his ancestral glories.

"And a cow to chaperon it—God bless her!" Barney saluted respectfully, as he turned to go.

Sir Gerald looked down on his lady-love with laughing eyes.

"My offence is rank," he quoted. [197]

"Oh, it's not an unpardonable sin," Evelyn assured him, also laughing, but confused. "What a goose you must have thought me all this time—the way I have condescended to you!"

"The greater my triumph in winning you on my own recognizances," he replied.

Evelyn held him at arms' length, contemplatively. "What a difference," she remarked, "between the myself of to-day and of a year ago! Then I should have suspected myself of being influenced by this—but now nothing seems to matter so much as that we care for each other."

"Miss Durant! O Miss Durant!" The lovers broke apart as, by a cross-cut through the bushes, the minister came hurrying toward them. "Here is—some one who brings you news of your father."

He pointed to an elderly man who, with lagging footstep, followed him.

"Of daddy? Hurrah!" Evelyn clapped her hands. "That was the one thing needed to complete my happiness! How is he? And where? Why hasn't he come to me himself?" she demanded impatiently of the stranger.

"Our friend here has traveled far," Maclane gently reminded her. "He is worn and spent." [198]

"Oh, how thoughtless I am!" As Evelyn placed the newcomer in a comfortable chair she noticed that his features, as she saw them between his slouch hat and heavy beard, were pinched, and that his frame was bowed beyond his years, as if from recent suffering. "How tired you look! You have been ill?" she asked him considerably.

"He has undergone great hardships for the sake of a dearly loved daughter," Maclane hastened to explain. "He has escaped with but little besides his life. But for that let us give thanks. Let us make him feel that, so long as he is spared, his daughter will not mind poverty."

"To be sure!" Evelyn tried not to show the impatience she felt at the concerns of outsiders being placed before her own, with a touch of her old patronizing manner adding, "And I dare say my father and I can arrange matters so that this good man's daughter need not complain of poverty."

The stranger opened his lips to speak, but unable to command himself, turned his head aside with a slight groan.

With an inexplicable foreboding, Evelyn looked from him to Maclane, and in the latter's kind eyes reading a deep pity, "What is wrong?" she faltered. "Has anything happened to my father?" [199]

"Nothing that sympathy and loving care cannot cure," replied the minister. "Mr. Durant was on his way to you a year ago when he fell into the power of ruffians, even as Travers, for his own evil purposes, informed you. After serious ill-treatment at their hands he escaped, but so broken in mind and body that for months he wandered about, unable to fix his own identity or put himself in communication with his friends. Now, thank God, he is almost cured."

"He shall be completely so, if, as you say, love can accomplish it." Evelyn started up. "I'll go to him at once." She addressed the stranger. "Where is he?"

"First—" Again Maclane hurriedly interposed. "There is something you should know about your father's finances. He is not rich, as you think him. By incessant toil from time to time he used to make vast sums, as miners are apt to do—and as miners are apt to do, he spent as fast as he made, his one extravagance being your pleasure. But the inexhaustible supply, the purse of Fortunatus—that was a fable that somehow grew up between your romanticism and his optimism. It does not exist. It never has existed. To-day he is absolutely penniless."

The words rained on her like hailstones. Evelyn met them, standing erect, very white and still.

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At last, "I do not grasp your meaning," she replied. "Every one in the district knows that my father is a very rich man."

"Not so." Maclane shook his head. "Every one knows the reverse; has always known it. Believe me, my child, what I tell you is true."

"My father's wealth does not exist." Evelyn's mind seemed to take slow, cautious steps backward over the minister's statements, with every impact feeling surer of the truth. "To-day he is absolutely penniless. Every one knows it; has always known it. Then why," she demanded with sudden passion, "has it been kept from me?"

"Out of kindness," replied Maclane, simply.

"Kindness!" Evelyn laughed scornfully, hysterically; calmed herself, then laughed again. "Kindness! When I recall how I used to brag of what my wealth would do for the place—and all the time, poor fool that I am, I have been the laughing-stock——"

"Again not so," emphatically said Maclane. "Think how quickly you fell into our primitive ways, becoming the heart and spirit of the camp. Believe me, Evelyn, you have endeared yourself, accomplished a thousand times as much by this year's bread-winning toil and good-fellowship as had you been the Lady Bountiful you started out to be. It isn't money that builds up camps, closing dives and opening reading-rooms—it's neighborliness—working and suffering with people, side by side. And in all his grief, remorse for your bitter disappointment, your poor father may take this comfort: that it has been the making of you as a woman, just as you, the real woman, have been the making of the camp."

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"Thank you." Evelyn spoke in a hard little dry voice. "Some day I may bring myself to see it in that light." She took a few steps to and fro, then came to a standstill opposite the minister. "Mr. Maclane, I want you to give my love to the 'boys'—to all who, by their silence, have shielded me as they thought, from the painful truth. Tell them that I appreciate it. Also ask them to try not to show that they pity me. I'm going to do something that's not easy for me. It would be easiest to go away to a strange place, where I could hide my head—but I have my poor father to think of. I have a good business here, which will support us both decently, at least. I shall bring him here to care for him—and mind! not one word of reproach, or mockery, is he ever to hear from any one! Not one word!"

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"Bravely spoken," cried Maclane. "Oh, there's happiness in store for you, my child. You'll see."

"Together, sweetheart!" Scarlett, who had been standing by in mute distress for her great trouble, now came to her and took her hand. "We'll fight it out together—you and I."

"Oh, no." Evelyn wrenched her hand from him. "That is all over. Things are changed with me. My eyes are open at last. I can forgive every one but you, Sir Gerald Scarlett—you who let me condescend to you, lead you on—and finally almost do the asking!"

"Faith, your eyes may be open, but they don't see as straight as they did when closed," Scarlett indignantly contradicted her. "I've loved ye all along, and sooner; since the moment I saw your picture smiling up to me among the roses."

"We won't discuss it. I only know"—Evelyn's voice broke—"I never want to see you again."

"But if only I could make people understand—believe in me——"

The stranger, who, all this time, had been sitting bowed forward, his face buried in his hands, suddenly broke forth. "It's not a fable! The Rainbow Mine—it's *true!* I discovered it the day—but where—where—where? My God, where?" He looked about wildly.

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Evelyn turned sharply on the speaker. "Who are you?"

Matthew Durant, his passion spent, lifted streaming eyes to his daughter's face. "Don't you know me, Evie?"

"Oh, no, no! You're not—oh, daddy!" Falling on her knees beside him, she gathered the feeble form into her strong young arms.

Then Maclane led Scarlett quietly away.

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CONCLUSION

Within the cabin her father was resting peacefully. While eating the food she set before him, he told Evelyn the history of his wonderful discovery, as it came back, fragmentarily, to his blurred memory, and she, the better to bring him back, as she thought, to sanity, humored his delusion by not betraying incredulity.

At the mission where he had been tended during the long illness that followed his captivity, so he explained, he had purposely given a fictitious name and account of himself, lest the truth should somehow reach Blenksoe, thus furnishing the clue to the whereabouts of the unstaked mine, which precaution also accounted for his having eluded the diligent search that the Mounted Police had never ceased to prosecute since his disappearance. From Blenksoe, however, he had no longer anything to fear; that arch-conspirator having gone the way of his leader, Dandy Raish, by the avenging bullet from some victim's hand.

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And, now, please God, he concluded, restored health would bring back recollection, enabling him to unearth the pot of gold to which the heavenly sign had pointed him.

When, at last, her loving tendance had won him to sleep, Evelyn went out into the cool air, to draw a long breath and readjust her reckonings with life that the day's events had thus cruelly disturbed.

It was the sunset's glowing aftermath that, to the pilgrims of the north, alone justifies a long journey from conditions that those hide-bound with conventions are inclined to associate with creature comfort, opening a new wonderland of beauty. In such regions where nature is elemental, man becomes elementary, feeling himself in the Almighty's workshop, in close communication with the powers of life, dealt with, not by subtle processes that the artificial conditions of city life have engendered, but swiftly, directly, summarily, as in the days of burning bush and pillars of flame.

Gazing over the now prosperous township of Lost Shoe Creek, across the lake, to the colossal mountains shutting it in from that "outside," to which even miners so heavily under the mysterious spell of the North that nothing ever could induce them to forsake it, still never ceases fondly to speak of as "God's country," Evelyn seemed to herself to be born again. Had she known it, it was then that she attained the noblest moment of her being, resolving, even as she already had resolved to meet it bravely, also to meet this uncompromising blow of providence without bitterness; if possible with love.

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Hearing Durant move within, she was about to go to him when her attention was arrested by a tatterdemalion figure at her gate, beseeching charity.

"Mademoiselle—peety ze poor!"

"Alphonse!" she exclaimed, recognizing the once jaunty person of her former courier, alias Count St. Hilaire.

Alphonse, who had not thought of her from that day to this, in turn recognizing her, hastened to attribute his present pitiful plight as the deserved vengeance of an outraged Heaven for his baseness in despoiling one of its own angels of kodak and motorcar. "But," he wept, "zese fruits of sin did not long time 'dure. Ze automobile she bust, zen I bust—and now—I have a such hunger."

In spite of the weight of sadness at her heart, Evelyn could not but smile. It was one of the jests of the great powers—jest that are, nevertheless, always tinged with irony, this confronting her with the scarecrow of her whilom splendor at the supreme hour of her misery.

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Grateful for food which he devoured eagerly, overwhelmed by the gift of a small sum she bestowed on him to enable him to prosecute his journey, Alphonse sought some expression of his feelings beyond his mere copious Gallic thanks. He was selling photographs for a living, and he besought mademoiselle, could she bring herself to overlook the regrettable fact that they were the product of her own camera, to accept the choicest example of his art—a veritable triumph, an arc-en-ciel—a rainbow!

Involuntarily, Evelyn shuddered at the word. Would the gods never cease their mocking sport, she wondered, even while with becoming graciousness she thanked Alphonse and sent him on his way, rejoicing. She still held the picture in her hand, carelessly, occupied with her thoughts, when she heard a cry from Durant, who had come out without her noticing him, and was looking over her shoulder.

"My God! Evelyn! Look," he cried. "The mine—The Rainbow!"

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"Father, dear," she sought to soothe him, "it is nothing—merely a chance photograph."

"Nothing? It is my witness, my record," answered Durant. "No, Evie, I'm not mad. This clears away the last cloud. Examine it carefully." Getting out his prospector's glass, he polished the lens carefully and held it over the photograph.

Evelyn looked, as she was bidden, at first merely to humor him, then with awakening interest as, under the glass's magnifying power, she studied the picture in detail. In his passion for the picturesque Alphonse had, indeed, put her camera to good use. In this composition he had caught a striking moment: Durant himself, in his rough miner's garb, standing with arms flung up, as if in thankfulness to Heaven, while near by, beside a half-uprooted willow-bush, knelt Walter Pierce

with an expression of wonder on his young face; while in the background, beyond the creek, stood the imperturbable mountains, spanned by a faint, elusive rainbow.

"This is the very spot!" Durant laughed like a happy boy. "Lost Shoe Creek! Fancy forgetting even the name!—I had always believed in it, though every other miner turned it down. It had shared the fate of hundreds of other northern camps: a new strike; a stampede, prospectors, traders, grafters, from all quarters rushing madly in; then, disappointment, failure, starvation, desertion to new fields. It became the most god-forsaken place on earth—an abandoned camp drained of everything but the dregs of its population. I alone held on, having a nose for gold, and scenting it right here, and now and then coming on indications: Blenksoe, Raish, and all the other grafters meanwhile dogging my steps to profit by any strike I might make, jump my claim, and make away with me!—Oh, this brings it all back, this picture: Walter Pierce; your coming; how Nick and the boys covered up my humiliation; my trying to kill myself; and then—the gold!"

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While he was speaking, he had hurried to the clearing at the back of the cabin, comparing the lay of the land with the picture, Evelyn following with keenest anxiety at this new phase of his delusion, yet not knowing how to restrain him.

"Father, dear, don't," she remonstrated, seeing him uprooting a willow with frenzied eagerness. "Why, that's the bush on which I spread out my wash."

But Durant only laughed and went on spading up the soft earth with a bit of wood. Wild as were his actions, his face and bearing had regained all their old, light-hearted poise. He was as Evelyn always had known him on his occasional visits to her, when they spent money like princes and amused themselves like children.

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Soon he threw his improvised tool aside. "Here we are! Look at this, Evie!"

Evelyn took the substance he handed to her, and, as the earth crumbled from it, saw that it was of irregular shape, and oddly indented, as though some underground giant had chewed it with Titanic teeth before spewing it up for man's good or ill, as fate might decree. A slight, bluish hue with which it first met the eye melted softly into that indefinable lustre that proclaims gold and only gold—the lust for which is more potent than the love of woman, wine; in whose quest more lives have been sacrificed than for any other cause since the world began; for whose possession souls innumerable are being bartered every day.

"A sixty-dollar nugget," Durant appraised it, weighing it in his expert hand, "and valuable merely as an earnest of what lies beneath—just a chip of the old block; a clue to the great Lode! Now, to take possession formally!" He paced the ground, whittled and marked the stakes, and was preparing to post them, when a sudden thought arrested him. "But—the land now lies within the township limits!" he groaned. "Oh, my girl, what, if, after all, my luck should fail you!"

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Evelyn smiled happily. "I think I can come to your assistance in that matter. If you will call tomorrow morning at the office of E. Durant you can acquire the mineral rights from the present owner of the lot, who happens to be—myself. Then you can record it as soon as the Commissioner's books are open."

"But——" Durant looked about with a touch of the furtive apprehension that had shadowed his recent life, and that never wholly left him. "Suppose some one has seen—how can I defend it?"

"Oh," cried Evelyn, "no fear about that! There are no claim-jumpers in this camp, thanks to Scarlett of the Mounted."

"Aye, Scarlett. A fine fellow that. He did me a great kindness last year," said her father. "It began by his finding your picture, which I had dropped, and giving it back to me. If my foresight had been equal to my hindsight, I should have confided my discovery to him as soon as I made it, and so saved you this year of bitter experience, my girl."

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"Well, daddy," replied Evelyn, "if you haven't suffered too much by it, not only do I not regret it, but I'm glad. It has taught me to value the gifts of the mother Lode infinitely less, and infinitely more, than formerly. I can hardly wait overnight to claim my pot of gold from the rainbow's foot—but I'm humbler about the possession of wealth than I used to be. And I want the whole camp to be 'in it.'"

"And so they shall, my girl," responded Durant, heartily. Then, as two figures came in sight, "There goes the Sergeant now, with Mr. Maclane, passing by the gate. Suppose we begin with them, Evie. Suppose we call them in and tell them all about it." He already was summoning them.

"Suppose, for the present, you take charge of Mr. Maclane," amended Evelyn, as the two drew near, "and leave the Sergeant to me."

Scarlett and the minister were bent on some errand in another quarter of the town, but by tacit consent had taken the road past Evelyn's cabin, actuated, in the case of the older man, by a kind wish not to lose sight of her for long, and in the case of the lover by the force that guides all steps toward the beloved. For, dismissed as he had been, and dejected as he found himself accordingly, yet in his heart of hearts there still lurked a hope that she might relent toward him. When, therefore, they saw Evelyn, radiant, and beckoning to them from the veranda, they joined her and her father with alacrity. Nor did good Maclane need any suggestion from Durant that the two young people should be left to make their peace unaided.

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"Sergeant Scarlett," Evelyn began when the older men had withdrawn to examine Durant's discovery, "I want to beg your pardon for the way I treated you this afternoon! I felt bitter, cheated—oh, it wasn't your fault one bit; it was my own, which was why I was so angry with you. And you—all along you have behaved so generously to me—nobly!—Yes, let me finish," she cried, retreating from the advance with which he sought to interrupt her. "I shall always think it—but I may not ever be in the mood to tell you again quite how well I think of you."

"But, Evelyn, dearest, what's the good of compliments to a hungry man?" cried Scarlett. "I'm asking ye for bread—and ye give me the blarney-stone."

Evelyn laughed, and, sitting, patted the place beside her, invitingly. "I'll tell you the whole story. It's like a romance—I was going to write you a letter about it if you had not come."

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"We'll write it together. We'll write it all our lives." Her lover slipped an arm about her. "But we'll start with the postscript."

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK SCARLETT OF THE MOUNTED ***

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