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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK A MAN: HIS MARK. A ROMANCE ***

A MAN: HIS MARK

Second Edition

A Romance

By W. C. Morrow

**Author of "Bohemian Paris of To-Day," "The Ape, The Idiot, and
Other People," etc.**

With a Frontispiece by Elenore Plaisted Abbott

Philadelphia and London J. B. Lippincott Company

1899



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A Romance

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A MAN: HIS MARK

CHAPTER ONE

One forenoon, in the winter of the great storms that swept the Pacific States, Adrian Wilder, a tall, slender, dark young man, stood in front of his stone hut on a shoulder of Mt. Shasta and watched the assembling of the elemental furies to do their savage work in the mountains. By all the signs that he had learned he knew that mighty havoc was to be done; but he did not foresee, nor did the oldest residents of that wilderness, that this was the beginning of the most memorable winter of terrors known to the white man's history of the region.

A strong sense of security and comfort filled him as, turning from the gathering tumult about him, he studied the resistance of his hut. He, with Dr. Malbone's help, had built it from foundation to roof, using the almost perfectly shaped blocks from the talus of the lofty perpendicular basalt cliff at whose base he had built his nest that summer. With nice discrimination he had selected the stones from the great heap that stretched far down from one end of the shelf upon which he had built; with mud he had fitted the stones to form floor, walls, arched roof, and chimney. With boards and a window-sash borne by him up the mountain from the road in the canon he had fashioned a window and doors. By the same means—for the shelf was inaccessible to a wagon—he had brought furniture, books, provisions, and fuel.

The hut was strong and comfortable.

Should snow fall to a great depth, he could easily shovel it down the steep slope of the canon. Should an avalanche come,—that made him wince. Still, he had made calculations on that account. By arching the roof of his hut he had given it great strength. Better than that, should an avalanche plunge over the edge of the cliff it must first gather great speed and momentum. Stretching back mountainward from the top of the cliff was a considerable space nearly level; an avalanche descending from the higher reaches of the vast mountain would likely stop on this level ground; but should it be so great and swift as to pass over, its momentum would likely carry it safely over his hut, as the water of a swiftly running stream, plunging over a ledge, leaves a dry space between itself and the wall.

But why think of the avalanche, with its crushing, burying snow, and, far worse, its formidable boulders that could annihilate any structure made by men? It were better to think of the comfort and security of the hut, and listen to the pleasant music of the little stream at the base of the cliff.

Better still was it to view the coming onslaught of the elements; to note the marvellous coherency of the plan by which their destruction was to be wrought; to observe how the splendid forces at play worked in intelligent harmony to shape a malevolent design. To a man of Wilder's fine sensibilities, every fury unleashed in the gathering tumult seemed to be possessed of superhuman malignancy of purpose and capability of execution. The furious wind that came driving down the canon lying far below him was the breath of the approaching multitude of storm-demons. The giant trees on the slopes of the canon seemed to brace themselves against the impending assault. Behind the wind, filling all the sky with a gray blanket that darkened away to the source of the wind, was the silent, stealthy snow-cloud, waiting to follow up and bury the havoc of the wind, and finish the destruction that the wind would begin.

From contemplation of this splendid spectacle the young man's thoughts turned to the dangers with which the storm threatened the mountain folk, most of whom were engaged in the lumber traffic. Would any of these be cut off from their homes? The rising rage of the wind indicated the closing of all the roads with fallen trees: would that bring serious hardships to any? In the summer, now past, the environs and flanks of Mt. Shasta had sparkled with the life and gayety of hundreds of seekers for health and pleasure,—the wealthy thronging a few fashionable resorts, the poorer constrained to a closer touch with nature and the spirit of the vast white mountain; but they now were gone, and the splendid wilderness was left to the savage elements of winter. Had any delayed their leaving and were at that moment in the drag-net of the storm?

Above all, there was Wilder's one close friend in the mountains, Dr. Malbone, who, like Wilder, had left the turmoil of city life to bury himself in these wild fastnesses. They had known each other in San Francisco years

before. For five years the scattered people of the mountains had employed the services of this skilful physician, and had come to trust and honor him in the touching way that simple natures trust and honor a commanding soul. It was Dr. Malbone who had so wisely assisted in the building of the stone cabin at the foot of the cliff. It was he who had explained the principle of the arch to the younger man, and had shown him how to bend and place the supports of the growing arch until the keystones were fitted in. It was he who had explained the mysteries and uses of ties and buttresses. What would Dr. Malbone do in the storm? What risks would he run, to what hardships be exposed, in visiting his patients? Only a few miles separated these two friends, but with such a storm as was hastening forward these few might as well be thousands.

Far up the canon Wilder heard the first fierce impact of the storm, for the heavy crash of a falling tree sounded above the roaring of the wind. By walking cautiously out to the extremity of a point that projected from the shelf upon which his cabin stood, he had been accustomed to see the snowy domes of Mt. Shasta. He knew that the storm sweeping down the canon was but a feeble echo of the mightier tumult on the great father of the north. In the hope that he might see something of this greater battle, he now made his way to the extremity of the point, the wind making his footing insecure; but only broad slaty clouds were visible in that direction, transmitting the deep rumblings of the hurricane that raged about Mt. Shasta's higher slopes.

It was while standing on the extremity of the point that the young man, turning his glance to the deep canon beneath him, beheld a thing that filled him with alarm. At the bottom of the canon, the Sacramento River, here a turbulent mountain stream, and now a roaring torrent from the earlier rains of the season, fumed and foamed as it raced with the wind down the canon, hurrying on its way to its placid reaches in the plains of California. The crooked road cut into the hither slope above the high-water level of the river was not the main highway running north and south through the mountains; it served the needs of a small local traffic only. Wilder felt both surprise and apprehension to observe a light wagon driven at a furious pace down the road, flying before the storm. The incident would have been serious enough had the wagon, the two horses, and the man and woman in the wagon belonged to the mountains. The horses were of fine blood, and were unused and unsuited to the alarming situation in which they now found themselves; the wagon was too elegant and fragile for the mountains in winter; and even at the distance that separated its occupants from Wilder, he could see that they were filled with a terror such as the mountaineers never know. The man was driving. Instead of proceeding with caution and keeping the horses perfectly in hand, he was lashing them with the whip. A man used to the mountains would never have been guilty of that folly.

It was clear that they were heading down the canon for the main road, still some miles away, by following which a little further they would arrive at a station on the railway. Pieces of luggage in the rear end of the wagon indicated that the travellers must have been spending the summer or autumn in the remoter mountains, where some beautiful lakes offered special charms to lovers of nature. Obviously their departure had been delayed until the approach of the present storm drove them hurriedly away, to be overtaken here in the canon.

The roaring of the wind, the surge of the torrential river, and, worst of all, the trees that were now crashing down, might have bewildered the steadiest head not trained to the winter savagery of the wilderness. A single tree across the road ahead might have meant disaster. Except for the little stone hut of Adrian Wilder, placed purposely to secure as great isolation as possible, and invisible from the road, there was no shelter within miles of the spot.

Presently the catastrophe came. The man, evidently seeing just ahead a tree that was swinging to its fall, shouted to the horses, and laid on the whip with added vigor, aiming to pass before the tree should fall. The horses, wholly beside themselves with terror, reared, and then plunged forward; but a moment had been lost. The horses and wagon passed under the falling tree just in time to be crushed and buried under it. The thunder of the fall echoed above the roar of the wind and the crash of more distant falling trees. Nothing of the four living things that had passed under the trap remained to Wilder's view; they had been as completely blotted out as though they had never filled a place in the great aching world.

CHAPTER TWO

FOR a moment the young man gazed in a stupid hope that the impossible would happen,—that horses, wagon, man, and woman would emerge and continue their mad flight down the canon. Then, so completely and suddenly had all this life and activity Ceased, he wondered if the old anguish that had driven him to the solitude of the mountains was now tricking an abnormal imagination and weaving phantasms out of the storm, to torture him a moment with breathless dread, and then suppress themselves in the seeming of a tragic death. He remembered the warnings of Dr. Malbone,—he must close his mind upon the past, must find in the present only the light with which the world is filled, and must aim for a sane and useful future.

All this consumed but a moment. At once there burst upon him the awful reality of the tragedy that had worked itself out so logically before him. Humanity cried aloud within him. He sprang toward his hut, procured an axe, and plunged down the slope of the talus, taking no heed of the crude but surer trail that he had made from the road to his hut. He slipped, fell, gathered himself up, fell again, but rapidly neared his goal.

He paused when he had reached the prostrate tree. Through the branches his peering revealed a crushed, still heap. He pushed his head and shoulders within and called. There was no response.

He was at the rear of the wagon, and soon saw that it had been crushed into an indeterminate mass of

wood and iron. By pushing apart the more yielding branches he brought to view the up-turned face of the man, whose eyes, fixed in death, stared horribly from a head curiously and grotesquely unshaped by the crush of the branches. The young man drew back. He gasped for breath; he called upon his self-command to bear him up in this strenuous time. He attacked the branches with his axe and cleared them away. He half wondered that the eyes of the dead remained open while they filled with particles of the bark riven by the axe. Presently the body came within reach. With unspeakable repulsion the young man placed his hand upon the stranger's chest. There was no sign of life. Indeed, he wondered that he had taken any trouble to ascertain what he already knew.

All this time the young man's dread and terror, heightened by a sense of utter loneliness in the presence of the dead, had driven the woman from his mind. He had not yet seen the slightest trace of her. Did he have the strength to behold a woman mangled as he had found the man... Still, they should have decent interment; that was his duty as a man. And further, it was necessary that their identity be ascertained, in order that their friends might be informed.

There was something else. Far back in the mountains, that wilder wilderness of the Trinity range, and in the Siskiyou range, beyond them, there were huge gray wolves, fierce and formidable. Now and then a daring hunter had come out of those mountains with the skin of a great gray wolf. There were old stories in the mountains that when the snow had been deep and of prolonged duration, the gray wolves came down to the tamer reaches inhabited by men, driven thither by hunger, for the game upon which they subsisted had fled before the snow to find herbage. The first to come out had been deer; soon after them had come the wolves. As the deer fell before the rifles of the settlers, the wolves had been driven to depredations on cattle and horses. There were ugly tales, too, of men attacked by them. Out of all this had grown the legend of a she-wolf that bore away children to her wolf-pack.

After the wind now raging in the mountains would come the snow, silent, deep, and implacable, to hide the work of the fallen tree below the hut; but would it hide everything so well that the great gray wolves, if driven by hunger from the remoter mountains, would fail to find what hunger required them to seek?

Wilder again attacked the tree with his axe,—another one lay dead there, and she must be found; and there was heavy and horrifying work ahead before the wind should cease and the snow begin to fall. At first the young man resumed his attack with the furious energy that had hitherto sustained his effort; but wisdom and caution came now to his aid. He realized his feebleness of mind, spirit, and body. He had devoted weeks of arduous work to the construction of his hut, and that had lent a certain strength to his muscles and buoyancy to his soul. Still, he was hardly more than a shadow of his old self, before his life had been wrecked a year ago, and he had come into the mountains to make a sturdy fight for self-mastery, for the regeneration of whatever shreds of manhood were left within him, and for their patching and binding into a fabric that should take its place in the ranks of men and work out a man's destiny.

He went about his task with greater deliberation. He forced himself to regard with calmness the distorted dead face upturned toward him. He worked with that slowness which makes greater haste in achievement. This brought a surer judgment and an economy of effort and time. He cut the branches one by one and dragged them away.

Soon the woman's form appeared. In the extreme moment of the catastrophe she had evidently sprung forward; this had brought her body, face downward, between the horses; they, in being crushed under the trunk of the tree, fallen across them, had nevertheless given her a certain protection; the trunk, in breaking the backs of the horses, had missed her head. As for the rest, she was so closely wedged between the horses that it would be difficult to extricate her.

This, however, was finally accomplished after great labor. The woman's face and clothing were blood-stained. So much worse did she look than the man, that Wilder had a new struggle with himself to command courage and strength for the task. He dragged her out to a clear place in the road, and made the same perfunctory examination as in the case of the man. While he was doing so the woman moved and gasped, and this unexpected indication of life was the greatest shock of the tragedy.

But it was one of those shocks which bring new life and strength. Whereas, before he had been facing, without daring to contemplate, the awful duty that he owed the dead, here now was the most precious thing that the world then could have offered him,—here was Life, human life, fleeting, perhaps, but infinitely precious.

Wilder knelt beside the unconscious woman and with eager hands loosened her clothing. He ran to the river, dipped his handkerchief in the water, bathed her face, and removed some of the blood that covered it. He chafed her hands and wrists, anxiously watching for the slightest change. This came rapidly and progressed steadily. Removed from the crushing pressure of the horses, her chest found its natural expansion, and the rhythm of deep, slow breathing was established. Wilder had learned numerous elementary things from Dr. Malbone; he saw that, although the sufferer was so grievously hurt as to be unconscious, life was yet strong within her.

Time, then, was the precious element here. The sufferer must be taken at once to the hut, and Dr. Malbone summoned. As for the dead man, there was no present danger on his account, and the living demanded first attention.

A formidable task now confronted the young man. First, he had to bear the unconscious woman up the steep trail to the hut; then he should have to go many miles afoot to summon Dr. Malbone. The young man thought nothing of the difficulties, but all of the doing.

He was about to assail the task of getting the woman upon his shoulder, when it occurred to him that her injuries might possibly be aggravated by his manner of carrying her. He thereupon made a hasty examination. The head was bleeding. The face bore no visible injuries. The bones of the arms were whole. The left leg, however, was broken above the knee. What the particular cause of the sufferer's unconsciousness was he could only guess. Perhaps it was merely a condition of temporary congestion, produced by the fearful pressure to which she had been subjected between the horses. A bleeding at the ears and nose seemed to the young man a bad sign.

Her condition having been thus approximately ascertained, the next problem was to bear her to the hut in a way that should do the least harm to her injuries. The first necessary thing to be done, therefore, was to prevent any mobility in the region of the fracture. To this end he burrowed again into the débris and brought forth some boards that had served as the bottom of the wagon. Tearing strips from the woman's clothing, he bound the boards to her in a way to protect her from harm in moving her.

The strain upon his attentiveness sharpened and strengthened him in every way. He formed the whole plan of his bearing her to the hut, making her temporarily comfortable, summoning Dr. Malbone, and attending to the details of nursing her back to health.

To lift her gently upon a bowlder; to bend forward and adjust her upon his back with infinite care; to proceed with her up the laborious ascent,—all this was skilfully and expeditiously done.

Serious difficulties began soon to embarrass him. He discovered that she was above the average height and weight of women, heavier than he, although he was the taller. He found that the numerous abrupt steps in the trail laid a heavy tax upon his strength, and that some steep places proved slippery under the burden that he bore. In addition, the muscles of his arms strained and cramped; and long before he had reached the shelf upon which his hut was perched he fell to his knees a number of times from exhaustion. But the end came at last when he staggered into his hut, dragged a cover from his bed to the floor, and gently laid his burden upon it.

CHAPTER THREE

DURING all this time the fury of the storm had not abated in the least. That, indeed, had been one of the worst obstacles with which he had contended in mounting the steep to his hut. Immediately upon laying his charge on the floor he had begun to prepare his bed for the guest, but weakness from exhaustion overcame him. He reeled; a red blindness assailed him; and, in spite of a fierce effort to maintain command of his strength and faculties, he found himself plunging headlong upon his bed.

A moan recalled him to consciousness, and it was not until later that he realized the distressing length of time that he had lain unconscious. He remembered that when he fell he was very warm from the exertion of ascending the slope, and that when he awoke he was excessively cold. Furthermore, twilight had come.

Dismayed over the loss of time, he proceeded at once to make his charge comfortable. He prepared his bed for her and placed her upon it. She was still unconscious, but he saw that she was rallying.

He suddenly realized that it was now impossible for him to summon Dr. Malbone, for the fury of the storm had been steadily increasing, and the crash of falling trees still sounded above the roaring of the wind. It would be worse than foolhardy for him to brave the storm and the darkness. At any moment she might recover consciousness and find herself alone and suffering in this strange place; and a whole night and day would hardly have been sufficient for him to fetch the surgeon, had that been a physical possibility. So the young man realized that he alone, with no training in the surgeon's and physician's art, must take this woman's life in his hands, and for a long time to come be her physician and nurse, cook and housekeeper, mother and confidant, father and protector.

That realization was sufficiently cruel and taxing, but the ordeal that now confronted him was the most trying of all. He had not yet given any attention to the appearance of his charge, further than to ascertain to what extent she was hurt. When he now lighted a candle and held it to her face, he saw that she was a young and handsome woman.

He noted the high-bred patrician face through the grime, the abundant dark-brown hair, the black brows but slightly arched and nearly meeting between the eyes, the fine nose, the habitual, half-hidden curve of scorn at the corners of her mouth, and the firm, strong, elegantly moulded chin.

It was evident that the man and the woman were father and daughter, for the resemblance between the distorted dead face and the grimy living one was strong; the manifest difference in ages finished the conclusion.

Was she fatally hurt? What if she should die? What effect would the knowledge of her father's death have upon her? How long would she remain helpless on the couch, held by her injuries; and how long, after her possible recovery, would she be held a prisoner by the impassable condition of the roads? Would she be cheerful and brave through it all?

She was growing more and more restless; wise haste was now the crowning necessity. First of all, she must have suitable clothing, and it must be provided before he made his bungling efforts to set her broken bone. How could he hope to perform this difficult surgical feat with no more knowledge of its requirements than he had secured while serving a few times as Dr. Malbone's untrained assistant in the mountains, and with the most inadequate understanding of the use of such splints, bandages, needles, and ligatures as Dr. Malbone had given him for his use upon himself in case of an emergency, and with an imperfect knowledge of the narcotics, stimulants, febrifuges, and other medicines with which Dr. Malbone had provided him? The sufferer had youth and superb health; but how could he feel the smallest assurance that, in the event he should secure a knitting of the fracture, crookedness and deformity from improper adjustment would not result? But there was nothing to do but try, and to bring every intelligent force of his nature to the task.

He hoped that she would not regain consciousness before he should make another trip to the scene of the tragedy and secure her luggage. The twilight was deepening. He threw logs on the smouldering fire in the chimney-place and started to leave. He paused a moment at the door to watch his patient. She was again

stirring and moaning.

"A sedative would be safer," he reflected. And then, when he had poured it with great difficulty down her throat, he wondered if he had given her too much, and if it would have a bad effect in depressing her vitality and working against her rallying. He waited until she had become still and quiet, and then hastened down to the road.

The storm had been gradually changing in character. He had expected the snow to wait until the wind had fallen, but a hurricane was still blowing, and snow was coming down in long gray slants. Already it had begun to whiten and fill crevices into which the wind was driving it. It would have been better had he brought a lantern, but there was no time for that; and the wind doubtless would have made its use impossible.

At the wreck he found his axe and cleared away more branches. Only a very faint suggestion of the dead white face peering up at him came through the twilight; and there was work to be done in that quarter to-morrow, however much snow might be lodged and packed in the branches. Soon he found two large and heavy travelling bags, one larger than the other; this, he reasoned, must be the woman's; his strength to carry both to the hut was inadequate now, and he needed all possible steadiness of nerve for the task ahead. A laborious climb brought him back to the hut with the bag and his axe. By the light of a candle he anxiously read the name on a silver tag attached to the handle of the bag. It was,—*"Laura Andros, San Francisco."*

It was with awe and reverence that he opened the bag and in a gingerly fashion drew forth its contents and carefully laid them aside. He had already noted in a vague way that his guest was a woman of wealth and elegance, and he now observed that, although the articles he disclosed were intended in large part for vigorous mountain use, an unmistakable stamp of daintiness and refinement was upon them all.

Having now found garments in which he could make her comfortable after his surgical work was done, he proceeded with the stupendous task that awaited him. He wondered how much precious time he had lost, if any, through sheer dread of his duty. But whatever the delay, and whatever its causes, it had been useful in preparing him for the ordeal. Up to this moment an unaccountable and distressing trembling of all his members at frequent intervals had alarmed him, but strength and steadiness came with his nearer approach to the task.

Commanding his soul to meet the need of the hour, he went sturdily about his work. He knew how desperately painful were operations for the setting of fractured bones, and how great was the skill required for the administering of an anæsthetic. He had never known even a skilled surgeon to undertake alone what he must now do without either skill or assistance. It would not be sufficient should he do his best: his best must be perfectly done.

He produced his store of splints, bandages, stimulants, and anaesthetics, and arranged them conveniently to hand, as he had seen Dr. Malbone do. He examined his patient's pulse; it was too quick and weak to give him high confidence. He made a good fire, for the night was cold; and he called heavily upon his store of candles to furnish as much light as possible.

His bed, upon which she lay, was a most crude and inadequate affair. It was of his own construction, and had been intended to serve its part in the life of severe austerity that he had made for himself in the mountains. It was made of rough boards nailed to wooden posts. To serve for mattress, fragrant pine-needles filled it. Upon this were spread sheets and blankets. The pillow also was made of pine-needles. Thus, without springs, the bed was hard and unfit for a daintily reared woman; more so because of the illness that she would suffer and the great length of time that she would be confined to the bed; but it was the best he had. As the hut was very small and had but one room, this bed had been fitted snugly into a corner. Wilder moved it out, that he might be able to work freely on both sides of it. This cramped the hut all the more.

The examination that he had made in the road was for the purpose of discovering broken bones. There he had found the bone of the left thigh broken at some undetermined point between the knee and the hip. But broken bones are not all the hurts that one may receive in such an accident,—cuts and contusions might prove equally dangerous if overlooked.

With exquisite care he prepared her for the work that he must do. As she was fully dressed, this required patience from his unskilled hands. Finally, this part of the task, inexpressibly hard for a man of his delicacy of feeling, was accomplished. What anguish he suffered on his own account and in foreseeing her confusion and possible resentment upon realizing that he, an utter stranger, and not a physician, had done all this for her, it were idle to set forth here.

To his great relief he found that the bone of the left thigh was, so far as he could judge, the only one that had suffered fracture; but a careful inspection revealed several bruises; and at last, in searching for the source of the blood that had covered her face when he drew her from the débris, he found a cut in her crown. His first work must be there.

Covering her comfortably, he washed the blood from her hair and face, and, bearing in mind the pride that she must have cherished for her glorious hair, he quickly shaved as small a space on her crown as possible. He first tried adhesive plaster to bring the edges of the cut together; but the water and his handling of the wound started the hemorrhage afresh, and this compelled him to close the wound with ligatures.

He was pleased to observe that the hemorrhage was stopped. This made him so well satisfied and so confident that the greater magnitude of the remaining work appalled him less. Indeed, that had begun to exercise a scientific fascination that abnormally sharpened his wits and steadied his nerves. It was this task that he now attacked.

All this time the sufferer had lain unconscious. This was a blessing, unless the state had been induced by causes worse than consciousness of the pain from setting the bone. There was time hereafter to consider all that. The one present duty was to proceed with the operation without another moment's delay, for inflammation had already set in.

While, with infinite care, he was fitting, as best he could, the ends of the broken bone, he was startled out of all self-command by a scream of agony from her, half-strangled, and therefore made all the more terrifying, by the bandage under her chin; and she was sitting up, staring at him. Every one of the young man's faculties

was temporarily paralyzed. A benumbing coldness was upon him. With a mighty effort he gathered himself up, but his breathing was difficult, and sweat streamed down his face. He firmly laid her back upon the pillow, and said,—

“Be quiet; you shall not be hurt again.” She was singularly docile, although he could see by the wildness of her eyes and a fluttering in her throat that something was raging within her. With one hand he gently pressed her eyelids down, and with the other he wetted a handkerchief from a bottle of chloroform and held it just clear of her mouth and nostrils. For a moment she rebelled against the stifling vapor and tried to drag his hand away; but, finding him determined, she yielded, and soon was stupefied.

The work must be rapid now. There was no time to wonder if she had comprehended anything or seen in him a stranger. No interruption could come from her now; that was the vital thing; but the anaesthetic would soon lose its force. He resumed his work, taking great care, in matching the injured member with the sound one, to avoid crippling her for life. He then adjusted the splints, keeping the member straight. Finally, he secured it against bending at the knee by adjusting a board on the under side of the leg throughout its entire length. He finished his work by binding the upper part of her body to the bed-frame, to prevent her rising. Then, extinguishing his candles, making her as comfortable as possible on the hard bed, and putting more wood on the fire, he sat down to watch. Everything seemed to be going well.

By this time the night was far advanced. The wind was still blowing a terrific gale. An aching, irresistible weariness stole over the watcher. He drew his chair close to the bed and anxiously observed his charge. He examined her pulse; it was rising; her skin was hot and dry. She had passed from under the influence of the anaesthetic, and was now sleeping restlessly. He waited in dread for her awaking, for the unexpected situation in which the young man found himself was complex and difficult. It was essential that his patient should be as tranquil as possible. Knowledge of her father’s death might prove disastrous. Hence she must be deceived, and yet deception was unspeakably repugnant to the young man’s nature. But now it was a duty, which above all things must be done. She must be buoyed with hope. All her fortitude would be needed to bear the miserable conditions of her imprisonment. Meantime, the young man would post notices along the road, calling for help from the first persons passing.

CHAPTER FOUR

MUCH thinking and planning had to be done, for the unexpected situation in which the young man found himself was complex and difficult. It was essential that his patient should be as tranquil as possible. Knowledge of her father’s death might prove disastrous. Hence she must be deceived, and yet deception was unspeakably repugnant to the young man’s nature. But now it was a duty, which above all things must be done. She must be buoyed with hope. All her fortitude would be needed to bear the miserable conditions of her imprisonment. Meantime, the young man would post notices along the road, calling for help from the first persons passing.

Already the road was wholly impassable, and it would grow worse. None of the friends or relatives of the dead man and his daughter could have been informed of their leaving the lakes. The natural conclusion from their absence would be that an early winter of unusual severity had compelled them to remain until spring. The people in the mountains would have no way of learning that the two had failed to reach the railway. Thus had the travellers been completely blotted out of their world. No relief parties would be sent out to search for them. Not until the unlikely discovery of the notices that Wilder would post could there be the slightest knowledge of the tragedy.

More than that, the road upon which Wilder’s hut looked down was only one of two that penetrated the wilderness in that direction. In the summer it had a small travel, but by reason of its crookedness, narrowness, and sharp grades it was avoided by heavy traffic. It would be the last road to be cleared. Snow-shoes were practically unknown in these mountains, for seasons of long snow blockades were rare; but there would be no occasion for snow-shoe travel over this road. The only prospect for the escape of Wilder and his charge was on foot, after the lapse of the months that would be required for her recovery, and after the snow was gone.

Innumerable domestic perplexities presented themselves to the young man’s mind. His charge, being perfectly helpless, must depend entirely upon him for her every want. Would she have the wisdom and goodness to accept the situation cheerfully, or would its humiliation and hardships gnaw constantly at her strength and patience, and delay her recovery or precipitate her death? How could she possibly accept the situation philosophically? She would find a bitter contrast between this life and the one of luxury and indulgence to which she had been accustomed. Even should she develop the highest order of fortitude, the rude food, in small variety, that he had to give her, cooked badly, could hardly tempt her appetite, and thus build up her strength. Then, her bed was a wretched affair, and there was serious danger that its hardness alone, without regard to her possible resignation to its discomforts, would produce hurtful physical results. If only wise and helpful Dr. Malbone could know and come!

Let the days bring forth what they would, Wilder would do his duty as he knew it. The fire crackled cheerily on the hearth and filled the hut with its warmth and glow and peace. The walls were tight and strong, and were holding firm against the storm. The agonizing strain of the last twelve hours was over, and all strength must be saved for the future.

In the flickering firelight the young man studied the face of his charge at leisure, and he saw that she was singularly handsome; but there seemed to be a certain hardness in her face, relaxed in unconsciousness

though it was. Perhaps it was only because there stood out before his memory the one face in all the world that, with its infinite gentleness and sweetness, embodied every grace for which his spirit yearned. It was not so beautiful and brilliant a face as this,—but there came up Dr. Malbone's warning, uttered over and over with the most earnest impressiveness:

"As you value your reason and life, as you value the possibilities of your happiness and your usefulness to humanity, turn your face from the past, and with all the courage and will of a man confront the future. Nature is kind to all of her children who love her and seek her. She heaps our past with wreckage, only to train and prepare us for a noble future. There can be no peace where there has been no travail. There would be no strength were there no weakness in need of its help. The man who fails to the slightest extent in his duties to humanity and himself burdens his life to that extent. Be brave and hopeful and helpful, as it becomes a man to be, and labor incessantly for the best, as it becomes a man to do."

And the man with the curiously-twisted face peering out from the tree-branches, what had been the aim of his life, that it should find such an end? After all, was there any taint of unmanliness in that end? Doubtless even now he was covered deep under snow. If he should be left there, the great gray wolves might come down and find him. They were big and powerful, and men who had seen them hungry told fearful tales of their daring and ferocity. If the snow should drive them down, they would find the dead horses under the tree; and after that there would be but one house here where they could find human beings.

There need be no dread of them; but suppose that some night there should come a scratching at the door of the hut,—that would mean the gaunt shewolf, who bore away children to the wolf-pack.

She would beg for a rind of bacon to eat, and a corner on the hearth to sleep. She would bear ugly wounds from her struggles with men and beasts, and these would have to be dressed, and rents in her hide stitched; and if there were broken bones, they must be set. Would she be patient under the torture, or would she snap and howl after the manner of wolves?...

Wilder was startled to full consciousness by a moan. He bent over his patient and looked into her open eyes. She gazed up at him vacantly. He took her hand; it was hot. He placed a hand upon her forehead; it was burning. A haggard look of pain and distress sat upon her face.

An eager appeal was in her glance, and her lips moved feebly. He bent his ear to them. She was faintly whispering—

"Water, water!"

His heart bounding with gladness, he brought cold water. With difficulty he restrained her eagerness, lest she discover that she was crippled and bound. He covered her eyes with a napkin, for he observed that her glance was becoming strained and curious. She submitted quietly, while he gave her the water with a spoon. After that she sighed in weariness and content, but her deep inspiration was checked by pain. Her burning skin and an uneasiness throughout her entire frame warned him that she had a fever. He gave her a remedy for that. It was not until daylight had come that, after watching her for hours as she lay awake and seemingly halfconscious, he observed her finally drift into sound slumber.

The young man rose and found himself weak and dizzy; but after he had prepared and eaten a simple breakfast he felt stronger. Seemingly by a miracle, he had gone through his task in safety thus far. He must now leave his patient for a while, to discharge a grim duty that awaited him in the road below,—a duty from which his every sensibility recoiled with unspeakable repugnance. Lest an untoward accident should happen in his absence, he gave his patient a stupefying drug.

He dreaded to open the front door of his hut. When he did, he found the thing that he feared: the wind had ceased after midnight, and the snow had been falling ever since, and still was falling. It had whitened the walls of the canon, and, before the wind had ceased, had eddied and drifted about the hut in a way that filled the young man with alarm for the future. Would his strength be sufficient to fight it if the storm should be greatly prolonged, to the end that he and his charge should not be buried alive?

He put this dread away, and with a heavy heart followed the steep trail down to the road.

CHAPTER FIVE

NOON was near at hand when the guest of the hut waked to full consciousness. Her first impulse was to cry out with the pain that tortured her; but her strong will assumed command, and she looked inquiringly into the anxious face beside her. Obviously she realized that a catastrophe had overtaken her, and she was now silently demanding an explanation.

Wilder had not expected this. Her calmness, and, more than that, her silent demand, were so different from the childish and unreasonable petulance that he had expected, that he was unprepared and confused.

"You have been hurt," he stammered; "and it will be necessary for you to keep very quiet for a time."

"How was I hurt?" she faintly asked. "The horses were frightened by the storm and ran away."

"Oh, the storm! I remember." Then she looked quickly and anxiously about. "My father," she said,— "where is he?"

For a moment the oddly distorted face in the branches came grimacing between Wilder and his duty, but with a gasp and a repelling gesture he drove it away,—not so dexterously but that his struggle was seen.

"He—has gone to bring help," he said. Then, quickly leaving the bedside to conceal his weakness and the shame of the lie that choked him, he added hastily, "Yes, he was not hurt; and when he and I had brought you

to this hut he went to find help. He will return as soon as possible." He felt that her glance was upon him with merciless steadiness. "Now," said he, returning to the couch, "I will remove these bandages,"—referring to the cords that bound her to the bed;—"but you must promise me not to move except under my direction. Do you?"

She slightly nodded an assent, and he unbound her.

"Come," he added, "you must have some of this broth. No, don't try to rise; I will feed you from this spoon. It is not too hot, is it? That is good. Presently you will feel much better. You are not in much pain now, are you?"

"I am not a child," she answered, with a slight touch of disdain and reproof. But he cheerily said,—

"Excellent, excellent! That is the way to feel!"

She lay silent for a while, looking up at the roof. Presently she said,—

"I imagine that I am badly hurt. Please tell me how and where I am injured."

"Well, your left leg was hurt, and we shall have to keep it bandaged and your knee from bending. And there were some bruises on your side, and an injury to the scalp."

"My scalp?" she quickly asked, raising her hand and asking, "Surely you did not shave my head?"

"No," he replied, smiling amusedly; "except a small spot, and you can cover that until the hair grows out."

She was not fully satisfied until she had felt the splendid wealth of hair that lay massed upon the pillow.

"May I ask who you are?" This was the question that he had dreaded most of all; but before he could stammer out the truth a light broke over her face, and she astounded him with this exclamation:

"Oh, you are the famous Dr. Mal-bone! This is extraordinary! I am very, very fortunate."

Wilder had never conceived a lie so dazzling and happy as this mistake. Between wonder at his stupidity for not having thought of it, and a great delight that she had so naturally erred, he was too bewildered either to affirm or deny. He only realized that she had unwittingly solved the most difficult of his present problems. Had she been looking at him, she might have wondered at the strange expression that lighted up his face, and particularly the crimson temporarily displacing the death-like pallor that she had observed.

"Yes," she resumed, after a pause, "I am fortunate; for I suppose that my injuries are a great deal worse than you have given me to believe, and that such skill as yours is needed." She turned her glance again full upon him; but he had recovered his address, and now met her look with an approach to steadiness. "But," she said, "you are a much younger man than I had expected to see; and you don't look so crabbed as I might have inferred you were from the message you sent me a month ago."

She paused, evidently expecting him to make some explanation; but he was silent, and looked so distressed that she smiled.

"You may remember," she continued, "that a young lady at the lakes sent for you to treat her for bruises sustained in a fall, and that you told her messenger to give her your compliments and say that cold-water applications, an old woman, and God would do as well with such a case as you. I am that young lady."

Wilder liked the young woman's blunt and forthright manner, although it was novel and embarrassing.

"There were doubtless important cases demanding attention," he explained.

"No doubt," she agreed.

"And, after all," he suggested, "didn't you follow the advice and get good results?"

"Yes," she answered, again smiling faintly; "that is true." She closed her eyes. Presently she extended her hand, which Wilder took. She looked earnestly into his face, and asked, "It will be a long siege with me, will it not?"

"Much depends upon your temperament," he answered. "If——"

"That is evasion," she interrupted. "Be candid with me." There was no demand in this request; it was an appeal from such depths of her as she knew, and it touched him.

"Yes," he stammered, "unless——"

"The bone is broken, isn't it?"

"Yes; but you are young and your health is superb. That is everything."

A despairing look grayed her face, which then quickly reddened with anger and rebellion. Her host said nothing. He saw that she was competent to make the fight with herself without his aid; that her mind, though now disturbed by her suffering, was able to comprehend much that her condition meant, being obviously an uncommonly strong, clear mind, and that it would give to an acceptance of her position the philosophic view that was so much needed. He saw the hard, brave fight that she was making, and he had no fear for the outcome. Gradually he saw the contemplative expression of the eyes turned within, and the face grow gaunt and haggard under the strain. As slowly he saw her emerge from the depths into which he had thrust her, and from the very slowness of the victory, he knew that she had won. When again she looked into his face, he knew that her soul had been tried as it never had been before, and that she was stronger and better for it. And he knew that there was yet another trial awaiting her which perhaps she could not have borne had not she passed through this one.

"Another thing," she said, as earnestly as before; "when do you expect my father to return?"

"Very soon—as soon as he——"

"Evasion again," she protested, a slight frown of impatience darkening her face; but it instantly disappeared, and her manner was appealing again. "Be my friend as well as my physician, Dr. Malbone. Please tell me the truth. I can bear it now."

The young man bowed his head in dejection.

"Snow is still falling," he said, "and doubtless many trees are across the road. We can only wait and hope."

A transient look of gratitude for his seeming candor softened her hard beauty, and she withdrew her hand and her glance. Then he knew that another mighty struggle was taking place within her. He knew from the

deep crimson that suffused her face how fully she realized all that he must be to her during the weary weeks to come. He saw the outward evidences of the unthinkable revulsion that filled her, with him as its cause. He knew that in agony of soul she rebelled against the fate that had placed her helpless in the hands of a stranger, and that stranger a man, and that man the one now serving her, however willingly, however faithfully, with whatever tact and delicacy. He saw, from her hopeless glance about the cabin, the bitterness of the fight that she was making to accept its repellent hospitality. And, worst of all, he saw, or thought he saw, that in the victory that she finally won there was more of an iron determination to endure than of a simple resignation to accept.

So these two began their strange life together. As may be supposed, it was wholly devoid of true companionship, and necessarily so. That made it the harder, in a way, for both. From the severe furnishings of his larder the host did his best to provide for her comfort. She never complained of the coarse, inadequate food, all of which had to be of a kind that could bear keeping for months, and none of which was pleasing to a fastidious taste made all the more delicate by illness and prostration from her injuries. All of the countless attentions that her helplessness imposed upon him he gave with the business-like directness of a physician and nurse, and this was obviously gratifying to her. She never complained of the cruel hardness of the bed, and never failed to express her gratitude for the slight shiftings of position that he deemed it safe to give her.

Most cheering to the host was the fair progress that his patient made. Her curious mistake that he was Dr. Malbone had given him a mastery of the situation that was of inestimable value. Manifestly she reposed full confidence in his skill, and he made the most of that. She never again asked for opinions concerning her father's return. Her only inquiries were with regard to the weather, the severity of which did not relax from day to day, from week to week. When Wilder would return from short excursions over the snow, which now lay deep throughout the mountains and was steadily growing deeper, she would look at him a moment expectantly, hoping for good news; but it was not necessary for him to say that there was none, and she asked no questions.

The dread and dismay of Wilder grew with the heaping up of snow about the hut. Before he built the house, he had learned that in winter, when the storms were very severe, the shelf upon which he had reared the structure was banked with snow, but to what height no one had ever ascertained. There had never been such a storm as this within the memory of the white settlers. Hence the snow was heaped higher than ever before. There were special reasons for this. The shelf formed an eddying-point for the wind that came in the intervals of the snowfall, and the snow from all sides was thus swirled and pitched upon the shelf. It had not yet reached the roof, but it had to be kept cleared from the window and the front door, and that meant watchfulness and labor. Should it continue to accumulate until it reached the roof and the top of the chimney, a serious situation would confront the prisoners.

Not while the patient remained helpless was there anything but a rigid business bearing between these two unhappy mortals. Between them was reared an impalpable wall that neither cared to attack. But in time the patient grew better and stronger both in body and mind; and, besides, strange developments began to make themselves felt.

Among the effects of the young woman, Wilder had discovered a book in which she kept a journal. She had called for it as soon as she was able to write; and, as a woman's observation is keener than a man's, it is best to introduce here (and in other places throughout the narrative) such extracts from her journal as seem helpful.

CHAPTER SIX

THE following is from the lady's journal:

"Yes, I will write it again, absurd though it may turn out to be: There is some mystery about this cabin. I have tried over and over to convince myself that my weakness and the unnatural situation in which I am placed make me morbid and suspicious; but I know that I am still a hard-headed woman, without a particle of nonsense in my composition; and I know that I am able to see things in their proper light, and to understand them in a way. And I say that the signs of something wrong here are growing more and more evident, without furnishing me the least clue to the nature of the mystery; but I feel that, whatever the mystery is, it is one to be dreaded. I try not to think about it; but where is the sense in that? Is it not better for me to do all the observing and thinking I can, and thus be the better prepared for whatever may happen.

"I sometimes try to think that it is only the strangeness of this strange man—if I may call him a man—that makes me feel a mystery in the air. It is hard to get hold of anything tangible in his bearing, so unobtrusively alert he is. There must be some explanation of the fact that a physician as skilful as he is should bury himself in these mountains—should hide himself from the different world to which he evidently belongs.

"He is a gentleman,—I will do him the justice to admit that. He is a great deal besides any gentleman that I have ever seen before. Let me try to explain this to myself. Although he makes not the slightest show of attending to my wants, I know his every thought is upon me. He sleeps on the stone floor in front of the fireplace,—that is, if he sleeps at all, which I sometimes doubt. Even when he is not looking at me in that distant, abstracted way that he has, I feel that the whole cabin is filled with his eyes, and that they are always looking at me, day and night, but with an expression different from the veiled one of his own eyes. They do not have the distant, thoughtful, perfunctory, business-like expression of the eyes in his head, but a different one,—an expression that seems to be a mixture of duty, pity, kindness, patience, forbearance, and—it will make me feel better to write it—*contempt*. I feel that these countless eyes are reading my deepest thoughts,

and looking over my shoulder as I write.

"Of course I do not really feel all this, else I should not be writing thus. But I feel something. O God! when will this wretched strain be over?..."

"I have discovered that he guards most jealously the back door of the cabin. When I first came to consciousness after my hurt, I saw what I took to be evidence that my strength of will was greater than his. I believe so yet; but he certainly has a way of baffling me and holding me in a position from which I cannot escape. I am curious to know a great many things; it is my right to know them. Why does he surround himself with a deafness that nothing can penetrate? Why and how does he make it impossible for me to ask him questions? And who ever heard of a man so supremely indifferent as not to ask a woman placed as I am a single question about herself, her life, her tastes, her family, her world? Why has he made it impossible for me to ask him any questions? At first he had placed my bed so that I could see the rear door by turning my head; but when he observed that I had become curious, he found an excuse to turn my bed so that it was impossible for me to see the door, and I was too proud to object.

"I wish I could have respect for him. Of course he surmises that I am wealthy, and he must know that he will be handsomely paid for his services. I gave him to understand as much one day, and he looked at me in a blank way that was most disconcerting. But that did not deceive me. I do not wish to be unjust, but I know something about human nature. I think that the man's whole course may be to impress me with his great solicitude and make his services appear the more valuable. Bah! he needn't have gone to the trouble.

"I am going to watch that door in spite of him. I know already that he keeps it carefully locked, and that when he goes out he bars it on the other side. Such distrust, when I am so unable to pry into his secrets, is unwarranted and offensive. Another thing I have noted. The back door leads into some kind of inner apartment.

"How is he going to guard it when I am able to be about? Then his life will be a burden. I will make it so.

"Gratitude? Oh, yes! I have heard of such a thing. But this is an obligation that money can discharge, and I will see that it does. Has he done anything more for me than a physician ought to do? I am familiar with the ways in which these gentry play upon the gratitude of their wealthy patients, and present bills that they think a sense of shame will accept. So long as the rich are the prey of the poor, the poor need not expect sympathy from the rich. I know the power of money to secure attendance of all sorts, and I can see its power manifested now.

"This man seems to be utterly lacking in masculine qualities. To give an illustration: The other day, when he thought I was absorbed in reading,—I must say that he has excellent taste in books,—I found tears trickling down his cheeks while he was reading before the fire. I noted from the division of the book as he held it open the approximate place where he was reading. Afterward I asked him for the book, and found that it opened readily at a place where the leaves were tear-stained. It was the silliest story imaginable,—a foolish account of true-lovers separated by designing persons and dying of a broken heart! Imagine a grown man crying over such nonsense as that!

"Here is a queer circumstance that I have noted, and have wondered about: In not a single one of Dr. Malbone's books does his name appear; and it is evident that wherever it did appear he has erased it. There may be easy ways of accounting for this, but to me it looks suspicious. Is it a part of the mystery of a refined and skilful physician burying—I believe hiding—himself in these mountains? I remember to have heard at the lakes that he never attended city people spending the summer here if he could avoid it. I certainly know that he refused to visit me, and that he sent me an insulting message besides. What is the reason? Is he more or less acquainted with people of the better class, and is he afraid of meeting some whom he may have known when he lived somewhere else and passed under a different name? The inhabitants of these mountains venerate him, and believe that his skill is omnipotent. Well, I have nothing to say against his skill, for certainly he has handled my case perfectly; but if these simple and ignorant mountain-folk should see him in the intimacy in which I know him, and discover what a cold, suspicious, weak, petty man he is, I think they would reform their opinion of him.

"During the last month he has been going oftener and oftener through the back door. What business has he there? If I did not have a feeling that, little as he trusts me, I might safely trust him to the end of the world, I would have a fear for my own safety. But I rest secure in the belief that the prospect of collecting a generous fee for restoring me safe to my father is a sufficient protection, to say nothing of the confidence that I have in the man's queer sense of honor. Why, he treats me as though I were a queen, and bears himself as my humblest subject hanging upon my smallest word—up to a certain point. Beyond that I get bewildered.

"Oh, my father, my father! There is no man in the world like you, none that knows me, that loves me as you do! If you only knew how my heart yearns every moment for you! Why could not this man have the least of your qualities,—your iron will, your scorn of weak things in human nature, your dominating, achieving power. It is in comparing this man with you that I find him so small, so pusillanimous, so different from the standard of manhood that you have made me adopt, so different from me, so infinitely far from me. It is good that it is so, but it makes me lonely beyond all expression. I would rather be alone in a desert than with this strange mirage of a man, this male with an infinite capacity for the little things that only little women are suited to do. He tortures me with his goodness, his self-sacrifice to me, his making me feel that he lives only to make me comfortable and bring me back to health. Where are you, my father? I know that you will come to me when you can. That much I know, I know! Come, father, and take me from this awful prison!..."

"I think I have done remarkably well to be as patient as I have been. This horrid food is enough to kill a healthy woman,—tinned meats and vegetables, tinned everything, and hardly any flour, but sea-biscuits instead! Of course my poor slave does his best to prepare things in such a way that it will be possible for me to eat them, for he seems to realize that I am a human being....

"I am determined to bring this man to an acquaintance with his tongue. The loneliness that I feel is unbearable. He must be as lonely as I, and, like me, he is probably too proud to make a sign. Of course he talks to me now when I make him, but about things in Asia or Africa that I am certain are as dull to him as to me. He is maintaining this distance, I am certain, just to guard his history and true character, and to keep me

in a position where it will remain impossible for me to find out what is going forward on the other side of that door. I will talk to him about myself; that will compel him to talk about himself. I can't bear this isolation. It is inhuman. And I have no fears that he will presume. They passed long ago.

"I have just two more things to record at present. One is that my host is growing thinner and more hollow-eyed, and the other is that several times lately I have dreamed of hearing the strangest and sweetest music. It sounded like the playing of a violin by a master hand. I have been unable to determine whether I was really dreaming. One singular thing in connection with it is that when I looked for him the other night on his rugs before the fire after I had heard the music, or dreamed I heard it, he was not there. I tried to remain awake until he returned, for I wondered where he could be in the middle of the night, with the snow heaped up to the roof of the house and a fearful gale blowing cold outside, and I felt lonely and uneasy. But I went to sleep before he returned. I have no doubt, however, that he was on the other side of the rear door."

This ends, for the present, the extracts from the lady's journal.

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE patient had so far recovered that she could be propped up in bed, where she straightened out the bungling work of her inexperienced hair-dresser, and made her glorious hair a fit embellishment of her beauty. She was pale, and her cheeks had lost the roundness and her eyes the brilliancy of their wont. But she was regaining the flesh that she had lost, and the brightness of spirit that her afflictions had dimmed; and her pallor only softened and refined a beauty that likely had been somewhat too showy in health.

Something even better than that had been accomplished. It was not conceivable that her strong and rebellious spirit had been ever before brought under other than the ordinary restraints of a conventional life. She had developed the good sense to make the most of her present uncomfortable situation, and the will to bear its hardships. In the eyes of her host the superiority of her character entitled her to admiration, which he gave her simply and unconsciously, without any regard to her sex and beauty. Her acute insight had informed her of this admiration, and her spirit chafed under its character. One day she said,—

"It seems strange to me, Dr. Malbone, that you have never taken any interest in my past life."

He looked at her quickly and curiously, and somewhat awkwardly replied,—

"I did not wish to intrude, Miss Andros."

"Would that have been intrusion? I hadn't thought of it."

"You must know that I feel an interest in everything that concerns you." He said this readily, simply, and naturally, and she wondered if he was sincere.

"Of course," she went on, "lack of all companionship between us means mutual distrust." This was a sharp thrust, and it found him unguarded. Then she saw that she had gone too far at the start; and this impression was confirmed when, after a pause, he remarked,—

"You and I have been strangely placed. I knew that the conventions of the best-bred people mean much to you, and I have merely respected your natural and proper regard for them. Under these circumstances it was not possible for me to make the first effort to be—friendly, if you will permit the expression."

She smiled, but the manliness of the rebuke and its entire justice made her secretly resent it. She was determined to hold herself perfectly in hand, for a serious purpose now moved her, and she would not be balked.

"That is all in the past now," she said. "I have learned to know you as a man of the finest sense of honor, proud, reserved, and self-sacrificing. It would not have been possible for any other sort of man to treat a woman as you have treated me. No, don't interrupt me. There is nothing but common sense and simple justice in what I am saying, and unless you let me say it you will be harsh and cruel. After all that you have done for me, it is my right to tell you how I feel about it."

He looked so embarrassed and miserable that she laughed outright; and the music of that rare note sounded in his heart; for it was not a cruel laugh, but merry and hearty, as one would laugh at the comical discomfiture of a friend; and as such it fulfilled its purpose.

Thus the ice that had filled the cabin was broken, in a measure, at last, and this at once eased the gloom and coldness of the wretched lives imprisoned therein.

From that beginning the convalescent drifted easily and gracefully into an account of her world of wealth and pleasure and fashion. She realized that she must first open her own life before she could expect her host to give her a view of his and of the nearer and stranger things that impinged upon her. Her voice was smooth and musical. She dwelt particularly upon the lighter and fashionable side of her life, because she believed that the tact and refinement of the man who listened so well, yet so silently, were born of such a life, and that he had deliberately withdrawn himself from it.

Matters went more smoothly after that day. But the young woman was finally forced to accept her defeat,—she had opened her own simple, vacant life, but had gained not a glimpse into his. And she realized, further, that all the advances toward a friendlier understanding had been made by her, and none by him; that his manner toward her, with all its tireless watchfulness, its endless solicitude, its total extinction of every selfish thought, its impenetrable reserve, had not changed one jot or tittle. Then a bitter resentment filled her, and she hated him and determined to torture him.

He had not been so guarded but that she had found a vulnerable spot in his mail. This was what she

regarded as the silly, sentimental side of his nature. She had led him into this disclosure by a long series of adroit moves, the purpose of which he had not suspected. Assuming a profound appreciation of the softer and tenderer things of life, she had brought herself into the attitude of one who cherishes them, and thus led him into the trap. Their talk concerned love, and he opened his heart and displayed all its foolish weakness.

"Can there be anything more sacred," he asked, warmly, "than the love of men and women? Is there anything to which trifling should be more repugnant? The man who loves one woman with all in him that makes him a man, has taken that into his soul which will be its refining and uplifting force to the end of all things with him; and, noble as that is, the love of a woman for one man who loves her surpasses it beyond all comprehension, and is the truest gleam of heavenly radiance in human lives."

It was spared him to see the amused and contemptuous curl of lip that bespoke a world-worn heart; but he had let down his guard, and his punishment would come.

It was some days afterward that the blow fell. The convalescent was now sitting on a chair, where her ever-solicitous nurse had placed her. She was now ready to strike. She would hold up to him a mirror of himself,—a weak, sentimental, pusillanimous man. Fortunately, she could relate from an experience in her own life a tale whose ridiculous hero she judged had been just such a man as Dr. Malbone. She would be violating none of the rules of hospitality. Her host had permitted her to walk into a humiliating position, and her desire to punish him should not be denied gratification.

She had brought the talk round to the mistakes that men and women make in the bestowal of their affection, and remarked carelessly that men were proverbially stupid in estimating the loveliness of women. Almost without exception, she declared, they preferred girls for their beauty, their softness, their negative qualities, their genuine or pretended helplessness; and she added that a woman of strength and true worth would scorn a love so cheaply won and held in so light esteem by its bestowers.

"But some girls," she added, "are even worse than men. You may generally expect stupidity from a man, but not always folly from a girl. A rather distressing case of a girl's folly once came to my notice. There was a girl who had been my classmate in school. It was there that we formed for each other the girlish affection which all girls must have at that age. Yet the difference between us was great even then, and it increased after we had gone out into the world. She and I moved in the same circle. Her parents were wealthy, and she had every opportunity to see and learn life and get something of value from it. Instead of that, she grew more and more retired, and less fitted for the life to which she belonged. She was the most unpractical and romantic girl that ever lived. Her girl friends dropped her one by one. I was the last to remain, and I did all I could to get some worldly sense into her soft and foolish head. She would only smile, and put her arms round me, and declare that she knew she was foolish, but that she couldn't help it.

"She was very fond of music and poetry, and at last I learned that she was taking lessons on the violin from some fiddling nobody who made his living by playing and teaching. I never happened to see him, or I might have done something to stop the mischief that was brewing. Her parents were blind to her folly, but that is a common weakness of parents.

"There never had been any great exchange of confidences between Ada and me since our school-days. I could have told her a great deal about the ways of men,—you see," the narrator hastened to add, "I had been a very good observer, and had learned some things that it is to the advantage of every girl to know. I mean, you understand, about love. It is only people with a silly view of that subject that ever get into trouble. Girls of Ada's disposition have no sense; they invariably suffer through lack of perception and strength.

"Although I did not see much of her, it at last became evident that something serious was the matter. Her manner became softer and gentler, her sympathies were keener, and there was a light in her eyes that an observing woman cannot misunderstand. I was somewhat older than she, and that gave me an advantage in the plan that I decided upon; but of greater advantage was her reliance upon me. It was necessary that I should gain her full confidence, as I didn't wish to take any step in the dark, nor one that might have proved useless. You will understand that in all I afterward did and caused to be done I acted solely from a regard for her welfare. I believed that she had formed an attachment for this—this fiddler—bah! Everything in me revolts when I think of it. Here was a girl that was pretty, sweet, gracious, the soul of trust and fidelity, ready to throw herself away upon an unspeakable fiddler! And there was no excuse whatever for it. A score of men adored her,—men of her own station in life,—men of wealth, men of culture, men of strength and character, men of birth, men of consequence in the world. Incredible as it may seem, they passed over other girls far more capable in every way, and sighed for this shy violet.

"I knew that there was something wrong in her refusal to accept the attentions of any of them. I knew that her inherited tastes, the examples all around her, and her natural regard for the wishes of her parents and friends, ought to have induced her to give her affections to a man worthy of her. I determined to find out what that obstacle was; and it was solely for her own good that I did so. I knew that if she married this—this low musician, her life would be filled with bitterness, disappointment, and regrets. I knew that she would soon come to be ashamed of the alliance. I knew—"

"How did you know all that?" came in a voice so strange, so constrained, so distant, that she turned in wonder toward her host. He sat looking into the fire, the ruddy glow of which concealed the death-like pallor that during the last few minutes had been deepening in his face.

"How did I know it?" she responded in surprise. "That is a singular question from one who ought to be as well aware of it as I."

He made no reply, and she turned her head to the window and watched the snow steadily rebuilding the bank that her host had so recently cleared away.

"Perhaps," she remarked, with a slight sneer, "you asked that question to get an argument with me, for I have heard you express romantic and sentimental views on the subject of love. But of one thing I am confident: I know that you have been a man of the world, and that you understand life and human nature; and I know that while men like to assume a sentimental attitude toward love, it is merely a pose. I will not argue the matter with you. You know as well as I that such a marriage would have been a fatal mistake."

She said this in a hard, emphatic way that indicated her desire to end the discussion. Then she resumed her

story.

"I got into her confidence by professing sympathy with her, and adopting her point of view,—by anticipating it, I mean, for she was too guarded to disclose it. The poor little idiot fell into the trap. She had been carrying her secret for months, and the burden of it was wearing her out. You know, a nature of that kind must have sympathy, must have some one to listen, must have a confidant. She had not dared to trust her parents, for she knew that they would put a stop to her folly. When she found, as she thought, that I was in full sympathy with her, she laid her poor foolish heart completely open. And what do you think she was going to do?"

She turned toward her host as she asked the question, and found him still sitting immovable and looking into the fire. He seemed not to have heard her, for he made no answer; and his stony silence and stillness gave her a strange sensation that might have weighed more with her had she not been so deeply interested in her narrative, and so well satisfied with her part in its happenings. She turned her glance again toward the window, and resumed:

"She had decided to run away with this vulgar—fiddler. There was but one thing lacking,—he had not asked her; but she believed that he loved her with all his soul, and that he was having a fight with himself to decide whether it would be right for him to bring so scandalous a thing upon her. She and he both realized that it would be worse than useless for him to ask her parents for her. She said to me, 'He fears that I shall be unhappy in the poverty that would be my lot if we should go away and marry. He fears that I should miss the luxuries to which I had been accustomed. He fears that my friends will think he had married me for my fortune. He has so many fears, and they are all for me. Yet I know that he would cheerfully lay down his life for me. There never was a man so unselfish, so generous, so ready to sacrifice himself for others.'

"I could hardly keep from laughing while the poor child was telling me all that rubbish. Before employing harsh measures to check her foolish purpose, I resorted to milder ones. While continuing to be sympathetic, I nevertheless said a great many things that would have set her thinking if she had had any sense. I gave her to understand, as delicately as possible (for I was careful not to rouse any resentfulness or stubbornness in her), that her lover undoubtedly was a worthless fellow, as persons of his class are; that he was weak in character and loose in morals; that he was merely a sly adventurer, playing adroitly upon her innocence and confidence, and anxious to leave his laborious life for one of ease at her expense. I compared her station as his wife with that as the wife of a man in her own sphere.

"The trouble was that she cared nothing for the position that she occupied. She honestly believed, poor idiot! that she could be as happy poor as rich. But the great obstacle was her infatuation for the man, and her belief that he was finer and better than the men of her own station. She was dreamy and romantic, and that is why she idealized this fiddling nobody. The more she told me of his gentleness, his refinement, his unselfishness, his poetic nature, the more I saw that he lacked the sterling qualities of manhood, the more I realized that he had made a careful study of her weaknesses and was playing upon them with all the unscrupulous skill of his species. She implored me to meet him, to know him, to study him. Of course that was out of the question. She was sure, she said, that I should come to admire and respect him as she had. I firmly declined to see him. I have even forgotten his name."

There was a pause in the narration. The young man was so still that his guest looked round at him, and found his gaze fastened upon her. She started, for she saw that it held a veiled quality that she did not understand, and that for a moment filled her with uneasiness. He quickly and without a word looked again at the fire.

CHAPTER EIGHT

THE convalescent thrust aside the momentary depression that her host's strange expression had given her, and proceeded.

"At last I realized that all mild measures would be useless. I knew that at any time something dreadful might happen, and I was determined to save my old schoolmate from the disgrace and sorrow that she was inviting. Without directly encouraging her to proceed as she had started, I gave her to understand that she might always depend upon my friendship. Then I set about the serious work that I had to do."

There was another long pause.

"Well?" said her host, a little harshly and impatiently; and that change from no his habitual gentleness gave her a passing wonder. Then she saw that she was hurting him. She had waited for that sign.

"I knew that it would be an easy task to match my wit with that of a sentimental, scheming fiddler and a foolish girl. I needn't give all the details of the plan that I carried out. It was merely a matter of getting an engagement for him somewhere else for a time, and of presenting to her in his absence some evidence of his faithlessness. I knew them both well enough to foresee that she would never let him know what she had heard,—that she would simply send him adrift, and expect him to make an explanation if he was innocent, and that he would be too abashed to demand an explanation from her or make one himself. There was no danger that he would open a way to disprove or even deny the evidence that I produced.

"All this, you understand, I did with the greatest delicacy. The plan worked perfectly. They never saw each other again."

Wilder turned and looked her full in the face. It was the way in which he did it that sharpened her attention, for it was a look in which she felt, rather than saw, a command.

"What became of them?" he quietly asked, but she felt that the question required an answer.

"Oh," she replied, her air of indifference veiling her determination to hold control of the situation, "the vagabond fiddler was never seen again. As for Ada—but that was infinitely better than to have lived a life of wretchedness—"

"As for Ada?"

"She was dead in a month,"—this with a hard and defiant manner.

The young man rose from his chair, which he clumsily upset. In a strangely uncertain, stumbling fashion he went to the front door, and felt for the latch, as though blind. Then he changed his mind and started for the rear door; but whatever purpose he had was interrupted by his overturning a small table and sending the books and other articles upon it clattering to the floor. Evidently startled and confused by the noise and his own clumsiness,—though hardly more so than the young woman, who was watching him in amazement,—he righted the table with difficulty, and began to pick up the articles that had fallen from it. Instead, however, of replacing them on the table, he put them on the bed. His face was livid, his eyes were sunk alarmingly deep in his skull, and he seemed to have become suddenly old and wrinkled. His hands trembled, and weakness so overcame him that he sat down upon the edge of the bed.

This state quickly passed, and the young man looked at his guest, who had been compelled to turn her chair laboriously to observe him; and when he saw the perplexed and distressed look in her face—seeing nothing of the gratification and triumph that her distress partly obscured—he smiled faintly and came firmly to his feet. "It must have been an attack of vertigo," he explained, feebly. But he continued to look at her so steadily and with so penetrating a gaze that her uneasiness increased. Had she carried her torture of him too far? Oh, well, it would do him good in the end!

"And now," he said, in a voice that steadily grew stronger and firmer, "I will tell *you* a story." He was standing directly in front of her and looking down into her face. "One day, just after a great sorrow had fallen upon me, I was strolling along the water-front of San Francisco, and sat down upon some lumber at the end of a pier. I had not noticed a number of rough-looking young men sitting near me, until one of them said, in the course of the talk that they were having, 'Yes, but I loved her! It was the way in which he said it that attracted my notice. I judged from his appearance that he was a laborer, perhaps a stevedore; but there was something in his voice that belongs to stricken men in all the walks of life. One of his companions said, 'Nonsense, Frank; there's just as good fish in the sea as ever was caught out of it.' But Frank shook his head and said, 'Not for me.' The others said nothing, and after a little while Frank repeated, 'Not for me.' Did you ever hear a man say that?"

Wilder's voice, which had been steadily growing louder, suddenly sank almost to a whisper as he asked his guest that question. The wrinkles were deepening in his face, and his glance had a sharpness of penetration that the young woman found it hard to meet without wincing.

"Then," resumed Wilder, "another of his companions, seeking to show him the folly of his grief, made some remarks about the woman that I cannot repeat. Frank replied without anger: 'Don't say that, Joe: you mean well, but don't say it. She was the woman I loved. Every night, now, when I put out the light to go to bed, I see her in the room; and when I go on streets that are dark, I think she's walking with me. I loved that woman; and now I don't know what to do. For she's dead, boys, she's dead; and by God! they killed her.'"

Wilder was still looking down into the face of his guest as he concluded, and she had been looking up into his; but when, with a trembling voice, he spoke the last sentence, her glance dropped to the floor. After a pause he spoke again, and his voice was full, round, and passionate.

"They killed her, madam, as they have killed many another. How it was that they killed the woman whose death had filled this rough man's life with grief and despair, I do not know. But they killed her. Some murderous human hand shattered a scheme that the Almighty himself had laid. I wish you could have heard him say, 'She's dead, boys, she's dead; and by God! they killed her.' The sound of its agony would have found the heart that was intended to do more than keep you alive with its beating. Do you know what murder is? Do you know the difference between the gross, stupid, brutal murder that in satisfying its coarse lust for blood runs its thick neck into the halter, and the finer, daintier, infinitely more cruel murder that kills with torturing cruelty, and thus outwits the gallows? The blood-murderer is a poor fool, dwarfed in mind and crippled in soul. Perhaps he gets his full punishment when the law stretches his useless neck. But the murderer who outwits the law in his killing, who murders the innocent and unsuspecting and confiding, who makes friendship the cup from which the poison is drunk, who employs the most damnable lies and treachery, who calmly watches the increasing agonies of his victim as the poison slowly does its work,—what punishment do you think can reach such a murderer as that?"

The young man's voice had become loud, harsh, and threatening. Violent emotions were stirring him. His whole slender frame seemed to have expanded. His face was flushed, his eyes were blazing, his fingers clutched at invisible things, his entire aspect was menacing. His guest, awed and terrified, raised her glance to his face.

"And by whom is such a murder done?" he cried. "It is done by one who, coming into the world with a soul fresh and complete from the hands of the Creator, deliberately turns aside from the way of nature and nature's God, crushes the attributes that form our one link with heaven and our one hope of immortality, throtles all that might be useful in bringing light and strength into the lives of others, and in shameless defiance of the Almighty's manifest will sets up false gods to worship, sacrifices self-respect for self-love, banishes the essence of life and clings to the dross, and wallows like swine in a mire of his own making. The blood-murderer is infinitely better than that. He has at least a human heart in all its savage majesty.

"And for what is such a murder done? It proceeds from a dwarfed, distorted soul, deliberately, consciously, intelligently made so by its possessor. Its purpose is to destroy the one touch of beauty, sweetness, and purity that makes us akin to the angels. It sees an exquisite flower; that flower must be plucked, else its beauty would flourish and its destiny be fulfilled. It finds love in its purest, noblest, most unselfish form between two whom God had made each for the other for the fulfilling of his own inscrutable design, and by lies and treachery proceeds to kill one and destroy the happiness of the other. What punishment, madam, is adequate for such a murder? The hands of the law would be polluted by strangling a murderer so base, so cowardly, so

infinitely lower and meaner than the lowest beasts, so utterly unworthy of the honor of the gallows-tree. There can be but one adequate punishment, and only Omnipotence could devise a hell sufficient for it. And the sooner this punishment comes, the sooner will the vengeance of God be satisfied. What higher duty could rest upon a mortal standing in awe and reverence under his Maker's law than to set the law in force?"

In the dismay and terror that now filled her soul the woman could not mistake the meaning of that threat, nor the madness that would give it force. A numbing fear, a feeling that she was sinking into a bottomless pit, put gyves upon all her faculties. In a hopeless stupor she sat, in speechless dread of the blow that she felt must fall. To her dazed attention the avenger himself stood before her in all the terror of infuriated justice free from its leash and plunging forward headlong and irresistible to satisfy its vengeance. Never had she dreamed that a mortal could face a thing so terrible as this man, who, having dragged her from death, and with infinite patience, gentleness, and unselfishness had been nursing her back to health and strength, now stood as the judge and executioner of her naked, trembling, convicted soul. Her eyes strained, her lips apart, she looked up, speechless and motionless, into his face; and to her his blazing eyes and tense frame filled all the world with vengeance, scorn, and death.

"Woman," he cried, "whether it be murder or justice, your death would remove an infamous stain from the face of this fair world. If you can, make your peace with God, for I am going to send your damned black soul where it can do no further harm. It is with immeasurable hate, with infinite loathing, that I am going to kill you."

He clutched her shoulder, and the hot iron grip of his fingers tore her skin. He thrust his face close to hers, and she heard the grinding of his teeth, which his parted lips showed as the fangs of a maddened beast.

"You viper!" he cried; "you have no right to life!"

She saw his free hand seeking her throat. Then her energies were unlocked. She threw back her head, and with all her might cried out,—

"Father! father! help me! save me!" The young man started back, clutched his head with both hands, and looked about in a wild and frightened way.

"What was that?" he breathlessly asked. "Did you hear? The wolves are coming down. That was the howl of the she-wolf!" In a dazed manner he found his way to the back door, opened it, passed out, and bolted it behind him.

CHAPTER NINE

MORE extracts from the lady's journal:

"I can never begin an entry in my journal without having that frightful scene come between me and these pages. Oh, it was terrible,—terrible beyond all comprehension! I cannot believe, after thinking it over and over during these weeks that have passed since it occurred, that it was the fear of death that so terrified me, and, I know, made an old woman of me. No, it could not have been that. It was the fear of going with that awful condemnation upon me. Was it just? Was it true?"

"He seems to have recovered at last from the alarming depression that followed his outbreak, and this gives me leisure to think, leisure to recall many circumstances that in my blindness, my incredible blindness and stupidity, I had overlooked. I take into account the fearful strain under which he had suffered so long. He is a delicate, finely organized man, and has had more to do and to bear than a dozen strong men would have done and borne so well and patiently.

"There was his anxiety on the score of my recovery. Then there were the endless duties of waiting on me, of thinking of the thousands of little things that had to be thought of and done, and that he never forgot nor neglected. He has done my cooking, my washing,—everything that was hard and distasteful for a man to do. Then there was his constant anxiety on account of the snow; and it has been growing daily all through the winter with the increasing dangers and discomforts; and besides his anxiety was the hard physical labor—far too heavy for him—that he has been compelled to do in order to keep our hut from being buried and ourselves from being smothered. And, last, there has been the constant wearing upon him of a close imprisonment with me, for whom I know he now must have a most intense dislike.

"I am satisfied, too, that he has anxieties concealed from me. That they are associated with something upon which the back door opens, I have no doubt. There are several reasons for my thinking so. I am so nearly well now that I could get about and be helpful to him if he would only make me a crutch, as I have often begged him to do; but he has always put me off, saying that it was too early for a crutch, that my desire to be useful would give me a serious setback through making me overdo, and that the main thing for us both to consider was the return of my strength as quickly as possible, and our escape on snow-shoes that he would make as soon as I should be able to walk. It has all sounded very plausible, but it seems to me that common-sense would suggest that I take a little exercise. In spite of my having regained my flesh, I am as weak as an infant. Knowing that he is a good physician, I doubt his sincerity about the crutch. I believe the solemn truth is that he fears I would try to invade his cherished secret if I were able to be about.

"I know that he keeps the provisions in the place into which the back door opens, and that this fact seems to give him a sufficient excuse for going there so often,—especially as he does the cooking there; and that is another strange circumstance. For weeks after I was first brought to the hut he prepared the food on the broad hearth here; but after a while he did that in the rear apartment, explaining that the odors from the cooking were not good for me, and that it was uncomfortable for him to cook before an open fireplace. I

protested that I did not mind the odors, and he replied that I would at least consider his comfort.

"Another thing: He has not eaten with me for a long, long time. His original plan was to prepare my meal, wait on me until I had finished, and then have his own at the little table in the chimney-corner. I did not observe for some time that he had quit eating in that way, and that he took his meals in the rear apartment. He always speaks of it as an 'apartment,' and not as a room. I wonder why. I have been sitting up for a long time now, and do not require his assistance after he has brought me my food. It would be much pleasanter if he would sit at the little table and eat with me. Is his dislike of me so deep that he cannot eat with me? With all my sense, I have permitted this condition of affairs to come about! And we both are sufferers by it.

"It is no wonder, with all these things troubling him, that he has changed so much since I came. He is as scrupulously neat as ever, and he makes this poor little hut shine, but he has changed remarkably since I came. It has been so gradual that I didn't observe it until my blindness was no longer sufficient to keep me from seeing it. He was slender and evidently not strong when I came, but he has become a shadow, and his gaunt cheeks and hollow eyes are distressing to me. When he comes in now from fighting the snow,—for we must not be buried by it, and must have light and air, and the top of the chimney must be kept clear,—his weakness and exhaustion, though he tries so hard to conceal them, are terrible to see.

"And now a great fear has come to me. It is that at any moment he may break down and die. I wish I had not written that, I wish I had never thought of it. Oh, if my father would only come! What can be keeping him? Do I not know that he loves me better than anything else in the world? Am I not all that he has to love and cling to? I cannot, cannot, understand it. Dr. Malbone says it is unreasonable for me to expect my father, and that if he should make the effort to reach me now it would be at too great a risk to his own life. He tries to assure me that my father will be governed entirely by the advice of the people who know the mountains, and that they will restrain him from making any such attempt, as they would not dare to make it themselves. All that may be true, but it is difficult for me to believe it. If I could only get a word from him, it would give me greater strength to bear the horrors of my situation. But why should I complain, when Dr. Malbone bears it all so patiently, so sweetly, so cheerfully?

"Still, that awful picture of murder comes between me and these pages unceasingly. I think I can understand now why men sometimes kill women. Why should men and women be so different? Why should it be impossible for them to comprehend each other? It was Murder that I saw standing before me—both the horrible picture of murder as he painted it, with me as the murderess—me as the murderess!—and Murder in the flesh as he stood ready to strangle me. Oh, the incredible ferocity of the man, the terrible, wild savagery of him, the awful dark and nether side of his strangely complex character! All along I had taken him for a pusillanimous milksop, a baby, an old woman, a weak nobody; and at once he dropped his outer shell and stood forth a Man,—terrible, savage, brutal, overwhelming, splendid, wonderful! What is my judgment worth after this? And I was so proud of my understanding of men!

"Why didn't he kill me? It was my cry that checked him; but why should it? Was it my appeal for help that brought him to his senses? I think so. It touched that within him which had been so keenly alert, so unrelaxingly vigilant, ever since I had come under his care. But what did he mean by the howl of the she-wolf? And what did he mean by saying that the wolves had come down? Several times since that terrible scene he has waked me in the night with groans, and with crying out in his sleep, 'The she-wolf?' These things have a meaning, I know. Why does he explain nothing? And why have I permitted an estrangement between us that makes it impossible for me to seek his confidence? Is it too late now?

"Oh, the terrible moments, the interminable hours, that passed after he had left the hut by the rear door! Every second, at first, I expected him to return and kill me. Would he have a rifle, a revolver, a knife, or a bludgeon, or would he come with those terrible long fingers hooked like claws to fasten upon my throat? And yet, somehow, I felt safe; I felt that his old watchfulness and solicitude had returned.

"As soon as I could overcome the half-stupor into which his outburst had thrown me I dragged myself to the rear door, intending to barricade it against him. The effort was exceedingly painful and exhausting, and brought me great suffering for a week afterward. But my sufferings of mind and spirit were so much greater that I could bear those of the flesh. When I had crawled to the door and was trying to drag a box against it, I heard something that stopped me. I am not certain that it was anything real. There was a loud singing in my ears from the awful fright that I had suffered, and what I heard may have been that, made seemingly coherent by my over-strained imagination. What I heard sounded like the distant, smothered, awful strains of Saint-Saens's 'Dance of Death' played on the violin. But wild and terrible as it sounded, it came as a pledge of my safety. Murder cannot come with music.

"I drew myself away and with great effort clambered upon the bed, where I lay a long time in complete exhaustion. Time had no meaning for me. A dull, massive, intangible weight seemed to be crushing me, and I longed—oh, how I longed!—for human sympathy.

"The hut was dark when he returned. We had been very saving with the candles, for Dr. Malbone explained that they were running low; so in the evenings we generally had only the fire-light. There seemed to be a generous supply of fire-wood in the rear apartment, and some of it was a pitchy pine that gave out a fine blaze. When he returned the fire had burned out. I felt no fear when I heard him enter. I knew by the unsteadiness of his movements that he was weak and ill, but the first sound of his voice as he called me anxiously was perfectly reassuring.

"I am lying on the bed,' I answered.

"He groped to the bedside and there he knelt, and buried his face in his hands upon the coverlet. And then—I say it merely as his due, merely as the simple truth—he did the manliest thing that a man ever did. He raised his head and in dignified humility said,—

"I have done the most cowardly, the most brutal thing that a man can do. Will you forgive me? Can you forgive me?

"I put out my hand to stop him, for it was terrible that a man should be so humble and broken; but he took my hand in both of his and held it.

"Will you? Can you? he pleaded.

"It was the only time that his touch had been other than the cold and perfunctory one of the physician, and—I feel no shame in writing it—it was the first time in my life that the touch of a man's hand had been so comforting. For a moment his hand seemed to have been thrust through the wall that hitherto had separated us so completely.

"'You were not the one to blame,' I said. 'I alone was the guilty one.'

"'No, no!' he protested, warmly. 'What provocation under heaven could excuse such conduct as mine?'

"'I will forgive you,' I said, 'upon one condition.'

"'And that——'

"'You forgive me in turn.'

"Very slowly, as soon as I had said that, the pressure with which he had been holding my hand began to relax. What did that mean, and why did he remain silent, and why did a pain come stealing into my heart? Could not he be as generous as I? Had I overrated him, after all?

"'It was terrible!' he half whispered. 'By every obligation resting upon a man, I should have been kind to you. You were my guest as well as my patient. You were crippled and helpless, and unable to defend yourself. You were a woman, looking to every man, by the right of your sex, for comfort and protection. I was a man, owing to you, because you were a woman, all the comfort and protection that every man owes to every woman. All of these obligations I trampled under foot.'

"Why did he put that sting into our reconciliation? Had he not done it so innocently, so unintentionally, it would not have hurt so much. I withdrew my hand from his very slowly; he made no effort to retain it. He did not again ask me to forgive him, and he did not offer me his forgiveness. The breach in the wall was closed, and the barrier stood intact and impregnable between us.

"Presently he rose and made a fire, and prepared me something to eat; but I had no appetite. Then he found that I had a fever, and he was much distressed. There was just one comforting touch of sympathy when he said to me,—

"'You were sobbing all the time I was making the fire and preparing your supper. I promise not to frighten nor distress you again.'

"How did he know I had been sobbing, when I had taken so much pains to conceal it? And yet I might have known that his watchfulness upon my welfare is so keen, so unrelaxing, that nothing affecting me can be hidden from him.

"I was confined to bed a week, and suffered greatly both in mind and body. I had hurt my crippled leg, and that made my physician very anxious. During all this time it had not occurred to me, so sodden with selfishness is my nature, that he had suffered a very serious nervous shock from his outburst of mad passion, and that only by a mighty effort was he holding up to put me again on the road to recovery. A realization of the truth came when my ill turn had passed. He had hardly placed me comfortably on a chair when a ghastly pallor made a death's-head of his face, and he reeled to the bed and fell fainting upon it, still having the thoughtfulness to say, as he reeled,—

"'I am—a little—tired—and sleepy. I—am perfectly—well. Have no—uneasiness.'

"Except for his slight, short breathing, he lay for hours as one dead; and then I realized more fully than ever the weight of the awful burden that my presence has laid upon him. I know that I am killing him. O God! is there nothing that I can do to help him, to make it easier for him? What have I done that this horrible curse should have come upon me?

"The most wonderful of all the strange things that I have seen and learned in this terrible imprisonment is that his kindness toward me has not suffered the slightest change. He is still the soul of thoughtfulness, watchfulness, unselfishness, and yet he has denounced me to my face as a——

"Another thing I have found: All the training that I have had in cleverness goes for nothing here. He always avoids the beginning of any conversation on subjects other than those that lie immediately near us. It therefore requires a great effort on my part—and I think I deserve some praise for it—to draw him into discussions of general matters. In these discussions he never advances an opinion if he suspects that I have an opposite one, and never opposes nor contradicts me; but I cannot help feeling that his views are so much broader and deeper than mine, so much wiser, so much more charitable, so much nearer to what he calls 'the great heart of humanity,' as to make me seem shallow and mean. Am I really so? I try not to be.

"With indescribable tact and delicacy, he holds me at an infinite distance, and I have been unable to find any way to bridge the vast gulf.... After all, why should I try? If he despises me, I cannot help it. This miserable position in which I am placed will be at an end some time; and when I am again free, and in my own world, I will show him the gratitude that I feel. Will he let me?...

"What is there so repulsive about me? Why should I be treated as a viper? And why is it that of all the men I have known—men whom I could handle as putty—this obscure backwoods doctor sets himself wholly apart from me, remains utterly impregnable, shames and humiliates me with a veiled pity, and feels not the slightest touch of the power that I know myself to have? Is my face ugly? Are my manners crude? Is my voice repellent? Where are my resources of womanly tact that I have used successfully in the past? Why is it that I fail utterly to impress him as having a single admirable trait, a single grace of appearance, manner, or character?

"It is hard to bear all this. I try to be brave and strong and cheerful, as he always is; but it is human nature to resent his treatment, and it is cruel of him to keep me in such a position. It is the first time in my life that I have been at a disadvantage.

"I imagine that he has suffered some great sorrow. Indeed, he said so in his outburst. His distrust of me seems to indicate its character. He probably gave some heartless woman his whole love, his whole soul, and she laughed at him and cast him off. That would go hard with a man of his kind. There can be no other explanation; and now I am the sufferer for that woman's sin: he thinks that all women are like her.

"I will write this vow, so that I may turn to it often and strengthen my purpose by reading it:

"I will make this man like me. I will tear down the wall that he has built between us. I will employ every resource to bring him to my feet. I will make him appreciate me. I will make him need me. I will make him want me.

"That is my vow."

Thus end, again for the present, these extracts from the lady's journal.

CHAPTER TEN

THE severity of the winter did not relax. There were intervals when the wind did not blow and the snow did not fall; but there were neither warm winds nor sunshine to melt the snow, the depth of which grew steadily and aggravated the impassableness of the roads. Day by day, week by week, month by month it strengthened the bars of the prison holding the two unhappy souls.

With the prolonged and increasing rigors of the winter harder and harder grew the rigors of the prison. The strength of Wilder's spirit was beginning to break down; and while it distressed his fair charge to see him suffer, it warmed her heart to realize that the day of her triumph was near,—the day when she should serve him as gently, as unselfishly, as faithfully as he had served her. It would be sweet to have him helpless, to have him lean upon her, need her, want her.

Her manner had undergone a great change since the terrible scene in which her life was threatened. Her firmness, her self-reliance, her aggressiveness, her condescension, all had gone, and she bore herself toward her rescuer as mother, sister, and friend. In innumerable little ways she saved him trouble through denying herself, and did it so tactfully that he never suspected the deception. Under the influence of this he had at last made her a crutch, which, though rude and uncomfortable, she declared to be a miracle of ease. She believed that in giving it to her he expressed more confidence in her than he had felt before.

Its introduction into the scheme of their lives worked changes that astonished and pleased him. In spite of his distressed protests, she overhauled his meagre wardrobe, and with deft workmanship put every article in perfect order. Her skill and ingenuity were employed in many other ways, so that the cabin soon took on a look very different from that which she had found when she came. Little touches lent an air of grace and a sense of comfort that the place had not borne before.

She relieved him of all the work of caring for her, except that of cooking; this was a duty that he reserved with immovable stubbornness. Nor could she contrive with all her wiles and persuasion to make him have his meals with her. She formed many a theory to explain his conduct in that particular. Finally, she settled upon this one: He preferred to fill the rôle of a servitor; as such he must take his meals apart. But why should he so choose? Was it because he deemed it the safer course for them both? Was it because he wished to discipline her by placing her above him, when by obvious right they were equals? Speculation was useless; she was forced to accept the fact, which she did with all the grace at her command.

He had grown thin to emaciation. His hands were those of a skeleton covered tightly with skin. His cheeks were greatly sunken, and the drawn skin upon his cheek-bones was a chalky white. But his eyes were the most haunting of his features. They seemed to be looking always for something that could not be found, and to show a mortal dread of a catastrophe that had given no sign of its imminence. In their impenetrable depths she imagined that she saw all mysteries, all fears, all anxieties.

Still, though very weak, he kept sturdily and cheerfully at his duties. There was the snow to fight. There was the fire to be kept up, for the cold was intense. There was the cooking to do.

Uncomfortable as her bed was, she knew that it was luxurious in comparison with the thinly covered floor of stones and earth upon which he slept. In time this came to haunt her unceasingly, and she pondered every conceivable plan to make him more comfortable. At first it was her firm intention to make him take the bed while she slept on the floor; but she knew that it would be useless to make the suggestion; so she was forced to abandon the idea, dear as it was to her, and happy as its adoption would have made her. Instead, she did what she could to make his pallet comfortable. Her ingenuity made so great a difference that his gratitude touched her.

One day she discovered him in agonizing pain. The torture was so great that it broke down his iron fortitude and drew his face awry. She was instantly at his side, her hand on his shoulder and her face showing a wistful anxiety.

"What is it, my friend?" she inquired, in the gentlest voice.

With a pitiful effort at self-mastery he declared that it was only a trifling and transitory pain, and that it was rapidly passing. She knelt beside him and looked anxiously into his face. Her solicitude evidently increased his suffering, but she was determined to make the fight then and there.

"Tell me what it is, my friend," she begged.

This was the second time that she had called him "my friend."

"It is only rheumatism," he said, somewhat impatiently, and making a gentle effort to push her away. But she persisted.

"That is not a trifling thing," she said, "for your strength is greatly reduced. Where is the pain?"

"Oh, I don't know; you are only making it harder for me!" he petulantly exclaimed.

A great gladness filled her heart, for she knew that he was giving way, and that her solicitude was hastening his collapse.

"No," she said, "I will make you well. Where is the pain?" His face gave the glad sign of his wavering.

"Where is the pain?" she repeated. "It is my right to know and your duty to tell me."

"In my——" he said, gasping, "in my chest."

She rose and went to the bed, which she prepared for him. When he saw what her intention was he came to his feet with great effort. Before she could divine his purpose or check him, he had gone to the rear door, hastily opened it, and saying, "I will be back in a moment," passed out and closed it after him. She stood bewildered at the neatness with which he had baffled her, and alarmed for his safety. But he had promised to return at once, and she knew that he would if he could. To her great relief he soon came back, bearing some biscuits and a few tins of provisions. As he stepped within and locked the door he dropped a tin, and before she could go to his assistance he had fallen while trying to pick it up. She drew him to his feet, and was amazed to discover how much stronger she was than he, and yet she had thought herself very weak. She seated him upon the edge of the bed and began to remove his shoes.

"No, no!" he gasped; "you shall not do that."

But she kept on and succeeded, and laid him upon the bed and drew the covers over him.

"Now," she said, "tell me what to give you."

He did so, and it gave her infinite satisfaction to have him take the medicine from her hand. Soon his pain relaxed, and he fell into a heavy slumber.

While she watched him as might a mother her slumbering first-born, her soul warmed and expanded, and her one shy regret was that his head was not resting on her breast. But there were duties awaiting her. She took up the surplus ashes from the hearth. She revived the fire with the wood that he had heaped up at the chimney-side the night before. She put snow into a vessel to heat water. She stowed away his pallet. She prepared to make tea as soon as the water should be hot. In the performance of these and other minor tasks she was very happy, and for the first time since she had entered the hut she sang softly. The work was not easy, for she had little strength, being unused so long to exercise, and her lameness and the crutch interfered sorely.

One sting hurt unceasingly. She reflected that her host had decided to take to the bed under her persuasion, and that he had brought the provisions from the rear apartment so that she might prepare food during his helplessness; but this was because he had not trusted her to get the provisions herself,—had made it unnecessary for her to enter the forbidden chamber. As well as she could she tried to be generous; she tried to think that a man so kind, so thoughtful, so respectful, must have the best reasons for keeping her out of that room. If so, she had no right to expect his confidence. But why did he give her no explanation? Why should he not trust her to that extent? This was the sting that hurt.

In a vague way she believed that something ought to be put on his chest for the pain that he had suffered there.

She had an intense desire to do something for him. She thought that cloths saturated with liniment would be good for him. With great caution, to avoid waking him, she opened the garments covering his chest. He still slept heavily, for the medicine that he had taken carried a soporific element. When she had bared his breast and seen the frightful emaciation of his body, she quickly covered him, fell upon her face to the floor, and sobbed.

The day advanced, but still he slept. Her one hope now was that he would sleep into the night, for that would require her to sleep on the pallet before the hearth. She had another precious hope, and it was that they would at last eat a meal together; but she would rather that he slept; so, toward evening, she made a simple meal and ate her share alone, and kept his ready for him against his waking.

She marvelled that there was so much to do in so small a place, and that the day—the sweetest, she believed, of all the days of her life—had passed so quickly. At short intervals she would lean over him and listen to his short, half-checked breathing; or she would gently lay her cool hand upon his hot forehead, or hold one of his burning hands in hers, and then press it to her cheek. It seemed surpassingly wonderful that the strong man, strong in spirit only, should be lying now as helpless as an infant, wholly dependent upon her.

At times he was restless, and talked unintelligibly in his sleep; she was instantly at his side, to soothe him with her cool, soft hand upon his face; and when she saw that it always calmed him, she sighed from the sweet pain that filled her breast. Once, when he seemed on the verge of waking, she slipped her arm under his head, and gave him more of the medicine, which he took unresistingly, and slept again. As the night wore on, she made herself unhappy with trying to choose between sitting at his bedside and watching, and suffering the hardship that he had borne so long in sleeping on the pallet. While she was in the throes of this contention, another urgent matter arose. It had been her host's custom to bring in a supply of wood every night. That which he had brought the night before was now exhausted, and more was needed. How could she get it. She knew that he had locked the back door and put the key into a certain pocket. She knew that she could not get the wood without the key. Procuring a supply of fuel was one precaution that he had overlooked when he had brought in a supply of provisions.

He was in a profound slumber. She could get the key, and thus provide the wood for the night. But would it be right to do so? If the fire went out the cold would be intense, and might prove fatal to him. If she should enter the forbidden room, would that be taking an unfair advantage of his helplessness? It was a hard problem, but in the end her sense of duty outweighed her sense of delicacy. With the greatest caution she slipped her hand into his pocket and secured the key. With equal caution she went to the door and unlocked it.

Then a great fear assailed her. What lay beyond the door? Might it not be some danger that only her host could safely face? If so, what could it be?... It were wise to have a candle; but search failed to discover one. She secured a small torch from the fire, and cautiously opened the door.

To her surprise, no chamber was revealed, but merely a walled and roofed passage closed at the farther end with a door. Piled within it was a store of wood; there was nothing else. It was very awkward for the

young woman to carry the crutch, the torch, and the wood all at once; it was necessary to relinquish the torch. She carried it back to the fireplace, and went again to the passage, piled some wood in her free arm, and started back. As she did so she saw her host sitting up and staring at her in horror. This so frightened her that she dropped the wood, screamed, and fell fainting to the floor.

When she became conscious she found herself on the bed and her host watching beside her. There was the old look of command in his face, the old veil that hung between her and his confidence; and thus her glorious day had come to an inglorious end, and her spirit was nearly crushed. Her host had recovered in a measure,—sufficiently for him to resume the command of his house. No questions were asked, no explanations were given. He thanked her gratefully for her kindness to him, and thus her brief happiness came to an end. The old round of labor, of waiting, of hoping, of suffering, of imprisonment, was taken up again.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

A FEW days afterward they were sitting before the fire in silence. It had become habitual with the young woman to study every look and movement of her host; to anticipate him in the discharge of the household duties; to provide for him every little comfort that the meagre resources of the hut afforded; and to observe with a strange pleasure the steady breaking down of his will and courage. She realized that his recent attack, though so quickly overcome, was a warning of his approaching complete collapse; and she believed that only when that should happen could she hope with sympathy and careful nursing to save him. She welcomed the moroseness that was stealing over him, his growing failure to study her every want, and his occasional lapses into a petulant bearing toward her. It gratified her to see him gradually loosen the iron mask that he had worn so long. Most significant of all his symptoms were hallucinations that began to visit him. At times he would start up in violent alarm and whisper, "Did you hear the howling of the wolves?" At others he would start in alarm to resist an imaginary attack upon the rear door. A touch of her hand, a gentle, firm word, would instantly calm him, and then he would look foolish and ashamed.

On this day, as they sat before the fire, matters took a new and strange turn. He suddenly said,—
"Listen!"

She was so deeply absorbed in watching him and so expectant of erratic conduct from him that she gave no thought to the possibility of danger from an external source. For dreary months she had waited in this small prison, and no longer gave heed to any tumult without. The young man had been lounging in hopeless languor, but now he sat upright, every nerve, muscle, and faculty under extraordinary tension.

"It is coming!" he cried. "I have been expecting it every day. Come—quick, for God's sake!"

Saying that, he seized her by the arm, and with furious eagerness and surprising strength dragged her to the rear door, giving her little time to seize her crutch. He unlocked the door and threw it open, but before he could open the door at the further end of the passage she heard a heavy roar and felt the great mountain tremble. Wholly ignorant of the meaning of it all, but seeing that her host was moved by an intelligent purpose, and feeling profound confidence and comfort in the protection that he was throwing about her, she placed herself completely under his guidance.

The rear door was opened, and they entered a dark, cold chamber. With every moment the roaring increased and the trembling of the mountain was augmented. Then came a tremendous, stupefying crash, and the cataclysm gradually died away in silence, leaving an impenetrable, oppressive blackness.

The two prisoners stood in breathless silence, held tightly in each other's arms. The young woman asked no questions; her sense of security and comfort in this man's arms filled the whole want of her hour. She felt vaguely that something more dreadful than all their past misfortunes had befallen them; but that feeling brought no chill to the strong warm blood that swept rhythmically through her heart. She was at peace with her fate. If this was death, it was death for them both, it was death with him.

Her keen sympathy made her intensely attentive to every sign that he gave; and thus it was that she accepted, without surprise or dismay, the realization that he was not rallying, and that, on the contrary, he was sinking under the nameless blow that had fallen upon them. It was not anxiety for that, but for him, that now gave her every conscious quality a redoubled alertness. His grasp upon her tightened, and by this she knew that he felt the need of her, and was clinging to her. He trembled in every member, and swayed as he stood. With little effort she bore him to the ground, where, kneeling beside him and holding his hands, she softly spoke,—

"My friend, we are together; and so long as each is the stay of the other, we shall have strength and courage for all things. Now tell me what I may do for you." She knew by the pressure of his hand upon hers that her words had found good ground. She gently pressed her advantage. "Tell me what I may do for you. You are weak. You know how strong and healthy and willing I am; then, imagine how much pleasure it would give me to help you! You need a stimulant. Is there one in the cabin? Tell me where it is, and I will bring it."

"You are kind," he said, tremulously.

"But do you know what has happened?" As he asked this question he rose to a sitting posture, she assisting him.

"No," she calmly answered; "but no matter what has happened, we are together, and thus we have strength and courage for it."

"Ah," he said, hopelessly, "but this is the end! An avalanche has buried us and the cabin is destroyed!"

Terrible as was this declaration, it had no weakening effect upon his companion.

"Is that all?" she cheerily asked. "But avalanches melt away, and we have each other. And if it come to the very worst, we shall still have each other. Besides each other, we have life, and with life there is always hope, there is always the duty to hope. If we abandon hope, life itself is abandoned."

This worked like good wine in his veins; but she knew by the way in which he still clung to her, seemingly fearful that she would leave him for a moment, that a dreadful unknown thing sat upon him. She waited patiently for him to disclose it. She knew that the shock of the catastrophe had wholly cleared his mind, and that the old terrors which he had concealed from her were working upon him with renewed activity. Still he kept silence.

"Do you know," she presently said, "that I am glad the avalanche has come? I understand now the dread of some terrible happening that has been haunting you. Well, it has come, and we are still alive; and better than that, we have each other. Think how much more dreadful it might have been! Suppose that it had come while you were outside, and swept you away. Suppose that it had crushed us in the cabin. But here we are, safe and sound, and happy each in the presence of the other.... And I am thinking of something else. The snow stopped falling long ago. Lately we have had warm winds and some rain. This must mean, my friend, that the worst is over. And doesn't it mean that the rain has softened the snow and loosened it to make this avalanche?"

A sudden strength, a surprised gladness, were in the pressure that he now gave her hand.

"It is true, it is true!" he softly exclaimed.

"Then," she continued, "the winter has dealt its last blow, and our liberation is at hand; for the rains that caused the avalanche will melt the snow that it has piled upon us, and also the snow that has closed the roads. It seems to me that the best of all possible things has happened."

"I hadn't thought of that!" he exclaimed, with a childish eagerness that made her heart glow.

"Besides," she continued, "how do you know that the cabin is destroyed? Let us go and see."

Her gentle strength and courage, the seeming soundness of her reasoning, and her determination not to take a gloomy view of their state, roused him without making him aware of his weakness. Her suggestion that the cabin possibly had not been destroyed was a spur to his dulled and stunned perception.

"That is true," he cheerfully said; "let us go and see."

Still clinging closely to each other, they groped in the darkness for the door.

"You have matches, haven't you?" she inquired.

"Yes," he answered, in confusion; "but we can find the door without a light."

That was not so easy. For the first time, now that the terrors of the moment had passed, the young woman was nursing a happiness that she had not known during all the dreary weeks of their imprisonment,—except once, in his illness, when it had been of so short duration.

Feeling thus content, she suddenly reflected that she was at last in the forbidden apartment, where she believed some fearful mystery was kept concealed from her. Their voices had been long smothered in the cramped hut. The contrast that she now found was startling; yet her thoughts might not have reverted to the fact that she was at last in the presence of the mystery had not Wilder's embarrassed refusal to make a light rekindled her interest. The first thing in that direction that she noticed was the singular resonance of their voices, as though they were in a place of a size just short of the echoing power. More than that, it was cold, though not nearly so cold as the outer air; and she heard the musical tinkle of dripping and running water.

Wilder had evidently lost all idea of direction. In clinging to his companion as he groped, he took great care to guard her against stumbling and collision. His free hand (the other arm was about her waist) was extended. With great difficulty, increased by his eagerness, he finally found his bearings and advanced to the door. Slowly and cautiously they pushed on through the passage, and then, to their great relief, into the hut itself. This they found intact, but smoky and entirely dark,—the avalanche had smothered the chimney and shut out the light from the window. With matches they discovered that the window had not been broken and that the outer wall of the house held none of the pressure of the snow. In his peculiar fashion, however, Wilder began to foresee troubles.

"The pressure of the mass above," he said, "will compress the snow below, and thus give our window, and perhaps the outer wall of the cabin itself, a pressure that they can't bear. The hut is buried. We can have no more fires. The worst of all is that, having no air, we must suffocate in time."

"Is all that necessary, my friend?" his companion asked. "We can at least try to clear away the snow and thus remove all those difficulties; and there is a chance—and a good one, don't you think?—for the snow to melt quickly. Besides all that, we have not yet tried to dig out through the snow."

"True, true, every word of it!" he cried, delightedly. "What a clear, strong mind you have!"

This was the first compliment that he had ever paid her, and its obvious sincerity gave it a precious value.

It was she that now led the attack upon their prison of snow. What infinite satisfaction and pride it gave her to know that at last she was the guiding spirit of the hut; with what firm but gentle tact she overcame, one by one, his objections to her worrying or working; how she watched his every movement, hung upon his every word, relieved him as much as possible of the stress that burdened him, and ministered to his comfort in all ways; with what blithe songs in her heart and cheery words on her lips she lightened the toil of that dreadful time, need only be mentioned here. But it was she that led, that inspired, that achieved, and he knew it. This was the blessed light that shone for her through it all.

A search revealed loose and easily removed snow at one end of the hut, against the face of the cliff. His work in the lead, digging and tunnelling, hers in the rear, removing the snow and keeping courage in his heart, brought them presently to the outer air. Then, for the first time, they beheld the glorious sunshine, and like children they shouted in glee to see it. Both walls of the canon were still heavily covered with snow, but numerous small slides had broken it, and the rain had softened and ploughed it. Evidently it was rapidly melting.

Another scene held them as they stood hand in hand looking down into the canon. The great avalanche that

had overwhelmed them had been arrested in the bottom of the canon, and had made a large lake by damming the river. Rapidly the lake grew in size and backed up the canon. Soon at any moment the growing mass of water must break through its dam, and that would be a spectacle to behold.

They could not wait for that. With incredible labor—he no longer protesting against her full share in the work, and she heedless of her lameness and of its serious hindrance to her efforts—they together, hand in hand, clambered over the snow until they stood above the hut, and cheerily began to dig it free,—a task seemingly so far beyond their powers that something wonderful must have sustained them in assailing it. Thus they were working in the afternoon sunshine, for the first time boon companions, and as happy and light-hearted as children, when an exclamation from Wilder drew her attention to the dam. It was giving way under the pressure of water. Instantly she recognized a danger that he had overlooked.

“Back to the cliff!” she cried, seizing his hand and dragging him away, “or we’ll go down with the snow.”

They reached their tunnel and the cabin in good time; but soon afterward the dam broke, and the swirling, thundering mass of water bore it down the canon. This removed the support of the snow backed up between the river and the top of the cliff, and it went plunging down into the water, leaving the top of the hut exposed, and solving the problem of the prison of snow.

CHAPTER TWELVE

ONCE again from the lady’s journal:

“It is impossible for me to describe the hope, peace, and comradeship that have transformed this place into a little nest, where it had been so terrible a prison before. The sunshine outside continues, and I know that it is but a matter of days when my father will come. It seems unaccountable to me that anything in the world could have stayed him so long; but Dr. Mal-bone assures me that the roads and mountains are still utterly impassable; that the roads, besides being strewn with fallen trees, are in places washed away, and that our one means of escape will be afoot, on our own account. We are now talking it over all the time, and are ready to start at the first favorable moment. My leg is nearly well; only a slight pain after severe exertion, and a most embarrassing weakness there, are the trouble now. But he is putting me through excellent treatment and training to overcome all that; and he has given me the joyous promise that we shall make the start in a week from to-day.

“And now I must write of some other wonderful things that have happened. The change that has come in our mutual bearing and understanding is so incredible that I hardly dare put it down here, lest it prove a dream. I made a vow some time ago in this journal that I would make this man need me and want me. That victory is won. And I know that in winning it over him I have won it over myself. O God, how blind, how stupidly, sordidly blind, I have been all these years! In the depths of my wretched selfishness, in the dark caverns of my meanness, I had never dreamed of the real human heart throbbing and aching and hoping all about me; it has taken this strange man to drag me forth into the light. And not at all willingly or consciously has he done so. There is a sting in that. At times I hate him still when I think of it all. It was the silent, intangible, undirected force radiating from him that has wrought the change. I feel no humiliation in saying this. I say it and know it in spite of the great distance that separates us,—the social barriers that mean so little and do so much. It will remain with me forever, whatever happen, to have known a man; to have known him in his strength and weakness, in his splendid unselfishness and childish reliance; in his simplicity and complexity; in his singleness of purpose and variety of attributes; in his gentleness and ferocity, and, above all, in his wonderful sense of duty. But I wish he were moved by something besides duty.

“There is another thing I must write, and I write it with a consciousness of burning cheeks. At times I find him—rather, I feel him—looking at me with a certain gentleness when I am not observing. What does that mean? Have I learned men so badly that I can mistake its meaning? The most convenient woman will do for the man who may prefer another but inaccessible one. Until we came closer together since the avalanche passed and the sunshine came, I was not a woman to him. No; I was a Duty. But there has now come into his voice and his glance a new quality,—stay! Remember that the weakness of women is their vanity. Could there happen so wonderful a thing as this man’s regard for me of the kind that a woman wants from the man whom she worships? If so, is he too proud, too reserved, too conscious of his present obligation of duty and protection, to make it known? Does he still fear me? Does he still hold in his heart the frightful denunciation that he hurled at me? Does he still loathe me as a murderess? Is my wealth a barrier? Does he lack the courage to dare what every man must dare in order to secure the woman he loves?

“Loves? Why did I write that word? By what authority or right? And yet, of all the words that the sunshine of the soul has placed upon the tongue, that is the sweetest....

“Distressing things have happened since I wrote the foregoing. For a time the stimulation of sunshine and hope, the sure prospect of *my* release from this prison, worked miracles with his strength, both of body and mind; but three days ago he grew silent and moody, then restless and anxious; by night he was down with a fever, the cause of which I cannot understand. When I see his fleshless chest and arms, I wonder if he has some malady that is killing him, and that he has concealed from me. His drawn face, with the skin tight to breaking on his cheek-bones, and his extreme emaciation, look like consumption; but he has no other symptoms, and he declares that he is perfectly sound. Is my presence so distressing that it alone is killing him? If so, it is murder for me to stay longer. If I only knew!

“Why does he conceal anything from me? What could he have to conceal that it is not right for me to know? And yet I know that the act of concealment could not thus be killing him,—it is the thing he is concealing that

has the terror. It would be infinitely better for us both if he let me share it, and, as I am so much stronger than he, I could bear it so much better; the sharing of it would lighten his burden, and my sympathy would give him strength. Why cannot he see all this, when it is so clear to me? I must be patient, patient, patient! That is my watchword now.

"As in the former case, when he was taken ill, so now he prepared for his illness by bringing in a small, but this time utterly inadequate, supply of provisions. Not in a single instance, down to this last attack, has he consented to eat with me; he has always retreated through the rear door and eaten alone. It is now getting hard for me to bear this singular tyranny about the food. He eats with me now, because, being helpless in bed, he cannot avoid it; but he eats so little! It is impossible for him to gain strength in this way, and I am distressed beyond expression. He simply declares that he cannot eat. Singularly enough, he is always urging me of late to eat little, else I shall bring on a long list of disorders that will prevent our escape. For that matter, there is so little left of the store that he brought from the rear that I am uneasy lest the supply be exhausted and he remain stubbornly to his purpose not to trust me to get more from the place behind the rear door. What will be the end of this dreadful situation?

"It seems an odd inconsistency in his nature that this subject of eating should consume so much of his wandering thoughts. In his delirium he paints gorgeous pictures of feasts. He marvels at the splendor of Nero's banquets, and declares that the people with so much to eat must have been fat and content! I hate to put this down, for it seems treasonable to betray this touch of grossness in a nature so singularly fine. If he thinks so much of eating, why should he be urging me to eat sparingly of the rude things that his larder might afford, and that cost me so much effort to eat with a good grace? It is strange how many unexpected things we learn of others in intimate association!...

"In glancing over these last pages I see how wretchedly I have failed to give the least insight into our life and relations. How could I ever have had the heart to see, much more put in writing, the slightest flaw in so noble a character? It would seem that the sympathy born of this new relation between us ought to touch only the best in my nature. Shame, shame, shame on me! Do I not see his haunting glance follow me everywhere, and resting upon me always with inexpressible gratitude?

"He is almost completely dependent upon me now. I nurse him as I would a child. It would be utterly inadequate to say that this fills me with happiness as being a return of some of the kindness that he has shown me. No, there is something besides that. The gratitude in my heart is great,—greater than I had thought so small and mean a heart could have. I am glad that I have it. But the joy of it all is the doing for this man, without regard to gratitude. To do for him; to nurse him; to cheer him; to feel that he needs me and wants me,—that is my heaven. And although a dreadful fear haunts me that he is dying,—that in some way that I cannot understand I am killing him,—that if he should die my life would be empty and dark,—still, it would be infinitely sweet to have him die in my arms, still needing me, still wanting me. Now that I have written that,—how could I have written it?—I will write more in all shamelessness. I want him to say that he needs me and wants me,—that he needs me and wants me to the end of his life.

"As I have written that much, I will write the rest, else my heart will burst. I love this man. I love him with all my heart, all my soul. I love him for everything that he is, not for anything that he has done. He is the one man whom the great God in His cruel wisdom and merciless providence has sent into my life for me to love. And with my tears wetting these pages, and my soul breathing prayers for his recovery, and his delivery to me, I pledge and consecrate myself to him to the end of my days, whatever may come. With every good impulse within me I will strive to be worthy of so great a heart, so noble a love. I will try to win his love by deserving it....

"An unexpected change for the better has come. Our supply of food had fallen so low that I had about determined to take matters into my own hands, enter the forbidden chamber, and get more provisions, when another idea occurred to me. It was absolutely necessary that we have more food. More important than that was the evident fact that he would die for the need of it if it were not forthcoming. I feared the disturbing effect of my going into the forbidden chamber, and so decided to make a thorough search of the cabin first. Knowing his inexplicable peculiarity on the subject of our food, I suspected that at some time in his mental wandering he may have concealed some in the cabin. So this morning before daylight, while he slept,—his sleeping is incredibly light,—I cautiously made a search of the cabin, and happily found a few nourishing things in the bottom of a box, where he had either concealed them or left them forgotten. These I prepared for him in a most tempting manner. I arranged my own dishes in a way to make him think I had eaten abundantly myself, and told him so when he awoke and refused to eat, urging me to eat what I had prepared for him.

"When I had convinced him that I had eaten all I could, he took a little, gingerly, from my hand. I had laid my plans well. As I fed him I talked incessantly, telling him a story that I knew would interest him. Before he realized what he was doing—his mind was not as alert as it normally is—he had eaten somewhat generously. The effect was magical. Color came to his cheeks and the quiet old sparkle to his eyes. Before long, to my great surprise and delight, he was up, and then went out to note the prospect for our leaving. He came back with a radiant face and buoyant manner, and said,—

"My friend, we will start at sunrise to-morrow.'

"My heart gave a great bound. It was a simple matter to make our preparations, as it was necessary that we travel as light as possible. It is time that we were leaving, for the last of the food that he brought from the rear is exhausted....

"The morning has come. And now we are about to turn our backs upon this strange place of suffering and mystery, its suffering endured, its mystery unsolved. And without shame do I say that I would rather walk out thus, and face the perils that lie ahead, with this man as my guide, my protector, my friend, than go forth in all the stateliness and triumph that wealth could afford.

"Farewell, dear, dear little home, my refuge, my cradle, my hope. I will come back, and—"

"He is calling me at the door. I must kiss this table, these chairs, that bed, the walls. But it is with Him that I go." Thus closed the lady's journal.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

THE two started bravely in the fine morning sunshine. There were long and laborious miles ahead, and only a short day in which to overcome them and their difficulties. In his heart the young man believed that it would be impossible for them to complete the task that day, and he dreaded the shelterless night that would overtake them. But should he break down, the day's work would have hardened his companion for the rest of the journey alone. There was a chance that they would find help on the way, for surely efforts would be making to clear the roads. The snow had disappeared from all exposed places.

They descended the shaly, slippery trail to the road, and here he was gratified to see that the avalanche had cleared away the fallen tree and the wreck of the wagon. He led the way up the canon, for in that direction were the nearest houses.

He found the road even worse than he had expected. Being a narrow way, cut into the steep slope of the canon, to leave it in rounding fallen trees and breaches left by the storm was a slow and laborious task, and time was precious for a number of reasons. Each had a load to bear,—he some covering against the night, and she some articles of her own. These soon became very burdensome to both.

On they plodded. While a heaviness appeared in his manner, her bearing was cheerful and spirited. A sadness that he made no effort to conceal and that she bravely hid oppressed them both. To find him sad was sufficient to tinge her sadness with happiness. They rested at short intervals, for the exertion soon began to tell upon them, but upon him the more. They slaked their thirst from the river. To the woman it seemed a spring-time stroll through flowering fields, softened by the sweet sadness of May. To him it was a task that brought them step by step nearer to the end, where he must deal her the crudest blow of her life. For at the end she expected news of her father. She would hear it, and from the one who would have been the most glad to spare her. But she must not know yet. All her strength was needed for the task before her. It is time to break hearts when their breaking can be no longer deferred.

He had been trudging ahead. He must have suspected that she observed the labor with which he walked, the uncontrollable tendency of his knees to give way, the reeling that now would send him against the bank, and then upon the outer edge of the grade; for presently he asked her to walk ahead. She complied.

Their slow and laborious work presently made it impossible for them to talk. They went on in silence. After they had proceeded thus for some hours, a thing occurred that struck dismay to her soul. Her companion suddenly became voluble. At first he was coherent, although he talked about matters to which she was a total stranger. This showed an alarming unconsciousness of her presence. As he talked, he became more and more incoherent, and at times laughed inanely. Presently, with awe in his voice, he said,—

"She was the woman I loved. She's dead, boys, she's dead; and by God! they killed her."

Her spirit sank. After all that she had hoped and yearned for, there now had come back the most terrible of the ghosts of the bitter past. After all the seeming bridging of the chasm that had separated them, it opened now all the wider and deeper and darker.

"Do you know what a murderer is?" he exclaimed in a loud voice, as he swung his arm threateningly aloft. "A she-wolf, the slyest and most dangerous of beasts. She comes whining and fawning; she licks your hand; she wins your trust. And then, when you have warmed her, and patched her torn skin, and mended her broken bones, she turns upon you and tears out your heart with her fangs."

Stifling, faint, barely able to stand, the young woman stood aside, and he passed her without seeing her.

"Yes," he resumed in great excitement, "I must be a man,—always a man. What! kill a woman? No, no, no! Not that. That would be terrible, brutal, cowardly. Yes, I must be a man. She needs me; I will help her. Is that door locked? She must never know—never know so long as she lives. Ah, that is beautiful, wonderful, savory,—a feast for gods and angels! Yes, I will do my duty. She needs me. She despises me. Very good; I will do my duty. She scorns my poor food—secretly, but I know! She is getting well. Thank God for that! She shall eat all she can. Me? No, no. I don't want anything. No; I don't want a thing. I have no appetite!"

He burst into laughter, and the echo of it came back from the opposite wall of the canon.

"Oh, my love, my love!" he cried, suddenly becoming sad, "how could you cast me off, when all had been so true and trusting between us? But I know it was better so. It was not right for me to stand in the way." He paused, and his voice sank into an awed whisper as he said, "She's dead, boys, she's dead; and by God! they killed her."

He pushed rapidly on, muttering things that she could not hear, that she did not want to hear. Not a word of kindness for her had come from him in his delirium, and her heart was breaking.

"When it is all over," he said aloud, "I will go to my old friend, and he will nurse me back to health and strength, and I will begin the fight again. I will be a man—always a man. I will do my duty. And the she-wolf—no, no, no! She will not tear out my heart with her claws and fangs. No! There is no she-wolf! I say, there is no she-wolf. No! She is kind to me. I know it, I know it! She is gentle and thoughtful and unselfish. She is very, very beautiful. She won't leave me, will she? She won't leave me alone! But she is unmaning me! I must not let her do that! I must be a man and do my duty. No, you must not take off my shoes. I can do that. I have no pain—none whatever. Yes, I will be calm. Your voice is sweet; it is music; it fills me with peace and comfort; and your hand on my face—how soft and pleasant it is! I wish I could tell you; but no, I must do my duty; I must be a man! I will not listen to your voice. I will not let you touch me. That would keep me from my duty."

These words raised her from despair to bliss. And so he had fought his inclinations,—he needed her, he wanted her!

Still he kept on. She strained every hearing faculty for his slightest word. For what he had already said, she could bear his forgetting her presence. Still they pushed on, he muttering and laughing; but for all his madness, he was wise and cautious amid the dangers and hardships of the road. No longer did he advise her, guide her, assist her, and show her the innumerable unobtrusive attentions to which she had become accustomed.

At last he suddenly stopped in a stretch of good road and looked about, bewildered.

"Where is this?" he whispered; then aloud, "Oh, it is the trail of the wolves! After them will come the she-wolf, and her fangs—" He dropped his parcel and clutched his breast. "Her fangs!" he gasped. He looked about and picked up a stick, which he swung as a club about him. "The she-wolf is here!" he cried.

His glance fell upon his companion, standing in awe and pity and love before him. Instantly a fearful malignity hardened his face, and his eyes blazed with the murder that had filled them once before. He clutched the stick more fiercely, and glared at her with a mixture of terror and ferocity. But she stood firm, and gently said,—

"My friend!"

His face instantly softened. She stood smiling, her glance caressing, her whole bearing bespeaking sympathy and affection.

"My dear friend," she said, in a voice whose sweetness sank deep within him, "you know me!"

A look of joyous recognition swept over his face.

"I am so glad!" he breathlessly said. "I thought you had left me alone!"

Saying this, he sank to the ground, smiling upon her as he fell.

She knelt beside him, placed a soothing hand upon his cheek, and spoke comforting words. His face showed the profound gratification that filled him, and her soul spread its wings in the sunshine that filled the day with its glories.

He lay limp and helpless, but she knew that he must be going forward if he could. She caressed him, she coaxed him, she raised him to a sitting posture, she put her arms under his and lifted him to his feet; but his breathing was short and distressed, his head rolled listlessly, and his legs refused their offices. Then she realized that the last remnant of his strength, both of body and spirit, was gone; and her heart sank to the uttermost depths.

"Lay me down," he said, very gently, but clearly, and with perfect resignation. "Lay me down, my friend, and go on alone. I am very tired, and must sleep. Keep to the road. I don't think it is far to the nearest house. You are sure to find some one. Be brave and keep on."

She laid him down and turned away. A cruel choking had throttled her power of speech. With tears so streaming from her eyes that she went about her purpose half blind, she found a drier place in the road, gathered pine-needles less soaked than the rest, made a bed for him there, and spread upon it the blankets that he had been carrying. When she looked again into his face he was sleeping lightly, and his breathing betrayed great physical distress. As gently as a mother lifting her sleeping babe, she took him up in her arms, bore him to the bed, and with infinite care and tenderness laid him upon it. Then with some twigs and handkerchiefs she fashioned a canopy that shielded his head from the sun. She covered him with a free part of the blanket; but fearing that it would prove insufficient, she removed her outer skirt and covered him with that; these covers she tucked about him, that he might not easily throw them off.

He had not been roused by these attentions. She knelt beside him and gently kissed his hands, his cheeks, his forehead, his lips, and wiped away her streaming tears as they fell upon his face. He moved slightly, opened his eyes, looked into her face, and smiled. Very feebly he took her hand, brought it to his lips, kissed it, smiled again, closed his eyes, and with a sigh of weariness fell asleep. She knelt thus and watched him for a little while, seeing him sink deeper and deeper into slumber. Then she rose. And now may the great God give heart and strength for the mighty task ahead!

Not trusting herself to look back upon him, she gathered up her courage and started. On she went, her head high, her eyes aflame, her cheeks aglow. A suffocating, heart-aching loneliness haunted her, dogged her, gnawed at her spirit. More than once she wavered, weak and trembling, under the backward strain upon her heart-strings. More than once she cried aloud, "I can't leave him! I can't leave him! I must go back!" And then she would summon all her strength again, and cry, "It is for his sake that I go! It is to save him that I leave him!"

Thus, rended by contending agonies, she went on and on. With incredible self-torturings she pictured the dangers to which she had left him exposed. What had he meant by the wolves? Was there really danger from that source? Often in his sleep in the hut, and again when his mind would wander, he had spoken of the wolves, and always in terror; but most dreadful of all things to him was the she-wolf. Yet during all the time that she had been imprisoned with him in the hut there had not been the least sign of a wolf, not the most distant howl of one. Why had this hallucination been so persistent with him, so terrifying to him?

The miles seemed interminable. She kept her eyes and ears strained for signs and sounds of human life. At intervals she would call aloud with all her might, and after hearing the echo of her voice die away in the canon, wait breathlessly for a response that never came. With eager haste she pushed on. Clambering over fallen trees, heading gullies that she could not leap, wading swift rivulets with which the rapidly melting snow was still ploughing the road, she came at length within view of some men who were clearing the road with axes and mending it with shovels,—the rough, strong, silent, capable men of the mountains. She frantically waved her handkerchief and called as she went. They stopped their work and stood gazing at her in wondering silence. They saw that she was not of their kind; but their trained sensibilities informed them that the great mountains had been working their terrible will upon human helplessness, and they stood ready to put the strength of their arms and hearts into the human struggle.

Imperfectly clad as she was, her form and bearing suggesting a princess, her beauty, enhanced by her joy

at finding help, radiant and dazzling, their wonder and shyness held them stolid and outwardly unresponsive, and they silently waited for her to speak. She went straight to them, and, looking at them one after another as she spoke, she said,—

“Will you help me, men? I left a man exhausted in the road some miles down the canon. I fear he is dying. Will you go with me and help me bring him up? Is there a doctor anywhere near? Is there a house to which we may take him?”

There was a moment of silence,—these men are slow, but all the surer for that.

One of them, a bearded, commanding man of middle age, said,—

“Yes, we will go and bring him up. A doctor lives up the canon. Maybe he’s at home. The man can’t walk?”

“No; he is lying helpless in the road.” The strong man, whom she afterward heard the others call Samson,—one of those singular coincidences of name and character,—turned and picked out two men.

“You two,” he said, as quietly as though he were directing the road-work, “cut two poles and make a litter with them and a blanket. Go and bring the man up. You,” he said to a third, “help them make the litter, and give a hand on the trip.” Two others he directed to prepare the wagon, which stood a short distance up the road. Another he sent up the road to summon the doctor. Then he turned his attention to the young woman. Without consulting her, he made a comfortable nest of greatcoats and blankets, and when he had so deftly and quickly finished it, he said to her,—

“Come and rest here.”

“No!” she vehemently protested; “I am going back with the men.”

“You are not going back with the men. If you did, there would be two for them to bring up instead of one. One is enough. Make yourself comfortable here; you are safe.”

The slight rebuke in this, and the quiet determination with which the man spoke, informed her that she must lay a reasoning hand upon her agonizing fear and impatience. She obeyed him with as good a grace as she could find.

Again without consulting her, he brought some hot coffee, poured it into a tin-cup, and held it out to her.

“Drink that,” he said.

She drank it. He then produced some bread, which he sliced and buttered.

“Eat that,” he said.

She obeyed. While doing so she watched the men make the litter, and marvelled at the skill with which they worked, and the quickness with which the task was done, seemingly without the slightest effort or hurry. Then in silence the three men swung down the road.

The man named Samson, although he had not appeared to be giving any attention to his fair guest, was in front of her the moment she had finished the bread and butter. He carried some things in his arms, and threw them down at her feet.

“Take off your shoes and stockings,” he said, “and put on these socks; they are thick and warm. Take off all your other things that are wet, and wrap yourself up in these blankets. By the time the litter comes your things will be dry in the sun.”

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

THE three remaining men turned to their work of clearing the road, headed by Samson. He had not asked her any questions; he did not even look again her way; but presently he brought her clothes, which he had spread and dried in the sunshine, and told her that by the time she was dressed the litter would be there. This she found to be so.

Coming down the road, on a powerful horse, she saw a bearded, ruddy-faced, stocky, middle-aged man, whose business she easily guessed from the country-doctor’s saddle-bags slung across his horse. The doctor rode up and greeted,—

“Hello, Samson! Man hurt?”

“Don’t know,” answered the foreman.

Then, with a jerk of his thumb toward his guest, he added, “She can tell you.”

The doctor had not seen her. He looked around, gazed at her a moment in astonishment, and then, with a fine courtesy singularly different from the hearty roughness with which he had greeted the man, he raised his hat.

This diversion had kept the attention of the two from the quiet arrival of the men with the litter. When the young woman saw it, she forgot the presence of all save him lying so quiet where the men had placed him on a bed made by Samson from coats. She ran and knelt beside him; she kissed his cheeks; she chafed his hands; she begged him to speak, to live for her sake.

The strong hand of the doctor lifted her from the unconscious man and gently put her aside. A moment’s astonished gaze into the pallid, upturned face brought this burst from the doctor,—

“Adrian Wilder—dying!” He turned anxiously upon the young woman, and demanded, “Where did you find him? What is the matter here?”

“You mistake,” she firmly said. “He is Dr. Malbone.”

"Dr. Malbone!" he exclaimed. "Why, I am Dr. Malbone. This man is my friend, Adrian Wilder!"

His look was half fierce and full of suspicion.

Too surprised to comprehend at once the full meaning of his declaration, she stood staring at the physician in silence. That gentleman, turning from her, dropped on his knees and made a hurried examination of the unconscious man. "I don't understand this," he said to himself. He quickly opened Wilder's shirt. Upon seeing the emaciation there, and exclaiming in amazement and horror, he turned again upon the young woman as he knelt, and demanded,—

"Explain this to me. Be quick, for every moment is precious. I don't want to make a mistake, and I must know. He has pneumonia; but there is something behind it. Where and when did you find him?"

In a few words she told the salient facts of the story as she believed it,—the running away of the horses, the breaking of her leg, her father's departure to fetch relief, her care at the stone hut.

"When did this accident happen to you?" the doctor asked.

"Four months ago."

"And you two have lived alone at his cabin?"

"Yes."

He glanced her over, and looked more puzzled than ever.

"You are looking hearty," he said; "how is it that my friend is in this condition?"

"It must have been his care of me and his worry on my account."

This appeared half to satisfy Dr. Malbone.

"Yes," he said, "not being a doctor, and being extremely susceptible to the pressure of his duty toward you, he may have worn himself out."

With that he hastily gave the young man a stimulant, and said,—

"Fall to here, men, and help me revive him, else he will be dead before we know it. Chafe his wrists and ankles. Hurry, men, but be gentle. That is good. Slow, there, John; those horny hands of yours are strong and rough. Samson, bring some strong coffee as quickly as God will let you. Rub him under the blankets, men; don't let him chill. Maybe we can get him out of this pinch. The great thing now is to take him to my house.... Ah, that is good work, lads! His heart is waking up a little. That is good. That is very good."

Dr. Malbone straightened up, and turned to the young woman, again fastening upon her the strange, severe, suspicious, half-threatening look that she had already learned to dread.

"I fear there is something unexplained here, madam, something concealed. I am not accusing you. My friend is a strange, fine man, and for good reasons he may have withheld something from you. But he would never hide anything from me. Did he give you a letter for any one?"

"He did not."

"Have you seen him writing?"

"No."

"Martin, hand me his coat."

Dr. Malbone searched the pockets, and found a sealed letter addressed to him. He tore it open and read. As he read his astonishment grew. When he had finished, he turned a strange, pitying look upon the young woman.

"He charges me to give you this when I shall have read it."

He handed her the letter, which she read. It ran thus:

"My dear Friend,—This is written to give Miss Andros some unhappy information that she ought to have at the earliest safe and proper moment, and as a precaution against my breaking down before that moment arrives. To have told her at first might have prevented her recovery. The proper moment to tell her will have arrived when she is in safe hands. I trust that they may be yours, and I know that you will show her every kindness that your generous soul can yield.

"It is this: Her father lost his life in the accident on the grade, by the falling of a tree upon him. His body rests under the earth in the farther end of the cave into which the rear door of my cabin opens. The grave is marked with a board giving his name. Nailed up in a box near the door are his personal effects.

"Give this letter to my afflicted friend. It will convey no hint of the profound sympathy that I feel, nor of what I suffer in thus raising my hand to deal her so cruel a blow.

"I can only crave her forgiveness for deceiving her both as to her father's death and my being a physician."

The eager hope, the anxiety, the absorption of her entire self in the stricken man at her feet, fled before the crushing whirlwind of grief that now overwhelmed her. The loss of her father was the loss of the anchor of her life, the loss of the one sure thing upon which her soul rested, in which she knew peace, security, sympathy, and strength. She spoke no word, but gazed far down the canon, a picture of complete desolation. Dr. Malbone stood beside her, looking down thoughtfully into the face of his friend. The men, relieved from their work of bringing back a faint glow of the flickering life on the ground, moved away silently, with the instinctive delicacy of their kind, knowing that they were facing a tragedy that they did not understand.

The letter fell from the young woman's hand as she still gazed in mute agony down the canon. A slight swaying of her form warned Dr. Malbone that his time for action had arrived.

"A noble life still is left to us," he quietly said, without looking up, and with a certain unsteadiness in his voice; "and it appeals to us for all that we have to give of help and strength and sympathy."

It was a timely word. Instantly she dragged herself out of the crushing tumult into which she had been plunged.

"Yes," she said, radiant with love and towering above the wreck that encompassed her, "the noblest of all lives is still left to us, and it shall have all that lies in us to give."

"Then," said Dr. Malbone, "time is very precious. Let us take him to my home at once."

The sun had set behind the western mountains, but it still tipped the snowy summit of Mount Shasta with a crimson glow.

"Put the horses through," said Dr. Malbone to the man who drove.

They made good speed up the grade, Dr. Malbone pondering in silence some problem that still sorely troubled him, the young woman sitting on the floor of the wagon and holding the hand of the unconscious man. Presently they arrived at Dr. Malbone's house, where his plain, homelike wife, a competent mountain woman, quickly had the patient comfortable in bed, while her husband went thoroughly into the treatment. His was a mercurial spirit, the opposite of the gentle soul now seemingly passing away under his hands.

"I can find absolutely nothing," he finally exclaimed, in despair, "except simple inanition as the probable cause and a complication of this attack, and I know that it is absurd. You must help me, madam. Tell me how you lived."

Numerous sharp questions were required before he finally came upon the trail of the truth. She had delayed saying that Wilder had not eaten with her, and that toward the last he was niggardly with the food, because she feared that it would sound like a reproach. The moment she mentioned it, Dr. Malbone was transfigured. He sprang back from the bedside and confronted her, menacing and formidable, as Wilder had confronted her on that terrible day when she told him the story of her breaking up the attachment between a musician and her friend, and the death of the girl from a broken heart. What had she done or said that should bring this second storm of a man's fury upon her?

"And you no doubt think," cried Dr. Malbone, "that you have learned from his letter the true reason for his keeping you out of the cave. In all this broad world is there any human being so besotted with selfishness as not to be able to burrow through its swinishness for the truth? Come and look at this." He dragged her to the bedside and showed her the body of his patient. "Is there under heaven," he continued, "a mental or a spiritual eye so blinded with brutal egotism, so drunk with self-interest, as not to read the story that this poor withered frame writes large? Do you not understand that in those acts—over which you no doubt whined and complained in your empty heart—he gave evidence of a sublime sacrifice for you? Look at your own abundant flesh. You never went hungry in the hut. You never asked yourself if he might have food sufficient for two during the long winter. And now you see that he has denied himself for your comfort. He is dying of starvation, because in his splendid unselfishness he wanted you to be comfortable."

Dr. Malbone paused, but his eyes were still blazing upon her, and his body trembled with the passion that stirred him.

"One affliction has fallen upon you; may you have strength and grace to bear it; but I say this: If ten thousand such afflictions had overtaken you, the suffering from them would not be adequate——"

He suddenly checked himself, and gave his wife hurried instructions for the preparation of some nutriment. While this was preparing, he resorted to such vigorous measures as the urgency of the case demanded. All this quickly brought him under self-control, and he worked with the sure hand of a skilful man battling with all his might in a desperate emergency. The young woman had sunk into a chair, where she sat dazed, weak, ill, and ignored, not daring to offer help, and praying dumbly for the opening of a vast gulf to entomb her.

The patient rallied under the physician's treatment. Slowly, but with palpable effect, Dr. Malbone dragged him a little way from the brink of death. The doctor's coat was off, but sweat streamed down his face. His wife—silent, intelligent, and alert—gave him all the help that he required, and neither of them looked toward the suffering woman sitting crushed and miserable in the chair. Thus the time passed until the intense anxiety in the physician's face began to relax; and at last, with a sigh, he sank wearily into a chair, remarking to his wife,—

"There is nothing more to do for the present. He is rallying. Give him time. The chances are a hundred to one against him."

He rested his head on the back of his chair and closed his eyes, while his wife went to discharge her duties in another part of the house. Soon he raised his head, and in his old kindly manner said to the young woman,

"I am sorry for the way in which I talked just now, and I ask you to forgive me. You will understand my outburst and be more inclined to forgive me when I tell you something of my poor friend's life; for I am certain that he has told you nothing. Has he?"

"No," she answered, weakly and humbly.

"He has suffered so cruel a wrong in the past that when I see the least approach to imposition upon his noble unselfishness it maddens me. I ought not to have blamed you. You were not conscious of imposing upon him. I believe that he is dying. If so, there will be no harm in my telling you his story. If he lives, I can trust you with it.

"I had known him in San Francisco, but I came to these mountains long before him. It was less than two years ago that he came to me, and you can never realize the shock that his condition gave me. After a while he told me of his trouble as he understood it. It was this: Through giving violin lessons to a young lady of wealth and of great loveliness of character, he became deeply attached to her, and in return she gave him her whole affection. She was willing and anxious to marry him, even though she knew that her parents and friends would disown her if she did. He hesitated, from pure unselfishness, to bring upon her any distress that their marriage might cause. The poor fool could not understand that she would have gladly given up everything in life for him. He was called away to fill a lucrative engagement, and in his absence her heart changed toward him. Soon afterward she died. When he came to me he was broken in spirit and body, and it was my privilege to start him aright in a chastened and nobler life. He and I built the cabin, and there he was to pass the winter in unremitting study and self-mastery.

"That was the story as he told it to me and as he believed it to be. But I saw that something was behind it that in his sweetness and generosity he had never suspected. I myself learned the truth. By means of a few inquiries made by letter to a friend in San Francisco, I found that an old school-friend of the girl had made

the trouble. It was a case of malicious revenge. The girl whom my friend loved had innocently and unconsciously received the love of a man for whom she cared nothing, as her whole affection was with my friend. This man was very rich, and for that and other reasons was regarded as a prize. It appears that before losing his heart to this loveliest of girls he had been devoted to her old school-friend, a beautiful and dashing belle, who expected to marry him. When she found that she had lost him, she planned revenge. She was utterly without heart or principle. So she traded on her old school-mate's confidence in her, and used that friendship to separate the lovers with lies and cunning. She succeeded. The girl died of a broken heart, and my friend's life was ruined."

A look of unutterable horror settled upon the young woman's face, and she sat upright and rigid, staring helplessly at him.

"I never told him what I had learned," resumed the physician. "It might have broken his heart, and he had suffered enough. I did not want him to know that malice, revenge, and murder had played their part in his story."

The young woman's face bore so singular an expression that the physician marvelled. She was white, and deep and unaccustomed lines marred her beauty.

"He knows the whole truth," she said, quietly, and with a strange hardness. "He knows that I am the woman who brought about their separation. He learned it from me long ago in his cabin." What Dr. Malbone might have done under the spur of the horror and amazement that filled him was checked by a violent fit of coughing with which his patient had been seized. His physician's training instantly sent him to the bedside.

"Help me here!" he cried, as he raised the sufferer.

The young woman staggered to the bed. Dr. Malbone shot a malevolent glance at her, but she did not heed it. He raised his hand to thrust her back, but she grasped it, and quietly and firmly said,—

"I am going to help you."

He yielded, and told her what to do, and she did it.

The cough was checked, and the sufferer was laid back upon the pillow. His eyes were open, and he looked from one of the watchers to the other as they stood on opposite sides of the bed. At first he was puzzled, and then a bright look of recognition lighted up his face. He smiled as he extended a feeble hand to each.

"You are safe," he faintly said to the young woman. "I am glad. Dr. Malbone will be kind to you." To the physician he said, his voice tremulous with affection, "My dear old friend, always true, always kind."

He wanted to say more, but Dr. Malbone checked him and gave him something to strengthen him. He took it, shaking his head and smiling sadly. Presently, as his eyes grew brighter, Dr. Malbone said,—

"You may speak now, Adrian, if you wish."

The young woman had knelt, and, taking the sufferer's hand in both of hers, bowed her head over it as she pressed it to her lips.

"Look at me," he said to her.

She raised her head, and they looked long and silently at each other. He seemed troubled and anxious.

"My poor friend," he said, "you have not yet learned. Dr. Malbone—a letter—my pocket."

"I have read the letter, my friend," she hastened to say. "I know all about my father, and I know how thoughtful and kind you were not to tell me."

"Then you forgive me?" he begged.

"Forgive you, my friend? Yes, a thousand times; but how can you forgive——"

She buried her face in his pillow; her arm stole round him, and she drew him against her breast.

"I did that long ago," he replied.

"My noble, generous friend!" she said. "But can you understand what you have been to me, what you have done for me, what you are to me? Can you believe that you have made a true woman of me? Am I still the she-wolf, my friend?"

A supreme agony moved her in this appeal. He feebly tried to check her with his hand, but she nestled her cheek close against his and pleaded,—

"Do you understand that you have made me worthy of every kind regard that so noble a man could have for a woman? Can you believe, friend of my life, that you have made me such a woman as would be perfect in your eyes?"

He made no reply, and, still holding him in her arms, she raised her head to look into his face. He was regarding her with a strange and distant wistfulness, and there shone in his eyes a pale, far light that stretched through infinite space. A faint smile played upon his lips, the feeble pressure of his hand closed upon hers.

"You will not leave me, will you?" she pleaded. "You will come back to health, my friend. You will teach me, you will guide me. The world will be bright and beautiful, for all our suffering has been borne. We belong each to the other, my friend, in friendship, trust, and sympathy."

Still he smiled as he looked into her face; and as he smiled, and she saw the strange, far light that shone from so inconceivable a distance in the awful depths of his eyes, her eager heart found a bridge of glass spanning the gulf between them. Then he sighed deeply, and his eyes rolled upward. She sprang from the bed to her feet.

"Dr. Malbone!" she cried, in a suppressed voice, "quick! he has fainted!"

The physician, who had stepped a little way apart, came forward and looked down into the still face of his friend. Then he glanced up at the young woman, who was trembling with eager impatience.

"There is nothing to do," sadly replied Dr. Malbone; then he passed round the bed, took the young woman gently by the arm, and, in a kind voice, said, "Come with me."

She went with him, wondering, and looking over her shoulder toward the bed. He led her into an adjoining

room, closed the door, and placed a chair for her.

"No, Dr. Malbone!" she protested. "How can I, when he needs us both so much? Hurry back to him; I will stay here if you wish."

"No," replied the physician; "my place is here."

A look of desperate eagerness settled in her face, and she was listening intently for a sound from the other room. The physician regarded her pityingly, as she stood trembling in an agony of impatience and apprehension. Unable to control herself longer, she seized him by the arm, and cried,—

"Dr. Malbone, you know best, but I can't bear to leave him! Do you know that I fear he will die? He is all the world to me, and I can't bear to let him go. Do you understand that? I want him to live. I want to show him what a good woman's trust and love can be. I want to give my whole life to his happiness. I want to atone for all the evil and suffering that I have brought upon him. I want him to know that he has found peace and a refuge at last. Dr. Malbone, go and save him!"

Dr. Malbone took her hands in his, and said,—

"Will you try to understand what I am going to say?"

"Yes, yes!" she answered.

"Then command all the strength of your soul."

"Dr. Malbone!" she gasped, peering into his eyes, her face blanching.

With pity and tenderness the physician said,—

"Our friend is dead; he died in your arms."

THE END.

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK A MAN: HIS MARK. A ROMANCE ***

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