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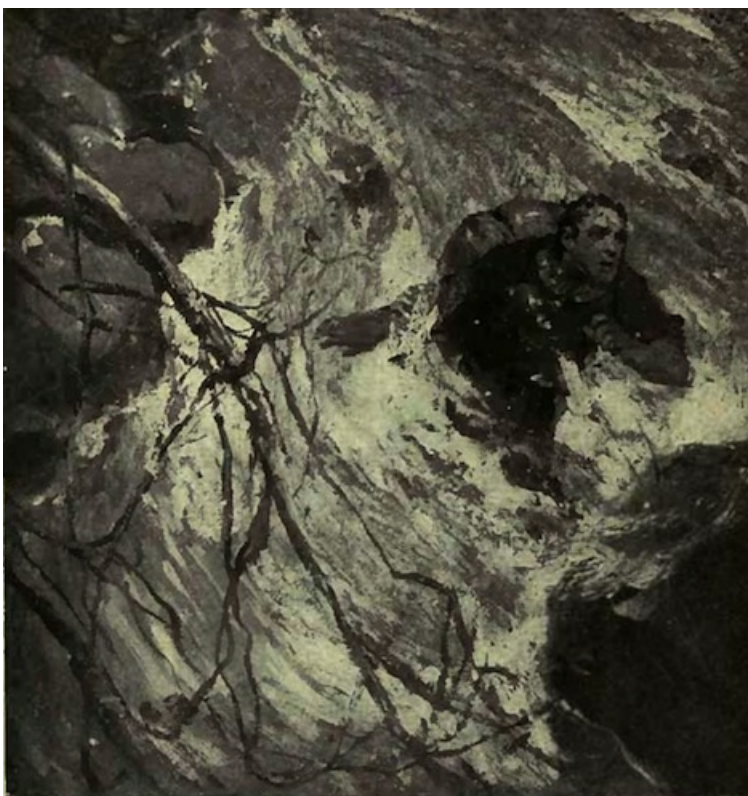
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"Two steps took him up to the waist, and he had trouble

in finding solid bottom at the next." (Chap. xvii.)

THE PROTECTOR

BY
HAROLD BINDLOSS

Author of "The Impostor," "Hawtrey's Deputy,"
"The Pioneer," etc., etc.

WARD, LOCK & CO., LIMITED
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THE PROTECTOR

CHAPTER I—A FRIEND IN NEED.

A light breeze was blowing down the inlet, scented with the smell of the firs, and the tiny ripples it chased across the water splashed musically against the bows of the canoe. There was a thud as the blade struck the water, and the long, light hull forged onwards with slightly lifted, bird's-head prow, while the two men swung forward for the next stroke with a rhythmic grace of motion. They knelt, facing forward, in the bottom of the craft; and dissimilar as they were in features and, to some extent, in character, the likeness between them was stronger than the difference. Both bore the unmistakable stamp of a wholesome life spent in vigorous labour in the open. Their eyes were clear, and like those of most bushmen singularly steady; their skin was weather-darkened, and they were leanly muscular.

On either side of the lane of green water giant firs, Cedars and balsams, crept down the rocky hills to the whitened driftwood fringe. They formed part of the great coniferous forest which rolls westwards from the wet coast range of Canada's Pacific province, and, overleaping the Strait, spreads across the rugged and beautiful wilderness of Vancouver Island. Ahead, clusters of little frame houses showed up here and there in openings among the trees, and a small sloop, towards which the canoe was heading, lay anchored near the wharf.

The men had plied the paddle during most of that day, from inclination rather than necessity, because they could have hired Siwash Indians to undertake the labour for them, had they been so minded. They were, though their appearance did not suggest it, moderately prosperous; but their prosperity was of recent date, and they had been accustomed to doing everything for themselves, as are most of the men who dwell among the woods and ranges of British Columbia.

Vane, who knelt nearest the bows, was twenty-seven years of age, and he had spent nine of them chopping trees, driving cattle, poling canoes, and assisting in the search for useful minerals among the snow-clad ranges. He wore a wide, grey felt hat which had lost its shape from frequent wettings, an old shirt of the same colour, and blue duck trousers, rent in places; but the light attire revealed a fine muscular symmetry. He had brown hair and brown eyes, and a certain warmth of colouring which showed through the deep bronze of his skin hinted at a sanguine and somewhat impatient temperament.

His companion, Carroll, had lighter hair and grey eyes, and his appearance was a little less vigorous and a little more refined, though he, too, had toiled hard and borne many privations in the wilderness. His dress resembled Vane's. The two had located a valuable mineral property some months earlier, and though this does not invariably follow, had held their own against city financiers during the negotiations that preceded the floating of a company to work the mine. That they had succeeded in securing a good deal of the stock was largely due to Vane's pertinacity, and said something for his acumen; but both had been trained in a very hard school.

As the wooden houses ahead rose higher and the sloop's grey hull grew into sharper shape upon the clear green shining of the brine, Vane broke into a snatch of song.

"Had I the wings of a dove, I would fly,
Just for to-night, to the Old Country."

He stopped and laughed. "It's nine years since I've seen it, but I can't get those lines out of my head. Perhaps it's because of the girl who sang them. Somehow, I felt sorry for her. She had remarkably fine eyes."

"Sea-blue," said his companion. "I don't grasp the connection between the last two remarks."

"Neither do I," Vane admitted. "I suppose there isn't one. But they weren't sea-blue, unless you mean the depth of indigo, when you're out of sounding. They're Irish eyes."

"You're not Irish. There's not a trace of the Celt in you, unless it's your habit of getting indignant with the folks who don't share your views."

"No, sir," answered Vane. "By birth, I'm North Country—England, I mean. Over there, we're respectable before everything, and smart at getting hold of whatever's worth having. As a matter of fact, you Ontario Scotsmen are mighty like us."

“You certainly came out well ahead of those city men who put up the dollars,” said Carroll. “I guess it’s in the blood, though I fancied they would take the mine from you.”

Vane brought his paddle down with a thud. ““Just for to-night, to the Old Country,”” he hummed, and added: “It sticks to one.”

“Why did you leave the Old Country?”

“That’s a blamed injudicious question to ask, but you shall have an answer. There was a row at home—I was a sentimentalist then and just eighteen—and as the result of it I came out to Canada.” His voice changed and grew softer. “I hadn’t many relatives, and except one sister, they’re all gone now. That reminds me—she’s not going to lecture for the county education authorities any longer.”

The sloop was close ahead, and, slackening the paddling they ran alongside. Vane glanced at his watch when they had climbed on board.

“Supper will be finished at the hotel,” he remarked. “You had better get the stove lighted. It’s your turn, and that rascally Siwash seems to have gone off again. If he’s not back when we’re ready, we’ll sail without him.”

Carroll, accordingly, prepared the meal, and when they had finished it they lay on deck smoking with a content which was not altogether accounted for by a satisfied appetite. They had spent several anxious months, during which they had come very near the end of their slender resources, arranging for the exploitation of the mine, and now at last the work was over. Vane had that day made his final plans for the construction of a road and wharf by which the ore could be economically shipped for reduction, or as the alternative to this, for the erection of a small smelting plant. They had bought the sloop as a convenient means of conveyance and shelter, since they could live in some comfort on board. Now they could take their ease for a while, which was a very unusual thing to both of them.

“I suppose you’re bent on sailing this craft back?” Carroll said at length, “We could hire a couple of Siwash to take her home while we rode across the island and got the cars to Victoria. Besides, there’s that steamboat coming down the coast to-night.”

"Either way would cost a good deal extra, Vane pointed out.

“That’s true,” Carroll agreed with an amused look, “You could charge it to the Company.”

Vane laughed. “You and I have a big stake in the concern, and I haven’t got used to spending money unnecessarily yet. I’ve been mighty glad to earn 2.50 by working from sun-up until dark, though I didn’t always get it afterwards. So have you.”

“How are you going to dispose of your dollars, then? You have a balance in cash, as well as the shares.”

“It has occurred to me that I might spend a few months in the Old Country. Have you ever been over?”

“I was across some time ago, but if you would sooner I went with you, I’ll come along. We could start as soon as we’ve arranged the few matters left open in Vancouver.”

Vane was glad to hear it. He knew little about Carroll’s antecedents, but the latter was obviously a man of education, and they had been comrades for the last three years. During that time they had learnt to trust each other, and to bear with each other’s idiosyncrasies. Filling his pipe again as he lay in the fading sunlight, Vane looked back on the nine years he had passed in Canada; and allowing for the periods of exposure to cold and wet, and the almost ceaseless toil, he admitted that he might have spent them more unpleasantly.

Having quarrelled with his relatives, he had come out with only a few pounds and had promptly set about earning a living with his hands. When he had been in the country several years, however, a friend of the family had sent him a small sum, and the young man had made a judicious use of the money. The lot he bought outside a wooden town doubled in value, and the share he took in a new orchard paid him well; but he had held aloof from the cities, and his only

recklessness had been prospecting journeys into the wilderness. Prospecting for minerals is at once an art and a gamble, but even in this direction, in which he had had keen wits against him, Vane had held his own; but there was one side of life with which he was practically unacquainted.

There are no social amenities on the rangeside or in the bush, and women are scarce. Vane had lived in Spartan simplicity; his passions had remained unstirred, and now he was seven-and-twenty, sound and vigorous of body and, as a rule, level of head. At length, however, there was to be a change. He had earned an interlude of leisure, and he meant to enjoy it, without, as he prudently determined, making a fool of himself.

Presently Carroll took his pipe from his mouth.

“Are you going ashore to the show to-night?” he asked.

“Yes,” said Vane lazily. “It’s a long while since I’ve struck another entertainment of any kind, and that yellow-haired mite’s dancing is one of the prettiest things I’ve seen.”

“You’ve been twice already,” Carroll pointed out. “The girl with the blue eyes sings her first song rather well.”

“I think so,” Vane agreed with a significant absence of embarrassment. “In this case a good deal depends upon the singing—the interpretation, don’t they call it? The thing’s on the border, and I’ve struck places where they’d have made it gross; but the girl only brought out the mischief. Strikes me she didn’t see there was anything else in it.”

“That’s curious, considering the crowd she goes about with,” Carroll suggested. “Aren’t you cultivating a critical faculty?”

Vane disregarded the ironical question. “She’s Irish; that accounts for a good deal.” He paused and looked thoughtful. “If I knew how to do it, I’d like to give the child who dances five dollars. It must be a tough life, and her mother—the woman at the piano—looks ill. I wonder why they came to a place like this?”

“Struck a cold streak at Nanaimo, the storekeeper told me,” Carroll replied. “Anyway, since we’re to start at sun-up, I’m staying here.” Then he smiled. “Has it struck you that your attendance in the front seats is liable to misconception?”

His companion rose without answering and dropped into the canoe. Thrusting her off, he drove the craft towards the wharf with vigorous strokes, and Carroll shook his head whimsically as he watched him.

“Anybody except myself would conclude that he was waking up at last,” he said.

A minute or two later, Vane swung himself up on to the wharf and strode into the wooden settlement. There were one or two hydraulic mines and a pulp mill in the vicinity, and though the place was by no means populous, a company of third-rate entertainers had arrived some days earlier. On reaching the rude wooden building in which they had given their performance and finding it closed, he accosted a lounge.

“What’s become of the show?” he asked.

“Busted,” replied the man. “Didn’t take the boys’ fancy, and the crowd went out with the stage this afternoon, though I heard that two of the women stayed behind.”

Vane turned away with a slight sense of compassion. He, however, dismissed the matter from his mind, and having been kneeling in a cramped position in the canoe most of the day, decided to stroll along the waterside before going back to the sloop.

Great firs stretched out their sombre branches over the smooth shingle, and now the sun had gone their clean resinous smell was heavy on the dew-cooled air. Here and there brushwood grew among out-cropping rock, and catching sight of what looked like a stripe of woven fabric beneath a brake, he strode towards it. Then he stopped with a start, for a young woman lay with her face hidden from him in an attitude of dejected abandonment. He was about to turn away softly, when she started and looked up at him. Her eyes were wet, but they were of the deep blue he had described to Carroll,

and he stood still.

“You shouldn’t give way like that,” he said.

It was all he could think of; but he spoke without obtrusive assurance or pronounced embarrassment, and the girl, who shook out her crumpled skirt over one little foot with a swift movement, choked back a sob, and favoured him with a glance of keen scrutiny as she rose to a sitting posture. She was quick at reading character—the life she led had made that necessary—and his manner and appearance were reassuring. She, however, said nothing, and sitting down on a neighbouring boulder, he took out his pipe from force of habit.

“Well,” he added, in much the same tone as he would have used to a distressed child, “what’s the trouble?”

She told him, speaking on impulse. “They’ve gone off and left me. The takings didn’t meet expenses.”

“That’s bad,” said Vane gravely. “Do you mean they’ve left you alone?”

“No,” replied the girl; “in a way it’s worse than that. I suppose I could go—somewhere—but there’s Mrs. Marvin and Elsie.”

“The child who danced?”

The girl assented, and Vane looked thoughtful.

“The three of you stick together,” he suggested.

“Of course. Mrs. Marvin’s the only friend I have.”

“Then I suppose you’ve no idea what to do?”

His companion confessed it, and explained that it was the cause of her distress and that they had had bad luck of late. Vane could understand that as he looked at her; her dress was shabby, and he fancied she had not been bountifully fed.

“If you stayed here a few days, you could go out with the next stage, and get on to Victoria with the cars,” he said. He paused and continued diffidently: “It could be arranged with the hotel-keeper.”

She laughed in a half-hysterical manner, and he remembered that fares were high in the country.

“I suppose you have no money,” he added, with blunt directness. “I want you to tell Mrs. Marvin that I’ll lend her enough to take you all to Victoria.”

Her face crimsoned, which was not quite what he had expected, and he suddenly felt embarrassed.

“No,” she replied; “I can’t do that. For one thing, it would be too late when we got to Victoria. I think we could get an engagement if we reached Vancouver in time to get to Kamloops by—”

Vane knitted his brows when he heard the date, and it was a moment or two before he spoke.

“Then,” he said, “there’s only one way you can do so. There’s a little steamboat coming down the coast to-night, and I had half thought of intercepting her and handing the skipper some letters to post in Victoria. He knows me. That’s my sloop yonder, and if I put you on board the steamer, you’d reach Vancouver in good time. We would have sailed at sun-up anyway.”

The girl hesitated, which struck Vane as natural, and turned partly from him. He surmised that she did not know what to make of his offer, though her need was urgent. In the meanwhile he stood up.

“Come along and talk it over with Mrs. Marvin,” he went on. “I’d better tell you I’m Wallace Vane of the Clermont mine. Of course, I know your name from the programme.”

She rose and they walked back to the hotel. Once more it struck him that the girl was pretty and graceful. On reaching the hotel, he sat down on the verandah while she went in, and a few minutes later the elder woman came out and looked at him much as the girl had done. He grew hot under her gaze and repeated his offer in the curtest terms.

“If this breeze holds, we’ll put you on board the steamer soon after daybreak,” he explained.

The woman’s face softened, and he recognised now that there had been suspicion in it. “Thank you,” she added, “we’ll come.” Then she added with an eloquent gesture: “You don’t know what it means to us.”

Vane merely took off his hat and turned away, but a minute or two afterwards he met the hotel-keeper.

“Do these people owe you anything?” he asked.

“Five dollars,” answered the man.

Vane handed him a bill. “Take it out of this, and make any excuse you like. I’m going to put them on board the steamboat.”

The man made no comment, and Vane, striding down to the beach, sent a hail ringing across the water. Carroll appeared on the sloop’s deck and answered him.

“Hallo!” he cried. “What’s the trouble?”

“Get ready the best supper you can manage for three people as quick as you can.”

Then he turned away in a hurry, wondering rather uneasily what Carroll would say when he grasped the situation.

CHAPTER II—A BREEZE OF WIND.

There were signs of a change in the weather when Vane walked down to the wharf with his passengers, for a cold wind which had sprung up struck an eerie sighing from the sombre firs and sent the white mists streaming along the hillside. There was a watery moon in the sky, and on reaching the end of the wharf Vane fancied that the singer hesitated; but the elder woman laid her hand upon the girl's arm reassuringly and she got into the canoe. In a few minutes Vane ran the craft alongside the sloop and saw the amazement in Carroll's face by the glow from the cabin skylight. He, however, fancied that his comrade would rise to the occasion and he handed his guests up.

"My partner, Carroll. Mrs. Marvin and her daughter; Miss Kitty Blake. You have seen them already," he said. "They're coming down with us to catch the steamer."

Carroll bowed, and Vane, who thrust back the cabin slide, motioned the others below. The place was brightly lighted by a nickelled lamp, though it was scarcely four feet high and the centreboard trunk occupied the middle of it. A wide, cushioned locker ran along each side a foot above the floor, and a swing table, fixed above the trunk, filled up most of the space between. There was no cloth upon the table, but it was invitingly laid out with canned fruit, coffee, hot flapjacks, and a big lake trout.

"You must help yourselves while we get sail upon the boat," said Vane. "The saloon's at your disposal, my partner and I have the fo'c'sle. You will notice there are blankets yonder, and as we'll have smooth water most of the way you should get some sleep."

He withdrew, closing the slide, and went forward with Carroll to shorten in the cable; but when they stopped beside the bitts his companion broke into a soft laugh.

"Is there anything to amuse you?" Vane asked curtly.

"Well," said Carroll with an air of reflection, "it strikes me you're making a rather unconventional use of your new prosperity, and it might be prudent to consider how your friends in Vancouver may regard the adventure."

Vane sat down upon the bitts and took out his pipe. "One trouble in talking to you is that I never know whether you're in earnest or not. You trot out your cold-blooded worldly wisdom, and then you grin at it."

"I think that's the only philosophic attitude," replied Carroll. "It's possible to grow furiously indignant with the restraints stereotyped people lay on one; but on the whole it's wiser to bow to them and chuckle. After all, they've some foundation."

Vane looked up at him sharply.

"You've been right in the advice you have given me more than once: you seem to know how prosperous and what you call stereotyped folks look at things. But you've never explained where you got the knowledge."

"That," said Carroll, "is quite another matter."

"Anyway," continued Vane, "there's one remark of yours I'd like to answer. You would, no doubt, consider I made a legitimate use of my money when I entertained that crowd of city people—some of whom would have plundered me if they could have managed it—in Vancouver. I didn't grudge it, but I was a little astonished when I saw the wine and cigar bill. It struck me that the best of them scarcely noticed what they got—I think they'd been up against it at one time, as we have; and it would have done the rest of the guzzlers good if they'd had to work all day with the shovel on pork and flapjacks. But we'll let that go. What have you and I done that we should swill in champagne, while a girl with a face like that one below and a child who dances like a fairy haven't enough to eat? You know what I paid for the last cigars. What confounded hogs we are!"

Carroll laughed outright. There was not an ounce of superfluous flesh upon his comrade, who was hardened and toughened by determined labour, and the term hog appeared singularly inappropriate.

“Well,” said Carroll, “you’ll no doubt get used to the new conditions by and by, and in regard to your latest exploit there’s a motto on your insignia of the Garter which might meet the case. But hadn’t we better heave her over her anchor?”

They seized the chain and as it ran below a sharp, musical rattle rang out, for the hollow hull flung back the metallic clinking like a sounding board. When the cable was short-up, they grasped the halyards and the big gaff mainsail rose flapping up the mast. They set it and turned to the headsails, for though, strictly speaking, a sloop only carries one, the term is loosely applied in places, and as Vane had changed her rig there were two of them.

“It’s a fair wind, and I expect we’ll find more weight in it lower down,” said Carroll. “We’ll let the staysail lie and run her with the jib.”

They set the jib and broke out the anchor. Vane took the helm, and the sloop, slanting over until her deck on one side dipped close to the frothing brine, drove away into the darkness. The lights of the settlement faded among the trees, and when Carroll coming aft flung a strip of canvas over the skylight, his comrade could see the black hills and climbing firs on both sides slip by. Sliding vapours streaked them, a crisp splashing sound made by the curling ripples followed the vessel; the canoe surged along noisily astern, and the frothing and gurgling grew louder at the bows. They were running down one of the deep, forest-shrouded inlets which, resembling the Norwegian fiords, pierce the Pacific littoral of Canada.

“I wonder how the wind is outside,” Vane said.

Carroll looked round and saw the white mists stream athwart the pines on a promontory they were skirting. “That’s more than I can tell. In these troughs among the hills it either blows straight up or directly down, and I dare say we’ll find it different when we reach the sound. One thing’s certain—there’s some weight in it now.”

Vane nodded agreement, though an idea that troubled him crept into his mind. “I understand the steamboat skipper will run in to land some Siwash he’s bringing down. It will be awkward in the dark if the wind’s onshore.”

Carroll made no comment, and they drove on, until as they swept round the point the sloop, slanting sharply, dipped her lee rail in the froth.

“We’ll have to tie down a reef,” he said.

Vane told him to take the tiller and scrambling forward, rapped upon the cabin side, which he flung back. Mrs. Marvin lay upon the leeward locker with a blanket across her and the little girl at her feet; Miss Blake sat on the weather one with a book in her hand.

“We’re going to take some sail off the boat,” he said. “You needn’t be disturbed by the noise.”

“When do you expect to meet the steamer?” Miss Blake inquired.

“Not for two or three hours, anyway,” Vane answered, with a hint of uncertainty in his voice. Then, as he fancied the girl had noticed it, he closed the slide.

“Down helm!” he said to Carroll, and there was a banging and thrashing of canvas as the sloop came up into the wind. They held her there, with the jib aback, while they hauled the canoe on board, which was not an easy task, and then with difficulty hove down a reef in the mainsail. It was heavy work, because there was nobody at the helm, and the craft falling off once or twice as they leaned out upon the boom with toes on her depressed lee rail, threatened to hurl them into the frothing water. Neither of them were trained sailors, but on that coast with its inlets and sounds and rivers the wanderer learns to handle sail and paddle and canoe-pole.

They finished their task, and when Vane seized the helm Carroll sat down under the shelter of the coaming, out of the flying spray.

“We’ll probably have some trouble putting your friends on board the steamer, even if she runs in,” he remarked. “What

are you going to do if there's no sign of her?"

"It's a question I've been shirking for the last half-hour," Vane confessed.

"I'd like to point out that it would be very slow work beating back up this inlet, and if we did so there isn't a stage across the island for several days. No doubt you remember you have to see that contractor on Thursday, and there's the directors' meeting."

"It's uncommonly awkward," Vane answered dubiously.

Carroll laughed. "It strikes me your guests will have to stay where they are, whether they like it or not; but there's one consolation—if this wind is from the north-west, which is most likely, it will be a fast run to Victoria. And now I'll try to get some sleep."

He disappeared down a scuttle forward, leaving Vane somewhat disturbed in mind. He had merely contemplated taking his guests for a few hours' run, but to have them on board for, perhaps, several days was a very different thing. Besides, he was far from sure that they would understand the necessity for the latter, in which case the situation might become difficult. In the meanwhile, the sloop drove on, until at last towards morning the beach fell back on each hand and she met the long swell tumbling in from the Pacific. The wind was from the north-west and blowing moderately hard; there was no light yet in the sky above the black heights to the east of him, and the swell grew higher and steeper, breaking white here and there. The sloop plunged over it wildly, hurling the spray aloft, and it cost him a determined effort to haul his sheets in as the wind drew ahead. Shortly afterwards, the beach faded altogether on one hand, and he saw that the sea was piled up into foaming ridges. It seemed most improbable that the steamer would run in to land her Indian passengers, and he drove the sloop on with showers of stinging brine beating into her wet canvas and whirling about him.

By and by he noticed that a stream of smoke was pouring from the short funnel of the stove, and soon afterwards the cabin slide opened. Miss Blake crept out and stood up in the well, gazing forward while she clutched the coaming.

Day was now breaking, and Vane could see that her thin dress was blown flat against her. There was something graceful in her pose, and it struck him that she had a very pretty slender figure.

"Where's the steamer?" she asked.

It was a question Vane had dreaded; but he answered it honestly: "I can't tell you. It's very likely that she has gone straight on to Victoria."

He read suspicion in her suddenly hardening face.

"You expected this when you asked us to come on board!" she cried.

"No," said Vane, whose face grew hot. "On my honour, I did nothing of the kind. There was only a moderate breeze when we left, and when it freshened enough to make it unlikely that the steamer would run in, I was as vexed as you seem to be. As it happened, I couldn't go back. I must get on to Victoria as soon as possible."

She looked at him searchingly.

"Then what are we to do?" she asked.

There was distress in the cry, but Vane answered it in his most matter-of-fact tone: "So far as I can see, you can only reconcile yourself to staying on board. We'll have a fresh fair wind for Victoria once we're round the next head, and with luck we ought to get there late to-night."

"You're sure you'll be there, then?"

"I'm sorry I can't even promise that: it depends upon the weather," he replied. "But you mustn't stand up in the spray. You're getting wet through."

She still clung to the coaming, but he fancied that her misgivings were vanishing; and he spoke again: "How are Mrs. Marvin and the little girl? I see you have lighted the stove."

The girl sat down, shivering, in the partial shelter of the coaming, and at last a gleam of amusement which he thought was partly compassionate shone in her eyes.

"I'm afraid they're—far from well. That was why I lighted the fire; I wanted to make them some tea. I thought you wouldn't mind."

Vane smiled. "Everything's at your service. Go and get your breakfast, and put on a coat you'll find below if you come out again."

She disappeared, and Vane felt relieved. Though the explanation had proved less difficult than he had anticipated, he was glad that it was over. Half an hour later she appeared again, carrying a loaded tray, and he wondered at the ease of her movements, for the sloop was plunging viciously.

"I've brought you some breakfast. You have been up all night," she said.

Vane laughed. "As I can only take one hand from the helm, you will have to cut up the bread and canned stuff for me. Draw that box out and sit down beneath the coaming if you mean to stay."

She did as he told her. The well was some four feet long, and the bottom of it about half that distance below the level of the deck. As the result of this, she sat close to his feet, while he balanced himself on the coaming, gripping the tiller. He noticed that she had brought an oilskin jacket with her.

"Hadrn't you better put this on first? There's a good deal of spray," she said.

Vane struggled into the jacket with some difficulty, and she smiled as she handed him up a slice of bread and canned meat. "I suppose," she said, "you can only manage one piece at once?"

"Thank you. That's about as much as you could expect one to be capable of, even allowing for the bushman's appetite. I'm surprised to see you looking so fresh."

"Oh!" said the girl, "I used to go out with the mackerel boats at home; we lived at the ferry. It was a mile across the lough, and with the wind westerly the sea worked in."

"The lough?" said Vane. "I told Carroll you were from the Green Isle."

It struck him that this was, perhaps, imprudent, since it implied that they had been discussing her; but, on the other hand, he thought the candour of the statement was in his favour. Then he added: "Have you been long out here?"

Her face grew wistful. "Four years," she answered. "I came out with Larry—he's my brother. He was a forester at home, and he took small contracts for clearing land. Then he married—and I left him."

Vane made a sign of comprehension. "I see. Where's Larry now?"

"He went to Oregon. There was no answer to my last letter; I've lost sight of him."

"And you go about with Mrs. Marvin? Is her husband alive?"

Sudden anger flared up in the girl's blue eyes, though, he knew it was not directed against him.

"Yes," she said. "It's a pity he is. Men of his kind always seem to live."

It occurred to Vane, that Miss Blake, who had evidently a spice of temper, could be a staunch partisan; and he also noticed that now he had inspired her with some degree of trust in himself, her conversation was marked by an ingenious candour. For all that, she changed the subject.

“Another piece, or some tea?” she asked.

“Tea first,” said Vane, and they both laughed when she afterwards handed him a double slice of bread.

“These sandwiches strike me as unusually nice,” he informed her. “It’s exceptionally good tea, too.”

The blue eyes gleamed with amusement, “You have been in the cold all night—but I was once in a restaurant.” She watched the effect of this statement on him. “You know I really can’t sing—I was never taught, anyway, though there were some of the settlements where we did rather well.”

Vane hummed a few bars of a song. “I don’t suppose you realise what one ballad of yours has done. I’d almost forgotten the Old Country, but the night I heard you I felt I must go back and see it again. What’s more, Carroll and I are going shortly; it’s your doing.”

This was a matter of fact, but Kitty Blake had produced a deeper effect on him, although he was not aware of it yet.

“It’s a shame to keep you handing me things to eat,” he added disconnectedly. “Still, I’d like another piece.”

She smiled, delighted, as she passed the food to him. “You can’t help yourself and steer the boat. Besides—after the restaurant—I don’t mind waiting on you.”

Vane made no comment, but he watched her with satisfaction while he ate, and as one result of it the sloop plunged heavily into the frothing sea. There was no sign of the others, and they were alone on the waste of tumbling water in the early dawn. The girl was pretty, and there was a pleasing daintiness about her.

She belonged to the people—there was no doubt of that; but then Vane had a strong faith in the people, native-born and adopted, of the Pacific slope. It was from them he had received the greatest kindnesses he could remember. They were cheerful optimists; indomitable grapplers with forest and flood, who did almost incredible things with axe and saw and giant-powder. They lived in lonely ranch houses, tents, and rudely flung up shacks; driving the new roads along the rangeside, risking life and limb in wild-cat adits. They were quick to laughter and reckless in hospitality.

Then with an effort he brushed the hazy thoughts away. Kitty Blake was merely a guest of his; in another day he would land her in Victoria, and that would be the end of it. He was assuring himself of this when Carroll crawled up through the scuttle forward and came aft to join them. In spite of his prudent reflections, Vane was by no means certain that he was pleased to see him.

CHAPTER III—AN AFTERNOON ASHORE.

Half the day had slipped by, when the breeze freshened further and the sun broke through. The sloop was then rolling wildly as she drove along with the peak of her mainsail lowered before a big following sea. Vane looked thoughtful as he gripped the helm, because a head ran out from the beach he was following three or four miles way, and he would have to haul the boat up to windward to get round it. This would bring the combers upon her quarter, or, worse still, abeam. Kitty Blake was below; Mrs. Marvin had made no appearance yet, and he spoke to Carroll, who was standing in the well.

"The sea's breaking more sharply, and we'd get uncommonly wet before we hammered round yonder head," he said. "There's an inlet on this side of it where we ought to find good shelter."

"The trouble is that if you stay there long you'll be too late for the directors' meeting," Carroll answered.

"They can't have the meeting without me, and, if it's necessary, they can wait," Vane pointed out. "I've had to. Many an hour I've spent cooling my heels in offices before the head of the concern could find time to attend to me. No doubt it was part of the game, and done to impress me with a due sense of my unimportance."

"It's possible," Carroll agreed, smiling.

Kitty Blake made her appearance in the cabin entrance just then, and Vane smiled at her.

"We're going to give you a rest," he announced. "There's an inlet close ahead where we should find smooth water, and we'll put you all ashore until the wind drops."

There was no suspicion in the girl's face now, and she gave him a grateful glance before she disappeared below with the consoling news.

Soon afterwards, Vane luffed into a tiny bay, where the sloop rode upright in the sunshine, with loose canvas flapping softly in a faint breeze while the cable rattled down.

They got the canoe over, and when he had landed Mrs. Marvin and her little girl, both of whom looked very woebegone and the worse for the voyage, into her, Vane glanced round.

"Isn't Miss Blake coming?" he asked.

Mrs. Marvin, who was suggestively pallid, smiled. "She's changing her dress." She glanced at her own crumpled attire and added: "I'm past thinking of such things as that."

They waited some minutes, and then Vane called to Kitty, who appeared in the entrance to the cabin, "Won't you look in the locker, and bring anything you think would be nice? We'll make a fire and have supper on the beach; if it isn't first-rate, you'll be responsible."

A few minutes later they paddled ashore, and Vane landed them on a strip of shingle with a wall of rock behind it, to which dark firs clung in the rifts and crannies. The sunshine streamed into the hollow, the wind was cut off, and not far away a crystal stream came splashing down a ravine.

Vane, who had brought an axe, made a fire of resinous wood, and Carroll and Kitty prepared a bountiful supper. After it was finished Carroll carried the plates away to the stream, towards which Mrs. Marvin and the little girl followed him, and Vane and Kitty were left beside the fire. She sat on a log of driftwood, and he lay on the warm shingle with his pipe in his hand. The clear green water splashed and tinkled upon the pebbles close at his feet, and a faint, elfin sighing fell from the firs above them. It was very old music, the song of the primeval wilderness, and though he had heard it often, it had a strange, unsettling effect upon him as he languidly watched his companion. There was no doubt that she was pleasant to look upon; but although he failed to recognise this clearly, it was to a large extent an impersonal interest he took in her. She was not so much an attractive young woman with qualities that pleased him, as a type of something that had so far not come into his life; something which he vaguely felt that he had missed. One could have fancied that by

some deep-sunk intuition she surmised this fact, and felt the security of it.

“So you believe you can get an engagement if you reach Vancouver in time,” he said at length. Kitty assented, and he asked, “How long will it last?”

“I can’t tell. Perhaps a few weeks. It depends upon how the boys are pleased with the show.”

“It must be a hard life,” Vane broke out. “You must make very little—scarcely enough, I suppose, to carry you on from one engagement to another. After all, weren’t you as well off at the restaurant? Didn’t they treat you properly?”

She coloured a little at the question. “Oh, yes; at least, I have no fault to find with the man who kept it, or his wife.”

Vane made a hasty sign of comprehension. He supposed that the difficulty had arisen from the conduct of one or more of the regular customers. He felt he would very much like to meet the man whose undesired attentions had driven his companion from her occupation.

“Did you never try to learn keeping accounts or typewriting?” he asked.

“I tried it once, but the mill shut down.”

“I’ve an idea that I could find you a post,” Vane made the suggestion casually, though he was troubled by an inward diffidence.

He saw a tinge of warmer colour creep into the girl’s cheeks.

“No,” she said decidedly. “It wouldn’t do.”

The man knitted his brows, though he fancied that she was right. “Well,” he replied, “I don’t want to be officious—but how can I help?”

“You can’t help at all.”

Vane, who saw that she meant it, lay smoking in silence for a minute or two. Then Carroll came up with Mrs. Marvin and the child, and he felt strongly stirred when the little girl walked up to him shyly with a basket filled with shells. He drew her down beside him, with an arm about her waist, while he examined her treasures, and then glancing up met Kitty’s eyes and felt his face grow hot with an emotion he failed to analyse. The child was delicate; life had scanty pleasure to offer her, but now she was happy.

“They’re so pretty, and there are lots of them,” she said. “Can’t we stay here longer and gather some more?”

“Yes,” said Vane, conscious that Carroll, who had heard the question, was watching him. “You shall stay and get as many as you want. I’m afraid you don’t like the sloop.”

“No,” replied the child gravely, “I don’t like it when it jumps. After I woke up it jumped all the time.”

“Never mind,” said Vane. “The boat will keep still to-night, and I don’t think there’ll be any waves to roll her about to-morrow. We’ll bring you ashore first thing in the morning.”

He talked to her for a few minutes, and then strolled along the beach with Carroll.

“Why did you promise that child to stay here?” Carroll asked.

“Because I felt like doing so.”

“I needn’t remind you that you’ve an appointment with Horsfield about the smelter, and there’s a meeting of the board next day. If we started now and caught the first steamer across, you wouldn’t have much time to spare.”

“That’s correct. I shall have to wire from Victoria that I’ve been detained.”

Carroll laughed expressively. “Do you mean to keep your directors waiting to please a child?”

“I suppose that’s one reason. Anyway, I don’t propose to hustle the little girl and her mother on board the steamer helpless with sea sickness,” He paused and a gleam of humour crept into his eyes. “As I told you, I’ve no objection to letting the directors wait my pleasure.”

“But they set the concern on its feet.”

“Just so,” said Vane coolly. “On the other hand, they got excellent value for their services—and I found the mine. What’s more, during the preliminary negotiations most of them treated me very casually.”

“Well?” said Carroll.

“There’s going to be a difference now, I’ve a board of directors; one way or another, I’ve had to pay for the privilege pretty dearly; but I don’t intend that they should run the Clermont mine.”

Carroll glanced at him with open amusement. There had been a marked change in Vane since he had floated the company, but it was one that did not astonish his comrade. Carroll had long suspected him of latent capabilities, which had suddenly sprung to life.

“You ought to see Horsfield before you meet the board,” he pointed out.

“I’m not sure,” Vane answered. “In fact, I’m uncertain whether I’ll give Horsfield the contract, even if we decide about the smelter. I don’t want a man with too firm a hold up against me.”

“But if he put his money in with the idea of getting certain pickings?”

“He didn’t explain his intentions, and I made no promises,” Vane answered dryly. “He’ll get his dividends; that’ll satisfy him.”

They rejoined the others, and when the white mists crept lower down from the heights above and the chill of the dew was in the air, Vane launched the canoe.

“It’s getting late, and there’s a long run in front of us to-morrow,” he informed his passengers. “The sloop will lie as still as if moored in a pond, and you’ll have her all to yourselves. Carroll and I are going to camp ashore.”

He paddled them off to the boat, and coming back with some blankets cut a few armfuls of spruce twigs in a ravine and spread them out beside the fire. Then sitting down just clear of the scented smoke, he lighted his pipe and asked an abrupt question: “What do you think of Kitty Blake?”

“Well,” said Carroll cautiously, “I must confess that I’ve taken some interest in the girl; partly because you were obviously doing so. In a general way, what I noticed rather surprised me. It wasn’t what I expected.”

“You smart folks are as often wrong as the rest of us. I suppose you looked for cold-blooded assurance, tempered by what one might call experienced coquetry?”

“Something of the kind,” Carroll agreed. “As you say, I was wrong. There are only two ways of explaining Miss Blake, and the first’s the one that would strike most people. That is, she’s acting a part, possibly with an object; holding her natural self in check, and doing it cleverly.”

Vane laughed scornfully. “I wouldn’t have entertained that idea for five minutes.”

“Then,” said Carroll, “there’s the other explanation. It’s simply that the girl’s life hasn’t affected her. Somehow she has kept fresh and wholesome.”

“There’s no doubt of it,” said Vane shortly.

“You offered to help her in some way?”

“I did; I don’t know how you guessed it. I said I’d find her a situation. She wouldn’t hear of it.”

“She was wise,” said Carroll. “Vancouver isn’t a very big place yet, and the girl has more sense than you have. What did you say?”

“Nothing. You interrupted us. But I’m going to sleep.”

He rolled himself up in his blanket and lay down among the soft spruce twigs, but Carroll sat still in the darkness and smoked his pipe out. Then he glanced at his comrade, who lay still, breathing evenly.

“No doubt you’ll be considered fortunate,” he said, apostrophizing him half aloud. “You’ve had power and responsibility thrust upon you. What will you make of them?”

Then he, too, lay down, and only the soft splash of the tiny ripples broke the silence while the fire sank lower.

They sailed next morning and eventually arrived in Victoria after the boat which crossed the Strait had gone, but the breeze was fair from the westwards, and after dispatching a telegram Vane put to sea again. The sloop made a quick passage, and for most of the time her passengers lounged in the sunshine on her gently-slanted deck. It was evening when they ran through the Narrows into Vancouver’s land-locked harbour.

Half an hour later, Vane landed his passengers, and it was not until he had left them they discovered that he had thrust a roll of paper currency into the little girl’s hand. Then he and Carroll set off for the C.P.R. hotel.

CHAPTER IV—A CHANGE OF ENVIRONMENT.

On the evening after his arrival in Vancouver, Vane, who took Carroll with him, paid a visit to one of his directors and, in accordance with the invitation, reached the latter's dwelling some little time before the arrival of other guests, whose acquaintance it was considered advisable that he should make.

Vane and his companion were ushered into a small room with an uncovered floor and simple, hardwood furniture. It was obviously a working room, for, as a rule, the work of the Western business man goes on continuously except when he is asleep; but a somewhat portly lady with a good-humoured face reclined in a rocking-chair. A gaunt, elderly man of rugged appearance rose from his seat at a writing-table as his guests entered.

"So ye have come at last," he said. "I had you shown in here, because this room is mine, and I can smoke when I like. The rest of the house is Mrs. Nairn's, and it seems that her friends do not appreciate the smell of my cigars. I'm not sure that I can blame them."

Mrs. Nairn smiled placidly. "Alec," she explained, "leaves them lying everywhere, and I do not like the stubs on the stairs. But sit ye down and he will give ye one."

Vane felt at home with both of them. He had met people of their kind before, and, allowing for certain idiosyncrasies, considered them the salt of the Dominion. Nairn had done good service to his adopted country, developing her new industries, with some profit to himself, for he was of Scottish extraction; but while close at a bargain he could be generous afterwards. When his guests were seated he laid two cigar boxes on the table.

"Those," he said, pointing to one of them, "are mine. I think ye had better try the others; they're for visitors."

Vane, who had already noticed the aroma of the cigar that was smouldering on a tray, decided that he was right, and dipped his hand into the second box, which he passed to Carroll.

"Now," said Nairn, "we can talk comfortably, and Clara will listen. Afterwards it's possible she will favour me with her opinion."

Mrs. Nairn smiled at them encouragingly, and her husband proceeded: "One or two of my colleagues were no pleased at ye for putting off the meeting."

"The sloop was small, and it was blowing rather hard," Vane explained.

"Maybe," said Nairn. "For all that, the tone of your message was not altogether conciliatory. It informed us that ye would arrange for the postponed meeting at your earliest convenience. Ye didna mention ours."

"I pointed that out to him, and he said it didn't matter," Carroll broke in, laughing.

Nairn spread out his hands in expostulation, but there was dry appreciation in his eyes. "Young blood must have its way." Then he paused. "Ye will not have said anything to Horsfield yet about the smelter?"

"No. So far, I'm not sure it would pay us to put up the plant, and the other man's terms were lower."

"Maybe," Nairn answered, and he made the word very expressive. "Ye have had the handling of the thing; but henceforward it will be necessary to get the sanction of the board. However, ye will meet Horsfield to-night. We expect him and his sister."

Vane thought he had been favoured with a hint, but he also fancied that his host was not inimical and was merely reserving his judgment. The latter changed the subject.

"So ye're going to England for a holiday," he remarked. "Ye'll have friends who'll be glad to see ye?"

"I've one sister and no other near relatives, but I expect to spend some time with folks you know. The Chisholms are old

family friends and, as you will remember, it was through them I first approached you.” Then obeying one of the impulses which occasionally swayed him he turned to Mrs. Nairn. “I’m grateful to them for sending me the letter of introduction to your husband. He didn’t treat me as the others did when I first went round this city with a few mineral specimens.”

He had expected nothing when he spoke, but there was a responsive look in the lady’s face which hinted that he had made a friend; and as a matter of fact, he owed a good deal to his host.

“So ye are meaning to stay with Chisholm,” Nairn exclaimed. “We had Evelyn here two years ago and Clara said something about her coming out again.”

“I never heard of that, but it’s nine years since I saw Evelyn.”

“Then there’s a surprise in store for ye,” said Nairn. “I believe they’ve a bonny place, and there’s no doubt Chisholm will make ye welcome.”

The slight pause was expressive. It implied that Nairn, who had a somewhat biting humour, could furnish a reason for Chisholm’s hospitality if he desired, and Vane was confirmed in this supposition when he saw the warning look which his hostess cast at her husband.

“It’s likely that we’ll have Evelyn again in the fall,” she broke in. “It’s a very small world, Mr. Vane.”

“It’s a far cry from Vancouver to England,” said Vane. “How did you come to know Chisholm?”

Nairn answered him. “Our acquaintance began with business, and he’s a kind of connection of Colquhoun’s.”

Colquhoun was a man of some importance, who held a Crown appointment, and Vane felt inclined to wonder why Chisholm had not sent him a letter to him. Afterwards he guessed at the reason, which was not flattering to himself or his host. The latter and he chatted awhile on business topics, until there was a sound of voices below, and going down in company with Mrs. Nairn they found two or three new arrivals in the entrance hall. More came in, and when they sat down to supper, Vane was given a place beside a lady whom he had already met.

Jessie Horsfield was about his own age; tall and slight of figure, with regular features, a rather colourless face, and eyes of a cold, light blue. There was, however, something which Vane considered striking in her appearance, and he was gratified by her graciousness to him. Her brother sat almost opposite to them, a tall, spare man, with an expressionless countenance, except for the aggressive hardness in his eyes. Vane had noticed this look in them, and it had roused his dislike; but he had not observed it in those of Miss Horsfield, though it was present now and then. Nor did he realise that while she chatted, she was unobtrusively studying him; She had not favoured him with much notice when she was in his company on a previous occasion; he had been a man of no importance then.

“I suppose you are glad you have finished your work in the bush,” she remarked presently. “It must be nice to get back to civilisation.”

“Yes,” Vane assented; “it’s remarkably nice after living for nine years in the wilderness.”

A fresh dish was laid before him, and his companion smiled. “You didn’t get things of this kind among the pines.”

“No,” said Vane. “In fact, cookery is one of the chopper’s trials. You come back dead tired, and often very wet, to your lonely tent, and then there’s a fire to make and supper to get before you can rest. It happens now and then that you’re too played out to trouble, and go to sleep instead.”

“Dreadful,” said the girl, sympathetically. “But you have been in Vancouver before.”

“Except on the last occasion, I stayed down near the water-front. We were not provided with luxurious quarters or suppers of this kind then.”

Jessie nodded. “It’s romantic, and though you must be glad it’s over, there must be some satisfaction in feeling that you

owe the change to your own efforts. Doesn't it give you a feeling that in some degree you're master of your fate? I fancy I should like that."

It was subtle flattery, and there were reasons why it appealed to the man. He had wandered about the province in search of employment, besides being beaten down at many a small bargain by more fortunately situated men. Now, however, he had resolved that there should be a difference: instead of begging favours, he would dictate terms.

"I should have imagined it," he said, in answer to her last remark, and he was right, for Jessie Horsfield was a clever woman, who loved power and influence. Then she abruptly changed the subject.

"It was you who located the Clermont mine, wasn't it?" she asked. "I read something about it in the papers; I think they said it was copper."

This vagueness was misleading, because her brother had given her a good deal of information about the mine.

"Yes," said Vane, who was willing to take up any subject she suggested; "it's copper, but there's some silver combined with it. Of course, the value of any ore depends upon two things—the percentage of the metal, and the cost of extracting it."

She waited with flattering interest, and he added: "In both respects, Clermont produce is promising."

After that he did not remember what they talked about; but the time passed rapidly and he was surprised when Mrs. Nairn rose and the company drifted away by twos and threes towards the verandah. Left by himself a moment, he came upon Carroll sauntering down a corridor, and the latter stopped him.

"I've had a chat with Horsfield," he remarked.

"Well?" said Vane.

"He may have merely meant to make himself agreeable, and he may have wished to extract information about you. If the latter was his object, he was not successful."

"Ah!" said Vane thoughtfully. "Nairn's straight, anyway, and to be relied upon. I like him and his wife."

"So do I," Carroll agreed.

He moved away, and a few moments later Horsfield joined Vane, who had strolled out on to the verandah.

"I don't know if it's a very suitable time to mention it, but are you any nearer a decision about that smelter yet?" he said. "Candidly, I'd like the contract."

"No," said Vane. "I can't make up my mind, and I may postpone the matter indefinitely. It might prove more profitable to ship the ore out for reduction."

Horsfield examined his cigar. "Of course, I can't press you; but I may perhaps suggest that as we'll have to work together in other matters, I might be able to give you a *quid pro quo*."

"That occurred to me," said Vane, "On the other hand, I don't know how much importance I ought to attach to the consideration."

His companion laughed with apparent good-humour. "Oh, well!" he answered, "I must wait until you're ready."

He strolled away, and presently joined his sister.

"How does Vane strike you?" he asked. "You seem to get on with him."

"I've an idea that you won't find him easy to influence, and the girl looked at her brother pointedly.

"I'm inclined to agree with you," said Horsfield. "In spite of that, he's a man worth cultivating."

He passed on to speak to Nairn, and by and by Vane sat down beside Jessie in a corner of a big room. It was simply furnished, but spacious and lofty and looked out across the verandah. It was pleasant to lounge there and feel that Miss Horsfield had good-naturedly taken him under her wing, which seemed to describe her attitude.

"As Mrs. Nairn tells me you are going to England, I suppose we shall not see you in Vancouver for some months," she said presently. "This city really isn't a bad place to live in."

Vane felt gratified. She implied that he would be an acquisition and included him among the number of her acquaintances. "I fancy I shall find it a particularly pleasant one," he responded. "Indeed, I'm inclined to be sorry I've made arrangements to leave it very shortly."

"That is pure good-nature," his companion laughed.

She changed the subject, and Vane found her conversation entertaining. She said nothing of any consequence, but she knew how to make a glance or a changed inflection expressive. He was sorry when she left him, but she smiled at him before she moved away.

"If you and Mr. Carroll care to call, I am generally at home in the afternoon," she said.

She crossed the room, and Vane, who joined Nairn, remained near him until he took his departure.

It was late the next afternoon, and an Empress liner from China and Japan had arrived an hour or two earlier, when he and Carroll reached the C.P.R. station. The Atlantic train was waiting, and an unusual number of passengers were hurrying about the cars. They were, for the most part, prosperous people, business men and tourists from England, going home that way, and when Vane found Mrs. Marvin and Kitty, he was once more conscious of a stirring of compassion. Kitty smiled at him diffidently.

"You have been so kind," she began, and, pausing, added with a tremor in her voice: "But the tickets——"

"Pshaw!" said Vane. "If it will ease your mind, you can send me what they cost after the first full house you draw."

"How shall we address you?"

"Clermont Mineral Exploitation. I don't want to think I'm going to lose sight of you."

Kitty turned away from him a moment, and then looked back.

"I'm afraid you must make up your mind to that," she said.

Vane could not remember his answer, though he afterwards tried; but just then an official strode along beside the cars calling to the passengers, and when a bell began tolling Vane hurried the girl and her companions on to a platform. Mrs. Marvin entered the car, Elsie held up her face to kiss him before she disappeared, and he and Kitty were left alone. She held out her hand, and a liquid gleam crept into her eyes.

"We can't thank you properly," she said. "Good-bye."

"No," Vane protested. "You mustn't say that."

"Yes," said Kitty firmly. "It's good-bye. You'll be carried on in a moment."

Vane gazed down at her, and afterwards wondered at what he did; but she looked so forlorn and desolate, and the pretty face was so close to him. Stooping swiftly, he kissed her, and had a thrilling fancy that she did not recoil; then the cars lurched forward, and he swung himself down.

CHAPTER V—THE OLD COUNTRY.

A month had passed since Vane said good-bye to Kitty, when he and Carroll alighted one evening at a little station in the north of England.

The train went on, and Vane stood still, looking about him with a poignant recollection of how he had last waited on that platform, sick at heart, but gathering his youthful courage for the effort that he must make. It all came back to him; the dejection, the sense of loneliness; for he was then going out to the Western Dominion in which he had not a friend. Now he was returning prosperous and successful. But once again the feeling of loneliness was with him—most of those whom he had left behind had made a longer journey than his.

Then he noticed an elderly man in livery approaching, and held out his hand with a smile of pleasure.

“You haven’t changed a bit, Jim,” he said.

“A bit stiffer in the joints, and maybe a bit sourer,” was the answer; then the man’s wrinkled face relaxed. “I’m main glad to see thee, Mr. Wallace. Master wad have come, only he’d t’ gan t’ Manchester suddenly.”

Vane helped him to place their baggage in the trap, and then, gathering up the reins, bade him sit behind. After half an hour’s ride through a country rolled in ridge and valley, Vane pulled up where a stile path led across a strip of meadow.

“You can drive round; we’ll be there before you,” he said to the groom as he got down.

Carroll and he crossed the meadow, and passing round a clump of larches, came suddenly into sight of an old grey house with a fir wood rolling down the hillside close behind it. The building was long and low, weather-worn and stained with lichens where the creepers and climbing roses left the stone exposed. The bottom row of mullioned windows opened upon a terrace, and in front of the latter ran a low wall with a mossy coping on which was placed urns bright with geraniums. It was pierced by an opening approached by shallow stairs on which a peacock stood, and between them and the two men stretched a sweep of lawn. A couple of minutes later a lady met them in the hall, and held out her hand to Vane effusively. She was middle-aged, and had once been handsome, Carroll thought, but there were wrinkles about her eyes, which had a hint of hardness in them.

“Welcome home, Wallace,” she said. “It should not be difficult to look upon the Dene as that—you were here so often once upon a time.”

“Thank you,” said Vane. “I felt tempted to ask Jim to drive me round by the Low Wood; I wanted to see the place again.”

“I’m glad you didn’t,” and the lady smiled sympathetically. “The house is shut up and going to pieces. It would have been depressing to-night.”

Vane presented Carroll. Mrs. Chisholm’s manner was gracious; but for no particular reason Carroll wondered if she would have extended the same welcome to either, had his comrade not come back the discoverer of a mine.

“Tom was sorry he couldn’t wait to meet you, but he had to leave for Manchester on some urgent business,” she informed Vane, and looked round as a girl with disordered hair came up to them.

“This is Mabel,” she said. “I hardly think you will remember her.”

“I’ve carried her across the meadow,” smilingly remarked Vane.

The girl greeted the strangers demurely, and favoured Vane with a critical gaze. “So you’re Wallace Vane—who found the Clermont mine. Though I don’t remember you, I’ve heard a good deal about you lately. Very pleased to make your acquaintance.”

Vane’s eyes twinkled as he shook hands with her. Her manner was quaintly formal, but he fancied there was a spice of mischief hidden behind it, and in the meanwhile Carroll, watching his hostess, surmised that her daughter’s remarks had

not altogether pleased her. She, however, chatted with them until the man who had driven them appeared with their baggage, when they were shown their respective rooms.

Vane was the first to go down, and reaching the hall found nobody there, though a clatter of dishes and clink of silver suggested that a meal was being laid out in an adjoining room. Sitting down near the hearth, he looked about him.

His eyes rested on many objects that he recognised, but as his glance travelled to and fro it occurred to him that much of what he saw conveyed a hint that economy was needful.

By and by he heard a patter of feet, and looking up saw a girl descending the stairs in the fading stream of light. She was clad in trailing white, which gleamed against the dark oak and rustled softly as it flowed about a tall, finely-outlined and finely-poised figure. She had hair of dark brown with paler lights in its curling tendrils, gathered back from a neck that showed a faintly warmer whiteness, than the snowy fabric beneath it. It was, however, her face which seized Vane's attention; the level brows, the quiet, deep brown eyes, the straight, cleanly-cut nose, and the subtle suggestion of steadfastness and pride which they all conveyed. He rose with a cry that had pleasure and eagerness in it: "Evelyn!"

She came down, moving lightly but, as he noticed, with a rhythmic grace, and laid a firm, cool hand in his.

"I'm glad to see you back, Wallace," she said. "But you have changed."

"I'm not sure that's kind. In some ways you haven't changed at all; I would have known you anywhere."

"Nine years is a long time to remember any one."

Vane had seen few women during that period; but he was not a fool, and he recognised that this was no occasion for an attempt at gallantry. There was nothing coquettish in Evelyn's words, nor were they ironical. She had answered in the tranquil, matter-of-fact manner which, as he remembered, usually characterised her.

"It's a little while since you landed, isn't it?" she added.

"A week," said Vane. "I'd some business in London, and then I went on to look up Lucy. She had just gone up to town, and I missed her. I shall go up again to see her as soon as she answers my note."

"It won't be necessary. She's coming here for a fortnight very soon."

"That's kind," said Vane. "Whom have I to thank for suggesting it?"

"Does it matter? It was a natural thing to ask your only sister—who is a friend of mine. We have plenty of room, and the place is quiet."

"It used not to be. If I remember, your mother generally had it full part of the year."

"Things have changed," said Evelyn quietly.

Vane was baffled by something in her manner. Evelyn had never been effusive—that was not her way—but now, while she was cordial, she did not seem disposed to resume their acquaintance where it had been broken off. After all, he could hardly have expected this.

"Mabel is like you, as you used to be," he said. "It struck me as soon as I saw her; but when she began to talk there was a difference."

"Yes," she said. "I think you're right in both respects. Mopsy has the courage of her convictions. She's an open rebel."

There was no bitterness in her tone. Evelyn's manner was never pointed, but Vane fancied that she had said a meaning thing, one that might explain what he found puzzling in her attitude, when he held the key to it. Then she went on: "Mopsy was dubious about you before you arrived, but I'm pleased to say she now seems reassured."

Then Carroll came down, and a few moments later Mrs. Chisholm appeared and they went in to dinner in a low-ceilinged room. Nobody said anything of importance, but by and by Mabel turned to Vane.

"I suppose you have brought your pistols with you," she said.

"I never owned one," Vane informed her.

The girl looked at him with an excellent assumption of incredulity. "Then you have never shot anybody in British Columbia?"

Carroll laughed, as if this greatly pleased him, but Vane's face was rather grave as he answered her.

"No," he said. "I'm thankful I haven't."

"Then the West must be getting what the Archdeacon—he's Flora's husband, you know—calls decadent," the girl retorted.

"She's incorrigible," Mrs. Chisholm interposed with a smile.

Carroll, who was sitting next to Mabel, leaned towards her confidentially. "In case you feel badly disappointed, I'll let you into a secret," he said. "When we feel real savage, we take the axe instead."

Evelyn fancied that Vane winced at this, but Mabel looked openly regretful.

"Can either of you pick up a handkerchief going at full gallop on horseback?" she inquired.

"I'm sorry I can't, and I've never seen Wallace do so," Carroll answered, laughing, and Mrs. Chisholm shook her head at her daughter.

"Miss Clifford complained of your inattention to the study of English last quarter," she said severely.

Mabel made no answer, though Vane thought it would have relieved her to grimace, and by and by the meal came to an end. Some time afterwards, Mrs. Chisholm rose from her seat in the drawing-room.

"We keep early hours at the Dene, but you will retire when you like," she said. "As Tom is away, I had better tell you that you will find syphons and whisky in the smoking-room. I have had the lamp lighted."

"Thank you," Vane replied with a smile. "I'm afraid you have taken more trouble on our account than you need have done. Except on special occasions we have generally confined ourselves to strong green tea."

Mabel looked at him in amazement. "Oh!" she said, "the West is certainly decadent. You should be here when the otter hounds are out. Why, it was only——"

She broke off abruptly beneath her mother's withering glance, and when they were left alone, Vane and Carroll strolled out upon the terrace, pipe in hand.

"I suppose you could put in a few weeks here," Vane remarked.

"I could," Carroll replied. "There's an—atmosphere—about these old houses that appeals to me, perhaps because we have nothing like it in Canada. Besides, I think your friends mean to make things pleasant."

"I'm glad you like them."

Carroll understood that his comrade would not resent a candid expression of opinion. "I do; the girls in particular. They interest me. The younger one's of a type that's common in our country, though it's generally given room for free development into something useful there. Mabel's chaffing at the curb. It remains to be seen if she'll kick, and hurt herself in doing so, presently."

Vane, who remembered that Evelyn had said something to the same effect, had already discovered that Carroll possessed a keen insight in certain matters.

“And her sister?” he suggested.

“You won’t mind my saying that I’m inclined to be sorry for her? She has learned repression—been driven into line. That girl has character, but it’s being cramped and stunted. You live in walled-in compartments in this country.”

Vane strolled along the terrace thoughtfully. He was not offended, and he understood his companion’s attitude. Like other men of education and good upbringing, driven by unrest or disaster to the untrammelled life of the bush, Carroll had gained sympathy as well as knowledge. Facing facts candidly, he seldom indulged in decided protest against any of them. On the other hand, Vane was on occasion liable to outbreaks of indignation.

“Well,” said the latter at length, “I guess it’s time to go to bed.”

CHAPTER VI—UPON THE HEIGHTS.

Vane rose early next morning, as he had been accustomed to do, and taking a towel with him made his way across dewy meadows and between tall hedgerows to the tarn. Stripping where the rabbit-cropped sward met the mossy boulders, he swam out joyously, breasting the little ripples which splashed and sparkled beneath the breeze that had got up with the sun. Coming back where the water lay in shadow beneath a larch wood, which as yet had not wholly lost its vivid green, he disturbed the paddling moor-hens and put up a mallard from a clump of swaying reeds. Then he dressed and turned homewards.

Scrambling over a limestone wall tufted thick with parsley fern, he noticed Mabel stooping down over an object which lay among the heather where a rough cartroad approached a wooden bridge. On joining her, he saw that it was a finely-built canoe with a hole in one bilge she was examining. She looked up at him ruefully, as she said, "Very sad, isn't it? That stupid Little did it with his clumsy cart."

"I think it could be mended," Vane replied.

"Old Beavan—he's the wheelwright—said it couldn't, and dad said I could hardly expect him to send the canoe back to Kingston. He bought it for me at an exhibition." Then a thought seemed to strike her. "Perhaps you had something to do with canoes in Canada?"

"I used to pole one loaded with provisions up a river, and carry the lot round several falls. You're fond of paddling."

"I love it. I used to row the fishing-punt, but it's too old to be safe, and now the canoe's smashed I can't go out."

"Well," said Vane, "we'll walk across and see what we can find in Beavan's shop."

They crossed the heath to a tiny hamlet nestling in a hollow of a limestone crag. There Vane made friends with the wheelwright, who regarded him dubiously at first, and obtained a piece of larch board from him. The grizzled North countryman watched him closely as he set a plane, which is a delicate operation, and then raised no objection when Vane made use of his work bench. After that, Vane, who had sawn up the board, borrowed a few tools and copper nails, and he and Mabel went back to the canoe. On the way she glanced at him curiously.

"I wasn't sure old Beavan would let you have the things," she remarked. "It isn't often he'll lend even a hammer, but he seemed to take to you; I think it was the way you handled his plane."

"It's strange what little things win some people's good opinion, isn't it?"

"Oh! don't," she exclaimed. "That's how the Archdeacon talks. I thought you were different."

The man acquiesced in the rebuke, and after an hour's labour at the canoe, scraped the red lead he had used off his hands, and sat down beside the craft. By and by he became conscious that his companion was regarding him with what seemed to be approval.

"I really think you'll do, and we'll get on," she informed him. "If you had been the wrong kind you would have worried about your red hands. Still, you could have rubbed them on the heather, instead of on your socks."

"I might have thought of that," Vane agreed. "But, you see, I've been accustomed to wearing old clothes. Anyway, you'll be able to launch the canoe as soon as the joint's dry."

"There's one thing I should have told you," the girl replied. "Dad would have sent the canoe away to be mended if it hadn't been so far. He's very good when things don't ruffle him; but he hasn't been fortunate lately. The lead mine takes a good deal of money."

Vane admired her loyalty, and refrained from taking advantage of her candour, though there were one or two questions he would have liked to ask. When he was last in England, Chisholm had been generally regarded as a man of means, though it was rumoured that he was addicted to hazardous speculations. Mabel, who did not seem to mind his silence, went on:

"I heard Stevens—he's the gamekeeper—tell Beavan that dad should have been a rabbit because he's so fond of burrowing. No doubt, that meant he couldn't keep out of mines."

Vane made no comment, and to change the subject, reminded her: "Don't you think it's getting on for breakfast time?"

"It won't be for a good while yet. We don't get up early, and though Evelyn used to, it's different now. We went out on the tarn every morning, even in the rain; but I suppose that's not good for one's complexion, though bothering about such things doesn't seem to be worth while. Aunt Julia couldn't do anything for Evelyn, though she had her in London for some time. Flora is our shining light."

"What did she do?" Vane inquired.

"She married the Archdeacon, and he isn't so very dried up. I've seen him smile when I talked to him."

"I'm not astonished at that, Mabel."

His companion looked up at him demurely. "My name's not Mabel—to you. I'm Mopsy to the family, but my special friends call me Mops. You're one of the few people one can be natural with, and I'm getting sick—you won't be shocked at that—of having to be the opposite."

Half an hour later, Vane, who had seldom had to wait so long for it, sat down to breakfast. All he saw spoke of ease and taste and leisure. Evelyn, who sat opposite him, looked wonderfully fresh in her white dress. Mopsy was as amusing as she dared to be; but he felt drawn back to the restless world again as he glanced at his hostess and saw the wrinkles round her eyes and a hint of cleverly-hidden strain in her expression. He fancied a good deal could be inferred from the fragments of information her youngest daughter had let drop.

It was the latter who suggested that they should picnic upon the summit of a lofty hill, from which there was a striking view; and as this met with the approval of Mrs. Chisholm, who excused herself from accompanying them, they set out an hour later. The day was bright, with glaring sunshine, and a moderate breeze drove up wisps of ragged cloud that dappled the hills with flitting shadow.

Vane carried the provisions in a fishing-creel, and on leaving the head of the valley they climbed leisurely up easy slopes, slipping on the crisp hill grass now and then. By and by they plunged into tangled heather on a bolder ridge, which was rent by black gullies, down which at times wild torrents poured. This did not trouble either of the men, but Vane was surprised at the ease with which Evelyn threaded her way across the heath. She wore a short skirt, and he noticed the supple grace of her movements and the delicate colour the wind had brought into her face. She had changed since they left the valley. She seemed to have flung off something, and her laugh had a gayer ring; but while she chatted with him he was still conscious of a subtle reserve in her manner.

Climbing still, they reached the haunts of the cloud-berries and brushed through broad patches of the snowy blossoms that open their gleaming cups among the moss and heather.

Then turning the flank of a steep ascent, they reached the foot of a shingly scree, and sat down to lunch in the warm sunshine, where the wind was cut off by the peak above. Beneath them a great rift opened up among the rocks, and far beyond the blue lake in the depths of it they caught the silver gleam of the distant sea.

The creel was promptly emptied, and when Mabel afterwards took Carroll away to see if he could get up a chimney in some neighbouring crags, Vane lay resting on one elbow not far from Evelyn. She was looking down the long hollow, with the sunshine upon her face.

"You didn't seem to mind the climb," he said.

"I enjoyed it. I am fond of the mountains, and I have to thank you for a day among them."

On the surface, the words offered an opening for a complimentary rejoinder, but Vane was too shrewd to seize it. He had made one venture, and he surmised that a second one would not please her.

“They’re almost at your door,” he said. “One would imagine you could indulge in a scramble among them whenever if pleased you.”

“There are a good many things that look so close and still are out of reach,” Evelyn answered with a smile that somehow troubled him. Then her manner changed. “You are content with this?”

Vane gazed about him; at purple crags in shadow, glistening threads of water that fell among the rocks, and long slopes that lay steeped in softest colour, under the summer sky.

“Content is scarcely the right word for it,” he assured her. “If it wasn’t so still and serene up here, I’d be riotously happy. There are reasons for this quite apart from the scenery: for one, it’s pleasant to feel that I need do nothing but what I like for the next few months.”

“The sensation must be unusual. I wonder if, even in your case, it will last so long.”

Vane laughed and stretched out one of his hands. It was lean and brown, and she could see the marks of old scars on the knuckles.

“In my case,” he answered, “it has only come once in a lifetime, and if it isn’t too presumptuous, I think I’ve earned it.” He indicated his battered fingers. “That’s the result of holding a wet and slippery drill, but those aren’t the only marks I carry about with me—though I’ve been more fortunate than many fine comrades.”

“I suppose one must get hurt now and then,” said Evelyn, who had noticed something that pleased her in his voice as he concluded. “After all, a bruise that’s only skin-deep doesn’t trouble one long, and no doubt some scars are honourable. It’s slow corrosion that’s the deadliest.” She broke off with a laugh, and added: “Moralising’s out of place on a day like this, and they’re not frequent in the North. In a way, that’s their greatest charm.”

Vane nodded.

“Yes,” he said. “On the face of it, the North is fickle, though to those who know it that’s a misleading term. To some of us it’s always the same, and its dark grimness makes you feel the radiance of its smile. For all that, I think we’re going to see a sudden change in the weather.”

Half of the wide circle their view would have commanded was cut off by the scree, but long wisps of leaden cloud began to stream across the crags above, intensifying, until it seemed unnatural, the glow of light and colour on the rest.

“I wonder if Mopsy is leading Mr. Carroll into any mischief; they have been gone some time,” said Evelyn. “She has a trick of getting herself, and other people into difficulties. I suppose he is an old friend of yours, unless, perhaps, he’s acting as your secretary.”

Vane’s eyes twinkled. “If he came in any particular capacity, it’s as bear-leader. You see, there are a good many things I’ve forgotten in the bush, and as I left this country young, there are no doubt some I never learned.”

“And so you make Mr. Carroll your confidential adviser. How did he gain the necessary experience?”

“That,” replied Vane, “is more than I can tell you, but I’m inclined to believe he has been at one of the universities; Toronto, most likely. Anyhow, on the whole he acts as a judicious restraint.”

“But don’t you really know anything about him?”

“Only what some years of close companionship have taught me.”

Evelyn looked surprised, and he spread out his hands in a humorous manner. “A good many people have had to take me in that way, and they seemed willing to do so; the thing’s not uncommon in the West. Why should I be more particular than they were?”

Just then Mabel and Carroll appeared. The latter's garments were stained in places as if he had been scrambling over mossy rocks, and his pockets bulged.

"We've found some sundew and two ferns I don't know, as well as all sorts of other things," she announced.

"That's correct," said Carroll; "I've got them. I guess they're going to fill up most of the creel."

Mabel superintended their transfer, and then addressed the others generally: "I think we ought to go up the Pike now, when we have the chance. It isn't much of a climb from here. Besides, the quickest way back to the road is across the top and down the other side."

Evelyn agreed, and they set out, following a sheep-path which skirted the screes, until they left the bank of sharp stones behind, and faced a steep ascent. Parts of it necessitated a breathless scramble, and the sunlight faded from the hills as they climbed, while thicker wisps of cloud drove across the ragged summit. They reached the latter at length and stopped, bracing themselves against a rush of chilly breeze, while they looked down upon a wilderness of leaden-coloured rock. Long trails of mist were creeping in and out among the crags, and here and there masses of it gathered round the higher slopes.

"I think the Pike's grandest in this weather," Mabel declared. "Look below, Mr. Carroll, and you'll see the mountain is like a starfish. It has prongs running out from it."

Carroll did as she directed him, and noticed three diverging ridges springing off from the shoulder of the peak. Their crests, which were narrow, led down towards the valley, but their sides fell in rent and fissured crags to great black hollows.

"You can get down two of them," Mabel went on. "The first is the nearest to the road, but the third's the easiest. It takes you to the Hause; that's the gap between it and the next hill."

A few big drops began to fall, and Evelyn cut her sister's explanations short.

"We had better make a start at once," she said.

They set out, Mabel and Carroll leading and drawing farther away from the two behind; and the rain began in earnest as they descended. Rock slope and scattered stones were slippery, and Vane found it difficult to keep his footing on some of their lichenized surfaces. He, however, was relieved to see that his companion seldom hesitated, and they made their way downwards cautiously, until, near the spot where the three ridges diverged, they walked into a belt of drifting mist. The peak above them was suddenly blotted out, and Evelyn bade Vane hail Carroll and Mabel, who had disappeared. He sent a shout ringing through the vapour, and caught a faint and unintelligible reply, after which a flock of sheep fled past and dislodged a rush of sliding stones. Vane heard the latter rattle far down the hillside, and when he called again a blast of chilly wind whirled his voice away. There was a faint echo above him, and then silence again.

"It looks as if they were out of hearing, and the slope ahead of us seems uncommonly steep by the way those stones went down," he remarked. "Do you think Mabel has taken Carroll down the Stanghyll ridge?"

"I can't tell," said Evelyn. "It's comforting to remember that she knows it better than I do. I think we ought to make for the Hause; there's only one place that's really steep. Keep up to the left a little; the Scale Crags must be close beneath us."

They moved on cautiously, skirting what seemed to be a pit of profound depth in which dim vapours whirled, while the rain, which grew thicker, beat into their faces.

CHAPTER VII—STORM-STAYED.

The weather was not the only thing that troubled Vane as he stumbled on through the mist. Any unathletic tourist from the cities could have gone up without much difficulty by the way they had ascended, but it was different coming down on the opposite side of the mountain. There, their route laid across banks of sharp-pointed stones that rested lightly on the steep slope, interspersed with out-cropping rocks which were growing dangerously slippery; and a wilderness of crags pierced by three great radiating chasms lay beneath.

After half an hour's arduous scramble, he decided that they must be close upon the top of the last rift, and stood still for a minute looking about him. The mist was now so thick that he could scarcely see thirty yards ahead, but the way it drove past him indicated that it was blowing up a hollow. On one hand a rampart of hillside loomed dimly out of it; in front there was a dark patch that looked like the face of a dripping rock; and between the latter and the hill a boggy stretch of grass ran back into the vapour. Then he turned, and glanced at Evelyn with some concern. Her skirt was heavy with moisture, and the rain dripped from the brim of her hat, but she smiled at him reassuringly.

"It's not the first time I've got wet," she said.

Vane felt relieved on one account. He had imagined that a woman hated to feel draggled and untidy, and he was willing to own that in his case fatigue usually tended towards shortness of temper. Though the scramble had scarcely taxed his powers, he fancied that Evelyn, had already done as much as one could expect of her.

"I must prospect about a bit," he said. "Scardale's somewhere below us; but if I remember, it's an awkward descent to the head of it, and I'm not sure of the right entrance to the Hause."

"I've only once been down this way, and that was a long while ago," Evelyn replied.

Vane left her, and plodded away across the grass. When he had grown scarcely distinguishable in the haze, he turned and waved his hand.

"I know where we are; the head of the beck's close by," he cried.

Evelyn joined him at the edge of a trickle of water splashing in a peaty hollow, and they followed it down, seeing only odd strips of hillside amidst the vapour, until at length the ground grew softer and Vane, going first, sank among the long green moss almost to his knees.

"That won't do. Stand still, please," he said. "I'll try a little to the right."

He tried in one or two directions; but wherever he went he sank over his boots, and, coming back, he informed his companion that they had better go straight ahead.

"I know there's no bog worth speaking of; the Hause is a regular tourist track," he added, and suddenly stripped off his jacket. "First of all, you'll put this on; I'm sorry I didn't think of it before."

Evelyn demurred, and he rolled up the jacket. "You have to choose between doing what I ask and watching me pitch it into the beck," he declared. "I'm a rather determined person, and it would be a pity to throw the thing away, particularly as the rain hasn't got through it yet."

She yielded, and after he had held up the garment while she put it on, he spoke again:

"There's another thing; I'm going to carry you for the next hundred yards, or possibly farther."

"No," said Evelyn firmly. "On that point my determination is as strong as yours."

Vane made a sign of acquiescence. "You can have your way for a minute; I expect it will be long enough."

He was correct, Evelyn moved forward a pace or two, and then stopped with the skirt she had gathered up brushing the

quivering emerald moss, and her boots, which were high ones, hidden in the latter. She had some difficulty in pulling them out. Then Vane coolly picked her up.

“All you have to do is to keep still for the next few minutes,” he informed her in a most matter-of-fact voice.

Evelyn did not move, though had he shown any sign of self-conscious hesitation she would at once have shaken herself loose. He was conscious of a thrill and a certain stirring of his blood, but this, he decided, must be sternly ignored, and his task occupied most of his attention. It was not an easy one, and he stumbled once or twice, but he accomplished it and set the girl down safely on firmer ground.

“Now,” he said, “there’s only the drop to the dale, but we must endeavour to keep out of the beck.”

His voice and air were unembarrassed, though he was breathless, and Evelyn fancied that in this and the incident of the jacket he had revealed the forceful, natural manners of the West. It was the first glimpse she had had of them, though she had watched for one, and she was not displeased. The man had merely done what was most advisable, with practical sense.

A little farther on, a shoot of falling water swept out of the mist above and came splashing down a crag, spread out in frothing threads. It flowed across their path, reunited in a deep gully which they sprang across, and then fell tumultuously into the beck, which was now ten or twelve feet below on one side of them. They clung to the rock as they traced it downwards, stepping cautiously from ledge to ledge. At times a stone plunged into the mist beneath them, and Vane grasped the girl’s arm or held out a steadying hand, but he was never fussy or needlessly concerned. When she wanted help, it was offered at the right moment; but that was all, and she thought that had she been alarmed, which was not the case, her companion’s manner would have been more comforting than persistent solicitude. He was, she decided, one who could be relied upon in an emergency.

Though caution was still necessary, the next stage of the journey was easier, and by and by they reached a winding dale. They followed it downwards, splashing through water part of the time, and at length came into sight of a cluster of little houses standing between a river and a big fir wood.

“It must be getting on towards evening,” said Evelyn. “Mopsy and Carroll probably went down the Ridge, and as it runs out lower down the valley, they’ll be almost at home.”

“It’s six o’clock,” said Vane, glancing at his watch. “You can’t walk home in the rain, and it’s a long while since lunch. If Adam Bell and his wife are still at the ‘Golden Fleece,’ we’ll get something to eat there and borrow you dry clothes. He’ll drive us home afterwards.”

Evelyn made no objections. She was very wet and beginning to feel weary, and they were some distance from home. She restored him his jacket, and a few minutes later they entered an old hostelry which, like many others among these hills, was a farm as well as an inn. The landlady, who recognised Vane with pleased surprise, took Evelyn away with her, and afterwards provided Vane with some of her husband’s clothes. Then she lighted a fire, and when she had laid out a meal in the guest-room, Evelyn came in, attired in a dress of lilac print.

“It’s Maggie Bell’s,” she explained demurely. “Her mother’s things were rather large. Adam is away at a sheep auction, and they have only the trap he went in, but they expect him back in an hour or so.”

“Then we must wait,” said Vane. “Worse misfortunes have befallen me.”

They made an excellent meal, and then Vane drew up a wicker chair to the fire for Evelyn and sat down opposite to her. Outside, the rain dripped from the mossy flagstone eaves, and the song of the river stole in monotonous cadence into the room.

Evelyn was silent and Vane said nothing for a while. He had been in the air all day, and though this was nothing new to him, he was content to sit lazily still and leave the opening of conversation to his companion. In the meanwhile it was pleasant to glance towards her now and then. The pale-tinted dress became her, and he felt that the room would have looked less cheerful had she been away.

The effect she had on him was difficult to analyse, though he lazily tried. She appealed to him by the grace of her carriage, the poise of her head, her delicate colouring, and the changing lights in her eyes; but behind these points something stronger and deeper was expressed through them. He fancied she possessed qualities he had not hitherto encountered, which would become more precious when they were fully understood. He thought of her as wholesome in mind; one who sought for the best; but she was also endowed with an ethereal something that could not be defined.

Then a simile struck him: she was like the snow that towers high into the empyrean in British Columbia; in which he was wrong, for there was warm human passion in the girl, though it was sleeping yet. By and by, he told himself, he was getting absurdly sentimental, and he instinctively fumbled for his pipe and stopped. Evelyn noticed this and smiled.

"You needn't hesitate," she said. "The Dene is redolent of cigars, and Gerald smokes everywhere when he is at home."

"Is he likely to turn up?" Vane asked. "It's ever so long since I've seen him."

"I'm afraid not. In fact, Gerald's rather under a cloud just now. I may as well tell you this, because you are sure to hear of it sooner or later. He has been extravagant, and, as he assures us, extraordinarily unlucky."

"Stocks and shares?" suggested Vane, who was acquainted with some of the family tendencies.

Evelyn hesitated a moment. "That would have been more readily forgiven him. I believe he has speculated on the turf as well."

Vane was surprised, since he understood that Gerald Chisholm was a barrister, and betting on the turf was not an amusement he would have associated with that profession.

"Then," he said thoughtfully, "I must run up and see him later on."

Evelyn felt sorry she had spoken. Gerald needed help, which his father was not in a position to offer. She was not censorious of other people's faults; but it was impossible to be blind to some aspects of her brother's character, and she would have preferred that Vane should not meet Gerald while the latter was embarrassed by financial difficulties. She changed the subject.

"Several of the things you told me about your life in Canada interested me," she said. "It must have been bracing to feel that you depended upon your own efforts and stood on your own feet, free from all the hampering customs that are common here."

"The position has its disadvantages. You have no family influence behind you; nothing to fall back upon. If you can't make good your footing you must go down. It's curious that just before I came over here a lady I met in Vancouver expressed an opinion very like yours. She said it must be pleasant to feel that one was, to some extent at least, master of one's fate."

"Then she merely explained my meaning more clearly than I have done."

"One could have imagined that she has everything she could reasonably wish for. If I'm not transgressing, so have you. It's strange you should both harbour the same idea."

"I don't think it's uncommon among young women nowadays. There's a grandeur in the thought that one's fate lies in the hands of the high unseen powers; but to allow one's life to be moulded by—one's neighbours' prejudices and preconceptions is a different matter. Besides, if unrest and human striving were sent, was it only that they should be repressed?"

Vane sat silent a moment or two. He had noticed the brief pause and fancied that she had changed one of the words that followed it. He did not think it was her neighbours' opinions she most chafed against.

"It's not a point I've been concerned about," he replied at length. "In a general way, I did what I wanted."

“Which is a privilege that is denied to us.” Evelyn spoke without bitterness, and added a moment later: “What do women who are left to their own resources do in Western Canada?”

“Some of them marry; I suppose that’s the most natural thing,” said Vane with an air of reflection that amused her. “Anyway, they have plenty of opportunities. There’s a preponderating number of unattached young men in the newly-opened parts of the Dominion.”

“Things are different here, or perhaps we want more than they do across the Atlantic,” said Evelyn. “What becomes of the others?”

“They wait in the hotels; learn stenography and typewriting, and go into offices and stores.”

“And earn just enough to live upon meagrely? If their wages are high, they must pay out more. That follows, doesn’t it?”

“To some extent.”

“Is there nothing better open to them?”

“No,” said Vane thoughtfully; “not unless they’re trained for it and become specialised. That implies peculiar abilities and a systematic education with one end in view: you can’t enter the arena to fight for the higher prizes unless you’re properly armed. The easiest way for a woman to acquire power and influence is by a judicious marriage. No doubt it’s the same here.”

“It is,” replied Evelyn smiling. “A man is more fortunately situated.”

“I suppose he is. If he’s poor, he’s rather walled in, too; but he breaks through now and then. In the newer countries he gets an opportunity.”

Vane abstractedly examined his pipe, which he had not lighted yet. It was clear that the girl was dissatisfied with her surroundings, and had for some reason temporarily relaxed the restraint she generally laid upon herself; but he felt that if she were wise, she would force herself to be content. She was of too fine a fibre to plunge into the struggle that many women had to wage, and though he did not doubt her courage, she had not been trained for it. He had noticed that among men it was the cruder and less developed organisations that proved hardiest in adverse situations; one needed a strain of primitive vigour. There was, it seemed, only one means of release for her, and that was a happy marriage. But a marriage could not be happy unless the suitor was all that she desired, and Evelyn would be fastidious, though her family would, no doubt, only look for wealth and station. He imagined that this was where the trouble lay. He would wait and keep his eyes open. Shortly after he arrived at this decision, there was a rattle of wheels outside and the landlord, who came in, greeted him with rude cordiality. In another minute or two Vane handed Evelyn into the gig, and Bill drove them home through the rain.

CHAPTER VIII—LUCY VANE.

Bright sunshine streamed down out of a cloudless sky when Vane stood talking with his sister upon the terrace in front of the Dene one afternoon shortly after his ascent of the Pike in Evelyn's company. He leaned against the low wall, frowning, for Lucy had hitherto avoided a discussion of the subject which occupied their attention, and now, as he would have said, he could not make her listen to reason.

She stood in front of him, with the point of her parasol pressed firmly into the gravel, and her lips set, though there was a smile which suggested forbearance in her eyes. Lucy was tall and spare of figure; a year younger than her brother, and of somewhat determined character. She earned her living in a northern manufacturing town by lecturing on domestic economy for the public authorities. Vane understood that she also took part in Suffrage propaganda. She had a thin, forceful face, which was seldom characterised by repose.

"After all," Vane broke out, "what I've been urging is a very natural thing. I don't like to think of your being forced to work as you are doing, and I've tried to show that it wouldn't cost me any self-denial to make you an allowance. There's no reason why you should be at the beck and call of those committees any longer."

Lucy's smile grew plainer. "I don't think that describes my position very accurately."

"It's possible," Vane agreed with a trace of dryness. "No doubt you insist on the chairman or lady president giving way to you; but that doesn't affect the question. You have to work, anyway."

"But I like it, and it keeps me in some degree of comfort."

The man turned half impatiently and glanced about him. The front of the old grey house was flooded with light, and the lawn below the terrace glowed luminously green. The shadows of the hollies and cypresses were thin and unsubstantial, but where a beach overarched the grass, Evelyn and Mrs. Chisholm, attired in light draperies, reclined in basket chairs. Carroll, who wore thin grey tweed, stood close by, talking to Mabel, and Chisholm sat a little apart upon a bench with a newspaper in his hand. He looked half asleep, and a languorous, stillness pervaded the whole scene.

"Wouldn't you like this kind of thing as well?" he asked. "Of course, I mean what it implies—the power to take life easily and get as much enjoyment as possible out of it. It wouldn't be difficult, if you would only take what I'd be glad to give you." He indicated the languid figures in the foreground. "You could, for instance, spend your time among folks like these; and, after all, it's what you were meant to do."

"Well," said Lucy, "I believe I'm more at home with the other kind of folks—those in poverty, squalor, and ignorance. I've an idea they've a stronger claim on me, but that's not a point I can urge. The fact is, I've chosen my career, and there are practical reasons why I shouldn't abandon it. I had a good deal of trouble in getting a footing, and if I fell out now, it would be harder still to take my place in the ranks again."

"But you wouldn't require to do so."

"I can't be sure. I don't want to hurt you; but, after all, your success was sudden, and one understands that it isn't wise to depend upon an income derived from mining properties."

"None of you ever did believe in me."

"I suppose there's some truth in that; you really did give us some trouble. Somehow you were different—you wouldn't fit in—though I believe the same thing applied to me, for that matter."

"And now you don't expect my prosperity to last?"

The girl hesitated, but she was candid by nature. "Perhaps I had better answer. You have it in you to work determinedly and, when it's necessary, to do things that men with less courage would shrink from; but I doubt if yours is the temperament that leads to success. You haven't the huckster's instincts; you're not cold-blooded enough. You wouldn't cajole your friends or truckle to your enemies."

“If I adopted the latter course, it would be very much against the grain,” Vane confessed.

Lucy laughed. “Well,” she said, “I mean to go on earning my living; but you can take me up to London for a few days and buy me some hats and things. Then I don’t mind you giving something to the Emancipation Society.”

“I don’t know if I believe in emancipation or not, but you can have ten guineas.”

“Thank you,” said Lucy, glancing round towards Carroll, who was approaching them with Mabel. “I’ll give you a piece of advice—stick to that man. He’s cooler and less headstrong than you are; he’ll prove a useful friend.”

Carroll came up just then. “What are you two talking about?” he asked. “You look animated.”

“Wallace has just promised me ten guineas to assist the movement for the emancipation of women,” Lucy answered pointedly. “I may mention that our society’s efforts are sadly restricted by the lack of funds.”

“He’s now and then a little inconsequential in his generosity,” Carroll rejoined. “I didn’t know he was interested in that kind of thing, but as I don’t like to be outdone by my partner, I’ll subscribe the same.”

“Thanks,” said Lucy, who made an entry in a pocket-book in a businesslike manner.

They strolled along the terrace together, and as they went down the steps to the lawn, Carroll inquired with a smile, “Have you tackled Chisholm yet?”

“I would have done so had it appeared likely to have been of any use, but I never waste powder and shot,” Lucy replied. “A man of his restricted views would sooner subscribe handsomely to put us down.”

Carroll turned to his comrade. “Are you regretting the ten guineas? You don’t look pleased.”

“No,” said Vane; “the fact is, I wanted to do something which wasn’t allowed. I’ve met with the same disillusionment here as I did in British Columbia.”

Lucy looked up at her brother. “Did you attempt to give somebody money there?”

“I did,” said Vane shortly. “It’s not worth discussing, and anyway she wouldn’t listen to me.”

They strolled on, Vane frowning, while Carroll, who had seen signs of suppressed interest in Lucy’s face, smiled unobserved. Neither he nor the others had noticed Mabel, who was following them.

They joined the rest, and some time afterwards, Mrs. Chisholm addressed Carroll, who was lying back in a deep chair with his eyes, which were half closed, turned in Lucy’s direction.

“Are you asleep, or thinking hard?” she asked.

“Not more than half asleep,” Carroll protested. “I was trying to remember ‘A Dream of Fair Women.’ It struck me as a suitable occupation for a drowsy summer afternoon in a place like this, but I must confess that it was Miss Vane who put it into my head. She reminded me of one or two of the heroines not long ago, when she was championing the cause of the suffragist.”

“You mustn’t imagine that English women in general sympathise with her, or that such ideas are popular at the Dene,” Mrs. Chisholm rejoined.

Carroll smiled reassuringly. “I wouldn’t have imagined the latter for a moment. But, as I said, on an afternoon of this kind one can be excused for indulging in romantic fancies; and don’t you see what brought those old-time heroines into my mind—I mean the elusive resemblance to their latter-day prototype?”

Mrs. Chisholm looked puzzled. “No,” she declared. “One of them was Greek, another early English, and the finest of all was the Hebrew maid. As they couldn’t even have been like one another, how could they have collectively borne a

resemblance to anybody else?”

“That’s logical, on the surface. To digress, why do you most admire Jephthah’s daughter, the gentle Gileadite?”

His hostess affected surprise. “Isn’t it evident, when one remembers her patient sacrifice, her fine sense of family honour?”

Carroll felt that this was much the kind of sentiment one could have expected from her; and he did her justice in believing that it was genuine and that she was capable of acting up to her convictions. His glance rested on Vane for a moment, and the latter was startled as he guessed his comrade’s thought.

Evelyn sat near him, reclining languidly in a wicker chair. She had been silent and, now her face was in repose, the signs of reserve and repression were plainer than ever. There was, however, pride in it, and he felt that she was endowed with a keener and finer sense of family honour than her mother. Her brother’s career was threatened by the results of his own imprudence, and though her father could hardly be compared with the Gileadite warrior, there was, Vane imagined, a disturbing similarity between the two cases. It was unpleasant to contemplate the possibility of this girl’s being called upon to bear the cost of her relations’ misfortunes or follies. Carroll, however, looked across at Lucy with a smile.

“You don’t agree with Mrs. Chisholm?” he suggested.

“No,” said Lucy firmly. “Leaving the instance in question out, there are too many people who transgress and then expect somebody else—a woman as a rule—to serve as a sacrifice.”

“I don’t agree, either,” Mabel broke in. “I’d sooner have been Cleopatra or Joan or Arc—only she was burned, poor thing.”

“That was only what she might have expected. An unpleasant fate generally overtakes people who go about disturbing things,” Mrs. Chisholm said severely.

The speech was characteristic, and the others smiled. It would have astonished them had Mrs. Chisholm sympathised with the rebel idealist whose beckoning visions led to the clash of arms. Then Vane turned to his comrade.

“Aren’t you getting off the track?” he asked. “I don’t see the drift of your previous remarks.”

“Well,” said Carroll, with an air of reflection, “there must be, I think, a certain distinctive stamp upon those who belong to the leader type; I mean the folks who are capable of doing striking and heroic things. Apart from this, I’ve been studying you English—and it has struck me that there’s occasionally something imperious, or rather imperial, in the faces of your women in the most northern counties. I can’t define the thing, but it’s there—in the line of nose, the mouth, and I think most marked in the brows. It’s not Saxon, or Norse, or Danish. I’d sooner call it Roman.”

Vane was slightly astonished. He had seen that look in Evelyn’s face, and now, for the first time, he recognised it in his sister’s.

“I wonder if you have hit it,” he said with a laugh. “You can reach the Wall from here in a day’s ride.”

“The Wall?”

“The Roman Wall; Hadrian’s Wall. I believe one authority states they had a garrison of 100,000 men to keep it.”

Chisholm joined the group. He was a tall, rather florid-faced man with a formal manner, dressed immaculately in creaseless clothes.

“The point Carroll raises is interesting,” he remarked. “While I don’t know how long it takes for a strain to die out, there must have been a large civil population living near the wall, and we know that the characteristics of the Teutonic peoples, who followed the Romans, still remain.”

Nobody else had any comment to make, and when by and by the group broke up, Evelyn was left alone for a few minutes with Mabel.

“Gerald should have been sent to Canada instead of Oxford,” she said. “Then he might have got as rich as Wallace Vane and Mr. Carroll.”

“What makes you think they’re rich?” Evelyn asked with reproof in her tone.

“Oh!” said Mabel, “we all knew they were rich before they came, and they were giving Lucy guineas for the suffragists an hour ago. They must have a good deal of money to waste it like that. Besides, I think Wallace wanted her to take some more, and he seemed quite vexed when he said he’d tried to give money to somebody else in Canada, who wouldn’t have it. As he said—she—it must have been a woman—but I don’t think he meant to mention that. It slipped out.”

“You had no right to listen,” Evelyn retorted severely; but the information sank into her mind, and she afterwards remembered it.

CHAPTER IX—CHISHOLM PROVES AMENABLE.

Vane spent a month at the Dene with quiet satisfaction, and when at last he left for London and Paris he gladly promised to come back for another few weeks before he sailed for Canada. He stayed some time in Paris, because Carroll insisted on it, but it was with eagerness he went north again. For one reason—and he laid some stress upon this—he longed for the moorland air and the rugged fells, though he also admitted that Evelyn's society enhanced their charm for him.

At last, shortly before setting out on the journey, he took himself to task and endeavoured to determine what his feelings towards her were, but he signally failed to elucidate the point. It was only clear that he was more contented in her presence, and that, apart from her physical comeliness, she had a stimulating effect upon his mental faculties, although so far as he could remember she seldom said anything remarkable. Then he wondered how she regarded him, and to this question he could find no answer. For the most part there was a reserve he found more piquant than deterrent about her, and he was conscious that while willing to talk with him freely she was still holding him off at arm's length.

On the whole, he could not be absolutely sure that he desired to get much nearer. Though he failed to admit this clearly, his attitude was largely one of respectful admiration with a vein of compassion in it. Evelyn was unhappy, and out of harmony with her relatives, which he could understand more readily because their ideas often jarred on him.

He had been back at the Dene a fortnight, when one morning he walked out of the hamlet where the wheelwright's shop was with a telegram in his hand. Sitting down on the wall of a bridge close by, he turned to Carroll, who had accompanied him.

"I think you have Nairn's code in your wallet," he said. "We'll decipher the thing."

Carroll laid the message upon a smooth stone and set to work with a pencil.

"'Situation highly satisfactory,'" he read aloud, and commented: "It must be, if Nairn paid for another word; 'highly's' not in the code." Then he went on with the deciphering: "'Result of reduction exceeds anticipations. Stock, 30 premium. Your presence not immediately required.'"

"That's distinctly encouraging," said Vane. "Now they're getting farther in, the ore must be carrying more silver."

"It's fortunate. I ran through the bank account last night, and you have spent a lot of money. It confirms my opinion that you have expensive friends."

Vane frowned at this, but Carroll continued undeterred: "You want pulling up after the way you have been indulging in a reckless extravagance, which I feel compelled to point out is new to you. The cheque drawn in favour of Gerald Chisholm rather astonished me. Have you said anything about it to his relatives?"

"I haven't," Vane answered shortly.

"Then, judging by the little I saw of him, I should consider it most unlikely that he has made any allusion to the matter. The next cheque was more surprising; I mean the one you gave his father."

"They were both loans."

"Have you any expectation of getting the money back?"

"What has that to do with you?"

Carroll spread out his hands. "Only this—I think you need looking after. We can't stay here indefinitely. Hadn't you better get back to Vancouver before your English friends ruin you?"

"I'll go in three or four weeks, not before."

Carroll sat silent a minute or two; and then he looked his companion squarely in the face.

“Is it your intention to marry Evelyn Chisholm?”

“I don’t know what has put that into your mind.”

“I should be astonished if it hadn’t suggested itself to her family,” Carroll retorted.

“I’m far from sure it’s an idea they’d entertain with any great favour. For one thing, I can’t live here.”

“Try them, and see. Show them Nairn’s telegram when you mention the matter.”

Vane swung himself down from the wall.

“It’s very possible that I may do so,” he informed his comrade. “But we’ll get along.”

His heart beat more rapidly than usual as they turned back towards the house, but he was perfectly composed when, some little time later, he sat down beside Chisholm, who was lounging away the morning on the lawn.

“I’ve been across to the village for a telegram I expected,” he announced. “The news is encouraging.”

He read it to Chisholm, who had determined on the line he meant to follow.

“You’re a fortunate man,” he said. “There’s probably no reasonable wish that you can’t gratify.”

“There are things one can’t buy with dollars,” Vane replied.

“That is very true. They’re often the most valuable. On the other hand, some of them may now and then be had for the asking. Besides, when one has a sanguine temperament, it’s difficult to believe that anything one sets one’s heart upon is quite unattainable.”

Vane wondered if he had been given a hint. Chisholm’s manner was suggestive and Carroll’s remarks had had an effect on him. He sat silent, and Chisholm spoke again: “If I were in your place, I should feel I had all I could desire within my reach.”

Vane was becoming sure that his comrade had been right. Chisholm would not have harped upon the same idea unless he had intended to convey some particular meaning, but the man’s methods roused Vane’s dislike. He could face opposition, and he would sooner have been discouraged than judiciously prompted.

“Then if I offered myself as a suitor for Evelyn, you would not think me presumptuous?” he said.

Chisholm was somewhat surprised at his abruptness, but he smiled reassuringly.

“No,” he said; “I can’t see why I should do so. You are in a position to maintain a wife in comfort, and I don’t think anybody could take exception to your character.” He paused a moment. “I suppose you have some idea of how Evelyn regards you?”

“I haven’t the faintest notion,” Vane confessed. “That’s the trouble.”

“Would you like me to mention the matter?”

“No,” said Vane decidedly. “In fact, I must ask you not to do anything of the kind. I only wished to make sure of your good will, and now I’m satisfied on that point, I’d sooner wait, and speak—when it seems judicious.”

Chisholm nodded. “Yes,” he said indulgently, “I dare say that would be wisest.”

Vane, who thanked him, waited. He fancied that the transaction, which seemed the best name for it, was not complete yet; but he meant to leave what should follow to his companion. He would not help the man.

“There’s a matter which had better be mentioned now, distasteful as it is,” Chisholm said at length. “I can settle nothing upon Evelyn. As you must have guessed, my affairs are in a far from promising state. Indeed, I’m afraid I may have to ask your indulgence when the loan falls due, and I don’t mind confessing that the prospect of Evelyn’s making what I think is a suitable marriage is a relief to me.”

Vane’s feelings were somewhat mixed, but contempt figured prominently among them. He could find no fault with Chisholm’s desire to safeguard his daughter’s future, but he was convinced that the man looked for more than this. He felt he had been favoured with a delicate hint, to which his companion expected an answer.

“Well,” he said curtly, “you need not be concerned about the loan. To go a little farther, I should naturally take an interest in the welfare of my wife’s relatives. I don’t think I can say anything more in the meanwhile.”

He knew that he might have spoken more plainly without offence, when he saw Chisholm’s smile, but the latter looked satisfied.

“Those are the views I expected you to hold,” he declared. “I believe Mrs. Chisholm will share my gratification if you find Evelyn disposed to listen to you.”

Vane left him shortly afterwards with a sense of shame. He felt he had bought the girl and that, if she ever heard of it, she would find it hard to forgive him for the course he had taken. By and by he met Carroll, who looked at him inquiringly.

“I’ve had a talk with Chisholm,” said Vane. “It has upset my temper—I feel mean. There’s no doubt that you were right.”

Carroll smiled and showed that he could guess what was in his comrade’s mind. “I wouldn’t worry too much about the thing,” he replied. “The girl probably understands the situation. It’s not pleasant, but I expect she’s more or less resigned to it. She can’t help herself.”

Vane gazed at him with anger. “Does that make it any better? Is it any comfort to me?”

“Take her out of it. If she has any liking for you, she’ll thank you for doing so afterwards.”

Vane, who made no answer, strode away, and nobody saw any more of him for an hour or two.

He had her father’s consent, but he felt he could not plead his cause with Evelyn just then. With her parents on his side, she was at a disadvantage, and he shrank from the thought that she might be forced upon him against her will. This was not what he desired, and she might hate him for it afterwards. She was very alluring; there had been signs of an unusual gentleness in her manner, but he wanted time to win her favour, aided only by such gifts as he had been endowed with. It cost him a determined effort, but he made up his mind to wait.

CHAPTER X—WITH THE OTTER HOUNDS.

A week or two had slipped away since Vane's eventful interview, when he lounged upon the terrace after breakfast chatting with Carroll.

Suddenly a long, faint howl came up the valley, and was answered by another in a deeper note. Then a confused swelling clamour, which slightly resembled the sound of chiming bells, broke out, softened by the distance. Carroll stopped and listened.

"What in the name of wonder is that?" he asked. "The first of it reminded me of a coyote howling, but the rest's more like the noise the timber wolves make in the bush at night."

"You haven't made a bad shot," Vane laughed. "It's a pack of otter hounds hot upon the scent."

The sound ceased as suddenly as it had begun, but a few moments later Mabel came running towards the men.

"I knew the hounds met at Patten Brig, but Jim was sure they'd go down-stream," she cried breathlessly. "They're coming up, and I think they're at the pool below the village. Get two poles—you'll find some in the tool-shed—and come along at once."

She clambered into the house through a window, calling for Evelyn, and Carroll smiled.

"We have our orders," he remarked. "I suppose we'd better go."

"It's one of the popular sports up here," said Vane. "You may as well see it."

They set out a few minutes later, accompanied by Evelyn, while Mabel hurried on in front and reproached them for their tardiness.

At length, after crossing several wet fields, they came into a rushy meadow on the edge of the river, which spread out into a wide pool, fringed with alders which had not yet lost their leaves and the barer withes of osiers. There was a swift stream at the head of it, and a long rippling shallow at the tail, and a very mixed company was scattered along the bank and in the water.

A red-coated man with whip and horn stood in the tail outflow, and three or four more with poles in their hands were spread out across the stream behind him. These and one or two in the head stream appeared by their dress to belong to the hunt, but the rest, among whom were a few women, were attired in everyday garments and of different walks in life: artisans, labourers, people of leisure, and a belated tourist or two.

Three or four big hounds were swimming aimlessly up and down the pool; a dozen more or thereabouts trotted to and fro along the water's edge, stopping to sniff and give tongue in an uncertain manner now and then; but there was no sign of an otter.

Carroll looked round with a smile when his companions stopped. "There'll be very little work done in this neighbourhood to-day," he said. "I'd no idea there were so many folks in the valley with time to spare. The only thing that's missing is the beast they're after."

"An otter is an almost invisible creature," Evelyn explained, "You very seldom see one, unless it's hard pressed by the dogs. There are a good many in the river, but even the trout fishers, who are about at sunrise in the hot weather and wade in the dusk, rarely come across them. Are you going to take a share in the hunt?"

"No," replied Carroll, glancing humorously at his pole. "I don't know what I brought this thing for, unless it was because Mopsy sent me for it. I'd sooner stay and watch with you. Splashing through a river after a little beast which I don't suppose they'd let an outsider kill doesn't interest me, and I don't see why I should want to kill it, anyway. Some of you English people have sporting ideas I can't understand. I struck a young man the other day—a well-educated man by the look of him—who was spending the afternoon happily with a ferret by a corn stack, killing rats with a club. He seemed

uncommonly pleased with himself because he'd got four of them."

"Oh!" exclaimed Mabel, "you're as bad as the silly people who call killing things cruelty. I wouldn't have thought it of you."

"I've seen him," said Vane, "drop a deer going almost as fast as a locomotive through thick brush, with a single-shot rifle, and I believe he once assisted in killing a panther in a thicket you couldn't see two yards ahead in. The point is, that he meant to eat the deer, and the panther had been taking a rancher's hogs."

"Then I'm sorry I brought him," said Mabel decidedly. "He's not a sportsman."

"I really think there's some excuse for the more vigorous sports," Evelyn declared. "Of course, you can't eliminate a certain amount of cruelty; but admitting that, isn't it just as well that men who live in a luxurious civilisation should be willing to plod through miles of heather after grouse, risk their limbs on horseback, or spend hours in cold water? These are bracing things; they imply moral discipline. It can't be nice to ride at a dangerous fence, or flounder down a rapid after an otter when you're stiff with cold. The effort to do so must be wholesome."

"A sure thing," Carroll agreed. "The only drawback is that when you've got your fox or otter, it isn't worth anything. A good many of the folks in the newer lands have to make something of the kind of effort you described every day. In their case, the results are waggon-trails, valleys cleared for orchards, new branch railroads. I suppose it's a matter of opinion, but if I'd put in a season's risky work I'd sooner have a piece of land to grow fruit on, or a share in a mineral claim—you get plenty of excitement in prospecting—than a fox's tail. But there are people in Canada who wouldn't agree with me."

He strolled along the water's edge with Evelyn, and presently looked round.

"Mopsy's gone, and I don't see Vane," he said.

"After all, he's one of us. If you're born in the North Country, it's hard to keep out of the river when you hear the otter hounds."

They took up their station behind a growth of alders, and for a while the dogs went trotting by in twos and threes or swam about the pool, but nothing else broke the surface of the leaden-coloured water. Then there was a cry, an outbreak of shouting, a confused baying, and half a dozen hounds dashed past. Evelyn stretched out her hand.

"Look!" she said.

Carroll saw a small grey spot—the top of the otter's head—moving across the slacker part of the pool, with a very slight, wedge-shaped ripple trailing away from it. It sank next moment; a bubble or two rose, and then there was nothing but the smooth flow of water.

A horn called shrilly, a few whip-cracks rang out like pistol shots, and the dogs took to the water, swimming slowly here and there. Men scrambled along the bank and while some, entering the river, reinforced the line spread out across the head rapid, others joined the second row, wading steadily up-stream, and splashed about as they advanced with iron-tipped poles. Nothing rewarded their efforts; the dogs turned and went down-stream; and then suddenly everybody ran or waded towards the tall outflow. A clamour of shouting and baying broke out, and floundering men and swimming dogs went down the stream together in a confused mass. Then there was silence, and the hounds came out and trotted to and fro along the bank, up which dripping men clambered after them. Evelyn laughed as she pointed to Vane, who looked wetter than most, among the leading group.

"I don't suppose he meant to go in. It's in the blood," she said.

"There's no reason why he shouldn't, if it amuses him," Carroll replied.

A little later, the dogs were driven in again, and this time the whole of the otter's head was visible as it swam, up-stream. The animal was flagging, and on reaching shoaler water it sprang out altogether now and then, rising and falling

in the stronger stream with a curious serpentine motion. In fact, as head and body bent in the same sinuous curves, it looked less like an animal than a plunging fish. The men guarding the rapid stood ready with their poles, and more were wading and splashing up both sides of the pool. The otter's pace was getting slower; sometimes it seemed to stop, and now and then it vanished among the ripples. Carroll saw that Evelyn's face was intent, though there were signs of shrinking in it.

"Now," he said, "I'll tell you what you are thinking—you want that poor little beast to get away."

"I believe I do," Evelyn confessed.

They watched with strained attention. The girl could not help it, though, she dreaded the climax. Her sympathies were now with the hard pressed, exhausted creature that was making a desperate fight for life. The pursuers were close behind it, the swimming dogs leading them; and ahead lay a foaming rush of water which did not seem more than a foot deep with men spread out across it. The shouting from the bank had ceased, and everybody waited in tense expectancy, when the otter disappeared.

The dogs reached the rapid, where they were washed back a few yards before they could make head up-stream. Men who came splashing close upon their tails left the river to scramble along its edge; and then stopped abruptly, while the dogs swam in an uncertain manner about the still reach beyond. They came out in a few minutes, and scampered up and down among the stones, evidently at fault, for there was no sign of the otter anywhere. The hunted creature had crept up the rush of water among the feet of those who watched for it, and vanished unseen into the sheltering depths beyond.

Evelyn sighed with relief. "I think it will escape," she said. "The river's rather full after the rain, which is against the dogs, and there isn't another shallow for some distance. Shall we go on?"

They strolled forward behind the dogs, which were again moving up-stream; but they turned aside to avoid a wood, and it was some time later when they came out upon a rocky promontory dropping steeply to the river. The hunt was now widely scattered about the reach. Men crept along slippery ledges above the water, and moved over steeply-slanting slopes, half hidden among the trees.

A few were in the river, and three or four of the dogs were swimming; the rest, spread out in twos and threes, trotted to and fro among the undergrowth, Carroll did not think they were following any scent, but a figure creeping along the foot of the rock not far away presently seized his attention.

"It's Mopsy," he said. "The foothold doesn't look very safe among those stones, and there seems to be deep water below."

He called out in warning, but the girl did not heed. The willows were thinner at the spot she had reached, and, squeezing herself through them, she leaned down, clinging to an alder branch.

"He's gone to holt among the roots," she cried.

Three or four men came running along the opposite bank and apparently decided that she was right, for the horn was sounded and here and there a dog broke through the underbrush; then, just as the first-comers reached the rapid, there was a splash. It was a moment or two before Evelyn or Carroll, who had been watching the dogs, realised what had happened, and then the blood ebbed from the girl's face. Mabel had disappeared.

Running a few paces forward, Carroll saw what looked like a bundle of spread-out garments swing round in an eddy. It washed in among the willows, and he heard a faint cry.

"Somebody help me, quick; I've caught a branch."

He could not see the girl now, but an alder bough was bending sharply, and he flung a rapid glance around him. The summit of the rock he stood upon rose above the trees, and though he would have faced the risky fall had there been a better landing, it seemed impossible to alight among the stones without a broken leg. Further down-stream he might reach the water by a reckless jump, because the promontory sloped towards it there; but he would not be able to swim back

against the current. His position was a painful one; it looked as if there was nothing that he could do.

Next moment men and dogs went scrambling and swimming down the rapid; but they were in hot pursuit of the otter, which had left its hiding-place, and it was evident that the girl had escaped their attention. Carroll shouted savagely as his comrade appeared among the tail of the hunt below. The others were too occupied to heed, or perhaps concluded that he was urging them on; but Vane, who was in the water, seemed to understand. In another few minutes he was swimming down the pool along the edge of the alders. Then Carroll saw that Evelyn expected him to take some part in the rescue.

“Get down before it’s too late!” she cried.

Carroll spread out his hands, as if to beg her forbearance, and while every impulse urged him to the leap he endeavoured to keep his head.

“I can’t do any good just now,” he answered, knowing he was right and yet feeling horribly ashamed. “She’s holding on, and Wallace will reach her in a moment or two.”

Evelyn broke out on him in an agony of fear and anger. “You coward!” she cried. “Will you let her drown?”

She turned and ran forward, but Carroll, dreading that she meant to attempt the descent, seized her shoulder and held her fast. While he grappled with her, Vane’s voice rose from below, and he let his hands drop.

“Wallace has her! There’s no more danger,” he said.

Evelyn suddenly recovered some degree of calm.

Standing, breathless, a pace or two apart, they saw Vane and the girl appear from beneath the willows and wash away down-stream. The man was swimming but he was hampered by his burden, and once he and Mabel sank almost from sight in a whirling eddy. Carroll said nothing, but he turned and ran along the sloping ridge, until where the fall was less and the trees were thinner he leaped out into the air. He broke through the alders amidst a rustle of bending boughs and disappeared; but a moment later his head rose out of the water close beside Vane, and the two men went down-stream with Mabel between them.

Evelyn scrambled wildly along the ridge, and when she reached the foot of it Vane was helping Mabel up the sloping bank of gravel. The girl’s drenched garments clung about her, her wet hair was streaked across her face; but she seemed able to stand, and she was speaking in jerky gasps. The hunt had swept on through shoaler water, but there was a cheer from the stragglers across the river. Evelyn clutched her sister, half laughing, half sobbing, and incoherently upbraided her. Mabel shook herself free, and her first remark was characteristic.

“Oh!” she said, “don’t make a silly fuss.” Then she tried to shake out her dripping skirt. “I’m only wet through, Wallace, take me home.”

Vane picked her up, which was what she seemed to expect, and the others followed when he pushed through the underbush towards a neighbouring meadow. Evelyn, however, was still a little unnerved, and when they reached a gap in a wall she stopped, and leaning against the stones turned to Carroll.

“I think I’m more disturbed than Mopsy is,” she said. “What I felt must be some excuse for me. I’m sorry for what I said; it was unjustifiable.”

“Anyway, it was perfectly natural; but I must confess that I felt some temptation to make a fool of myself. I might have jumped into those alders, but it’s most unlikely that I could have got out of them.”

Evelyn looked at him with a faint respect. She had not troubled to point out that he had not flinched from the leap, when it seemed likely to be of service.

“How had you the sense to think of that?” she asked.

"I suppose it's a matter of practice," Carroll answered with amusement. "One can't work among the ranges and rivers without learning to make the right decision rapidly. When you don't, you get badly hurt. The thing has to be cultivated, it's not instinctive."

Evelyn was struck by the explanation. This acquired coolness was a finer thing, and undoubtedly more useful than hot-headed gallantry, though she admired the latter.

"Wallace was splendid in the water," she broke out, uttering part of her thoughts aloud.

"I thought rather more of him in the city," Carroll replied. "That kind of thing was new to him, and I'm inclined to believe I'd have let the folks he had to negotiate with have the mine for a good deal less than what he eventually got for it. But I've said something about that before, and after all I'm not here to play Boswell."

The girl was surprised at the apt allusion; it was not what she would have expected from the man. Since she had not recovered her composure, she forgot what Vane had told her about him, and her comment was an incautious one. "How did you hear of him?"

Carroll parried this with a smile.

"Oh!" he said, "you don't suppose you can keep those old fellows to yourselves—they're international. But hadn't we better be getting on? Let me help you through the gap."

They reached the Dene some time later, and Mabel, very much against her wishes, was sent to bed, while shortly afterwards Carroll came across Vane, who had changed his clothes, strolling up and down among the shrubberies.

"What are you doing here?" he asked.

Vane looked embarrassed. "For one thing, I'm keeping out of Mrs. Chisholm's way; she's inclined to be effusive. For another, I'm trying to decide what I ought to do. We'll have to pull out very shortly, and I had meant to have had an interview with Evelyn to-day. That's why I feel uncommonly annoyed with Mopsy for falling in."

Carroll made a grimace. "If that's how it strikes you, any advice I could offer would be wasted. A sensible man would consider it a promising opportunity."

"And trade upon it."

"Do you really want the girl?"

"That impression's firmly in my mind," said Vane, curtly.

"Then you had better pitch your quixotic notions overboard, and tell her so."

Vane made no answer, and Carroll, seeing that his comrade was not inclined to be communicative, left him.

CHAPTER XI—VANE WITHDRAWS.

Dusk was drawing on when Vane strolled along the terrace in front of the Dene.

He was preoccupied and eager, but fully aware of the need for coolness, because it was very possible that he might fail in the task he had in hand. By and by he saw Evelyn, whom he had been waiting for, cross the opposite end of the terrace, and moving forward he joined her at the entrance to a shrubby walk. A big, clipped yew with a recess in which a seat had been placed stood close by.

"I've been sitting with Mopsy," said Evelyn. "She seems very little the worse for her adventure—thanks to you." She hesitated, and her voice grew softer. "I owe you a heavy debt—I am very fond of Mopsy."

"It's a great pity she fell in," Vane declared.

Evelyn looked at him with surprise. She scarcely thought he could regret the efforts he had made on her sister's behalf, but that was what his words implied.

"The trouble is that the thing might seem to give me some claim on you, and I don't want that," he explained. "It cost me no more than a wetting; I hadn't the least difficulty in getting her out."

His companion was still puzzled. She could find no fault with him for being modest about his exploit, but that he should make it clear that he did not require her gratitude seemed to her unnecessary.

"For all that, you did bring her out," she persisted.

"I don't seem to be beginning very fortunately," Vane replied. "What I mean is, that I don't want to urge my claim, if I have one. I'd sooner be taken on my merits." He paused a moment with a smile. "That's not much better, is it? But it partly expresses what I feel. Leaving Mopsy out altogether, let me try to explain—I don't wish you to be influenced by anything except your own idea of me. I'm saying this because one or two points that seem in my favour may have a contrary effect."

Evelyn made no answer, and he indicated the seat. "Won't you sit down, I have something more to say."

The girl did as he suggested, and his smile faded. "Now," he went on, "you won't be astonished if I ask if you will marry me?"

He stood looking down on her with an impressive steadiness of gaze. She could imagine him facing the city men, from whom he had extorted the full value of his mine, in the same fashion, and in a later instance, so surveying the eddies beneath the osiers when he had gone to Mabel's rescue. She felt that they had better understand one another.

"No," she said; "if I must be candid, I am not astonished." Then the colour crept into her cheeks, as she met his gaze. "I suppose it is an honour and it is undoubtedly a—temptation."

"A temptation?"

"Yes," said Evelyn, mustering her courage to face a crisis she had dreaded. "It is only due to you that you should hear the truth—though I think you suspect it. I have some liking for you."

"That is what I wanted you to own," Vane broke in.

She checked him with a gesture. Her manner was cold, and yet there was something in it that stirred him more than her beauty.

"After all," she answered, "It does not go very far, and you must try to understand. I want to be quite honest, and what I have to say is—difficult. In the first place, things are far from pleasant for me here; I was expected to make a good marriage, and I had my chance in London; I refused to profit by it, and now I'm a failure. I wonder if you can realise

what a temptation it is to get away.”

“Yes,” he said; “it makes me savage to think of it. I can, at least, take you out of all this. If you hadn’t had a very fine courage, you wouldn’t have told me.”

Evelyn smiled a curious wry smile.

“It has only prompted me to behave, as most people would consider, shamelessly; but there are times when one must get above that point of view. Besides, there’s a reason for my candour. Had you been a man of different stamp, it’s possible that I might have been driven into taking the risk. We should both have suffered for a time, but through open variance we might have reached an understanding—not to intrude on one another. As it is, I could not do you that injustice, and I should shrink from marrying you with only a little cold liking.”

The man held himself firmly in hand. Her calmness had infected him, and he felt that this was not an occasion for romantic protestations, even had he felt capable of making them, which was not the case. As a matter of fact, such things were singularly foreign to his nature.

“Even that would go a long way with me, if I could get nothing better,” he declared. “Besides, you might change. I could surround you with some comfort; I think I could promise not to force my company upon you; I believe I could be kind.”

“Yes,” assented Evelyn; “I shouldn’t be afraid of harshness from you; but it seems impossible that I should change. You must see that you started handicapped from the beginning. Had I been free to choose, it might have been different; but I have lived for some time in shame and fear, hating the thought that some one would be forced on me.”

He said nothing, and she went on. “Must I tell you? You are the man.”

His face grew hard and for a moment he set his lips tight. It would have been a relief to express his feelings concerning his host just then.

“If you don’t hate me for it now, I’m willing to take the risk,” he said at length. “It will be my fault if you hate me in the future; I’ll try not to deserve it.”

He imagined she was yielding, but she roused herself with an effort.

“No,” she said. “Love on one side may go a long way, if it is strong enough—but it must be strong to overcome the many clashes of thought and will. Yours”—she looked at him steadily—“would not stand the strain.”

Vane started. “You are the only woman I ever wished to marry.” He paused with a forcible gesture. “What can I say to convince you?”

She smiled softly. “I’m afraid it’s impossible. If you had wanted me greatly, you would have pressed the claim you had in saving Mopsy, and I would have forgiven you that; you would have urged any and every claim. As it is, I suppose I am pretty”—her lips curled scornfully—“and you find some of your ideas and mine agree. It isn’t half enough. Shall I tell you that you are scarcely moved as yet?”

It flashed upon Vane that he was confronted with the reality. Her beauty had appealed to him, but without rousing passion, for there was little of the sensual in this man. Her other qualities, her reserved graciousness, which had a tinge of dignity in it; her insight and comprehension, had also had their effect; but they had only awakened admiration and respect. He desired her as one desires an object for its rarity and preciousness; but this, as she had told him, was not enough. Behind her physical and mental attributes, and half revealed by them, there was something deeper: the real personality of the girl. It was elusive, mystic, with a spark of immaterial radiance which might brighten human love with its transcendent glow; but, as he dimly realised, if he won her by force, it might recede and vanish altogether. He could not, with strong ardour, compel its clearer manifestation.

“I think I am as moved as it is possible for me to be,” he said.

Evelyn shook her head. "No; you will discover the difference some day, and then you will thank me for leaving you your liberty. Now I beg you to leave me mine and let me go."

Vane stood silent a minute or two, for the last appeal had stirred him to chivalrous pity. He was shrewd enough to realise that if he persisted he could force her to come to him. Her father and mother were with him; she had nothing—no common-place usefulness or trained abilities—to fall back upon if she defied them. But it was unthinkable that he should brutally compel her.

"Well," he said at length, "I must try to face the situation; I want to assure you that it is not a pleasant one to me. But there's another point. I'm afraid I've made things worse for you. Your people will probably blame you for sending me away."

Evelyn did not answer this, and he broke into a little grim smile. "Now," he added, "I think I can save you any trouble on that score—though the course I'm going to take isn't flattering, if you look at it in one way. I want you to leave me to deal with your father."

He took her consent for granted, and leaning down laid a hand lightly on her shoulder. "You will try to forgive me for the anxiety I have caused you. The time I've spent here has been very pleasant, but I'm going back to Canada in a few days. Perhaps you'll think of me without bitterness now and then."

He turned away, and Evelyn sat still, glad that the strain was over, and thinking earnestly. The man was gentle and considerate as well as forceful, and she liked him. Indeed, she admitted that she had not met any man she liked as much, but that was not going very far. Then she began to wonder at her candour, and to consider if it had been necessary. It was curious that this was the only man she had ever taken into her confidence; and her next suitor would probably be a much less promising specimen. On the other hand, it was consoling to remember that eligible suitors for the daughter of an impoverished gentleman were likely to be scarce.

It had grown dark when she rose and, entering the house, went up to Mabel's room. The girl looked at her sharply as she came in.

"So you have got rid of him," she said. "I think you're very silly."

"How did you know?" Evelyn asked with a start.

"I heard him walking up and down the terrace, and I heard you go out. You can't walk over raked gravel without making a noise. He went along to join you, and it was a good while before you came back at different times. I've been waiting for this the last day or two."

Evelyn sat down with a strained smile. "Well," she said, "I have sent him away."

Mabel regarded her indignantly. "Then you'll never get another chance like this one. If you had only taken him I could have worn decent frocks. Nobody could call the last one that."

This was a favourite grievance and Evelyn ignored it; but Mabel had more to say. "I suppose," she went on, "you don't know that Wallace has been getting Gerald out of trouble?"

"Are you sure of that?" Evelyn asked sharply.

"Yes," said Mabel; "I'll tell you what I know. Wallace saw Gerald in London—he told us that—and we all know that Gerald couldn't pay his debts a little while since. You remember he came down to Kendal and went on and stayed the next night with the Claytons. It isn't astonishing that he didn't come here after the row there was on the last occasion."

"Go on," said Evelyn. "What has his visit to the Claytons to do with it?"

"Well," said Mabel, "you don't know that I saw Gerald in the afternoon. After all, he's the only brother I've got; and as Jim was going to the station with the trap I made him take me. The Claytons were in the garden; we were scattered about,

and I heard Frank and Gerald, who had strolled off from the others, talking. Gerald was telling him about some things he'd bought; they must have been expensive, because Frank asked him where he got the money. Gerald laughed, and said he'd had an unexpected stroke of luck that had set him straight again. Now, of course, Gerald got no money from home, and if he'd won it he would have told Frank how he did so. Gerald always would tell a thing like that."

Evelyn was filled with confusion and hot indignation. She had little doubt that Mabel's surmise was correct.

"I wonder if he has told anybody, though it's scarcely likely," she said.

"Of course he hasn't. We all know what Gerald is. Wallace ought to get his money back, now you have sent him away," Mabel, who had waited a moment or two, went on. "But, of course, that's most unlikely. It wouldn't take Gerald long to waste it."

Evelyn rose, and, making some excuse, left the room. A suspicion which had troubled her more than Gerald's conduct had lately crept into her mind, and it now thrust itself upon her attention—several things pointed to the fact that her father had taken a similar course to that which her brother had taken. She felt that had she heard Mabel's information before the interview with Vane, she might have yielded to him in an agony of humiliation. Mabel had summed up the situation with stinging candour and crudity—Vane, who had been defrauded, was entitled to recover the money he had parted with. For a few moments Evelyn was furiously angry with him, and then, growing calmer, she recognised that this was unreasonable. She could not imagine any idea of a compact originating with the man, and he had quietly acquiesced in her decision.

Soon after she left her sister, Vane walked into the room which Chisholm reserved for his own use. Chisholm was sitting at the table with some papers in front of him and a cigar in his hand, and Vane drew out a chair and lighted his pipe before he addressed him.

"I've made up my mind to sail on Saturday, instead of next week," he said.

"You have decided rather suddenly, haven't you?"

Vane knew that what his host wished to inquire about was the cause of his decision, and he meant to come to the point. He was troubled by no consideration for the man.

"The last news I had indicated that I was wanted," he replied. "After all, there was only one reason why I have abused Mrs. Chisholm's hospitality so long."

"Well?" said Chisholm, with an abruptness which hinted at anxiety.

"You will remember what I asked you some time ago. I had better say that I abandon the idea."

Chisholm started, and his florid face grew redder while Vane, in place of embarrassment, was conscious of a somewhat grim amusement. It seemed strange that a man of Chisholm's stamp should have any pride, but he evidently possessed it.

"What am I to understand by that?" he asked with some asperity.

"I think what I said explained it. Bearing in mind your and Mrs. Chisholm's influence, I've an idea that Evelyn might have yielded, if I'd strongly urged my suit; but that was not by any means what I wanted. I'd naturally prefer a wife who married me because she wished to do so. That's why, after thinking the thing over, I've decided to—withdraw."

Chisholm straightened himself in his chair, in fiery indignation, which he made no attempt to conceal.

"You mean that after asking my consent and seeing more of Evelyn, you have changed your mind. Can't you understand that it's an unpardonable confession; one which I never fancied a man born and brought up in your station could have brought himself to make."

Vane looked at him with an impassive face. "It strikes me as largely a question of terms—I mayn't have used the right

one. Now you know how the matter stands, you can describe it in any way that sounds nicest. In regard to your other remark, I've been in a good many stations, and I must admit that until lately none of them were likely to promote much delicacy of sentiment."

"So it seems," Chisholm was almost too hot to sneer. "But can't you realise how your action reflects upon my daughter?"

Vane held himself in hand. He had only one object: to divert Chisholm's wrath from Evelyn to himself and he thought he was succeeding in this. For the rest, he cherished a strong resentment against the man.

"It can't reflect upon her, unless you talk about it, and both you and Mrs. Chisholm have sense enough to refrain from doing so," he answered dryly. "I can't flatter myself that Evelyn will grieve over me." Then his manner changed. "Now we'll get down to business. I don't purpose to call that loan in, which will, no doubt, be a relief to you."

He rose leisurely and, strolling out of the room, met Carroll shortly afterwards in the hall. The latter glanced at him sharply.

"What have you been doing?" he inquired. "There's a look I seem to remember in your eye."

"I suppose I've been outraging the rules of decency, but I don't feel ashamed. I've been acting the uncivilised Westerner, though it's possible that I rather strained the part. To come to the point, however, we pull out for the Dominion first thing to-morrow."

Carroll asked no further questions. He did not think it would serve any purpose, and he contented himself with making arrangements for their departure, which they took early on the morrow. Vane had a brief interview with Mabel, who shed some tears over him, and then by her contrivance secured a word or two with Evelyn alone.

"Now," he said, "it's possible that you may hear some hard things of me, and I count upon your not contradicting them. After all, I think you owe me that favour. There's just another matter—as I won't be here to trouble you, try to think of me leniently."

He held her hand for a moment and then turned away, and a few minutes later he and Carroll left the Dene.

CHAPTER XII—VANE GROWS RESTLESS.

Vane had been back in Vancouver a fortnight when he sat one evening on the verandah of Nairn's house in company with his host and Carroll, lazily looking down upon the inlet.

Nairn referred to one of the papers in his hand.

"Horsfield has been bringing up that smelter project again, and there's something to be said in favour of his views," he remarked. "We're paying a good deal for reduction."

"We couldn't keep a smelter going at present," Vane objected.

"There are two or three low-grade mineral properties in the neighbourhood of the Clermont that have only had a little development work done on them," Nairn pointed out. "They can't pay freight on their raw product; but I'm thinking we'd encourage their owners to open up the mines, and get their business, if we had a smelter handy."

"It wouldn't amount to much," Vane replied. "Besides, there's another objection—we haven't the dollars to put up a thoroughly efficient plant."

"Horsfield's ready to find part of them and do the work."

"I know he is," said Vane. "He's suspiciously eager. The arrangement would give him a pretty strong hold upon the company; there are ways in which he could squeeze us."

"It's possible. But, looking at it as a personal matter, there are inducements he could offer ye. Horsfield's a man who has the handling of other folks' dollars, as weel as a good many of his own. It might be wise to stand in with him."

"So he hinted," Vane answered shortly.

"Your argument was about the worst you could have used, Mr. Nairn," Carroll broke in, laughing.

"Weel," said Nairn, good-humouredly, "I'm no urging it. I would not see your partner make enemies for the want of a warning."

"He'd probably do so, in any case; it's a gift of his," said Carroll. "On the other hand, it's fortunate he has a way of making friends: the two things sometimes go together."

Vane turned to Nairn with signs of impatience. "It might save trouble if I state that while I'm a director of the Clermont I expect to be content with a fair profit on my stock in the company."

"He's modest," Carroll commented. "What he means is that he doesn't propose to augment that profit by taking advantage of his position."

"It's a creditable idea, though I'm no sure it's as common as might be desired. While I have to thank ye for it, I would not consider the explanation altogether necessary," said Nairn, whose eyes twinkled. Then he addressed Vane: "Now we come to another point—the company's a small one, the mine is doing satisfactorily, and the moment's favourable for the floating of mineral properties. If we got an option on the half-developed claims near the Clermont and went into the market, it's likely that an issue of new stock would meet with investors' favour."

"I suppose so," said Vane. "I'll support such a scheme, when I can see how an increased capital could be used to advantage and I am convinced about the need for a smelter. At present, that's not the case."

"I mentioned it as a duty—ye'll hear more of it; for the rest, I'm inclined to agree with ye," Nairn replied.

A few minutes later he went into the house with Carroll, and as they entered it he glanced at his companion. "In the present instance, Mr. Vane's views are sound," he said. "But I see difficulties before him."

“So do I. When he grapples with him it will be by a frontal attack.”

“A bit of compromise is judicious now and then.”

“In a general way it’s not likely to appeal to my partner. When he can’t get through by direct means, there’ll be something wrecked. You had better understand what kind of man he is.”

“It’s no the first time I’ve been enlightened upon the point.”

Shortly after they had disappeared, Miss Horsfield came out of another door, and Vane rose when she approached him.

“Mrs. Nairn told me I would find you and the others in the verandah,” she informed him. “She said she would join you presently, and it was too fine to stay in.”

“I think she was right,” Vane replied. “As you see, I’m alone. Nairn and Carroll have just deserted me, but I can’t complain. What pleases me most about this house is that you can do what you like in it, and—within limits—the same thing applies to this city.”

Jessie laughed, and sank gracefully into the chair he drew forward.

“Yes,” she said. “I think that would please you. But how long have you been back?”

“A fortnight, since yesterday.”

There was a hint of reproach in the glance Jessie favoured him with. “Then I think Mrs. Nairn might have brought you over to see us.”

Vane wondered if she meant she was surprised he had not come of his own accord, and he was mildly flattered.

“I was away at the mine a good deal of the time,” he replied deprecatingly.

“I wonder if you are sorry to get back?”

Turning a little, Vane indicated the climbing city, rising tier on tier above its water front; and then the broad expanse of blue inlet and the faint white line of towering snow.

“Wouldn’t anything I could say in praise of Vancouver be trifle superfluous?” he asked.

Jessie recognised that he had parried her question neatly, but this did not deter her. She was anxious to learn if he had felt any regret in leaving England, or, to be more concise, if there was anybody in that country whom he had reluctantly parted from. She admitted that the man attracted her. There was a breezy freshness about him, and though she was acquainted with a number of young men whose conversation was characterised by snap and sparkle, they needed toning down. This miner was set apart from them by something which he had doubtless acquired in youth in the older land.

“That wasn’t quite what I meant,” she said. “We don’t always want to be flattered, and I’m in search of information. You told me you had been nine years in this country, and life must be rather different yonder. How did it strike you after the absence?”

“It’s difficult to explain,” Vane replied with an air of amused reflection which hinted that he meant to get away from the point. “On the whole, I think I’m more interested in the question how I struck them. It’s curious that whereas some folks insist upon considering me English here, I’ve a suspicion that they looked upon me as a typical colonial there.”

“One wouldn’t like to think you resented it.”

“How could I? This land sheltered me when I was an outcast, and set me on my feet.”

“Ah!” said Jessie, “you are the kind we don’t mind taking in. The rest go back and abuse us. But you haven’t given me

very much information yet.”

“Then,” said Vane, “the best comparison is supplied by my first remark—that in this city you can do what you like. You’re rather fenced in yonder, which, if you’re of a placid disposition, is, no doubt, comforting, because it shuts out unpleasant things. On the other hand, if you happen to be restless and active, the fences are inconvenient, because you can’t always climb over, and it is not considered proper to break them down. Still, having admitted that, I’m proud of the old land. It’s only the fences that irritate me.”

“Fences would naturally be obnoxious to you. But we have some here.”

“They’re generally built loose, of split-rails, and not nailed. An energetic man can pull off a bar or two and stride over. If it’s necessary, he can afterwards put them up again, and there’s no harm done.”

“Would you do the latter?”

Vane’s expression changed. “No,” he said. “I think if there were anything good on the other side, I’d widen the gap so that the less agile and the needy could crawl through.” He smiled at her. “You see, I owe some of them a good deal. They were the only friends I had when I first tramped, jaded and footsore, about the province.”

Jessie was pleased with his answer. She had heard of the bush choppers’ free hospitality, and she thought it was a graceful thing that he should acknowledge his debt to them.

“Now at last you’ll be content to rest a while,” she suggested. “I dare say you deserve it.”

“It’s strange you should say that, because just before you came out of the house I was thinking that I’d sat still long enough,” Vane answered with a laugh. “It’s a thing that gets monotonous. One must keep going on.”

“Then,” said Jessie, “take care you don’t walk over a precipice some day when you have left all the fences behind. But I’ve kept you from your meditations, and I had better see if Mrs. Nairn is coming.”

She left him, and he was lighting a cigar when he noticed a girl whose appearance seemed familiar in the road below. Moving along the verandah, he recognised her as Kitty, and hastily crossed the lawn towards her. She was accompanied by a young man whom Vane had once seen in the city, but she greeted him with evident pleasure.

“Tom,” she said, when they had exchanged a few words, “this is Mr. Vane,” Then turning to Vane she added: “Mr. Drayton.”

Vane, who liked the man’s face and manner, shook hands with him, and then looked back at Kitty.

“What are you doing now, and how are little Elsie and her mother?” he inquired.

Kitty’s face clouded. “Mrs. Marvin’s dead. Elsie’s with some friends at Spokane, and I think she’s well looked after. I’ve given up the stage. Tom”—she explained shyly—“didn’t like it. Now I’m with some people at a ranch near the Fraser on the Westminster road. There are two or three children and I’m fond of them.”

Drayton smiled. “She won’t be there long. I’ve wanted to meet you for some time, Mr. Vane. They told me at the office that you were away.”

“Ah!” said Vane, “I suppose my congratulations won’t be out of place. Won’t you ask me to the wedding?”

Kitty blushed. “Will you come?”

“Try,” said Vane, and Drayton broke in:

“There’s nobody we would sooner see. I’m heavily in your debt, Mr. Vane.”

“Oh, pshaw!” rejoined Vane. “Come and see me any time: to-morrow, if you can manage it.”

Drayton said he would do so, and shortly afterwards he and Kitty moved away, but Vane, who turned back across the lawn, was not aware that Jessie had watched the meeting from the verandah and had recognised Kitty, whom she had once seen at the station. She had already ascertained that the girl had arrived at Vancouver in his company, which, in view of the opinion she had formed about him, somewhat puzzled her; but she said one must endeavour to be charitable. Besides, having closely watched the little group, she was inclined to believe from the way Vane shook hands with the man that there was no danger to be apprehended from Kitty.

CHAPTER XIII—A NEW PROJECT.

Vane was sitting alone in the room set apart for the Clermont Company in Nairn's office, when Drayton was shown in. He took the chair Vane pointed to and lighted a cigar the latter gave him.

"Now," he began with some diffidence, "you cut me off short when I met you the other day, and one of my reasons for coming over was to get through with what I was saying then. It's just this—I owe you a good deal for taking care of Kitty; she's very grateful, and thinks no end of you, I want to say I'll always feel you have a claim on me."

Vane smiled at him. It was evident that Kitty had taken her lover into her confidence with regard to her trip on board the sloop, and, that she had done so said a good deal for her.

"It didn't cost me any trouble," Vane replied. "We were coming down to Vancouver, anyway."

Drayton's embarrassment became more obvious. "It cost you some dollars; there were the tickets. Now I feel I have to —"

Vane stopped him. "When you are married to Miss Blake you can pay me back, if it will be a relief to you. When's the wedding to be?"

"In a couple of months," said Drayton, who saw it would be useless to protest. "I'm a clerk in the Winstanley mills, and, as one of the staff is going, I'll get a move up then. We are to be married as soon as I do."

He said a little more on the same subject, and then, after a few moments' silence added: "I wonder if the Clermont business keeps your hands full, Mr. Vane."

"It doesn't. It's a fact I'm beginning to regret."

Drayton appeared to consider. "Well," he said, "folks seem to regard you as a rising man with snap in him, and there's a matter I might, perhaps, bring before you. Let me explain. I've taken an interest, outside my routine work in the lumber trade of this province and its subsidiary branches. I figured any knowledge I could pick up might stand me in some dollars some day. So far"—he smiled ruefully—"it hasn't done so."

"Go on," said Vane, whose curiosity was aroused.

"Well, I think that pulping spruce—paper spruce—is likely to be scarce soon. The supply's not unlimited and the world's consumption is going up by jumps."

"There's a good deal of timber you could make pulp of in British Columbia alone," Vane interposed.

"Sure. But there's not a very great deal of spruce that could be milled into high-grade paper pulp; and it's rapidly getting worked out in most other countries. Then, as a rule, it's mixed up with the firs, cedars and cypresses; and that means the cutting of logging roads to each cluster of milling trees. There's another point—a good deal of the spruce lies back from water or a railroad, and it would be costly to bring in milling plant or pack the pulp out."

"That's obvious," said Vane: "for you might have to haul every pound of freight over a breakneck divide."

Drayton leaned forward confidentially. "Then if one struck high-grade paper spruce—a valley full of it—with water power and easy access to the sea, there ought to be dollars in the thing?"

"Yes," said Vane, with growing interest. "That is very probable."

"I could put you on the track of such a valley," Drayton replied.

"We had better understand each other. Do you want to sell me the information, and have you offered it to anyone else?"

His companion answered with the candour he had expected. "The one or two folks I've spoken to don't seem anxious to consider it. It's mighty hard for a small man to launch a project."

"As a rule, it is."

"Then," Drayton continued, "the idea's not my own. It was a mineral prospector—a relative of mine—who struck the valley on his last trip. He's an old man, and he came down played out and sick. Now I guess he's slowly dying." He paused a moment. "Would you like to see him?"

"I'll go with you now, if it's convenient," Vane replied.

They crossed the city to where a row of squalid frame shacks stood on its outskirts. In one which they entered, a gaunt man, with grizzled hair lay upon a rickety bed. A glance showed Vane that the man was very frail. Drayton, who explained the cause of his visit, motioned Vane to sit down, and the prospector fixed his eyes upon the latter.

"I've heard of you. You're the man who located the Clermont—and put the project through," he said. "You had the luck. I've been among the ranges half my life, and you can see how much I've made of it. When I struck a claim worth anything, somebody else got the money."

Vane had reasons for believing that this was not an uncommon experience; but the man went on again: "Well, you look straight, and I've got to take some chances; it's my last stake. We'll get down to business; I'll tell you about that spruce."

He spoke for a few minutes, and then asked abruptly: "What are you going to offer?"

Vane had not been certain that he would make any offer at all; but, as had befallen him before, the swift decision flashed instinctively into his mind.

"If I find that the timber and its location come up to your account of it, I'll pay you so many dollars down—whatever we can agree upon—when I get my lease from the land office," he said. "Then I'll make another equal payment the day we start the mill. But I don't bind myself to record the timber or put up a mill, unless I'm convinced it's worth while."

"I'd sooner take less dollars and a small share in the concern; and Drayton must stand in."

"It's a question of terms," Vane replied. "I'll consider your views."

They discussed it for a while, and when they had at length arrived at a provisional understanding, the prospector made a sign of acquiescence. "We'll let it go at that; but the thing will take time, and I'll never get the money. If you exercise your option, you'll sure pay it down to Seely?"

"Celia's his daughter," Drayton explained. "He has no one else. She's a waitress at the — House in the city." He named an hotel of no great standing. "Comes home at nights and looks after him."

Vane glanced round the room. It was evident that Celia's earnings were small; but he noticed several things which suggested that she had lavished loving care upon the sick man, probably at the cost of severe self-denial.

"Yes," he answered; "I'll promise that. But, as I pointed out, while we have agreed upon the two payments, I reserve the right of deciding what share your daughter and Drayton are to take afterwards within the limits sketched out. I can't fix it definitely until I've seen the timber—you'll have to trust me."

The prospector once more looked at him steadily, and then implied by a gesture that he was satisfied.

The man fumbled under his pillow, and produced a piece cut out from a map of the province, with rough pencil notes on the back of it.

"It was on my last prospecting trip I found the spruce," he said. "I'd been looking round for the Company I was with, and I figured I'd strike the coast over the range. The creeks were full of snow-water, and as I was held up here and there

before I could get across, provisions began to run short. By and by I fell sick; but I had to get out of the mountains, and I was pushing on for the Strait when I struck the place where the spruce is. After that, I got kind of muddled in the head, but I went down a long valley on an easy grade and struck some Siwash curing the last of the salmon. The trouble is, I was too sick to figure exactly where the small inlet they were camped by lies. They took me back with them to their rancherie—you could find that—and sailed me across to Comox by and by. I came down on a steamboat, and the doctor told me I'd made my last journey."

Vane expressed his sympathy. The narrative has been crudely matter-of-fact, but he had been out on the prospecting trail often enough to fill in the details the sick man omitted.

"How far was the valley from the inlet?" he asked.

"I can't tell you. I think I was four days on the trail, but it might have been more. I was too sick to remember. Anyway, there was a creek you could run the logs down."

Vane nodded. "Well," he said, "how far was the inlet from the rancherie?"

"I was in the canoe part of one night and some of the next day. Guess thirty miles wouldn't be far out."

"That's something to go upon."

Vane rose. "If Drayton will come along with me, I'll send him back with a hundred dollars. It's part of the first payment—but your getting it now should make things a little easier for Celia."

"But you haven't located the spruce yet."

"I'm going to locate it, if the thing's anyway possible." Vane shook hands with the man. "I expect to get off up the Strait very shortly."

The prospector looked at him with relief and gratitude in his eyes, "You're white—and I guess you'd be mighty hard to beat."

Vane touched Drayton's arm, and when they reached the street, his companion glanced at him with open admiration.

"I'm glad I brought you across," he broke out. "You have a way of getting hold of folks, making them believe in you. Hartley hasn't a word in writing, but he knows you mean to act square with him. Kitty felt the same thing—it was why she came down in the sloop with you."

Vane smiled, though there was a trace of embarrassment in his manner. "Now you mention it, you were equally confiding. We have only arrived at a rather indefinite understanding about your share yet."

"We'll leave it at that," said the other. "I haven't struck anybody else in this city who would hear about the thing. Anyway, I'd prefer a few shares in the concern, as mentioned, instead of money. If you get the thing on foot, I guess it will go."

During the rest of the day Vane was busy on board the sloop, but in the evening he walked over to Horsfield's house with Mrs. Nairn, and found Jessie and her brother at home. Horsfield presently took him to his smoking-room.

"About that smelter," he said. "Haven't you made your mind up yet?"

"Isn't it a matter for the board?" Vane asked suggestively. "There are several directors."

Horsfield laughed. "We'll face the fact; they'll do what you decide upon."

Vane did not reply to this. "Well," he said, "at present we couldn't keep a smelter big enough to be economical going, and I'm doubtful if we would get much ore from the other properties you were talking to Nairn about."

“Did he say it was my idea?”

“He didn’t: I’d reasons for assuming it. Those properties, however, are of no account.”

Horsfield waited expectantly, and Vane went on: “If it seems possible that we can profitably increase our output later by means of further capital, we’ll put up a smelter. But in that case it might be economical to do the work ourselves.”

“Who would superintend it?”

“I would, if necessary.”

Horsfield smiled in a significant manner. “Aren’t you inclined to take hold of too much? When you have plenty in your hands, it’s good policy to leave a little for somebody else. Sometimes the person who benefits is willing to reciprocate.”

The hint was plain, and Nairn had said sufficient on another occasion to make it clearer; but Vane did not respond.

“If we gave the work out, it would be an open tender,” he said. “There would be no reason why you shouldn’t make a bid.”

Horsfield found it difficult to conceal his disgust. He had no desire to bid on an open tender, which would prevent his obtaining anything beyond the market price.

“The question must stand over until I come back,” Vane resumed. “I’m going up the west coast shortly and may be away some little time.”

They left the smoking-room soon afterwards, and when they strolled back to the other, Vane sat down near Jessie.

“I hear you are going away,” she began.

“Yes,” said Vane; “I’m going to look for pulping timber.”

“But why do you want pulping timber?”

“It can sometimes be converted into dollars.”

“Isn’t there every prospect of your obtaining a good many already? Are you never satisfied?”

“I suppose I’m open to take as many as I can get,” Vane answered with an air of humorous consideration. “The reason probably is that I’ve had very few until lately. Still, I don’t think it’s altogether the dollars that are driving me.”

“If it’s the restlessness you once spoke of, you ought to put a check on it and try to be content. There’s danger in the longing to be always going on.”

“It’s a common idea that a small hazard gives a thing an interest.”

Jessie shot a swift glance at him, and she had, as he noticed, expressive eyes.

“Be careful!” she said. “After all, it’s wiser to keep within safe limits, and not climb over too many fences.” She hesitated, and her voice grew softer. “You have friends who would be sorry if you got hurt.”

The man was a little stirred; she was alluring physically, while something in her voice had its effect on him. Evelyn, however, still occupied his thoughts, and he smiled at his companion.

“Thank you,” he said. “I like to believe it.”

CHAPTER XIV—VANE SAILS NORTH.

It was growing dusk on the evening of Vane's departure when he walked out of Nairn's room. His host was with him, and when they entered an adjacent room, where a lamp was burning, the older man's face relaxed into a smile as he saw Jessie Horsfield talking to his wife. Vane stopped a few minutes to speak to them, and it was Jessie who gave the signal for the group to break up.

"I must go," she said to Mrs. Nairn. "I've already stayed longer than I intended. I'll let you have those patterns back in a day or two."

"Mair patterns!" Nairn exclaimed with dry amusement. "It's the second lot this week; ye're surely industrious, Jessie. Women"—he addressed Vane—"have curious notions of economy. They will spend a month knitting a thing to give to somebody who does not want it, when they could buy it for half a dollar done better by machinery. I'm no saying, however, that it does not keep them out of mischief."

Jessie laughed. "I don't think many of us are industrious in that, way now. After all, isn't it a pity that so many of the beautiful old handicrafts are dying out? No loom, for instance, could turn out some of the things your wife makes. They're matchless."

"She has an aumrie—ye can translate it trunk—full of them," said Nairn. "It's no longer customary to scatter them ower the house."

Mrs. Nairn's smile was half a sigh. "There were no books, and no mony amusements, when I was young," she said to Jessie. "We sat through the long winter forenights, counting stitches, at Burnfoot, under the Scottish moors. That, my dear, was thirty years ago."

She shook hands with Vane, who left the house with Jessie, and watched them cross the lawn.

"I'm thinking ye'll no see so much of Jessie for the next few weeks," Nairn, who had accompanied her to the door, remarked. "Has she shown ye any of yon knick-knacks when she finished them?"

His wife shook her head at him reproachfully. "Alec," she said, "ye're now and then hasty in jumping at conclusions."

"Maybe," replied Nairn. "I'm no infallible, but the fault ye mention is no common in the land where we were born. I'm no denying that Jessie has enterprise, but how far it will carry her in this case is mair than I can tell."

He smiled as he recalled a scene at the station some time ago, and Mrs. Nairn looked up at him.

"What is amusing ye, Alec?" she asked.

"It was just a bit idea no worth the mentioning," said Nairn. "I think it wouldna count." He paused, and resumed with an air of reflection: "A young man's heart is whiles inconstant and susceptible."

Mrs. Nairn, who ignored the last remark, went into the house, and in the meanwhile Jessie and Vane walked down the road until they stopped at a gate, Jessie held out her hand.

"I'm glad I met you to-night," she said. "You will allow me to wish you every success?"

"Thank you," he replied. "It's nice to feel one has the sympathy of one's friends."

He turned away, and Jessie stood watching him as he strode down the road. There was, she thought, something that set him apart from other men in his fine poise and swing. She was, however, forced to confess that, although he had answered her courteously, there had been no warmth in his words.

As it happened, Vane was just then conscious of a slight relief. He admired Jessie, and he liked Nairn and his wife; but they belonged to the city, which he was on the whole glad to leave behind. He was going back to the shadowy woods,

where men lived naturally, and the lust of fresh adventure was strong in him.

On reaching the wharf he found Kitty and Celia Hartley, whom he had not met hitherto, awaiting him with Carroll and Drayton. A boat lay at the steps, and he and Carroll rowed the others off to the sloop. The moon was just rising from behind the black firs at the inlet's inner end, and a little cold wind faintly scented with resinous fragrance, that blew down across them, stirred the water into tiny ripples that flashed into silvery radiance here and there.

A soft glow shone out from the skylights to welcome them as they approached the sloop, and when, laughing gaily, they clambered on board, Carroll led the way to the tiny saloon, which just held them all. It was brightly lighted by two nickelled lamps; flowers were fastened against the panelling, and clusters of them stood upon the table, which was covered with a spotless cloth. Vane took the head of it and Carroll modestly explained that only part of the supper had been prepared by him. The rest he had obtained in the city, out of regard for the guests, who, he added, had not lived in the bush.

Carroll started the general chatter, which went on after the meal was over, and nobody appeared to notice that Kitty sat with her hand in Drayton's amidst the happy laughter. Even Celia, who had her grief to grapple with, smiled bravely. Vane had given them champagne, the best in the city, though they drank sparingly; and at last, when Celia made a move to rise, Drayton stood up with his glass in his hand.

"We must go, but there's something to be done," he said. "It's to thank our host and wish him success. It's a little boat he's sailing in, but she's carrying a big freight if our good wishes count for anything."

They emptied the glasses, and Vane replied: "My success is yours. You have all a stake in the venture, and that piles up my responsibility. If the spruce is still in existence, I've got to find it."

"And you're going to find it," said Drayton confidently.

Then Vane divided the flowers between Celia and her companion, but when they went up on deck Kitty raised one bunch and kissed it.

"Tom won't mind," she said. "Take that one back from Celia and me."

They got down into the boat. Then, while the girls called back to Vane, Drayton rowed away, and the boat was fading out of sight when Kitty's voice reached the men on board. She was singing a well-known Jacobite ballad.

"Considering what his Highland followers suffered on his account and what the women thought of him," said Carroll, "some of the virtues they credited the Young Chevalier with must have been real," He raised his hand. "You may as well listen."

Vane stood still a moment with the blood hot in his face, and the refrain rang more clearly across the sparkling water:

"Better lo'ed ye cannot be,
Will ye no come back again?"

"I don't know if you feel flattered, but I've an idea that Kitty and Celia would go into the fire for you, and Drayton seems to share their confidence," Carroll resumed, in his most matter-of-fact tone.

Vane began to shake the mainsail loose. "I believe we both talked rather freely to-night; but we have to find the spruce."

"So you have said already," Carroll pointed out. "Hadn't you better heave the boom up with the topping lift?"

They got the mainsail on to her, broke out the anchor and set the jib; and as the boat slipped away before a freshening breeze Vane sat at the helm, while Carroll stood on the foredeck, coiling up the gear. The moon was higher now; the broad sail gleamed a silvery grey; the ripples, which were getting bigger, flashed and sparkled as they streamed back from the bows, and the lights of the city dropped fast astern. Vane was conscious of a keen exhilaration. He had started on a new adventure; he was going back to the bush, and he knew that no matter how his life might change, the wilderness

would always call to him. In spite of this, however, he was, as he had said, conscious of an unusual responsibility. Hitherto he had fought for what he could get for himself; but now Kitty's future partly depended upon his efforts, and his success would be of vast importance to Celia.

He had a very friendly feeling towards both the girls. Indeed, all the women he had met of late had attracted him in different ways, but Evelyn stood apart from all.

She appealed less to his senses and intellect than she did to a sublimated something in the depths of his nature; and it somehow seemed fitting that her image should materialise before his mental vision as the sloop drove along under the cloudless night sky, while the moonlight poured down glamour on the shining water. Evelyn harmonised with such things as these.

It was true that she had repulsed him; but that, he remembered, once more with a sense of compunction, was what he deserved for entering into an alliance against her with her venial father. He was glad now that he had acquiesced in her dismissal of him, since to have stood firm and broken her to his will would have brought disaster upon both of them. He felt that she had not wholly escaped him, after all: by and by he would go back and seek her favour by different means. Then she might, perhaps, forgive him and listen.

CHAPTER XV—THE FIRST MISADVENTURE.

The breeze freshened fiercely with the red and fiery dawn, and Vane, who had gone below, was advised of it by being flung off the locker on which he sat with coffee and biscuits before him, in the saloon. The jug, overturning, spilled its contents upon his person, the biscuits were scattered, but he picked himself up in haste and scrambled out into the well. He found the sloop slanted over with a good deal of her lee deck submerged in rushing foam, and Carroll bracing himself against the strain upon the tiller.

"I'll let her come up when you're ready," Carroll remarked. "We had better get some sail off her, if we mean to hold on to the mast."

He put down his helm, and the sloop, forging round to windward, rose upright, with her heavy mainboom banging to and fro. After that, they were desperately busy for the next few minutes, and Vane wished they had engaged a hand in Vancouver, instead of waiting to hire a Siwash somewhere up the coast. There was a headsail to haul to windward, which was difficult, and the mainsheet to get in; and then the two men, standing on the slippery inclined deck, struggled hard to haul the canvas down to the boom. The jerking spar smote them in the ribs; once or twice the reefing tackle beneath it was torn from their hands; but they mastered the sail, tying two reefs in it, to reduce its size, and the craft afterwards drove away with her lee rail just awash.

"You had better go down and get some biscuits," Vane said to his comrade. "You mayn't have an opportunity later."

"It looks like that," Carroll agreed. "The wind's backing northwards, and that means more of it before long. You can call if you want me."

He disappeared below, and Vane sat at the helm with a frown on his face. He knew that the breeze would increase and draw ahead, which was unfortunate, because they would have to beat, fighting for every fathom they slowly made. There was no help for it, and he buttoned his jacket against the spray, while by the time Carroll came up the sloop was plunging sharply; pitching showers of stinging brine all over her when the bows went down. They drove her at it stubbornly most of the day, making but little to windward, while the seas got bigger and whiter, until they had some trouble to keep the light boat they carried upon the deluged deck. At last, when she came bodily aft amidst a frothing cascade which poured into the well, Vane brought the sloop round, and they stretched away to the eastwards, until they could let go the anchor in smooth water beneath a wall of rock. They were very wet, and stiff with cold, for winter was drawing near.

"We'll get supper," said Vane. "If the breeze drops at dusk, we'll go on again."

Having eaten little since dawn, they enjoyed the meal, and Carroll would have been content to remain at anchor afterwards. The tiny saloon was comfortably warm, and it would be pleasanter to lounge away the evening on a locker with his pipe, instead of sitting amidst the bitter spray at the helm. But Vane was proof against his companion's hints.

"With a head wind, we'll be some time working up to the rancherie, and then we have thirty miles of coast to search for the inlet Hartley reached," he said. "After that, there's the valley to locate; he was uncertain how far it lay from the beach."

"It couldn't be very far. You wouldn't expect a man who was sick to make any great pace."

"I can imagine a man who knew he must reach the coast before he started making a pretty vigorous effort. Do you remember the time we crossed the divide in the snow?"

"I could remember it, if I wanted," said Carroll with a shiver. "It's about the last thing I'm anxious to do."

"The trouble is that there are many valleys in this strip of country, and we may have to try a number before we strike the right one," Vane went on. "I can't spend very much time over this search. As soon as the man we put in charge of the mine has tried his present system long enough to give us something to figure on, I want to see what can be done to increase our output. We haven't marketed very much refined metal yet."

“There’s no doubt it would be advisable,” Carroll, who looked after their finances, answered. “As I’ve pointed out, you have spent a good deal of the cash you got when you turned the Clermont over to the company. In fact, that’s one reason why I didn’t try to head you off this timber-hunting scheme. You can’t spend many dollars over it, and if the spruce comes up to expectations, you ought to get them back. It would be a fortunate change, after your extravagance in England.”

“That is a subject I don’t want to talk about. We’ll go up and see what the weather’s like.”

Carroll shivered when they stood in the well. A nipping wind came down across the darkening firs ashore, but there was no doubt that it had fallen somewhat, and he resigned himself when Vane began to pull the tiers off the mainsail.

In a few minutes they were under way, the sloop heading out towards open water with two reefs down in her mainsail; a great and ghostly shape of slanted canvas that swept across the dim, furrowed plain of sea. By midnight the breeze was as strong as ever, but they had clear moonlight and they held on; the craft plunging with flooded decks through the white combers, while Carroll sat at the helm, battered by spray and stung with cold.

When Vane came up an hour or two later, the sea was breaking viciously. They held on and, soon after day broke with its first red flush ominously high in the eastern sky, stretched in towards the land, with a somewhat sheltered bay opening up beyond a foam-fringed point ahead of them. Carroll glanced dubiously at the white turmoil, in the midst of which black fangs of rock appeared, before he turned to his companion.

“Will she weather the point on this tack?” he asked.

“She’ll have to,” said Vane, who was steering.

They stood on, though it occurred to Carroll that they were not opening up the bay very rapidly. The light was growing, and he could now discern the orderly phalanxes of white-topped combers that crumpled into chaotic spouting on the point’s outer end. The sloop would not last long if she touched bottom there; but once more, after a glance at his companion’s face, he kept silent. After all, Vane was leader, and when he looked as he did then he usually resented advice. The mouth of the bay grew wider, until Carroll could see most of the forest-girt shore on one side of it; but the surf upon the point was also growing unpleasantly near. Wisps of spray whirled away from it and vanished among the scrubby firs clinging to the fissured crags behind. The sloop, however, was going to windward, for Vane was handling her with skill, and she had almost cleared the point when there was a bang, and the sloop stopped suddenly. The comber to windward that should have lifted her up broke all over her; flinging the boat on deck upon the saloon skylight, and pouring inches deep over the coaming into the well. Vane was hurled from the tiller and cut his forehead, for his wet face was smeared with blood, but he had seized a big oar to shove her off when she swung upright, moved, and struck again. The following sea hove her up; there was another less violent crash, and while Vane dropped the oar and grasped the helm she suddenly shot ahead.

“She’ll go clear,” he shouted, “Jump below and see if she’s damaged.”

Carroll got no farther than the scuttle, for the saloon floorings on the depressed side were already awash and he could hear an ominous splashing and gurgling.

“It’s pouring into her,” he reported.

Vane nodded. “You’ll have to pump.”

“We passed an opening some miles to lee. Wouldn’t it be better if you ran back there?” Carroll suggested.

“No,” said Vane; “I won’t run a yard. There’s another inlet not far ahead, and we’ll stand on until we reach it. I’d put her on the beach here, only that she’d go to pieces with the first shift of wind to the westward.”

Carroll agreed with this opinion; but there is a great difference between running to leeward with the sea behind the vessel, and thrashing to windward when it is ahead, and he hesitated.

“Get the pump started. We’re going on,” Vane said shortly.

The pump was, fortunately, a powerful one, and they had nearly two miles of smoother water before they stretched out of the bay upon the other track; but when they did so Carroll, who glanced down again through the scuttle, could not flatter himself that he had reduced the water.

After half an hour of it, he was breathless and exhausted, and Vane took his place. The sea was higher, the sloop wetter than she had been, and there was no doubt that the water was rising fast inside her. Carroll wondered how far ahead the inlet his companion had mentioned lay, and the next two hours were anxious ones to both of them. Turn about, they pumped with savage determination and went back, gasping, to the helm, to thrash the boat on. They drove her remorselessly; and she went through the combers, swept and streaming, while the spray scourged the helmsman’s face as he gazed to weather. Their arms and shoulders ached from working in a cramped position, but since there was no help for it, they toiled doggedly, until at last the crest of a crag they were heading for sloped away in front of them.

A few minutes later, they drove past the end of it into a broad lane of water with long ranks of firs dropping steeply to its edge. The wind was suddenly cut off; the combers fell away, and the sloop crept slowly up the inlet, which wound, green and placid, among the hills. Vane strode to the scuttle and looked down at the flood which splashed languidly to and fro below.

“It’s fortunate that we’re in. Another half-hour would have seen the end of her,” he said. “Let her come up a little. There’s a smooth beach to yonder cove.”

She slid in quietly, scarcely rippling the smooth surface of the tiny basin, about which there rose great black firs, and Carroll laid her on the beach.

“Now,” said Vane, “drop the boom on the shore side, to keep her from canting over; and then we’ll get breakfast. We’ll see where she’s damaged when the tide ebbs.”

Since most of their stores had lain in the flooded lockers, from which there had been no time to extricate them, the meal was not an appetising one. They were, however, glad of it, and, rowing ashore afterwards, they lay on the shingle in the sunshine while the sloop was festooned with their drying clothes.

“If she has only split a plank or two we can patch her up,” Vane remarked, “There are all the tools we’ll want in the locker.”

“Where will you get new planks from?” Carroll inquired. “I don’t think we have any spikes that would go through the frames.”

“That,” said Vane, “is the trouble. I expect I’ll have to make a trip across to Comox for them in a sea canoe. We’re sure to come across a few Siwash somewhere in the neighbourhood. I can’t say that this expedition is beginning fortunately.”

“There’s no doubt on that point,” Carroll agreed.

“Well,” said Vane, “she has to be patched up, and until I find that spruce I’m going on.”

Carroll made no comment. It was not worthwhile to object when Vane was obviously determined.

CHAPTER XVI—THE BUSH.

It was a quiet evening, nearly a fortnight after the arrival of the sloop, and pale sunshine streamed into the cove. Little glittering ripples lapped lazily along the shingle, and the placid surface of the inlet was streaked with faint blue lines where wandering airs came down from the heights above. Now and then an elfin sighing fell from the ragged summits of the tall black firs, but it died away again, and afterwards the silence was only broken by the pounding of a heavy hammer and the crackle of a fire.

Carroll sat beside the latter, alternately holding a stout plank up to the blaze and dabbing its hot surface with a dripping mop. A big sea canoe lay drawn up near the spot, and one of its copper-skinned Siwash owners sat amongst the shingle, stolidly watching the white men. His comrade was inside the sloop, holding a big stone against one of her frames, while Vane crouched outside her, swinging a hammer.

Vane, who was stripped to shirt and trousers, had arrived from Comox across the Strait at dawn that morning in the sea canoe. It was a long trip and they had had wild weather on the outward journey, but he had set to work with characteristic energy as soon as he landed. Now, though the sun was low, he was working rather harder than ever, with the flood tide, which would shortly compel him to desist, creeping up to his feet.

Carroll, who watched him with quiet amusement, was on the whole content that the tide was rising, because his comrade had firmly declined to stop for dinner, and he was conscious of a sharpened appetite. It was comforting to reflect that Vane would be unable to get the plank into place before the evening meal, because if there had been any prospect of his doing so, he would certainly have postponed the latter.

By and by he stopped a moment and turned to Carroll. "If you were any use in an emergency, you'd be holding up for me instead of that wooden image inside," he remarked. "He will back the stone against any frame except the one I'm nailing."

"The difficulty is that I can't be in two places at the same time," Carroll pointed out. "Shall I leave this plank? You can't get it in to-night."

"I'm going to try," Vane answered grimly.

He turned round to direct the Siwash and then cautiously hammered in one of the wedges a little farther, after which, swinging back the hammer, he struck a heavy blow. The result was disastrous, for there was a crash and one of the shores shot backwards, striking him on the knee. He jumped with a savage cry, and next moment there was a sharp snapping, and the end of the plank sprang out. Then another shore gave way, and when the plank fell clattering at his feet he whirled the hammer round his head, and hurled it violently into the bush. This appeared to afford him some satisfaction, and he strode up the beach, with the blood dripping from the knuckles of one hand.

"That's the blamed Siwash's fault," he said. "I couldn't get him to back up when I put the last spike in."

"Hadn't you better tell him to come out?" Carroll suggested.

"No," said Vane. "If he hasn't sense enough to see that he isn't wanted, he can stay where he is all night. Are you going to get supper, or must I do that, too?"

Carroll set about preparing the meal, which the two Siwash partook of and afterwards departed, with some paper currency. Then Vane, walking down the beach, came back with the plank, and after lighting his pipe, pointed to one or two broken nails in it.

"That's the cause of the trouble," he said. "It cost me a week's journey to get the package of galvanised spikes—I could have managed to split a plank or two out of one of these firs. The storekeeper fellow assured me they were specially annealed for heading up. If I knew who the manufacturers were, I'd have pleasure in telling them what I think of them. If they set up to make spikes, they ought to make them, and empty every keg that won't stand the test on to the scrap heap."

Carroll smiled. The course his partner had indicated was the one he would have adopted. He was characterised by a somewhat grim idea of efficiency, and never spared his labour to attain it, though the latter fact had now and then its inconveniences for those who had co-operated with him, as Carroll had discovered. The latter had no doubt that Vane would put the planks in, if he spent a month over the operation.

"I wouldn't have had this trouble if you'd been handier with tools," he resumed.

"My abilities aren't as varied as yours, and the thing is bad economy," Carroll replied. "Skill of the kind you mentioned is worth about three dollars a day."

"You were getting two dollars for shovelling in a mining ditch, when I first met you."

"I was," Carroll assented good-humouredly; "I believe another month or two of it would have worn me out. It's considerably pleasanter and more profitable to act as your understudy; but a fairly proficient carpenter might have bungled the latter."

Vane looked embarrassed. "Let it pass; I've a pernicious habit of expressing myself unfortunately. Anyhow, we'll start again on those planks first thing to-morrow."

He stretched out his aching limbs beside the fire, and languidly watched the fires grow dimmer and the mists creep in ghostly trails down the steep hillside, until Carroll broke the silence.

"Wallace," he said, "wouldn't it be wiser if you met that fellow Horsfield to some extent?"

"No," said Vane decidedly. "I have no intention of giving way an inch. It would only encourage the man to press me on another point, if I did. I'm going to have trouble with him, and the sooner it comes the better. There's only room for one controlling influence in the Clermont mine."

"In that case it might be as well to stay in Vancouver as much as possible and keep your eye on him."

"The same idea has struck me since we sailed," Vane said. "The trouble is that until I've decided about the pulp mill he'll have to go unwatched, for the same reason that prevented you from holding up for me and steaming the plank."

"If any unforeseen action of Horsfield's made it necessary, you could let this pulp project drop."

"No," said Vane, "You ought to understand why that's impossible. Drayton, Kitty and Hartley count upon my exertions. They're poor folks and I can't go back on them. If we can't locate the spruce or it doesn't seem likely to pay for working up, there's nothing to prevent my abandoning the undertaking; but I'm not at liberty to do so just because it would be a convenience to myself. Hartley got my promise before he told me where to search."

He strolled away to the tent they had pitched on the edge of the bush, but Carroll sat a while smoking beside the fire. He was suspicious of Horsfield, and foresaw trouble, more particularly now his comrade had undertaken a project which seemed likely to occupy a good deal of his attention. Hitherto, Vane had owed part of his success to his faculty of concentrating all his powers upon one object.

They rose at dawn next morning, and by sunset had fitted the new planks. Two days later, they sailed to the northwards, and eventually found the rancherie Hartley had mentioned, where they had expected to hire a guide. The rickety wooden building, however, was empty, and Vane pushed on again. He had now to face an unseen difficulty because there were a number of openings in that strip of coast, and Hartley's description was of no great service in deciding which was the right one.

During the next day or two, they looked into several bights, and seeing no valleys opening out of them, went on again, until one evening they ran into an inlet with a forest-shrouded hollow at the head of it. Here they moored the sloop close in with a sheltered beach, and after a night's rest got ready their packs for the march inland.

They had a light tent without poles, which could be cut when wanted; two blankets, an axe, and one or two cooking

utensils, besides their provisions.

In front of them a deep trough opened up in the hills, but it was filled with giant forest, through which no track led, and only those who have traversed the dim recesses of the primeval bush can fully understand what this implies. The west winds swept through that gateway, reaping as they went, and here and there tremendous trees lay strewn athwart each other with their branches spread abroad in horrible tangles. Some had fallen amidst the wreckage left by previous gales, which the forest had partly made good, and there was scarcely a rod of the way that was not obstructed by half rotten trunks. Then there were thick bushes, and an undergrowth of willows where the soil was damp with thorny brakes and matted fern in between. In places, the growth was almost like a wall, and the men, who skirted the inlet, were glad to scramble forward among the rough boulders and ragged driftwood at the water's edge for some minutes at a time, until it was necessary to leave the beach behind.

After the first few minutes, there was no sign of the gleaming water. They had entered a region of dim green shade, where the moist air was heavy with resinous smells. The trunks rose about them in tremendous columns; thorns clutched their garments, and twigs and brittle branches snapped beneath their feet. The day was cool, but the sweat of tense effort dripped from them, and when they stopped for breath at the end of an hour, Vane estimated that they had gone a mile.

"I'll be content if we can keep this up," he said.

"It isn't likely," Carroll, who glanced down at a big rent in his jacket, replied with a trace of dryness.

A little farther on, they waded with difficulty through a large stream, and Carroll, who stopped, glanced round at a deep rift in a crag on one side of them.

"I don't know if that could be considered a valley, but we may as well look at it," he suggested.

They scrambled towards it, and reaching gravelly soil, where the trees were thinner, Vane surveyed the opening. It was very narrow, and appeared to lose itself among the rocks. The size of the creek which flowed out of it was no guide, because those ranges are scored by running water.

"We won't waste time over that ravine," he said. "I noticed a wider one farther on, and we'll see what it's like, though Hartley led me to understand that he came down a straight and gently-sloping valley. The one we're in answers the description."

It was two hours before they reached the second opening, and then Vane, unstrapping his packs, clambered up the steep face of a crag. When he came back his face was thoughtful and, sitting down, he lighted his pipe.

"This search seems to take us longer than I expected," he said. "To begin with, there are a number of inlets, all of them pretty much alike, along this part of the coast; but I needn't go into the reasons for supposing that this is the one Hartley visited. Taking it for granted that we're right, we're up against another difficulty. So far as I could make out from the top of that rock, there's a regular series of ravines running back into the hills."

"Hartley told you he came straight down to tidewater, didn't he?"

"That's not much of a guide," Vane replied. "The slope of every fissure seems to run naturally from the inland watershed to this basin. Hartley was sick, and it was raining all the time; and coming out of any of these ravines he'd only have to make a slight turn to reach the water. What's more, he could only tell me he was heading roughly west and allowing that there was no sun visible, that might have meant either north-west or south-west, which gives us the choice of searching the hollows on either side of the main valley. Now, it strikes me as most probable that he came down the latter; but we have to face the question whether we should push straight on, or search every opening that might be called a valley?"

"What's your idea?" Carroll rejoined.

"That we ought to go into the thing systematically and look at every ravine we come to."

"I guess you're right, but I don't move another step to-night."

“I’ve no wish to urge you. There’s hardly a joint in my body that doesn’t ache.” Vane flung down his pack and stretched himself with an air of relief. “That’s what comes of civilisation and soft living. It would be nice to sit still while somebody brought me my supper.”

As there was nobody to do so, he took up the axe and set about hewing chips off a fallen trunk, while Carroll made a fire. Then he cut the tent poles, and a few armfuls of twigs for a bed, and in half an hour the camp was pitched and a meal prepared. They afterwards lay a while, smoking and saying little, beside the sinking fire, the red light of which flickered upon the massy trunks and fell away again. Then they crawled into the tent and wrapped their blankets round them.

CHAPTER XVII—VANE POSTPONES THE SEARCH.

When Vane rose early next morning, there was frost in the air, and when breakfast was ready the men ate hastily, eager for the exertion that would put a little warmth into them.

“We had it a good deal colder on other trips; I suppose I’ve been getting luxurious, since I seem to resent it now,” said Vane. “There’s no doubt that winter’s beginning earlier than I expected up here; As soon as you can strike the tent, we’ll move on.”

The valley grew wilder and more rugged as they proceeded. In places, its bottom was filled with muskegs, cumbered with half-submerged, decaying trunks of fallen trees; and when they could not spring from one falling log to another they sank in slime and water to the knee. They entered transverse valleys, and after hours of exhausting labour, abandoned the search of each in turn and plodded back to the one they had been following. Their boots and clothing suffered; their packs were rent upon their backs, and, since men engaged in such work must be generously fed, their provisions diminished rapidly.

At length, one lowering afternoon, they were brought to a standstill by the river, which forked into two branches, one of which came foaming out on a cleft in the rocks. This would have mattered less had it flowed across the level; but just there it had scored itself out a deep hollow, from which the roar of its turmoil rose in long reverberations. Carroll, who was aching all over, stood upon the brink, and first of all gazed ahead. He surmised from the steady ascent and the contours of the hills that the valley was dying out, and that they should reach the head of it in another day’s journey. The higher summits, however, were veiled in leaden mist, and there was a sting in the cold breeze that blew down the hollow and set the ragged firs wailing. Then he glanced dubiously at the dim, green water, which swirled in deep eddies and boiled in white confusion among the fangs of rock sixty or seventy feet below. Not far away the stream was wider and he supposed in consequence shallower, though it ran furiously.

“It doesn’t look encouraging, and we have no more food left than will take us back to the sloop if we’re economical,” he said. “Do you think it’s worth while going on?”

“I haven’t a doubt about it,” Vane declared. “We ought to reach the head of the valley and get back here in two or three days.”

“Three days will make a big hole in the provisions.”

“Then we’ll have to put up with short rations,” Vane rejoined.

“If you’re determined, we may as well get on.”

He stepped cautiously over the edge of the descent, and went down a few yards with a run, while loosened soil and stones slipped away under him. Then he clutched a slender tree, and proceeded as far as the next on his hands and knees. After that, it was necessary to swing himself over a ledge, and he was on the whole astonished when he alighted safely on one below, from which he could scramble down to the narrow strip of gravel between rock and water. He was standing, breathless, looking at the latter, when Vane joined him. The stones dipped sharply, and two or three large boulders, ringed about with froth, rose near the middle of the stream, which seemed to be running slacker on the other side of them.

There was nothing to show how deep it was, but Carroll braced himself for an effort and sturdily plunged in.

Two steps took him up to the waist, and he had trouble in finding solid bottom at the next, because the gravel rolled and slipped away beneath his feet in the strong stream. The current also dragged hard at his limbs, and he set his lips tight when it crept up to his ribs. Then he lost his footing, and was washed away, plunging and floundering, with now and then one toe resting momentarily upon the bottom, until he was hurled against the first of the boulders with a crash that almost drove the little remaining breath out of his body. He clung to it desperately, gasping hard; and then with a determined struggle contrived to reach the second stone, against which the stream pressed him, without finding any support for his feet. A moment or two later, Vane was washed down towards him, and grabbing at the boulder held on by it. They said

nothing to each other, but they looked at the sliding water between them and the opposite bank. Carroll was getting horribly cold, and felt the power ebbing out of him; he thought if he must swim across he had better do so at once.

Launching himself forward, he felt the flood lap his breast, but as his arms went in he struck something violently with one leg and found that he could stand up on a submerged ledge. This carried him a yard or two, and though he stepped over the end of the ledge into deeper water, he reached a strip of shelving shingle, up which he staggered. Vane overtook him, and they scrambled up the slope ahead, which was a little less steep than the one they had descended. The work warmed them slightly, and they needed it, but as they strode on again, keeping to the foot of the hillside where the timber was less dense, a cold rain drove into their faces. It grew steadily thicker; the straps began to gall their wet shoulders, and their saturated clothing clung heavily about their limbs. In spite of this, they went on until nightfall, when it was difficult to make a fire, and after a reduced supper found a little humid warmth in their wet blankets.

The next day's work was much the same, only that they crossed no rivers and it rained harder; and, when evening came, Carroll, who had burst one boot, was limping badly. They made camp among the dripping firs which partly sheltered them from the bitter wind, and shortly after supper both fell asleep.

At evening next day they reached the head of the valley. It was still raining and heavy mists obscured the summits of the hills, but above the lower slopes of rocks glimmering snow ran up into the vapour. There were a few balsams and hemlocks about them, but no sign of a spruce.

"Now," said Carroll, "I expect you'll be satisfied."

Vane was no nearer to owning himself defeated than he had been when they first set out. "We know there's no spruce in this valley; and that's something," he replied. "When we come back again we'll try the next one."

"It has cost us a good deal to make sure of the fact."

Vane's expression changed. "We haven't ascertained the cost just yet. As a rule, you don't make up the bill until you're through with the undertaking; and it may be a longer one than either of us think. Now we'll turn upon our tracks."

Carroll recalled his speech afterwards, but just then he only hitched his burden a little higher on his aching shoulders as he plodded after his comrade down the rain-swept hollow, and he had good cause to remember the march to the inlet. It rained most of the way, and their clothes were never dry; parts of them, indeed, flowed in tatters about their aching limbs, and before they had covered half the distance their boots were dropping to pieces. What was more important, their provisions were rapidly running out, and they marched on a few handfuls of food, carefully apportioned twice daily. At last one night they lay down hungry, with empty bags, to sleep shelterless in the rain, for they had thrown their tent away; and Carroll had some difficulty in getting on his feet next morning.

"I believe I can hold out until sundown, though I'm far from sure of it," he said. "You'll have to leave me behind if we don't strike the inlet then."

"We'll strike it in the afternoon," Vane assured him.

They set out as soon as they had reslung their packs, and Carroll limped and stumbled. He managed, however, to keep pace with Vane, and some time after noon the latter cried out as a twinkling gleam among the trees caught his eye. Then the shuffling pace grew faster, and they were breathless when at last they stopped and dropped their burdens beside the boat. It was only at the third or fourth attempt they got her down to the water, and the veins were swollen high on Vane's flushed forehead when at last he sat down, panting heavily, on her gunwale.

"We ran her up quite easily, though we had the slope to face then," he remarked.

"You could scarcely expect to carry boats about without trouble, after a march like the one we've made," Carroll pointed out.

They ran her in and pulled off to the sloop. When they sat down in the little saloon, in which there was a mirror, Vane grinned.

“I knew you looked a deadbeat, but I’d no idea I was quite so bad,” he said. “Anyhow, we’ll get the stove lighted and some dry things on. The next question is—what shall we have for supper?”

“That’s simple,” Carroll answered. “Everything that’s most tempting and the whole of it.”

Some little time later, they flung their boots and rent garments overboard and sat down to a feast. The plates were empty when they rose, and in another hour both of them were wrapped in heavy slumber.

CHAPTER XVIII—JESSIE CONFERS A FAVOUR.

It was blowing fresh next morning from the south-east, which was right ahead, and Vane's face was hard when he and Carroll got the boat on deck and set about tying down two reefs in the mainsail.

They got sail upon the sloop and drove her out into a confused head sea, through which she laboured with flooded decks, making very little to windward. When night came, a deluge killed the breeze, and next day she lay rolling wildly in a heavy calm, while light mist narrowed in the horizon and a persistent drizzle poured down upon the smoothly-heaving sea. Then they had light variable winds, and their provisions were once more running out when they drew abreast of a little coaling port. Carroll suggested running in and going on to Victoria by train, but they had hardly decided to do so when the fickle breeze died away, and the tide-stream bore them past to the south. They had no longer a stitch of dry clothing left, and they were again upon reduced rations.

Still bad fortune dogged them, for that night a fresh head wind sprang up and held steadily while they thrashed her south, swept by stinging spray. Their tempers grew shorter under the strain, and their bodies ached from the chill of their soddened garments and sitting hour by hour at the helm. At last the breeze fell, and shortly afterwards a trail of smoke and a half seen strip of hull emerged from the creeping haze astern of them.

"A lumber tug," said Vane. "She seems to have a raft in tow, and it will probably be for Drayton's people. If you'll edge in towards her, I'll send him word that we're on the way."

There was very little wind just then and presently the tug was close alongside, pitching her bows out of the slow swell, while a mass of timber, wonderfully chained together, surged along astern. A shapeless oil-skinned figure stood outside her pilot-house, balancing itself against the heave of the bridge, which slanted and straightened.

"Winstanley?" Vane shouted.

The figure waved an arm, as if in assent, and Vane raised his voice again. "Report us to Mr. Drayton. We'll come along as fast as we can."

The man turned and pointed to the misty horizon, astern. "You'll get it from the north before to-morrow."

Then the straining tug and long wet line of working raft drew ahead, while the sloop crawled on, close-hauled, towards the south. Late that night, however, the mists melted away, and a keen rushing breeze that came out of the north crisped the water. She sprang forward when the ripples reached her; the flapping canvas went to sleep, and while each slack rope tightened a musical tinkle broke out at the bows. It grew steadily louder, and when the sun swung up red above the eastern hills, she had piled the white froth to her channels and was driving forward merrily, with little sparkling seas tumbling, foam-tipped, after her. The wind fell light as the sun rose higher, but she ran on all day, and the western sky was still blazing with a wondrous green when she stole into Vancouver harbour.

The light faded as they crept across the inlet before a faint breeze, but when they had got the anchor over and the boat into the water, Carroll made out two dim figures standing on the wharf and waved a hand to them.

"It's Drayton, I think," he said. "Kitty's with him."

They pulled ashore, and Drayton shook hands with them.

"I've been looking out for you since noon," he said. "What about that spruce?"

There was eagerness in his voice, and Vane's face clouded. "We couldn't find a trace of it."

Drayton's disappointment was obvious, though he tried to hide it. "Well," he said resignedly, "I've no doubt you did all you could."

"Of course," Kitty broke in. "We're quite sure of that."

Vane thanked her with a glance; he felt sorry for her and Drayton. They were strongly attached to each other, and he had reason for believing that even with the advanced salary the man expected to get they would find it needful to study strict economy.

"I'm going to make another attempt. I expect some of our difficulties will vanish after I've had a talk with Hartley," he said.

Kitty looked grave. "That's impossible," she answered softly. "Hartley died a week ago."

Vane started.

"I'm sorry," he said. "How's Celia?"

"She's very sick." There was concern in Kitty's voice. "Hartley got worse soon after you left, and she sat up all night with him after her work for the last two weeks. Now she's broken down, and she doesn't seem to know if they'll take her back again at the hotel."

"I must go and see her," said Vane. "But won't you and Drayton come with us and have dinner?"

Drayton explained that this was out of the question—Kitty's employer, who had driven in that afternoon, was waiting with his team; and the party left the wharf together. A few minutes later, Vane shook hands with the girl and her companion.

"Don't lose heart," he said. "We're far from beaten yet."

They separated, and after dinner Vane, who rejoiced in the unusual luxury of clean, dry clothes, walked across to call on Nairn. He was shown into a room where Jessie Horsfield was sitting, but she rose with a slight start when he came in. Vane, who had been preoccupied since he had heard Kitty's news, did not notice it, and Jessie's manner was reposeful and quietly friendly when she held out her hand.

"So you have come back?" she said. "Have you succeeded in your search?"

Vane was gratified. It was pleasant to feel that she was interested in his undertaking.

"No," he confessed. "I'm afraid I have failed."

"Then," said Jessie, with reproach in her voice, "you have disappointed me."

It was skilful flattery, since she had conveyed the impression that she had expected him to succeed, which implied that she held a high opinion of his abilities.

"After all, you must have had a good deal against you," she resumed consolingly. "Won't you sit down and tell me about it? Nairn, I understand, is writing some letters, and he sent for Mrs. Nairn just before you came in."

She indicated a chair beside the open hearth and Vane sat down opposite her, where a low screen cut them off from the rest of the room. Vane, who was still stiff and aching from exposure to the cold and rain, revelled in the unusual sense of comfort. In addition to this, his companion's pose was singularly graceful, and the ease of it and the friendly smile with which she regarded him somehow implied that they were on excellent terms.

"It's very nice to be here again," he said.

Jessie looked up at him languidly. He had spoken as he felt, on impulse, which was more gratifying than an obvious desire to pay her a compliment would have been.

"I suppose you wouldn't get many comforts in the bush," she suggested.

"No," said Vane. "Comforts of any kind are remarkably scarce up yonder. As a matter of fact, I can't imagine a country

where the contrasts between the luxuries of civilisation and the other thing are sharper. But that wasn't exactly what I meant."

"Then what did you mean?"

"I don't know that it's worth explaining," Vane answered with an air of consideration. "We have rather luxurious quarters at the hotel, but this room is somehow different. It's restful—I think it's homely—in-fact, as I said, it's nice to be here."

Jessie understood that he had been attempting to analyse his feelings, and had failed clearly to recognise that her presence contributed to the satisfaction he was conscious of. She had no doubt that if he were a man of average susceptibility, the company of an attractive woman would have some effect on him after his sojourn in the wilds; but whether she had produced any deeper effect she could not determine. Nor did it appear judicious to prompt him unduly.

"But won't you tell me your adventures?" she said.

It required a few leading questions to start him, but at length he told the story.

"You see," he said in conclusion, "it was lack of definite knowledge as much as the natural obstacles that brought us back—and I've been troubled about the thing since we landed."

Jessie's manner invited his confidence. "I wonder," she said softly, "if you would care to tell me why?"

"Hartley's dead, and I understand his daughter has broken down after nursing him. It's doubtful if her situation can be kept open, and it may be some time before she's strong enough to look for another." He hesitated. "In a way, I feel responsible for her."

"You really aren't responsible in the least," Jessie declared. "Still, I can understand the idea troubling you. Would you like me to help you?"

"I can hardly ask it, but it would be a relief to me," Vane answered with obvious eagerness.

"Then, if you'll tell me her address, I'll go to see her, and we'll consider what can be done."

Vane leaned forward impulsively. "You have taken a weight off my mind. It's difficult to thank you properly."

"I don't suppose it will give me any trouble. Of course, it must be embarrassing to feel you had a helpless young woman on your hands."

Then a thought flashed into her mind, as she remembered what she had seen at the station some months ago. "I wonder if the situation is an altogether unusual one to you," she continued. "Have you never let your pity run away with your judgment before?"

"You wouldn't expect me to proclaim my charities," Vane objected humorously which was the only means of parrying the question that occurred to him.

"I think you are trying to put me off. You haven't given me an answer."

"I believe I was able to make things easier for somebody else not very long ago," Vane confessed, reluctantly, but without embarrassment. "I now see that I might have done harm without meaning to do so. It's sometimes extraordinarily difficult to help folks—which is why I'm so grateful for your offer."

For the next few moments Jessie sat silent. It was clear that she had misjudged him, for although she was not one who demanded too much from human nature, the fact that Kitty Blake had arrived in Vancouver in his company had undoubtedly rankled in her mind. Now she acquitted him of any blame, and it was a relief to do so. She changed the subject abruptly.

“I suppose you will make another attempt to find timber?” she suggested.

“Yes,” said Vane. “In a week or two.”

He had hardly spoken when Mrs. Nairn came in and welcomed him with her usual friendliness.

“I’m glad to see ye, though ye’re looking thin,” she said. “Why did ye not come straight to us, instead of going to the hotel? Ye would have got as good a supper as they would give ye there.”

“I haven’t a doubt of it,” Vane declared. “On the other hand, I hardly think even one of your suppers would quite have put right the defect in my appearance you mentioned. You see, the cause of it has been at work for some time.”

Mrs. Nairn regarded him with half-amused compassion. “If ye’ll come ower every evening, we’ll soon cure that. I would have been down sooner if Alec, who’s writing letters, had not kept me. There was a matter or two he wanted to ask my opinion on.”

“I think that was very wise of him.”

His hostess smiled. “For one thing, we had a letter from Evelyn Chisholm this afternoon. She’ll be out to spend some time with us in about a month.”

“Evelyn’s coming here?” Vane exclaimed, with a sudden stirring of his heart.

“And why should she not come?” Mrs. Nairn inquired. “I told ye some time ago that we partly expected her. Ye were-na astonished then.”

She appeared to expect an explanation of the change in his attitude, and as he volunteered none she drew him a few paces aside.

“If I’m no betraying a confidence; Evelyn writes that she’ll be glad to get away a while. Now, I’ve been wondering why she should be anxious to leave home.”

She looked at him fixedly, and to his annoyance he felt his face grow hot. Mrs. Nairn had quick perceptions, and was now and then painfully direct.

“It struck me that Evelyn was not very comfortable there,” he replied. “She seemed out of harmony with her people.”

Mrs. Nairn glanced at him again with amusement in her eyes. “It’s no unlikely. The reason may serve—for the want of a better.” Then she changed her tone. “Ye’ll away up to Alec; he told me to send ye.”

Vane went out of the room, but he left Jessie in a thoughtful mood. She had seen him start at the mention of Evelyn, and it struck her as significant, since she had heard that he had spent some time with the Chisholms; On the other hand there was the obvious fact that he had been astonished to hear that Evelyn was coming out, which implied that their acquaintance had not progressed far enough to warrant the girl’s informing him. Besides, Evelyn would arrive for a month, and Jessie reflected that she would probably see a good deal of Vane in the meanwhile. She now felt glad that she had promised to look after Celia Hartley, which would, no doubt, necessitate her consulting with him every now and then.

CHAPTER XIX—VANE FORESEES TROUBLE.

Nairn was sitting at a writing-table when Vane entered his room, and after a few questions about his journey, he handed the younger man one of the papers that lay in front of him.

“It’s a report from the mine,” he said.

Vane carefully studied the document.

“It only brings us back to our last conversation on the subject,” he remarked when his host glanced at him inquiringly. “We have the choice of going on as we are doing, or extending our operations by an increase of capital. In the latter case, our total earnings might be larger, but I hardly think there would be as good a return on the money actually sunk. Taking it all round, I don’t know what to think; but if it appeared that there was a moral certainty of making a satisfactory profit on the new stock, I should consent.”

Nairn chuckled. “A moral certainty is no a very common thing in mining.”

“I believe Horsfield’s in favour of the scheme. How far would you trust that man?” Vane inquired.

“About as far as I could fling a bull by the tail. The same thing applies to both of them.”

“He has some influence. He’d find supporters.”

Nairn saw that the meaning of his last remark which implied that he had no more confidence in Jessie than he had in her brother, had not been grasped by his companion, but he did not consider it judicious to make it plainer. Instead, he gave Vane another piece of information: “Horsfield and Winter work into each other’s hands.”

“But Winter has no interest in the Clermont.”

Nairn smiled sourly. “He holds no shares in the mine, but there’s no much in the shape of mineral developments yon man has no an interest in. Since ye do not seem inclined to yield Horsfield a point or two, it might pay ye to watch the pair of them.”

Vane, who was aware that Winter was a person of some importance in financial circles, remained silent for a couple of minutes. “Now,” he said, at length, “every dollar we have in the Clermont is usefully employed and earning a satisfactory profit. Of course, if we put the concern on the market, we might get more than it is worth from investors; but that doesn’t greatly appeal to me.”

“It’s unnecessary to point out that a director’s interest is no invariably the same as that of his shareholders,” Nairn rejoined.

“It’s an unfortunate fact. But I’d be no better off if I only got the same actual return on a larger amount of what would be watered stock.”

“There’s sense in that. I’m no urging the scheme—there are other points against it,” answered Nairn.

“Well,” said Vane, “I’ll go up and look round the mine and then we’ll have another talk about the matter.”

They changed the subject, but Vane walked back to his hotel in a thoughtful frame of mind, and finding Carroll in the smoking-room related his conversation with Nairn.

“I’m a little troubled about the situation,” he concluded. “The Clermont finances are now on a sound basis, but it might after all prove advantageous to raise further capital, and in such a case we would, perhaps, lie open to attack. Nairn’s inclined to be cryptic in his remarks; but he seems to hint that it would be advisable to make Horsfield some concession—in other words, to buy him off.”

“Which is a course you have objections to?”

“Yes,” said Vane, “very decided ones.”

“I think that, in a general way, Nairn’s advice is sensible. Where mining and other schemes are floated, there are men who make a good living out of the operations. They’re trained to the business; they’ve control of the dollars; and when a new thing’s put on the market, they consider they’ve the first claim on the pickings.”

“You needn’t elaborate the point,” Vane broke in impatiently.

“You made your appearance in this city as a poor and unknown man with a mine to sell,” Carroll went on. “Disregarding tactful hints, you laid down your terms and stuck to them. Launching your venture without considering their views, you did the gentlemen I’ve mentioned out of their accustomed toll, and I’ve no doubt that some of them were indignant. It’s a thing you wouldn’t expect them to sanction. Now, however, one who has probably others behind him is making overtures to you. You ought to consider it a compliment; a recognition of ability. The question is—Do you mean to slight these advances and go on as you have begun?”

“That’s my present intention,” Vane answered.

“Then you needn’t be astonished if you find yourself up against a determined opposition by and by,” said Carroll.

“I think my friends will stand by me.” Vane looked at him steadily.

“Thanks. I’ve merely been pointing out what you may expect, and hinting at the most judicious course—though the latter’s rather against my natural inclinations. I’d better add that I’ve never been particularly prudent, and the opposite policy appeals to me. If we’re forced to clear for action, we’ll nail the flag to the mast.”

It was spoken lightly; because the man was serious, but Vane knew he had an ally who would support him with unflinching staunchness.

“I’m far from sure it will be needful,” he replied, and they talked about other matters until they strolled off to their rooms.

They spent the next week in the city, where Vane was kept occupied; after which they sailed once more for the north; and pushed inland until they were stopped by snow among the ranges, without finding the spruce. The journey proved as toilsome as the previous one, and both the men were worn out when they reached the coast. Vane was determined on making a third attempt, but he informed Carroll that they would visit the mine before proceeding to Vancouver. They had heavy rain during the voyage down the Strait, and when on the day after reaching port, the jaded horses they had hired plodded up the sloppy trail to the mine, a pitiless deluge once more poured down on them.

The light was growing dim among the dripping firs, and a deep-toned roar came throbbing across their shadowy ranks. By and by Vane, who was leading, turned and glanced back at Carroll.

“I’ve never heard the river so plainly before,” he said. “It must be unusually swollen.”

Since the mine was situated on a narrow level flat between the hillside and the river, Carroll understood the anxiety in his comrade’s voice; and urging the wearied horses they pressed on a little faster. It was almost dark when they reached the edge of an opening in the firs, and saw a cluster of iron-roofed, wooden buildings and a tall chimney stack, in front of which the unsightly ore-dump extended. Wet and chilled and worn out as the men were, there was comfort in the sight; but Vane noticed that a shallow lake stretched between him and the buildings. On one side of it there was a broad strip of tumbling foam, which rose and fell in confused upheavals and filled the forest with the roar it made. Vane drove his horse into the water, and dismounting among the stumps before the ore-dump, found a wet and soil-stained man awaiting him. A long trail of smoke floated away from the iron stack behind him, and through the sound of the river there broke the clank and thud of hard-driven pumps.

“You have got a big head of steam up, Salter,” he said.

The man nodded. "We want it. It's taking me all my time to keep the water out of the workings. Leave your horses—I'll send along for them—and I'll show you what we've been doing after supper."

"I'd sooner go now, while I'm wet," Vane answered.

They went down into the mine. The approach looked like a canal, and they descended the shallow shaft amidst a thin cascade. The tunnel they reached slanted, for the lode dipped, and the lights that twinkled here and there among the timbering showed shadowy, half-naked figures toiling in water which rose well up their boots. Further streams of it ran in from fissures, and Vane's face grew grave as he plodded through the flood with a lamp in his hand. He spent an hour in the workings, asking Salter a question now and then, and afterwards went back with him to one of the sheds, where he dressed in dry clothes and sat down to a meal.

When it was over and the table had been cleared, he lay in a canvas chair beside the stove, in which resinous billets snapped and crackled cheerfully. The deluge roared upon the iron roof; the song of the river rose and fell, filling the place with sound; and now and then the pounding and clanking of the pumps broke in.

Vane examined the sheet of figures Salter handed him. Then he carefully turned over some of the pieces of stone the table was partly covered with.

"There's no doubt those specimens aren't so promising, and the cost of extraction is going up," he said at length. "I'll have a talk with Nairn when I get back, but in the meanwhile it looks as if we were going to have trouble with the water."

"It's a thing I've been afraid of for some time," Salter answered. "We can keep down any leakage that comes in through the rocks, though it means driving the pumps hard, but an inrush from the river would beat us."

Vane let the matter drop, and an hour later he retired to his wooden berth. In a few minutes he was fast asleep, but was awakened by a shrill note, which he recognised as the whistle of the engine. It was sounding the alarm, and next moment he was struggling into his clothing; then the door swung open and Salter stood in the entrance, lantern in hand, with water trickling from him. There was keen anxiety in his expression.

"Flood's lapping the bank top now," he said. "There's a jamb in the narrow place at the head of the rapid, and the water's backing up. I'm going along with the boys."

He vanished as suddenly as he had appeared, and Vane dragged on his jacket. If the mine were drowned, operations might be stopped for a considerable time. What was more, it would precipitate a crisis in the affairs of the company and necessitate an increase of its capital, which he would sooner avoid.

He was outside in less than a minute and stood still looking about him, while the deluge lashed his face and beat his clothing against his limbs. He could only make out a blurred mass of climbing trees on one side, and a strip of foam cutting through the black level which he supposed was water, in front of him. His trained ears, however, gave him a little information, for the clamour of the flood was broken by a sharp snapping and crashing, which he knew was made by driftwood driving furiously against the boulders. In that region, the river banks are encumbered here and there with great logs, partly burned by forest fires, reaped by gales, or brought down from the hill-sides by falls of frost-loosened soil. A flood higher than usual sets them floating, and on subsiding sometimes leaves them packed in a gorge or stranded in a shallow to wait for the next big rise. Now they were driving down and, as Salter had said, jamming at the head of the rapid.

Suddenly a column of fierce white radiance leaped up lower down-stream and Vane knew that a big compressed air lamp had been carried to the spot where the driftwood was gathering. Even at a distance, the brightness of the glare dazzled him, so that he could see nothing else when he headed towards it. He collided with a fir stump and struck it with his knee, and in another minute the splashing about his feet warned him that he was entering the water. Having no wish to walk into the main stream, he floundered to one side. He was, however, getting nearer to the blaze, and by and by he made out a swarm of figures scurrying about beneath it. Some of them had saws or axes, for he caught the gleam of steel, and broke into a run; and presently Carroll, whom he had forgotten, came up, calling to him.

CHAPTER XX—THE FLOOD.

When he reached the blast lamp, which was raised on a tall tripod, Vane stood with his back to the pulsating blaze while he grasped the details of a somewhat impressive scene. A little up-stream of him the river leaped out of the darkness, breaking into foaming waves, and a wall of dripping firs flung back the roar it made, the first rows of serried trunks standing out hard and sharp in the fierce white light. Nearer where he stood, a projecting spur of rock narrowed in the river, which boiled tumultuously against its foot, while about half-way across the top of a giant boulder rose above the flood.

Vane could only just see it, because a mass of driftwood, which was momentarily growing, stretched from bank to bank. A big log, drifting down sideways, had brought up upon the boulder and once fixed had seized and held fast each succeeding trunk. Some had been driven partly out upon those that had preceded them; some had been drawn beneath the latter, and catching the bottom had jambed. Then the rest had been wedged by the current into the gathering mass; trunks, branches, and brushwood all finding a place. When the stream is strong, a jamb, as it is called, usually extends downwards, as well as rises, as the water it pens back increases in depth, until it forms a solid barrier from surface to bed. If it occurs during a log-drive, the river is choked with lumber. Bent figures were at work with axes at the shoreward end of the mass; others had crawled out along the logs, in search of another point where they could advantageously be attacked; but Vane, watching them with practised eyes, decided that they were largely throwing their toil away. Next, he glanced down-stream; but powerful as the light was, it did not pierce far into the darkness and the rain, and the mad white rush of the rapid vanished abruptly into the surrounding gloom. Then he caught the clink of a hammer on a drill, and seeing Salter not far away strode towards him.

“How are you getting to work?” he asked.

Salter pointed to the foot of the rock they stood upon. “I reckoned if we could put a shot in yonder, we might cut out stone enough to clear the butts of the larger logs that are keying up the jamb.”

“You’re wasting time—starting at the wrong place.”

“It’s possible, but what am I to do? I’d sooner split that boulder or chop down to the king log there, but the boys can’t get across.”

“I think I could,” Vane answered. “I’ll try, if it’s necessary.”

Salter expostulated, “I want to point out that you’re the boss director of this company. I don’t know what you’re making out of it, but you can hire men to do the kind of work you think of undertaking for three dollars a day.”

“We’ll let the boys try it, if they’re willing.” Vane raised his voice. “Are any of you open to earn twenty dollars? I’ll pay that to the man who’ll put a stick of giant-powder in yonder boulder, and another twenty to whoever can find the king log and chop it through.”

Three or four of them crept cautiously along the driftwood bridge. It heaved and worked beneath them; the foam sluiced across it, and the stream forced the thinner tops of shattered trees above the barrier. It was obvious that the men were risking life and limb, and there was a cry from the rest when one of them went down and momentarily disappeared. He scrambled to his feet again, but those behind him stopped, bracing themselves against the stream, knee-deep in rushing froth. Most of them had followed rough and dangerous occupation in the bush; but they were not professional river-Jacks trained to high proficiency in log-driving, and one turning shouted to the watchers on the bank.

“This jamb’s not solid,” he explained. “She’s working open and shutting; and you can’t tell where the breaks are.” He stooped and rubbed his leg, and Vane understood him to add: “Figured I had it smashed.”

Vane swung round towards Carroll, who was standing close by. “We give them a lead.”

Salter ventured another remonstrance: “Stay where you are. How are you going to manage if the boys can’t tackle the thing?”

“They haven’t as much at stake as I have,” was Vane’s reply. “I’m a director of the company as you pointed out. Give me two sticks of giant-powder, some fuse, and detonators.”

After cramming the blasting material into his pocket, Vane called to Carroll: “Are you coming with me?”

“Since I can’t stop you, I suppose I’d better go,” Carroll replied.

They sprang down the bank. Vane crawled out on the working timber, with Carroll, who carried a heavy hammer, a few feet behind him. The perilous bridge they traversed groaned beneath their feet, but they had joined the other men before they came to any particularly troublesome opening. Then the cluster of wet figures was brought up by a gap filled with leaping foam, in the midst of which brushwood swung to and fro and projecting branches ground on one another. Whether there was solid timber a foot or two beneath, or only the entrance to some cavity by which the stream swept through the barrier, there was nothing to show, but Vane set his lips and jumped. He alighted on something that bore him, and when the others followed, floundering and splashing, the deliberation which had hitherto characterised their movements suddenly deserted them. They had reached the limit beyond which it was no longer useful.

When they had crossed the gap, Vane and those behind him blundered on in hot fury. They had risen to the demand on them, and the curious psychic change had come; now they must achieve success or face annihilation. But in this there was nothing unusual; it is the alternative offered to many a log-driver, miner, and sailor-man.

Neither Vane nor Carroll, nor any of those who assisted them, had any clear recollection of what they did. Somehow they reached the boulder; somehow they plied axe or iron-hooked peevie, while the unstable, foam-lapped platform rocked beneath their feet. Every movement entailed a peril no one could calculate, but they savagely toiled on. When Vane began to swing a hammer above a drill, or whom he got it from, he did not know, any more than he remembered when he had torn off and thrown away his jacket, though the sticks of giant-powder, which had been in his pocket, lay close by upon the stone. Sparks sprang from the drill which Carroll held and fell among the coils of snaky fuse; but that did not trouble either, and it was only when Vane was breathless that he changed places with his companion.

About them, bowed figures that breathed in stertorous gasps grappled desperately with grinding, smashing logs. Sometimes they were forced up in harsh distinctness by a dazzling glare; sometimes they faded into blurred shadows as the pulsating flame upon the bank sank a little or was momentarily blown aside; but all the while gorged veins rose on bronzed foreheads and toil-hardened muscles were taxed to the uttermost. At last, when a trunk rolled beneath him, Carroll missed a stroke and realised with a shock of dismay that it was not the drill he had brought his hammer down upon.

“I couldn’t help it,” he gasped. “Where did I hit you?”

“Get on,” Vane said hoarsely. “I can hold the drill.”

Carroll struck for a few more minutes, after which he flung down the hammer and inserted the giant-powder into the holes sunk in the stone. Next he lighted the fuse; and, warning the others, they hastily recrossed the dangerous bridge. They had reached the edge of the forest when a flash sprang up amidst the foam and a sharp crash was followed by a deafening, drawn-out uproar. Rending, grinding, smashing, the jamb broke up, hammered upon the partly shattered boulder, and carrying it away or driving over it washed in tremendous ruin down the rapid. When the wild clamour had subsided, Salter gave the men some instructions, and then as they approached the lamp noticed Vane’s reddened hand.

“That looks a nasty smash; you want to get it seen to,” he remarked.

“I’ll get it dressed at the settlement; we’ll make an early start to-morrow,” said Vane. “We were lucky in breaking the jamb; but you’ll have the same trouble over again any time a heavy flood brings down an unusual quantity of driftwood.”

“It’s what I’d expect,” agreed Salter.

“Then something will have to be done to prevent it. I’ll go into the matter when I reach the city.”

Carroll and Vane walked back to the shack, where the former bound up his comrade’s injured hand, and, after a rest, left

the mine early next morning. Vane got his hand dressed when they reached the little mining town at the head of the railroad, and on the following day they arrived in Vancouver.

CHAPTER XXI—VANE YIELDS A POINT.

The short afternoon was drawing towards its close when Vane came out of a building in Hastings Street, Vancouver.

"The meeting went satisfactorily, taking it all round," he remarked to Carroll, who was with him.

"I think so," agreed his companion. "But I'm far from sure that Horsfield was pleased with the stockholders' decision."

Vane nodded in a thoughtful manner. After returning from the mine, he had gone inland to examine a new irrigation property he had been asked to take an interest in, and had only got back in time for a meeting of the Clermont shareholders, which Nairn had arranged in his absence. The meeting was just over, and though Vane had been forced to yield to a majority on some points, he had secured the abandonment of a proposition he considered dangerous.

"Though I don't see what the man could have gained by it, I'm inclined to believe that if Nairn and I had been absent he'd have carried his reconstruction scheme," he said. "That wouldn't have pleased me."

"I thought it injudicious," Carroll commented.

"It was only because we must raise more money I agreed to the issue of the new shares," Vane went on. "We ought to pay a fair dividend on such a moderate sum."

"You think you'll get it?"

"I've not much doubt."

Vane was capable and forceful; but his abilities were rather of a practical than a diplomatic order, and he was occasionally addicted to headstrong action. Knowing that he had a very cunning antagonist intriguing against him, his companion had misgivings.

"Shall we walk back to the hotel?" he asked.

"No," said Vane; "I'll go across and see how Celia Hartley's getting on. I'm afraid I've been forgetting her."

"Then I'll come too. You may need me; there are matters you're not to be trusted with alone."

Just then Nairn came down the steps and waved his hand to them. "Ye will no forget that Mrs. Nairn is expecting both of ye this evening."

He passed on, and they set off together across the city towards the district where Celia lived. Though the quarter in question may have been improved out of existence since, some little time ago rows of low-rented shacks stood upon mounds of sweating sawdust which had been dumped into a swampy hollow. Leaky, frail, and fissured, they were not the kind of places any one who could help it would choose to live in; but Vane found the sick girl still installed in one of the worst of them. She looked pale and haggard; but she was busily at work upon some millinery, and the light of a tin lamp showed Drayton and Kitty Blake sitting near her.

"You oughtn't to be at work; you don't look fit," Vane said to Celia, and hesitated a moment before he continued: "I'm sorry we couldn't find that spruce; but, as I told Drayton, we're going back to try again."

The girl smiled bravely. "Then you'll find it next time. I'm glad I'm able to do a little; it brings a few dollars in."

"But what are you doing?"

"Making hats. I did one for Miss Horsfield, and afterwards friends of hers sent me some more to trim. She said she'd try to get me some work from one of the big stores."

"But you're not a milliner, are you?" said Vane, who felt grateful to Jessie for the practical way in which she had kept

her promise to assist.

“Celia’s something better,” Kitty broke in. “She’s a genius.”

The others laughed, and Vane, anxious to turn the conversation away from Miss Horsfield’s action, led them on to general chatter, under cover of which he drew Drayton to the door.

“The girl looks far from fit,” he said. “Has the doctor been over lately?”

“Two or three days ago,” answered Drayton. “We’ve been worried about her. It’s out of the question that she should go back to the hotel, and she can only manage to work a few hours daily. There’s another thing—the clerk of the fellow who owns these shacks has just been along for his rent. It’s overdue.”

“Where’s he now?”

Drayton laughed, for the sounds of a vigorous altercation rose from farther up the unlighted street. “I guess he’s yonder, having some more trouble with his collecting.”

“I’ll fix that matter, anyway,” said Vane, who disappeared into the darkness.

It was some time later when he re-entered the shack, and waited until a remark of Celia’s gave him a lead.

“You’re really a partner in the lumber scheme,” he said. “I can’t see why you shouldn’t draw some of your share of the proceeds beforehand.”

“The first payment isn’t to be made until you find the spruce and get your lease,” the girl reminded him. “You’ve already paid a hundred dollars we had no claim upon.”

“That doesn’t matter; I’m going to find it.”

“Yes,” said Celia, with a look of confidence, “I think you will. But,” and a flicker of colour crept into her thin face—“I can’t take any more money until it’s done.”

Vane, failing in another attempt to shake her resolution, dropped the subject, and soon afterwards he and Carroll took their departure. They were sitting in their hotel, waiting for dinner, when Carroll, who lay in a luxurious chair, looked up lazily.

“What are you thinking about so hard?” he inquired.

Vane glanced meaningfully round the elaborately furnished room. “There’s a contrast between all this and that rotten shack. Did you notice that Celia never stopped sewing while we were in?”

“I did,” said Carroll. “I suppose you’re going to propound another conundrum of a kind I’ve heard before—why you should have so many things you don’t particularly need while Miss Hartley must go on sewing, when she’s hardly able for it, in her most unpleasant shack? I don’t know if the fact that you found a mine answers the question; but if it doesn’t the thing’s beyond your philosophy.”

“Come off,” Vane bade him with signs of impatience. “Your moralising gets on one’s nerves. Anyhow, I straightened out one difficulty—I found the rent man, who’d been round worrying her, and got rid of him.”

Carroll groaned in mock dismay, which covered some genuine annoyance with himself.

“What’s the matter?” Vane inquired. “Do you want a drink?”

“I’ll get over it,” Carroll informed him. “It isn’t the first time I’ve suffered from the same complaint. But I’d like to point out that your chivalrous impulses may be the ruin of you some day. Why didn’t you let Drayton settle with the man? You gave him a cheque, I suppose?”

"I did; I'd only a few loose dollars on me. Now I see what you're driving at, and I want to say that any little reputation I possess can pretty well take care of itself."

"Just so. No doubt it will be necessary; but you're not the only person concerned."

"But who's likely to take notice of the thing?"

"I can't tell; but you make enemies as well as friends, and you're walking in slippery places which you're not altogether accustomed to. You can't meet your difficulties with the axe here."

"That's true," assented Vane, and they went in to dinner.

After the meal, they walked across to Nairn's, and when they had been ushered into a room in which several other guests were assembled, Vane sat down on a sofa, beside Jessie Horsfield.

"I want to thank you; I was over at Miss Hartley's this afternoon," he began.

"I understood you were at the mining meeting."

"So I was; your brother would tell that—"

Vane broke off, remembering that he had defeated Horsfield.

"You were opposed to him; but it doesn't follow that I share all his views. Perhaps I ought to be a stauncher partisan."

"If you'll be just to both of us, I'll be satisfied."

"I suppose that means you're convinced of the equity of your cause," she suggested.

"I expect I deserve the rebuke, but aren't you trying to switch me off the subject?" Vane answered with a laugh. "It's Celia Hartley I want to talk about."

He did her injustice; Jessie felt that she had earned his gratitude, and she had no objection to his expressing it.

"It was a happy thought of yours to give her hats and things to make; I'm ever so much obliged to you. I felt you could be trusted to think of the right thing. An ingenious idea of that kind would never have occurred to me."

"It was very simple; I noticed a hat and dress of hers which she owned she had made. The girl has some talent; I'm only sorry I can't keep her busy."

"Couldn't you give her an order for a dozen hats? I'd be glad to be responsible."

"The difficulty would be the disposal of them. They would be of no use to you, and I couldn't allow you to present them to me."

"I wish I could," Vane declared. "You certainly deserve them."

This was satisfactory, so far as it went, though Jessie would have preferred that his desire to bestow the favour should have sprung from some other motive than a recognition of her services to Celia Hartley. She was, however, convinced that his only feeling towards the girl was one of compassion. Then she saw that he was looking at her with half-humorous annoyance in his face.

"Are you grieved I won't take those hats?" she asked.

"I am," Vane confessed and proceeded to explain with unnecessary ingenuousness: "I'm still more vexed with the state of things its typical of—I suppose I mean the restrictedness of this civilised life. When you want to do anything in the bush, you take the axe and set about it; but here you're continually running up against some artificial obstacle."

“One understands that it’s worse in England,” said Jessie. “But in regard to Miss Hartley, I’ll recommend her to my friends as far as I can.”

Just then Vane made an abrupt movement, and Jessie realised by his expression that he had suddenly become oblivious of her presence. She had no doubt about the reason for this, because Evelyn Chisholm entered the room. The lamplight fell upon her as she crossed the threshold, and Jessie recognised unwillingly that she looked surprisingly handsome. Handsome, however, was not the word Vane would have used. He thought Evelyn looked exotic, highly cultivated, strangely refined, as though she had grown up in a rarefied atmosphere in which nothing rank could thrive. Though Evelyn had her faults, the impression she made on him was, perhaps, more or less justifiable.

Then he remembered that the girl had been offered to him and he had refused the gift. He wondered how he had exerted the necessary strength of will, for he was conscious that admiration, respect, pity, had now changed and melted into sudden passion. His blood tingled and, as it happened, no change of his expression was lost upon his companion.

Laying a check upon his thoughts, he resumed a desultory conversation with Jessie, though he betrayed himself several times during it, and at length she let him go. It was, however, some time before he secured a place beside Evelyn. He was now quiet and self-contained.

“Nairn promised me a surprise this evening, but it has exceeded all my expectations,” he said. “How are your people?”

Evelyn informed him that their health was satisfactory, and added, watching him the while: “Gerald sent his best remembrances.”

“Ah!” said Vane in a casual manner, “I’m glad to have them.”

Evelyn was now convinced that Mabel had been correct in concluding that he had assisted Gerald financially, though she was aware that nothing would induce either of the men to acquaint her with the fact.

“I understood from Mrs. Nairn that you were away in the bush,” she said.

He turned and regarded her steadily. “That was the case, and I’m shortly going off again. Perhaps it’s fortunate that I may be away some time. It will leave you more at ease.”

The last remark was more of a question than an assertion, and Evelyn knew the man could be direct. She also esteemed candour.

“No,” she said; “I wouldn’t wish you to think that—and I wouldn’t like to believe that I had anything to do with driving you away.”

Vane saw a faintly warmer tone show through the clear pallor of her skin; but while his heart beat faster than usual he felt that she meant just what she said and nothing more. He must proceed with caution, which was, on the whole, foreign to him; and shortly afterwards he left her.

When he had gone, Evelyn sat thinking about him. She had shrunk from the man in rebellious alarm when her parents would have bestowed her hand on him; but even then, and undoubtedly afterwards, she had felt that there was something in his nature which would have attracted her, had she been willing to allow it to do so. Now, though he had said nothing to rouse it, the feeling was stronger. Then she remembered with a rather curious smile her father’s indignation when Vane had withdrawn from the field. He had done this because she had appealed to his generosity, and she had been grateful to him; but, unreasonable as she admitted the faint resentment she was conscious of to be, the recollection of the fact that he had yielded to her wishes was somehow bitter.

In the meanwhile, Carroll had taken his place by Jessie’s side.

“I understand you steered your comrade satisfactorily through the meeting to-day,” she began.

“No,” objected Carroll, “I can’t claim any credit for doing so. In matters of the kind, Vane takes full control, and I’m

willing to own that he drove us all, including your brother, on the course he chose.”

“Then it’s in other matters you exercise a little judicious pressure on the helm?”

The man looked at her in well-assumed admiration of her keenness. “I don’t know how you guessed it, but I suppose it’s a fact. It’s, however, an open secret that Vane’s now and then unguardedly ingenuous; indeed, there are respects in which he’s a babe by comparison, we’ll say, with either of us.”

“That’s rather a dubious compliment,” Jessie informed him. “What do you think of Miss Chisholm? I suppose you saw a good deal of her in England?”

“I spent a month or two in her company; so did Vane. I fancy she’s rather like him in several ways; and there are reasons for believing that he thinks a good deal of her.”

Having watched Vane carefully when Evelyn came in, Jessie was inclined to agree with him, and she glanced round the room. One or two people were moving about and the rest were talking in little groups; but there was nobody very near, and she fancied that she and her companion were safe from interruption.

“What were some of the reasons?” she asked.

Carroll had expected some question of this description, and had decided to answer it plainly, because it seemed probable that Jessie would get the information out of him in one way or another. He had also another motive, which he thought a commendable one. Jessie had obviously taken a certain interest in Vane, but it could not have gone very far as yet, and Vane did not reciprocate it. The latter was, however, impulsive, while Jessie was calculating and clever, and Carroll, who was slightly afraid of her, foresaw that complications might follow any increase of friendliness between her and his comrade. He thought it would be better if she left Vane alone.

“Well,” he said, “since you have asked, I’ll try to tell you.”

He proceeded to recount what had passed at the Dene and Jessie listened, with an expressionless face.

“So he gave her up—because he admired her?” she said at length.

“That’s my view of it,” Carroll agreed.

Jessie made no comment, but he felt that she was hardly hit, which was not what he had anticipated. He began to wonder if he had acted judiciously and he glanced about the room. It did not seem considerate to study her expression then. A few moments later she turned to him with a smile in which there was the faintest hint of strain.

“I daresay you are right; but there are one or two people I haven’t spoken to,” she said and moved away from him.

Some time after this Mrs. Nairn came upon Carroll standing for the moment alone. “It’s no often one sees ye looking moody,” she informed him. “Was Jessie no gracious?”

“That,” said Carroll, smiling, “is not the difficulty. I’m an unsusceptible and somewhat inconspicuous person, not worth powder and shot, so to speak, for which I’m sometimes thankful. I believe it saves me a good deal of trouble.”

“Then, is it something Vane has done that is on your mind? Doubtless, ye feel him a responsibility?”

“He’s all that,” Carroll confessed. “Still, you see, I’ve constituted myself his guardian; I don’t know why, because he’d probably be very vexed if he suspected it.”

“The gods give ye a good conceit o’ yourself!” Mrs. Nairn exclaimed.

“I need it,” said Carroll humbly. “This afternoon I let him do a most injudicious thing, and now I’ve done another which I fear is worse. On the whole, I think I’d better take him away to the bush. He’d be safer there.”

“Ye will not, no just now,” declared his hostess firmly.

Carroll made a sign of resignation. “Oh, well,” he said, “if you say so, I’m quite willing to stand out and let things alone. Too many cooks are apt to spoil the kail.”

Mrs. Nairn left him, but she afterwards once or twice glanced thoughtfully at Vane and Evelyn, who had once more drawn together.

CHAPTER XXII—EVELYN GOES FOR A SAIL.

It was about the middle of the morning and Vane sat in Nairn's office. Specimens of ore lately received from the mine were scattered about a table, and Nairn had some papers in his hand.

"Weel?" he said, when Vane, after examining two or three of the stones abruptly flung them down.

"The ore's running poorer," Vane admitted. "On the other hand, I partly expected this, and there's better stuff in the reef. We're a little too high; I look for more encouraging results when we start the lower heading."

He went into details of the new operations and, when he had finished, Nairn, who had been jotting down some figures, looked up.

"Yon workings will cost a good deal," he pointed out. "Ye'll no be able to make a start until we're sure of the money."

"We ought to get it."

"A month or two ago I would have agreed with ye, but general investors are kittle cattle, and the applications for the new stock are no numerous."

"The plain English of it is that the mine is not so popular as it was," said Vane impatiently.

"I'm thinking something of the kind," Nairn agreed, and then proceeded with a cautious explanation: "The result of the first reduction and the way ye forced the concern on the market secured ye notice. Folks put their money on ye, looking for sensational developments, and when the latter are no forthcoming they feel a bit sore."

"There's nothing discouraging in our accounts. Even if the ore all ran as poor as that"—Vane pointed to the specimens on the table—"the mine could be worked on a paying basis. We have issued no statements that could spread alarm."

"Just so," said Nairn. "What was looked for was mair than a paying basis—ye have no come up to expectations. Forby, it's my opinion that damaging reports have somehow leaked out from the mine. I see clouds on the horizon."

"Bendle pledged himself to take up a big block of the shares," pointed out Vane. "If Howitson does the same, as he said he would, our position would be secure. As soon as it was known that they were largely interested, others would follow them."

"Now ye have it in a nutshell—it would put a wet blanket on the project if they both backed down. In the meanwhile we cannot hurry them."

Vane rose. "We'll leave it at that. I've promised to take Mrs. Nairn and Miss Chisholm for a sail."

He went out and had got rid of the slight uneasiness the interview had occasioned him before he reached the water-front, where he found Mrs. Nairn and Evelyn awaiting him with Carroll in attendance. In another few minutes they were rowing off to the sloop, and as they approached her the elder lady glanced with approval at the craft, which swam, a gleaming ivory shape, upon the shining green brine.

"Ye have surely been painting the boat," she said. "Was that for us?"

Vane disregarded the last question. "She wanted it, and paint's comparatively cheap."

It was a little thing, but Evelyn was pleased. The girls had not been greatly considered at the Dene, and it was flattering to recognise that the man had thought it worth while to decorate his craft in her honour. She did not ask herself if he had wished to please her; he had invited her for a sail some days ago, and he was thorough in everything he did. He handed her and Mrs. Nairn on board and when they sat down in the well, he and Carroll proceeded to hoist the mainsail. It looked exceedingly large as it thrashed and fluttered above their heads, and there seemed to be a bewildering quantity of ropes, but Evelyn was chiefly interested in watching Vane.

He was wonderfully quick, but no movement was wasted. His face was intent, his glances sharp, and she liked the crisp, curt way in which he spoke to Carroll. The man's task was, in one sense, not important, but he was absorbed in it. Then, while Carroll slipped the moorings, he ran up the headsails, and springing aft, seized the tiller as the boat, slanting over, began to forge through the water. It was the first time Evelyn had ever travelled under sail and, receptive as she was of all new impressions, she sat silent a few minutes rejoicing in the sense of swift and easy motion. The inlet was crisped by small white ripples, and the boat with her boom broad off on her quarter drove through them; a sparkling wedge of foam on her lee bow and a stream of froth sluicing past her sides. Overhead, the great inclined sail cut, sharply white, against the dazzling blue, and close by her Vane sat gripping the tiller.

They swept out through the gate of the Narrows, and Vane luffed the boat up to a moderately fresh breeze. "It's off the land, and we'll have fairly smooth water," he explained, and added: "How do you like sailing?"

"It's glorious on a day like this," she declared and looked back towards the distant snow. "If anything more were wanted, there are the mountains, too."

Vane smiled, but there was a suggestive sparkle in his eyes. "Yes," he said; "we have them both, and that's something to be thankful for. The sea and the mountains: the two grandest things in this world."

"If you think that, how did you reconcile yourself to the city?"

"I'm not sure I've done so." He indicated the gleaming heights. "I'm going back up yonder very soon."

Mrs. Nairn glanced at Carroll, who affected to be busy with a rope; then she turned to Vane. "It will no be possible with winter coming on."

"It's not really so bad then," Vane declared. "Besides, I expect to get my work done before the hardest weather's due."

"But ye cannot leave Vancouver until ye have settled about the mine."

"I don't want to," Vane admitted. "That's not quite the same thing."

"It is with a good many people," Carroll interposed with a smile.

In the meanwhile, they were driving out to the southwards, opening up the Strait, with the forests to port growing smaller and the short seas increasing in size. The breeze was cold, but the girl was warmly clad and the easy motion in no way troubled her. The rush of keen salt air stirred her blood, and all round her were spread wonderful harmonies of silver-laced blue and green, through which the straining fabric that carried her swept on. The mountains were majestic, but except when tempests lashed their crags or torrents swept their lower slopes they were wrapped in eternal repose; the sea was filled with ecstatic motion.

"The hills have their fascination; it's a thing I know," she said, to draw the helmsman out. "I think I should like the sea, too; but at first sight its charm isn't quite so plain."

"You have started him," interposed Carroll. "He won't refuse that challenge!"

Vane accepted it with a smile which meant more than good-humoured indulgence. "Well," he began, "the sea's the same everywhere, unbridled, unchanging; a force that remains as it was in the beginning. Once you're out of harbour, under sail, you have done with civilisation. It has possibly provided you with excellent gear, but it can do no more; you stand alone, stripped for the struggle with the elements."

"Is it always a struggle?" Evelyn asked, to prompt him.

"Always. The sea's as treacherous as the winds that vex it; pitiless, murderous. When you have only sail to trust to, you can never relax your vigilance; you must watch the varying drift of clouds and the swing of the certain tides. There's nothing and nobody to fall back upon when the breeze pipes its challenge; you have sloughed off civilisation and must stand or fall by the raw natural powers man is born with, and chief among them is the capacity for brutal labour. The

thrashing sail must be mastered; the tackle cracking with the strain must be hauled in. Perhaps that's the charm of it for some of us whose lives are pretty smooth—it takes one back, as I said, to the beginning.”

“But haven't human progress and machines made everybody's lives more smooth?”

Vane laughed somewhat grimly. “Oh, no; I think that can never be done. So far, somebody pays for the other's ease. At sea, in the mine, and in the bush, man still grapples with a rugged, naked world.”

The girl was pleased. She had drawn him out, and she thought he had in speaking kept a fair balance between too crude a mode of colloquial expression and poetic elaboration. There was, she knew, a vein of poetic conception in him, and the struggle he had hinted at could only be described fittingly in heroic language. It was, in one sense, a pity that those who had the gift of it and cultivated imagination had, for the most part, never been forced into the fight; but that was, perhaps, not a matter of much importance. There were plenty of men, such as her companion, endowed with endurance, who if they seldom gave their thoughts free rein, rejoiced in the struggle; and by them the world's sternest work was done.

“After all,” she said, “we have the mountains in civilised England.”

Vane did not respond with the same freedom this time. He was inclined to think he had spoken too unrestrainedly.

“Yes,” he agreed, smiling; “you can walk about them—where you won't disturb the grouse—and they're grand enough; but if you look down you can see the motor dust trails and the tourist coaches in the valleys.”

“But why shouldn't people enjoy themselves in that way?”

“I can't think of any reason. No doubt, most of them have earned the right to do so. But you can't rip up those hills with giant-powder where you feel inclined, or set to work to root out some miles of forest. The Government encourages that kind of thing here.”

“And that's the charm?”

“Yes,” said Vane. “I suppose it is.”

“I'd better explain,” Carroll broke in. “Men of a certain temperament are apt to fall a prey to fantasies in the newer lands; any common sense they once possessed seems to desert them. After that they're never happy, except when they're ripping things—such as big rocks and trees—to pieces, and though they'll tell you it's only to get out minerals or clear a ranch, they're wrong. Once they get the mine or ranch they don't care about it, and set to work wrecking things again. Isn't that so, Mrs. Nairn?”

“There are such crazy bodies,” agreed the lady. “I know one or two, but if I had my way with them they should find one mine, or build one saw-mill.”

“And then,” said Carroll, “you would chain them up for good by marrying them.”

“I would like to try, but I'm no sure it would act in every case. I have come across some women as bad as the men; they would drive their husbands on. Maybe”—and she smiled in a half-wistful manner—“it's as well to do something worth the remembering when ye are young. There's a long time to sit still in afterwards.”

Half in banter, and half in earnest, they had given Evelyn a hint of the master passion of the true colonist, whose pride is in his burden. Afterwards, Mrs. Nairn led the conversation, until Carroll laid out in the saloon a somewhat elaborate lunch which he had brought from the hotel. Then the others went below, leaving Vane at the helm; and Carroll looked at him ruefully when they came up again.

“I'm afraid Miss Chisholm's disappointed,” he explained.

“No,” said Evelyn; “that would be most ungrateful. I only expected a more characteristic example of sea cookery. After what Mr. Vane told us, a lunch like the one you provided, with glass and silver, struck me as rather an anachronism.”

“It’s better to be broken in to sea cookery gently,” Vane interposed with some dryness.

“It’s a poor compliment to take it for granted that we’re afraid of a little hardship. Besides, I don’t think you’re right.”

Vane, who left the helm to Carroll, went below, and the latter smiled at Evelyn.

“He won’t be long,” he informed her. “He hasn’t got rid of his primitive habits yet.”

Vane came up satisfied in about ten minutes, and glancing about him before he resumed the helm, noticed that it was blowing fresher, but it did not inconvenience the party, and as they ran homewards the breeze gradually died away. The broad inlet lay still in the moonlight when they crept across it with the water lapping very faintly about the bows, and it was over a mirror-like surface they rowed ashore. Nairn was waiting at the foot of the steps, and Evelyn walked back with him, feeling, she could not tell exactly why, that she had been drawn closer to the sloop’s helmsman.

CHAPTER XXIII—VANE PROVES OBDURATE.

Vane spent two or three weeks very pleasantly in Vancouver, for Evelyn, of whom he saw a good deal, was gracious to him. The embarrassment both had felt on their first meeting in the Western city had speedily vanished; they had resumed their acquaintance on what was ostensibly a purely friendly footing, and, since both avoided any reference to what had taken place in England, it had ripened into a mutual confidence.

This would have been less probable in the older country, where they would have been continually reminded of what the Chisholm family had expected of them; but the past seldom counts for much in the new and changeful West, whose inhabitants look forward to the future. Indeed, there is something in its atmosphere which banishes regret and retrospection; and when Evelyn looked back at all, she felt inclined to wonder why she had once been so troubled by the man's satisfaction with her company. She decided that this could not have been the result of any aversion from him, and that it was merely an instinctive revolt against the part her parents had wished to force upon her. Chisholm and his wife had blundered as such people often do, for it is possible that had they adopted a perfectly neutral attitude everything would have gone as they desired.

Their mistake was nevertheless a natural one. Somewhat exaggerated reports of Vane's prosperity had reached them; but while they coveted the advantages his wealth might offer their daughter, in their secret hearts they looked upon him as something of a barbarian, which idea the opinions he occasionally expressed in their hearing did not dispel. Both feared that Evelyn regarded him in the same light, and it accordingly became evident that a little pressure might be required. In spite of their prejudices, they did not shrink from applying it.

In the meanwhile, several people in Vancouver watched the increase of friendliness between the girl and Vane. Mrs. Nairn and her husband did so with benevolent interest, and it was by the former's adroit management, which Evelyn did not often suspect, that they were thrown more and more into each other's company. Jessie Horsfield, however, looked on with bitterness. She was a strong-willed young woman who had hitherto generally contrived to obtain what she had set her heart upon, and she had set it upon this man. Indeed, she had fancied that he returned the feeling, but disillusionment had come on the evening when he had unexpectedly met Evelyn. Her resentment against the girl grew steadily stronger, until it threatened to prove dangerous on opportunity.

There were, however, days when Vane was disturbed in mind. Winter was coming on, and although it is rarely severe on the southern seaboard, it is by no means the season one would choose for an adventure among the ranges of the northern wilderness. Unless he made his search for the spruce very shortly, he might be compelled to postpone it until the spring, at the risk of being forestalled; but there were two reasons which detained him. He thought he was gaining ground in Evelyn's esteem, and he feared the effect of absence; while there was no doubt that the new issue of the Clermont shares was in very slack demand. To leave the city might cost him a good deal, but he had pledged himself to go.

The latter fact was uppermost in his mind one evening when he set off to call upon Celia Hartley, and, as it happened, Evelyn and Mrs. Nairn were driving past as he turned off from a busy street towards the quarter in which she lived. It had been dark some little time, but Evelyn had no difficulty in recognising him. Indeed, she watched him for a few moments while he passed on into a more shadowy region, where the gloom and dilapidation of the first small frame houses were noticeable, and she wondered what kind of people inhabited it. She did not think Mrs. Nairn had noticed Vane.

"You have never taken me into the district on our left," she said.

"I'm no likely to," was the answer. "We're no proud of it."

"I suppose the Chinese and other aliens live there," Evelyn suggested.

"They do," said Mrs. Nairn with some dryness. "I'm no sure, however, that they're the worst."

"But one understands that you haven't a criminal population."

"We have folks who're on the fringe of it, only we see they live all together. People who would be respectable live

somewhere else, except, a few who have to consider cheapness, but it's no a recommendation to be seen going into yon quarter after dark."

This left Evelyn thoughtful, since she had undoubtedly seen Vane going there. She considered herself a judge of character and generally trusted her intuitions, and she believed the man's visit to the neighbourhood in question admitted of some satisfactory explanation. On the other hand, she felt that her friends should be beyond suspicion. Taking it all round, she was rather vexed with Vane, and it cost her some trouble to drive the matter out of her mind, though she succeeded in doing so.

She did not see Vane next day, but the latter called upon Nairn at his office during the afternoon.

"Have you had any more applications for the new stock?" he asked.

"I have not," said Nairn. "Neither Bendle nor Howiston has paid up yet."

"Investors are shy; that's a fact," Vane confessed. "It's unfortunate. I've already put off my trip north as long as possible; I wanted to see things on a satisfactory basis before I went."

"A prudent wish. I would advise ye to carry it out."

"What do you mean by that?"

"Something like this: If the money's no forthcoming, we may be compelled to fall back upon a different plan, and, unless ye're to the fore, the decision of a shareholders' meeting might not suit ye. Considering the position and the stock ye hold, any views ye might express would carry mair weight than mine could do in your absence."

Vane drummed with his fingers on the table. "I suppose that's the case; but I've got to make the journey. With moderately good fortune it shouldn't take me long."

"Ye would be running some risk if anything delayed ye and we had to call a meeting before ye got back."

"I see that, but it can't be helped. I expect to be back before I'm wanted. Anyway, I could leave you authority to act on my behalf."

After a further attempt to dissuade him, Nairn spread out one hand resignedly. "He who will to Cupar maun be left to gang," he said. "Whiles, I have wondered why any one should be so keen on getting there, but doubtless a douce Scottish town has mair attractions for a sensible person than the rugged North-West in winter time."

Vane, who smiled at this, went out and left him; and when he reached home Nairn briefly recounted the interview to his wife over his evening meal. Evelyn, who was with them, listened attentively.

"Yon man will no hear reason," Nairn concluded. "He's thrawn."

Evelyn had already noticed that her host, for whom she had a strong liking, spoke broader Scots when he was either amused or angry, and she supposed that Vane's determination disturbed him.

"But why should he persist in leaving the city, when it's to his disadvantage to do so, as you lead one to believe it is?" she asked.

"If the latter's no absolutely certain, it's very likely," Nairn informed her.

"You have only answered half my question," Evelyn pointed out.

Mrs. Nairn smiled. "Alec," she said, "is reserved by nature, but if ye're anxious for an answer I might tell ye."

"Anxious hardly describes it," Evelyn replied.

“Then we’ll say curious. The fact is, Vane made a bargain with a sick prospector, in which he undertook to locate some timber the man had discovered away among the mountains. He was to pay the other a share of its value when he got his Government licence.”

“Is the timber very valuable?”

“No,” broke in Nairn. “One might make a fair business profit out of pulping it, though the thing’s far from certain.”

“Then why is Mr. Vane so keen on finding it?”

The question gave Mrs. Nairn a lead, but she decided to say no more than was necessary. “The prospector died, but that bound the bargain tighter, in Vane’s opinion. The man died without a dollar, leaving a daughter worn-out and ill with nursing him. According to the arrangement, his share will go to the girl.”

“Then,” said Evelyn, “Mr. Vane is really undertaking the search in order to keep his promise to a man who is dead; and he will not even postpone it, because if he did so this penniless girl might, perhaps, lose her share? Isn’t that rather fine of him?”

“On the whole, ye understand the position,” Nairn agreed, “If ye desire my view of the matter, I would merely say that yon’s the kind of man he is.”

Evelyn made no further comment, though the last common phrase struck her as a most eloquent tribute. She had heard Vane confess that he did not want to go north at present, and she now understood that to do so might jeopardise his interests in the mine; but he was undoubtedly going. He meant to keep his promise—this was what one would expect of him.

As it happened, he took her for a drive among the Stanley pines one mild afternoon a few days later, and though she knew she would regret his departure she was unusually friendly. Vane rejoiced at it, but he had already decided that he must endeavour to proceed with caution and content himself in the meanwhile with the part of trusted companion. For this reason, he chatted lightly, which he felt was safer, during most of the drive, but he once or twice responded without reserve when, by chance or design, she asked a leading question.

“I wonder if you ever feel any regret at having left England for this country,” she said.

“I did so pretty often when I first came out,” he answered. “In those days, I had to work in icy water, and carry massive lumps of rock.”

“I dare say regret was a very natural feeling then; but that wasn’t quite what I meant.”

“So I supposed,” Vane confessed. “Well, I’d better own that when I spent a week or two in England—at the Dene—I began to think I missed a good deal by not staying at home. It struck me that the life you led had a singular charm. Everything went so smoothly there among the sheltering hills. One felt that care and anxiety could not creep in. Somehow the place reminded me of Avalon.”

“The impression was by no means correct,” said Evelyn. “But I don’t think you have finished. Won’t you go on?”

“Then if I get out of my depth you mustn’t blame me. By and by I discovered that charm wasn’t the right word—the place was permeated with a narcotic spell.”

“Narcotic?” said Evelyn. “Do you think the term’s more appropriate?”

“I do,” Vane declared, “Narcotics, one understands, are insidious things. If you take them regularly, in small doses, they increase their hold on you, until you become wrapped up in dreams and unrealities. If, however, you get too big a dose at the beginning, it leads to a vigorous revulsion. It’s nature’s warning and remedy.”

“You’re not flattering,” said Evelyn. “But I almost fancy you are right.”

“We are told that man was made to struggle; to use all his powers. If he rests too long beside the still backwaters of life in fairylike dales, they’re apt to atrophy, and he finds himself slack and nerveless when he goes out to face the world again.”

Evelyn nodded, for she had felt and striven against the insidious influence he spoke of. She had now and then left the drowsy dale for a while; but the life she had then caught glimpses of was equally sheltered, one possible only to the favoured few. Even the echoes of the real tense struggle seldom passed its boundaries.

“But you confessed not long ago that you loved the Western wilderness,” she said. “You have spent a good deal of time in it; you expect to do so again. After all, isn’t that only exchanging one beautiful, tranquil region for another? The bush must be even quieter than the English dales.”

“I expect I haven’t made the point quite clear. When one goes up into the bush it’s not to lounge and dream there, but to make war upon it with the axe and drill.” He pulled up his team and pointed to a clump of giant trees. “Look here. That’s Nature’s challenge to man in this country.”

Evelyn confessed that it was a very impressive one. The great trunks ran up far aloft, tremendous columns, before their higher portions were lost in the vaulted roof of sombre greenery. They dwarfed the rig and team; she felt herself a pigmy by comparison.

“They’re rather bigger than the average,” her companion resumed. “Still, that’s the kind of thing you run up against when you buy land to make a ranch of or clear the ground for a mine. Chopping, sawing up, splitting those giants doesn’t fill one with languorous dreams; the only ones our axe-men indulge in materialise. It’s a bracing struggle. There are leagues and leagues of trees, shrouding the valleys in a shadow that has lasted since the world was young; but you see the dawn of a wonderful future breaking in as the long ranks go down.”

Once more, without clearly intending it, he had stirred the girl. He had not spoken in that rather fanciful style to impress her; she thought he had, trusting in her comprehension, merely given his ideas free rein. But in doing so he had somehow made her hear the clear trumpet-call to action, which, for such men, rings through the roar of the river and the song of the tall black pines.

“Ah!” she said, “I dare say it’s a fine life in many ways, but it must have its drawbacks. The flesh must shrink from them.”

“The flesh?” he said and laughed. “In this land it takes second place—except, perhaps, in the cities.” Then he turned and looked at her curiously. “Why should you talk of shrinking? The bush couldn’t daunt you; you have courage.”

The girl’s eyes sparkled, but it was not at the compliment. His words rang with freedom, the freedom of the heights, where heroic effort was the rule in place of luxury. She longed now, as she had often done, to escape from bondage, to break away.

“Ah, well,” she said, half-wistfully, “I expect it’s fortunate that such courage as I have may never be put to the test.”

Though reticence was difficult, Vane made no comment. He had spoken unguardedly already, and he had decided that caution was desirable. As it happened, an automobile came up when he restarted his team, and he looked round as he drove on again.

“It’s curious that I never heard the thing,” he said.

“I didn’t either,” said Evelyn, and added, as if any explanation were needed: “I was too engrossed in the trees. But I think Miss Horsfield was in it.”

“Was she?” said Vane in a very casual manner, and Evelyn, for no reason that she was willing to admit, was pleased.

She had not been mistaken. Jessie Horsfield was in the automobile, and she had had a few moments in which to study Vane and his companion. The man’s look and the girl’s expression had struck her as significant; and her lips set

ominously tight as the car sped on. She felt she almost hated Vane, and there was no doubt that she entirely hated the girl at his side.

CHAPTER XXIV—JESSIE STRIKES.

It was the afternoon before Vane's departure for the north, and Evelyn, sitting alone for the time being in Mrs. Nairn's drawing-room, felt disturbed by the thought of it. She sympathised with his object, but she supposed there was a certain risk attached to the journey, and that troubled her. In addition to this there was another point on which she was not altogether pleased. She had twice seen Vane acknowledge a bow from a very pretty girl whose general appearance suggested that she did not belong to Evelyn's own walk of life, and that very morning she had noticed him crossing a street in the young woman's company. Vane, as it happened, had met Kitty Blake by accident and had asked her to accompany him on a visit to Celia.

Evelyn did not think she was of a jealous disposition, and jealousy appeared irrational in the case of a man whom she had dismissed as a suitor; but the thing rankled in her mind. While she considered it, Jessie Horsfield entered the room.

"I'm here by invitation, to join Vane's other old friends in giving him a good send-off," she explained.

Evelyn noticed that Jessie laid some stress upon her acquaintance with Vane, and wondered if she had any motive for doing so.

"I suppose you have known him for some time," she said.

"Oh, yes," was the careless answer. "My brother was one of the first to take him up when he came to Vancouver."

The phrase jarred on Evelyn. It savoured of patronage; besides, she did not like to think that Vane owed anything to the Horsfields.

"Though I don't know much about it, I understood they were opposed to each other," she said coldly.

"Their business interests don't coincide; but it doesn't follow that they should disagree about anything else. My brother did all he could to dissuade Vane from going on with his search for the timber until the winter was over."

"I think it is rather fine of him to persist in it," Evelyn declared.

Jessie smiled, though she felt venomous just then. "Yes," she agreed; "one undoubtedly feels that. Besides, the thing's so characteristic of him; the man's impulsively generous and not easily daunted. He possesses many of the rudimentary virtues, as well as some of the corresponding weaknesses, which is very much what one would look for."

"What do you mean by that?" Evelyn inquired, suppressing her resentment. Though she was not prepared to pose as Vane's advocate, she was conscious of a growing antagonism against her companion.

"It's difficult to explain, and I don't know that the subject's worth discussing," said Jessie. "However, what I think I meant was this—Vane's of a type that's not uncommon in the West, and it's a type one finds interesting. He's forcibly elementary, which is the only way I can express it; the restraints the rest of us submit to don't bind him; he breaks through them."

This, so Evelyn fancied, was more or less correct. Indeed, the man's disregard of hampering customs had pleased her, but she allowed that some restraints were needful. As it happened, her companion followed up the same train of thought.

"When one breaks down or gets over fences, it's necessary to discriminate," she went on lightly. "Men of the Berserker type, however, are more addicted to going straight through the lot. In a way, they're consistent—having smashed one barrier, why should they respect the next?"

Jessie, as she was quite aware, was playing a dangerous game; one that might afterwards be exposed. Still, the latter possibility was of less account because detection would come too late if she were successful. She was acquainted with the salient points of Evelyn's character.

"They're consistent, if not always very logical," she concluded after a pause. "One endeavours to make allowances for

men of that description.”

Something in her tone roused Evelyn to sudden imperious anger. It was intolerable that this woman should offer excuses for Vane.

“What particular allowances do you feel it needful to make in Mr. Vane’s case?” she asked.

Now she was faced by the direct question, Jessie hesitated. As a rule, she was subtle, but she could be ruthlessly frank, and she was possessed by a hatred of the girl beside her.

“You have forced me to an explanation,” she expostulated. “The fact is that while he has a room at the hotel he has an—establishment—in a different neighbourhood. Unfortunately, what you could best describe as a Latin quarter is a feature of some Western towns.”

It was a shock to Evelyn; one she found it hard to face, though she was not convinced. The last piece of information agreed with something Mrs. Nairn had told her; but although she had on one occasion had the testimony of her eyes in support of it, Jessie’s first statement sounded incredible.

“It’s impossible,” she declared.

Jessie smiled in a bitter manner. “It’s unpleasant, but it can’t be denied. He undoubtedly pays the rent of a shack in the neighbourhood I mentioned.”

Evelyn sat tensely still for a moment or two. She dared not give rein to her feelings, she would not betray herself; but composure was extremely difficult.

“If that is so, how is it that he is received everywhere—at your house and by Mrs. Nairn?” she asked.

Jessie shrugged her shoulders. “People in general are the more or less charitable in the case of a successful man. Apart from that, Mr. Vane has a good many excellent qualities. As I said, one has to make allowances.”

Just then, to Evelyn’s relief, Mrs. Nairn came in, and though the girl suffered during the time, it was half an hour before she could find an excuse for slipping away alone. Then, sitting in the gathering darkness, in her own room, she set herself to consider, as dispassionately as possible, what she had heard. It was exceedingly difficult to believe the charge; but Jessie’s assertion was definite enough, and one which, if incorrect, could be readily disproved. Nobody would say such a thing unless it could be substantiated, and that led Evelyn to consider why Jessie had given her the information. She had obviously done so with at least a trace of malice; but this could hardly have sprung from jealousy, because Evelyn could not think that a woman would vilify a man for whom she had any tenderness. Besides, she had seen Vane entering the part of the town indicated, where he could not have had any legitimate business. Hateful as the suspicion was, it could not be contemptuously dismissed. Then she granted that she had no right to censure the man; he was not accountable to her for his conduct; but calm reasoning carried her no farther. She was once more filled with intolerable disgust and burning indignation. Somehow she had come to believe in Vane, and he had turned out an impostor.

It was about an hour later when Vane and Carroll entered the house with Nairn and proceeded to the latter’s room, where he offered them cigars.

“So ye’re all ready to sail the morn?” he said.

Vane, who nodded, handed him some papers. “There’s your authority to act in my name if it’s required. I expect to be back before there’s much change in the situation; but I’ll call at Nanaimo, where you can wire me if anything turns up during the three days it may take us to get there.”

“I suppose there’s no use in my saying anything more now; but I can’t help pointing out that, as head of the concern, you have a certain duty to the shareholders which you seem inclined to disregard,” Carroll remarked.

“I’ve no doubt their interests will be as safe in Nairn’s hands as in mine,” Vane rejoined.

"I fail to see why ye could no have let the whole thing stand over until the spring," said Nairn. "The spruce winna run away."

"I'd have done so had it been a few years earlier, but the whole country is overrun with mineral prospectors and timber-righters now. Every month's delay gives somebody else a chance of getting in ahead of me."

"Weel," said Nairn resignedly. "I can only wish ye luck, but should ye be detained up yonder, if one of ye could sail across to Comox to see if there's any mail there, it would be wise to do so." He waved his hand. "No more of that; we'll consider what tactics I had better adopt in case of delay."

An hour had passed before they went down to join the guests who were arriving for the evening meal. As a rule, the Western business man, who is more or less engrossed in his occupation, except when he is asleep, enjoys little privacy; and his friends sometimes compared Nairn's dwelling to the rotunda of an hotel. The point of this was that people of all descriptions who have nothing better to do are addicted to strolling into the combined bazaar and lounge which is attached to many Canadian hostelryes.

As it happened, Vane sat next to Evelyn at table; but after a quiet reply to his first observation, she turned and talked to the man on her other side. Since the latter, who was elderly and dull, had only two topics—the most efficient means of desiccating fruit and the lack of railroad facilities—Vane was somewhat astonished that she appeared interested in his conversation, and by and by he tried again. He was not more successful this time, and his face grew warm as he realised that Evelyn was not inclined to talk to him. Being a very ordinary mortal and not particularly patient, he was sensible of some indignation, which was not diminished when, on looking round, Jessie Horsfield, who sat opposite, favoured him with a compassionate smile. He took his part in the general conversation, however, and the meal was over and the guests were scattered about the adjoining rooms, when, after impatiently waiting for the opportunity, he found Evelyn alone. She was standing with one hand on a table, looking rather thoughtful.

"I've come to ask what I've done," he began.

Evelyn, who was not prepared for this blunt directness, felt disconcerted, but she broke into a chilly smile.

"The question's rather indefinite, isn't it?" she said. "Do you expect me to be acquainted with all your recent actions?"

"Then I'll put the thing in another way—do you mind telling me how I have offended you?"

The girl almost wished that she could do so. Appearances were badly against him, but she felt that if he declared himself innocent she could take his word in the face of overwhelming testimony to the contrary. Unfortunately, however, it was unthinkable that she should plainly state the charge.

"Do you suppose I should feel warranted in forming any opinion upon your conduct?" she retorted.

"But you have formed one, and it isn't favourable."

The girl hesitated a moment, but she had the courage of her convictions, and she felt impelled to make some protest.

"That," she said, looking him in the eyes, "is perfectly true."

He looked more puzzled than guilty, and once more she chafed against the fact that she could give him no opportunity of defending himself.

"Well," he said, "I'm sorry; but it brings us back to my first question."

The situation was becoming painful as well as embarrassing, and Evelyn, perhaps unreasonably, grew more angry with the man.

"I'm afraid," she said "you are either clever at dissembling or have no imagination."

Vane held himself in hand with an effort, "I dare say you're right on the latter point," he informed her. "It's a fact I'm sometimes thankful for. It leaves one more free to go straight ahead. Now, as I see the dried-fruit man coming in search of you, and you evidently don't mean to answer me, I can't urge the matter."

He turned away and left her wondering why he had abandoned his usual persistency, unless it was that an uneasy conscience had driven him from the field. It did not occur to her that the man had, under strong provocation, merely yielded to the prompting of a somewhat hasty temper. In the meanwhile, he crossed the room in an absent-minded manner, and presently found himself near Jessie, who made room for him at her side.

"It looks as if you were in disgrace to-night," she said, and waited with concealed impatience for his answer. If Evelyn had been clever or bold enough to give him a hint as to what he was suspected of, Jessie foresaw undesirable complications.

"I think I am," he owned without reflection. "The trouble is, that while I may deserve it on general grounds, I'm unconscious of having done anything very reprehensible in particular."

Jessie was sensible of considerable relief. The man was sore and resentful; he would not press Evelyn for an explanation, and the breach would widen. In the meanwhile she must play her cards skilfully.

"Then that fact should sustain you," she rejoined. "We shall miss you after to-morrow; more than one of us. Of course, it's too late to tell you that you were not altogether wise in resolving to go."

"Everybody has been telling me the same thing for the last few weeks," Vane informed her.

"Then I'll only wish you every success. It's a pity Bendle and the other man haven't paid up yet."

She met his surprised look with an engaging smile. "You needn't be astonished. There's not very much goes on in the city that I don't hear about—you know how men talk business here; and it's interesting to look on, even when one can't actually take a hand in the game. It's said the watchers sometimes see most of it."

"To tell the truth, it's the uncertainty as to what those two men might do that has been chiefly worrying me."

"I believe I understand the position; they've been hanging fire, haven't they? But I've reasons for believing they'll come to a decision before very long."

Vane looked troubled, "That's interesting, but I ought to warn you that your brother—"

"I've no intention of giving him away, and, as a matter of fact, I think you are a little prejudiced against him. After all, he's not your greatest danger. There's a cabal against you among your shareholders."

She knew by the way he looked at her that he admired her acumen. "Yes," he agreed; "I've suspected that."

"There are two courses open to you; the first is to put off your expedition."

The answer was to the effect she had anticipated. "I can't do so, for several reasons."

"The other is to call at Nanaimo and wait until, we'll say, next Thursday. If there's need for you to come back, I think it will arise by then; but it might be better if you called at Comox too—after you leave the latter you'll be unreachable. Well, if it seems necessary, I'll send you a warning. If you hear nothing, you can go on."

Vane reflected hastily. Jessie, as she had told him, had opportunities of picking up valuable information about the business done in that city, and he had confidence in her.

"Thank you," he said. "It will be the second service you have done me, and I appreciate it. Anyway, I promised Nairn I'd call at Nanaimo, in there was a wire from him."

"It's a bargain, and now we'll talk of something else," said Jessie, and she drew him into an exchange of badinage, until

noticing that Evelyn once or twice glanced at her with some astonishment she presently got rid of him. She could understand Evelyn's attitude and did not wish her friendliness with the offender to appear unnatural after what she had said about him.

At length the guests began to leave, but most of them had gone when Vane rose to take his departure. His host and hostess went with him to the door, but though he once or twice glanced round eagerly, there was no sign of Evelyn. He lingered a few moments on the threshold after Mrs. Nairn had given him a kindly send-off; but nobody appeared in the lighted hall, and after another word with Nairn he went moodily down the steps to join Jessie and Carroll, who were waiting for him below. As the group walked down the garden path, Mrs. Nairn looked at her husband.

"I do not know what has come over Evelyn this night," she remarked.

Nairn followed Jessie's retreating figure with distrustful eyes. "Weel," he said, "I'm thinking yon besom may have had a hand in the thing."

Then he turned, and they went in.

A few minutes later, Jessie, standing where the light of a big lamp streamed down upon her through the boughs of a leafless maple, bade Vane farewell at her brother's gate.

"If my good wishes can bring you success, it will most certainly be yours," she said; and there was something in her voice which faintly stirred the man, who was feeling very sore.

"Thank you," he said, and she did not immediately withdraw the hand she had given him. He was grateful to her, and thought she looked unusually pretty with the sympathy shining in her eyes.

"You will not forget to wait at Nanaimo and Comox?" she went on.

"No," said Vane. "If you recall me, I'll come back at once; if not, I'll go on with a lighter heart, knowing that I can safely stay away."

Jessie said nothing further, and he moved on. She felt that she had scored, and she knew when to stop. The man had given her his full confidence.

CHAPTER XXV—THE INTERCEPTED LETTER.

The wind was fresh from the north-west when Vane drove the sloop out through the Narrows in the early dawn and saw a dim stretch of white-flecked sea in front of him. Landlocked as they are by Vancouver Island, the long roll of the Pacific cannot enter those waters; but they are now and then lashed into short, tumbling seas, sufficient to make their passage difficult for a craft no larger than the sloop. Carroll frowned when a comber struck the weather bow and a shower of stinging spray whipped his face.

“Right ahead again,” he remarked. “But as I suppose you’re going on, we’d better stretch straight across on the starboard tack; we’ll get smoother water along the island shore.”

They let her go, and Vane sat at the helm, hour after hour, drenched with spray, hammering her mercilessly into the frothy seas. They could have done with a second reef down, for the deck was swept and sluicing, and most of the time the lee rail was buried deep in rushing foam; but Vane showed no intention of shortening sail. Nor did Carroll, who saw that his comrade was disturbed in temper, suggest it: resolute action had, he knew, a soothing effect on Vane. As a matter of fact, the latter needed soothing. Of late, he had felt that he was making steady progress in Evelyn’s favour, and now she had most unexplainably turned against him; but, rack his brain as he would, he could not discover the reason. That he was conscious of no offence only made the position more galling.

In the meanwhile, the boat engrossed more and more of his attention. It was a relief to drive her hard at some white-topped sea, and watch her bows disappear in it with a thud, while it somehow eased his mind to see the smashed-up brine fly half the height of her drenched mainsail. There was also satisfaction in feeling the strain on the tiller when, swayed down by a fiercer gust, she plunged through the combers with the froth swirling, perilously close to the coaming, along her half-submerged deck.

The day was cold; the man, who was compelled to sit almost still in a nipping wind, was soon wet through, but this in some curious way further tended to restore his accustomed optimism and good-humour. He had partly recovered both, when, as the sloop drove through the whiter turmoil whipped up by a vicious squall, there was a crash forward.

“Down helm!” shouted Carroll. “The bobstay’s gone.”

He scrambled towards the bowsprit, which, having lost its principal support, swayed upward, in peril of being torn away by the sagging jib. Vane, who first rounded up the boat into the wind, followed him; and for several minutes they had a struggle with the madly-flapping sail, before they flung it, bundled up, into the well. Then they ran in the bowsprit, and Vane felt glad that, although the craft had been rigged in the usual Western fashion, he had changed that by giving her a couple of headsails in place of one.

“She’ll trim with the staysail, if we haul another reef down,” he said.

It cost them some labour, but they were warmer afterwards, and when they went on again Vane glanced at the bowsprit.

“We’ll try to get a bit of galvanised steel in Nanaimo,” he said. “I can’t risk another smash.”

“You had better be prepared for one, if you mean to drive her as you have been doing,” Carroll flung back the saloon scuttle. “You’d have swamped her in another hour or two; the cabin floorings are all awash.”

“Then hadn’t you better pump her out?” retorted Vane. “After that, you can light the stove. It’s beginning to dawn on me that it’s a long while since I had anything to eat.”

By and by they made a bountiful if somewhat primitive meal, in turn, sitting in the dripping saloon, which was partly filled with smoke, and Carroll sighed for the comforts he had abandoned. He did not, however, mention his regrets, because he did not expect his comrade’s sympathy.

The craft, being under reduced sail, drove along more easily during the rest of the afternoon, and they ran into a little colliery town on the following day. There Vane replaced the broken bobstay with a solid piece of steel, and then sat

down to write a letter, while Carroll stretched his cramped limbs ashore.

The letter was addressed to Evelyn, and he found it difficult to express himself as he desired. The spoken word, as he had discovered, is now and then awkward to use, but the written one is more evasive still, and he shook his head ruefully over the production when he laid down his pen. This was, perhaps, unnecessary, for, having grown calm, he had framed a terse and forcible appeal to the girl's sense of justice, which would in all probability have had its effect on her had she received it. Though he hardly realised it, the few simple words were convincing.

Having received no news from Nairn or Jessie, they sailed again in a day or two, bound for Comox, farther along the coast, where there was a possibility of communications overtaking them; but in the meanwhile matters which concerned them were moving forward in Vancouver.

It was rather early one afternoon when Jessie called upon a friend of hers and found her alone. Mrs. Bendle was a young and impulsive woman from one of the eastern cities, and she had not made many friends in Vancouver yet, though her husband, whom she had lately married, was a man of some importance there.

"I'm glad to see you," she said, greeting Jessie eagerly. "It's a week since anybody has been in to talk to me and Tom's away again."

Jessie made herself comfortable in an easy-chair, before she referred to one of her companion's remarks.

"Where has Mr. Bendle gone now?" she asked.

"Into the bush to look at a mine. He left this morning, and it will be a week before he's back. Then he's going across the Selkirks with that Clavering man about some irrigation scheme."

This suggested one or two questions, which Jessie desired to ask, but she did not frame them immediately. "It must be dull for you," she said sympathetically.

"I don't mean to complain," her companion informed her. "Tom's reasonable; the last time I said anything about being left alone he bought me the pair of ponies."

"You're fortunate in several ways; there are not a great many people who can make such presents. But while everybody knows how your husband has been successful lately, I'm a little surprised that he's able to go into Clavering's irrigation scheme. It's an expensive one; but I understand, they intend to confine it to a few, which means that those interested will have to subscribe handsomely."

"Tom," said her companion, "likes to have a number of different things in hand. He told me it was wiser when I said I couldn't tell my friends back East what he really is, because he seemed to be everything at once. But your brother's interested in a good many things too, isn't he?"

"I believe so," answered Jessie. "Still, I'm pretty sure he couldn't afford to join Clavering and at the same time take up a big block of shares in Mr. Vane's mine."

"But Tom isn't going to do the latter now."

Jessie was almost startled; this was valuable information which she could scarcely have expected to obtain so easily. There was more she desired to ascertain, but she had no intention of making any obvious inquiries.

"It's generally understood that Mr. Vane and your husband are on good terms," she said. "You know him, don't you?"

"I've met him at one or two places, and I like him, but when I mention him, Tom smiles. He says it's unfortunate Mr. Vane can only see one thing at once, and that the one which lies right in front of his eyes. For all that I've heard him own that the man is likeable."

"Then it's a pity he's unable to stand by him now."

“I really believe Tom was half sorry he couldn’t do so last night. He said something that suggested it. I don’t understand much about these matters, but Howitson was here, talking business, until late.”

Jessie was satisfied. Her hostess’s previous incautious admission had gone a long way, but to this was added the significant information that Bendle was inclined to be sorry for Vane. The fact that he and Howitson had decided on some joint action after a long private discussion implied that there was trouble in store for the absent man, unless he could be summoned to deal with the crisis in person. Jessie wondered if Nairn knew anything about the matter yet, and decided that she would try to sound him. In the meanwhile, she led her companion away from the subject, and they discussed millinery and such matters until she took her departure.

It was early in the evening when she reached Nairn’s house, which she had thought it better to arrive at a little before he came home, and was told that Mrs. Nairn and Miss Chisholm were out but were expected back shortly. Evelyn had been by no means cordial to her since their last interview, and Mrs. Nairn’s manner had been colder; but Jessie decided to wait, and for the second time that day fortune seemed to play into her hands.

It was dark outside, but the entrance hall was brightly lighted, and she could see into it from where she sat. Highly-trained domestics are generally scarce in the West, and the maid had left the door of the room open. By and by there was a knock at the outer door and a young lad came in with some letters in his hand. He explained to the maid that he had been to the post office and had brought his employer’s private mail. Then he withdrew, and the maid, who first laid the letters carelessly on a little table, also retired, banging a door behind her. The concussion shook down the letters, and several, fluttering forward with the sudden draught, fell near the threshold of the room. Jessie rose to replace them.

When she reached the door, she stopped abruptly, for she recognised the writing on one envelope. There was no doubt it was from Vane, and she noticed that it was addressed to Miss Chisholm. Jessie picked it up, and when she had laid the others upon the table stood with it in her hand.

“Has the man no pride?” she said, half aloud.

Then she looked about her, listening, greatly tempted, and considering. There was no sound in the house; Evelyn and Mrs. Nairn were out, and she was cut off from its other occupants by a closed door. Nobody would know that she had entered the hall, and if the letter were subsequently missed it would be unlikely that any question regarding its disappearance would ever be asked. If there was no response from Evelyn, Vane, she thought, would not renew his appeal. Jessie had no doubt that the letter contained an appeal of some kind, which might lead to a reconciliation, and she knew that silence is often more potent than an outbreak of anger. She had only to destroy the letter, and the breach between the two people whom she desired to separate would widen automatically.

There was little risk of detection, but standing tensely still, with set lips and her heart beating faster than usual, she shrank from the decisive action. She could still replace the letter, and look for other means of bringing about what she wished. She was self-willed, and endowed with few troublesome principles, but until she had poisoned Evelyn’s mind against Vane she had never done anything flagrantly dishonourable. Then, while she waited, irresolute, a fresh temptation seized her in the shape of a burning desire to learn what the man had to say. He would reveal his feelings in the message, and she could judge the strength of her rival’s influence over him.

Yet she hesitated, with a half-instinctive recognition of the fact that the decision she must make was an eventful one. She had transgressed grievously in one recent interview with Evelyn, but, while she had no idea of making reparation, she could, at least, stop short of a second offence. She had perhaps, not gone too far yet, but if she ventured a little farther, she might be driven on against her will and become inextricably involved in an entanglement of dishonourable treachery.

The issue hung in the balance—the slightest thing would have turned the scale—when she heard footsteps outside and the tinkle of a bell. Moving with a start, she slipped back into the room just before the maid opened the adjacent door. In another moment or two, she thrust the envelope inside her dress, and gathered her composure as Mrs. Nairn and Evelyn entered the hall. The former approached the table and turned over the handful of letters.

“Two for ye from England, Evelyn, and one or two for me,” she said, and, as Jessie noticed, flashed a quick glance at her companion. “Nothing else,” she added. “I had thought Vane would maybe send a bit note from one of the Island ports

to say how he was getting on.”

Then Jessie rose to greet her hostess. The question was decided; it was too late to replace the letter now. She could not remember what they talked about during the next half-hour, but she took her part until Nairn came in, and contrived to have a word with him before leaving. Mrs. Nairn had gone out to give some instructions about supper and, when Evelyn followed her, Jessie turned to Nairn.

“Mr. Vane would be at Comox now,” she said. “Have you any idea of recalling him? Of course, I know a little about the Clermont affairs.”

Nairn glanced at her with thoughtful eyes. “I’m no acquainted with any reason that would render such a course necessary.”

Evelyn reappeared shortly after this, and on the whole Jessie was glad of it, but she excused herself from staying for the evening meal, and walked home thinking hard. It was needful that Vane should be recalled, and though he had written to Evelyn, she still meant to send him word. He would be grateful to her, and, indignant and wounded as she was, she would not own herself beaten. She would warn the man, and afterwards, perhaps allow Nairn to send him a second message.

On reaching her brother’s house she went straight to her own room and tore open the envelope. The colour receded from her face as she read, and sinking into a chair she sat still with hands clenched. The message was terse, but it was stirringly candid, and even where the man did not fully reveal his feelings in his words she could read between the lines. There was no doubt that he had given his heart unreservedly into her rival’s keeping.

For a while she sat still, and then, stooping swiftly, seized the letter, which she had dropped, and rent it into fragments. Her eyes had grown hard and cruel; love of the only kind she was capable of had suddenly turned to hate. What was more, it was a hate that could be gratified.

A little later, Horsfield came in, and though she was very composed now, she noticed that he looked at her in an unusual manner once or twice during the meal that followed.

“You make me feel you have something on your mind,” she said at length.

“That’s a fact,” Horsfield confessed. The man was attached to and rather proud of his sister.

“Well?”

Horsfield leaned forward confidentially. “See here,” he said, “I’ve always imagined that you would go far, and I’m anxious to see you do so. I wouldn’t like you to throw yourself away.”

His sister could take a hint, but there was information she desired, and the man was speaking with unusual reserve.

“Oh!” she said, with a slight show of impatience, “you must be plainer.”

“Then you have seen a good deal of Vane, and, in case you have any hankering after his scalp, I think I’d better mention that there’s reason to believe he won’t be worth powder and shot before very long.”

“Ah!” said Jessie, with a calmness which was difficult to assume, “you may as well understand that there is nothing between Vane and me. I suppose you mean that Howitson and Bendle are turning against him?”

“Something like that,” Horsfield agreed in a tone which implied that her answer had afforded him relief. “The man has trouble in front of him.”

Jessie changed the subject. What she had gathered from Mrs. Bendle was fully confirmed, but she had made up her mind. Evelyn’s lover might wait for the warning which could save him, but he should wait in vain.

CHAPTER XXVI—ON THE TRAIL.

It was a long, wet sail up the coast with the wind ahead, and Carroll was content, when, on reaching Comox, Vane announced his intention of stopping there until the mail came in. Immediately after its arrival, Carroll went ashore, and came back empty-handed.

"Nothing," he said. "Personally, I'm pleased. Nairn could have advised us here if there had been any striking developments since we left the last place."

"I wasn't expecting to hear from him," Vane replied.

Carroll read keen disappointment in his face, and was not surprised, although the absence of any message meant that it was safe for them to go on with their project, which should have afforded his companion satisfaction.

They got off shortly afterwards and stood out to the northwards.

Most of that day and the next two they drifted with the tides through narrowing waters, though now and then for a few hours they were wafted on by light and fickle winds. At length they crept into the inlet where they had landed on the previous voyage, and on the morning after their arrival set out on the march. There was on this occasion reason to expect more rigorous weather, and the load each carried was an almost crushing one. Where the trees were thinner, the ground was frozen hard, and even in the densest bush the undergrowth was white and stiff with frost, while, when they could see aloft through some chance opening, a forbidding grey sky hung over them.

On approaching the rift in the hillside which he had glanced at when they first passed that way, Vane stopped a moment.

"I looked into that place before, but it didn't seem worth while to follow it up," he said. "If you'll wait, I'll go a little farther along it."

Though the air was nipping, Carroll, who was breathless, was content to remain where he was, and he spent some time sitting upon a log before a faint shout reached him. Then he rose, and making his way up the hollow, found his comrade standing upon a jutting ledge.

"I thought you were never coming," the latter remarked. "Climb up; I've something to show you."

Carroll joined him with difficulty, and Vane stretched out his hand.

"Look yonder," he said.

Carroll looked and started. They stood in a rocky gateway with a river brawling down the chasm beneath them; but a valley opened up in front. Filled with sombre forest, it ran back almost straight between stupendous walls of hills.

"It answers Hartley's description," he said. "After all, I don't think it's extraordinary we should have taken so much trouble to push on past the right place."

"How's that?" Vane demanded.

Carroll sat down and filled his pipe. "It's the natural result of possessing a temperament like yours. Somehow, you've got it firmly fixed into your mind that everything worth doing must be hard."

"I've generally found it so."

"I think," said Carroll, grinning, "you've generally made it so. There's a marked difference between the two. If any means of doing a thing looks easy, you at once conclude it can't be the right way, which is a mode of reasoning that has never convinced me. In my opinion, it's more sensible to try the easiest method first."

"As a rule, that leads to your having to fall back upon the other one; and a frontal attack on a difficulty's often quicker

than considering how you can work round its flank. In this case I'll own we have wasted a lot of time and taken a good deal of trouble that might have been avoided. But are you going to sit here and smoke?"

"Until I've finished my pipe," Carroll answered. "I expect we'll find tobacco, among other things, getting pretty scarce before this expedition ends."

He carried out his intention, and they afterwards pushed on up the valley during the rest of the day. It grew more level as they proceeded, and in spite of the frost, which bound the feeding snows, there was a steady flow of water down the river, which was free from rocky barriers. Vane, who now and then glanced at the latter attentively, stopped when dusk was drawing near, and fixed his gaze on the long ranks of trees that stretched away in front of him; fretted spires of sombre greenery lifted high above a colonnade of mighty trunks.

"Does anything in connection with this bush strike you?" he asked.

"Its stiffness, if that's what you mean," Carroll suggested, smiling. "These big conifers look as if they'd been carved. They're impressive, in a way, but they're too artificial."

"That's not what I mean," Vane informed him impatiently.

"To tell the truth," said Carroll, "I didn't suppose it was. Anyway, these trees aren't spruce. They're red cedar, the stuff they make the roofing shingles of."

"Precisely. Just now, shingles are in good demand in the Province, and with the wooden towns springing up on the prairie, Western millers can hardly send roofing material across the Rockies fast enough. Besides this, I haven't struck a creek more adapted for running logs down, and the last sharp drop to tidewater would give power for a mill. I'm only puzzled that none of the timber-lease prospectors has recorded the place."

"That's easy to understand," said Carroll. "Like you, they'd no doubt first search the most difficult spots to get at."

They went on in another minute, and pitched their light tent beside the creek when darkness fell.

"By the by, I thought you were disappointed when you got no mail at Comox," Carroll remarked at length, feeling that he was making something of a venture.

"I was," said Vane.

This was not encouraging, but Carroll persisted. "That's strange, because your hearing nothing from Nairn left you free to go ahead, which, one would suppose, was what you wanted."

Vane, as it happened, was in a confidential mood; though usually averse from sharing his troubles, he felt he needed sympathy. "I'd better confess I wrote Miss Chisholm a few lines from Nanaimo."

"Ah!" said Carroll softly; "and she didn't answer you. Now, I couldn't well help noticing that you were rather in her bad graces that night at Nairn's. No doubt, you're acquainted with the reason?"

"I'm not," Vane replied. "That's just the trouble."

Carroll reflected. He had an idea that Miss Horsfield was somehow connected with the matter, but this was a suspicion he could not mention.

"Well," he said, "as I pointed out, you're addicted to taking the hardest way. When we came up here before, you marched past this valley, chiefly because it was close at hand; but I don't want to dwell on that. Has it occurred to you that you did something of the same kind when you were at the Dene? The way that was then offered you was easy."

"This is not the kind of subject one cares to talk about; but you ought to know I couldn't allow them to force Miss Chisholm upon me against her will. It was unthinkable! Besides, looking at it in the most cold-blooded manner, it would

have been foolishness, for which we'd both have to pay afterwards."

"I'm not so sure of that," said Carroll thoughtfully. "There were the Sabine women among other instances. Didn't they cut off their hair to make bow-strings for their abductors?"

His companion made no answer, and Carroll, deciding that he had ventured as far as was prudent, talked of something else until they crept into the little tent, and soon afterwards they fell asleep.

They started with the first of the daylight next morning, but the timber grew denser and more choked with underbrush as they proceeded, and for several days they wearily struggled through it and the clogging masses of tangled, withered fern. Besides this, they were forced to clamber over fallen trunks, when the ragged ends of the snapped-off branches caught their loads. Their shoulders ached, their boots were ripped, their feet were badly galled; but they held on stubbornly, plunging deeper into the mountains all the while.

Soon after setting out one morning, they climbed a clearer hillside to look about them. High up ahead, the crest of the white range gleamed dazzlingly against leaden cloud in a burst of sunshine; below, dark forest, still wrapped in gloom, filled all the valley; and in between, on the middle slopes, a belt of timber touched by the light shone with a curious silvery lustre. Though it was some distance off, probably a day's journey, allowing for the difficulty of the march, Vane gazed at it earnestly. The trees were bare—there was no doubt of that, for the dwindling ranks, diminished by the distance, stood out against the snow-streaked rock like rows of rather thick needles set upright. Their straightness and the way they glistened suggested the resemblance.

"Ominous, isn't it?" Carroll said at length. "If this is the valley Hartley came down, and everything points to that, we should be getting near the spruce."

Vane's face grew set. "Yes," he agreed. "There has been a big fire up yonder; but whether it has swept the lower ground or not is more than I can tell. We'll find out early to-morrow."

CHAPTER XXVII—THE END OF THE SEARCH.

The two men made a hurried breakfast in the cold dawn and not long afterwards they were struggling through thick timber, when the light suddenly grew a little clearer. Carroll remarked upon the fact and Vane's face hardened.

"We're either coming to a swamp, or the track the fire has swept is close in front," the latter said.

A thicket lay before him, but he smashed savagely through the midst of it, the undergrowth snapping and crackling about his limbs. Then there was a network of tangled branches to be crossed, and afterwards, reaching slightly clearer ground, he broke into a run. Three or four minutes later, he stopped, breathless and ragged, with his rent boots scarcely clinging to his feet; and Carroll, who came up with him, gazed eagerly about.

The living forest rose behind them, an almost unbroken wall, but ahead the trees ran up in detached and blackened spires. Their branches had vanished; every cluster of sombre-green needles and delicate spray had gone; the great rampikes, as they are called, looked like shafts of charcoal. About their feet lay crumbling masses of calcined wood which grew more and more numerous where there were open spaces farther on and then the bare, black columns ran on again, up the valley and the steep hill benches on either hand. It was a weird scene of desolation; impressive to the point of being appalling in its suggestiveness of widespread ruin.

For the space of a minute the men gazed at it; and then Vane, stretching out his hand, pointed to a snow-sheeted hill.

"That's the peak Hartley mentioned," he said in a voice which was strangely incisive. "Give me the axe."

He took it from his comrade and, striding forward, attacked the nearest rampike. Twice the keen blade sank noiselessly overhead, scattering a black dust in the frosty air; and then there was a clear, ringing thud. After that, Vane smote on with a determined methodical swiftness, until Carroll grabbed his shoulder.

"Look out!" he cried. "It's going."

Vane stepped back a few paces; the trunk reeled and rushed downwards: there was a deafening crash, and they were enveloped in a cloud of gritty dust. Through the midst of it they dimly saw two more great trunks collapse; and then somewhere up the valley a series of thundering shocks, which both knew were not echoes, broke out. The sound jarred upon Carroll's nerves, as the thud of the felled rampike had not done, but Vane picked up one of the chips and handed it to him.

"We have found Hartley's spruce," he said.

Carroll did not answer for a minute. After all, when defeat must be faced, there was very little to be said, though his companion's expression troubled him. Its grim stolidity was portentous.

"I suppose," he remarked at length, "nothing could be done with it?"

Vane pointed to the butt of the tree, which showed a space of clean wood surrounded by a blackened rim.

"You can't make marketable pulp of charcoal, and the price would have to run pretty high before it would pay for ripping most of the log away to get at the residue," he answered harshly.

"But there may be some unburned spruce farther on," Carroll urged.

"It's possible," said Vane. "I'm going to find out."

This was a logical determination; but, in spite of his recent suggestion, Carroll realised that he would have abandoned the search there and then, had the choice been left to him, in which he did not think he was singular. After all they had undergone, the shock of the disappointment was severe. He could have faced a failure to locate the spruce with some degree of philosophical calm; but to find it at last, useless, was very much worse. But he did not expect his companion to turn back yet: before he desisted, Vane would seek for and examine every unburned tree. What was more, Carroll, who

thought the search could serve no purpose, would have to accompany him. Then the latter noticed that Vane was waiting for him to speak, and he decided that this was a situation which he had better endeavour to treat lightly.

"I think I'll have a smoke," he said. "I'm afraid any remarks I could make wouldn't do justice to the occasion. Language has its limits."

He sat down on the charred log and took out his pipe before he proceeded: "A *brûlée*'s not a nice place to wander about in when there's any wind, and I've an idea there's some coming, though it's quiet now."

Shut in, as they were, in the deep hollow with the towering snows above them, it was impressively still; and in conjunction with the sight of the black desolation the deep silence reacted upon Carroll's nerves. He longed to escape from it, to make a noise, though this, if done unguardedly, might bring more of the rampikes thundering down. He could hear tiny flakes of charcoal falling from them, and though the fire had long gone out, a faint and curious crackling, as if the dead embers were stirring. He wondered if this were some effect of the frost; it struck him as disturbing and weird.

"We'll work right round the *brûlée*," said Vane. "Then I suppose we had better head back for Vancouver, though we'll look at that cedar as we go down. Something might be made of it; I'm not sure we've thrown our time away."

"You wouldn't be sure of such a thing," said Carroll. "It isn't in you."

Vane disregarded this. A new constructive policy was already springing up out of the wreck of his previous plans. "There's a good mill site on the inlet, but as it's a long way from the railroad we'll have to determine whether it would be cheaper to tow the logs down or split them up on the spot," he went on. "I'll talk it over with Drayton; he'll no doubt be useful, and there's no reason why he shouldn't earn his share."

"Do you believe the arrangement you made with Hartley applies to the cedar?"

"Of course," said Vane. "I don't know that the other parties could insist upon the original terms—we can discuss that later; but, though it may be modified, the arrangement stands."

His companion considered the matter dispassionately, as an abstract proposition. Here was a man, who, in return for certain information respecting the whereabouts of a marketable commodity, had undertaken to find and share it with his informant. The commodity had proved to be valueless, but during the search for it he had incidentally discovered something else. Was he under any obligation to share the latter with his informant's heirs?

Carroll decided that the question could only be answered in the negative; but he had no intention of disputing his comrade's point of view. In the first place, this would probably only make Vane more determined or ruffle his temper; and in the second Carroll, who felt very dubious about the prospect of working the cedar profitably, was neither a covetous nor an ambitious person, which was, perhaps, on the whole, fortunate for him.

Vane, as his partner realised, was ambitious; but in place of aspiring after wealth or social prominence—the latter of which had, indeed, of late began to pall on him—his was a different aim; to rend the hidden minerals from the hills, to turn forests into dressed lumber, to make something grow. Dollars are often, though not always, made that way; but while he affected no contempt for them, in Vane's case their acquisition was undoubtedly not the end. Fortunately, he was not altogether singular in this respect.

When he next spoke, there was, however, no hint of altruistic sentiment in his curt inquiry: "Are you going to sit there until you freeze?"

Carroll got up, and they spent the rest of the day plodding through the *brûlée*, with the result that when darkness fell Vane had abandoned all idea of working the spruce. Next morning, they set out for the inlet, and one afternoon during the journey they came upon several fallen logs lying athwart each other with their branches spread in a horrible tangle between. Vane proceeded to walk along one log, which was tilted up several yards above the ground, balancing himself carefully upon the rounded surface; and Carroll followed until the end of a broken branch, which he evidently had not noticed, caught in the leader's clothes. Next moment there was a sharp snapping, and Vane plunged down into the tangle beneath, while Carroll stood still and laughed. It was not an uncommon accident.

Vane, however, did not reappear; nor was there any movement among the half-rotten boughs and withered sprays, and Carroll, moving forward hastily, looked down into the hole. He was disagreeably surprised to see his comrade lying, rather white in face, upon his side.

"I'm afraid you'll have to chop me out," he said, and his voice was hoarse. "Get to work; I can't move my leg."

Moving farther along the log, Carroll dropped to the ground, which was less encumbered there, and spent the next quarter of an hour hewing a passage to his comrade. Then as he stood beside him, hot and panting, Vane looked up.

"It's my lower leg; the left," he said. "Bone's broken; I felt it snap."

Carroll turned from him for a moment in consternation. Looking out between the branches, he could see the lonely hills tower, pitilessly white, against the blue of the frosty sky, and the rigid firs running back as far as his vision reached upon their lower slopes. There was no touch of life in all the picture; everything was silent and motionless, and its desolation came near to appalling him. When he looked round again, Vane smiled wryly.

"If this had happened farther north, it would have been the end of me," he said. "As it is, it's awkward."

The word struck Carroll as singularly inadequate, but he made an effort to gather his courage when his companion broke off with a groan of pain.

"It's lucky we helped that doctor when he set Pete's leg at Bryant's mill," he said. "Can you wait a few minutes?"

Vane's face was beaded with damp now, but he tried to smile. "It strikes me," he answered, "I'll have to wait a mighty long time."

Carroll turned and left him. He was afraid to stand still and think, but action was a relief. It was some time before he returned with several strips of fabric cut from the tent curtain, and the neatest splints he could extemporise from slabs of stripped-off bark, and the next half-hour was a trying one to both of them. Sometimes Vane assisted him with suggestions—once he reviled his clumsiness—and sometimes he lay silent with his face awry and his lips tight set; but at length it was done, and Carroll stood up, breathing hard.

"I'll fasten you on to a couple of skids and pull you out," he said. "Then I'll make camp."

He managed it with difficulty, pitched the tent above Vane, whom he covered with their blankets, and made a fire outside.

"Are you comfortable now?" he inquired.

Vane looked up at him with a somewhat ghastly grin. "I suppose I'm about as comfortable as could be expected. Anyhow, I've got to get used to the thing. Six weeks is the shortest limit, isn't it?"

Carroll confessed that he did not know, and presently Vane resumed: "It's lucky that the winters aren't often very cold so near the coast."

The temperature struck Carroll as low enough, but he made no answer. To his disgust, he could think of no cheering observation, for there was no doubt that the situation was serious. They were cut off from the sloop by leagues of tangled forest which a vigorous man would find it difficult to traverse, and it would be weeks before Vane could use his leg; no human assistance could be looked for, and they had only a small quantity of provisions left. Besides this, it would not be easy to keep the sufferer warm in rigorous weather.

"I'll make supper. You'll feel better afterwards," he said at length.

"Then don't be too liberal," Vane warned him.

The latter fell into a restless doze after the meal, and it was dark when he opened his eyes again.

"I can't sleep any more, and we may as well talk—there are things to be arranged," he said. "In the first place, as soon as I feel a little easier, you'll have to sail across to Comox and hire some men to pack me out. When you've sent them off, you'll make for Vancouver, and get a timber licence and find out how matters are going on."

"That," said Carroll firmly, "is out of the question. Nairn can look after our mining interests—he's a capable man—and if the thing's too much for him they can go to smash. Besides, they won't give you a timber licence without full particulars of area and limits, and we've blazed no boundaries. Anyhow, I'm staying right here."

Vane began to protest, but Carroll raised his hand. "Argument's not conducive to recovery. You're on your back, unfortunately, and I'll give way to you, as usual, as soon as you're on your feet again, but not before."

"I'd better point out that we'll both be hungry by then. The provisions won't last long."

"Then I'll look for a deer as soon as I think you can be left. And now we'll try to talk of something more amusing."

"Can you see anything humorous in the situation?"

"I can't," Carroll confessed. "Still, there may be something of that description which I haven't noticed yet. By the way, the last time we were at Nairn's, I happened to cross the room near where you and Miss Horsfield were sitting, and I heard her ask you to wait for something at Nanaimo or Comox. I thought it curious."

"She told me to wait, so she could send me word to come back, if it was needful."

"Ah!" said Carroll; "I won't ask why she was willing to do so—it concerns you more than me—but I fancy that as regards your interests in the Clermont a warning from her would be worth as much as one from Nairn; that is, if she could be depended on."

"Have you any doubt upon the subject?"

"Don't get angry. Perhaps I've talked too much. We have to think of your injury."

"I'm not likely to forget it," Vane informed him. "But I dare say you're right in one respect—as an amusing companion you're a dead failure, and talking isn't as easy as I imagined."

He lay silent afterwards, and, though he had disclaimed any desire for sleep, worn by the march and pain, as he was, his eyes presently closed. Carroll, however, sat long awake, and afterwards admitted that he felt badly afraid. Deer are by no means numerous in some parts of the bush; they had not seen one during the journey; and though there was a little food left on board her, it was a long way to the sloop.

Once or twice, for no obvious reason, he drew aside the tent flap and looked out. The sky was cloudless and darkly blue, and a sickle moon gleamed in it, keen and clear with frost. Below, the hills were washed in silver, majestic, but utterly cheerless; and lower still the serrated tops of the rigid firs cut against the dreary whiteness. After each glimpse of them, Carroll drew his blanket tighter round him with a shiver. Very shortly, when the little flour and pork were gone and their few cartridges had been expended, he would be reduced to the condition of primitive man. Cut off from all other resources, he must then wrest what means of subsistence he could from the snowy wilderness by brute strength and cunning and such instruments as he could make with his unassisted hands, except that an axe of Pennsylvania steel was better than a stone one. Civilisation has its compensations, and Carroll longed for a few more of them that night.

On rising next morning, he found the frost keener, and he spent the day and a number of those that followed in growing anxiety, which was only temporarily lessened when he once succeeded in killing a deer. There was almost a dearth of animal life in the lonely valley. Sometimes at first, Vane was feverish; often he was irritable, and the recollection of the three or four weeks he spent with him afterwards haunted Carroll like a nightmare. At last, when he had spent several days in vain search for a deer and the provisions were almost exhausted, he and his companion held a council of emergency.

"There's no use in arguing," Vane declared. "You'll rig me a shelter of green boughs outside the tent and close to the

fire. I can move from the waist upwards, and if it's necessary, drag myself with my hands. Then you can chop enough cord-wood to last a while, cook my share of the eatables, and leave me while you go down to the sloop. There's half a bag of flour and a few other things I'd be uncommonly glad of on board her."

Carroll expostulated; but it was evident that his companion was right, and next morning he started for the inlet, taking with him the smallest possible portion of their provisions. So long as he had enough to keep him from fainting on the way, it was all he required, because he could renew his stores on board the boat. The weather broke during the march; driving snow followed him down the valley, and by and by gave place to bitter rain. The withered underbush was saturated, the soil was soddened with melting snow, and after the first scanty meal or two he dare risk no delay. He felt himself flagging from insufficient food, and it was obvious that he must reach the sloop before he broke down. He had tobacco, but that failed to stay the gnawing pangs, and before the march was done he was on the verge of exhaustion; forcing himself onward, drenched, and grim of face; scarcely able to keep upon his bleeding feet.

It was falling dusk and blowing fresh when he limped down the beach and with a last effort launched the light dinghy and pulled off to the sloop. She rode rather deep in the water, but that did not trouble him. Most wooden craft leak more or less, and it was a considerable time since he had pumped her out. Clambering wearily on board, he made the dinghy fast; and then stood still a moment or two, looking about him with his hand on the cabin side. Thin flakes of snow drifted past him; the firs were rustling eerily ashore, and ragged wisps of cloud drove by low down above their tops. Little frothy ripples flecked the darkening water with streaks of white and splashed angrily against the bows of the craft. The prospect was oppressively dreary, and the worn-out man was glad that he was at last in shelter and could snatch a few hours' rest.

Thrusting back the slide, he stepped below and lighted the lamp. The brightening glow showed him that the boat's starboard side was wet high up, and, though there was a good deal of water in her, this puzzled him, until an explanation suggested itself. They had moored the craft carefully, but he supposed she must have dragged her anchor or kedge and swung in near enough the shore to ground towards low-tide. Then, as the tide left her, she would fall over on her starboard bilge, because they had lashed the heavy boom down on that side, and the water in her would cover the depressed portion of her interior. This reasoning was probably correct; but he did not foresee the result, until after lighting the stove and putting on the kettle, he opened the provision locker, which was to starboard. Then he saw with a shock of dismay that the stock of food they had counted on was ruined. The periodically submerged flour bag had rotted and burst, and most of its contents had run out into the water as the boat righted with the rising tide; the prepared cereals, purchased to save cooking, had turned to mouldy pulp; and the few other stores were in much the same condition. There were only two sound cans of beef, and a few ounces of unspoiled tea in a canister.

Carroll's courage failed him as he realised it, but he felt that he must eat and sleep before he could grapple with the situation. He would allow himself a meal and a few hours' rest; and crawling out while the kettle boiled, he shortened in the cable and plied the pump. Then he went below, and feasted on preserved beef and tea, gauging the size of each slice with anxious care, until he reluctantly laid the can aside. After that, he filled his pipe and, stretching out his aching limbs on the port locker, which was comparatively dry, soon sank into heavy sleep.

CHAPTER XXVIII—CARROLL SEEKS HELP.

Carroll slept for several hours before he awakened and sat up on the locker, shivering. He had left the hatch slightly open, and a confused uproar reached him from outside—the wail of wind-tossed trees; the furious splash of ripples against the bows; and the drumming of the halliards upon the mast. There was no doubt that it was blowing hard; but the wind was off the land, and the sloop in shelter.

Filling his pipe, he set himself to think, and promptly decided that it would have been better had he gone down to the sloop in the beginning, before the provisions had been spoiled, instead of in the end. Reluctance to leave his helpless companion had mainly prevented him from doing this, but he had also been encouraged by the possibility of obtaining a deer now and then. It was clear that he had made a mistake in remaining, but it was not the first time he had done so, and the point was unimportant. The burning question was: What must he do now?

It would obviously be useless to go back with rations that would barely suffice for the march: Vane still had food enough to keep life in one man for a little while. On the other hand, it would not be a long sail to Comox with a strong northerly wind; and if the sloop would face the sea that was running he might return with assistance before his comrade's scanty store was exhausted. Getting out the mildewed chart, he laid off his course, carefully trimmed and lighted the binnacle lamp, and going up on deck hauled in the kedge anchor. He could not break the main one out, though he worked savagely with a tackle, and deciding to slip it, he managed to lash three reefs in the mainsail and hoist it with the peak left down. Then he sat down to gather breath—for the work had been cruelly heavy—before he let the cable run and hoisted the jib.

She paid off when he put up his helm, and the black loom of trees ashore vanished. He thought he could find his way out of the inlet, but he only knew that he had done so when the angry ripples that splashed about the boat suddenly changed to confused tumbling combers. They foamed up in swift succession on her quarter, but he fancied she would withstand their onslaught, so long as he could prevent her from screwing up to windward when she lifted. It would need constant care, and if he failed, the next comber would, no doubt, break on board. His task was one that would have taxed the vigilance of a strong, well-fed man, and Carroll had already nearly reached the limit of his powers.

His case, however, was by no means an unusual one. The cost of the subjugation of the wilderness is the endurance of hunger and thirst, cold and crushing fatigue; and somebody pays to the uttermost farthing. Carroll, sitting drenched, strung up, and hungry, at the helm, was merely playing his part in the struggle, though he found it cruelly hard.

It was pitch dark, but he must gaze ahead and guess the track of the pursuing seas by the angle of the spouting white ridge abreast of the weather shrouds. He had a compass, but when his course did not coincide with safety it must be disregarded. The one essential thing was to keep the sloop on top, and to do so he had frequently to let her fall off dead before the mad white combers that leaped out of the dark. By and by, his arms began to ache from the strain of the tiller, and his wet fingers grew stiff and claw-like. The nervous strain was also telling, but that could not be helped; he must keep the craft before the sea or go down with her. There was one consolation—she was travelling at a furious speed.

At length, morning broke over a leaden sea that was seamed with white; and he glanced longing at the meat-can on the locker near his feet. He could reach it by stooping, though he dare not leave the helm, but he determined to wait until noon before he broke his fast again. It could not be very far to Comox, but the wind might drop. Then he began to wonder how he had escaped the perils of the night. He had come down what was really a wide and not quite straight sound passing several unlighted islands. Before starting, he had decided that he would run so long and then change his course a point or two, but he could not be sure that he had done so. He had a hazy recollection of seeing surf, and once a faint loom of land, but he supposed he had avoided it half-consciously or that chance had favoured him.

In the afternoon, the wind changed a little, backing to the north-west; the sky grew brighter, and he made out shadowy land over his starboard quarter. By and by he recognised it with a start. It was the high ridge north of Comox, and as he had run farther than he had expected, he must try to hoist the peak of the mainsail and haul her on the wind. There was danger in rounding her up, but it must be faced, though a sea foamed across her as he put down his helm. Another followed, but he scrambled forward and struggled desperately to hoist the downhanging gaff. The halliards were swollen; he could scarcely keep his footing on the deluged deck that slanted steeply under him. He thought he could have mastered the banging canvas had he been fresh; but, worn out as he was, drenched with spray, and buffeted by the shattered tops of the seas, the task was beyond his power. Giving it up, he staggered back, breathless and almost

nerveless, to the helm.

He could not reach Comox, which lay to windward, with the sail half-set, but it was only seventy miles or thereabouts to Nanaimo and not very much farther to Vancouver. The breeze would be fair to either, and he could charter a launch or tug for the return journey. Letting her go before the sea again, he ate some canned meat ravenously, tearing it with one hand.

Shortly afterwards, a grey mass rose out of the water to port and he supposed it was Texada. There were mines on the island, and he might be able to engage a rescue party; but he reflected that he could not beat the sloop back to windward unless the breeze fell, which it showed no signs of doing. It would be more prudent to go on to Vancouver, where he would be sure of getting a steamer, but he closed with the long island a little, and dusk was falling when he made out a boat in the partial shelter of a bight. Standing in closer, he saw that there were two men in the craft, and driving down upon her he backed the jib and ran alongside.

There was a crash as he struck the boat, and an astonished and angry man clutched the sloop's rail.

"Now what in the name of thunder?" he began, and stopped, struck by Carroll's ragged appearance.

"Can you take this sloop to Vancouver?" the latter inquired.

"I could if it was worth while," was the cautious answer. "It will be a mighty wet run."

"Seven dollars a day, until you're home again," said Carroll. "A bonus if you can sail her with the whole reefed mainsail up—I won't stick at a few dollars. Can your partner pull that boat ashore alone? If not, cast her adrift, I'll buy her."

"He'll make the beach," said the other, jumping on board. "Seven dollars sounds a square deal. I won't put the screw on you."

"Then help me hoist the peak," Carroll bade him. "After that, you can take the helm; I'm played out."

The man, who shouted something to his companion, seized the halliards; and the sloop drove on again furiously; with an increased spread of canvas, while Carroll stood holding on by the coaming while the boat dropped back.

"I'll leave you to it," he informed the new helmsman. "It's twenty-four hours since I've had more than a bite or two of food, and some weeks since I had a decent meal."

"You look like it," the other informed him. "Been up against it somewhere?"

Carroll, who did not reply, crawled below and managed to light the stove and make a kettleful of tea. He drank a good deal of it, and nearly emptied the remaining small meat-can, which he presently held out for his companion's inspection, standing beneath the hatch.

"There's some tea left, but this is all there is to eat on board the craft," he said. "You're hired to take her to Vancouver—and you'd better get there as soon as you can."

The bronzed helmsman nodded. "She won't be long on the way if the mast holds up."

"Have you seen any papers lately?" Carroll inquired. "I've been up in the bush and I'm interested in the Clermont mine. It looked as if there might be some changes in the company's prospects when I went away."

"I noticed a bit about it in the *Colonist* a while back," was the answer. "They sold out to another concern, or amalgamated with it; I don't remember which."

Carroll was not astonished. The news, which implied that he must be prepared to face a more or less serious financial reverse struck him as a fitting climax to his misadventures.

"It's pretty much what I expected, and I'm going to sleep," he said. "I don't want to be wakened before it's necessary."

He crawled below, and he had hardly stretched himself out upon the locker before his eyes closed. When he opened them, feeling more like his usual self, he saw that the sun was above the horizon, and recognised by the boat's motion that the wind had fallen. Going out, he found her driving through the water under her whole mainsail and the helmsman sitting stolidly at the tiller. The man stretched out a hand and pointed to the hazy hills to port.

"We'll fetch the Narrows some time before noon," he said. "If you'll take the helm, I guess we'll halve that meat for breakfast."

His prediction proved correct, for Carroll reached his hotel about midday, and hastily changing his clothes, set off to call on Nairn. He had not recovered his mental equipoise, and in spite of his long, sound sleep, he was still badly jaded physically. On arriving at the house, he was shown into a room where Mrs. Nairn and her husband were sitting with Evelyn, waiting for the midday meal. The elder lady rose with a start of astonishment when he walked in.

"Man," she said, "what's wrong? Ye're looking like a ghost."

It was not an inapt description. Carroll's face was worn and haggard, and his clothes hung slack on him.

"I've been feeling rather unsubstantial of late, as the result of a restricted diet," he answered with a smile, and sat down in the nearest chair, while Nairn regarded him with carefully suppressed curiosity.

"Ye're ower lang in coming," he remarked. "Where did ye leave your partner?"

Carroll sat silent a moment or two, his eyes fixed on Evelyn. It was evident that his sudden appearance unaccompanied by Vane, which he felt had been undesirably dramatic, had alarmed her. At first he felt compassionate, and then he was suddenly possessed by hot indignation. This girl, with her narrow prudish notions and cold-blooded nature, had presumed to condemn his comrade, unheard, for an imaginary offence. The thing was at once ludicrous and intolerable; if his news brought her dismay, let her suffer. His nerves, it must be remembered, were not in their normal condition.

"Yes," he said, in answer to his host's first remark; "I've gathered that we have failed to save the situation. But I don't know exactly what has happened; you had better tell me."

Mrs. Nairn made a sign of protest, but her husband glanced at her restrainingly.

"Ye will hear his news in good time," he informed her, and turned to Carroll. "In a few words, the capital wasna subscribed; it leaked out that the ore was running poor and we held an emergency meeting. With Vane away, I could put no confidence into the shareholders—they were anxious to get from under—and Horsfield brought forward an amalgamation scheme: his friends would take the property over, on their valuation. I and a few others were outvoted; the scheme went through, and when the announcement steadied the stock, which had been tumbling down, I exercised the authority given me and sold your shares and Vane's at considerably less than their face value. Ye can have particulars later. What I have to ask now is: Where is Vane?"

The man's voice grew sharp; the question was flung out like an accusation, but Carroll still looked at Evelyn. He felt very bitter against her.

"I left him in the bush with no more than a few days' provisions and a broken leg," he said.

Then, in spite of Evelyn's efforts to retain her composure, her face blanched; and Carroll's anger vanished, because the truth was clear. Vane had triumphed through disaster; his peril and ruin had swept his offences away. The girl, who had condemned him in his prosperity, would not turn away from him in misfortune. In the meanwhile, the others sat silent, gazing at the bearer of evil news, until he spoke again.

"I want a tug to take me back at once, if she can be got," he said. "I'll pick up a few men along the water-front."

Nairn rose and went out of the room. The tinkle of a telephone bell reached those who remained, and he came back a

minute or two later.

"I've sent Whitney round," he announced. "He'll come across if there's a boat to be had, and now ye look as if ye needed lunch."

"It's several weeks since I had one," said Carroll with a smile.

The meal was brought in, but for a while he talked as well as ate; relating his adventures in somewhat disjointed fragments, while the rest sat listening. He was also pleased to notice something which suggested returning confidence in him in Evelyn's intent eyes as the tale proceeded. When at last he had made the matter clear, he added: "If I keep you waiting, you'll excuse me."

His hostess watched his subsequent efforts with candid approval, and, looking up once or twice, he saw sympathy in the girl's face, instead of the astonishment or disgust he had half expected. When he had finished, his hostess rose and Carroll stood up, but Nairn signed to him to resume his place.

"I'm thinking ye had better sit still a while and smoke," he said.

Carroll was glad to do so, and he and Nairn conferred together, until the latter was called to the telephone.

"Ye can have the Brodick boat at noon to-morrow," he said on his return.

"That won't do," Carroll objected heavily. "Send Whitney round again; I must sail to-night."

He had some difficulty in getting out the words, and when he rose his eyes were half closed. Walking unsteadily, he crossed the room and sank into a big lounge.

"I think," he resumed, "if you don't mind, I'll go to sleep."

Nairn merely nodded, and when, after sitting silent a minute or two, he went softly out, the worn-out man was already wrapped in profound slumber. As it happened, Nairn received another call by telephone and left in haste for his office, without speaking to his wife; with the result that the latter and Evelyn, returning to the room by and by in search of Carroll, found him lying still. The elder lady raised her hand in warning as she bent over the sleeper, and then, taking up a light rug, spread it gently over him, Evelyn, too, was stirred to sudden pity, for the man's attitude was eloquent of exhaustion.

They withdrew gently and had reached the corridor when Mrs. Nairn turned to the girl.

"When he first came in, ye blamed that man for deserting his partner," she said.

Evelyn confessed it, and her hostess smiled meaningly. "Are ye no rather ready to blame?"

"I'm afraid I am," said Evelyn, with the colour creeping into her face, as she remembered an instance in which she had condemned another person hastily.

"In this case," said her companion, "ye were very foolish. The man came down for help, and if he could not get it, he would go back his lone; if all the way was barred with ice and he must walk on his naked feet. Love of woman's strong and the fear of death is keen, but ye will find now and then a faith between man and man that neither would sever." She paused and looked at the girl fixedly as she asked: "What of him that could inspire it?"

Evelyn did not answer. She had never seen her hostess in this mood, and she was also stirred; but the elder lady went on again: "The virtue of a gift lies in part, but no altogether, with the giver. Whiles, it may be bestowed unworthily, but I'm thinking it's no often. The bond that will drag Carroll back to the North again, to his death if it is needful, has no been spun from nothing."

Evelyn had no doubt that Mrs. Nairn was right. Loyalty, most often, demanded a worthy object to tender service to; it

sprang from implicit confidence, mutual respect, and strong appreciation. It was not without a reason Vane had inspired it in his comrade's breast; and this was the man she had condemned. The latter fact, however, was by comparison a very minor trouble. Vane was lying, helpless and alone, in the snowy wilderness, in peril of his life, and she knew that she loved him. She realised now, when it might be too late, that had he in reality been stained with dishonour, she could have forgiven him. Indeed, it had only been by a painful effort she had maintained some show of composure since Carroll had brought the disastrous news and she felt she could not keep it up much longer.

What she said to Mrs. Nairn she could not remember, but escaping from her, she retired to her own room, to lie still and grapple with an agony of fear and contrition.

It was two hours later when she went down and found Carroll, who still looked drowsy, about to go out. His hostess had left him for a moment in the hall, and meeting the girl's eyes, he smiled at her reassuringly.

"Don't be anxious; I'll bring him back," he said.

Then Mrs. Nairn appeared, and in a few moments Carroll went out without another word to Evelyn. She did not ask herself why he had taken it for granted that she would be anxious; she was beyond any petty regard for appearances. It was consoling to remember that he was Vane's tried comrade; one of the men who kept their word.

CHAPTER XXIX—JESSIE'S CONTRITION.

After leaving Mrs. Nairn, Carroll walked towards Horsfield's residence in a thoughtful mood, because he felt it incumbent upon him to play a part he was not particularly fitted for in a somewhat delicate matter. Uncongenial as his task was, it was one which could not be left to Vane, who was even less to be trusted with the handling of such affairs; and Carroll had resolved, as he would have described it, to straighten out things.

His partner had somehow offended Evelyn, and though she was now disposed to forgive him, the recollection of his suppositious iniquity might afterwards rankle in her mind. Though Vane was innocent of any conduct she could with reason take exception to, it was first of all needful to ascertain the exact nature of the charge against him. Carroll, who had for several reasons preferred not to press this question upon Evelyn, had a strong suspicion that Jessie Horsfield was at the bottom of the trouble. There was also a clue to follow—Vane had paid the rent of Celia Hartley's shack; and he wondered if Jessie could by any means have heard of it. If she had done so the matter would be simplified, because he had a profound distrust of her. A recent action of hers was, he thought, sufficient to justify this attitude.

He found her at home, reclining gracefully in an easy-chair in her drawing-room, and though she did not seem astonished to see him, he fancied her expression hinted at suppressed concern.

"I heard you had arrived alone, and I intended to come over and make inquiries as soon as I thought Mrs. Nairn would be at liberty," she informed him.

Carroll had found the direct attack effective in Evelyn's case, and he determined to try it again. "Then," he began, "it says a good deal for your courage." He had never doubted that she possessed the latter quality, and she displayed it now.

"So," she said calmly, "you have come as an enemy."

"Not exactly; it didn't seem worth while. Though there's no doubt you betrayed us—Vane waited for the warning you could have sent—so far as it concerns our ruined interests in the Clermont, the thing's done and can't be mended. We'll let that question go. The most important point is that if you had recalled us, as you promised, Vane would now be safe and sound."

This shot told. The girl's face became less imperturbable; there was eagerness and a suggestion of fear in it. "Then has any accident happened to him?" she asked sharply.

"He's lying in the bush, helpless, in imminent peril of starvation."

"Go on," said the girl, with signs of strain clearly perceptible in her voice.

Carroll was brief, but he made her understand the position, after which she turned upon him imperiously. "Then why are you wasting your time here?"

"It's a reasonable question. I can't get a tug to take me back until noon to-morrow."

"Ah!" said Jessie, and added: "You will excuse me for a minute."

She left him astonished. He had not expected her to take him at a disadvantage, as she had done with her previous thrust, and now he did not think she had slipped away to hide her feelings. That did not seem necessary in Jessie's case, though he believed she was more or less disturbed. She came back presently, looking calm, and sat down again.

"My brother will be here in a quarter of an hour," she informed him. "Things are rather slack, and he had half promised to take me for a drive; I have called him up through the telephone."

Carroll did not see how this bore upon the subject of their conversation, but he left her to take the lead.

"Did Vane tell you I had promised to warn him?" she asked.

“To do him justice, he let it out before he quite realised what he was saying. I’d better own that I partly surprised him into giving me the information.”

“The expedient seems a favourite one with you,” said Jessie. “I suppose no news of what has happened here can have reached him?”

“None. If it’s any consolation, he has still an unshaken confidence in you.” Carroll assured her with blunt bitterness.

The girl showed faint signs of confusion, but she sat silent for the next few moments, and during them it flashed upon her companion with illuminating light that he had heard Celia Hartley say Miss Horsfield had found her orders for millinery. This confirmed his previous suspicion that Jessie had discovered who had paid the rent of Celia’s shack, and that she had with deliberate malice informed Evelyn, distorting her account so that it would tell against Vane. There were breaks in the chain of reasoning which led him to this conclusion, but he did not think Jessie would shrink from such a course, and he determined to try a chance shot.

“Vane’s inclined to be trustful and his rash generosity has once or twice got him into trouble,” he remarked, and went on as if an explanation were needed: “It’s Miss Hartley’s case I’m thinking about just now. I’ve an idea he asked you to look after her. Am I right?”

As soon as he had spoken he knew he had hit the mark. Jessie did not openly betray herself, but there are not many people who can remain absolutely unmoved when unexpectedly asked a startling question. Besides, the man was observant, and had strung up all his faculties for the encounter. He saw one of her hands tighten on the arm of her chair and a hint of uneasiness in her eyes, and it sufficed him.

“Yes,” she said; “I recommended her to some of my friends. I understand she is getting along satisfactorily.”

Carroll felt compelled to admire her manner. He believed she loved his comrade and had nevertheless tried to ruin him in a fit of jealous rage. She was now keenly regretting her success, but though he thought she deserved to suffer, she was bravely facing the trying situation. It was one that was rife with dramatic possibilities, and he was grateful to her for avoiding them.

“You are going back to-morrow,” she said after a brief silence. “I suppose you will have to tell your partner what you have discovered here as soon as you reach him?”

Carroll had not intended to spare her, but now he felt almost compassionate, and he had one grain of comfort to offer. “I must tell him that his shares in the Clermont have been sacrificed. I wonder if that is all you meant?”

Jessie met his inquiring gaze with something very like an appeal; and then spread out her hands in a manner to indicate that she threw herself upon his mercy.

“It is not all I meant,” she confessed.

“Then, if it’s any relief to you, I’ll confine myself to telling him that he has been deprived of his most valuable property. I dare say the news will hit him hard enough; but though he may afterwards discover other facts for himself, on the whole I shouldn’t consider it likely. As I said, he’s confiding and slow to suspect.”

He read genuine gratitude, which he had hardly expected, in the girl’s face; but he raised his hand and went on in the rather formal manner which he felt was the only safe one to assume. “I had, however, better mention that I am going to call upon Miss Hartley. After that I shall be uncommonly thankful to start back for the bush.” He paused, and concluded with a sudden trace of humour: “I’ll own that I feel more at home with the work that waits me there.”

Jessie made a little gesture which, while it might have meant anything, was somehow very expressive, and just then there were footsteps outside. Next moment Horsfield walked into the room.

“So you’re back,” he said.

“Yes,” said Carroll shortly. “Beaten at both ends—there’s no use in hiding it.”

Horsfield showed no sign of satisfaction, and Carroll afterwards admitted that the man behaved very considerately.

“Well,” he said, “though you may be surprised to hear it, I’m sorry. Unfortunately, our interests clashed, and I naturally looked after mine. Once upon a time, I thought I could have worked hand in hand with Vane; but our ideas did not coincide, and your partner is not the man to yield a point or listen to advice.”

Carroll was aware that Horsfield had by means which were far from honourable deprived him of a considerable portion of his possessions. He had also betrayed his fellow shareholders in the Clermont mine, selling their interests, doubtless for some benefit to himself, to another company. For all that, Carroll recognised that since he and Vane were beaten, as he had confessed, recriminations and reproaches would be useless as well as undignified. He preferred to face defeat calmly.

“It’s the fortune of war,” he replied. “What you say about Vane is correct; but although it is not a matter of much importance now, it was impossible from the beginning that your views and his ever should agree.”

“Too great a difference of temperament? I dare say you’re right. Vane measures things by a different standard—mine’s perhaps more adapted to the market-place. But where have you left him?”

“In the bush. Miss Horsfield will, no doubt, give you particulars; I’ve just told her the tale.”

“She called me up at the office and asked me to come across at once. Will you excuse us for a few minutes?”

They went out together, and Jessie, who came back alone, sat down and looked at Carroll in a diffident manner.

“I suppose,” she said, “one could hardly expect you to think of either of us very leniently; but I must ask you to believe that I am sincerely distressed to hear of your partner’s accident. This was a thing I could never have anticipated; but there are amends I can make. Every minute you can save is precious, isn’t it?”

Carroll agreed, and she resumed: “Then I can get you a tug. My brother tells me the *Atlin*’s coming across from Victoria and should be here early this evening. He has gone back to the office to secure her for you, though she was fixed to go off for a log boom.”

“Thank you,” said Carroll. “It’s a great service.”

Jessie hesitated. “I think my brother would like to say a few words when he returns. Can I offer you some tea?”

“I think not,” said Carroll, smiling. “For one thing, if I sit still much longer, I shall, no doubt, go to sleep again, as I did at Nairn’s, which would be neither seemly nor convenient, if I’m to sail this evening. Besides, now we’ve arranged an armistice, it might be wiser not to put too much strain on it!”

“An armistice?”

“I think that describes it.” Carroll’s manner grew significant. “The word implies a cessation of hostilities—on certain terms.”

Jessie could take a hint, and his meaning was clear. Unless she forced him to do so, he would not betray her to his comrade, who might never discover the part she had played; but he had given her a warning, which might be bluntly rendered as, “Hands off.” There was only one course open to her—to respect it. She had brought down the man she loved, but it was clear that he was not for her, and now the unreasoning fury which had driven her to strike had passed, she was troubled with contrition. There was nothing left except to retire from the field, and it was better to do so gracefully. For all that, there were signs of strain in her expression as she capitulated.

“Well,” she said, “I have given you a proof that you have nothing to fear from me. My brother is the only man in Vancouver who could have got you that tug for this evening; I understand the saw-mill people are very much in need of

the logs she was engaged to tow.”

She held out her hand and Carroll took it, though he had not expected to part from her on friendly terms.

“I owe you a deal for that,” he said and turned away.

His task, however, was only half complete when he left the house, and the remaining portion was the more difficult, but he meant to finish it. He preferred to take life lightly; he had trifled with it before disaster had driven him out into the wilds; but there was resolution in the man, and he could force himself to play an unpleasant part when it was needful. Fortune also favoured him, as she often does those who follow the boldest course.

He had entered Hastings Street when he met Kitty and Celia. The latter looked thin and somewhat pale, but she was moving briskly, and her face was eager when she shook hands with him.

“We have been anxious about you—there was no news,” she said. “Is Mr. Vane with you? How have you got on?”

“We found the spruce,” said Carroll. “It’s not worth milling—a forest fire has wiped most of it out—but we struck some shingling cedar we may make something of.”

“But where’s Mr. Vane?”

“In the bush; I’ve a good deal to tell you about him, but we can’t talk here. I wonder if we could find a quiet place in a restaurant, or if the park would be better.”

“The park,” said Kitty decidedly.

They reached it in due time and Carroll, who had refused to say anything about Vane on the way, found the girls a seat in a grove of giant firs and sat down opposite to them. Though it was winter, the day, as is often the case near Vancouver, was pleasantly mild.

“Now,” he began, “my partner is a singularly unfortunate person. In the first place, the transfer of the Clermont property, which you have no doubt heard of, means a serious loss to him, though he is not ruined yet. He talks of putting up a shingling mill, in which Drayton will be of service, and if things turn out satisfactory you will be given an interest in it.”

He added the last sentence as an experiment, and was satisfied with the result.

“Never mind our interests,” cried Kitty. “What about Mr. Vane?”

For the third time since his arrival, Carroll made the strongest appeal he could to womanly pity, drawing with a purpose a vivid picture of his comrade’s peril and suffering. Nor was he disappointed, for he saw consternation, compassion, and sympathy in the girls’ faces. So far, the thing had been easy, but now he hesitated, and it was with difficulty he nerved himself for what must follow.

“He has been beaten out of his stock in the mine; he’s broken down in health and in danger; but, by comparison, that doesn’t count for very much with him,” he continued. “He has another trouble, and though I’m afraid I’m giving things away in mentioning it, if it could be got over, it would help him to face the future and set him on his feet again.”

Then he briefly recounted the story of Vane’s regard for Evelyn, making the most of his sacrifice in withdrawing from the field, and again he realised that he had acted wisely. A love affair appealed to his listeners, and there was a romance in this one that heightened the effect of it.

“But Miss Chisholm can’t mean to turn from him now,” said Celia.

Carroll looked at her meaningly. “No; she turned from him before he sailed. She heard something about him.”

His companions appeared astonished. “But she couldn’t have heard anything that anybody could mind,” Kitty exclaimed indignantly. “He’s not that kind of man.”

"It's a compliment," said Carroll. "I think he deserves it. At the same time, he's a little rash, and now and then a man's generosity is open to misconception. In this case, I don't think one could altogether blame Miss Chisholm."

Kitty glanced at him sharply and then at Celia, who at first looked puzzled and afterwards startled. Then the blood surged into Kitty's cheeks. "Oh!" she said, as if she were breathless, "I was once afraid of something like this. You mean we're the cause of it?"

The course he followed was hateful to Carroll, but the tangle could not be straightened without somebody's feelings being hurt, and it was his comrade he was most concerned about.

"Yes," he said quietly, "I believe you understand the situation."

He saw the fire in Kitty's eyes and that Celia's face was also flushed, but he did not think their anger was directed against him. They knew the world they lived in, and, for that matter, he could share their indignation. He resented the fact that a little thing should bring such swift suspicion upon them. He was, however, not required to face any disconcerting climax.

"Well," said Celia, "why did you tell us this?"

"I think you both owe Vane something, and you can do him a great favour now," Carroll informed her.

Kitty looked up at him. "Don't ask me too much, Mr. Carroll. I'm Irish, and I feel like killing somebody."

"It's natural," said Carroll, with a sympathetic smile. "I've now and then felt much the same thing; it's probably unavoidable in a world like this. However, I think you ought to call upon Miss Chisholm, after I've gone, though you had better not mention that I sent you. You can say you came for news of Vane—and add anything you consider necessary."

The girls looked at one another, and at length, though it obviously cost her a struggle, Kitty said to Celia firmly: "We will have to go." Then she faced round towards Carroll. "If Miss Chisholm won't believe us she'll be sorry we came."

Carroll made her a slight inclination. "She'll deserve it, if she's not convinced. But it might be better if you didn't approach her in the mood you're in just now."

Kitty rose, signing to Celia, and he turned back with them towards the city, feeling a certain constraint in their company and yet conscious of a strong relief. It had grown dark when he returned to Nairn's house.

"Where have ye been?" his host inquired. "I had a clerk seeking ye all round the city. I cannot get ye a boat before the morn."

Carroll saw that Mrs. Nairn shared her husband's desire to learn how he had been occupied. Evelyn was also in the room.

"There were one or two little matters that required attention, and I managed to arrange them satisfactorily," he said. "Among other things, I've got a tug and I expect to sail in an hour or two. Miss Horsfield found me the vessel."

He noticed Evelyn's interest, and was rather pleased to see it. If she were disposed to be jealous of Jessie, it could do no harm. Nairn, however, frowned.

"I'm thinking it might have been better if ye had not troubled Jessie," he commented.

"I'm sorry I can't agree with you," Carroll retorted. "The difference between this evening and noon to-morrow is a big consideration."

"Weel," said Nairn resignedly, "I canna deny that."

Carroll changed the subject, but some time later Mrs. Nairn sat down near him in the temporary absence of her husband and Evelyn.

“We will no be disturbed for two or three minutes,” she said. “Ye answered Alec like a Scotsman before supper and put him off the track, though that’s no so easy done.”

“You’re too complimentary,” he declared. “The genuine Caledonian caution can’t be acquired by outsiders. It’s a gift.”

“I’ll no practise it now,” said the lady. “Ye’er no so proud of yourself for nothing. What have ye been after?”

Carroll crossed his finger tips and looked at her over them. “Since you ask the question, I may say this: If Miss Chisholm has two lady visitors during the next few days, you might make sure she sees them.”

“What are their names?”

“Miss Hartley, the daughter of the prospector who sent Vane off to look for the timber; Miss Blake who, as you have probably heard, once came down the west coast with him, in company with an elderly lady and myself.”

Mrs. Nairn started; then she looked thoughtful, and finally broke into a smile of open appreciation.

“Now,” she said, “I understand. I did not think it of ye. Ye’re no far from a genius.”

“Thanks,” said Carroll modestly. “I believe I succeeded better than I could have expected, and perhaps than I deserved.”

Then they were interrupted, for Nairn walked hastily into the room.

“There’s one of the *Atlin’s* deck hands below,” he announced. “He’s come on here from Horsfield’s to say the boat’s ready with a full head of steam up, and the packers ye hired are waiting on the wharf.”

Carroll rose and became in a moment intent and eager. “Tell him I’ll be down almost as soon as he is,” he said. “You’ll have to excuse me.”

Two minutes later, he left the house, and fervent good wishes followed him from the party on the stoop. He did not stop to acknowledge them, but shortly afterwards the blast of a whistle came ringing across the roofs from beside the water-front.

CHAPTER XXX—CONVINCING TESTIMONY.

One afternoon three or four days after Carroll had sailed, Evelyn sat alone in Mrs. Nairn's drawing-room, a prey to confused regrets and keen anxiety. She had recovered from the first shock caused by Carroll's news, but though she could face the situation more calmly, she could find no comfort anywhere—Vane was lying helpless and famishing, in the frost-bound wilderness. She knew she loved the man; indeed, she had really known it for some time, and it was that which had made Jessie's revelation so bitter. Now, fastidious in thought and feeling as she was, she wondered if she had been too hard upon him; it was becoming more and more difficult to believe that he could have justified her disgust and anger, but this was not what troubled her most. She had sent him away with cold disfavour; he was threatened by many dangers; it was horrible to think of what might befall him before assistance arrived, and yet she could not drive the haunting dread out of her mind.

She was in this mood when a maid announced that two visitors wished to see her; and when they were shown in, she found it difficult to hide her astonishment as she recognised in Kitty the very attractive girl she had once seen in Vane's company. It was this which prompted her to assume a chilling manner, though she asked her guests to be seated. Neither of them appeared altogether at her ease, and there was, indeed, a rather ominous sparkle in Kitty's blue eyes. The latter began the conversation.

"Mr. Carroll was in town not long ago," she said. "Have you had any news of him since he sailed?"

Evelyn did not know what to make of the question, and she answered coldly: "No; we do not expect any word for some time."

"I'm sorry," said Kitty. "We're anxious about Mr. Vane."

On the surface, the announcement appeared significant, but the girls' boldness in coming to her for news was unexplainable to Evelyn. Puzzled as she was, her attitude became more discouraging.

"You know him, then?" she said.

Something in her tone made Celia's cheeks burn and she drew herself up.

"Yes," she said; "we know him, both of us; I guess it's astonishing to you; but I met him first when he was poor, and getting rich hasn't spoiled Mr. Vane."

Evelyn was once more puzzled—the girl's manner savoured less of assurance than of wholesome pride which had been injured. Kitty, however, broke in:

"We had no cards to send in; but I'm Kathleen Blake, and this is Celia Hartley—it was her father sent Mr. Vane off to look for the spruce."

"Ah!" said Evelyn, a little more gently, addressing Celia; "I understand your father died."

Kitty flashed a commanding glance at Celia, who spoke: "Yes; that is correct. He left me ill and worn out, without a dollar, and I don't know what I should have done if Mr. Vane hadn't insisted on giving Drayton a little money for me, on account, he said, because I was a partner in the venture. Then Miss Horsfield got me some work to do at home among her friends. Mr. Vane must have asked her to: it would be like him."

Evelyn sat silent for a few moments. Celia had given her a good deal of information in answer to a very simple remark; but she was most impressed by the statement that Jessie, who had prejudiced her against Vane, had helped the girl at his request. It was difficult to believe she would have done so had there been any foundation for her insinuations. If Celia spoke the truth, and Evelyn somehow felt this was the case, the whole thing was extraordinary.

"Now," said Celia, "it's no way surprising I'm grateful to Mr. Vane and anxious to hear if Mr. Carroll has reached him." This was spoken with a hint of defiance, but the girl's voice changed. "I am anxious. It's horrible to think of a man like him freezing in the bush."

Her concern was so genuine and yet somehow so innocent that Evelyn's heart softened.

"Yes," she said; "it's dreadful." Then she asked a question: "Who's the Mr. Drayton you mentioned?"

Kitty blushed becomingly; this was her lead. "He's a kind of partner in the lumber scheme; I'm going to marry him. He's as firm a friend of Mr. Vane's as any one. There's a reason for that—I was in a very tight place once, left without money in a desolate settlement where there was nothing I could do, when Mr. Vane helped me. But, perhaps, that wouldn't interest you."

For a moment her doubts still clung to their hold in Evelyn's mind; and then she suddenly drove the last of them out, with a stinging sense of humiliation. She could not distrust this girl; it was Jessie's suggestion that was incredible.

"It would interest me very much," she said.

Kitty told her story effectively, but with caution, laying most stress upon Vane's compassion for the child and her invalid mother. She was rather impressed by Miss Chisholm, but she supposed the latter was endowed with some of the failings common to human nature.

Evelyn listened to her with confused emotions and a softened face. She was convinced of the truth of the simple tale, and the thought of Vane's keeping his monied friends and directors waiting in Vancouver in order that a tired child might rest and gather shells upon a sunny beach stirred her deeply. It was so characteristic; exactly what she would have expected him to do.

"Thank you," she said quietly when Kitty had finished; and then, flinging off the last of her reserve, she asked a number of questions about Drayton and Celia's affairs. Before her visitors left all three were on friendly terms, but Evelyn was glad when they took their departure.

She wanted to be alone to think, though, in spite of the relief she was conscious of, her thoughts were far from pleasant, and foremost among them figured a crushing sense of shame. She had wickedly misjudged a man who had given her many proofs of the fineness of his character; the evil she had imputed to him was born of her own perverted imagination. She was no better than the narrow-minded, conventional Pharisees she detested, who were swift to condemn out of the uncleanness of their self-righteous hearts. Then, as she began to reason, it flashed upon her that she was, perhaps, wronging herself. Her mind had been cunningly poisoned by an utterly unscrupulous and wholly detestable woman, and she flamed out into a fit of imperious anger against Jessie. She had a hazy idea that this was not altogether reasonable, since she was to some extent fastening the blame she deserved upon another person; but it did not detract from the comfort the indulgence in her indignation brought her.

When she had grown calmer, Mrs. Nairn came in, and Mrs. Nairn was a discerning lady. It was not difficult to lead Evelyn on to speak of her visitors, for the girl's pride was broken and she felt in urgent need of sympathy; but when she had described the interview she felt impelled to avoid any discussion of its more important issues.

"I was surprised at the girl's manner," she concluded. "It must have been embarrassing to them; but they were really so delicate over it, and they had so much courage."

Mrs. Nairn smiled. "Although one has travelled with third-rate strolling companies and the other has waited in an hotel? Weel, maybe your surprise was natural. Ye cannot all at once get rid of the ideas and prejudices ye were brought up with."

"I suppose that was it," said Evelyn thoughtfully.

Her companion's eyes twinkled. "Then, if ye're to live among us happily, ye'll have to try. In the way ye use the words, some of the leading men in this country were no brought up at all."

"Do you imagine that I'm going to live here?"

Mrs. Nairn gathered up one or two articles she had brought into the room with her and moved towards the door, but

before she reached it she looked back at the girl.

“It occurred to me that the thing was no altogether impossible,” she said.

An hour afterwards, Evelyn went down into the town with her, and in one of the streets they came upon Jessie leaving a store. The latter was not lacking in assurance and she moved forward to meet them, but Evelyn gazed at her with a total disregard of her presence and walked quietly on. There was neither anger nor disdain in her attitude; to have shown either would have been a concession she could not make. The instincts of generations of gently-reared Englishwomen were aroused, as well as the revulsion of an untainted nature from something unclean.

Jessie’s cheeks turned crimson and a malevolent light flashed into her eyes as she crossed the street. Mrs. Nairn noticed her expression and smiled at her companion.

“I’m thinking it’s as weel ye met Jessie after she had got the boat for Carroll,” she said.

The remark was no doubt justified, but the fact that Jessie had been able to offer valuable assistance failed to soften Evelyn towards her. It was merely another offence.

In the meanwhile the tug had steamed northwards, towing the sloop which would be required, and, after landing the rescue party at the inlet, steamed away again. Before she had disappeared Carroll began his march, and his companions long remembered it. Two of them were accustomed to packing surveyors’ stores through the seldom-trodden bush, and the others had worked in logging camps and chopped new roads; but though they did not spare themselves, they lacked their leader’s stimulus. Carroll, with all his love of ease, could rise to meet an emergency, and he wore out his companions before the journey was half done. He scarcely let them sleep; he fed them on canned stuff to save delay in lighting fires, and he grew more feverishly impatient with every mile they made. He showed it chiefly by the tight set of his lips and the tension in his face, though now and then, when fallen branches or thickets barred the way, he fell upon the obstacles with the axe in silent fury. For the rest, he took the lead and kept it, and the others, following with shoulders aching from the pack straps, and laboured breath, suppressed their protests.

Like many another made in that country, it was an heroic journey, one in which mind and body were taxed to the limit. Delay might prove fatal; the loads were heavy. Fatigue seized the shrinking flesh, but the unrelenting will, trained in such adventures, mercilessly spurred it on. Toughened muscle is useful and in the trackless North can seldom be dispensed with; but man’s strength does not consist of that alone; there are occasions when the stalwart fall behind and die.

In front of them, as they progressed, lay the unchanging forest, tangled, choked with fallen wreckage, laced here and there with stabbing thorns; appalling and almost impenetrable to the stranger. They must cleave their passage, except where they could take to the creek for an easier way and wade through stingingly cold water or flounder over slippery fangs of rock and ice-encrusted stones. There was sharp frost among the ranges and the brush they broke through was generally burdened with clogging snow. They went on, however, and on the last day Carroll drew away from those who followed him. It was dark when he discovered that he had lost them, but that did not matter, for now and then faint moonlight came filtering down and he was leaving a plain trail behind. His shoulders were bleeding beneath the biting straps; he was on the verge of exhaustion; but he struggled forward, panting heavily, and rending his garments to rags as he smashed through the brakes in the darkness.

The night—it seemed a very long one—was nearly over, when he recognised the roar of a rapid that rang in louder and louder pulsations across the snow-sprinkled bush. He was not far from the end now, and he became conscious of an unnerving fear. The ground was ascending sharply and when he reached the top of the slope the question he shrank from would be answered for him; if there was no blink of light among the serried trunks, he would have come too late.

He reached the summit and his heart jumped; then he clutched at a drooping branch to support himself, shaken by a reaction that sprang from relief. A flicker of uncertain radiance fell upon the trees ahead and down the bitter wind there came the reek of pungent smoke. After that, for the bush was slightly more open, Carroll believed he ran, and presently came crashing and stumbling into the light of the fire. Then he stopped, too stirred and out of breath to speak, for Vane lay where the red glow fell upon his face, smiling up at him.

“Well,” he said, “you’ve come. I’ve been expecting you, but on the whole I got along not so badly.”

Carroll flung off his pack and sat down beside the fire; then he fumbled for his pipe and began to fill it hurriedly with trembling fingers.

“Sorry I couldn’t get through sooner,” he explained. “The stores on board the sloop were spoiled; I had to go on to Vancouver. But there are things to eat in my pack.”

“Hand it across,” said Vane. “I haven’t been faring sumptuously the last few days. No, sit still; I’m supple enough from the waist up.”

He proved it by the way he leaned to and fro as he opened the pack and distributed part of its contents among the cooking utensils, while Carroll, who assisted now and then, did not care to speak. The sight of the man’s gaunt face and the eagerness in his eyes prompted him to an outbreak of feeling which was rather foreign to his nature and which he did not think Vane would appreciate. When the meal was ready, the latter looked up at him.

“I’ve no doubt this journey cost you something, partner,” he said.

Then they ate cheerfully, and Carroll, who watched his friend’s efforts with appreciation, told his story in broken sentences—sometimes with his mouth rather full, for he had not troubled about much cooking since he left the inlet. Afterwards, they lighted their pipes, but by and by Carroll’s fell from his relaxing grasp.

“I can’t get over this sleepiness,” he explained. “I believe I disgraced myself in Vancouver by going off in the most unsuitable places.”

“I dare say it was natural,” said Vane with some dryness. “Anyway, hadn’t you better hitch yourself a little farther from the fire?”

Carroll did so and lay still afterwards, but Vane kept watch during the rest of the night, until in the dawn the packers appeared.

CHAPTER XXXI—VANE IS REINSTATED.

Breakfast was over and the two men, wrapped in blankets, lay on opposite sides of the fire. Now that they had a supply of provisions, haste was not a matter of importance, and the rescue party needed a rest. Carroll was aching all over his body and somewhat disturbed in mind, because he had not said anything about their financial affairs to his comrade yet, and the subject must be mentioned.

“What about the Clermont?” Vane asked at length. “You needn’t trouble about breaking the news; come right to the point.”

“Then to all intents and purposes the company has gone under; it’s been taken over by Horsfield’s friends. Nairn has sold our stock—at considerably less than its face value”; and Carroll added a brief account of the absorption of the concern.

“Ah!” said Vane, whose face set hard. “I anticipated something of the kind last night; I saw how you kept clear of the matter.”

“But you said nothing.”

“No,” said Vane. “I’d had time to consider the thing while I lay here, and it didn’t look as if I could have got an intelligible account out of you. But you may as well mention how much Nairn got for the shares.”

He lay smoking silently for a few minutes after Carroll told him, and the latter was strongly moved to sympathy since he thought it was not his financial reverse but one indirect result of it which would hit his comrade hardest.

“Well,” said Vane grimly, “I suppose I’ve done what my friends would consider a mad thing in coming up here, and I must face the reckoning.”

Carroll wondered if their conversation could be confined to the surface of the subject, because there were depths it would be better to leave undisturbed.

“After all, you’re far from broke,” he said as cheerfully as he could. “You have what the Clermont stock brought in, and you may make something out of this shingle-splitting scheme.”

There was bitterness in Vane’s laugh. “When I left Vancouver for England, I was generally supposed to be well on the way to affluence, and there was some foundation for the idea. I had floated the Clermont in the face of opposition; people believed in me; I could have raised what dollars I required for any new undertaking. Now a good deal of my money and my prestige is gone: folks have very little confidence in a man who has shown himself a failure. Besides, I may be a cripple.”

Carroll could guess his companion’s thoughts. There was a vein of stubborn pride in him, and he had, no doubt, decided it was unfitting that Evelyn’s future should be linked to that of a ruined man. This was an exaggerated view, because Vane was in reality far from ruined, and even if he had been so, he had in him the ability to recover from his misfortunes. Still, the man was obstinate and generally ready to make a sacrifice for an idea. Carroll, however, consoled himself with the reflection that Evelyn would probably have something to say upon the subject if she were given an opportunity, and he thought Mrs. Nairn would contrive that she had one.

“I can’t see any benefit in making things out as considerably worse than they are,” he said.

“Nor can I,” Vane agreed. “After all, I was getting pretty tired of the city, and I suppose I can raise enough to put up a small-power mill. It will be a pleasant change to take charge for a year or two in the bush. I’ll make a start at the thing as soon as I’m able to walk.”

This was significant, because it implied that he did not intend to remain in Vancouver, where he would have been able to enjoy Evelyn’s company; but Carroll made no comment, and by and by Vane spoke again.

“Didn’t you mention last night that it was through Miss Horsfield you got the tug?” he asked. “I was thinking about something else at the time.”

“Yes,” said Carroll. “She made Horsfield put some pressure on the people who had previously hired the boat.”

“Ah!” said Vane, “that’s rather strange.”

For a moment he looked puzzled, but almost immediately his face grew impassive, and Carroll knew that he had some idea of Jessie’s treachery. He was, however, sure that any suspicions his comrade entertained would remain locked up in his breast.

“I’m grateful to her, anyway,” the latter resumed. “I believe I could have held out another day or two, but it wouldn’t have been pleasant.”

Carroll began to talk about the preparations for their return, which he soon afterwards set about making, and early next morning they started for the sloop, carrying Vane upon a stretcher they had brought. Though they had to cut a passage for it every here and there, they reached the vessel safely, and after some trouble in getting him below and on to a locker, Carroll decided to sail straight for Vancouver. They were favoured with moderate fair winds, and though the boat was uncomfortably crowded, she made a quick passage and stole in through the Narrows as dusk was closing down one tranquil evening.

As it happened, Evelyn had spent part of the afternoon on the forest-crested rise above the city, up which new dwellings were then creeping, though they have, no doubt, spread beyond it and back into the bush by now. From there she could look down upon the inlet and she had visited the spot frequently during the last few days, watching eagerly for a sail that did not appear. There had been no news of Carroll since the skipper of the tug reported having landed him, and the girl was tormented by doubts and anxieties. She had just come back and was standing in Mrs. Nairn’s sitting-room, when she heard the tinkle of the telephone bell. A moment or two later her hostess entered hastily.

“It’s a message from Alec,” she cried. “He’s heard from the wharf: Vane’s sloop’s crossing the harbour. I’ll away down to see Carroll brings him here.”

Evelyn turned to follow her, but Mrs. Nairn waved her back. “No,” she said firmly, “ye’ll bide where ye are. See they get plenty lights on—at the stair-head and in the passage—and the room on the left of it ready.”

She was gone in another moment and Evelyn, who carried out her instructions, afterwards waited with what patience she could assume. At last there was a rattle of wheels outside, followed by a voice giving orders, and then a tramp of feet. The sounds brought her a strange inward shrinking, but she ran to the door, and saw two tattered men awkwardly carrying a stretcher up the steps, while Carroll and another assisted them. Then the light fell upon its burden, and half prepared as she was, she started in dismay. Vane, whom she had last seen in vigorous health, lay partly covered with an old blanket which had slipped off him to the waist, and his jacket looked a mass of rags. His hat had fallen aside, and his face showed hollow and worn and pinched. Then he saw her and a light sprang into his eyes, but next moment Carroll’s shoulder hid him, and the men plodded on towards the stairs. They ascended them with difficulty, and the girl waited until Carroll came down.

“I noticed you at the door, and I expect you were a little shocked at the change in Vane,” he said. “What he has undergone has pulled him down, but if you had seen him when I first found him, you’d have been worse startled. He’s getting on quite satisfactorily.”

Evelyn was relieved to hear it; but Carroll, who had paused, continued: “As soon as the doctor comes, we’ll make him more presentable; but as I’m not sure about the last bandages I put on, he can’t be moved till then. Afterwards, he’ll no doubt hold an audience.”

There was nothing to do but wait, and Evelyn again summoned her patience. Before long a doctor arrived, and Carroll followed him to Vane’s room alone. The latter’s face was very impassive, though Carroll waited in tense suspense while the doctor stripped off the bandages and bark supports from the injured leg. He examined it attentively, and then looked round at Carroll.

“You fixed that limb when it was broken in the bush?” he said.

“Yes,” said Carroll, with a desperate attempt to treat the matter humourously. “But I really think we both had a hand in the thing. My partner favoured me with his views; I disclaim some of the responsibility.”

“Then I guess you’ve been remarkably fortunate, which is perhaps the best way of expressing it.”

Vane raised his head and fixed his eyes upon the speaker. “It won’t have to be rebroken? I’ll be able to walk without a limp?”

“I should say the latter’s very probable.”

Vane’s eyes glistened and he let his head fall back.

“It’s good news; better than I expected. Now if you could fix me up again, I’d like to get dressed. I’ve felt like a hobo long enough.”

The doctor nodded indulgently. “We can venture to change that state of affairs, but I’ll superintend the operation.”

It was some time before Vane’s toilet was completed, and then Carroll surveyed him with humorous admiration.

“You do us credit, and now I suppose I can announce that you’ll receive?” he said.

Nairn and his wife and Evelyn came in, and the former, who shook hands with Vane very heartily, afterwards looked down at him with twinkling eyes.

“I’d have been glad to see ye, however ye had come,” he said, and Vane fully believed him. “For a’ that, this is no the way I could have wished to welcome ye.”

“When a man won’t take his friends’ advice, what can he expect?” said Vane.

“Let it be a warning. If the making of your mark and dollars is your object, ye must stick to it and think of nothing else. Ye cannot accumulate riches by spreading yourself, and philanthropy’s no lucrative, except maybe to a few.”

“It’s good counsel, but I’m thinking that’s a pity,” his wife remarked. “What would ye say, Evelyn?”

The girl was aware that the tone of light banter had been adopted to cover deeper feelings, which those present shrank from expressing; but she ventured to give her thoughts free rein.

“I agree with you in one respect,” she said. “But I can’t believe that the object mentioned is Mr. Vane’s only one. He would never be willing to pay the necessary price.”

It was a delicate compliment, uttered in all sincerity, and Vane’s worn face grew warm. He was, however, conscious that it would be safer to avoid being serious, and he smiled.

“Well,” he said, “looking for timber rights is apt to prove expensive, too. I had a haunting fear I might be lame, until the doctor banished it. I’d better own that I’d no great confidence in Carroll’s surgery.”

Carroll, keeping strictly to the line the others had chosen, made him an ironical bow, but Evelyn was not to be deterred.

“It was foolish of you to be troubled,” she declared. “It isn’t a fault to be wounded in an honourable fight, and even if the mark remains there is no reason why one should be ashamed of it.”

Mrs. Nairn glanced at the girl rather sharply, but Carroll came to his comrade’s assistance.

“Strictly speaking, there wasn’t a wound,” he pointed out. “Fortunately it was what is known as a simple fracture. If it had been anything else, I’m inclined to think I couldn’t have treated it.”

Nairn chuckled, as if this met with his approval, but his wife turned round and they heard a patter of footsteps on the stairs.

“Yon bell has kept on ringing since we came up,” she said. “I left word I was no to be disturbed. Weel”—as the door opened—“what is it, Minnie?”

“The reception-room’s plumb full,” announced the maid, who was lately from the bush. “If any more folks come along, I won’t know where to put them.”

Now the door was open, Evelyn could hear a murmur of voices on the floor below, and next moment the bell rang violently again, which struck her as a testimonial to the injured man. Vane had not spent a long time in Vancouver, but he had the gift of making friends. Having heard of the sloop’s arrival, they had come to inquire for him, and there was obviously a number of them.

Mrs. Nairn glanced interrogatively at Carroll. “It does not look as if they could be got rid of by a message.”

“I guess he’s fit to see them,” Carroll answered. “We’ll hold the levée. If he’d only let me, I’d like to pose him a bit.”

Mrs. Nairn, with Evelyn’s assistance, did so instead, rearranging the cushions about the man, in spite of his confused and half-indignant protests; and during the next half hour the room was generally full. People walked in, made sympathetic inquiries, or exchanged cheerful banter, until Mrs. Nairn forcibly dismissed the last of them. After this she declared that Vane must go to sleep, and paying no heed to his assertion that he had not the least wish to do so, she led her remaining companions away.

A couple of hours had passed when she handed Evelyn a large tumbler containing a preparation of whipped-up eggs and milk.

“Ye might take him this and ask if he would like anything else,” she said. “I’m weary of the stairs and I would not trust Minnie. She’s handiest at spilling things.”

“It’s the third and I’d better say firmly, the limit,” Carroll remarked. Then he assumed an aggrieved expression as Evelyn moved off with a tray. “I can’t see why I couldn’t have gone. I believe I’ve discharged my duties as nurse satisfactorily.”

Evelyn shared his suspicions. Her hostess’s artifice was a transparent one, but she nevertheless fell in with it. She had only seen Vane in the company of others; this might be the same again to-morrow, and there was something to be said. By intuition as much as reason, she knew that there was something working in his mind, something that troubled him and might trouble her. It excited her apprehension and animated her with a desire to combat it. That she might be compelled to follow an unconventional course did not matter. This man was hers—and she could not let him go.

She entered his room collectedly. He was lying, neatly dressed, upon a couch, with his shoulders raised against the end of it, for he had thrown the cushions which had supported him upon the floor. As she came in, he leaned down in an attempt to recover them, and finding himself too late, looked up guiltily. The fact that he could move with so much freedom was a comfort to the girl. She set down the tray on a table near him.

“Mrs. Nairn has sent you this,” she said, and the laugh they both indulged in drew them together.

Then her mood changed, and her heart yearned over him. He had gone away a strong, self-confident, prosperous man, and he had come back defeated; broken in health and fortune and terribly worn. Her pity shone in her softening eyes.

“Do you wish to sleep?” she asked.

“No,” Vane assured her; “I’d a good deal sooner talk to you.”

“Well,” said Evelyn, “I have something to say. I’m afraid I was rather unpleasant to you the evening before you sailed. I was sorry for it afterwards; it was flagrant injustice.”

“Then I wonder why you didn’t answer the letter I wrote at Nanaimo.”

“For a very good reason; I never got it.”

Vane considered this for a few moments. “After all,” he said, “it doesn’t matter now. I’m acquitted?”

“Absolutely.”

“Do you know,” he said, “I’ve still no idea of my offence?”

Evelyn was exceedingly glad to hear it, but a warmth crept into her face, and as the blood showed through the delicate skin he fixed his eyes intently upon her.

“It was all a mistake; I’m sorry still,” she declared penitently.

“Oh,” he said in a different tone; “I wouldn’t trouble about it. The satisfaction of being acquitted outweighs everything else. Besides, I’ve made a number of rather serious mistakes myself. The search for that spruce, for instance, is supposed to be one.”

“No,” said Evelyn decidedly; “whoever thinks that is wrong. It is a very fine thing you have done. It doesn’t matter in the least that you were unsuccessful.”

“You believe that?”

“Of course. How could I believe anything else?”

The man’s face changed again, and once more she read the signs. Whatever doubts and half-formed resolutions—and she had some idea of them—had been working in his mind were dissipating.

“Well,” he said, “I’ve sacrificed the best of my possessions and destroyed the confidence of folks who, to serve their ends, would have helped me on. Isn’t that a serious thing?”

“No; it’s really a most unimportant one; I”—and the slight pause gave the assertion force—“I really mean it.”

Vane partly raised himself with one arm and there was no doubting the significance of his intent gaze.

“I believe I made another blunder—in England. I should have had more courage and have faced the risk. But you might have turned against me then.”

“I don’t think that’s likely,” said Evelyn, lowering her eyes.

The man leaned forward towards her, but the hand he stretched out fell short, and the trivial fact once more roused her compassion for his helplessness.

“You can only mean one thing,” he said. “You wouldn’t be afraid to face the future with me now?”

“I wouldn’t be afraid at all,” said Evelyn quietly.

By and by Mrs. Nairn tapped at the door and smiled rather broadly when she came in; then she shook her head in reproach.

“Ye should have been asleep a while since,” she said to Vane, and turned to Evelyn. “Is this the way ye intend to look after him?”

She waved the girl towards the door and when she joined her in the passage kissed her effusively.

“Ye’ve got the man I would have chosen for ye,” she said.

THE END.

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