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LARRY of LONESOME LAKE

By HAROLD BINDLOSS

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LARRY OF LONESOME LAKE

CHAPTER I

SLEEPING BEAUTY

A warm wind from the Pacific touched the pines and the noise in their high tops was like the murmur of the sea. Branches swung and yellow light and trembling shadow splashed the big straight trunks. Then for a minute or two all was quiet, and Bethune heard a woodpecker tap on rotten bark. A stick cracked under his horse's feet, red and green feathers gleamed, and the bird was gone, but in the background a blue grouse began to drum.

In summer the Canadian Pacific slope is beautiful, and the time was Sunday afternoon, but Lawrence Bethune, steering his horse down the mountain trail, tried to calculate the sum he could prudently draw from the bank at Vancouver and the quantity of hay he ought to put up. The young steers he had examined at the ranch where he had stopped for the night were useful animals, and while summer lasted would find their food in the woods. In four or five days he could drive them across the pass to his ranch by Lonesome Lake; but he must not be rash, and the oats on the ground he had recently cleared were not growing strong. In British Columbia, there was the trouble: when one had chopped and burned the great pines, the crop for the first two or three years was thin. He ought perhaps to have sown more timothy and orchard grass.

Shining water crossed the trail, and when his horse's feet splashed in the creek he let go the bridle and allowed the animal to drink while he rolled a cigarette. At Bourlon ranch one used economy, and American cigarettes carried a duty stamp. In England Lawrence had not bothered about things like that; but when all one had was invested in virgin forest from which one hoped to chop a ranch, one mustn't be extravagant. Well, in four years he had cleared some ground, and before he was forced to let his hired men go they had ditched the swampy belt and the soil was drying out. To cut the trench through the hemlock roots was something of a job, but Lawrence knew himself a harder and stronger man than the young fellow who had shivered, and sometimes sweated, in the mud in France.

In Canada one must get hard, for the soft and slack went broke. All the same, the Pacific slope was a good country, and he looked about. Where the branches were thin, he saw the Cascade Range's snow cut the serene sky; on the other side, behind the woods, the sea sparkled like a looking-glass. The trees hid the ugly settlement by the inlet under the hill.

The creek, splashing musically, splashed across smooth, quartz-veined stones. Lawrence's glance followed the gliding water, and stopped. On the stony soil, the brushwood was thin, and little red wineberries shone among the glossy leaves. At the bottom of a big cedar, cradled by the spreading roots, a girl was asleep.

Lawrence put up his tobacco pouch. To study her was something of an impertinence, but at Qualichan white women were not numerous, and her type was not the mountain type. Anyhow, she certainly was asleep, and he thought fatigue had something to do with it.

Her body was thin and her face rather pinched, but, in her quiet sleep, attractive. She obviously used powder, and Lawrence doubted if the touch of strong color in her cheek were altogether natural. Her clothes, so far as he could judge, were cheaply fashionable; in fact, he imagined only her thin city shoes were good. In London or Paris she would not have excited his curiosity; under the Canadian pines, she was frankly puzzling. On the whole, she moved him to vague compassion, but he ought not to stop, and he touched his horse.

The horse splashed rather noisily through the creek, and the girl looked up. She saw a brown-skinned man on a cayuse horse. His clothes were yellow overalls, his long boots were shabby, and his large felt hat had some time since lost its shape in the rain. Yet when he met her swift glance his was rather apologetic than embarrassed. He was not remarkably young—thirty perhaps—and for all his shabby clothes, she thought she knew his type.

"If I disturbed you, I am sorry," he said, and lifted his hand to his hat.

She signed him to stop. Lawrence noted that she got up gracefully.

"I am rather glad you did disturb me. Do you know what time it is?"

"Half-past four," said Lawrence, looking at the sun.

"Thank you," said the girl with a sort of resigned shrug. "On Sundays supper is at six, and the settlement is two miles off."

"About two miles. The trail is downhill, and you have an hour and a half—"

"The trouble is, I must help cook supper at the *Tecumseh House*. I am the head, and only, waitress."

Lawrence was surprised. He had not thought her the sort of waitress Mrs. Monroe of the *Tecumseh* would engage. It had nothing to do with him, but now she was on her feet he thought her tired and slack. In fact, he wondered whether she was not ill.

"If you can ride, you might take my horse."

"You are kind," she said. "I could ride when I was six or seven years old, and I did not always use a saddle."

Lawrence shortened a stirrup. If she could ride a barebacked horse, she could use his saddle, but her skirt was short.

"The old cayuse will go quietly. You might leave him at the livery yard," he said, and held his hand for her foot.

Her shoe rested in his palm for a moment, and then she was in the saddle. He remarked that she was light and agile. Balancing sideways, she touched the horse.

"You are a good sort," she said, and vanished in the shade.

Lawrence sat down in the wineberries and lighted his cigarette. Although the mountain trail was steep, he did not think the girl would come down. He had noted her balance and confidence; anyhow, since her clothes were not at all riding clothes, he had imagined she would sooner he did not lead the horse. In fact, when he was out of sight, she might ride astride.

At the little coast settlement she was exotic, and he wondered how she got there. Then, Mrs. Monroe was a remarkably sober and rather grim Ontario Presbyterian, while the girl's proper background was perhaps a third-class cabaret. Yet he did not know. One sensed a touch of refinement.

Lawrence wondered why she interested him. He did not think her beautiful, although she was somehow attractive, and for long he had had nothing to do with women. He was not by temperament a recluse and misogynist, and when he talked about ranching in Canada his English friends were ironically amused. Lawrence allowed them to joke. His habit was not to argue about his plans; when he himself was satisfied he coolly went ahead. Well, he had for four years lived laboriously and frugally in the woods, and he did not regret the plunge the others had thought rash. He was, in fact, content, and if he held on for another ten years, he might begin to be prosperous.

In the meantime, he could not support the sort of wife he would care to marry, and he must leave women alone. Lawrence hoped he was logical, and so far he enjoyed his bachelor's freedom. Yet sometimes, particularly when he came home from work on a summer evening and all he heard was the cowbells in the creeping gloom, the log-house was lonely, and he pictured another in the quiet room.

Branches tossed, the pine-tops murmured, and Lawrence got up. He had thought to wait for morning, but the wind freshened and would carry the sloop down the strait. He ought to be round Stokonish Point, twenty miles off, by dark, and instead of bothering to cook on board, he might get supper at the hotel.

The dining-room at the *Tecumseh* was bleak. The sun and the stove had cracked the match-boards; the chairs were hard American bent-wood, and the table was covered with thin, shining oilcloth. Lumbermen, ranchers, storekeepers, and two or three mechanics pushed into the room as the bell stopped ringing. For the most part, they were a sober, rather laconic, and industrious lot, but in the store clothes they had put on for Sunday some were awkward and uncouth.

When Lawrence sat down, the girl he had met carried a tray across the floor. Although her load was heavy, he noted her supple carriage. She moved gracefully, and he imagined she could dance. To picture her stopping at the dreary spot was hard.

"Halibut; steak, if you like," she said, in a cultivated voice. "Dessert is desiccated apples and raspberry pie."

Lawrence asked for halibut, and with the fish she put down a large saucer of fried potatoes. Then for a moment she bent her head.

"Thank you for the horse. He is at the livery yard, and I was back in time."

She went off, and a young fellow across the table looked up with a grin.

"Some waitress for a back-blocks hotel! Has she given you a date?"

"Not at all," said Lawrence. "In an hour I'm off, and I expect an ambitious young woman would not have much use for a bush rancher. At the small coast settlements the storekeepers are the aristocrats. Anyhow, you take all the money we have got."

"That's the talk!" a big chopper remarked. "Steve puts on a white shirt Sundays and a gold tie-ring. Sold me a soft ax last week, and the crosscut I got a month since wants filing all the time. He's surely getting rich."

"If you paid your bills, I'd get rich sooner," Steve rejoined. "Anyhow, for a vaudeville kid, Ruby's a bully waitress, and the boys hope she'll stay."

Lawrence began to see a light, but why a vaudeville dancer should want to stop at the settlement was another thing, and since the girl had gone for fresh supplies he inquired.

"The Lacoste touring company was here for a week," a storekeeper replied. "When I saw Perry Lacoste at Victoria, two years since, the show was pretty good, but I guess he struck bad luck and couldn't hire a proper gang. This girl, Ruby, was near the best of the bunch. At all events, the show didn't draw, and when he pulled out for Vancouver, I reckon he was broke."

"He didn't go to Vancouver," somebody remarked. "Bill and I were at Cheemanco with the halibut sloop, and Perry was playing to quite a good house. One of the boys told us the gang was going up the strait on the *Maud*. If she keeps her time-bill, she sails in the morning."

Only a bushman could reach the cities across the mountains, and the settlement was off the Alaska steamers' route, but the *Maud*, an old wooden propeller, cruised about the inlets and islands. At some she touched but once in three or four weeks, and Lawrence imagined Ruby had somehow got left behind. Turning his head, he saw she had returned with the dessert and looked up sharply, as if the talk about the *Maud* interested her. Then she began to unload her tray and Lawrence drained his coffee mug.

By and by he went to the veranda. Somebody had given him a comparatively recent *Colonist*, and he had not had a newspaper for two or three weeks. Besides, the tide was running strongly south, and since he must steer the other way, he would not lose much by waiting until the stream got slack. After a time he pulled out his watch and started for the wharf.

Behind the rocks the wind was light, and the shadows of the big pines trembled in the sliding water. The tide yet flowed up the river-mouth and he need not hurry to get on board. He had thought nobody was about, but when he passed a lumber stack he saw the waitress sat where a sunbeam touched the boards. She looked straight in front and her brows were knit. Her pose was slack and Lawrence thought she brooded. He was not romantic and for four years he had concentrated on his ranch, but somehow the girl moved him to pity. Then she heard his step and looked up.

"I am going on board," he said, in an apologetic voice, and indicated a mast that topped the edge of the wharf. "The evening is fine, and after the hot dining-room I dare say you like the fresh breeze from the strait."

She smiled. Her smile was not coquettish, and Lawrence imagined she saw he implied that he had not purposely followed her to the wharf.

"To work for an old-fashioned Presbyterian has some advantages. On Sundays, at all events, one gets a few hours' rest, which accounts for your finding me asleep in the woods. But if you are a rancher, I expect you are industrious."

"Oh, well," said Lawrence, "I like my job. Yours, perhaps, is not inviting, and Mother Monroe's love for cleanliness might have some drawbacks."

"She never stops," the girl agreed. "Still, for all her hardness, she is kind, and when I was stranded she took me in. Since stranded implies being left on the beach like wreckage, it's quite the proper word. Then I expect she conquered some prejudices. My recent pals were not the sort of young women a good Presbyterian approves."

Lawrence understood he was allowed to stop, and he sat down on a mooring post. The girl interested him; her voice was cultivated, and she talked with the ironical frankness young women he had known in London used. For a few moments she was quiet; and then with a sweeping gesture she indicated the landscape.

"What a country! If one was fit and strong, and could but get a decent post—"

High up behind the climbing forest the Coast Range's snow shone in the evening light. In front the sea sparkled, but the jade-green inlet was in the shadow and darkly reflected gray rocks and giant pines. The breeze was warm and carried sweet, resinous scents.

"The country's all right, but one must be strong and hopeful," Lawrence remarked. "Looks as if you didn't like your job."

"I cannot *stick* it, although I've honestly tried, and not long since I thought my pluck and muscle as good as another's. When respectable industry is something fresh, to begin at six o'clock in the morning and stop when you have cleaned the supper plates gets exhausting. Then, of course, there's the strain on your temper, and so forth. Sometimes, you see, the boys are amorous. However, I mustn't bore you. If I could get across to Cheemanco, I'd rejoin the troupe. Perry owes me sixty dollars. But I must get across before he leaves on board the *Maud*."

Lawrence smiled. He did not know if her remark, so to speak, was spontaneous, or if she meant to indicate his part.

"It might be possible," he said. "I am going down the strait and Cheemanco is not much off my course. The wind is a beam wind, and if it holds, we ought to make the inlet in six or seven hours. Day breaks about three o'clock, but the *Maud* will not start until some time after work at the wharf begins. Yes, I believe I could engage to land you before she goes."

"You're a sport," the girl replied, and gave him a searching glance. Then she shrugged. "I don't see another plan, and something must be risked. If you can wait for ten minutes, I'll go for my clothes."

"You will need some help."

"Not at all. My trunk went on board with the company's luggage, and by this time I expect Pearl and Coralie have shared the loot."

She went off, and Lawrence frowned. For a sober, industrious rancher he perhaps was rash, but the girl was broke, and he ought to land her at Cheemanco in six or seven hours.

CHAPTER II

THE TIDE TURNS

The twenty-four foot, half-decked sloop *Pathfinder*, rocking gently, rubbed against the wharf piles. Her mainsail and high club-topsail were hoisted, and Lawrence, looking up from the deck, saw his passenger and three of the hotel boarders on the guard beam above his head. One threw him a thin, waterproof hold-all, which Lawrence caught. Another threw a line.

"If you make fast we'll walk you along; but I don't just see how Ruby's going to get down," said the man.

"Then, if you can't help you might step back," the girl rejoined.

Leaning out, she seized the boat's wire shroud, and swung across until her shoe touched a sail hoop on the mast. She reached the next, lower, hoop, and then stopped. Since the shroud spread to the boat's side, to stretch across was awkward.

"Let go the wire. Swing and seize the mast," Lawrence ordered.

Her arm went out, but her hand was small, and the mast was greased. Lawrence jumped, and when her shoe slipped from the hoop she fell into his arms. Four years' labor had hardened him, and by contrast with loads he sometimes moved, her slender body was light. His impulse was to carry her to the seat in the well and for a moment she was passive. Then he knew himself ridiculous, and she slipped from his arms.

"There's your rope. Stand by and we'll start you!" shouted the man on the beam.

Feet beat the boards and the sloop forged ahead. Three hefty fellows, running along the wharf, strained the line, and when they reached the end Lawrence broke out the hoisted jib.

"So long and good luck, Ruby! Come back soon," one shouted.

"The boys were kind," she said. "Why are ranchers and choppers, on the whole, a better lot than city men?"

"I don't know," said Lawrence, hauling the line on board. "I hope you're accurate; but just now my business is to steer."

Under the high rocks flickering puffs of wind trailed dark ruffled smears across the smooth green tide. The boat was close-hauled, and sometimes her tall sails slanted and water gurgled at her bows; then she swayed languidly upright and almost stopped. Sometimes, when the stony beach was but three or four yards off, she turned on her centerboard and the long boom lurched across, just above Ruby's head. By and by, however, Lawrence pulled up the board, and rocks and pines rolled back. Sheet-blocks rattled, and, trailing a white wake, *Pathfinder* swept out across the strait. Spray tossed about her weather bow and little sparkling seas splashed her lifted side. The tide ran to windward, Cheemanco was under the lee bow, and Lawrence let her go. He sat on deck, a tiller line round his wrist, and rather awkwardly loaded his pipe.

"*Kloosh chuck!* Water's fairly smooth, but you perhaps know Chinook?" he remarked. "I myself don't know as much as I pretend when I swap the news with a Siwash Indian. I hope you're a sailor."

"If it's some comfort to you, I shall not be sick. The Lacoste Varieties move about by land and sea and lake, and I suppose I have used all the means of locomotion known in North America, except, of course, really first-class steamers and Pullman cars. Perry's gang, as a rule, went *colonist*. But you will perhaps allow me to present Ruby Desmond, *première danseuse*, sentimental soloist, and sometimes, when the orchestra was drunk, rag-time kid."

Smiling at Lawrence, she rested her back against the coaming ledge. She was lightly built, and now she was at rest one sensed a sort of physical slackness and something like fragility. The girl, at all events, was tired, and Lawrence was sorry for her. On the whole, he liked her rather cynical frankness; when one toured with a variety show, a touch of hardness was, no doubt, useful. Anyhow, nothing indicated coquetry, and that was something.

"How did you get left behind?" he asked.

"I have wondered—I rather think Pearl had something to do with it. Perry owed us all several weeks' pay, but I believe he'd sooner be honest, so long as it did not cost him very much. One meets men like that; they mean well, but, as a rule, do not make good. Pearl is another sort. It looks as if she had plans for Perry, and she perhaps thought I had. In same circumstances, women are not remarkably scrupulous, Mr. Bethune."

"Then, you know who I am?"

"Since I'm not altogether a fool, I inquired. The boys reckoned you were white; but my object is not to flatter you, and I'll resume my tale. On the Saturday the steamer was at the wharf, we played to three houses; in fact, so long as we took a few dollars we carried on. At twelve o'clock I went to bed; Perry and Bob began to load up our stuff and Pearl said she would help. They were going to sleep on board. You see, the steamer was billed to start at six o'clock, but the captain had agreed to wait for some cattle a rancher would drive across the mountain as soon as it was light. The cattle did not arrive, and when I woke at eight o'clock the boat was gone. Bob had put my trunk on board, all the money I had was two dollars, and my clothes, so to speak, were stage properties. For all she's a hard-shell Puritan, Mrs. Monroe gave me a job."

Lawrence nodded. He liked the girl's pluck; he rather liked her dispassionate coolness. Then she had taken the job.

"Yes, it was awkward. But, if I might inquire, why'd you join a third-class strolling company?"

"The answer, dear man, is obvious: a first-class show would have no use for me. I mustn't pretend to be modest, and at one time I was ambitious, but I know where I must be frank. However, since you keep a yacht, it looks as if your ranching paid."

"The boat is George Loudon's," Lawrence replied with a smile. "At Qualichan he's *hiyu Tyee*—Indian agent, Government surveyor, and so forth; in fact, the big boss. If you thought me impertinent, I am sorry."

Ruby turned her head and gave him a cool, scrutinizing glance. She approved his crooked smile, and although he was not at all handsome, he was strongly built and athletic, and carried a stamp she knew. Moreover, she got a hint of steadfastness and sincerity.

"I imagine you are rather a good sort," she said. "It accounts for my resolve to give you a chance to invite me to cross the strait with you. You see, if we reach Cheemanco before the *Maud* sails, I can go on with the only occupation in Canada for which I'm fit, and if Perry's luck turns he might pay up."

For a few moments she looked about. The sun had gone and in the northwest an island cut the green and orange glow; ragged pines ridged its top in hard, black silhouette. In the east, the Cascades' snowy tops yet shone rose-pink, but the forests below the timber line melted to dusky blue. The sea was dim green, flecked by rippling white lines, and although the wind got lighter, the sloop forged ahead with a rhythmic plunge and swing. Her tall sails slanted, spray tossed about her bows, and little, splashing waves broke along her weather side. Their urgent leap and white tops indicated that the tide yet went up the strait.

"In a way," she resumed, "you are entitled to know something about your passenger, and if I were quiet you might feel you ought to talk, although you would sooner steer the boat. Very well. Professionally, I'm Ruby Desmond, but my proper name is Alice Thorne, and at school in England I sometimes played the leading part in Bowdlerized acts from Shakespeare, and the sort of tableaux one supposes to be Greek. It explains my raw ambition to be a tragedy queen, and my efforts to cultivate my voice. When I met Perry Lacoste at Toronto I had once or twice earned a guinea for singing, and since he offered me a part I took the plunge—"

Lawrence noted the interlude. Since she was at the English school he reckoned six or seven years had gone; but to inquire was not his business, and she continued:

"Perry had begun to go downhill, but he was yet something of a favorite in Ontario and Quebec. I believe he cannot read music, but I've known him carry away a *habitant* audience by an old *coureurs'* song. Then he knows Louisiana French, and some Creole songs have a queer, haunting charm. In fact, I've felt that Perry somehow had missed his mark. He might have been a musician; he was a rather indulgent sentimentalist—"

She went on and Lawrence thought the portrait she drew lifelike. Anyhow, the picture he got was distinct. Perry was the sort of plausible, handsome fellow women liked; he thought Ruby had liked him and tried to be just. Lacoste, however,

was getting fat and his voice began to go. When he was not sober, he talked much about his wife; Ruby imagined Angelique had ruled him firmly, and on the whole wisely, but she was dead, and Pearl was willing to console the widower. Ruby rather obviously did not like Pearl.

For a time they drew pretty good houses at small Ontario towns, but at Winnipeg their luck turned, and as they pushed on west got steadily worse. Florrie, who really could dance, married a wheat farmer; Bill, the conjurer, joined a tinhorn at a Calgary gambling joint, and, Ruby understood, was afterwards put out of town by the Royal North-West Police. She thought Perry might yet have pulled things straight, but for Pearl and liquor. Anyhow, when the company crossed the Rockies they were nearly broke.

Ruby narrated their adventures on the Pacific Slope. Lawrence saw she did not try to work on his sympathy; her tale was humorous, but he pictured the forlorn troupe going fast downhill. Ruby admitted she herself got slack and tired; and when they reached the settlement on the northwest coast, Pearl, who hated her, dominated Lacoste. The steamer sailed before the proper time, and Pearl had fixed it so that Ruby did not know.

She stopped, and shivered. Lawrence looked about. The sky was luminous green; the sea was dark. The wind got lighter, but the high topsail and running jib pulled nobly. He heard the water splash the planks and felt the dew on his skin.

"The night is going to be fine and we will carry all sail," he said. "I can give you a slicker coat, but if you crawl into the cabin you will find a candle lamp on the bulkhead. When you get a light, pull down the folding cot and fix the lanyard on the hooks. The blankets in the locker are, I think, pretty dry. While the large jib is up, the boat will not heave to, and if I leave the tiller, the sails will thrash about."

Ruby saw he thought she might not want him for a chamber maid, and when he gave her some matches she pushed back the sliding hatch. *Pathfinder's* cabin was not quite four feet high and the centerboard trunk occupied most of the floor. All the same, Ruby was not fastidious, and when she got into the folding cot she admitted she had occupied worse beds.

In a few minutes the reflection from the skylights vanished, and Lawrence pulled out his pipe. The sloop yet slipped along at four miles an hour, and Cheemanco was not very far off. In the morning he would land his passenger, but she was less of an embarrassment than he had thought, and he began to feel the sloop would be lonely when she was gone. Lawrence frowned. He mustn't be ridiculous, and he tried to think about the cattle he might perhaps have bought. By and by the jib flapped, and he hauled the sheet. It looked as if the wind veered west; it certainly was lighter, and his course to Cheemanco was about west by north.

At daybreak mist floated about the water and the dew-drenched sails hung slack. Lawrence pulled off his oilskin coat, and, hearing his passenger move, put a canvas bucket by the cabin hatch.

"Since we need breakfast, we must be frugal with the fresh water," he said. "However, Mrs. Loudon was on board not long since, and I dare say you will find a clean towel in the lockers."

The bucket vanished, and some time afterwards Ruby crawled from the hatch. Lawrence thought her skin was rather white and her face was pinched, but *Pathfinder's* low, dark cabin had not been planned for a lady's dressing-room. Moreover, woolly blue threads from the Hudson's Bay blanket stuck to her clothes. Lawrence wondered whether he ought to state that a looking-glass was in the port locker, but an up-to-date young woman presumably carried something of the sort.

"I am going under the counter for a sail and some rope," he said. "I expect to be four or five minutes. As a rule, the stuff you want is at the bottom of the dump."

Pulling a board from the stern transom, he crawled into a dark hole, and when all but his boots had vanished Ruby smiled. The rancher used some tact. At three o'clock in the morning one did not look one's best, particularly when one had slept in one's clothes. Well, she had five minutes, and she hurriedly unfastened her waterproof hold-all. In the meantime, Lawrence noisily pulled things about, and once she thought he swore. He probably had not planned to knock his head against a deck beam.

"If you have found the sail, you might perhaps come out. I don't know where the yacht is going," she at length remarked.

Lawrence crawled out backwards, and when he got on his feet it looked as if he had driven his hand into a grease pot. On the stage, the business one did not rehearse was sometimes the funniest.

"Do you know where we are?" Ruby asked.

"We are about nine miles from Cheemanco, and the sloop is going down the strait. The tide has turned and now runs north."

Ruby looked about. Behind the mist she saw blurred, dark hills. Using the boat's mast for a mark, she noted that the hills rolled slowly back, and although all was very quiet, faint wrinkling lines indicated that the water moved. For a moment or two she tried to calculate; and then she fronted Lawrence.

"You mean we might be carried past the port?"

"Yes; I'm sorry. I really thought the wind would hold until we were across."

Ruby tried for calm. She had not reckoned on the wind's dropping, and she believed he had not. His look was disturbed; in fact, she thought him annoyed. Well, that was comforting, but she had got a nasty knock.

"Cannot we row?" she asked in an anxious voice.

"I might scull, but I doubt if I could drive the boat a mile in an hour. She carries two or three tons of iron ballast. Her cable is not long enough for us to anchor."

Ruby sat down. She felt very slack, but she had fronted a crisis before.

"At seven or eight o'clock the steamer will start. Pearl, I expect, has got my clothes, and Perry has all the money I have earned for about two months. They will not stop at Vancouver, and I cannot chase them from town to town. Besides, there will not be another boat for a long time. Can you not do *something*?"

"I'm afraid all we can do is to get breakfast and hope a breeze will spring up," Lawrence replied. "The sky is dark and rain might start the wind. I ought not, of course, to have asked you on board—"

Ruby stopped him.

"You are not accountable. I meant you to ask me; sometimes one must run a risk, and I did not see another plan. I don't know if you are interested, but I was desperate. You see, for some time I felt I was getting tired and slack; to wander about with a dead-broke variety company is a tiring job. Mrs. Monroe is not an easy mistress, and I knew I could not keep my post at the *Tecumseh*. To rejoin Perry was my last chance. After all, his luck might turn and I'd get my pay."

"It's awkward," Lawrence agreed. "To some extent I entangled you, and as far as it is possible, I hope you will allow me to see you out."

Ruby gave him a level glance and a touch of color stained her skin.

"I mustn't claim to be fastidious, but I have not yet exploited strange young men. However, there is no use in talking, and if you are going to cook breakfast, I dare say I can help."



CHAPTER III

RUBY GOES OVERBOARD

At seven o'clock the mist rolled back, and in the east snow peaks cut the sky; silver haze yet crawled along their slopes where dark forests climbed. In front, six or seven miles off, a high, rocky island rose from the smooth sea. Although the west was dim, a gray smear indicated land. Lawrence, calculating the sloop's drift, reckoned he could make Cheemanco in two hours, if the wind were fair and strong, but the faint ripples that now and then crept across the glimmering water did not reach the boat.

Ruby occupied the cockpit bench. Food and strong coffee had braced her, and the fresh morning had brought a touch of color to her skin, but her look was drearily resigned.

"Those streaks are wind?" she said. "If we started now, d'you think we could land before the steamer goes?"

"It's just possible," Lawrence replied. "As a rule, however, a light wind blows from the south, and the tide is carrying us north."

Ruby shrugged. "For some time my luck has not been good. I'd hoped it might turn, but, so far, you are not much of a mascot. Still, of course, the plan for you to take me across was mine, and if you are invited to help a young woman another time, I expect you'll refuse."

"Looks as if I was rash," Lawrence agreed. "For your sake, I'm sorry I did not use some caution; but I think that's all. Anyhow, I haven't begun to grumble."

"You haven't yet landed me," Ruby rejoined. "In the meantime, you need not bother to be polite, and if to swear is some relief, I shall not be much jarred. A girl *is* a blasted nuisance on board a boat."

Lawrence smiled and said nothing. On the whole, he liked her frankness, and since he knew her anxious, it implied some pluck. The dark streaks on the water lengthened, two joined, and advancing fast, reached the sloop. Lawrence felt a cool touch on his skin, the slack sails swelled, sheet-blocks rattled, and the boat began to move. In five minutes she was going fast; her tall mast slanted and the ripples splashed against her planks. In ten minutes angry foam ran level with the two-inch rail on the inclined deck's lee side. Lawrence jumped for the cabin door and fastened the sliding hatch.

"Get into the slicker coat. I ought to shorten sail," he said when he was back at the tiller.

"Let her go," said Ruby. "If you cannot catch the *Maud*, I don't mind if we capsize."

For some time Lawrence risked it. The sea had not got up, and although spray was flying and the water crept farther across the deck, none yet splashed over the coaming ledge. Then a leaping wave curled across the cabin top, the mast slanted sharply, and the wire shrouds rang.

"Stop in the cockpit," he ordered. "Watch out for the boom, and don't stand up!"

Carrying a small sail along the inclined deck, he reached the mast, and for a few moments Ruby was daunted. The sloop, rounding to the wind, lurched upright, and the long boom jerked savagely across the cockpit. She saw Lawrence let go some ropes and the half-lowered jib swell like a balloon. Then it collapsed with a noise like a rifle shot and its thrashing folds swept the narrow deck behind the mast. Lawrence was under the sail, and she thought it must knock him overboard.

After a few harrowing moments, Ruby saw the sail was down. Lawrence, flat on the deck by the bowsprit, his legs round two short posts, pulled ropes, and another sail, tied in folds, slid out along the pole. In the meantime, the boat rolled and plunged; the big mainsail shook and banged, and ropes and blocks thrashed furiously about. The sail went up; Lawrence, moving surprisingly fast, was for a moment back at the tiller, and then again by the mast. Ruby was not a sailor, but she knew him competent, swift, and resolute. She admitted she approved men like that.

The high topsail tilted, its yard across the mast, and she saw Lawrence struggled with three different ropes. Since he had but two hands, she went to help. When she joined him he gave her a rope.

"I ordered you to stop. But that's the tack, and if you hold on, you won't go overboard. Pull when I shout. I believe the blasted sheet is round the gaff end."

He jerked the ropes and shouted. The long yard plunged down and stopped, and they dragged the sail on deck.

"Thanks!" gasped Lawrence, and when the boom lurched put his arm round Ruby's waist and dropped her into the cockpit.

Ruby smiled. Lawrence stripped the topsail from the yard and frowned. Since the boat lurched, he was justified to seize the girl and a variety actress was not easily embarrassed; but he had not reckoned on his not wanting to let her go. She was soft and round; she had allowed him to swing her across the skylight, because she trusted him to see her safe. Well, that was all he had thought to do, and his business was to tie a reef in the mainsail. The boat, with the storm jib pulled to windward, was steadier and he got to work. In five minutes the reef was tied, and he jumped for the tiller.

"The sea is getting up, but by and by the coast will shelter us—"

He stopped, for Ruby touched him, and turning his head, he saw a dark smear on the horizon.

"Smoke? A steamer's smoke?" she said.

"The *Maud's* smoke! We are nearer than I thought, and had the breeze come sooner—By George, I'm sorry!"

Ruby began to laugh, a queer, jarring laugh.

"Yes, it's *awkward*," she said, and Lawrence wondered whether she consciously parodied his remark. "Perry has got my money and I expect Pearl has got my clothes. Before I could get to Vancouver, they will be gone. My theatrical career has pretty obviously come to a full stop. If I had a little less pluck, or a little more—I really don't know which—I'd jump overboard."

So far as Lawrence could see, there was nothing to be said, and he concentrated on his steering. The short seas got angrier and broke in leaping foam across the sloop's weather bow. She plunged and the water on deck began to wash across the cockpit ledge.

"The wind veers west and the tide goes north," Lawrence said by and by. "The boat is going through the water, but she's not working to windward much and the seas come on board. I doubt if we can make Cheemanco, and I think we ought to run for shelter behind the island."

"Since the *Maud* is gone, it's not at all important," said Ruby drearily.

Lawrence pulled the small wet jib to windward, and gave her the tiller.

"Hold it downhill. For a minute or two I'll be busy."

The boat came up into the wind and foam swept her deck. Lawrence lifted the centerboard, and going to the mast, hoisted the boom's outer end and let the gaff swing down. Then he took the tiller from Ruby and put the boat before the wind. The half-lowered mainsail, squared across her, gently swayed and dipped, and she lurched along with a smooth and easy swing. But for the seas that tossed behind her, it looked as if the wind had dropped.

"We'll bring up for three or four hours," Lawrence remarked. "I dare say you will be glad to land, and when the tide turns or the breeze blows out I'll try to meet your plans."

"In the meantime, I do not see a plan. All I know, is Ruby Desmond is done with. When you turned the yacht she went overboard, and on the whole, I think the bottom of the strait is where she ought to be. From now I'm, properly, Alice Thorne. So long as I am your passenger, Alice for short."

"Oh, well," said Lawrence, smiling, "if you were on board for a little time, I believe you'd be a competent first mate."

"I wonder," said Alice. "Anyhow, I shall not be on board for long, and I expect you'll be happier when you dump me on a wharf."

Lawrence wondered, but he said nothing. When he studied the sky, he imagined Alice's voyage might be longer than she

thought. Alice was a nicer name than Ruby. One associated the other with third-class cabaret shows and scanty costume; in fact, with the sort of young woman his passenger not long since was. Lawrence frowned. To think about it led him nowhere. All he knew was, he was sorry for the girl.

An hour afterwards *Pathfinder* rounded a rocky point, and hoisting the mainsail, Lawrence steered up a bay. At its top he lowered sail and sculled into a cove, where, in three feet of water, he made fast to the rocks. Using the long boathook for a leaping pole, one could jump ashore, and when Alice had done so he landed the water breaker.

"I spotted a little creek by a beach we passed, and I might find some black raspberries in the woods," he said. "Nobody is on the island and you will not be disturbed."

Throwing the small cask on his shoulder, he went off, and since the shore was rocky and tangled brush grew between the big pine trunks, Alice imagined an hour or two might go before he was back. Under the lee of the high ground one hardly felt the wind; the pine-tops murmured and sometimes sparkling ripples sped across the bay, but that was all and the sun was hot. There was no bathroom at the *Tecumseh House*, and the shining water called.

Alice plunged from the cabin top and for some time after she landed occupied herself with her clothes and a very small looking-glass. The clothes were in the recent city fashion, but the material was cheap, and she could not remove the salt-water stains where the spray had run from Bethune's slicker coat. Moreover, she imagined he kept the coat among tarry ropes. Then she opened her shabby hold-all, and shook her head. The flimsy garments it carried were not at all the sort one could wear on board a boat.

The swim had refreshed her, and for a time she lay in the sun and indulged a delightful languidness. The cove was strangely beautiful and on one side reflected the pines' dusky spires. Sometimes the high tops swayed and the shadows trembled; sometimes silver ripples blotted out the picture. On her side of the cove the sun pierced the shade, and tall fern covered the thin soil. Where a bright beam touched a flowering bush, a hummingbird shone with purple and gold.

Alice let herself go slack. At the *Tecumseh* she had scoured the big dining-room, served three meals a day, and helped cook the food; on Sundays only did she get a few hours' rest. Her body was tired, and for two or three months she and her companions had borne some strain. In fact, the company sometimes went without proper food. At a mining town two girls left the troupe, and Alice wondered where they were now. She imagined they had gone across the track, where the red lights burn. Well, when one was hopeless and hungry, to be virtuous was hard. In Canada, as a rule, pay was good, but one must know one's job, and nobody had much use for a broken comedienne.

She was broke. All she had was two weeks' pay. The hard woman at the *Tecumseh* was just. She ought to ponder, but she was tired, and her brain would not work. To loaf in the sun and hear the wind in the trees was something fresh, and she admitted she would not be much disturbed if the wind did not drop. The sloop was clean, the cove was a charming spot, and when they sailed she did not know where to go.

She mused about Bethune. He had not planned to arrive after the *Maud* was gone. Nothing indicated that he wanted to keep his passenger on board. Well, she was glad he was sober, although she did not think him dull. An English public school boy, undergraduate perhaps, and then an officer in the war. Alice knew the type, although some examples did not use Bethune's kind reserve. She had been forced to knock one out with a thick bottle. Anyhow, she did not see a plan, and there was no use in bothering. The smell of the woods was soothing; the trees that smelt perhaps were balsams. Her head went back against the rock, and she was asleep.

Stones rattled on the ledge beside her, she heard a shout, and Lawrence, with the breaker in his arms, staggered down a bank where treacherous gravel rested between steep mossy slabs. At the bottom he sat down, violently, in the stones.

"If I startled you, I'm sorry," he remarked. "When you borrow another fellow's boat, you cannot use boots with creeper spikes."

The spot he had descended was nearly precipitous, and Alice imagined the water breaker weighed fifty or sixty pounds. Then she saw a wild-cabbage leaf, holding large black, and yellow, raspberries, a few yards off.

"Since sunrise you have three or four times declared you were sorry, but I was not really much alarmed," she said. "I imagine to carry a cask down a pitch like that, when you wear any sort of boots, is something of an exploit."

"An old-time rancher would not hesitate to pack a bag of flour across a mountain. The usual size weighs a hundred and

forty pounds."

"It looks as if a rancher's job was pretty strenuous."

"To some extent that is so," Lawrence agreed. "On the whole, Canada is a strenuous country."

"Oh, well, you could not carry the raspberries and the cask. When you plunged down the bank I suppose they were here."

"You argue logically; I was back before. The berries are ripe. I hope you'll like them."

Alice pondered. The raspberries were as large and sweet as English garden fruit, and in order that she might enjoy them he had twice scrambled for some distance across the rocks and through tangled brush. All the same, when he first arrived she was asleep, and sometimes when one slept one's pose was uncouth.

"I must get dinner," he resumed. "In the woods one, of course, dines at noon, but since the bill of fare for breakfast and supper is the same, it's not important. I am, however—I'm afraid I'm not a first-class cook."

"If you state you are sorry another time, I might be annoyed. Then I believe I am not a remarkably bad cook, and you might allow me to experiment."

"Very well. The stuff is in the port locker—on the left. The stove is a pressure stove. You pour some spirit in the cup and start the pump. Shall I come on board and help?"

Alice thought not. For one thing, the cabin was narrow and small, and when she was occupied she did not want him to crawl about. When one squatted by a stove, with one's bent head close to the roof, to be dignified was hard.

"Use anything you can find," he said when she jumped on deck. "All the same, if you are very extravagant, we might starve to-morrow."

"To-morrow I shall not be on board, and where you land me I expect you can get fresh supplies."

"Oh, well, I certainly hope we'll soon make port. That is to say, I did hope; but now I think about it—"

"You feel you ought to be polite?"

Lawrence smiled, a crooked smile she liked. "For some years I have lived in the woods, Miss Thorne. What I really did mean was, you cannot run a sailing boat on a time-bill. Much depends on the weather."

Alice crawled into the cabin and lighted the stove. Lawrence's remark, so to speak, was oracular, and might be disturbing, but she was not much disturbed. He was not the man to carry her where she did not want to go, and since she was a good sailor, she was as happy on board the sloop as she could hope to be while she searched for employment at a dreary frontier settlement. If she took a steamer to Vancouver, she would be destitute when she arrived.

Opening a locker, she found a can of beans, some coffee, a very small slab of bacon, a pound or two of flour, and some rather moldy desiccated apples. If one were frugal, the stuff might sustain them for two days. Alice set her mouth. She mustn't calculate, and she put a generous supply of bacon in the frying-pan.

CHAPTER IV

SUMMER AFTERNOON

Alice, balancing a tin plate on her knee, rested her back against a balsam trunk; the spruce branches Lawrence had cut for a seat were springy and soft. He had pulled off his overall jacket, and his blue shirt strained against his chest and arms. Although he was not heavily built, Alice noted his muscular development and his firm brown neck. He lay in the stones, but their hardness did not seem to bother him, and his pose was restful. Well, he had admitted that a rancher's job was strenuous, and she had noted his easy balance on the sloop's inclined deck and the slippery rocks. When one lived with dancers and acrobats, one did note things like that.

His brown face was firmly modeled and rather attractive. Sometimes his brown eyes twinkled; sometimes his look was thoughtful. One remarked a sort of calm control. Alice could not fix his age, but she guessed thirty. It appeared that he had fought in the war from the beginning, and although he did not state his rank, she imagined he had used command. She thought he might be generous, but he was not a generous fool. However, to speculate about him was not her business. In the meantime, he obviously approved the dinner she had cooked.

"I'm sorry all is gone, and I hope you had enough," he said. "If I had expected a passenger, I'd have loaded up supplies, but you made a first-class job with the stuff you had."

"If my cooking satisfies you, you are not fastidious."

"Oh, well, I suppose a bush rancher eats because he must. Circumstances do not encourage him to be an epicure; but if you're not properly fed, you cannot work. All the same, when you have raked oat-hay for twelve hours in the scorching sun, and fed and watered the ox team, to get busy at the stove is rather a bore. In fact, I admit I have sometimes smashed a pot I could not clean. To hear the thing break was worth the extravagance!"

"It looks like a Spartan life. A bachelor's freedom is, no doubt, worth something; but I expect it has drawbacks."

"The drawbacks are obvious," Lawrence agreed. "The trouble is, the sort of girl one would like to marry would not have much use for a back-block rancher."

Alice saw he knew where to stop, since she imagined the girl who might be happy and useful in the wilds was not the sort for him. He, however, began to pick up the knives and plates.

"At a log shack and on board a small boat to leave things about does not pay," he remarked. "If you smoke, I could roll you a cigarette."

"No, thanks! I smoke when I'm forced. A variety actress must be up-to-date, but I do not really like cigarettes. Although it's probably not important, I do not like cocktails."

"But you'd indulge your host? Well, in the woods you would not be bothered. One is satisfied with green tea, and sometimes does not wait for the water to boil. However, I think I'll take a smoke; and then I must mend my jacket. When I was reefing, a block-hook tore the sleeve."

"Then, you mend the clothes you tear?"

"As long as it is possible, although, as a rule, a good Canadian throws old stuff away. In fact, I now and then mend my boots. I'd rather like you to examine my workmanship, but it would imply my pulling off the boot."

Alice supposed he was humorous, but she did not know. His look was sober. She replied that to have his jacket mended for him might be something fresh, and when he agreed she got to work. Lawrence smoked his cigarette and watched her languidly. The girl was attractive, and since they landed she was somehow different. She had perhaps done something to her hair and clothes. Anyhow, when he met her at the settlement, he had remarked a queer hard frankness. Pert was not the word; *gamine* was the best he knew. He imagined the quality part of her professional equipment and in a way a shield. Now it was gone, and she was gentler. Well, she had declared that Ruby was done with!

"Thank you," he said when she gave him the jacket. "You are a bully cook and a first-class tailor. Two useful talents! But

d'you, by chance, know something about sheep?"

Alice looked at him in surprise. She wondered where he led, or if he led nowhere. Then she began to laugh.

"I expect I was ridiculous," he said in an apologetic voice.

"Not at all. At one time, my dear man, I knew much more about sheep than I wanted to know, particularly about foot-rot and fluke. To some extent, a speculation in Border-Leicester accounts for my emigrating. At all events, it accounts for my doing so without proper funds."

"It's strange. Sheep are rather my hobby, and I have a small flock. You see, when you raise beef cattle, a steer must grow for about two years before you begin to feed him up, and in the woods to get him fat is hard. Lambs, of course, are soon ready for market, and can get a living on the hills where cattle cannot. Then since I take an English livestock newspaper, the Border-Leicester interests me. If you can combine the hill sheep's hardiness and the large sheep's weight—"

"My father thought it possible, but he was an optimist," Alice rejoined. "In our bleak dale, where the Pennine moors join the Cheviots, the black-faced Leicesters did not thrive."

Perhaps it was strange, but she felt she might give Lawrence Bethune her confidence. Although he did not urge her, she knew him interested and sympathetic, and in the Canadian balsams' shade she talked about her home in the Old Country.

Her father was not properly a farmer. When he inherited Rainshope he was a lawyer at a market town, where Alice imagined he did not transact much business. The Rainshope sheepwalk was not large or prosperous, but after all, the Thornes were *statesmen*, and he shut his office.

Lawrence looked up, and Alice nodded.

"Yeomen, independent farmers! The oldest son gets the estate; the next, if funds permit, is articulated to a lawyer, or perhaps keeps a shop. My brother soon had enough and went for an architect; Tom, I rather think, will make his mark, particularly since he married a rich contractor's daughter. Miriam married a fashionable high-church clergyman. Our mother was dead, and my part, like Cinderella's, was to stop at home."

For a few moments she was quiet, and Lawrence wondered whether she thought she had been rash. Her look got hard and her mouth went tight. The wind touched the balsams' tops; sparkling ripples streaked the cove and splashed against the rocks. Then all was quiet, and Alice said:

"We began to talk about black-faced sheep and I expect I am boring you."

Lawrence declared he was interested, and she resumed her tale. At the school to which she went girls were expected to cultivate ornamental rather than useful qualities, but they were taught how to speak and walk. The classical plays and tableaux they got up were perhaps well done. Lawrence, no doubt, knew the sort of stuff, and all that mattered was, it excited her ambition to be an actress. Her relations, of course, did not approve. Tom and Miriam were some years older, and took it for granted that she would stop at Rainshope. Since her father needed somebody, and the others' careers were already fixed, Alice agreed.

She pictured a kind, indulgent gentleman, but Lawrence imagined Thorne was not remarkably competent. Alice said he had not the Northern dalesman's qualities. A dalesman stuck to all he had, and as a rule got some more. Tom was that sort; Alice, rather obviously, did not admire her prosperous brother.

Picturing her father and the bleak house on the moors, she, to some extent unconsciously, drew her own portrait. Lawrence imagined her stanch and rather hard. The hardness was perhaps acquired in Canada, but she refused to cheat or be cheated.

Thorne had sent his son and daughters to expensive schools, and when it looked as if the sheepwalk did not pay Alice admitted her duty was to keep his house and help him economize. For a lawyer, he was a trustful optimist, and, thinning out his flock, he resolved to speculate in heavy sheep. Alice thought him foolish. The little black-faces got their living on the moorland *heaf*, and in winter needed but a little hay. The large sheep needed much, and for the most part must be pasture fed. Turnips grew only in the lower dale, and corn was a risky crop. Lawrence perhaps knew the Pennine range's northern end was England's darkest, bleakest spot.

Although Tom came home from Newcastle to expostulate, Thorne *in-took* fresh moor. To drain, plow, and lime the intake cost a useful sum, and Alice wondered where the money was got. Anyhow, the thin corn was blighted, and the seed grass that followed was hardly worth mowing. Then for two or three bad years the meadow hay went down the becks, and Thorne was forced to buy in the low country.

The bad years broke him. Crossing the fell in a snowstorm, he got pneumonia, and when he was gone the bank seized the farm. Alice imagined other creditors were not paid; Tom and Miriam claimed that all they had got was theirs. She went to Toronto. If she had but gone three years sooner, when she was urged—

"Then you had friends at Toronto?" Lawrence remarked.

"I had not much claim on their kindness. They were kind, but when I arrived I knew I ought not to have gone. In three years one changes, and perhaps one gets fastidious. My talents were not commercially useful and I joined the Lacoste show."

"But when you knew the show was going down, why did you hold on? Your brother and sister could support you until you got a proper post. They might have helped you get a post in England."

Alice smiled, a rather bleak smile.

"One hates to be beaten. Then Tom's wife might not approve a relation who had danced at Wild West mining towns. Hannah is the sort to imagine the West is wild, and inhabited by pistol-shooting swashbucklers and painted courtesans. Miriam married a clergyman, and I did not see myself fitting in at a high-church vicarage. Besides, when we played the *Sultan's Favorite* I sent her my portrait, and since she did not acknowledge the present, I expect my humor jarred."

Lawrence thought it possible, but he liked Alice's pluck. She had stuck to her father, and she had refused to ask for help. She certainly had not told him much about the grounds for her resolve to leave Toronto, but his business was not to inquire. After a few moments she got up and he looked about.

A large canoe with a bow cut like a bird's head steered up the bay. Two wet spritsails swelled in the eddying wind and flapped. A woman threw water overboard, and the tin bailer sparkled in the sun. The long paddles splashed and the canoe, forging ahead, stopped a few yards from the rock. The people on board were dressed like white men, but their skin was yellow-brown, their noses were flat, and their eyes were narrow. Alice thought them rather a Chinese than Indian type. One shouted to Lawrence in a friendly voice, and when they had talked for a few minutes the paddles splashed and the canoe crossed the bay.

"Siwash! We talked in Chinook," he said. "They are going north to smoke salmon and dry berries, but the sea was bad, and they will bring up at a beach they know. They stopped to inquire if we had seen another lot. Anyhow, the Siwash are first-class sailors and their big canoes are able craft. If the sea is too bad for them, I doubt if we ought to risk a passage. I wonder whether you would like to scramble to the top of the island?"

Alice agreed. Under the big trees the fern was thick, and at some spots Lawrence broke a path through tangled brush. Where the woods stopped, the rocks were steep. He noted that Alice was not awkward and he did not think her afraid, but she went slowly and now and then stopped for breath. At length they reached the top and braced themselves against the wind.

The spot commanded a wide view, and looking south, they saw the sea roll in white-topped, parallel ridges, across which thin spray blew. A hundred feet below, creaming surf washed about the rocks. One need not be a sailor to know the little sloop must keep the bay. Alice jumped from the ledge, and, sitting down behind the stones, looked the other way. On her right hand, but some distance off, the Coast Range towered above climbing forests. In front, angry water, broken by islands and high-wooded heads, rolled back until rocks and trees got indistinct in the north. The ridge cut the wind and the sun was on the warm stones. Alice turned and gave Lawrence a humorous glance.

"You have satisfied me that we must wait for smoother water. I suppose that was your object when you proposed the excursion?"

"In the circumstances, I thought you ought to see for yourself," Lawrence agreed.

Alice laughed. "The circumstances certainly are unusual, but I am not keen to be shipwrecked, nor remarkably dull. Your

good intentions are rather obvious, Mr. Bethune. However, let's be practical. The landscape is majestic, but I am not a summer tourist. Are there settlements in the North where a girl who has no particularly useful talents might get a job?"

"On the whole, I think not," said Lawrence. "I do not know much about Rupert and the Alaska ports, but I believe you ought to go the other way. You'd have a better chance to get a post in the populated Fraser River belt and the American cities on Puget Sound. If the wind drops, or changes in the night, I dare say I could carry you to a lumber wharf where you might get a steamer south, but you might be forced to wait, fares are not cheap, and I believe your capital is the two weeks' pay you got at the *Tecumseh House*."

He pulled out a pocketbook. Alice remembered that before they started from the cove he had jumped on board the boat.

"I expected to buy some cattle, but did not do so, and I hope you will take the wallet," he resumed. "When you get a good post, you can send me the money."

A touch of color stained Alice's skin, but she gave him a steady glance.

"You are a very good sort. All the same, I have not yet taken presents from men, and you probably know I could not pay you back. I believe some fashionable women are not squeamish, but for a variety actress it's risky. Thank you, Mr. Bethune; but put up your wallet."

Lawrence did so. He knew she was firm, and when he weighed the circumstances he thought her firmness something one must admire. For a time they engaged in careless talk, and then started for the cove.

CHAPTER V

QUALICHAN SOUND

Alice cooked supper by a driftwood fire. Lawrence had wanted to do so and declared she was his guest, but she refused, and he admitted that she was a better cook than he. In fact, since he had enjoyed as good a meal some time had gone.

"Then you certainly are not an epicure," Alice remarked.

"The important thing is, I'm a rancher. A rancher does not waste on cooking time that might be more usefully employed. At Qualichan we are a remarkably industrious and frugal lot."

Alice reflected that he had wanted to give her his pocketbook; but since she would sooner he talked, she inquired if the frugality of the woodsmen were forced. Lawrence said it was, unless one were rich; and he imagined a rich man would like a softer job. When one had bought one's block of virgin forest, one engaged a chopper, and began to cut the trees. In a year, or perhaps two years, one sent off the hired man and bought two oxen. For some time the oxen ate all the hay one could grow, but one went on chopping, the cleared belt got wider, and when the oxen could not use all the crop, one bought a few cattle. He ought to state that the animals needed hay only in winter. In summer they got their food in the bush, and when one wanted the team, to find the brutes was usually a long day's job.

"But, so far, you have sold nothing. All you have done is spend money," Alice observed.

"That is so," Lawrence agreed. "You must build up the herd, and its increase is measured by the food you can grow. In the meantime, you get from the bank the smallest possible sum for groceries and clothes, and go on chopping. By the time your money's gone you hope your livestock will support you."

"But what about the men who have not a bank roll?"

"They take a job for a few months in summer, on the railroad or at a sawmill. Then, on the whole, the Government is generous. They must not *subsidize* the rancher, but roads help the Province's advance, and if your member of parliament knows his business, he gets you an *appropriation*. In some circumstances, the Government pays you to make a road to your ranch, or perhaps to nowhere, and they'll pay you to build a schoolhouse for your children. You choose your foreman, and for a month or two picnic in the wilds. Then you start for home, and go on chopping."

"Are there women in the valley where your ranch is?"

"Two, all the time," said Lawrence. "Another comes and goes. Mrs. Loudon was a Toronto school-mistress. She's thoroughbred, and George Loudon is *hiyu Tyee*, which is much the same thing as *pukka Sahib*. Perhaps you have noted that a catch-phrase you can't properly translate carries your meaning better than precise English. Mrs. Colman was a Lancashire dairymaid; I think you will like her. Mrs. James, I believe, helped at a tobacco store on Hastings, Vancouver, and when James goes to make roads she starts for the cities. Since she visits with friends, she argues it's as cheap as stopping at the ranch. James, however, reckons his road-making pay is mainly used for steamer tickets and city clothes. Now you know all I know about the ladies of Qualichan."

Alice thought his remarking that she would like Mrs. Colman strange. She imagined he pondered, and studied the sky; but she began to talk about something else, and by and by he built a sort of hut with a few spruce branches and slabs of bark.

At sunset she went on board, and when she had lighted the candle lamp, looked about with a queer touch of regret. The little white cabin was clean and homelike; when she wandered about with the Lacoste show she had known worse lodgings. In fact, now she thought about it, she had been happy on board the sloop. All the same, she must not occupy the neat folding cot another night.

When she put out the light and pushed up the skylights she smelt the pines and salt weed on the rocks. The wind in the trees was soothing and sometimes musical ripples splashed. She hoped Lawrence was not cold; he had refused to take a blanket and had carried off a sail. She speculated about him drowsily, and in ten minutes was asleep.

At six o'clock in the morning he shouted and asked her to light the pressure stove. He was going to look out from the top of the rocks and when he got back they must push off. They got breakfast in the cockpit. The morning was dark, and for

the Pacific slope in summer, cold. Lawrence said the wind blew across the inland ranges' snow.

"Since it has *backed* round, the weather will not be good," he added. "Our food, however, is nearly gone, and since I'm afraid we cannot beat up the strait, I think we ought to run for Qualichan Sound. By and by we might put you on board a returning Alaska tourist boat. In the meantime, I expect Mrs. Loudon would be glad to receive you."

Alice doubted. A third-class variety actress was not the guest one welcomed at a Government officer's house. For all that, she imagined Lawrence knew where his boat could, and could not, go. Besides, it was not very important. She had taken a rash plunge and must bear the consequences.

"When you invited me on board, you did not know all you undertook," she said.

"Oh, well, so far, we have had rather a jolly cruise, and if our luck is good, I expect to make Qualichan in the afternoon. Now you might put up the plates and jamb all fast. Pull down the cabin skylights and fix the locking pins."

Alice thought the orders ominous, and when they were carried out she saw Lawrence lash the big oar and topsail yard on deck, roll up and tie the mainsail's foot, and test the pump.

"You will soon need the slicker coat," he said. "In fact, if you have some thick clothes—"

"I have not," said Alice dryly. "The stuff in my hold-all is not the stuff one could wear on board a boat."

Lawrence got busy. The reefed mainsail went half-way up the mast, and a small storm jib fluttered at the bowsprit's end. He loosed a rope, and when the sloop was head to wind jumped on the rocks for another. The boat began to drift, and for an anxious moment or two Alice imagined she would be carried out to sea. Then, with a swift running jump, he crashed on deck, and swore.

"I'm sorry," he gasped when he got up.

"Oh, don't!" said Alice. "If you must apologize, you might invent another formula."

She began to laugh. After all, she had borne some strain, and when she thought him left behind, loneliness as much as the risk of shipwreck had daunted her. Although she had but known him for two rather eventful days, she had unconsciously come to reckon on his protection. Now she did not know where she went. All in front, like the sky and sea, was dark. She was being blindly forced along, and since she dared not weep, to laugh was some relief.

Eddying gusts carried them round the point; and then, in open water, *Pathfinder* swung along, with a measured lift and plunge, before the charging seas. Their white tops surged up on her quarter, sped forward, and crashed by the mast; the little reefed mainsail swelled and tossed; for a moment the sloop seemed to stop, and then leaped ahead. Lawrence balanced on the coaming, his eyes fixed on the spinning compass; Alice crouched in the cockpit and was thankful for his coat.

They drove past an indistinct island, and she saw pine branches toss in thin rain and mist; and then the seas got angrier and Lawrence shouted something about a tide-rip. Spray beat Alice's bent head, and water rolled about the deck. Some sluiced across the ledge, water streamed from the mainsail's foot, and when the sloop plunged, the little jib was buried half-way up.

"Get into the cabin," Lawrence shouted. "When you are in, fasten the door."

"I will not," Alice gasped. "If I did go, I'd be deadly sick. Besides if we are going to capsize, I'd sooner be on deck."

Lawrence laughed. His legs were across the ledge, and she saw the water drain from his clothes. Well, she had his slicker, and could she have persuaded him, she dared not give it up. She was not seasick, but she was horribly cold and cramped. For some time she had been getting tired and slack.

They crossed the tide-rip, and Lawrence hove *Pathfinder* to. When her bows swung round, a white sea leaped on board; and then the backed jib stopped her, and for a few minutes she plunged smoothly while Lawrence labored at the pump. When he stopped, Alice, getting up awkwardly, seized the lever, but a lurch flung her across the narrow floor, and shaken by the knock, she crawled as far as possible under the side deck. Lawrence pulled the lashing from the tiller, and they again drove ahead.

About two o'clock, rocks loomed in the mist, and when they ran behind the point the water got smooth, although savage gusts beat the pines and angry ripples splashed the boat. Lawrence hove her to and jumped from the coaming.

"Now we must get some food," he said.

Alice hated to move. She was wet and cold, and somehow lifeless, but she crawled from under the deck and with shaking hands began to cut a meat can. Lawrence took the can from her and started the blast stove. Where the oilskin coat stopped, her thin clothes were soaked, and he thought her skin very white. The girl had had enough, but she was not beaten and she meant to help. He carried the food to the cockpit where he could look about. Alice did not eat much, but she drained a can of hot coffee, and would not allow him to help her put away the stuff.

"Next stop's Qualichan Sound," he said, and pulling the jib to leeward, started the boat. "We ought to get there about six o'clock."

"So long as we land," said Alice, "I don't mind where you go."

The island vanished, and by and by tremendous rain beat down the sea and the wind almost dropped. Then the clouds rolled back, and a cold, savage blast swept a wide belt of frothing white across the water.

"Northwest!" said Lawrence. "Half-way round the clock, and it will be a tight jamb to fetch Qualichan Head in one tack. Stick close under the side deck. We are going to get wet!"

He lowered the centerboard, and Alice saw him laboriously haul the main sheet. For two or three hours that was all she saw for the water that poured across the ledge. Well, she could not get wetter, and she vaguely understood that the sloop was now going to windward, and the steersman must fight for every yard he won. She felt the combers that burst across the bows stop the quivering hull, and she felt the sweeping, sickening plunge.

At length the turmoil suddenly stopped, and Alice, getting up, leaned slackly against the ledge. High rocks towered above the sloop, and only wrinkled tide eddies disturbed the smooth green channel. The sloop drifted round a point, and where dark pines rolled down to the beach she saw a long wooden house and grotesque carved heads on a totem pole. In the background, green water, ruffled in places by the wind, curved away and vanished behind forest-covered hills.

Lawrence dropped anchor and lowered sail. Short, brown-skinned men, like Chinese, launched a canoe, and when he had talked with them for a few minutes he touched Alice.

"There's not much use in our trying to beat up channel, and when we get round the hill we'll find the wind blowing straight down. Only a bushman could shove through the woods, and the Indians will lend us a canoe."

They got on board. Lawrence and a Siwash paddled; Alice crouched—crouched was the proper word—on the spruce branches at the bottom of the canoe, and heavy rain began to fall. Two miles up the curving channel, they met the savage wind, and the water was beaten white. For all the men's labor, the canoe went astern, but crossing to the other shore, they crept back behind a point. At the point they used their poles, and Alice imagined Lawrence pulled off most of his clothes. The rain beat his shirt against his skin, he gasped and strained, but they crept round the point and resumed the paddles.

Dark rocks and misty forest rolled, very slowly, back; sometimes for four or five minutes the men fought hard to hold the canoe where she was. Alice had not thought men could labor like that; but they went up channel. At length, tall trees cut the wind, and they ran the canoe on a gravel bank not far from a house in a clearing surrounded by giant pines. Lawrence took her bundle and they followed a path across an orchard. When they reached the veranda steps Alice hesitated. Her shabby clothes were soaked, her hat had got soft and shapeless, and her shoes were full of water.

She felt she dared not front the strangers whom Lawrence must invite to be her hosts, but she was horribly cold and exhausted. Tremendous rain beat the woods and the light began to go.

She went up the steps. The house was dark and all was quiet. Lawrence beat on the door and went round to the back. When he rejoined Alice he knitted his brows.

"It's awkward!" he remarked. "Nobody is about, and the doors are fast. I expect the Loudons have gone up river and taken their China boy for a camp servant. The Siwash talked about some strangers seizing their fishing grounds and

breaking their salmon traps. George has perhaps gone up to investigate—"

"In short, we cannot get in?" said Alice. "When will your friends be back?"

"George might be four or five days. I am sorry."

Alice leaned slackly against the rails and began to laugh, a jarring, dreary laugh. Lawrence stopped her.

"Brace up! I'll break in and start the stove. Mrs. Loudon has generally a good stock of food and you can cook for yourself. Then you might use her clothes until yours are dried. She's a first-class sort, and I don't suppose she'd mind. In the morning I'll run across and see if you're all right."

Alice looked about and shivered. The Indians had gone, and the woods were getting dark. She was exhausted, but she dared not front the night in the strange, lonely house. Besides, in a few days she must front its proper occupant.

"I think not," she said. "Women are not remarkably trustful, and I doubt if a Government officer's wife would like me for her guest. In fact, if she found you had lodged in her house a girl you had casually *picked up* on your excursion, she might be much annoyed. Then Mr. Loudon might not approve your breaking his door. What about your friend the dairymaid?"

"Colman's ranch is four or five miles up the valley, and the trail's a bush trail. I might harness my bulls to the jumper sledge; but if they're rambling in the woods, I could not find the brutes in the dark. If you will not stop at Loudon's, you must go to my ranch, and I'll camp in the barn. I don't see another plan."

"I do not," said Alice. "If I camp on your friends' veranda, I'll probably freeze. When you invited me on board your yacht your object perhaps was good, but only a man could have dragged me into the horrible entanglement. Now you must pay for your rashness."

Lawrence said nothing. He seized her bundle and when he gave her his hand she went, rather unsteadily, down the steps.

CHAPTER VI

BOURLON RANCH

Under the big trees the trail was dark, and Alice's thin shoes sank in the mud; where fir roots crossed the path she stumbled and might have fallen but for Lawrence's support. Although she hated herself for her weakness, she dared not refuse his steadying hand. From the beginning, her adventure was ridiculous, and now she thought about it, humiliating. She had forced him to invite her on board his yacht, and she hoped he was satisfied that all her object had been to rejoin her party at Cheemanco.

All the same, it was not very important. Fatigue and cold had banished her scruples. She must get shelter from the pitiless rain, and she drearily plowed along. In the dark, she heard a river and chiming bells. Lawrence stopped and looked about.

"Cowbells! My oxen, Jerry and Bob. If I could catch them, I'd carry you to Mrs. Colman's on the sledge; but I expect they'd baffle me in the brush, and I have no rope."

The clanging notes got faint and Alice wondered whether Lawrence was annoyed. She herself was not. To be jolted for three or four miles through the dripping woods was unthinkable. She could hardly keep her feet and she must soon collapse. The thing was strange; she had not thought the cold and fatigue could altogether knock her out.

"They've gone," said Lawrence. "Buck up! In ten minutes we'll be home."

By and by the woods rolled back and they plowed across a clearing where tall grass grew. The wet heads brushed Alice's clothes, but the thin material already carried all the water it could hold. At the other side of the clearing a small house loomed against dark trees, and when Lawrence stopped Alice saw the walls were logs. After a few moments, he pushed back the door and got a light. The lamp was a good lamp, and she noted the clay cement between the logs; the floor was slightly uneven. Alice did not know the pine was split by hand. For a minute or two, Lawrence occupied himself by the square stove. When he got up resinous billets snapped and the smell of burning wood floated about.

"You are shivering," he said pityingly. "The room will soon be hot, but in the meantime pull off your shoes."

Alice tried. There was no use in pretending to be squeamish, but the straps had swollen and her fingers seemed powerless. Lawrence took her foot in his hands and pulled off the soaked shoe. Then he crossed the floor, and getting a light in another room, came back with an armful of clothes.

"I am going to the barn to change," he said. "The top drawer in the bureau is open, and if you haven't got all you want in your folder bag, you might find something useful. The stockings, at all events, are pretty good."

Alice lifted her head and her control went.

"I believe I told you the clothes in my hold-all are the sort of things Perry imagined an Eastern dancing girl might wear. And you perhaps begin to see where you have led me? I'm soaked and starved and draggled; and a girl hates to look like a scarecrow, particularly when a man of any kind is about. Then I don't suppose a steamer ever touches at this desolate spot, and if one did, I'm broke. When we knew the *Maud* was gone, I ought to have jumped overboard. I think I nearly went; but I suppose if I had done so, you'd have pulled me out."

Lawrence tried to soothe her, but fatigue and strain had banished all reserve.

"Oh, I dare say your object was good! To feel you were chivalrous was rather nice? In some circumstances, one hates to be pitied, and people who meddle where they oughtn't to meddle don't know the harm they do. Men, in particular, are generally fools. I know I'm talking like a vulgar little adventuress, and you meant to be kind; but my temper never was serene, and if you had trailed about the mining towns with a dead-broke variety show—"

At length she stopped, and leaning forward, her arms across the table, frankly wept. Lawrence put a kettle on the stove and some bacon in a frying-pan. Then he touched her.

"If you do not get out of your soaked clothes, you will be ill, and I am not much of a nurse. I am going to the barn, and

you will find some stuff you can put on in the open drawer. The Hudson's Bay blanket might do for a kimono and anyhow, it's warm. When you move the lamp to the window ledge, I'll come back and we'll get supper."

He waited for half an hour, and when he returned he imagined Alice had put on his overalls, but she was, for the most part, muffled in a large blue blanket, fastened by his cartridge belt. The important thing was, he thought, her calm. Alice remarked that he put on the stove a large square can; in the Canadian woods, a coal-oil can is commonly used for a flour bin and for boiling shirts.

"I must apologize, Mr. Bethune," she said in a quiet, cultivated voice. "Ever since I forced myself upon you, you have taken the proper line. I, of course, was nasty; but sometimes you feel you have reached the limit. However, I expect you know?"

Lawrence nodded and his mouth curved humorously.

"Yes; a man swears and sometimes throws things about! Absurd, of course, but one feels better afterwards. When we built the house, I chopped my foot, cut my hands with a drawknife, and then missed a nail and hit my thumb. I felt it was too much, and I threw the hammer as far as it would go. The hammer was expensive and went into thick brush. I mowed the stuff for half a day, but never found the confounded tool. Calm is economical, but sometimes it's hard."

Alice wondered whether he wished to banish her embarrassment. She was not as much embarrassed as he perhaps thought, but she played up, and when he served supper tried to eat. Although she had thought herself hungry, she shrank from food, and after swallowing a few morsels of greasy bacon she was satisfied by a mug of strong, sweet tea. By and by Lawrence put an obviously home-made deerskin chair by the stove, and while he cleaned the plates, in a bucket, she looked about.

The stove was in the middle of the kitchen; its pipe and a ladder went up to the roof, in which she imagined there was another room. Two rifles, a shotgun, and a rude bookcase occupied the wall. Overalls, oilskin clothes, and long boots hung from pegs in a corner. All, however, was clean, and she thought Lawrence a competent housekeeper.

"If you like, you might smoke," she said. "I do not want to feel I have taken possession of your house. But why do you call it Bournalon ranch?"

Lawrence lighted his pipe. Alice was not much interested, but she would sooner he talked. Sometimes, when a man talked in his own house, he unconsciously revealed his true character. Yet she had already weighed him, and on the whole was satisfied. Perhaps all she really wanted was to be allowed to indulge her queer languidness. The little room got delightfully warm, and the deerskin chair was easy. She did not want to move; she did not even want to lift her head.

"Loudon needed a name for his survey plans. Canada, you know, is measured off by range, township, and section, and at Qualichan George is Government boss. He's one of the best, and when I take you to the house you will like his wife."

"You said something like that before," Alice languidly remarked. "Since you must dispose of me somehow, I'd sooner you tried Mrs. Colman. If you think about it earnestly, you might see my reason. However, you began to tell me why you called your ranch Bournalon."

Although her pose was slack and she rested her head against the chair, Lawrence noted that she had resumed her *gamine* mood. When he was nearly knocked out he had known warmth and food work on his dull brain.

"One day when we burned the slashing, George came across. The fire had run into the growing timber and the trunks smoked. Where we had chopped, little fires flickered about between the broken branches and the big black logs. A tenderfoot's slashing is a horrible, tangled wreck, and my block looked very like Bournalon wood, after the tanks had galloped about and both sides' artillery had registered on the spot."

"Then you were at the famous wood?"

"I was there three times," said Lawrence. "We were not allowed to stop, but some of us came back—" He occupied himself with his pipe and resumed in an apologetic voice: "The convention is, one forgets. I hate to pretend, and so long as the picture is distinct, the politicians will be bothered to start us on a fresh crusade. Then the boys who followed the tanks across the battered, smoking wreck were not the sort one forgets. They're gone, but when we fired the slashing a big maple burned. The maple leaves dropped faster at Bournalon in September 'eighteen—"

He got up. "In up-to-date circles, I believe sentiment is barred, and you are tired. I have made up a bed at the barn and I'll go across. You will use the room where the light is. The water in the coal-oil can ought to be getting hot."

Lawrence went off and Alice smiled. He had thought she might be cold, and although his housekeeping was primitive, he gave her the best he had. Half an hour afterwards she turned out the lamp. Rain beat the roof, the woods murmured like the sea, but the hot coal-oil can was soothing and she was soon asleep.

A sharp metallic note disturbed her, and she lifted her head in alarm. Mrs. Monroe was ringing the bell at the bottom of the stairs, and Alice ought to have got up an hour since. The boarders would soon want breakfast, but the stove was not lighted, and she had not yet washed the nasty shining oilcloth on the long table. When she was a few minutes late, Mrs. Monroe stated she had no use for lazy *slobs*. If she lost her post, she might not get another; but her head throbbed and she was horribly languid.

Then she remembered she was not at *Tecumseh House*; she was at Bourlon ranch, in the woods. Something tapped on the window, and she slackly turned her head. A bright sunbeam touched the wall, and an arrowhead bush grew near the glass. Two or three hummingbirds hovered about the flowers. One could not see their throbbing wings; their tiny bodies sparkled with an iridescent gleam.

Again a bell called, but the note was farther off and musical. Cowbells, chiming in the woods! Alice got up, and going to the window, leaned against the frame. The *Tecumseh House* smelt of greasy food, soap and stale tobacco; now the scent of balsams and cedars floated about the room. The morning was calm and fresh, and across the clearing a lake shone like a looking-glass. Behind the forest a peak, veined at the top by snow, cut the sky.

Then somebody began to whistle. Alice knew the famous minuet, but she had not thought to hear it in the Canadian wilds. The time was good; one, two, three, and the turn on the last note distinct; but the slide in the trio might bother him. It did not. Lawrence Bethune knew something about music as well as sailing-boats.

An ax crashed. The noise was ringing and measured; two strokes, a pause, and two strokes again. Bethune perhaps meant to indicate that he was about and wanted breakfast. Alice must get her clothes from the kitchen, although she somehow hated the effort. The clothes were dry, and she found a wash-basin, but her hands shook, her head swam, and to dress was hard. All the same, she must brace up, and she pulled on the shrunk and salt-stained clothes. Then she sat down, slackly, in the deerskin chair and was horribly afraid. The kitchen revolved, her skin got cold, and she knew she was going to be ill. Yet her host must get his breakfast, and after a minute or two she pulled back the kitchen door.

Lawrence arrived and got to work about the stove. On board the sloop Alice had helped; now she kept her chair. Lawrence noted that her face was pinched and her skin colourless. The run to Qualichan had been too much for her; he himself had thought the boat might swamp. Her slackness moved his pity, but since she could not stay at the ranch, he must get breakfast and start for Colman's. If he went first, he could explain the circumstances, and perhaps save Alice some embarrassment by carrying Minnie Colman's invitation. Now he thought about it, however, to explain might be awkward, and he did not want Alice to go. Yet she must go, and in the meantime his line was to talk as casually and cheerfully as possible. He noted that Alice did not play up.

Although she drained a mug of tea, he could not persuade her to eat, and he began to be disturbed.

"In the woods, we are rather a primitive lot and I'm not much of a cook," he said. "However, you will be all right at Colman's."

Alice looked up with a queer smile.

"Your cooking is not the drawback, and I'm afraid you are going to get a shock. I very much doubt if I can get to the Colman ranch. Anyhow, I cannot walk there."

Lawrence pushed back his plate and stood up.

"You are ill? Really, properly ill?"

"Really, but improperly," Alice rejoined. "I am very sorry, Mr. Bethune, but you ought to have pushed me overboard."

She turned her head to the deerskin. She had tried to joke, but weakness conquered, and Lawrence and the stove got

indistinct. After a few moments he touched her, and his touch was comforting and kind.

"You mustn't bother! At Qualichan nobody is ill for long, and we are going to see you out. But let's be practical—"

He pondered. To jolt a sick girl to Colman's over the forest trail would not help her recovery. Besides, she was his guest.

"I have got it!" he remarked. "Since you cannot go to Colman's, Minnie must come here, and I can bring her across on the sledge. To begin with, I must catch the bulls, and if you don't mind—"

Alice let him go. Now she was not forced to try for calm, calm was easier. Since Lawrence was a man, he had not at the beginning seen the obvious line; he advanced by argument. Mrs. Colman must come to his ranch, and he was going to bring her. Bring was the word; Alice pictured him firmly putting the woman on his sledge. Then she clenched her fist. She must brace up, weakness must not conquer her, but the kitchen revolved and all got dark.

CHAPTER VII

THE CONVALESCENT

At the top of a hill, Lawrence stopped the oxen and lighted his pipe. The clumsy jumper—two small parallel logs, braced by three or four cross-bars—ran heavily in the gravel, and he was careful for his team. Besides, he would soon be at Colman's and he must ponder his tale. Now he thought about it, the tale might not convince Mrs. Colman. Since he was not a plausible fellow, he must be content to be accurate and trust his luck, and he began to think about Alice.

Lawrence imagined she was ill when they started on their unfortunate excursion, but for all that, had seized the chance to rejoin her friends. One soon noted Alice Thorne's pluck. Then he liked her ironical humor; her frankness sprang from pride. She fronted life squarely and refused to pretend. He did not know if she was beautiful, but she carried herself well, she had fine gray eyes, and her glance was level. She was very thin; when he lifted her on board the sloop he had remarked her lightness. She had stated the Lacoste Company was broke. In the meantime, his business was to engage a woman's help for her, and he started his oxen.

His job proved easier than he had thought. Mrs. Colman was large, fresh-coloured, and a competent housewife. Her other talents were perhaps not numerous, but she had inherited a vein of quiet shrewdness from her peasant stock. When Lawrence arrived, she put up her baking-board and rubbed the dough from her firm hands. She allowed him to talk about the baffling wind and tide currents, but she concentrated on two salient facts; he had brought home a girl, and the girl was ill. The first was frankly surprising and must be investigated at the proper time; the other moved her to action, and Mrs. Colman got busy.

She sent Lawrence to inform her husband, who was chopping in the woods. When Lawrence joined him, Jim sat down on a log and began to rub his ax with a small round hone shaped like a watch. Colman's business was to chop, and as a rule he confined himself to his proper job.

"If Minnie is going, I reckon it will be all right; she's a pretty good nurse," he said. "I guess you remember when the balsam fell on me? I was in the fern, with the top across my chest and a branch against my broken ribs. In three weeks Minnie fixed me so's I could get about again. But if the girl was going to Cheemanco, why'd you bring her to Qualichan?"

Lawrence admitted the inquiry was logical, and he smiled, for he recaptured a jingling rhyme: "*The night we went to Birmingham by way of Beachy Head.*"

"You are not a sailor, Jim, but, unless she's got an engine, a boat will not sail head to wind."

"Looks all right," Colman agreed. "Nothing to do with me, and so long as the girl is sick, I don't mind cooking for myself; but I guess Minnie and Mrs. Loudon will want to know—Anyhow, you had better get going. If Minnie's ready before you're back, she might get mad."

He resumed his chopping and the measured ax stroke rolled like a drum across the quiet woods. Lawrence smiled. He liked his neighbors. The Colmans were primitive, but they were sternly practical, and Jim was content to occupy himself with things he knew something about. He did know much about big trees.

Mrs. Colman was ready, and Lawrence thought it typical. As a rule, English girls, although the up-to-date sort were always hurried, had forced him to wait for them. The woodlanders did not move fast, but when they got going they did not stop. Mrs. Colman had not a portmanteau; she firmly clasped a large bundle, and ordered Lawrence to fix a sack of hay on the sledge. When he had done so she got on board, and they went ahead.

At Qualichan one did not use a wagon and only Loudon kept a horse. The trail curved about large fir stumps, and went up and down steep banks; but the oxen pulled steadily and the runners plowed through rattling gravel and greasy mud. Sometimes one heard a woodpecker, and sometimes a blue grouse drummed in the shade. The noise was like an ax stroke and drowned the woodpecker's tap. Piercing sunbeams splashed the trunks with yellow light, and between the great crawling roots little red wineberries shone. At spots where a storm had swept the forest, one looked out, as if from under a broken arch, on sparkling water, towering rocks, and distant snow.

Lawrence loved the woods. In the evening, when the laborious day was over and he had time to look about, their austere

beauty moved him; but when the light went and all one heard was the cowbells the ranch was lonely. The beauty one shared with another had somehow an extra charm. He mused about the guest whom chance had sent to his house, but after all the woods might bore her and soon she would be gone. Lawrence frowned, and tapped the oxen with his pointed stick. In the meantime, his guest was ill, and he must as soon as possible carry Mrs. Colman to the ranch.

When they got there, he loosed the oxen and sat down in the shade by the barn. After a time, Mrs. Colman came to the kitchen door.

"The lass is young, and youth can bear a lot," she said.

"You imply that her illness is dangerous? Do you know what it is?"

Mrs. Colman did not. She said Alice was feverish, and had told her that when she moved or coughed her side hurt and sometimes she was cold. Mrs. Colman's sister in England was like that when she had pleurisy, but Lizzie coughed a lot. Anyhow, the lass was wasted; clemming perhaps had summat to do with it.

"*Clemming?*" said Lawrence, with a frown. "D'you mean she has gone without proper food?"

"I wouldn't wonder. I'll likely be here for a week, and Jim must fettle for hissen. You will go across to Loudon's, and if you'll not can shove up window, you'll break t' door. Bring all the condensed milk you can lay your hands upon, and when you're back, fill up t' wood-box and move your stuff to barn."

Lawrence carried out his orders. To be given a job was something, and he knew Minnie Colman competent. In the afternoon he resumed his occupation. The ditch must be cut while the ground was wet and the draining water would help him judge the proper fall; and until dark fell he chopped roots and labored in the mud.

Six days went; and then, one morning, Mrs. Loudon arrived and stated that she meant to remain. Mrs. Loudon's manner was authoritative; she was at one time mistress at a large Toronto school. Lawrence knew her kind and thoroughbred. When he was getting his lunch in the barn she joined him, and smiled when she noted his anxious look.

"The bulletin is hopeful! I think the worst is past and Minnie Colman has some grounds to boast," she said. "However, for a few days you might stop for the night with George. Li Wen will give you supper, and in the morning will put you up some lunch."

Lawrence thanked her, and for a few moments indulged his satisfaction. He imagined Mrs. Loudon studied him, but he was willing for her to do so.

"Minnie did not seem very sure about her *diagnosis*," he remarked by and by. "If you hope to cure your patient, I expect to know what you are up against is some advantage."

"Oh, well, one imagines the doctors do not always know. Minnie declares for pleurisy; I suspect pneumonia, but I am not going to bother you with particulars. The important thing is, I believe our patient gets better, and we agree about the contributory causes, which is the phrase my household medical guide employs. Insufficient food, fatigue, and strain had worn down the girl, and when she was near the breaking point, you carried her to Qualichan in the storm."

"We started for Cheemanco; I reckoned to sail across in six or seven hours. To picture her going without proper food is disturbing. I had not thought it possible in Canada."

"Canada is utilitarian. If your talents are practically useful, you can get a job; if you are content to be *accomplished*, I cannot picture a harder country. At all events, Miss Thorne is not the girl I would engage for a waitress at a cheap hotel. She admits she took the post because she was forced, but soon found out she could not carry on. In fact, I think she was lucky when she resolved to cross the strait with you."

"I invited her on board," said Lawrence. "If I had left her alone, she'd have stopped at the settlement and might not have been ill. I expect you see my argument? What am I going to do about it when she gets better? She cannot get a post at Qualichan."

Mrs. Loudon gave him a direct and rather amused glance.

"Your responsibility begins to weigh? In the meantime you must let it go. As soon as possible we will move Miss

Thorne to my house, and I imagine she will not get much farther for two or three weeks."

Lawrence went back to his ditch. For some time Mrs. Loudon would, very competently, care for his sick guest, and all that bothered him was, he did not like another to carry his load. Yet, when he thought about it, load was not the proper word. To feel somebody, Alice, in fact, depended upon him, was rather intriguing. Until he met her, he had thought for himself alone.

When he and Loudon got supper, George suggested an excursion to the mountains. He had for some time wanted to check some heights and distances in the rather sketchy map, examine a supposititious vein of useful mineral, and so forth. His report to the department would justify the holiday, and if Larry was not too independent, he might go on the pay roll. Li Wen would carry the theodolite, and cook, and Bob, the hired man, would help them pack the camp truck.

Lawrence agreed. In remote Canada, a survey is the standard excuse for an excursion to the wilds, and George Loudon was a good mountaineer. For a week they enjoyed a strenuous holiday in the rocks, and when they returned to Loudon's house one evening, he found a note from his wife.

"Hannah imagines you will be glad to get back to your ranch," he said. "In the morning I must send Li Wen, and Hannah will expect us for dinner at twelve o'clock. At two o'clock, you will have a canoe at the landing and she will move Miss Thorne across. There's the program, Larry, and you had better be on time."

He smiled and leaned against a veranda post. Lawrence knitted his brows.

"Mrs. Loudon is very kind, George; if I did not know you both, I'd be embarrassed. You see, I brought Miss Thorne to Qualichan."

Loudon studied him with a twinkle.

"Why, that's all right, Larry. You mustn't worry about Hannah; I expect she likes her job. At one time she ruled two or three hundred girls, and now I guess she'd rule my Siwash if I wasn't firm. They are pretty good little fellows, but their philosophy is not the sort one teaches at Toronto schools. Anyhow, when Miss Thorne is convalescent, Hannah will have somebody help her spray, and talk about, our young fruit trees. If they bothered me as they bother her, I'd burn the lot."

"Fruit is going to pay," Lawrence remarked.

"Canada," said Loudon, "is the land of hope and credit, where you wait a long time for your money. I'd sooner get mine from the parsimonious Government. I do not get much, but I know when it arrives. However, the orchard is Hannah's, and I admit her habit is to put across all she undertakes."

Li Wen called them to supper, and at seven o'clock in the morning Lawrence pushed a few clothes into his bag and paddled across Lonesome Lake. At eleven, Alice Thorne lifted her head from the arm of the deerskin chair. The book Mrs. Loudon had given her was in the grass, the big spruce's shade had got narrow, and she supposed she had slept. Hot sunbeams pierced the gently moving sprays and the shadows flickered. In the log-house, twenty yards off, rattling pans indicated that Mrs. Loudon's China boy was at work.

To feel the soft wind on one's skin and smell the pines was soothing, and Alice languidly looked about. She saw a snow-veined peak, and thick woods, pierced by a shining lake that curved back into the shade. An oblong clearing occupied the foreground, and along its sides the timber stood like a giant wall. At its northern end, the big trunks, touched by strong sunlight, cut, in stately rows, the soft green gloom. Cowbells chimed, and a cloud's shadow softly trailed across the rippling orchard grass. All was beautiful and restfully calm.

Alice heard a step and turned her head. Mrs. Loudon came from the house and gave her a smile.

"Larry's ranch! Not yet large, but it is getting larger, and it stands for stubborn labor and some pluck. To clear a forest ranch is a strenuous piece of work."

Alice agreed, and inquired where and how one began. For all her languidness, Mrs. Loudon thought her interested.

"Oh, well, when you are bored you must stop me. I was for some time a schoolma'am and George declares I love to lecture. We will begin at the beginning. One buys a block of forest, *like that*. Where the trees are large the soil is deep,

and if you see a few maples, you know it is good."

She indicated the timber behind the house, and Alice saw rows of giant firs and spruces, and tall fern between the trunks. Then Mrs. Loudon indicated the clearing's farthest side.

"The first stage; the *slashing!*"

Horizontal trunks stuck out from a horrible entanglement of smashed branches and brown, dead needles. Mrs. Loudon stated that one burned the stuff, and then sawing the charred trunks across, rolled the logs in piles, which again were burned. Her pointing hand moved across a level belt where tall black stumps rose from dusty ashes. One chopped the trees about six feet from the ground, she said, and for a platform notched a plank into the wood.

In the next belt, the stumps, half buried by fern, stood like islands in a sea of rippling grass. Lawrence had sown stiff-headed timothy, but orchard grass was good, and sometimes a rancher waited for the stumps to rot. Larry, however, was grubbing out his. When one had dug and chopped about the roots, the oxen pulled up the mass. Blasting powder was quicker, but expensive.

Nearer the house, the stumps were gone, and short green oats and orchard grass rolled gently in the wind. For a year or two after the ground was cleared oats did not grow tall and were not threshed. In winter the cattle, which now foraged in the bush, must be fed. There was the trouble. Mrs. Loudon had wanted Larry to plant fruit trees, but he was obstinate. As a rule, a man was obstinate, particularly when he was wrong.

Alice's languid glance searched the clearing. Since Lawrence Bethune had chopped and sawn and burned the trees, he was, at all events, resolute.

"For one man to do so much looks almost impossible," she said.

"Something depends on the man," Mrs. Loudon remarked. "For a time Larry engaged a chopper, but much of the work was his—"

She stopped, for Lawrence came along the path through the oats. His blue shirt and overall trousers were fastened at the waist by a stained cartridge belt; his step was a woodsman's step, for he lifted his feet rather high. Yet he carried something of the soldier stamp; his skin was brown, and his body was modeled like a Greek athlete's.

Alice, rather slackly, began to get up, and Lawrence went faster. His object was, no doubt, to stop her, but Mrs. Loudon thought his speed carried a hint of eagerness. Alice perhaps had noted it, for although her skin a few moments since had been colorless, faint pink now touched her cheek. She, however, got up and Mrs. Loudon approved. The girl was a gentlewoman.

"Yes, I am better," she said when Lawrence inquired. "To be out in the sun is delightful, and since I am going to Mrs. Loudon's, I must thank you for the thought you took for me on board the yacht, for your hospitality, and for all the care you used when I was ill."

Lawrence gave her a puzzled glance. She was not the draggled, shivering girl he had carried to the house. For one thing, Mrs. Loudon had given her fresh clothes, but somehow she was dignified.

"Although I'm no longer captain, I am yet your host, and I'd sooner you did not stand up," he said. He put her gently into the chair, and resumed with a smile: "One likes to feel one is useful, but I had not much to do with curing you. Minnie Colman's gone; but Mrs. Loudon is here."

"Your friends are kind; but I think, for your sake, they were kinder, and you called them to my help," Alice rejoined.

"I wonder if you are discreet," said Mrs. Loudon. "On the whole, Larry is a good sort, but we do not proclaim it, particularly when he is about. When a man is your subject, the rule is a useful rule, my dear. But I see George has landed, and as soon as he arrives Li will serve the feast."

CHAPTER VIII

MRS. LOUDON ADVISES

Lawrence backed his paddle awkwardly. His other hand was occupied by a fishing-rod, and in the circumstances he could not use his landing-net. The trout, however, circled and must not go under the canoe; the beach was not far off, and if he could land—The tight line touched the canoe, and suddenly went slack. Lawrence dropped the rod and swore. The big trout was gone.

Somebody laughed and he looked up. Where the dark firs rolled down to the lake Mrs. Loudon stood on a rocky shelf. Her clothes and tall straight figure harmonized with the trunks, and in the quiet woods one learns to be still. But for her laugh, Lawrence might not have known she was about.

"I'm sorry, but the trout really was a good fish," he said.

Mrs. Loudon sat down in the stones, and he noted that she carried a camera.

"I have heard your first statement before," she rejoined. "Modern youth is not, as a rule, apologetic, and does not always bother to be polite."

"After all, one goes through life easier if one does not shove."

"Something depends on who you are and on whom you shove. On the whole, I don't know if modesty helps one much; but I was not watching you. A loon is fishing up the lake and I wanted his picture. You see, the New York editor liked my *Lesser Brethren of the Wilds*, and asked for more. George declares the paragraphs he supplied did it, but I admit I'm flattered. Then I can use the check."

Lawrence pushed his canoe on to the bank. A loon is not a friendly bird, and if he had the shining water for a background, his figure might be conspicuous. The fourteen-foot canoe was hewn by a Siwash workman from a cedar log and smoothed by fire. Her long flat floor melted into a pointed stern, and at the other end, swept up in a flowing curve to a bird's head. Her model was light and graceful and she could be paddled fast.

In the background, the shining lake, dimmed on the west side by trembling shadows, stretched into the woods. The evening was serene, and although the sun was behind the pines its beams touched the high rocks with yellow light. Lawrence had no hat, and he had rolled back his blue shirt from his brown, muscular arms. Mrs. Loudon studied him with a hint of amusement and he wondered what she wanted. Since she allowed him to stop, she probably did want something. As a rule, one saw where a man led; a woman's advance, so to speak, was indirect. All the same Hannah Loudon was a good sportsman, a botanist, and naturalist. He knew her straight, and firmly kind.

"Still!" she said, and with a swift smooth movement lifted the camera.

A strange harsh call, rather like a drunken laugh, pierced the brooding calm, and where the lake reflected the sky a long-necked bird forged across the gleaming surface. After a moment or two it vanished, and only the silver ripples marked where it had been.

"Got him," said Mrs. Loudon, and put down the camera. "The sand flies are getting busy. You might smoke."

Lawrence lighted his pipe and his eyes twinkled. He imagined that Mrs. Loudon wished to question him, but he had rather wanted to consult with her.

"Sometimes I wonder why you located in the B.C. woods," she said. "You might, for example, have gone to Rhodesia, or the Kenya highlands, where white men superintend and colored folk undertake the laborious chores. Since I believe they are not negroes, I'm purposely vague. Anyhow, one understands British East Africa is something of a sahib's country. Then you might have tried our inland irrigated belt, where English Pioneers are supplied with telephones and electric light."

"I am not a sahib," Lawrence remarked. "I'd sooner pull a crosscut saw than command a chopper, and if you used the axe in British East, your neighbors might think you let down the white man's prestige. To chop and hoe is the black man's

burden. The B.C. irrigated belt has some advantages, but land is dear and I understand you must see your friends do not steal the water for which you pay. My capital is small; in fact, it's nearly gone, and in order to get some back, I must stay with my block. Besides, Qualichan is good enough for George, and you are content."

Mrs. Loudon's glance swept the calm lake and mountains, and rested on the wooden house, round which fruit trees grew.

"Yes, I am happy, and George must go where he is sent. But were your English relations willing for you to emigrate?"

"My father and mother are long since dead, and the money I used was mine. I think nobody was interested, although one queer old fellow offered me a post. He wanted a sort of secretary-companion, and implied discreetly that I might, perhaps, inherit a useful sum."

"Were you not attracted?"

"Mosscrop has nearer relations and has already fired two or three secretaries who did not humor him as he thought they ought," Lawrence replied. "His main object is to preserve his health, which, I believe, is better than he thinks, and he rambles about in search of a suitable climate. In winter he's in Egypt, he has tried Australia, and I think he now plans an excursion to California by the Canadian Pacific route. If he calls me to Vancouver, I don't think I'll go. Anyhow, I will not give up my ranch. To indulge a valetudinarian for a reward I might not get is not my job."

Mrs. Loudon knew him resolved. In fact, she knew all she had wanted to know, and she imagined he suspected something like that, for he gave her a smile.

"Now," he said, "I want your advice about your patient."

"You have not much grounds to be anxious. For two or three weeks she needs rest and sunshine and proper food. In summer, I do not know a better spot for a convalescent than our house by the lake."

"But when the three weeks are over? I think she had begun to hate the variety show, but, without proper training, she might not find an occupation."

"Well, you might marry her. Some people might think you ought!"

Lawrence looked up sharply, a touch of darker color in his face. Mrs. Loudon smiled.

"Are you annoyed, Larry? Might I state that I know your soberness? And I believe I begin to know my guest. Now, if you are pacified, I'll resume. Alice Thorne is an attractive girl, and she has more useful qualities than you perhaps know. Then, if you are resolved to stop in the woods, you ought to have a wife. You certainly need a housekeeper."

"I doubt. Your house is a model, but I have known bush homesteads where a woman ruled. The man never knew when he'd get dinner and where his clothes were. Then, although I'm not romantic, I'd hesitate to marry for the reason you supply."

"You might have some other grounds," Mrs. Loudon remarked.

"It's possible. On the other hand, I must weigh the drawbacks that might daunt my wife. For some time I have got to be frugal, and in winter the woods are dreary. I'm not entitled to think a girl who knew the cities, Miss Thorne, for example, would be content—"

"You might ask her," said Mrs. Loudon. "She might, of course, refuse, but she will not think the worse of you for your wanting to marry her."

Lawrence knitted his brows. For a few moments his carelessly posed figure was as still as the pines. Well, Lawrence was a bushman, marked by the bushman's calm, but Mrs. Loudon knew he could move fast.

"I hope you'll weigh the plan," she said, and let him go.

Gravel rattled under the canoe and the paddle dipped. When Lawrence swung the long blade, it did not splash. Ripples beat the stones, the canoe circled and forged ahead. Lawrence's body swayed, and the measured shock of the powerful stroke echoed in the quiet woods. Mrs. Loudon got up and smiled, but her smile was rather sympathetic than humorous. In the path she met her husband. George Loudon was tall and strongly built. His neighbors knew him only for a good

woodsman, but at Government offices in Victoria his word carried weight.

"It looked as if you and Larry consulted about something important," he remarked.

"That is so, George. I was persuading him to marry Alice," Mrs. Loudon agreed, and laughed. "I believe he undertook to think about it! Larry is like that."

Loudon's look got thoughtful. "You are cleverer than I, and Miss Thorne has some charm, but I hope you were not rash. Larry is our friend, and after all she traveled about the Province with a third-class show."

"Exactly! I'll use your argument. For a young woman to follow Alice's career and not suffer by it implies some useful qualities. You think me trustful? Well, I have ruled, and advised, a large number of girls, and I believe I know the material my business was to mold. Larry would be happier married, but he might not find another girl with the cultivation and qualities his wife ought to have. They are not numerous in the woods."

"The qualities, or the girls?" said Loudon. "For a schoolma'am, you are vague. Then I reckon Larry, although a bachelor, is happy enough, and when a man does not grumble the proper line is to leave him alone. You, however, think he ought to be married. Your marriage, so to speak, was a success; but one remembers a fable about a fox who lost his tail."

Mrs. Loudon laughed. "Your modesty is notorious, George. I did not lose my freedom; I but exchanged it for a wider liberty."

They went to the house, and in the morning Lawrence arrived. Loudon had gone fishing; Mrs. Loudon was in her orchard, but Lawrence had reckoned on their being occupied, and when he saw Alice in the veranda he advanced soberly. For five or six days he had not seen her, and now the color came back to her skin and her clothes were different, she was prettier than he had thought. Then it looked as if rest and calm had given her a sort of dignity he had not remarked on board the sloop. He signed her not to get up and fronted her squarely, his arms slack and his battered hat in his brown hand.

"I hope I am not going to startle you, but will you marry me, Alice?" he said.

The blood came to Alice's skin. He did not think she blushed from confusion, because she gave him a queer, searching glance.

"I shall always remember your generous help, but I will not marry you, Mr. Bethune."

For a moment or two Lawrence was quiet; and then he gave her a crooked smile.

"Well, I had foreseen that you might refuse."

"You are modest," said Alice. "I suppose your keenest emotion is something like relief?"

Lawrence reflected that she was after all the girl he knew on board the sloop.

"If you are firm, I must try to be resigned, but that's another thing. It looks as if Ruby Desmond is not yet dead. I hope I'm allowed to state that I got fond of her."

Alice studied him. She did not know if he were hurt, and although her curiosity was excited, she thought she would not know. Lawrence Bethune could take a knock.

"When I said Ruby was done with I was rash, for so long as I am alive, I doubt if she will die. She's restless, ambitious, independent, rather vulgar, and greedy for excitement. Not at all the wife for an industrious rancher!"

"I'd risk it. She was brave, and cheerful when she had reason to be afraid. On board *Pathfinder* she trusted me."

"To trust you is not very hard," Alice remarked in a gentler voice.

Lawrence moved, and leaned against a post, a yard from her chair.

"I can't play up. I'm Larry Bethune and you are Alice; you declared the other's gone. To refuse me is your privilege. I don't know if I am entitled to ask your grounds."

"Ruby's the grounds, Mr. Bethune. You may have remarked that she talked carelessly, and she isn't gone. You don't know all she did, or all she might yet force me to do."

"I know she was straight and proud and fastidious. But if I talk about an imaginary third person, I'll soon get entangled —"

"Very well. To live in the woods you must be either primitive or austere cultivated; but I am neither. Suppose I did marry you, and then found out I couldn't stick your quiet ranch?"

"You might find out you could not stick the rancher," Lawrence remarked with a crooked smile. "Well, if you were firmly persuaded you could not be happy at Qualichan, I'd engage to let you go."

"But you would stay with your job?"

"Yes," said Lawrence quietly, "I have not another. Then, after all, you might not make good in the cities, and if you wanted to come back, I'd be at the ranch."

"You are generous," said Alice; "perhaps you're blindly trustful. To some extent my school is the modern school, but I do not want a husband who might be willing to let me go. It's done with, Lawrence. I like you very much, but I will not marry you."

For a few moments Lawrence said nothing, and Alice approved his quietness. By and by he looked up.

"Then we must talk about another matter. In two or three weeks I hope you will be fit and well. What are you going to do? You cannot rejoin the Lacoste gang."

Alice gave him a frank, humorous glance. "I expect it will be long before you again make yourself accountable for a forlorn young woman. However, if it is some comfort, I am provided for. Mrs. Loudon has engaged me to help in the orchard. The experiment is for three months. I might, of course, get bored, and I might get fired."

"She engaged you for three months?" said Lawrence. "The strange thing is, she said nothing about it."

Alice's glance got keen. "Then you consulted with Mrs. Loudon? About me? I suspected something. She perhaps suggested that you ought to marry me?"

"She declared I'd be happier married, which is quite another thing," Lawrence admitted with a touch of embarrassment; and then his eyes twinkled. "Since I cannot persuade you, I doubt her statement. Anyhow, I'm glad you have got the post."

"Thank you," said Alice. "We have some grounds for satisfaction. You know I am provided for, and I do not think my refusal has hurt you much. In the circumstances, to meet me when you look up Loudon ought not to be awkward. In fact, I believe we might yet be pals. You are rather a good pal, Lawrence."

She gave him her hand and he went down the steps. At the bottom, he seemed to hesitate, as if he might come back, and Alice's heart beat. Lawrence, however, took the path to the lake, and when he pushed off his canoe she brooded, her eyes fixed on the receding craft and her mouth rather tight. Then she got up abruptly and went to the house.

CHAPTER IX

EVENING CALM

A wandering breeze touched the pines and drove silver ripples across the lake. In Lawrence's clearing the sun was hot, and when he felt the wind on his skin he pushed back his hat. Behind him the oats lay in even yellow rows; in front their tasseled heads were nearly level with his waist. The pine-needles in the slashing smelt like honey. Lawrence pulled out a dirty handkerchief and when he had rubbed his wet forehead beat off the flies.

Since morning he had labored in his rough harvest field, and now the sun got low, his back hurt and his hands were sore. To mow oats with a scythe for ten hours is a strong man's job, but the standing corn melted and when he pulled a head to bits he thought the stuff would thrash. The trouble was, they had not yet a mill at Qualichan, and one could not use a binder among the stumps. Besides, if he had had a binder, he had not a horse, and in consequence he must cut the crop by hand.

The lower scythe-handle revolved; the worn screw had lost its grip, and he hammered a nail behind the band. Then he tried the edge, and for a few moments the hone rang musically on steel. Lawrence pulled up his belt, bent one knee, and swung. Oat stalks crackled, and the circling blade swept a path for his advance. His arms rather followed than controlled the scythe, but when the blade bit the stalks his swinging body supplied the impetus. Mowing was not altogether a matter of brute force, for before he could whet a keen edge he had experimented for two or three months. Since he needed all the straw he could gather, the scythe heel must keep the ground. The ground was uneven, and sometimes the point went in.

At the end of the row, tall fern grew about a massive stump and the oats were thin. Lawrence reflected that if he were rich he would leave the spot alone, but he was not rich, and if he mowed up to the roots, his cattle could pick the stuff they liked and might eat the lot. All the same, the fern stalks were tough, and when he swung strongly the scythe point went deep into a root. Pulling back the blade, he saw the stay at the inner end was gone and the shock had broken the handle screw. His mowing was over for the evening and he angrily threw down the tool.

A shadow touched the oats and he looked around. Alice, two or three yards off, studied him with a smile. Lawrence's brows were firmly knit; his face was hot and red.

"Sometimes politeness is hard; but I really don't think you ought to be annoyed when I arrive," she said.

"I was annoyed because I broke the blighted scythe. I did not know you were about," Lawrence rejoined.

"Now you do know, you do not look remarkably delighted. When I crossed the slashing, I purposely stepped on some dry sticks, but you refused to look up. I expect you were determined before you stopped you'd cut the blighted oats?"

"Your surmise is accurate. You get it first time, but I'm not going to apologize. A rancher who has not much money must concentrate on his job."

"Quite!" said Alice. "You do concentrate, Larry, and when the job beats you, you get mad; but, so long as you have done your best, I suppose the proper line is to smile. For example, you were resolved you would carry me to Cheemanco, but the tide turned and the wind changed, and we never got there. Well, although one cannot always be philosophical, there's no use in storming."

She moved back from the advancing shadow, and the sun touched her white clothes. In the background were shining yellow oats and stiff dark pines, but Lawrence felt she dominated the tranquil picture. Sun and mountain wind had touched with delicate color her pale skin, her gray eyes were calm, and he noted that her hair sparkled. Although she bantered him, her glance was kind. Then her light figure got round and one remarked the clean flowing lines. Lawrence remembered his lifting her, like a bundle of draggled clothes, into the canoe at the rancherie. His main object was to get her on board, and he had used some speed.

"I did not storm. On the whole, I think I was resigned," he said. "However, when you thought you'd look me up, I do not imagine your object was to philosophize."

"Not at all. The evening was fine and I carry a message: Mr. Loudon's compliments, and if his hired man's help is useful,

he will send Bob along."

"Thank you! The style is not George's style. I expect he really said: 'The independent fool cannot himself cut all those oats, and he ought to know he can have Bob when he likes.'"

"It was something like that, but the word was not independent," Alice replied. "However, do you want Bob?"

"George needs him," said Lawrence. "He, and I believe the Government, meet the wages bill, and a first-class chopper's pay is pretty good. You might compose a polite reply; when you have mowed oats for ten hours you get dull. Anyhow, the evening is fine but hot, and if you'd sooner not walk round by the lake-head, I will paddle you across."

"You are kind. The drawback is, I must not carry off an industrious rancher from his proper work."

"Come on!" said Lawrence. "When we are on the lake I'll perhaps think about the reply. You see, if one gets up at four o'clock in the morning—"

"It's obvious. At seven o'clock in the evening one is much too tired for futile compliments!"

They crossed the slashing, but where standing timber cut off the cleared ground from the lake Alice left the crooked path. A hundred and fifty foot fir trunk, supported by its broken branches, like an inclined bridge, crossed a swampy hollow.

"I came by the log," she said. "I begin to think I'm a pretty good bushman."

She seized a branch and was on the trunk. The top was rounded and the sun-scorched bark was treacherous; moreover, a woodsman's boots are spiked, but hers were smooth. For all that, she advanced fearlessly, and where she must pass a splintered branch she but steadied herself for a moment with one hand. Lawrence imagined the log would bother some English girls he knew, but Alice's balance and confidence were as firm as his. At the end she dropped lightly in the fern.

"Come on, Larry!" she called, and laughed.

The landing at the lake was rocky, and when Lawrence pushed the canoe to a shelf she grounded on a large stone a foot or two away. For a moment he hesitated. He could reach Alice's waist, and the canoe, supported by the stone, would not capsize. The impulse must not be indulged, but he wanted to lift her on board.

"If you will give me your hand—" she said in a cool voice.

Lawrence steadied her, and when she joined him shoved off the canoe.

"Although you are not a sailor, you landed exactly where you ought," he said.

"When you can dance an Apache tango, to jump on board a canoe is not much of an exploit."

"It's possible. My notion is, you are entitled to forget Ruby Desmond's accomplishments, now you have done with the Lacoste gang."

"But you are horribly old-fashioned," Alice rejoined. "To starve is not pleasant, and when one has no money one must use such talents as one has. However, since, for your sake, Mrs. Loudon has given me a respectable post, I hope soon to be an expert pomologist. You perhaps don't know we are shortly sending our first lot of first-grade, selected apples to Victoria? Mr. Loudon is skeptical about his wife's experiment, but he admits the sample is pretty good."

"Your talents are numerous. Since I have seen you balance on a log, I know you're an excellent dancer, but I haven't heard you sing. In fact, I'd rather like to, and calm water is not a bad sounding board."

"Oh, well," said Alice. "The drawback is you're fastidious, but Perry's audiences were not, and if I sang their favorites, you might be jarred. However, in Ontario I sometimes moved the sentimental Scots. But paddle smoothly; I am going to stand up."

Lawrence slowed his paddle. A Siwash river canoe is not a stable craft, but Alice, resting her hand on his shoulder for a moment, got up. Her firmly poised white figure cut the trembling reflections of the pines. In the background, Lawrence's ripe oats and dark rocks rolled down to the water. Alice's glance swept the landscape, and she began to sing.

*"Full yellow lie the corn riggs,
Adin' the braid hill-side—"*

The paddle stopped. Lawrence had not thought himself romantic, but the clear, musical voice carried him away. On the Canadian lake, the old song's haunting melancholy went deep. Moreover, he knew Alice had the artist's temperament. All she sang she felt, and forced him to feel.

When she stopped, an applauding shout echoed across the water and Lawrence said:

"Thank you! I don't know if it's adequate. Anyhow, you have captured George Loudon. In Toronto all, more or less, are Scots. But, since you can sing like that, why in thunder did you join the traveling show?"

"I know where I stop," said Alice. "After all, that's something! I expect the shores o' Clyde are swept by rain and dimmed by excursion steamers' smoke, but songs of the sort yet seem to move homesick emigrants. You, of course, are not homesick. But do you never wish you were back?"

"Oh, well, I don't know. My native soil is stiff English clay. Big elms dot the hedgerows, and a slow river winds about the level fields. It's possible one's temperament is molded by the country where one's ancestors lived, and my folks were sober, practical and slow. On the flat English clay romantic sentimentalists do not thrive. Then a man's home is where his job is. I believe I have got a man's job, and I am not going back."

"Some men hate their job. I have known a girl do so. A really nice man might think his home was where his wife was; but if you are married, you have got to stop there, and a place at which you're forced to stop gets dreary. But let's be practical. Since you will not borrow Loudon's man, I expect you'll be bothered to put up your hay. Well, I have made hay, and if you like, I'll help. You see, I stipulated for an afternoon every week."

"Sometimes," said Lawrence, smiling, "you are rather like a Louis Sixteen shepherdess; we had one, modeled in china, under a glass shade at home. You might use a crook with ribbons or a French marquise's stick. A Canadian hay-fork is quite another tool."

"Wait and see," Alice rejoined. "When your oats are cut I'll take a bushman's holiday. I know your independence, but sometimes you're not polite. In the meantime, you might paddle. I have stopped much longer than I thought, and Mrs. Loudon expects me to be home by dark."

Lawrence sent the canoe ahead and in a few minutes her bow took the ground. Alice climbed the bank and at the top waved her hand and vanished in the gloom of the pines. Lawrence shoved off, and when he got a light at the ranch he felt his house was lonely and somehow bleak.

CHAPTER X

THE HAYMAKERS

George Loudon had pushed through the woods since daybreak, and now he had had his lunch he stretched his legs in a long canvas chair. The time was two o'clock, and although a fresh breeze curled the lake, the veranda was hot.

By and by he looked up from the *Colonist* and reached for Mrs. Loudon's field glasses. Hannah was a naturalist, and he imagined she knew all the fish-hawks and eagles that haunted the lake.

"Somebody's helping Larry load up his oats; he wouldn't have Bob," he said.

"He knew you wanted Bob, and I waited to grub the stumps at the back of the orchard," Mrs. Loudon replied. "The belt we have recently cleared must be planted in the fall."

"Larry has a conscience. The provincial Government puts up most of Bob's pay, but you use him to break ground for your apple trees, and claim that fruit-growing is profitable. Where you get labor for nothing, an undertaking ought to pay. All the same, for a scrupulously honest woman—"

"The argument isn't sound, George. Who edits and disentangles your departmental reports? The Government is entitled to pay for documents in English anybody can understand."

Loudon laughed, and, picking up the glasses, searched the yellow field across the lake.

"Did you know Alice is loading up Larry's hay? And, by James, she handles the fork like a man!"

"I thought it possible; she started for his ranch at eight o'clock. Our engagement was that she got a free afternoon every week, but for a week or two she had not claimed the privilege."

"She *saved up* for a holiday, which she spends forking Larry's dusty oats in the scorching sun? Nobody, I suppose, would imagine she had not long since refused to marry him! When you think about it, they are a queer pair; but if he had persuaded her, I do not think he'd be sorry. You know, the other evening, when we heard her sing—"

Mrs. Loudon laughed. "You are not remarkably logical. Because Alice sings a song you like, you argue that she is the proper wife for Larry! Perhaps you had better let it go. And I imagined you were studying the *Colonist*."

"I was," said Loudon, and dropped the newspaper on the boards. "These city folk make me tired! Here is a tripe merchant in Victoria declaring the Government spoon-feeds the pampered ranchers at the miners' and lumbermen's expense. Oh, my hat! The ranchers we know work seventy hours in the week, and if I read some more I might get mad. Since I'm not a rancher and I went to look for a deer at six o'clock, I think I'll go to sleep."

He stretched his legs and pulled his handkerchief across his face. Mrs. Loudon smiled. George had not found a deer, and he had torn his clothes. As a rule, his mood was humorously calm, but when he had pushed through dew-drenched fern and devil's club thorn, without getting a shot, one made allowances.

Across the lake, Alice, carrying a hay-fork, steered Lawrence's oxen down a gentle slope. The animals were fastened by a wooden yoke and chain to the sledge. Poles fixed in the runners confined the load, and Lawrence balanced on the top. Alice stopped the team, and, thrusting her fork into a pile of oats, swung up the yellow mass. Lawrence noted that she dropped it neatly where it ought to go, and he spread and trampled down the crackling stuff.

"Can you take some more?" she asked.

"We might risk another lot," Lawrence replied.

Alice tapped the oxen and the sledge lurched ahead, but the ground was uneven and they were near a big stump. Fir roots keep the surface, and the sledge tilted.

"Aw, Jerry!" said Alice. "Get up, Bob!"

The oxen strained, but the root was higher than she had thought, and the slant got worse.

"It's going," she shouted. "Jump, Larry. Jump!"

Lawrence leaped from the top; the sledge turned over, and the poles crashed. Since the chain twisted, the oxen kept their feet, and, turning their heads, they blew from their nostrils and tranquilly studied the wreck.

"I'm sorry," said Alice; "I ought to have seen the root. But look at Bob and Jerry! Aren't they humorous?"

"They're steady and slow," said Lawrence. "Horses, of course, would have tried to run away, entangled themselves in the harness, fallen down, and so forth. Nothing disturbs a plow-ox. In all circumstances he's philosophical."

"I begin to think a bush rancher is something like that. Don't you see the poles are broken? When you have me for a partner, your luck is not good."

"The partnership is but begun and I have not grumbled," Lawrence remarked. "However, we must make good the damage."

Half the hay was strewn about, and he pulled off some more, and then, with a branch for a lever, righted the sledge. In about ten minutes he chopped and fixed fresh poles, and they began to put back the oats. When all was loaded, Lawrence pulled out his pipe.

"You are entitled to a rest, and I'd like a smoke."

They started for the shade, the oxen, which he had loosed, following three or four yards behind; and when he raked a pile of hay for Alice under a big cypress, the animals stopped, and, breathing noisily, fixed their calm eyes on them.

"You are something fresh," said Lawrence. "I believe an ox's keenest emotion is curiosity. It's possible they like your voice, but Jerry would sooner try to eat your white clothes."

"The clothes were white," said Alice, in a regretful tone. "I ought to have thought about the dust in the oats, but one does not put on one's orchard smock for a holiday."

She wondered whether he had noted that he had not seen the clothes before, but it looked as if he had not. He lifted the jacket he had carried into the shade and pulled out a small chip box.

"In the woods, chocolates and candies are scarce, but you will not take a cigarette."

Alice broke the box.

"Maple sugar is the nicest stuff they make in Canada, and I expect the block came, two thousand miles, from Ontario. Your habit is to give the best you have got."

"A bush rancher's best is nothing remarkable, and as a rule is not expensive. But you talked about your orchard smock. I hope you are happy at Loudon's. Although I wanted to know, I hesitated to inquire."

Alice gave him a smile. "Because you got me the post? You would sooner not force me to pretend? Well, I am happy. The Loudons are dears, and now the modest pale apples begin to blush, and the plums put on a velvet bloom, I love the fruit trees. Red and gold and purple, framed by dark-green leaves! Our orchard is a picture one might dream about."

Her glance swept the landscape. Where the clearing fronted north, the oats were not yet cut, and tossed their silver heads against a checkered background of copper and green. Then, behind the withered stuff in the slashing, the straight trunks went up like pillars supporting the dusky foliage. She looked the other way, across the sparkling lake, and saw rocks, seamed by dark ravines, shine with a steely luster in the sun. Very far back, a snow-veined peak cut the serene sky. A fish eagle circled above the lake; wood-pigeons called huskily in the shade.

"But all one sees is beautiful," she resumed. "For a time, beauty's soothing, and I'm entitled to a rest."

"I imagine helping Hannah Loudon is not particularly restful."

"Oh, well, after the Lacoste show—Sometimes when we shut down at eleven o'clock, we must change our clothes, pack our properties, and move the stuff to the depot for the night express. As a rule, we slept, sitting upright, in a second-class car, but I have stolen into a *colonist*, where they do not charge you for a polished-board berth. Sometimes we hustled on

board an old steamer, and I have camped for the night on deck. Canadians are not more trustful than other folk, and I've known Perry nearly beat to make his get-away. On the whole, I was sorry for him. I believe he'd sooner be honest where honesty, so to speak, was practical."

"It's done with," said Lawrence firmly. "You are never going back."

"I wonder—" said Alice. "My fruit-growing is an experiment. I don't yet know if it will work. In some circumstances, sober industry might get monotonous."

Lawrence said nothing. Alice's humor was baffling, and sometimes he did not know if she joked. He lay in the fern, his back against a cypress root, and Alice noted that his muscular body was rather slenderly modeled. When Larry let himself go slack, he was never uncouth. His brows were knit, as if he pondered, and she imagined he weighed her remarks. She laughed and indicated the oxen.

"Look at Jerry! He hardly moves his eyes, and when he breathes it's like a thoughtful sigh. I'm sure he's cogitating."

"Animals do think," said Lawrence. "For the most part, I imagine, Jerry thinks about his dinner."

"Some men are like that," Alice remarked. "City men, of course; ranchers are ascetic, athletic, and austere. The other type's home is in the offices and hotels back east; fat men with faces, and I expect minds, like pigs. Some people cannot help getting fat; I'm thinking about the other sort who get fat because they are pigs. You can spot them with a glance, and as a rule, they're carried about in expensive automobiles. Still, I myself am greedy; the maple sugar is going. And we must get to work."

She led the oxen to the sledge, and when Lawrence fastened the chain rubbed Jerry's neck.

"The time to cogitate is over. Get up!" she said.

The brawny animals strained forward, and Alice, walking by Jerry's head, looked back.

"You use some tact, Larry, for I expect you're horribly afraid I'll upset the load another time. Well, if I do so, I won't mind if you're annoyed."

They stopped at the log barn, in front of a hole that opened on a floor above the stable, and Alice seized the fork.

"I think you ought to rest. Pitching is heavy work," Lawrence remarked.

"I cannot spread the stuff in the dust and heat under the roof," Alice rejoined. "Since I came to help, I am going to help. Get up! When you are gone, I'll climb on the stack."

Lawrence swung himself through the hole, and a few moments afterwards a bundle of oats plunged into the straw. Alice's fork sparkled in the sun and sank; he saw her, lightly poised on its sloping top, drive the prongs into the load; and then, seizing the stuff she had thrown him, he spread it evenly and tramped down the stalks. Under the hot roof he could not stand upright; thick red dust floated about, and the crackling straw reached his knees. Fresh oats shot in through the hole, and when he had beaten down four or five lots he heard Alice laugh.

"Do you want a rest, Larry? If you cannot speed up, I'll soon build you in."

For twenty minutes Lawrence sweated, and when he went to the window Alice and the oxen were some distance off and he noted that they went fast. But for her *gamine* humor, she was not at all like the tired girl who had moved his pity at the settlement. Moreover, she used her hay-fork like a man.

They put up two or three more loads; and then Lawrence pulled out his watch.

"I will start the stove. You engaged to stop for supper."

"If I stop, I'll cook," said Alice. "I do not undertake to be frugal, and I do not want your help. You might use the opportunity to mow some oats in the shady corner. Perhaps you know Mrs. Loudon sometimes uses you for an example of resolute industry? George rejoins that he is a Government officer and he refuses to spoil the post for the man who follows him."

She took the scythe from the wall and tried the edge with her thumb. "A Redesdale man would think it dull. Give me your hone."

Stone rang on steel and the biting note indicated that the grit cut the blade. Lawrence knew a beginner cannot sharpen a scythe.

"You are a surprisingly good haymaker," he said.

For a moment or two Alice looked straight in front. The Canadian forest melted, and she saw the bleak moorlands that roll from Cheviot foot to Tyne.

"My father was a lawyer and the farm he inherited broke him," she said. "The statement looks contradictory, but in some circumstances it is possible to be ruined by land you get for nothing. For a time, when he was ill, I was forced to superintend. Then, when the hay is ripe at the dalehead, all who can must help. The rain does not stop for long, and if you're slow, the crop goes down the becks. A dark, stern country, but sometimes the sun shines and it's beautiful. The ling on the fellside is rosy pink, shot through by gray and silver bents; the mossy well-holes are yellow and emerald green. When you come down the sheep path by the gill, you smell the peat smoke and see the tops of the big plane-trees by the house. The thick leaves shiver in the wind that creeps about the dalehead. But I'm not going to think about it, and I engaged to cook supper."

Lawrence mowed some oats and went for a swim. When he got back from the lake Alice waited, and since she was at his table, the log kitchen was homelike, and supper a cheerful function. Although she had worked like a man in the hayfield, he noted that she was cool and fresh and had somehow removed the dust stains from her white clothes. By and by she looked up.

"I hope you approve my cooking."

"All was excellent, but the supper's greatest charm was your being here. I wish I could persuade you to stop for good."

"You mustn't!" said Alice, in a firm, cool voice. "If you are going to be romantic, I cannot come back another time. Your house is a friendly house, and when I was forlorn and ill I thought it like home. All the same, it cannot be my home. And I think we'll go to the bench by the porch."

Outside, two split boards were fixed along the wall, and when Alice sat down Lawrence leaned against a cedar stump. The evening was calm and the pines' quiet shadows stretched across the grass. A fish-hawk screamed by the lake, and in the distance cowbells chimed. When the thin musical notes died away all was very still. The calm perhaps was soothing, for although Alice had again refused him, Lawrence was not much disturbed, and it did not look as if she were embarrassed. Well, his luck might turn.

"When I first arrived I thought I might buy a farm in Ontario, and I was for a week or two at Toronto," he said. "The people are friendly, and I expect you could have got a post. Why did you, really, join the Lacoste troupe?"

"For one thing, I thought myself an actress," Alice replied. For a moment or two she brooded, and then resumed with a queer smile: "Besides, I wanted to get away. And perhaps you ought to know. My Toronto friends were John's friends, and they received me because we were to be married soon after I arrived."

Lawrence looked up sharply. "You went out in order to marry somebody? Might I ask you to go on?"

"The engagement was three years old," said Alice in a quiet voice. "When John started, he urged me to go with him, and I was willing. If I had gone, all might have been different, but father was alone, and Tom and Miriam declared my duty was to stop. I did stop, and in three years I suppose one changes."

"Sometimes one gets fastidious," Lawrence remarked. "But did you call your lover *John*?"

"Oh, yes," said Alice, smiling. "Perhaps it was significant. You are rather keen. Jack, so to speak, was not appropriate, and John was not at all the sort one calls Old Bean. He had a number of solidly useful qualities, but he was not humorous. I admit my humor is not refined, but one sort of respectable soberness rather annoys me. There, perhaps, was the trouble. John had made some progress and began to be important. I am freakishly independent."

"I think I see," said Lawrence. "You joined the varieties because you hoped he would be jarred? I don't know if it's a

first-class reason. But was he willing to let you go?"

"When he found out where I'd gone, we were at Winnipeg and he knew my obstinacy. I hoped he was just a little hurt, but I imagined he would soon brace up."

"If you had engaged to marry me, I'd have followed the show across Canada," Lawrence remarked.

"Oh, well," said Alice, "you are not John's sort. However, because you forced me, I have given you my confidence. And Mrs. Loudon will begin to think I have stopped longer than I ought."

She got up and in the quiet evening they crossed the hayfield to the lake.



CHAPTER XI

ISABEL ARRIVES

Lawrence's oats were harvested, and Mrs. Loudon's apples were sold at Victoria. In the orchard, leaves had begun to fall, and the maples in the woods shone yellow and crimson against the pines' unchanging green. Lawrence's sheep, driven down from the rocks, fed in the aftermath where the timothy grass was mown, and he split the rails he needed for a strong corral. Sometimes in winter savage timber wolves ranged the valley.

Mrs. Loudon and Alice, one afternoon, sat in the stones by the inlet's mouth. A kettle boiled on a driftwood fire and thin blue smoke drifted across the pines behind the beach. The sloop rode at anchor in the slow eddies by a point, and two hundred yards off, across the smooth green water, Alice saw the Siwash rancherie at which she had landed four months since.

A short, brown-skinned fellow, using a tool like a very small shipwright's adze, chipped a canoe from a log, and one or two more, indistinct in curling smoke, burned smooth a finished hull. A group of women squatted by a pile of fish, and their knives sparkled.

"Sea fish," said Mrs. Loudon. "The spawning salmon are on the gravel banks at headwater, and George declares all die. Only the young come back, three or four years afterwards, to the spot where they were hatched. I hope he will not force us to wait for him."

Coasting steamers going north sometimes landed goods at the inlet, and Mrs. Loudon expected some domestic supplies and young fruit trees. The steamer was five or six hours behind her time-table, but on the sheltered beach the sun was warm, and Alice enjoyed her rather unusual holiday. A light wind touched the pine-tops, and one smelt resin and salt weed. The distant peak had got whiter, but the valley was yet steeped in the brooding calm that marks the Canadian fall.

"Although the cold snaps are sharp, they are not long, and as a rule winter on the coast is mild," Mrs. Loudon remarked. "I do not think you will be sorry you agreed to stop."

"For some time before you asked me to stop I hoped you'd do so," Alice replied. "I am grateful to Larry for carrying me to your house."

Mrs. Loudon smiled. Summer by the lake had transformed the girl. Her skin had begun to bloom and her eyes sparkled; one sensed her keen vitality. She was a good musician, and in the orchard a willing and useful helper.

"Larry first took you to his house. I expect you were fortunate when you met him at the settlement, and not another."

"Yes, I know," said Alice. "Men like Larry are not numerous. All the same, sometimes one must make a plunge, and to rejoin Perry was the only chance I saw. When we saw the steamer's smoke, going away, I felt all I could do was to jump overboard. Now it looks ridiculous, but I believe I nearly went."

"Yet, when Larry urged it, you refused to make an easier plunge."

"That is so," said Alice, in a quiet voice. "I felt I must think for Lawrence, and I must think for myself. To some extent, he asked me to marry him because he thought he ought—I felt he might have a better object. I knew he would be kind, but all he really wanted was his ranch, and I did not particularly want a husband. Yet I admit I was tempted."

"To be romantic is old-fashioned," Mrs. Loudon remarked. "For all that, one might risk something for love."

"Ah," said Alice, "there was the trouble! Since I am up-to-date, I admit Larry was not very much in love with me. He's tenacious, but that is another thing. One, I suppose, might capture and carry away a man; but I didn't know if I wanted to, and I don't yet know. Well, I have been franker than I thought. And we might talk about something else."

"Then, when you refused your other lover, I really do not see why you joined the Lacoste show."

Alice laughed. "Larry asked. Pique, a girl's hurt vanity, devilment perhaps, accounted for something. I wanted John to get a knock and I thought my ambitious brother in England might be jarred. Then I believed I had some talent for the stage."

"But if you had studied your companions—I expect they were not at all your sort."

"Oh, well, I inherited two contrary temperaments. My father was something of a student and artist, and a gentleman. I believe he was a remarkably bad lawyer. My mother sprang from peasant stock; her folk were small farmers, notorious sportsmen, and poachers. Some rode at third-class steeplechases and, I imagine, sold unsound horses; one got into trouble about a dog he doped at a hound trail, and another went to prison after a cock-fight. But it is not important, and I see the steamer's boat."

A power-boat swung around the point and stopped in front of the rancherie. Four passengers landed, and Mrs. Loudon studied the group.

"Two are wharf-side roustabouts; no doubt, engaged for packers. A *packer* is a man who carries tents and food for survey parties and so forth. The others, I suppose, are city sports. They have brought a quantity of camp truck, and I saw a rifle."

"One is a woman," Alice remarked. "Her clothes are a man's clothes."

"Then she's fashionable. But the boys are unloading my fruit trees; *slinging* the bundles on the stones, and the flour bags are ours. One fool is dumping the sugar where the gravel is wet. However, I see George—"

Loudon, pulling hard, steered the dinghy to the beach, and for two or three minutes talked to the strangers. Then the group got on board the dinghy.

"He's bringing them across," said Mrs. Loudon. "Stir the fire. I hope the food will go round."

Loudon pushed the dinghy on the stones and presented his passengers. "Miss Isabel, and Mr. Mervyn Trent. They are Larry's friends and are going to his ranch as soon as the packers unload their stuff."

"We might claim to be Lawrence's relations, although the relationship is by marriage," the girl replied. "He does not expect us, and I hope he will not be annoyed when we arrive; but we have good tents, and I dare say he will allow us to camp in his woods. For two or three weeks, our object is to live the simple life. In England life gets horribly strenuous for people who have not an occupation, and I came to Canada for a rest."

"I have an occupation," Trent remarked. "At present, my job is at Victoria, but since I carry a confidential message, I got two or three weeks' leave. Any excuse for a holiday is good."

"That is so," Mrs. Loudon agreed. "On the whole, Canada is not a restful country, but for an experiment with the simple life Larry's ranch is quite the proper spot. I am sorry we cannot take you on board the sloop; when we have loaded up our stuff there will hardly be room to move. In the meantime, we can give you tea and sandwiches. Steamboat tea is not first-class."

The strangers sat down and Alice gave them an interested glance. Trent was rather a good-looking, athletic young fellow. She thought him cultivated, but she imagined his talents were not remarkable. She studied the girl, and admitted a vague antagonism for which she refused to account.

Miss Trent's belted coat, breeches, Stetson hat and long boots were obviously expensive, and were no doubt designed by a fashionable London outfitter for use in the Canadian wilds. The girl was not beautiful, but a man, Lawrence, for instance, might think her pretty. One noted a careless, and almost insolent, gracefulness, although her figure was boyishly straight. Alice thought her frank. Frankness was fashionable.

Mrs. Loudon gave them tea and sandwiches, and George remarked:

"If you are going to shoot, I hope you have got the proper licenses. A rancher and, in some circumstances, a friend stopping at his house may kill a deer for venison more or less when he likes; but our game laws are drawn to stop the kind of general massacre some British sportsmen carry on, for example, in East Africa."

"We are not keen sportsmen," said Trent. "If I spotted a deer on a rock, distinct against the sky, I might risk a shot at about a hundred yards."

"A deer's habit is not to show himself against the sky. All you see is a patch of dappled hide, which you can hardly

distinguish from the trunks and fern. At the beginning, you'd probably not know a deer fifty yards off."

"Oh, well, for a few days we'll be content to camp and loaf; and then we hope to make an excursion to the high rocks. Isabel's ambition is to be a mountaineer, and we have crawled about the peaks in Switzerland. One of our packers claims to know the Coast Range, and we might carry off Lawrence for a guide."

"If you are going into the mountains, you ought to have started sooner. Then I expect Larry will tell you he cannot leave his ranch," Mrs. Loudon replied.

"Mervyn undertook to persuade him to go back to Victoria with us," Isabel remarked. "Since I don't think he really expects to do so, his notion was to get as far away as possible. You see, if he vanishes in the mountains, Mosscrop cannot recall him."

"I am entitled to a holiday," Mervyn declared. "For twelve months I have humored and followed my valetudinarian relation about. Valetudinarian is accurate, because Mosscrop is not noticeably an invalid. I am secretary, courier, and shock-absorber, and I'll be happy for Lawrence to take my post. Then, for one or two reasons, he is the proper man. The others were sacked in six or eight months, and so far mine is the longest run."

Mrs. Loudon pondered. Mosscrop was, of course, the old fellow Larry sometimes talked about. She thought Trent's humorous frankness not altogether thoroughbred; but young folks did not bother about old-fashioned rules. Besides, George, no doubt, had stated that they were Larry's friends, and Trent perhaps wanted them to think him generous. Well, she did not see Lawrence take a post of the sort. His habit was not to look for a soft job.

She glanced across the water. The tide went smoothly up the inlet, and Trent's packers and one or two Indians loaded a sea canoe. They were not yet ready to push off, and Mrs. Loudon signed her husband to hand round fresh sandwiches.

"Is Mr. Mosscrop stopping for long at Victoria?" she asked.

"I doubt if he knows," Isabel replied. "We started for California, but somebody informed him that fogs float about the coast, and we might arrive in Japan. I myself do not care where I go. London is expensive, and when another provides the tickets, travel is cheap."

"I am going to play polo in California," Trent declared. "The thing can be wangled. All I have to do is to find out that the Canadian Pacific deck cabins are engaged, and the food and service are better on board the San Francisco boats. Then I might be sacked. The word is used in Lancashire, where the Mosscrop specialty is made."

"Then your relation is a manufacturer?" said Loudon.

"Now retired," said Trent. "The factory is not large, but they made an article, protected by patents, that is used in cotton mills. When the patents ran out and competitors cut prices, Mosscrop sold the works. It is understood that he carried off a useful sum, and since he likes bright young people, he invited Isabel to join our tour. Now you know all about us, and I hope you are not bored."

They began to talk about the mountains, but by and by Loudon asked if the steamer had landed other passengers at the neighboring inlets.

"They dumped a boat-load of cargo and two or three people at a settlement about sixty miles back," Trent replied. "One was a French-Canadian and not at all the sort you would expect to meet in the wilds. When somebody heard him sing on the lower deck we had him brought to the saloon, and he helped us nobly at a concert."

"The fellow was good," Isabel agreed. "At one time, I imagine his voice was first class. He sang French-Canadian *chansons* and negro *spirituelles*. The words of course baffled us, but one sensed an emotional force. However, once or twice when we called him back, he was frankly vulgar."

"All the same, he was funny," Trent rejoined. "You spotted the professional touch. Looked as if he might have toured the mining towns with a cheap revue company before he got fat and his voice got husky. Liquor, no doubt, had something to do with it."

Alice looked up. "Then the man was old? Did you hear his name?"

"I cannot remember. He was not young and his black hair was thin, but I expect his sort are perennially youthful. For all his shabby clothes, he carried himself with a swagger, and he talked with a touch of theatrical importance. However, when we put up a collection for him he made us a jolly good speech."

"But did he ask you for money?" Alice inquired.

"I think not; but he went third class, without a ticket. When he leaned against the rail and pulled out his tobacco pouch, his wallet dropped overboard."

"It's possible," said Loudon, smiling. "Still, I reckon the steamboat purser had heard the tale before."

Trent resumed his inquiries about the mountains, and Alice cogitated. Perry Lacoste might use the trick, and the portrait Trent had drawn was accurate. All the same, she could not account for Perry's going back to the settlement, particularly since he had not met all the company's bills. His object could not be to look her up; he was not her lover, and Pearl would not let him go. Pearl was as tenacious as she was unscrupulous. In fact, the musician could not be Perry Lacoste. All the same, Trent's narrative vaguely disturbed her.

After five or ten minutes, paddles splashed, and a large canoe crossed the inlet. The Trents thanked Mrs. Loudon and got on board. Loudon pushed off the dinghy and went to superintend the loading of the sloop.

CHAPTER XII

LAWRENCE'S CHOICE

Thin mist streaked the forest behind Bourlon Ranch. In the west the sky was red and green, but the light was nearly gone and the lake began to sparkle in the moon. The river throbbed and chiming cowbells echoed in the woods.

Lawrence sat on a cedar stump, four or five feet above the ground; a lamp burned in the kitchen and the reflections from the window dimly touched his face. His guests occupied the bench in front of the house, and Isabel Trent studied her host. His face was indistinct, but his quiet pose and bent head indicated that he pondered. Isabel had noted Larry's quietness before, and when she contrasted him with young men she knew in England, it was rather attractive. Then one remarked his firmness; one felt that Larry knew where he wanted to go and, as a rule, got there. Isabel's friends, for the most part, preferred to drift about.

Some time since, she might have had Larry for her lover, but she had not used all her charm; for one thing, her husband must be at all events comparatively rich. Now, if Lawrence were not foolishly independent, the marriage might have some advantages, but she had begun to think her charm for him was gone. The strange thing was, she did not know if she was much annoyed. Yet she had, now and then in England, thought about him with a sort of sentimental tenderness, and if Mervyn could persuade him to indulge Mosscrop, he might help her carry out her social ambitions.

She pulled his Hudson's Bay blanket across her shoulder. The evenings got cold, but the fading landscape was austere and beautiful, and if they went to the ranch kitchen there was nothing for one to do. Besides, they would soon start for the mountains and Mervyn declared she must begin to harden off. The metaphor was a gardener's metaphor, but she refused to acknowledge herself a tender plant. She knew the Alpine snow, and had been pulled up some famous Cumbrian ghylls. Mervyn, however, knocked out his pipe; he was going to talk.

"Your mail starts to-morrow, Lawrence," he said. "I don't know if Mosscrop is impatient, but I'm his ambassador and ought to report progress. The phrase is the sort of phrase he'd use, but I do not feel we get far ahead."

"We stop at the point we reached the evening you arrived," Lawrence rejoined.

"Oh, well, the old fellow sent me off to persuade you, and I'd like Isabel to support me when I state I tried. In a way, I'm noble, because if you turn down his offer, he will, *faute de mieux*, be satisfied with me. On our recent excursion to the Azure coast, I polished up my French."

"Yet you grumble about your post."

"Everybody grumbles about his post. The important thing is, I might not get another as soft, and unless I was sternly frugal, might be forced to take a city job. When I come to think about it, I don't altogether know who would give me a job."

"It's perhaps queer, but, on the whole, I like mine," Lawrence remarked.

"You are queer," said Trent. "But let's go ahead. If you allow for some peculiarities and know how to indulge him, old Lawrence Mosscrop is quite a good sort. You are the man he really wanted, and if you used some tact, you might inherit a good sum. I am not, officially, empowered to use the argument, but the old boy implied—I am authorized to state that your pay would be good and your duties light, although I feel Mosscrop exaggerates. In winter, you'd travel about with him; in summer his house on the Yorkshire moors is a charming spot, and when you were not refusing appeals for subscriptions and so forth, you would get some fishing. As a rule, he stops until October, but this year we started soon because he was not satisfied about some drains. In order perhaps to prove his keenness, he's willing, in case you married, to remodel a house on the estate for you."

"My wife would be rather like a sailor's wife."

"It looks as if old Lawrence had weighed the drawback. Anyhow, he implied that if he approved the girl, she might be allowed to join his party."

"There's another drawback," said Lawrence dryly. "I might not want to marry the sort of girl Mosscrop would approve."

In fact, I think it probable."

Isabel laughed. "Oh, Larry, you might try to be polite! You ought to know Lawrence Mosscrop is satisfied with me. Before you resolved to emigrate I believe he had plans for us."

"He declared Larry was a d—— independent fool and did not know when his luck was good," Trent agreed. "The old chap hates to be baffled. When he was Mosscrop o' Springbank he was boss omnipotent."

Lawrence got down from the stump. The light touched his face and the others saw his look was thoughtful.

"After all, he's kind, and you must Bowdlerize my reply. He offers me a loafer's life: I'd write a few letters to his bankers and stockbrokers, choke off subscription hunters, and audit the housekeeper's books. A clerk would do the lot in an hour or two a day. When we went on tour, I'd be free to talk in steamship smoking-rooms and play deck-quoits, risk small sums at foreign casinos, and lounge about fashionable sporting clubs. The post might attract one sort of man; but I'm not the sort. I'd sooner use the shovel on a Canadian road! You will thank Mosscrop and we'll let it go for good."

Trent gave his sister a keen glance. Isabel smiled, but her look was inscrutable.

"Since you are resolved, I must carry on, and I might have a harder job. However, as Mosscrop might inquire, does your ranching pay?"

"In four or five years it ought to support me. You have probably remarked that I'm not extravagant!"

"And in the meantime?"

"My bank-roll melts. Since I need tools, some clothes, and food, I hope it will not be gone before I can sell a few steers and sheep. One is forced to buy flour and groceries, but as a rule one can shoot a deer, and in summer, spear a salmon."

"Salmon might get monotonous," Isabel remarked. "We are not shabbily inquisitive; but how much does your housekeeping cost?"

Lawrence told her, and for a moment or two she was quiet. Then she said:

"I like your pluck, and you force me to admit that we are useless, extravagant rotters. I have spent for an evening frock a sum that would support you for a year, and I expect when Mervyn enjoys a hectic night in town—However, suppose your money is exhausted before you have cattle to sell?"

"The Vancouver storekeepers might carry me on, but interest is a heavy charge, and I'd probably sell the ranch."

"Then, after all your labor, you would be where you started?"

"He'd be farther back," said Trent. "His reserve fund would be gone."

"Not altogether; I'd get more for the ranch. Still, when I had bought a fresh block I'd be bothered for working capital and must go farther into the wilds where land is cheap."

"You would begin again?" said Isabel. "From our point of view you are a fool, Larry; but, by George, you are a man! The Old Country is not yet decadent, and when our lot is pitched on the scrap-heap, yours will forge ahead. But I'm getting theatrical, and if Mervyn can find his map, we'll talk about our trip to the mountains."

They went to the house, and some time afterwards, when Lawrence was occupied in the stable, Isabel looked thoughtfully about the kitchen. She noted the thick log walls, *chinked* by moss and clay; the split-board floor, and rude furniture, which was for the most part the work of Lawrence's hands. The small square stove was rusty and its pipe went through a bedroom in the roof. On a blackened shelf were two or three cooking pans. She pictured the long winter evenings, when he perhaps studied old newspapers and mended his clothes; in summer, when the light began to go and the woods were very quiet, the loneliness might be worse. Isabel Trent was not emotional, but she was moved to pity, and something like respect.

"Lawrence is finer stuff than us," she said to her brother. "When Mosscrop invited me to join you, I, of course, saw his plan. He wanted Lawrence, and hoped to use me for an attraction. Since we are not notorious for our modesty, I know I have some charm. The plan was his, but you agreed!"

"That is so," said Trent. "For all his eccentricities, Larry is a good sort, Mosscrop likes him, and if he plays up properly, he might be rich. However, I mustn't claim to be generous, because if I held on to the post, I should not get much. The old chap sometimes calls me an unproductive, loafing parasite! My notion is, parasites do not loaf; some I encountered on the coasting boat were unpleasantly active; but in Lancashire I believe people talk like that."

"Exactly!" said Isabel. "I am not afraid to be coarse. When you weighed the circumstances, you resolved to *give me a chance*. However, nothing's doing, and I expect Lawrence will marry the variety actress. After all, she has some qualities I have not. And I hope she'll be happy at Bourlon Ranch! Well, it looks as if Lawrence has forgotten us, and I think I'll go to bed."

She went off, and Trent frowned. His and Mosscrop's plans had not worked, but, after all, he had rather thought for Isabel than himself.

A day or two afterwards, he and Isabel started up river. Their object was to harden off and accustom themselves to life in camp before they plunged into the wilds. Lawrence undertook to join them as soon as he had put all straight at the ranch.

They were not long gone when he went one morning to the door. The rain he had heard in the night had stopped, mist floated horizontally across the pines, and he thought the day would be fine. Pacific-coast rain is the sort of rain that falls in England during a thunderstorm, and he speculated about the Trents. They, however, had wanted to try the simple life, and their tents were pretty good. Lawrence pulled out his watch. It was six o'clock, and at seven he must start for the mountains and round up some sheep. For an hour or two the brush would be horribly wet.

He lighted the stove and cut bacon and potatoes; now his guests were gone, he did not bother about flapjacks and hot biscuit. A rancher ate in order that he might work, and as a rule was satisfied with bacon, beans, and potatoes for breakfast, dinner, and supper, although, if time permitted, he fried the potatoes. By and by he heard a step, and looking up with surprise, saw a man at the door. The fellow looked exhausted, and his wet and muddy clothes were torn; Lawrence imagined he had got entangled by thorny devil's club.

"Hallo!" he said. "I guess you have hiked some distance. I am going to get breakfast. Will you join me?"

The stranger pulled off his soaked hat with a flourish, and when he sat down Lawrence gave him a frankly curious glance. He certainly was not a bushman; for one thing, he was fat. Then, for all his fatigue, one sensed a kind of jauntiness. Lawrence did not know the proper word, and he could not guess the other's occupation. He gave him some bacon and potatoes, and noted that he ate like a famished animal. When he had satisfied his appetite, Lawrence inquired where he was from.

"I leave the settlement since three days," the other replied. "There is much rain, I have not a blanket, and I cannot make a fire."

Lawrence nodded. The trail over the pass was rough, and for a tenderfoot three days was a pretty good hike. A bushman, of course, could build a lean-to for the night and cook a meal.

"Well, unless you are a chopper, I doubt if you will get a job at Qualichan."

"I am not a chopper," the man rejoined with a touch of dignity Lawrence thought amusing. "In the meantime, I search for Mr. Bethune."

"Then you need not search much farther. I am Bethune."

"*V'la la bonne chance!*" said the other, and his glance swept the room.

"Now I know you!" said Lawrence. "You are Perry—I suppose it's Pierre?—Lacoste. You might state what you want."

Lacoste bowed; Lawrence had remarked that he was theatrical.

"Many people know me! The Lacoste show is famous; but I search for Miss Desmon', whose proper name is Thorne. Some time since she sail with you for Cheemanco, but she is not arrive. She, perhaps, is here?"

"She was here," said Lawrence dryly. "I might help you find her, but I don't know. For one thing, I do not imagine she

wants to see you. When you stole away from the settlement, you cheated her and left her destitute."

"I do not cheat, sir. The steamer goes too soon, and I am told she is on board. When we make Cheemanco I cannot go back. One cannot travel without a ticket, and there is not a boat."

Lawrence cogitated. The fellow's excuse was plausible and Alice believed another was really responsible for her being left behind. In fact, she talked about Perry with humorous indulgence. Lacoste's glance again searched the kitchen, and Lawrence, divided between amusement and annoyance, imagined he looked for something that might indicate that a woman was about.

"If you reckon you can persuade Miss Thorne to rejoin your company, I expect you will be disappointed," he said. "Is that why you resolved to look her up?"

"The affair is my affair; but it is important I find her soon."

"Important for you? Or for Miss Thorne?"

"For her. Me, myself, I want nothing," Lacoste replied with theatrical dignity. "If I do not see her, she is sorry, and if you are her friend, I think you are sorry, too."

Lawrence knitted his brows. Alice, of course, did not acknowledge him her trustee, but in a way he felt himself accountable. Yet he thought Lacoste sincere, and to imagine the fellow her lover was ridiculous. If his errand really were important, one ought not to baffle him. Besides, he'd no doubt inquire at Loudon's. Lawrence signed Lacoste to the door.

"Miss Thorne is at the house you see across the lake, and if you keep the trail to the river, you will find a log bridge. In the meantime, it looks as if you needed a rest and to dry your clothes. I must start for the rocks, but the stove will burn for some time, and if you would like to sleep, you will find some blankets in the other room."

He took his rifle from a peg, waved his hand to acknowledge Lacoste's thanks, and went off. Although he wondered whether he was not rash, Alice was entitled to see the fellow.

CHAPTER XIII

LAWRENCE GETS A KNOCK

Lawrence, looking down from a steep hill-side, saw thin smoke float across the woods. Somebody at a spot three or four hundred feet below him nooned by a fire, and he wondered who the fellow was. The other was probably brewing tea, and Lawrence had not yet got his lunch.

On the stony slope the underbrush was thin, and Lawrence plunged downhill. For the last ten yards he rode, with legs braced, on a wave of rattling gravel, and when he seized a branch and stopped, the stones slid noisily across a ledge. At a level spot where a creek splashed, George Loudon, squatting by a fire, removed a small kettle's lid, and a few yards off Mrs. Loudon unpacked a picnic basket. A camera rested against a stone.

"You arrived spectacularly," she remarked. "When George rides an avalanche he prefers the sitting glissade."

"That is so," said Loudon. "I do not claim to be an acrobat, and I carry some weight. All the same, since a Government official does not wear overall trousers, and the other sort are expensive, Larry's plan is cheaper."

He brewed the tea and Mrs. Loudon gave Lawrence a slab of pie.

"When you saw who we were why did you frown?" she asked.

"The frown was unconscious; but I admit I hoped you were at your house."

"We ought to be there," said Loudon. "A fellow in the provincial parliament is annoying the Government, and I am ordered to supply statistics with which they hope to put the blighter down. Somebody, however, informed my wife that a white-headed eagle haunts the cliff, and she wants his portrait."

"Larry has not yet replied," Mrs. Loudon remarked.

"Perry Lacoste stopped at my shack in the morning, and is going to your house. He declares his object's good, but I'd sooner you received him."

Mrs. Loudon nodded. "Yes. The French-Canadian the Trents talked about! Sometimes one is dull. However, his looking up Alice has not much to do with you."

"In a way, I suppose it has not," Lawrence agreed with a touch of awkwardness. "If I had felt I was justified, I'd have waited and gone across with him. Still, he claimed his errand was important, and Alice might not have liked my butting in."

"It's possible," Mrs. Loudon agreed with a smile. "An up-to-date young woman hates to be controlled, and after all I don't know if you are the proper man—But what sort of a fellow is Lacoste?"

Lawrence narrated their interview and pictured his guest. For a few moments Mrs. Loudon pondered, and then looked up.

"When George has finished his lunch we will start for home, although I expect we will not get there for two hours. I think you had better not join the party."

Lawrence agreed. Alice might not approve his meddling, and Mrs. Loudon was competent. Moreover, he had found marks like a panther's at a swampy spot, and he might be forced to move his sheep. When the Loudons started he resumed his climb, and before he got back to his ranch dusk had begun to fall. Getting a light, he saw a note from Loudon on the table.

"Come over as soon as you return."

Twenty minutes afterwards, Lawrence went up the veranda steps. His skin was wet by sweat and he was breathless, for he had paddled fast. He thought the house quiet, and when he went into the big general room only George and Mrs. Loudon were about.

"Well?" he said, as coolly as possible. "You sent for me."

"George went across," said Mrs. Loudon. "When we got home Alice was gone. She and Lacoste went down the inlet on board a canoe."

Lawrence's hands strained on the arms of his chair. His impulse was to jump to his feet and storm, but, for Alice's sake, he must be cool. In fact, for a moment or two he wondered whether he might not pretend he knew why she had gone. Mrs. Loudon's eyes, however, were fixed upon his face and she was very keen.

"The fellow stated his business was important, and he must see her as soon as possible."

"Yet he seems to have waited until about one o'clock. There's the queer thing!"

"I expect he went to sleep," said Lawrence. "He was soaked by rain and exhausted. But please go on."

Mrs. Loudon told him all she knew. She and George arrived about three o'clock, and while they were away a stranger asked for Alice. Li Wen, the house boy, said the stranger was a rather fat city man, and his tight store clothes were good.

"You reckoned they were shabby and wet," Loudon remarked.

"The clothes were mine," said Lawrence, with a grim smile. "I don't know if they were remarkably good, but they were the best I had. You might, however, go ahead, ma'am."

In about ten minutes after the city man asked for her, Alice ordered Li Wen to put up some food. Twenty minutes afterwards, she went down the steps, and the fat man carried her waterproof folder. She gave Li Wen a note for Mrs. Loudon and started for the inlet. Some Siwash had come up with the flood tide, and Alice, the stranger, and two Indians got on board a sea canoe. That was all Mrs. Loudon knew, and she gave Lawrence the note.

Lawrence knitted his brows. The hand was uneven; Alice had written fast, as if she were excited or disturbed. The sentences were broken and apologetic. She must start for Vancouver and could not wait Mrs. Loudon's return. If she got off at once, she might join a steamer going up the strait. Alice did not know if she would be long at Vancouver, but she would write, and she thought her news might be surprising. She hoped she might get back, if it was but to thank her kind hosts, but nothing was definite yet. And she must get the steamer.

Lawrence turned to Loudon.

"You let her go? Your sloop is at the cove, the tide was ebbing, and the wind blew down the inlet."

"Exactly," said Loudon. "So far as I can calculate, Miss Thorne started an hour and a half before we arrived, and with two spritsails set and a fair wind, a Siwash canoe is a fast boat. Besides, I'd hesitate to stop a resolute young woman who's entitled to go where she likes."

"Very well," said Lawrence, "I will risk stopping Lacoste; the fellow has got my clothes and I'm justified to seize my property. His, you see, are yet at the ranch, and I don't propose to carry them along."

George laughed, and although Mrs. Loudon was sympathetic, she smiled. Larry's mouth was tight and his look was grim. He must not, however, be allowed to be absurd, and she signaled her husband.

"The canoe started six or seven hours since," Loudon remarked. "I dare say you can calculate where she is. Then, since Lacoste was at the settlement, he probably found out when a steamer was expected and is now on board. In the late fall the winds are light and baffling, and although I'm willing for you to use my boat, you might not make Vancouver for two weeks. When you get there, Alice will be gone."

"Suppose she was not?" said Mrs. Loudon. "You could not carry her off, and since she had an object for going, I doubt if you could persuade her to come back. You might, perhaps, beat up Lacoste, but I do not see how it would help, and Alice would be annoyed. If you think about it, she is the worst obstacle you are up against."

Lawrence admitted she was logical, and for a moment or two he brooded. Although he was hurt and savage, he was Alice's champion.

"Let's be frank," he said. "To imagine that swaggering low comedian could attract a girl like Alice is absurd. I believe

she has some talent for acting and her voice is fine. Now his company has broken up, he might want her help in some fresh theatrical venture; fellows of his sort are hopeful. If the plan did not work, he'd no doubt steal off as he did before."

"It's possible," Mrs. Loudon agreed. "All the same, you cannot follow them up and down the Pacific slope. If Lacoste's supposititious experiment succeeded you would have no grounds to meddle; if it did not, Alice would certainly refuse to take your help again. Then she states she might come back. All you can do is to wait."

"I suppose that is so," Lawrence replied in a moody voice. "Well, I'd sooner not hang about the ranch and wonder. I want action, and the Trents expect me to join them. They have pitched camp up river, and I'll push off at daybreak. Are you going, George?"

"No, thanks, Larry! If you had started a month since, I might have considered it; but when you have a housekeeper like mine, you get soft. In fact, I advise you to get back soon. The fall calm weather has stood for some time, but you might find fresh snow on the high ground, and when the storms begin, the Sentry Peak neighborhood is not the spot I'd care to haunt if my companions were city tenderfeet."

"They claim to be mountaineers."

"I hope they don't boast," said Loudon. "If you can cross the range, beat it down the valley on the other side for the settlement. After a week or two, I reckon your pals will have had enough. However, if you are going, I wish you good luck."

Lawrence went off. He was hurt, and anxious for Alice, but he agreed with Mrs. Loudon. Nothing entitled him to follow Alice, and he could not force her to return. All the same, action might be some relief, and to pilot the Trents across the mountains ought to keep him occupied. When he got to his ranch he made his pack, ate a frugal supper, and went to bed.

Three days afterwards, he climbed a rocky hill about which the river curved. Two hundred feet below him a canoe was pulled up on the bank. The canoe was his, and Trent's party had used her to carry their supplies. She would not, of course, carry the group, but to track her up stream by a line from the bank was easier than to move her load overland through tangled forest.

Lawrence smelt smoke, and by and by joined his friends at a level spot in the timber. A fire burned between two small trunks; the tents, supported at the ends by crossed poles with a ridge-pole resting in the notch, were firmly pitched, and since the curtains were pulled up Lawrence noted the neatly built branch beds. One packer, at all events, was a useful man. The evening was rather cold and mist floated across the white peak in the background. Lawrence saw the veins of snow had crept lower down the rocks.

After supper, he and Trent smoked their pipes and Isabel lighted a cigarette. Sitting by the fire in breeches, long boots, and gabardine coat, she was very like a slim young man. For the most part, Lawrence said nothing. Since their talk about Mossdrop at his ranch he had been bothered by a vague awkwardness when he was with the Trents. Moreover, he was tired and moody.

Sometimes Isabel gave him an interested glance, and he sensed a touch of ironical amusement. At one time he might have been her lover; his poverty was the obstacle, for she had delicately indicated that her husband must be rich. Lawrence had thought it done with, and was, in fact, long since resigned. Then Mervyn Trent had indicated a plan by which he might, at all events, be richer, but he had refused. In a way, it looked as if he had refused a chance to recapture Isabel. But recapture was not the word—Isabel never was his.

"You did not hurry to join us," Trent remarked.

"Before I could start I was forced to put all straight at the ranch," Lawrence apologized.

"Well, we must get off in the morning, and I suppose we must be content to cross the range at Sentry Mountain and return by the settlement. If you had been ready when we first arrived, we might have reached the Chilcotin country and gone down the Fraser."

Lawrence had recently got a knock, and he was bothered about Alice. When he got back to Qualichan he might get some news, but the suspense frayed his temper, and Trent's grumbling jarred.

"A bushman might push across, but you could not," he said. "If you had wanted to make the Fraser, you ought to have started two months since, when the days were long, and you would have needed another packer to carry the stuff you refuse to go without."

"I believe our packers are good."

"Steve knows his job; I expect he fixed your camp, but I doubt if he knows the Coast Range. Bill is a sawmill hand, although I dare say he has once or twice gone logging in the woods."

"Mervyn likes Bill," Isabel remarked with a twinkle. "He does not like Steve, and sometimes the fellow is not ingratiating. I begin to think he rather despises us."

Lawrence thought it possible. Steve was a bushman packer; Lawrence imagined he had borne all flesh and blood could bear. If he were forced, he could sleep behind a snow bank, go without food for two or three days, and yet carry his load. A man like that was rather scornful of luxurious tourists who demanded, in the wilds, a standard of comfort he had never known.

"Steve is not my favorite," Trent agreed. "When I engage a servant, I'd sooner he did not, obviously, think me a fool; but I suppose a good Canadian scorns to pretend. However, by now, you are to some extent Canadian, and I must go cautiously."

Lawrence smiled. For three or four days, Mervyn had, no doubt, helped to drag the canoe up river and portage her load round dangerous rapids. His efforts perhaps accounted for the touch of nastiness.

"As a rule, I believe the emigrant who arrived but three or four years since is more Canadian than the Canadian born. But you have not finished your remarks."

"Then, your adopted countrymen are kind and splendidly hospitable. The trouble is, you're *superior*. As soon as one lands, one senses a sort of condescension, as if you were willing to indulge us because we have not your advantages. Well, we are not altogether decadent in the Old Country. If the snow on Sentry Peak is awkward, I'd sooner Isabel were on the rope with me than Bill or Steve."

"I might let you down," said Lawrence humorously. "When you climb in Switzerland, I expect two porters carry up all you want for the night to a club hut. At three o'clock in the morning, you start up a glacier, but you must make your peak by noon and get down before the snow is soft and stones sweep the gullies."

"Yes," said Isabel, "it's something like that. You might, of course, be stopped by mist or storm, and be forced to camp for another night on a ridge ten thousand feet up. However, if your luck is good, you get back to your hotel in the evening, after a pretty strenuous day."

"Then you take a hot bath and dine, while a band plays, in an expensively decorated dining-room! In Canada, you cook your supper behind a rock, and at daybreak strap on a sixty-pound pack and hit the trail."

"Oh, well, you have shortened our excursion," Isabel rejoined. "I admit the Coast Range is fresh ground and we cannot pack; but, if you don't hustle us very hard, we will try to keep up."

They began to talk about something else and presently went to bed. Lawrence refused to share Mervyn's tent. The night was not very cold, and cutting a few branches, on which he put his blanket, he was soon asleep by the fire.

CHAPTER XIV

THE PORTAGE

At daybreak Lawrence rolled up his blanket and made his pack, which was conveniently carried by deerskin straps and an old trouser-brace. Steve split wood, and Lawrence hoped the ax's stroke would rouse his friends. Nothing indicated that they thought about getting up, and he did not want to call them, for although he was leader, his authority must not be forced. At supper, he had sensed a sort of strain, as if Trent might rebel. All the same, since they had plunged into the wilds when fall was nearly over, caution must be used.

Steve threw fresh wood on the fire and Lawrence looked about. All he saw downhill was level mist, under which the river brawled, and he turned his head. On the high slopes, shreds of pale vapor, like torn lace, clung for a few moments to the dark pines, and then floated up. Farther back, Sentry Mountain cut the serene sky and a dim star yet shown behind its snowy top. The morning was bracingly fresh.

"A fine day, I think," said Lawrence. "Where is Bill?"

"Gone for water; lots of water," Steve replied. "The dame likes it hot, and the boss can't shave with cold. Bill is chambermaid and bell-boy. They rap on a can for him!"

"They are my friends, and have put up the dollars for the trip."

"That's all right," said Steve. "I'll earn my pay."

"Aren't you a bit lame?"

"I reckoned you might spot it; the others didn't. When we drove some logs, I got nipped in a jamb and went down river with my leg broke. Since then I've got to look for a soft job, but I'll go where your pals want, and some piece farther than Bill."

Lawrence nodded. On the whole, he liked the fellow and he knew his independent type, but he imagined the jobs Steve thought soft would daunt a city laborer.

"When your turkey's packed, you might chop the small spruce behind the tents. Bring her down where she'll hit the hemlock."

Steve gave him a puzzled glance, and then laughed. Lawrence smiled and plunged downhill. At the bottom, he rubbed a long-blade razor on his boot. He did not need a looking-glass, and the river was his bath.

On the hill an ax beat like a drum, and when a tree crashed the noise echoed in the rocks. Lawrence pulled on his clothes, and, hurrying back, helped Bill cook breakfast. Bill was short, rather fat, and humorous, a useful man when camp was pitched, but Lawrence thought he would sooner cook than carry a load.

By and by the Trents arrived. Lawrence thought Isabel fresh, and her look cheerful. Her clothes were not yet noticeably the worse for her excursion; Mervyn's indicated that he had been in the river and had pushed through thorny undergrowth. His look was rather moody, but Lawrence admitted that one must make allowances. For a tenderfoot, the morning was cold, and until recently Mervyn had not occupied a spruce-branch bed. But Isabel had not, and, so far as Lawrence could distinguish, she was serene.

"Canada is a strenuous country, and I expect you have been about for an hour or two," she said. "When the tree crashed behind my tent, I was happily asleep."

"I do not altogether see why Lawrence chops trees in the morning," Mervyn grumbled. "One cuts tent poles and firewood when one pitches camp."

"Sometimes Mervyn is rather dull," Isabel remarked. "I dare say you can enlighten him, Larry."

"Then, I believe you broke a canoe pole and need a few fresh branches for the platform. One must keep flour and sugar dry."

"That is so, and a falling tree is an efficient rising-bell."

Trent laughed and concentrated on his breakfast. Lawrence knew the woods and must not think him annoyed. All the same, the excursion was Mervyn's excursion and he was not going to be hustled. By and by Isabel got up and glanced at Lawrence.

"We must be off in half an hour. You will have time to make your pack," he said.

"I shall be ready sooner," Isabel replied. "I don't know about Mervyn."

She and Lawrence went off, and Trent lighted his pipe. If his pack was not made in half an hour, the others must wait. He had got up before he wanted and he must weigh things. To begin with, it looked as if Lawrence had not properly noted his generosity. He had offered to resign, in the other's favor, a post numerous young fellows he knew would be keen to take. From Trent's point of view, the post had drawbacks, particularly since he was not forced to follow an occupation, but if he let it go he must be frugal. Moreover, if he held on and indulged Mossdrop, he might get a useful sum. He would not get all Lawrence might get; Larry was first favorite and his claim was stronger.

Anyhow, for his sister's sake, Trent was willing to withdraw. Isabel had certainly liked Lawrence, and had he been rich, would, no doubt, have married him. Lawrence had not openly courted her; he knew his drawbacks, but if she had delicately hinted—Mervyn knew young women who would not hesitate to signal a scrupulous lover. Anyhow, old Mossdrop had recently indicated that he would approve the marriage, and unless Lawrence was strangely dull, he ought to see he was offered a soft job, an inheritance, and an attractive wife. Isabel, of course, saw, and since she had joined the party, one might conclude that she agreed.

Well, Lawrence had turned down the plan. He was a fool, but Isabel was frankly baffling. If she were hurt, she would, of course, not allow one to know, but Trent was satisfied she was not hurt. In fact, it looked as if she liked Lawrence as much as before. Trent, however, was annoyed, and he thought himself justified. So much so, that could he have found a plausible excuse for abandoning the excursion, he would have returned to Victoria. To find an excuse that would hide his real object was hard, and since he had hired the packers and bought an expensive camp outfit, he might as well push on as far as the top of Sentry Peak.

At the time Lawrence fixed they launched the canoe. Isabel and Steve got on board. Bill, scrambling across the rocks and driftwood on the bank, hauled the tracking line, and at shallow spots Lawrence and Trent took the water and pushed the craft across the stony bottom. The river was fed by melted snow, and the turbid green current was horribly cold. In the deep valley, mist yet rolled about and all one saw was vague wet rocks and trees.

Lawrence reckoned they advanced two miles an hour, and Trent admitted they might not have gone as fast through the timber on the bank. In the Pacific slope forests, giant trees, wrecked by storms, rot where they fall, and fern and thick underbrush spring between the upright trunks. At some spots only a bushman can chop a path.

After an hour or two the mist rolled up and melted, and in front the river plunged down a gorge. On one side, a hundred-foot cliff dropped to the angry current; the other was a precipitous hill slope, on which small pines grew in the stones. Muddy foam that looked like curdled milk streaked the jade-green rapid. Lawrence's plan was to portage the canoe along the hill-side and relaunch her at the rapid's upper end. Trent objected.

"Some of the rocks are smooth and greasy with wet moss. If we went light, the pitch would not bother us, but to carry our supplies and the canoe is another thing. Can't we keep the river?"

"We might," said Lawrence thoughtfully. "I believe the Siwash go up the canyon, but much depends on the height of the water. We might be stopped by a rapid we could not pass, at a spot where we could not climb the bank. Then I am not a Siwash."

"And I am a raw tenderfoot?" Trent suggested.

Lawrence pondered. For an Indian river canoe, the canoe was rather large. She carried two passengers and the camp material, but in broken water that was all. If she were swamped, the flour and so forth might be damaged. Yet they might get through, and Trent's habit was to take the road he thought easiest. Lawrence sensed a kind of strain, and resolved, as far as possible, to humor the fellow.

"We will try it," he replied.

For half an hour they tracked, and Steve poled, the canoe up stream. Sometimes all but he and Isabel were in the river, pushing the craft across the stones; sometimes they were on the rocks, and she went smoothly across a revolving pool. The trouble was, one now and then slipped from a shelf into deep water, and at an awkward spot Bill, floating like a bottle, went down stream for twenty yards.

For the most part, the canyon was straight, but they reached a bend where the current broke savagely against the cliff at the entrant curve. On the other side, in the shallow salient, the stream rippled across a gravel bar. At the tail of the pool was the rapid up which they had toiled; at the top spray tossed about the boulders in the channel. Bill and Trent, on the rocks, hauled the tracking line, and the canoe forged slowly ahead through the slack water by the gravel bar. Isabel had landed, and Lawrence, climbing on a ledge, emptied the water from his long boots.

At the head of the pool the canoe touched bottom, and Steve, shouting to the trackers, leaned hard against his pole. The line broke, Trent sat down, violently, in the stones, Steve went overboard, and the canoe, relieved of his weight, swung across to the deep water at the bottom of the cliff. Lawrence doubted if she would hit the rocks, but if she grounded in the tail rapid, she would capsize.

Jumping from the ledge, he sped across the bar. The stones hurt his feet, but the canoe went down stream like a toboggan and speed was important. When the water touched his knees he threw himself forward in the flattest plunge he could make, and all the others saw was his bent, swinging arm. Lawrence did not see the canoe. For the most part, his head was under water, but he reckoned he knew where she was and how fast she went.

His hand crashed against her side and he seized the top. He did not try to get on board; a Siwash canoe has not much stability, and until he reached shallow water he was content to hold on. For a few moments they went down stream, and then his leg struck a rock. Next moment, his feet trailed across smooth stones, and, bracing himself firmly, he stood up. The canoe, however, did not stop, and until he got a firmer hold, he was dragged along. Then Steve came up, like an otter, from the turmoil, and they ran the canoe on to the bar.

"I reckon I have had enough," he said when the others arrived.

"You ought not to have indulged me," Trent remarked. "If it's some comfort, I acknowledge myself an obstinate fool. Now, I suppose, we must try to portage. Can we carry her up the rocks?"

"We must," said Lawrence dryly. "We'll get to work at once. Snow water's pretty cold."

They landed the load. To move the canoe sixty feet up the precipitous bank was an awkward job, but all could help, and at the top Trent was glad to sit in the stones and get his breath. Isabel noted that the water drained from Lawrence's and the packer's clothes, but nothing indicated that they thought their swimming the icy pool much of an exploit.

They were the first to get up, and turning the canoe over, they lifted the long hull, and with their heads underneath and their arms stretched along the sides, cautiously moved forward. Their steps, as far as possible, must synchronize, and to see in front was difficult. Isabel imagined the last man did not know where he went, and she thought the canoe rather like a very large thin beetle, propelled by four legs.

Sometimes one fell and pulled down the other; sometimes Bill took one's place, but he was clumsy and after a few minutes they sent him off. An hour after they started, they reached a level beach by quiet, deep water, a mile from the pool. Then they turned and went back for the loads they had left.

When all was carried across, they nooned by the quiet reach. At the canyon's end, the rocks rolled back, and the river curved about a wide basin. For two or three thousand feet, dark forest climbed the slopes, and then thin belts of trees crept up the ravines. The crags, streaked by sparkling threads of water, shone in the sun, and Sentry Peak dominated the valley's end. The forest cut its hollow front in a ragged line, and from the snowfield at its top narrowing white veins crept down between the ridges. Shreds of mist trailed about the hollows, where the snow was faintly blue. By the river, the sun was warm, and the smoke from Bill's cooking fire went straight up.

Isabel remarked that Lawrence allowed his clothes to dry on his skin. They were old and stained by soil and weather, but somehow he carried them like a pioneer's uniform. In the wilds, Lawrence had an attraction she had not felt at the ranch. He harmonized with the rocks and pines, and she admitted her brother did not. Mervyn's proper background was

the smooth grass where the tennis nets were stretched in front of an English country house. In spotless flannels, silk belt, and colored scarf, he was graceful and picturesque. Now, as his clothes got shabbier he got shabbier. But Larry must not imagine she mused about him.

"I forgot to ask for Miss Thorne," she said. "I suppose she is occupied fastening grease-bands round the fruit trees and hunting *lepidoptera*. But are the moths that eat apples lepidoptera?"

"Larry doesn't know," said Trent. "In North America the lot are bugs!"

"Mrs. Loudon ought to be grateful to you for finding her a companion and helper like Miss Thorne," Isabel resumed.

Lawrence looked up. In a way, he had found Alice, but he wondered whether Isabel used the word with a touch of malice. Before they started for the woods, she was much at Loudon's, and it looked as if she knew something about Alice's adventures.

"Miss Thorne is not at the ranch. She started for Vancouver the day before I took the trail."

"But she told me she was going to stop for the winter."

"She meant to do so," said Lawrence, reflecting that if Isabel returned to Qualichan she would see the Loudons. "The fellow who managed the variety company, however, arrived, and, I suppose, persuaded her to rejoin."

"The French-Canadian on board our steamer!" Isabel remarked. "But did not Miss Thorne consult with you? You had got her the post, and so forth."

"I was on the hill all day. When I got back they were gone."

"It's possible she imagined you might not approve," said Isabel. "One talks about the call of the wild! If you are a variety actress, I expect the spot-light and jazz band call louder—" She stopped for a moment, and resumed with a laugh: "For a holiday your woods are splendid, but to stop for good is another thing. I imagine an up-to-date young woman might get very bored at a forest ranch."

She got up and Lawrence knocked out his pipe. They launched the canoe, and Isabel, Steve, and Trent started up the quiet, winding river. Lawrence and Bill pushed across the stony, level flat. Their business was to find a camping ground, cut tent poles and branches, and make a fire before the others arrived.

CHAPTER XV

SENTRY PEAK

The sun was yet behind the mountains, but the snow on Sentry Peak had begun to shine in soft yellow light. Mist filled the valley and frost touched the pines. On the hill bench the timber was thin, and Lawrence and Isabel stood where the rocks dropped to the deep hollow behind the camp. They smelt wood smoke and a faint gray plume went up from the dark pine-tops. Under the mist, the river throbbed; Steve's ax crashed against a trunk. Trent sang a song from a popular London revue and in the mountains' austere calm, words and music were vulgarly commonplace. Isabel noted Lawrence's unconscious frown.

"Mervyn is in better humor. At length he feels he is on ground he knows," she said. "Then you allowed us an extra hour this morning, and he hates to get up in the dark. I do not pretend I like it."

"Oh, well, perhaps I did hustle you along, but the days get short, and when we are across the height-of-land we can slow down. My object was to get back to the low ground before the fine weather broke. One does not boss for bossing's sake."

Isabel laughed. "You are an optimist, Larry. Some men, and rather numerous women, simply love to rule."

"After all, if they have the proper qualities—"

"For the most part, they have not; they are the noisiest, and that is all. The strong, silent man is altogether out of date, and if you are modestly quiet, people think you a fool."

"Something depends on the people, and on where you are. In the woods, for example, you do not engage a chopper because he boasts he can chop. You give him an ax and watch him get to work. The best packer is the fellow who carries the most, through soft muskegs and up steep rocks."

"You are a sternly practical lot; but I think Mosscrop would agree," Isabel remarked. "In a way he's your sort, and he wanted you."

"Had he kept the factory, I might have indulged him. I am not going to take a valet-courier's job. In fact, I don't know if I want a soft job. However, Mervyn sent off my reply some time since and it's done with."

Isabel said nothing, but she agreed. It was done with. At one time, she might have carried Lawrence away. She rather thought any attractive woman could capture a man on whom she cleverly used her charm, so long as he was not attracted by another. Now she knew she could not move Lawrence Bethune. Moreover, she refused to experiment. It looked as if he were satisfied with the vaudeville girl. Yet the girl had vanished. If she herself had really loved Lawrence—

A crash pierced the morning calm and was followed by a dull, throbbing roar. On the mountain's front dust sped swiftly downhill and vanished in the pines.

"A plunging rock?" said Isabel.

Lawrence nodded. "The block has started a landslide. As a rule, the rocks come down in early summer, when the snow melts, but the Siwash, who pitch their fishing camps by the river, think the Sentry a bad mountain at any time."

Isabel pulled out her field-glasses. Two ridges swept down from the peak's high shoulders, and enclosed a wide semicircular basin. In the middle, directly under the white peak, a third ridge, shorter and steeper than the others, dropped to a small green lake. The ridges, getting narrower, to some extent converged at the top, and the snowfield disappeared in the hollows between them.

Isabel imagined the glaciers did not reach the lake. She had climbed higher peaks in Switzerland, but in order to reach the Sentry's top, one must labor through trackless forest before one got to the rocks by the glacier.

"Do you see your line?" Lawrence asked.

"My line?" said Isabel, with a meaning smile.

"To know where to stop is something," Lawrence rejoined. "On the river I was boss, but when we take the rocks I abdicate. For to-day I think you ought to lie off, and I'll move some stores across the hollow and *cache* the stuff; in the afternoon we'll shift camp as high as possible, and at daybreak begin the climb. Then we may spend a day or two looking for a pass to the valley on the other side. If we can get there, we would make the settlement sooner than we could reach my ranch, and I believe the woods are not so thick. At the settlement, we might engage a halibut boat to carry us round by sea—"

"We ought to get a steamer for Victoria," Isabel replied, and used her glasses. "Well, I think we will follow the south ridge. So far as I can distinguish, the snow at the top is good, and on the whole the Sentry's an easy peak. To find a line for loaded men might be another thing. However, let's get breakfast."

After breakfast, Lawrence carried a load of provisions down the rocks and buried the stuff in the stones on the ridge across the hollow. Steve laboriously moved the tents and camp gear up the south ridge, and Trent went off with Bill to look for a deer. They undertook to pull the canoe, which might not again be wanted, some distance up the river bank.

In the afternoon all were back at camp, and Trent was rather annoyed because he had not seen a deer. For three or four hours they loafed about the camp; and then carried the supplies Steve had left up the ridge to the spot he had reached in the morning. At dusk camp was pitched behind a rock where the trees running up to meet the snow got small.

In the frosty dawn Isabel joined the group by the fire. She had rubbed her face with prepared grease and carried thick gloves, and in place of her long boots puttees covered her legs. The queer thing was, although she thought the Sentry an easy peak, she did not want to talk. So far, Lawrence had planned for them, but he admitted he was not a mountaineer, and now she and Mervyn must lead, she hesitated. She noted with a touch of amusement that her brother did not. Mervyn rather liked to be in front, and he fussed about his ice-pick, vacuum flask, pack, and rope. Isabel might need her snow spectacles, he declared, and if she was going to take the confounded camera, it must be slung so that it would not get under her arm.

The rope was made in the Old Country, with a red yarn in the strand, but the stiff coils twisted in tangled loops, and Trent began to be impatient. When Lawrence seized the rope and shook out the kinks, Isabel laughed.

"It looks as if you knew something about ropes, but you do not use much tact," she said.

Bill served bacon and coffee, and the group soon got up.

"I'll lead and we will put on the rope," Trent remarked. "Larry will take the middle. At awkward spots Isabel can watch him and point out the best holds."

They tied on and started up the ridge. In the valley the forest was hidden, but the camp was above the mist, and when the last trees were behind them the gray peak began to get distinct. By and by the ridge got steep and broken, and they went down to an old moraine at the bottom of the rocks. The stones were sharp and slippery with frost, but for a time they pushed across the queer, round hummocks. In the meantime, the moraine got narrower, and at length the snow that was at first some distance off pushed them back to the ridge. For a few minutes they rested, and Trent looked about. The white surface was broken and cracked, but the upheavals were not large, and he imagined the cracks were not deep.

"The pitch is even and easy," he remarked. "All the fresh snow that seems to have fallen ought not to hide the *crevasses*, and I dare say we can work round the small *seracs*."

For two or three hours they stumbled about the glacier, and Lawrence acknowledged Trent's ability to lead. Sometimes he steered them across to the other converging ridge, and sometimes they were forced back to the rocks they had left. Once they crawled for a hundred yards along a narrow shelf, and then came down across the front of a snow-veined crag. On the whole, Lawrence thought the obstacles they encountered ought not to daunt an athletic man, and he noted Isabel's steadiness. At length, the ridge melted in a smooth, even slope, and they were on the peak.

Lawrence pulled out his watch. Eleven o'clock, and he reckoned another hour would see them at the top, although the last three hundred feet was steep. The morning had been pretty strenuous, but he had undertaken harder jobs.

They went up obliquely, plowing through loose fresh snow. Trent, turning the bottom of the steep, broken pyramid, cut steps up a gully at the back. Then they crawled across some ice-glazed ledges, and stopped, triumphant. Lawrence again pulled out his watch and saw two hours had gone.

For all the snow around them, behind a rock the sun was hot, and the light southwest breeze was soft. Lawrence had thought to find a keen east wind blowing from the high ranges inland. He would sooner the wind were east, but he got his lunch and looked about.

All one saw was mountains, covered for some distance from their feet by dark-green forest. The timber-line was roughly level, as if it had been splashed across the picture by a straight but shaking brush. Where the trees stopped, the rocks began, and in places a top, higher than the rest, was, like the Sentry, tipped by shining snow. When one looked north, however, all the distant tops were white. For the most part, the mountains, in parallel chains, went northwest, and smears of deep blue and gray indicated where the valleys pierced the majestic wilderness.

"There's the road to Chilcotin," said Lawrence, pointing east. "You might find a valley going, for some distance, the proper way; but on the whole you'd be forced to shove straight across, and up and down, for headwater."

"Oh, well, we have given up the plan," Trent replied. "You, of course, were right. If it's some comfort, I admit your habit is to be right."

Lawrence pulled out his pipe. Isabel imagined he saw his remark was rash. Mervyn hated to be baffled, but he ought to be a sport.

"We must look for a line to the settlement," she said. "I expect it goes down the valley below us. The trouble is to get there."

They studied the ground. The mountain's east front was steeper than the side they had climbed, and four or five hundred feet below the summit, the snow stopped at the top of a precipice. One could not see the bottom; one's line of sight touched the forest across the valley, but Lawrence sensed the profound gulf between. Farther south, the rocks were clear of snow. Their front, however, was precipitous, and below them a very sharp stony pitch dropped to the first small trees. Trent searched the gullies with his glasses.

"I could steer a roped party to the stones; but I doubt if anybody could carry a proper load, and we have some heavy stuff to move," he said, and with a sort of ironical politeness, gave Lawrence the glasses.

"That is so," said Lawrence firmly. "Nothing's doing *there!*"

"Very well. We must try the *massif*, beyond the north ridge. I rather think we might find a *col*, a neck in the main range, you know."

"I don't know if you are forced to translate," Isabel remarked.

Lawrence smiled, and turned his glance north. Across the snowfield, for two or three miles, the mountain's top was a sharp, horizontal ridge, but deep ravines pierced the slope and shadows indicated gaps. Then Loudon had talked about a pass by which prospectors from the upper Fraser had long since reached the coast. After a few moments he turned his head. In the southwest, over the sea, the sky was streaked by soft gray clouds. He had reckoned on frost, but it looked as if a warm Chinook wind might blow from the Pacific and sweep the ranges with drenching rain.

"Since I vetoed your first plan, I'd like to help you carry out the other," he said. "If we can cross the range, we ought, without much trouble, to make the coast; but we must get across in the next two or three days."

"We can get across," said Trent. "In the morning we'll go up the north ridge, and I'll undertake to find a neck. I don't see why you hesitate."

Lawrence cogitated. Although Mervyn's voice was careless, he felt a sort of antagonism, and its reaction on himself. He certainly had hustled the party up river, and he imagined Mervyn's point of view and his would seldom coincide, but that did not account for all. Sometimes one disputed, about speed and so forth, with one's pal. The antagonism really began when he refused Mossdrop's offer, and all that it implied. Then Lawrence, looking up, imagined Isabel studied him.

"In the morning it might rain, and heavy, warm rain would bring down the loose rocks," he said in an apologetic voice. "Then if we shoved off for Qualichan when the river began to rise, I expect we could shoot the canyon and the freshet would carry the canoe over the bars. We do not, of course, want a flood. If we go the other way, we must pack our loads through dripping brush and swollen creeks. Then, although I believe we could make the coast, I myself do not know the

valley."

"Safety first is a useful rule," Isabel remarked.

Trent laughed. "If you use it all the time, you get nowhere. Anyhow, in the morning, Larry will help me look for a pass."

A cloud floated across the sun and Isabel shivered. When she turned her head the sky in the west was dark. Now the cheerful light had gone the mountain was daunting.

"We have stopped some time," she said. "I think we ought to start."

The snow was getting soft, and on the steep pitches small, revolving blocks sped downhill. The queer round objects were not globular but flat, like plates. Where the surface was cracked and tunneled, the group followed the rocks, and sometimes stopped for a few moments while big stones crashed. At a spot where the slabs were scratched they plunged recklessly down a steep moraine; and then turning, saw a large block smash on the stones they had passed.

"In the circumstances, I think we'll climb the ridge and keep its top," Trent remarked.

The ridge carried them to the camp, and when they got there Lawrence looked across the woods. A soft wind touched his skin and the hills were dark. He thought the rapids noisier, and the pines were murmuring.

"We will get down before the rain begins," he said, and ordered the packers to break camp.

They pitched the tents in thick timber near the bottom of the hill, and Steve and Lawrence, cutting poles and stripping bark from the trunks, built an open-fronted bothy against a rock. By and by Lawrence called Bill.

"You moved the canoe?"

"Sure I did," said Bill. "She's up in the brush at the top of the bank."

"Very well," said Lawrence. "I think all's fixed for the night. We will take supper when you like."

CHAPTER XVI

THE NORTHWEST PASSAGE

Big drops splashed the tent and the strained wet canvas throbbed; water trickled noisily down a trunk, and Isabel, turning in her branch bed, pulled back the door curtain. Heavy with sleep, she did not for a few moments know where she was; and then, as consciousness returned, she fought a vague alarm. A dream had perhaps disturbed her; in her sleep her brain had reacted to the storm.

The wind roared in the pine-tops, and when the turmoil sank the clamor of the rapids was harshly loud. Water splashed in the dead needles, and tossing branches cracked. Isabel pictured the rugged wilderness across which they had labored when the weather was calm and fine. In front, the mountain blocked their path to the settlement, and she began to doubt if Mervyn could find a pass. If they steered for Qualichan, the flooded river might force them to keep the dripping woods, and although they were not extravagant, their supplies would presently run out. In fact, but for Steve and Lawrence they might starve.

Where the wood was green Mervyn could not light a fire, and Isabel admitted she could not. He could not put up a branch bed; now she thought about it, Lawrence had made her dry, springy couch. It looked as if she and her sort were rather a useless lot. They boasted some cultivation, but after all Lawrence's was higher than hers. Yet the packers obeyed him because he was a first-class woodsman. And he had indicated that he meant to stop in the woods. Isabel could not. The wilds were daunting and she began to be afraid.

Steve knew his job, but the queer, surly fellow was satisfied to carry out Lawrence's orders. Bill was a good cook. Isabel began to think that was all, and unless he were supplied with proper food and a substitute for a kitchen, a cook was not much use. In fact, but for Lawrence—Isabel reflected that she had circled back to the point from which she started.

In the thick timber, the camp behind a rock to some extent was sheltered from the rain, and a dull fire yet burned between the hearth logs. Faint reflections trembled on the wet trunks, and when a man's dark figure stole from the gloom Isabel's heart beat. She wondered whether a wandering Siwash had crept into the camp.

The man moved almost noiselessly to the fire, but when he dropped fresh wood between the logs and a yellow flame leaped up, the light touched Lawrence's face and his shining slicker coat. For a few moments he was quiet; Isabel imagined his glance searched the camp and he listened to the storm. Then he moved cautiously towards her tent, and she watched his slow advance with puzzled interest.

Stopping a yard off, he felt for the line that stayed the crossing front poles, and Isabel smiled. He wanted to move the toggle, in order to ease the strain the shrinking rope might put on the wet canvas. Lawrence's habit was to think about things like that. When the line was slack he stole away, and Isabel's disturbance went. So long as Lawrence was captain, she knew all was well.

In the morning mist rolled about the mountains and tremendous rain beat the pines, but the camp was sheltered, and when Isabel got up at seven o'clock Bill served breakfast in the bothy.

"You must put off your search for the pass," she said.

"I certainly am not going," Trent agreed.

"Oh, well," said Lawrence, "I am not keen, and I expect the mist would baffle a better mountaineer; but now I recollect, George Loudon once told me that prospectors from the Fraser used the Sentry for a mark when they crossed the ranges to search the coast creeks for gold. Some, in fact, did get a quantity of gold. Since you cannot carry tools and food and blankets up a precipice, it looks as if there was an easy way over the mountain's northern wall."

"A sort of Northwest Passage; they were steering for the Pacific," Trent remarked. "The queer thing is, Loudon did not inform us when we talked about going to Chilcotin. Then I can't help feeling you might have remembered the thing before. You, however, were not enthusiastic about the trip, and perhaps put Loudon wise."

"No," said Lawrence, "I honestly forgot. But if you were now in the wilds behind Chilcotin, would you be happier?"

"Not at all. Since the fine weather has broken, I'm quite as far from civilization as I care to be. Anyhow, we are entitled to a rest, and we'll put off our climb until to-morrow."

After breakfast they loafed about and smoked. The tents did not leak and the bark shack kept out most of the rain, but Isabel felt the time was dreary. So long as they were going somewhere, she did not grumble; to wait, when she imagined they ought to push on, began to be irksome. Then she would sooner Mervyn had not talked about a *Northwest Passage*; but she must not allow the rain and storm to work on her imagination.

In the meantime, the river's turmoil got ominously loud, and about eleven o'clock Lawrence went off downhill. He was not back for dinner, and when he arrived in the afternoon, the water dripping from his clothes, his look was grim. He signed Bill, who followed him a short distance into the timber and then vanished. Lawrence returned to the camp, and when he had put on fresh clothes joined the others in the shack. Sitting down, he lighted his pipe.

"Where did you send Bill?" Trent inquired.

"Down river. I fixed the spot he must reach, and although I doubt if he will get there, he durst not make camp until dark. The trip is probably useless, but he will, at all events, get wet."

Isabel looked up. So far, she had not seen Lawrence angry. Now his effort for calm was rather marked, and she knew Mervyn resented his meddling.

"After all, Bill is my man," he remarked.

"There's the trouble. When you wanted a packer, you engaged a valet-cook. Anyhow, you promised to see the canoe was properly pulled up. You sent Bill! In consequence the canoe is gone."

"Blast him!" said Trent savagely. "He declared she was safe where he put her. But suppose we cannot get across the range? By George, it might be awkward!"

Lawrence said nothing, but Isabel imagined he agreed, and she herself was disturbed. So long as they had the canoe to carry their stuff, they could, if the mountain baffled them, reckon on an easy line of retreat over ground they knew. She might, for example, be sent ahead on board with one packer and the load, and the others, going light along the bank, would find camp pitched and supper ready where they stopped for the night. Now all they needed must be transported laboriously on their backs, and at some spots loaded men could hardly advance five miles in a day.

"You mustn't make me accountable," Trent resumed.

"I am accountable," Lawrence replied. "I ought to have gone down to the bank as soon as I knew the water began to rise. Still, ten minutes' effort would have made all safe, and I rashly trusted Bill and you."

The blood leaped to Trent's skin. "I suppose you are justified to be nasty; but you are not an easy boss, and since Bill is my servant he perhaps rebelled. However, there's no use in disputing. D'you think we have lost the canoe for good?"

"She might jamb across a rock in the channel, and if she washed against a fallen tree, the branches might hold her. In any case, she'd be broken and useless; but I expect the flood will carry her down to the lake. Our best plan is to start for the settlement as soon as possible. It's nearer than my ranch."

Trent nodded. "We will go up at daybreak. I believe we can get across."

Isabel began to talk about something else and Lawrence played up. Trent smoked his pipe and brooded. At a country house or a country club he was a favorite. Old people liked his urbane politeness; young people thought him a jolly pal. He was athletic and had perhaps some grounds to trust his nerve and luck; but he had not the endurance that springs from labor and being forced to go without. Fatigue accounted for something. Trent was a product of civilization, and in the Canadian wilds his self-confidence and humorous philosophy broke down. His urbanity vanished, he magnified irritating trifles, and rebelled against Lawrence's control. Moreover, Lawrence's turning down Mosscrop's plan was not a trifle.

In the circumstances, careless talk was rather hard, and when it was time to go to bed all were conscious of some relief. At midnight the rain stopped, and when day broke the sky was clear. All was ready for an early start, and after breakfast Lawrence sent for Steve.

"If I am knocked out on the mountain, you are boss. You will start at once for Qualichan by the river, or for the settlement, over the range. It will depend upon our finding a pass you think you can safely pack the loads across. I expect you get me?"

"Sure," said Steve. "The dame will not make trouble and I can handle Mr. Trent. I guess I'll get them there."

"Very well. In the afternoon you will pack all loads, and as soon as we are back we'll break camp," Lawrence resumed, and stopped for a moment with a frown. "There was something else—but since I've forgotten, I expect it was not important."

He threw the coiled rope over his shoulder, seized the ice-pick, and waited a minute or two for Trent, who had not yet fastened his short, nailed boots. Isabel thought it typical, but by and by her brother got up and gave her a smile.

"You can label your trunk for the settlement. We are going to find a road," he said.

They vanished in the trees, but Isabel wondered. Mervyn's habit was to talk as if the job he undertook might be reckoned done. For example, he was confident he could persuade Lawrence to go back with them to Victoria! The drawback was, when Mervyn fronted obstacles his confidence, and sometimes his temper, went. All the same, it looked as if sleep had refreshed him and he was ashamed of his moodiness. Isabel hoped he and Lawrence would not dispute. Lawrence would not, unless he were forced, but if a road were found, she imagined he would be the discoverer.

Trent and Lawrence waded a creek the glacier fed, pushed through the timber in the deep basin between the mountain's spurs, and for three or four hours labored up the north ridge. Then they turned and followed the range from which the white peak sprang. The top was broken by small towers, and large stones covered the connecting flats. The stones rested on their corners, and one must balance on the sharp edges and step cautiously across the gaps. Trent could not go fast, and Lawrence's progress was marked by awkward jumps and halts. They were forced to work round, and sometimes to climb, the towers. Moreover, the rocks cut their view, and at each obstacle they surmounted they hoped the pass was behind the next.

They stopped for lunch on a splintered summit and Lawrence looked about. Overhead the sky was clear, but clouds rolled up from the west. A mile or two in front, light mist curled up from a fold in the range.

"We must be off the rocks when dusk falls," Trent remarked. "All the same, the blasted mountain cannot run on very far like a wall, and if we have time, we ought to find a break."

Lawrence crossed the stony summit, and looking down on the other side, called Trent. Some distance below the top, mist floated slowly away from the mountain's eastern slope.

"By George, the mist goes *through* the range!" said Trent. "I reckon the gap is six or seven hundred feet deep. There's your miners' Northwest Passage!"

He pushed his lunch into his rucksack and knitted his brows.

"If we keep the summit, we might be bothered to get down into the trough. Let's try the stone-field at the bottom of the rocks. My notion's to follow an oblique line to lower ground. We might be stopped by crags, but I expect we'd find a gully."

Lawrence agreed. He thought the gap was the old miners' road to the coast, but they must find out soon. The days were short, the sky was threatening, and they must, if possible, reach the valley before dark. They set off and plowed obliquely downhill across sharp stones and treacherous gravel.

CHAPTER XVII

THE STONE SHOOT

Lawrence sat down on a smooth block and awkwardly pulled out his pipe. When they crawled round a chock-stone in a gully, he had for a moment or two hung by one hand, and his wrist began to hurt. It did not bother him much and he had not wanted to stop, but Trent demanded a few minutes' rest. Although on the rocks he was the better man, he had not, like Lawrence, hardened his muscles by continuous labor. Lawrence, however, admitted that he had nearly had enough.

The stone-field was almost as rough as the mountain's top, and when they had gone down some distance they came to a row of crags, running like a buttress across the slope. At the bottom of the cliff, they were forced to crawl across big sharp-cornered blocks, and sometimes to climb into, and out of, an awkward ravine. The mountain was terraced by roughly parallel crags, and their path went up and down between rock and scree, for the stony slope below them was steep as a roof. On some pitches the stones could not rest, and one heard them tinkle and murmur as they slipped downhill.

Lawrence reckoned the time about three o'clock. He did not pull out his watch, because to get his pipe had hurt his hand. The sun was gone, the landscape got blurred, and he felt the queer raw cold that marks, and sometimes comes before, the mist's descent upon a mountain top. The pass, indicated by rolling vapor, was yet some distance off, and shreds of mist floated up as if a wind blew through the gap.

"Feels like rain," said Trent. "D'you think we'll get some?"

"The sky is dark. Thick mist would be worse."

"Mist is baffling," Trent agreed. "In a few minutes you don't know where you are, and unless you are on familiar ground, a compass is not much use."

"Oh, well, we are on the mountain's west side, and the river is at the bottom."

"The trouble is, there might be a precipice or two between."

Lawrence's glance searched the long stony slope. For two or three hundred yards from the rocks at the top, the pitch was steep but even; and then it stopped abruptly. Lawrence reflected that when one looked down a roof one could not see the wall on which it rested. Farther down, but a long way off, indistinct small trees rolled back and melted in the mist where the river ran. A rapid's turmoil faintly pierced the calm, and in the distance a rock crashed. He heard strange whispering noises, as if the stones were not at rest.

"Dark comes soon," Trent resumed. "My notion is, we ought to get off the mountain, and the *tongue* we passed not long since will carry us down to the timber line. Where stones lie a man can go, and we might not find another easy pitch. I expect your miners' pass is walled by high crags."

Lawrence had not thought the pitch remarkably easy, and his habit was to finish a job. Moreover, he now reckoned his doing so was justified.

"If we go down, we must come back in the morning," he rejoined. "Yesterday we were held up by rain, and since the canoe is gone, we must start for the coast as soon as possible. In fact, I had hoped we might pull out this afternoon."

"But, after all, another day—"

"The time is late in fall, and the nights get long. Are you keen to carry a load along the river bank to Qualichan?"

"I'd frankly hate it," Trent declared.

"Then the line to the settlement is shorter, and I believe the timber is thin. One must be logical. For eight or nine hours we have climbed about the mountain; in one or two more we ought to find out if there is a pass we can use. Speed is important. Why waste another day?"

Trent frowned. He had had enough and began to think about his supper. Then since he was the better mountaineer,

Lawrence's comparative freshness irritated him.

"You are logical. Since you firmly took control I have wished you were not," he said. "However, if you are resolved to find the pass, there's no use in talking. Let's shove off."

After some time, they stopped at the top of a gully. Water splashed along the bottom and Lawrence thought the wet stone ominously smooth. The sides were nearly perpendicular, and but for the large cracks, to get down might be difficult. On both banks, steep rocks went for some distance downhill. Lawrence studied the chasm doubtfully, and then turned his head.

Mist crept up the mountain and thin rain began to fall; he could hardly distinguish the crags half a mile off. He did not know where the pass was, but if they kept the mountain-side they would get there. In the meantime, they must cross the gully.

"Looks like the mountain's rubbish-shoot," Trent remarked. "All the same, the stones are quiet, and when I saw a good line to the valley you were determined to find the blasted pass. Let's get down."

He threw the doubled rope round a block, and Lawrence descended. When Trent joined him they let go one end, and pulling it down by the other, tied themselves on the rope. At the bottom, the gully was about two yards wide, and the pitch was sharp, but they got some support from the rock on one side. Trent hoped to reach a spot below the crags, and argued that although they were going downhill, to reach the pass nearer its foot would shorten the distance from the camp. Lawrence agreed, and for a time they cautiously advanced.

The gully got a little wider, but by and by Lawrence braced his legs and jammed his back against the rock. Two hundred feet below him the gully opened on a very steep stony pitch that vanished in rolling mist. Looking down, he felt that, if he let go, he might plunge through the vapor to a tremendous depth. In fact, he imagined Trent was daunted. Then he remembered a thing he had forgotten when he gave Steve his orders before they started.

"Do you know where I cached the food?" he asked.

"On the north ridge, was it not? I suppose you blazed a tree?"

"The north ridge is two or three miles long," said Lawrence impatiently. "Trees grow all over its lower end."

Trent stopped him, and flattened his back against the rock.

"Look out for the stone!"

Water splashed in a pool a short distance farther up the gully, and a large, ragged block leaped across a ledge. The trickling water helped its swift descent, and shocking against the other side, it spun round and sped by. Lawrence thought Trent's hands shook; his own skin was wet by sweat. After a few moments he heard the stones on the slope below him tinkle, as if a number moved.

"Let's get out of the devilish rubbish-shoot. The next time, our luck might not be as good," Trent gasped.

He crossed the gully. On the other side the rocks were broken, and one could reach the top without much effort, but Lawrence seized him.

"That's the wrong side! If we follow it, I doubt if we can cross the stones at the gully's foot."

"You are still determined? I am going back to the tongue we passed."

"Oh, buck up!" said Lawrence. "The tongue's as far off as the pass, and I'm going on."

Trent hesitated. He knew the risk they ran, and his impulse was to steer for a safer spot at his fastest speed. He thought Lawrence knew, but the stubborn fool refused to turn back. Trent had boasted about his mountaineering exploits; he was a good mountaineer, and he hated Lawrence for his firmness.

"Very well," he said sullenly. "Can you climb the crack behind you? If I get on your shoulder, I might find an anchorage for the rope, but the job will be difficult."

Lawrence said he could not; his wrist hurt and he did not dare put much weight on his hand. Trent frowned.

"Then we must look for an easier spot. Let me have the rope. I can move faster and speed's important. I'll get up where it's possible and steady you."

Throwing the coiled rope round his shoulders he started down the gully and stopped under a ledge, above which he thought the wall slanted back. To get on the ledge was awkward, and when the thick coil round his chest pushed him back he loosed the knot and left the rope on the stones. He might perhaps have waited and got on Lawrence's back, but Lawrence was not there, and Trent was resolved to get out of the dangerous gully.

He got up and when he was on the ledge saw a way to the top. He must, however, wait for Lawrence, and seizing the edge of a crack, he leaned outwards and looked down. Lawrence, in a pool below him, coiled the rope, and some distance up the hill stones crashed.

"Stand by for a catch!" Lawrence gasped.

He threw the coil, and the end fell across Trent's head. The ledge was narrow, and Trent, hoping to find a better anchorage, scrambled three or four yards farther up the roughly terraced rock. He was not altogether satisfied, but when he threw the rope behind a slanted block and then under a projecting corner, he thought the double fulcrum would enable him to support his load.

"If you are quick and come up smoothly, I can hold you," he called.

"In a moment—" said Lawrence. "In case I can't make it, the food *cache* on the north ridge—"

"Blast the *cache*! Come up!" Trent shouted.

The roar of plunging stones got loud and the rope shook. Lawrence was coming up, but although Trent braced his boots against a stone and his back against the rock, he was awkwardly balanced, and a projecting block cramped his arm. He had not had time to tie on the rope, and the corner under which he had jammed it was greasy with wet moss.

The rope strained, and Lawrence got his knee on the ledge. Trent saw he had tied on, and he pulled up some slack. The next yard was easy. Lawrence had but to reach out for a crack and he could get his foot on the ledge; Trent did not remember he had hurt his hand.

Lawrence reached the crack, but his strained wrist would not bear much weight and his foot slipped from the stone. Supported by the bowline under his arms, he clutched at a wet block, and his boots rattled on the rock's upright front. The rope jerked, and slipped back for three or four inches.

Trent strained and sweated. The veins on his forehead got tight, his mouth was parched, and his head throbbed. If he could hold on, Lawrence ought to find some support for hand or foot, but the rope was slipping off the lower kob, and a fresh jerk would pull Trent from the slab.

For all his muscular effort his brain worked, and he indulged a queer resentful rage. They ought to have turned back and gone down the tongue to the valley. He had wanted to do so, but Larry had refused. Now the obstinate fool was going to pull him down. He dared not turn his head; his eyes were fixed on the rope, which was ominously near the end of the block. His legs began to weaken, and his knees to bend. His head throbbed like a drum, but he heard the stones roar down the gully under Lawrence's dangling feet. For him to be pulled down would not help the other. The rope touched the end of the block, and Trent let go.

He fell back against the slab and mechanically shut his eyes. When he looked down, Lawrence had vanished, and muddy water and gravel splashed and rattled by. Trent dared not stop there, and climbing the slabs, he plunged across the broken ledges until he reached the top of a low cliff at the gully's foot.

So far as he could distinguish in the gathering mist, the mountain's front was terraced like a garden walk, although the spaces between the supports were not flat. Anyhow, there was another cliff two or three hundred yards lower down, and he heard the stones roll across its top. In fact, it looked as if all the broken stuff on the steep pitch moved down. The first big stones had started a landslide, and the noise was like the roar of surf on a gravel beach. Then Trent felt his hands and face were wet; he had not noted that rain began to fall.

For all the effort he had used, he shivered. He dared not go down; the stones would carry him over the crag. Lawrence had gone over. If his broken body was not yet rolling downhill, he was buried under the stones. Nobody could reach him. There was nothing to be done. Trent must brace up and try to think for himself. Somehow he must get back to the middle tongue. Lawrence was gone for good.

Keeping the top, he followed the gully uphill, and at length saw a spot where he could drop from a ledge to the bottom and climb the other side. He hated to risk the crossing, but the stones were quiet, and he dared not stop on the mountain. He got across and steered for the tongue. When he got there dusk was falling, but he went down in the dark, and when he reached the timber line he admitted his luck was good.

The trees were not large, and by and by it looked as if they went straight down. In the mist and dark, to risk a descent from trunk to trunk was rash, and finding a spot where the branches were thick, he resigned himself to wait for morning. Rain beat the trembling needles, and sometimes a rock crashed on a distant slope. Trent did not think he slept, but when fatigue for a few minutes dulled his brain he thought he heard Lawrence's boots on the stones in the gully, and a voice in the mist:

"Do you know where I cached the food?"

Trent looked up. Rain beat the branches and the wind touched the pine-tops. That was all, but it felt as if the night got horribly cold and his hands shook.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE NEW LEADER

At ten o'clock in the morning, Isabel tried to concentrate on some clothes she mended. She knew the time, because every few minutes since daybreak she had looked at her wrist-watch. When she got up, the rain was gone and the sky had begun to clear. That was something, because, if Mervyn had been stopped by mist, they would start as soon as the light was good. Isabel was anxious, but since Mervyn was a good and cautious mountaineer, she was not alarmed.

Sticks cracked in the thick timber, and she turned her head. Her impulse was to jump up, but the packers smoked their pipes by the fire, where Bill kept some food warm. Bill glanced at Steve.

"They've made it! Give me the coffee-pot."

"*One* has made it," Steve replied, and got on his feet.

Isabel's heart beat and her breath seemed to stop, but she fought for calm. She did not yet know who had come back, but if it were not Lawrence, she was leader. For a few moments she waited in suspense; and then Trent advanced from the shadow behind the trunks.

His clothes were torn and his steps dragged; he gave Isabel an apologetic glance, and then fixed his eyes on the ground. Isabel thought he did not know the packers were about. Fatigue accounted for something, but she was jarred. Had Larry come back alone, she knew he would not have looked like that.

"Where is Lawrence?" she asked.

Trent sat down on a hearth log. His sister's voice was hoarse but commanding, and nothing indicated that she rejoiced at his return. He rather felt as if he fronted a judge.

"Larry's dead. He went down the stone shoot—"

For a few moments Isabel said nothing. Somehow when she first saw Mervyn she knew—But if Larry was gone, she must be cool. Her brother's pose was slack and his head was bent. Steve, on his feet behind him, was ominously still; Bill balanced the coffee-pot as if he had forgotten it was in his hand.

"Where is the stone shoot? How did Lawrence fall?" she asked.

Trent narrated their adventures and his tale was nearly accurate. He knew Isabel studied him, and the packers did not move. He felt the group doubted him and he dared not try to be plausible. After all, there was nothing—anyhow there was not much—he need keep back. As soon as possible he stopped, and Steve turned to Isabel.

"When Mr. Bethune pulled out, he named me camp boss. Where I think them right, I'll take your orders."

"Thank you," said Isabel, and looked at her watch. "At twelve o'clock we go up the mountain. In the meantime, you and Bill might find something to do a little farther off."

The men moved back into the wood, and she turned to her brother.

"On the whole, I believe you were frank. I do not, however, see why you pulled off the rope."

"Larry was awkward. I could move faster, and I knew we must get out of the gully before fresh stones came down. I meant to find a spot he could climb."

"Yes," said Isabel as if she pondered, "your reply might go. But when you did find a spot and Lawrence threw you the rope, why did you not tie on?"

"There was not time," Trent said sullenly.

"I wonder—Since you were not firmly anchored, it's possible you reflected that he might pull you down."

Trent's face got red. He had not much grounds to boast, but he was not going to be bullied. Moreover, if he meant to justify himself, he must do so now. The tale he told must stand.

"To be pulled off my stand would not save Lawrence. The ledge was hardly a foot wide and a bulging slab behind me cramped my arm. The slimy wet moss did not hold my boots. Until the rope slipped from the block, I held up a heavy man. I do not see what more flesh and blood could do."

"You might have stopped on the mountain and searched for your pal—until you starved or found him," said Isabel in a queer hard voice. "It looks as if your first thought was to get back to camp. However, I mustn't indulge in theatrical heroics. We are not a heroic lot! But did you not say he tried to tell you where he put the food?"

"Yes. He wasted a moment or two in which he might have got on the ledge."

Isabel turned her head and Trent saw her hand clench on her coat. Then her fingers went slack and when she looked up a red flush melted from her face.

"Although the stones were almost upon him, he thought for us! For our sake, he determined to find the pass! When we arrived, he was happy at his ranch, and all he wanted was to be left alone; but we must meddle, and I thought I might tempt him to come back. The actress was better stuff; the woods would not have daunted her. Well, she went, and now Larry's gone. Mosscrop's plan has worked in a way he did not imagine, and I am his confederate. In a week or two, I suppose, we will be loafing expensively about a California tourist hotel. We ought to have gone down the mountain's rubbish-shoot—"

She braced up and lifted the coffee-pot.

"Give me your cup and take the covered plate. You must eat. At twelve o'clock we start to look for Lawrence."

Trent shivered. "He's under the stones. Nobody could find him. I'm exhausted; I cannot keep my feet."

"You are going up the mountain," Isabel rejoined. "If you refuse, I expect Steve will drag you; but you will not refuse. Loudon is a Government officer, and he must not think you were afraid to go. You have nearly two hours for food and sleep, if sleep is possible."

She went off, and although coffee was not the liquor Trent felt he needed, he drained his mug. The food in the covered plate was hot, but he could not eat, and resting his back against the hearth log, in a few moments he was asleep.

At twelve o'clock Isabel wakened him and he got up. He was horribly tired, and heavy with sleep, but the others must have a guide and he saw they were resolved that he should go. Pushing through the woods, they followed the river to the bottom of the north ridge, where Steve stopped for a moment or two.

"The cache is up there. If we had time, I reckon we could find it; but we have got all the stuff you'll want to carry up the mountain, and as soon as we have searched the stone-field, we pull out for the settlement."

"Then you are going by the pass?" said Isabel.

"If we can get across. Mr. Bethune reckoned it the shortest line. I promised I'd see you out, and I've got to do so soon. Summer's the time for city sports to picnic in the woods."

"When we arrive your pay stops," Trent remarked.

Steve shrugged scornfully.

"I'll earn all I get, but when we make the settlement, I'll be glad I'm through. You know where the gully is. S'pose you go ahead."

For a time they kept the river bank, where the timber was thin, but in the thinnest woods on the Pacific slope one cannot travel fast. Rotting logs and branches blocked their path, and where they were forced back to the water, ragged driftwood covered the stones. Isabel dared not calculate the distance to the river's mouth, and she hoped the valley across the pass was smoother; but when they dropped behind the packers and Trent grumbled she gave him a contemptuous glance.

"I do not claim to be logical," she said. "By contrast with these men, we are useless wastrels, but we have some sort of code. Anyhow, they must not think us shabbier than we really are."

Trent sullenly braced up. Since they might not return to the camp on the south ridge, they had carried off all the stuff they could move, and Steve had given him an awkward load. The packers were yet more heavily burdened, and Steve himself carried sixty or seventy pounds. By and by Trent saw the bottom of the tongue and steered uphill through timber which rapidly got thin. The mist was gone, and when the gap he thought the pass began to open, the others threw down their loads.

"I guess we won't hit a better camping spot," said Steve. "Bill will fix your tents and beds. We have got about three hours' daylight, but you want to hustle, ma'am."

He said nothing to Trent, but, looking about the baggage, seized the other's ice-pick. For some time they toiled up steep, stony slopes. In front, the mountain was terraced, and the rock buttresses under the higher stone-fields cut Trent's view, but he thought the crags for which he steered were not far below the gully. At length he stopped and looked up.

The cliff was sixty or seventy feet high, and for half a mile crossed the mountain like the front of a dam. At some spots it was upright; at others it tapered from its base, and Trent saw two or three lines to the top. Opposite him plunging stones and snow had cut into the rock, and the crest was nicked. Under the gap a great pile of broken stuff spread like a fan, its wider end downhill.

"You might begin by searching the pile," he said.

Isabel and Steve plowed across the stones. Trent sat down. Although he imagined they would find nothing, he did not want to search. It looked as if Isabel were the better man; he perhaps had not really known his sister, but when Larry's boots rattled on the gully's side, she was not at the rope. Yet Trent thought she would not have let go the rope. By and by they came back, and Steve remarked:

"Nothing's doing. I reckon two hundred tons of rubbish has come down since the rain. We're waiting for you to pilot us to the top."

Trent led them up. At the top they fronted the gully. From below, it looked almost perpendicular, and he allowed the others to study the straight, dark trough. He did not want Steve to think the mountain an easy mountain; moreover, Loudon might question the fellow. Trent had climbed worse gullies, but Lawrence was not a mountaineer, and glancing at the road they had taken, he acknowledged that Larry's nerve was good. Larry, however, had trusted him. He refused to think about it, and examined the ground.

At the top, under the gully's foot, the bank of stones was thin. They shot down the trough, and for some distance carried their speed. Lower down, they got thicker and spread sideways to the edge of the buttress crags. Trent saw the bank was highest at the middle, as if the blocks, in sliding down, spilled out from the center. The mass was not quiet. Small stones tinkled on a sharp musical note, and now and then a queer whispering noise indicated a movement of the wet stuff underneath. Trent thought a shock would start the lot downhill.

One, however, ought to find a comparatively safe line along the outside of the pile, and when he beckoned the others they began the laborious climb. The sharp-cornered pieces churned and slipped back under their boots, but they got up, and by and by saw a small gray object near the dangerous middle of the bank.

"A hat?" said Isabel. "If we had the rope—Anyhow, we must find out if it is a hat."

Trent pushed her back and took the ice-pick from Steve. Isabel mustn't risk it, but it looked as if somebody ought to go, and he was rather obviously the proper man. He thought Steve willing, but the packer could not use his feet like Trent, and if he were carried down, none might reach the coast.

Trent started from a point above his object. Stones slipped down in front of his boots, and sometimes a noisy rush marked his progress, but the top of the pile had dried and the stuff did not slide far. He reached the hat, and about fifty yards farther down, saw something else. He could get there; the trouble would be to stop when he arrived, but when Steve's shout proclaimed that he saw the object Trent cautiously advanced. After he had gone a few yards, the stones began to run, and he rode down on the rattling wave. His body was braced back, at an angle to the pitch, and his boots went deep; he dragged his ice-pick and the curved blade was a good brake. The stones, he hoped, moved fastest on the

top.

Risking a swerve, and stooping swiftly, he seized the object. The swerve carried him some yards from the middle and the stones were quieter. He had remarked that they spilled out sideways, and steering across obliquely, he reached firm ground. His skin was wet by sweat and he breathed hard, but he carried Lawrence's battered hat and part of a cotton flour-bag Lawrence had used for a rucksack. The thin material was torn and stained by blood. Trent had noted that the rag was not directly below the hat.

"I expect it's all we will find," he said, and turned to Steve. "If you want to examine the gully, I'll try to take you up."

Steve said nothing, but his smile was rather grim. Had he thought the other planned his companion's fall, he would have risked the climb. He did think Trent, afraid that he himself might be pulled down, had not held on as long as he might; but that was another thing. Isabel reflected that Mervyn was a fool to taunt the man on whose staunchness their reaching the settlement must depend. Mervyn's nerve and balance, however, were gone, and hers were strained.

Lawrence had obviously been carried over the cliff and buried by the stones. If he were yet on the slope, under the treacherous gravel, nobody could find the spot. He was gone for good, and when she glanced at Steve she knew the packer agreed.

"We might build a cairn," she said, in an uneven voice.

They piled the largest blocks they could carry in a rude pyramid on the edge of the crag. When the cairn was built, the sun was low, and a short distance to the north a slanted beam touched the mountain's top with gold. By contrast, a gap in the range was marked by dark, blue shadow. Isabel indicated the belt of strong color.

"After all, he found the pass for us," she said.

"I reckon there's our road," Steve agreed. "In the morning we'll get busy and relay our loads to the top; but we want to get down to the timber before it's dark."

He and Trent started downhill. For a minute or two Isabel stopped by the lonely cairn. Larry was gone. She had never really loved him, and she began to think that had he after all been willing to leave his woods and had wanted to marry her, she might have refused. She had begun to see she must not marry Lawrence for the advantages she might get. He was not her sort; he was a better, finer sort, and were men like him numerous, women might be happier. Yet, at one time he was her pal, and their friendship would haunt her like a fragrant memory. In her circle, to be romantic was to be ridiculous, but, standing firmly braced, she swung up her hand, as if she saluted.

When she rejoined the others, Trent saw her eyes were wet. Isabel had been crying. And she was not ashamed for him to know. He said nothing, and they pushed on faster down the hill.

CHAPTER XIX

DAYBREAK

A small stone, rolling down the bank, struck Lawrence's arm. The blow and his instinctive movement forced him back to consciousness, and he awkwardly turned his head. For a minute or two he did not know where he was; and then, far up in the south, he saw the dim white peak and two stars. He was on the mountain, but since he could not lift himself to look the other way, that was all he knew. The effort hurt and the power to move seemed to have gone out of his numbed body.

One arm and his legs were buried in sharp stones; his head and face were wet. The moisture was warm; it looked as if blood oozed from his hair and went down his neck. Anyhow, he could not move; the stones jammed him fast, and so long as he was quiet, the pain he bore was dull.

In the dark, the stones made queer, tinkling noises. He thought he heard the river a long way off, and sometimes the wind moaned in the crags. When the moaning got distinct, Lawrence imagined he was not far from the top of the crags. Since he was yet alive, he was obviously not at the bottom; but he could see only in one direction, up and back to where the glimmering snow cut the sky. When he slipped from the rock, the stones had swept him downhill, and now he supposed he was broken and done for. Somehow, it did not bother him. His body was numb, his brain was dull, and if he tried to rouse himself the pain might get worse. Besides, if he moved, a fresh stone slide might carry him over the rocks. Well, he couldn't move. He shut his eyes, and consciousness went.

When he next looked up, day had begun to break, and the stupefying dullness was gone. His brain worked, and he knew his wet clothes accounted for the numbing cold, and all his body hurt. Moreover, the stones pressed hard on his cramped legs. For all that, he shrank from the effort to struggle free, and finding he could move his head, he looked about. He saw the gully's dark mouth and the pitch down which he and the stones had shot. In their descent, they had rolled away from the center and thrown him to one side. Had he gone straight down, he must have gone over the cliff, but he had stopped a few yards from the edge, where the pile got thin.

In the cold light, the rocks above the horrible slope were daunting, and Lawrence looked down. The crag's top cut his view, but, some distance below, he saw another long stony pitch, crossed, at the bottom, by small, ragged pines. On the whole, the ground on his right hand was less steep and broken, but this was the north side, and the camp was on the other. Well, unless he could get free, it did not matter where the camp was, and he tried to brace himself for the struggle.

He was very slack, and to some extent he was afraid. His buried arm and legs hurt, and if he tried to use them he might find a bone was broken; moreover, his cramped and battered muscles rebelled against the prompting of his brain. Lawrence afterwards imagined he might never have got loose, but while he fought for control the bank began to move, and he heard the treacherous stuff pour across the ledge. If he waited, he might be buried altogether and panic lent him strength.

The stones rolled back from his arm and legs. Shivering and trembling, he was on his feet, but for a few moments the rope held him back. He had, however, tied a bowline, and a bowline is an easy knot to loose. Although the hemp was swollen and his hand shook, he pulled out the end, and started, as if he were drunk, for safer ground.

When he dropped at the bottom of a slab, his breath was gone and the mountain revolved, but he was fifty yards from the stones, and since he had got so far, his bones were sound. That was something, and as soon as he was steadier and the ground ceased to heave, he must find out where he was hurt.

To begin with, his head was cut; the cold perhaps had stopped the blood, which had soaked his shirt and crusted on his neck. He imagined the quantity he had lost accounted for his weakness. Then his arm was cut, and his side felt as if he had been battered by a steam hammer. His hat and flour-bag rucksack were gone, and where he cautiously touched his back and legs the bruised flesh hurt. The stones had rolled and hammered him against the blocks beneath, and had not all been moving, he imagined they would have beaten him to pulp. He tried to get up, but his head swam and nausea forced him back.

For a time weakness conquered; and then Lawrence began to cogitate. He did not think he had pulled down Trent; he rather thought Mervyn had let go the rope, and, believing him dead, had steered for camp. In the morning he would come back to look for his body; but if he, too, had gone down the shoot, Steve and Isabel would search for both. They,

however, could not arrive until afternoon, and if Trent had not reached the camp, they would not know where to go.

Lawrence dared not wait for them. On the wide stony slope, he would be a small, inconspicuous object, and he might be overcome by sleep or faintness. A pillar of smoke would be a useful beacon, and if he could reach the timber line, he might light a fire. Getting on his feet awkwardly, he followed the crags north, and at their end, slipped and stumbled down another pitch. Then he fell against a big jambed block, and for some time that was all he knew.

A sunbeam touched his face and he opened his eyes. The yellow light sped downhill, across wet slabs and rocks and dark-green pines. It stopped where mist floated about the river, and when Lawrence's glance plumbed the vast gulf his heart sank. To make the north ridge, where the food was, would occupy a strong, athletic man for four or five hours; and then the camp was two or three miles farther on. He certainly could not get there, and he doubted if he could reach the timber line. He was battered and cut and faint from loss of blood.

Yet Colman, some years since, lay for a night under a fallen tree and when his broken bones mended was not at all the worse. Then Loudon talked about a Siwash who, shot through the body, walked fifty miles to Qualichan and recovered from his hurt. Fifty miles, in tangled woods, where one must push through undergrowth and climb over giant uprooted trunks! But any forest rancher could tell you tales like that, and the moral was, what one man could do another, if forced, could do.

Lawrence got up and resumed his laborious journey downhill, although he could not go fast and the only line he saw inclined away from the camp. By and by he was stopped by a ravine, and he sat down in the stones. The sun was on the mountain and where the high rocks were wet they shone like polished steel. Water sparkled in the gullies, the mist had rolled away, and the river was a thin, silver thread, running nearly straight, but horribly far off, at the bottom of the tremendous hollow. Since the sun was on the water, some time had gone, but it did not look as if he was much nearer the trees.

He studied the ravine. Sharp gravel went down to the top of a wet slab, and since the stones were at rest, the pitch was not dangerously steep. One or two big horizontal cracks crossed the slab, and below it Lawrence saw terraced blocks. At the bottom, a little creek splashed noisily, and the ravine did not look like a stone shoot, because one or two dwarf junipers grew in the rocks. Lawrence doubted if he could get up the other side, but he could follow the creek, and he began to be conscious that his mouth was parched.

When he got down he could get a drink, and if he were all right, the descent would not bother him; but he was horribly unsteady, and when he fixed his eyes on the slab the cracks began to revolve like the spokes of a wheel. For all that, he must reach the timber line and make a fire. When Isabel and Steve saw the smoke they would come to his help; he did not know about Trent. In fact, he began to think Mervyn rather a shabby swine.

However, he must get down. An Indian, worse hurt than he, had walked fifty miles to Qualichan. Somebody told him about another, who, with a ghastly wound, walked a hundred miles to Fort William in Ontario. Looked as if a shot Indian's habit was to walk about, all over Canada! All the same, George Loudon did not exaggerate. George was a white man and *hiyu Tyee, pukka Sahib*, and so forth; but Mervyn wasn't. He was a d—— shabby hound. Lawrence knew, although he mustn't tell. Anyhow, he must steady up. Mervyn had nothing to do with the Indian who walked about.

He said the red-core rope would carry an elephant and when you went down the rocks you doubled the rope and threw the loop round some convenient block. Mervyn did not know that men who used ropes called a loop a *bight*; he did not know other things a man ought to know. When you got to the bottom, you pulled one end; you *overhauled* the rope. Perfectly simple. The drawback was, Lawrence did see the rope, and he was not an elephant. The elephant had nothing to do with it. All he had to do, as soon as the cracks stopped spinning, was to get into the blasted ravine.

For a few moments, he balanced at the top. His legs shook, his head swam, and at one side his ragged clothes fell back from his torn skin. The creek was thirty feet below, and since the slab rocked, he must use some caution. All the same, he was going down. Lawrence advanced his foot, and went.

Stones rattled about his boots. In three or four plunging strides, he reached the top of the slab, and shot down its wet surface on his back. Then his boot struck a crack, and, swinging round, he rolled for four or five yards and bumped across a ledge. The ledge perhaps saved him from a worse knock, but when he stopped, at the bottom, he did not know.

Five or six hours afterwards, he lifted his head and supported himself on his bent arm. Stupor or sleep had refreshed

him, and although every movement hurt, he began to feel he was steadier than when he pushed off. His mouth, however, was parched, and crawling to a pool, he drank thirstily and felt he needed food. His pack was gone, but when he and Trent, twenty-four hours since, lunched on the mountain top he thought he had shoved the stuff left over into his pocket. On one side, the stones had cut his coat to rags, but his luck was good, for he found half a crushed, wet bannock and some canned meat in the pocket on the other side. Sitting by the pool, he ate the pulpy stuff and tried to calculate.

His watch was smashed, but he could see the sun and reckoned the time was about three o'clock. If Trent had made camp, the search party would soon arrive. He was, however, some distance from the gully, and to the north; the others, starting from the south, would come up the tongue, and on the broken mountain-side he might not see them. His plan was to reach the timber and send up a smoke signal.

Turning his head, he glanced at the slab down which he had rolled. Since his bones were yet whole, his unconscious exploit looked impossible, but he had taken some hard knocks before, and he must concentrate on getting down the ravine. Although the effort was painful, he got on his feet, and setting his mouth, staggered downhill.

The ravine opened on a fresh stony pitch. Sometimes the gravel rolled down with him, sometimes he stumbled across large fixed blocks, and when he fell, to get up cost him much. All the same, the trees were nearer and he stubbornly pushed on.

When he stopped, the sun was low. The trees were short, bent by wind, and broken by plunging stones. A number were dead, and Lawrence needed branches from which the sap had dried, but he needed matches and the few he carried were wet. He put them on a stone where a pale sunbeam fell, and resting his back against a trunk, let himself go slack.

He could not see the gully, and the tongue was hidden by the rocks. The rescue party could not see him, but they would see the smoke float up, and he began to break dead branches and small dry twigs. By and by he would want some green stuff, and he crawled back to the stone. The matches were not dry, and one he rubbed left a pasty smear on the rock. The sun was lower and mist began to float up the mountain's side.

He hammered stones and once or twice got a spark. The spark dropped in the moss and twigs and died. When he went back to the stone, the matches were no drier and the pale beam had moved. Lawrence moved the stone, but a cloud floated up from the southwest and the long slopes got dim. Battered and exhausted, he watched the mist creep higher and the stones get damp. Then he put a slab of bark over the matches, and crept down into the wood where the trees were thick and green. Dusk had begun to fall, and it looked as if he were done with.

CHAPTER XX

A FIGHTING CHANCE

The night was not cold, and under the netted branches the dead needles were dry. Lawrence had camped in the woods before without a blanket and tent, and for most of the night he slept. Exhaustion perhaps conquered pain, but he had for long occupied himself in healthful labor from sunrise to dark, and sleep by mechanical habit was his reward.

When the cold at dawn wakened him he doubted if he could get up. His cut head throbbed, his torn arm was stiff and swollen, and when he cautiously moved his other arm and leg he felt as if every muscle in his body was sore and strained.

Behind the thin trunks, vague rocks and long stony slopes went up into curling mist; when he looked the other way, the massed trunks cut his view, but he heard the river brawl down the valley and a murmur in the trees. If a Chinook sprang up, the mist would soon roll back.

For some time he listened and dully tried to calculate the distance from the rapid. Two miles, he thought, through forest that would get thicker and worse tangled as he went down. In some places, he must crawl across, or under, big fallen trunks, and push through tall fern whose stiff dead stalks hid the broken branches' sharp ends. Where the wood was thinner, saplings sprang from the stones in the track of the landslides that had smashed the trees. To make the river was something of a job, but Lawrence meant to try.

In the evening, he had thought himself done for. Isabel and Steve would search for him, and he ought perhaps to have waited, but he was afraid fresh stones might come down and he had hoped to signal by smoke. He had not been able to make a fire, and if Isabel had reached the gully, she would be justified in thinking him dead. In fact, nobody would imagine he had escaped.

Very well. She would think for herself, and Steve would, very properly, agree. In all circumstances, Trent would think for himself. At the gully they would see the pass, and, remembering his advice, would no doubt decide to steer for the settlement. They would start as soon as possible; in fact, Lawrence pictured them starting now. If he could make a fire, he might yet signal, but the matches were still wet, and long before he reached the camp the party would be gone.

It was awkward. It was frankly daunting. Since Lawrence and Trent took the rocks his lunch on the mountain, and a handful of pulpy bannock in the ravine, was all he had eaten. If the others knew where he had cached the food on the north ridge, they would load up the stuff, and he must starve; but he could not remember if he had told Steve, and when he tried to tell Trent the stones came down. They, however, would not carry off his clothes and blanket. He might reckon on their cutting down their loads.

Well, there was no use in weighing the obstacles. He must try to make the north ridge before hunger helped his weakness to knock him out. He got up, and although his legs shook and his head swam, he set off.

For a time he stumbled across stones and gravel; and then the timber got thick. He was going down, but raspberry canes and prickly brush began to choke the gaps between the trunks. Lower down, he plunged into tangles of dead fern, where the sharp stalks dragged back his torn clothes and stabbed his skin. Then sometimes great logs crossed his path, their roots torn from the soil and their tops locked in neighboring trees. As a rule, Lawrence crawled underneath, between broken branches thrust down like centipedes' feet, but sometimes he was forced to climb across the inclined trunk.

At length he reached a spot where four or five big firs had crashed and the last to fall spanned the horrible entanglement like a bridge. To turn back was unthinkable, and in the thick undergrowth he could not see an easy line round. A log, however, is often a bushman's bridge, and he got on the trunk. Had he been fresh, to keep the rounded top would not have bothered him, but he was faint and exhausted, and for twenty or thirty feet the rotten lower branches had broken off and left short stumps, between which he must tread. Moreover, when he reached the sound branches he must squeeze through the gaps, and when he balanced on the thin top, twelve feet from the ground, his heart beat and his skin was wet by sweat. For all that, he must get down, and if he hesitated his shaken nerve might go.

Seizing a branch, he felt with his foot for one that slanted. His boot slipped from the bark, sharp pain stabbed his swollen arm, and he plunged into the tangle. A broken end caught his ragged coat and eased his fall; he heard the cloth

tear, and he crashed in dead fern. The jolt shook him, but he dared not stop, and in breathless panic he burrowed through the withered stuff. When he crawled out he lay on a mossy bank for half an hour.

Lawrence had loved the woods and thought them friendly. Now he perhaps got light-headed, for he knew the big trees his antagonists. They claimed their revenge for the gaps he had cut in their majestic ranks; he was their prisoner and they did not mean to let him go. If he were stopped by another obstacle, the forest would win.

He wondered who would be sorry. Trent's conscience might prick him because he had not risked sticking to the rope, but after all, from his point of view, he was justified in letting go. Alice was gone. Lawrence did not know why she went; she perhaps yet hoped to be an actress, for her pluck was good. Had she held the rope at the gully, she would not have let him down. Well, he had hoped—but it was done with, and he might soon be gone.

Isabel was finer stuff than Mervyn, and sometimes she might think about him with a sort of sentimental gentleness. One, of course, ought to be modest, but had he been keen, and willing to sell his ranch, he might have married Isabel. He must, however, sell his ranch and court old Mosscrop for his money. The woods had daunted Isabel, and it looked as if Alice had had enough. Had he offered to start for the cities, Alice might have risked his poverty. But he was firm; in a way, he was, and the woods were not yet satisfied—

He got on his feet. The d—— forest should not conquer him! He was going to the north ridge and, when he had dug up the food, to Vancouver. He was going to search the Pacific slope for Alice, and when he found her he *would* sell the ranch. Setting his mouth, he started with a lurch and plunged unsteadily into the tall raspberry canes.

Lawrence's luck was better than he had much grounds to hope. Battered, and faint from hunger and loss of blood, he could not for long have forced a path through the tangle, but by and by the tangle stopped. When summer is dry fires sweep the resinous forests of the Pacific slope, and if a wind fans the blaze the green trees burn. Loudon declared fires sometimes started where, so far as he could find out, nobody ever camped, and their origin had puzzled other forest officers. As a rule, the upright trunks are not altogether consumed, and when Lawrence crept out from the green shade he saw in front rows of tapered rampikes like giant telegraph poles. Undergrowth and branches had vanished, and where sunbeams touched the smooth charred columns they shone steely gray.

Lawrence's feet sank in powdered charcoal, but after the fern and the thickets, to reach clear ground was something. Moreover, in the *brulée* he could steer directly for the ridge and would not be forced to follow the river bank. For a time he pushed on, and then sat down at the bottom of a rampike.

He heard the wind in the green woods, and admitted that a *brulée* is not the spot at which a prudent man would choose to rest when a Chinook blows. Some rampikes with an unburned core might stand for years, but one could not tell which were sound, and, as a rule, when one crashed the shock brought down another, and sometimes a row. Then he had known the rampikes fall when it was calm. Dust clouds marked their plunge, and the echoes rolled for miles across the woods like the boom of guns.

All the same, he was forced to rest. In the open *brulée* the sun was faintly warm and his matches might dry. He felt in his pocket, but the matches were not there; he had left them under the slab of bark—a tenderfoot's trick that would cost him much, that might cost him his life! The matches were at his camp by the timber line, and since he could not go back, they might as well be in China. However, there was no use in storming, and he moodily looked about.

The sun was southwest. It was afternoon, and he had spent the greater part of two days on the mountain. Ridiculous! Trent, for example, would come down in six or seven hours. Since the *brulée* was open, one could see the buttress crags under the gully, and Lawrence, searching their crest, thought he knew the gap at the stone shoot's end. But there was something else, and resting his eyes for a few moments, he looked again. Touched by the sun, or he might not have seen it, a small, indistinct pyramid crowned a conspicuous rock. Since the rock was smooth, the object was not a pointed slab. It was a pyramid; a cairn the others had built to mark his supposititious grave.

Lawrence's mouth curved in a bleak smile, for although he was not where his friends thought, he might yet need a monument. They believed him dead, and no doubt were now climbing the pass, the Northwest Passage Trent had joked about. Well, he himself, like Henry Hudson and some more, had pushed off to search and vanished. But nobody had found a useful passage. One went west by Magellan Strait, or the Panama Canal. All must go west, and one way was perhaps as good as another—But he was getting light-headed, when he ought to weigh things as coolly as possible.

If the others were not on the pass, they were some distance downriver, and he could not overtake them. He, so to speak, must rule them out. Very well, his plan was to make the ridge and get the food at the cache. If he bucked up, he might do so, and sleep in a dry nook between the big fir roots; on stony ground, the roots kept the top. In the morning he might reach the camp on the south ridge, where his blankets and pack were, and, now he thought about it, he had cached some matches at the camp. When he found Bill extravagant, he had pushed some into a hole. In fact, if the food was yet on the ridge, he had a chance, a fighting chance, for his life.

Getting on his feet, he plowed across the *brulée*, and where the fire had died out pushed through the green woods for the river. Broken white branches and battered logs strewed the bank, but the flood had rolled the stuff together, and then had ebbed. In consequence, for a yard or two between the driftwood and the current, the slabs and gravel were clear.

Lawrence stumbled along. His head was bent and he lurched about drunkenly. Sometimes he stopped to drink; since he started from the timber line parching thirst had bothered him. Sometimes, where the channel was smoother than the bank, he took the water. Speed was important. The sun got low and he must make the ridge before dark. If he could not find the cache, his last chance was gone.

In the dusk, he crawled up the first steep pitch. Crawled was the proper word, for where he had a few days since carried a load he used his hands and knees. The important thing was, he cut, and knew, his former line. A spruce behind a hemlock; then one saw a big cedar, and went round a large mossy stone. Lawrence's heart beat, for he spotted the cedar. Two hundred yards farther on, along the ridge's south slope, he had blazed a tree. He was exhausted and his head swam, but when he stopped, the tree was just in front.

For a few moments he hesitated. If the food was gone, he was done for; he felt he dared not search the bank. Then, bracing himself sternly, he scrambled down for two or three yards and dropped in the stones. The cache was as he had left it; nobody had been there.

Lawrence pulled out a large flour-bag pack and studied the articles it held. Bacon, flour, and coffee; until he could make a fire, they were not much use. Canned meat? Although he was faint from hunger, he did not want the hard, dry stuff. Canned pork-and-beans? In France pork-and-beans were a joke, but when he put back the bag, he carried off the can and some raisins.

At the bottom of the blazed tree he scooped out the soft dead needles between two roots, and pulled a knife from his belt. Dusk was falling and he must open the can soon. Once or twice the stabbing knife missed the tin, but at length his aim was good, and he pushed his fingers into the hole. When the beans eluded him he lifted the can to his mouth; and then, crawling into his pine-needle bed, felt for the raisins. The bunch was gone. Anyhow, he could not find it in the dark. He was very tired. In a few minutes he was asleep.

CHAPTER XXI

THE DARK HOUR

Lawrence awoke and shivered. The Chinook had dropped and the night was cold. A faint, keen air stole down the valley and he imagined frost sparkled on the rocks. In the ranges winter began soon, but its advance to the warm coast was slow and he had thought to get there first. That was why he had tried to shove the others along, until Trent, like an obstinate fool, rebelled. He, however, was accountable for the party, and for the good of all, the fellow must acknowledge him boss.

Then Lawrence remembered. The others were across the pass, and since Steve steered them, they ought to make the settlement. He was alone on the north ridge, and must think for himself. To begin with, he was thirsty and very cold. Not far off, water splashed down a little ravine, but if he crawled down for a drink he might not get back and the hole between the fir roots was warmer than the stones. He began to scrape fresh needles over his chest, but stopped. The effort hurt and the stuff was damp. His clothes were damp, and so was the root against which he rested. Every blasted thing was damp, and the clammy cold bit deep.

In the thick woods, a bushman need not bother about cold, so long as he has matches, a blanket, and an ax. Lawrence had but his hunting knife. All the same, he imagined something besides the cold had disturbed him. Under the trees the dark was thick, but he reckoned the time was one o'clock; a bushman and a sailor do not need a watch. A wolf howled behind the woods and Lawrence heard another answer from the rocks. When the brutes trailed a deer they used a signal code. Nothing that roamed the woods could run down a deer, but the wolves coöperated to turn and wear out their victim.

On the Pacific slope, the timber wolves, so far as Lawrence knew, did not bother men, but as a rule a forest rancher carried an ax or a rifle. If a man were unarmed and sick, the brutes might be bold. Sometimes a prospector vanished, and the Siwash had found torn shreds of clothes by their inland fishing camps. In the dark, one must not dwell on things like that, and the dreary howls got faint.

Lawrence heard the river. The rapid's throb rose and fell with a measured beat and a sort of tremolo; and then, piercing the dull note, he heard another noise, for which he had perhaps mechanically listened. Claws scratched the rocks, and by and by padded feet pressed softly in the dead needles. The step was heavy and awkward; a black bear had climbed the bank and nosed about. The queer thing was, it looked as if the animal had not yet scented him.

The small black bear was rather a stupid brute. Lawrence had crept up to one that fed in the swamp cabbage, and until he was fifty yards off it did not know he was about. Then he had laughed at its clumsy speed, and let it go. Only city sports killed animals they did not need for food. The bear would not bother him, but if it robbed the cache he might starve, and trying to locate the noise, he felt for a stone.

He hesitated. Cinnamon bears were not numerous, but sometimes one left its haunts in the rocks, and when the huge red bear went hunting, it might hunt a man. George Loudon talked about two prospectors whom, in daylight, a cinnamon had chased from their tent, which the brute destroyed, and then devoured a month's camp supplies. One did not rashly meddle with an animal like that.

Yet if the bear carried off the pork, Lawrence must go without, and after all he had borne on the mountain, he was not going to be robbed. Something must be risked, and he shouted and awkwardly flung the stone. His hoarse voice went up on a queer thin note, and the stone fell in the soft needles a few yards off. All the same, claws scraped the rock, and dead raspberry canes cracked. The brute was going, as fast as its clumsy legs could move, and for a minute or two Lawrence marked its noisy passage across the wood. Where a buck goes over an obstacle, a black bear smashes through. The noise died away and he knew the cache was safe.

All the same, the thing had disturbed him. The bear might have been a cinnamon, and sometimes a panther came down the valley and carried off sheep and pigs. As a rule, a North American panther will not, unless wounded, attack a man, but it is not timid, and Loudon said it would now and then, perhaps in malicious sport, steal after a rancher through the woods. Anyhow, when Lawrence one evening walked home from Colman's, a large animal he could not see stealthily followed him. All he heard was the dry brush crackle and green twigs swing back. He had no rifle, and he dared not run, but when at length the noise stopped, his mouth was parched and his legs shook. The brute perhaps knew by his step he was strong

and athletic. Now, however, he was broken and sick.

He mustn't think about it. If he were frugal, the food he had would carry him to Qualichan, but when he reached the camp on the south ridge he must rest for two or three days. Fatigue accounted for his getting light-headed and for his thirst. He hated to admit he was ill, but the proper plan was to front things, and he felt as if he were going to be ill. At all events, he could not climb the pass, and the trail to Qualichan was hard and long. He might not reach Qualichan, and another might take his ranch. He hated to think a careless stranger might use his tools.

All the same, he would not know. Moreover, until the Trents arrived and Alice went, he had been happy at the ranch. For four or five years he had labored at a job he liked. He had thought it all a man was entitled to ask for; anyhow, it was all he wanted, but Alice, and to some extent Isabel, had banished his tranquillity. He might get more from life; he found out he really wanted more.

The woods were not the proper background for Isabel, and Alice found them dreary. Anyhow, she had gone, and to think she had gone for the love of Perry Lacoste was too absurd; the theatrical mountebank had hoped to exploit her singing, and when he again went broke, she might need Lawrence's help. If he were forced to search the Pacific slope, he must take her from the fellow, and if she could be persuaded to marry him, he'd sell his ranch—

He had resolved something like that before; but he must first make Qualichan, and he was going to be ill. He mustn't exaggerate; to rest for three or four days might put him right. His blanket was in the shack on the south ridge, and when day broke he must start. There was no use in bothering, particularly when one's brain would not work. He must start at daybreak. Before he knew, Lawrence was asleep.

At dawn he scrambled slackly down the ridge. A few days since, he had carried all the food in the cache across from the other camp. Now half the quantity was a crippling load, and the braces by which he hung the bag galled his sore shoulder. Since he might not get back, to leave food he would presently need was rash, but he doubted if he could carry the stuff he had. Moreover, if he made the camp in the afternoon he would be lucky. In the thick timber, to pack a load across the deep basin between the ridges was a strong man's job.

Lawrence stopped by a creek running down from the glacier. The muddy current brawled among the rocks that blocked the channel, but he thought it had shrunk. In the night, frost had hardened the snowfields and cut the streams that drained from under the ice. Winter advanced fast and would soon reach the valley. He, however, must get across, and he looked for an easy spot. He might have gone by the shallow he had waded before, but it was some distance upstream. When he fixed his line, he had forgotten the creek.

Near a shelf at the bottom of the bank a smooth island rock dammed back a revolving pool. He could stride the channel on his side; on the other he might jump to a ledge. To begin with, however, he must get down the bank. Spray leaped about the stones, the savage current roared, and the whirling foam in the green pool fixed his glance as if he were hypnotized. Then the bank was a steep mossy slab, and if he went down fast, he might not stop at the shelf.

Sitting in the wet moss, Lawrence pushed off. His boots hit the stones and brought him up, but the shock seemed to jar his brain, and when he stepped on to the island rock to balance was hard. The foam's swift circling dazzled him, and if he studied it long, he felt he must spin round in harmony. When he turned his head, the rocks on the other side revolved. Well, he must brace up. The ledge was but a yard off, and the bank above it was broken. He saw where he must land and where he could get hold. The trouble was, the stream surged furiously through the channel, and the stones he meant to seize went up and down like the waves. There was no use in waiting for them to steady. He must jump and trust his luck.

Lawrence jumped. The ledge was not where he had thought. Water splashed and his legs were in the creek, but, for the most part, his body was on the ledge. His hands fastened mechanically in a crack, and when the current swept his legs up level with his waist he made shift to crawl beyond its reach. The plunge, however, had broken his control, and he went up the bank in breathless panic, and until he reached the stones by the river did not stop. Then while the water drained from his ragged clothes, he lay in the sun and fought for calm.

If his nerve went, he was done for. He must stick to his pack, and he must make the camp. When he got there, he could light a fire and rest. The trouble was, he had not yet gone half-way and somehow it was eleven o'clock. When he again looked up, it was afternoon and he was numbed by cold.

To start cost him much and his halts were numerous, but he reached the camp. The ashes between the hearth logs were

cold, but Lawrence saw his blanket and clothes in the shack. Moreover, he saw a small hatchet the cook had used, and two or three large cans. Steve would carry the long chopper's ax, and now the canoe was gone, Bill had resolved to put up the smallest possible load. Lawrence blessed the fellow for his laziness.

Sitting on the branch bed, he let himself go slack. He had food, a blanket, and an ax of a sort, and water splashed down the rocks a few yards off. If the matches were dry, it was all a bushman needed, and after the dark, trackless woods, the camp was homelike. In fact, if he braced up and got to work, in half an hour he ought to make the bothy as comfortable as the kitchen at the ranch. The trouble was, he felt horribly languid; he wanted to stretch his bruised legs on the pine twigs and sleep.

He got up, went for water, and whittled a resinous fire-stick. When the end was like a paint brush, he split some cordwood Bill had left, and built the chips in a hollow cone. Crossing the camp, he pulled a can from a hole in the rocks, and found the matches dry. In a few minutes yellow flames leaped about the hearth logs, and Lawrence thrilled triumphantly. Fire was man's most useful servant; he had cheated the cruel wilds!

He mustn't, however, indulge in romantic bunk. The wilderness was a stubborn antagonist, and he could boast when he knew he had won. In the meantime, the light was going, and he must work while he was able. Although he hated the labor, he cut and stacked dead branches in the shack, brewed coffee, made dough for a bannock, and speared some bacon on a stick by the fire. Then he hung the food pack under the roof, and pulled off his wet, ragged clothes. A fastidious camper might not have thought the fresh clothes dry, but Lawrence was not fastidious; besides, he had a fire.

The queer thing was, now he had food he was not keen to eat, and a morsel of charred bacon and some doughy bannock blunted his appetite. He, however, drained a can of coffee and condensed milk, and was not disturbed because the can had recently held pork-and-beans. He had stuck to his pipe, but the tobacco smelt, and tasted, rank. In fact, it smelt like the smoke of the smudge fires one lighted when the mosquitoes were bad.

Dusk fell and pale stars came out behind the trees. The river brawled, but the woods were quiet, and cheerful reflections flickered about the trunks. A rock plunged down a moraine, but Lawrence did not hear another; frost hardened the high snowfields and held fast the stones. Lawrence getting up stiffly crawled to the shack. The blue H.B.C. blanket was thick and warm; the packed twigs and branches rested his aching body and that was all he knew.

CHAPTER XXII

ALICE'S RETURN

Wheels rolled, the cars rocked, and clicking rail joints beat a staccato rhythm. A washout in the Selkirks had delayed the Pacific express, and at Vancouver the yellow-funnel liner awaited the mail for Japan. Now the track went down grade, and the engineer hurled his huge machine along the foaming Thompson's bank.

Alice occupied a corner seat in a second-class car, and ate the sticky candies the peddler boy who roamed the cars had forced her to buy. She had also bought a lurid detective story he praised. The numerous murders did not interest her, but she liked to feel she could at length be extravagant. When they stopped at Kamloops she had telegraphed the C.P.R. hotel; the train was not on time, and at Vancouver she would dine in the evening, and, so to speak, in state. Perry was her guest, and so long as he kept sober, she meant to be a generous host.

Alice laughed. Perry had some drawbacks, but after all, he was a good sort, and when he undertook to find her he was broke. Yet he had, without a ticket, got on board the coasting boat, and used the money the passengers collected for him to bribe some halibut fishermen who carried him to Cheemanco. Since Alice was not at Cheemanco, he again crossed the Strait, and on his laborious tramp over the mountains to Qualichan supported life on crackers, cheese, and water from the creeks. Perry had not much use for water, and he was not at all a mountaineer. To some extent, his object was selfish, and Alice certainly was not going to marry him, but he deserved a reward.

Cinders rattled on the car roof; thick smoke clouded the windows and blew away. Far down in the tremendous rift, a green river foamed. On the other side, dark forest rolled up the rocks, and horizontal mist streaked the mountain-side. Then stone-fields and splintered crags went up to meet the snow.

Alice looked the other way. Stiff pines sped past the windows, in endless procession, as if they went on forever; and but for where the valleys opened and green lakes curved into the woods, they went, in fact, from the Rockies to the sea. At some spots, ambitious little towns sprang round the reeking smelters, but for all their rawness did not jar. Like the new towns, British Columbia somehow was unfinished, stark, and primitive. Nothing softened its austere grandeur; one felt the Mountain Province had but recently emerged from the turmoil of creation. A country for the young and strong and hopeful! Alice thought she would stop.

She might, if she liked, make the grand tour by Japan to London and not be altogether bankrupt when she arrived. Besides, an attractive young woman sometimes acquired a husband on board the tourist boats. Alice did not particularly want a husband; within about a week, she had refused two, although she imagined both had rather wanted her inheritance than herself. Alice smiled. She had been polite but firm. Moreover, she knew another who had asked her to marry him when she had nothing. To some extent, he perhaps did so because he thought he ought, and in the circumstances to refuse was easier; but she was not yet going to think about Lawrence Bethune.

She might, for example, go *home*, and live modestly at a market town she knew where the quiet streets go down from the Abbey and the Moot Hall to the river. The folk were her folk, but she was not going. At all events, not yet. Anyhow, she might, for once have bought a first-class ticket. Alice's mouth curved humorously. For long she had been sternly frugal and habit is strong; besides, she was born where Scotland and Northumbria join.

Yet she had liked the big tourists' hotel at Banff, in the Rockies, where she had met John and the Winnipeg lawyer, and stopped while cablegrams were exchanged with England. She imagined John's object was not altogether disinterested, but unless he had undertaken the long and expensive journey from Toronto, for her to prove she was Alice Thorne might have been hard. Well, the lawyer would write him a check, after she had gone. She knew John would take the check.

After all, it was not very long since he was her lover and hero. He was a handsome young fellow, marked by some useful talents and a rather lordly self-confidence that Alice at one time had admired. One felt that when John commanded, difficulties vanished. Alice now imagined he did not know how deeply her father was embarrassed, but when he got his post at Toronto he urged their marriage. Tom and Miriam, however, decided her duty was to stop.

John was *constant*. At all events, he did not marry somebody else, and three years after he emigrated, she sailed to rejoin him, but she had loved her sick father, and carried the marks of three years' strain. To some extent, she was perhaps another girl, and John was certainly another man. One saw he thought himself rather noble; when her father died,

impoverished, and she had no home, had he not sent for her? The sort of lover she wanted would himself have gone.

Other things had jarred. But she must not be a supercritical prig, and when she joined the Lacoste Varieties adventure called. John was resigned. At the Banff hotel, he pretended he had manfully taken a cruel knock, but was not revengeful, and now he had found her—Alice reflected humorously that until he knew about her inheritance, he had not searched. Anyhow, he got another knock, which perhaps hurt worse; but she must not be shabby. Besides, her inheritance was not at all large.

She thought with a queer gentleness about the crabbed old fellow whose money she had got. Walter Hodson (the moorfolk called him Hodjin) was her mother's relation, but he had liked her father. He had not liked Tom, and he frankly hated Miriam. They had thought him poor; the Staneside *heaf* did not carry many sheep and as a rule the hay went down the becks. When Alice visited at Staneside, they generally disputed, but Walter asked her to come back, and he sent her sick father plovers' eggs and heather honey.

Somehow he fed a few black cattle, and for all his age—Walter was seventy-five—his habit was to get up at five o'clock and clean the byre. At seven o'clock, the milk must go to the station, eight miles off, and Walter and a boy put the churns in the Digby. A milk churn weighs about one hundred and twenty pounds. When the snow blew round the farmstead one morning, Walter went to the byre and did not come back. Since his habit was to be punctual, his housekeeper put on her shawl and clogs, and found her master in the snow. At length, old Walter rested, but the byre was cleaned.

Alice reflected that her mother's folk were hard stuff. Shepherds, poachers, and farmers, they were a frugal, indomitable lot, and she wondered whether she had inherited something of their qualities.

Smoke streamed by the windows, the car's gentle swing and the measured roll of wheels were soothing, and Alice slept. When she awoke, the express was roaring down the Fraser valley and a young woman invited her to join her children's picnic. Alice agreed. She understood the woman's husband was a railroad carpenter, whom the company had moved along the line, and she liked simple, strenuous folk. Moreover, she could add to the sandwiches and vacuum flask such fruit and candies as the train boy supplied. Children were not fastidious, and sometimes a dollar, wisely spent, did buy happiness.

Alice, listening to the woman's talk, mused about the tourists she had met at Banff. A few were there to mend their broken health. For the most part, the others were fashionable and extravagantly up-to-date. They rather boasted that their main occupation was to search the world for pleasure, and an excursion, carefully planned by guides and followed by loaded porters, to the Rockies' snow was perhaps something fresh. The women had not excited Alice's jealousy. Although she herself was not long since a third-class vaudeville actress, she thought them vulgar. Anyhow, none would bear comparison with an Indian Agent's wife she knew.

For a time she sang in a half-voice quaint little songs for the carpenter's children, and when they were tired went back to her seat by the window and drowsily watched the pines speed by. In the evening, the forest rolled back, and she saw smoking sawmill stacks, tall office blocks, streets that climbed a bluff, a wide, calm inlet, and steamers' masts. When the cars stopped, Lacoste waited on the platform by the wharf. Alice noted his shabby clothes and anxious look, but she gave him a smile.

"I expect the company transfers the baggage for their hotel. In the meantime, I'll keep the checks."

"Then you are stopping at the C.P.R.?" said Lacoste, in a meaning voice.

"For a day or two. I have satisfied the lawyers. All's well, Perry, but we will talk about it at dinner. You are going to be my guest."

They crossed the wharf, and half an hour afterwards Alice followed Lacoste's rather conspicuous advance across the big dining-room. Perry's clothes did not harmonize with the expensive decorations, and she imagined hers excited the other women's surprise. All the same, Perry was not embarrassed. He escorted her past the tourist groups with a touch of theatrical gallantry and carried himself with a raffish swagger. Raffish was perhaps the proper word, but Alice refused to be apologetic. Perry was not at all a bad sort, and he was her guest.

The head waiter gave them a table at a quiet spot. The liner's passengers had gone on board, the room was not much

occupied, and Alice imagined the fellow knew his job. Perry, she thought, would as soon be conspicuous. When he studied the bill of fare his eyes sparkled and until he had satisfied his appetite he did not talk. Then he sighed, and for all the romantic look he gave her, Alice thought him sorry the feast was over.

"In short, the lawyers are convinced, and you are rich?" he said.

"I am not rich. I have some sheep in England and shares in a cattle-auction company. The shares are not sold on the stock exchange, and the lawyers do not know how much they are worth. In the meantime, my capital is about a thousand dollars."

Lacoste waved his hand, as if he implied that he was not vulgarly inquisitive.

"When you have charm, and some money, the world is yours; but a woman must use discretion or she is cheated by greedy adventurers. With a husband who knows the theater to guide you, you can go where you want. Me, I do know, but I am desolated—"

Alice stopped him. She laughed, but her laugh was kind.

"Nothing's doing, Perry! I do not want to be steered by my husband. Besides, if you think about marrying, I imagine you ought to marry Pearl."

"That one?" said Lacoste explosively. "When I am famous she loves me; when the show is broke she loves the real-estate office clerk! They are married at Indian Springs and one says the man is drunk. The boys from the pool room put them on the cars, and when the real estate man comes home a wad of bills is gone."

"I expect Pearl got the bills. She got my trunk," Alice remarked. "However, the clothes were Ruby's clothes and I had done with them; but it looks as if you were not a first-class guide."

Lacoste shrugged. Although Alice was humorous, he knew her firm.

"Very well! There is another thing. You have grace and talent; you might be famous."

"The trouble is, I have not a voice. You are a singer, and you ought to know."

"The voice is not very important," Lacoste declared. "Some I know who are favorites cannot sing. In vaudeville, the *verve* and *élan* carry one farther, and if you are supported by a proper company, I think you make your mark. But one must use a little money for advertisement, one must interest the newspapers, and soon people talk. When one knows where to get to work, it is not difficult."

For a few moments Alice said nothing. Perry wanted her to finance a fresh experiment. He was getting fat and shabby, but he knew good music, and she was not altogether scornful. John had wanted her money, although he was prosperous, and on the whole she thought him the meaner. She contrasted him with Loudon, and for all his expensive clothes and urbane confidence, she knew him second-class. Loudon pretended nothing; he was satisfied to carry out a strenuous job, for which his reward was not large.

Alice admitted that she really contrasted John and Lawrence Bethune. When she was ill and desperate, Lawrence had come to help. He wanted nothing for himself; he had asked her to marry him because he thought he ought! She had watched him labor at the bottom of a muddy trench, and she had studied the tourists at Banff. She imagined them rich, and some were cultivated, but none carried the stamp that marked Loudon and Larry Bethune. In the meantime, Perry waited.

"If I were willing to sing little risky songs, I might perhaps carry the show along," she said. "I am not willing. Sometimes Ruby sang such songs, because her pluck was not very good and she was afraid to starve. Ruby, however, went overboard one morning from a plunging sloop. She's at the bottom of the straits, where I think she ought to be."

Lacoste's look got puzzled. Perry did not understand, but Alice had not expected him to do so, and she resumed:

"When I joined your company, my ambition was to sing fine music; music without much ornament. My line was to be flowing melody, perfect intonation, and power on a sustained note! Well, of course, I couldn't do it. That's not at all important now; but I believe you can, and your audiences will stand for much better stuff than you think. I've known you carry the boys away by a little *habitant chanson*. There's your model. You're not clever at tricks and ornament, and

anyhow, they spoil the perfect line. Real beauty's Greek; one hates the florid Italian stuff, and Ruby deserved to be drowned because she sometimes sang, but hated, *muck*. But you are an artist, and if you cut out liquor and girls like Pearl, you may yet go far."

Lacoste bowed. Alice had not meant to flatter him and she thought she did not exaggerate, but when he looked up his glance was disturbed.

"It is perhaps too late! If one does not seize the proper time, one is left, and falls farther and farther back. But that is my affair, and if I am a fool, I must pay for my folly. Well, in the morning I start for Puget Sound, and I may not see you another time. If I have helped you mend your fortune, I am glad."

Alice leaned forward and touched his arm.

"You were a useful friend, and as far as the money I have so far got allows, I would like to be your partner. When you go, I have a packet for you, and now let's talk about something else."

Lacoste played up. The knocks he had taken were numerous, and his pluck was the pluck that marks the battered veteran. When at length Alice got up some time had gone. They went together to the hall, and stopping for a moment at the clerk's desk, she gave him a thick envelope.

"At Toronto you helped me more than you knew, and I wish you luck," she said.

Lacoste's habit was to be theatrical. He kissed her hand, and vanished behind the revolving door. Alice went to the desk and asked for the coasting steamers' time-table.

CHAPTER XXIII

A CONFERENCE BY THE FIRE

A balsam log snapped in the big open hearth and a resinous smell floated about the room. Leaping reflections touched the walls, for Mrs. Loudon had not yet got a light and mused drowsily in an easy chair by the fire. Loudon had sailed for a rancherie along the coast and might not be back for a week; supper was not yet ready, and for half an hour Mrs. Loudon thought she would rest.

Since morning she had occupied herself in her orchard. Now the leaves had fallen, the young apple trees must be pruned and protected against the moths; and she must, as far as possible, remove the large weeds. On the warm coast, to clear ground for an orchard was not enough; the forest stubbornly crept back, and one must keep the clearing clear. Bob had gone for Larry's cultivator, and in two or three days had grubbed up a noble pile of stuff. Mrs. Loudon would sooner he did so when her husband was not about. George was ridiculously scrupulous; he declared Bob was the Government's servant and ought not to be employed on her fruit ranch. Mrs. Loudon hoped she was honest, but a woman did not bother about things like that.

She had no longer Alice's help in the orchard. The girl was as useful as a man, and in the evenings the house had been more cheerful because she was about. Mrs. Loudon had begun to be fond of Alice, and her strange and sudden flight had hurt. Now she speculated about her languidly.

At the beginning, she admitted she had watched the girl and George. She, of course, knew her husband, but the other did not, and his humorous kindness, so to speak, might be misinterpreted. In fact, it might tempt one sort of girl to experiment. Alice, however, struck exactly the proper note. When George joked she bantered him, and their talk was friendly, but she implied that she acknowledged him her employer's husband.

Yet Mrs. Loudon felt Alice had treated her shabbily. In her care, the haggard, forlorn girl Larry had brought home was soon an attractive, and apparently happy, young woman. For all her sense of grievance, Mrs. Loudon smiled. Larry's casually bringing home a girl—she did not know a better phrase—was something of a joke. Anyhow, although she was perhaps not beautiful, Alice was attractive.

She knew how to carry herself, in a house, and in the woods. The sun had touched her skin with delicate color, and one sensed a calm and balance girls, as a rule, had not. Although she was sometimes humorously frank, she knew where to stop; and one soon remarked her pluck and independence.

All the same, she had rejoined the shabby theatrical adventurer whom the Trents and Lawrence had talked about. The fellow was broke, and Alice had toured the country long enough to get rid of any romantic illusions she might have indulged when she started. She had a pleasing voice, but she knew she could not be a famous singer. At all events, Mrs. Loudon knew. When one studied it, the thing was baffling; but Alice was gone, and her employer and friend had some grounds to be annoyed.

After the keen wind in the orchard, the fire was soothing, and Mrs. Loudon perhaps slept, for although she had not heard steps, somebody crossed the veranda and a heavy object bumped on the boards. Then Li Wen laughed, although he was, as a rule, as inscrutable as an effigy on a Siwash totem pole. Somebody he approved had arrived, but it could not be George.

The door opened and Alice came in. Mrs. Loudon looked up with blank astonishment. Alice gave her an apologetic smile.

"I have brought my trunk. Perhaps I was rash," she said. "I have really no right to hope you will take me back."

Mrs. Loudon pushed her into a chair by the fire.

"If you have come up the Inlet, I expect you are cold. Li will soon give us supper, and since he knows you have arrived, I need not hurry him. If he'd had longer notice, you would have got a feast."

"You have not yet told me if I'm allowed to stop."

"My dear, you mustn't be absurd! Perhaps it's strange, but ten minutes since I was thinking about you, and I confess I felt I did well to be annoyed. When you came in, the annoyance vanished. I suppose we are not always logical, and I hope I'm not indiscreet, but I would like to know why you went away."

Something bumped against the staircase wall, and the steps cracked under shuffling feet. Alice knew Li Wen carried up her trunk, and a few moments afterwards he appeared at the door. Her box, a light, and hot water were in her room, he said, and in twenty minutes supper would be served.

"Li works by schedule," Mrs. Loudon remarked. "He is considerably faster, and neater, than a hotel chambermaid. But the evenings get cold and you are tired. Perhaps you would like him to make a fire?"

Alice thought not, but when she went to her room she was moved. Her hosts and the other woodlanders she knew were kind. They asked nothing for themselves, and although they had not much, they were willing to give. By and by she returned to her chair by the fire, and Mrs. Loudon said:

"You were going to explain. But to begin with, I hope M. Lacoste did not escort you back."

"Perry started for the States," said Alice, smiling. "I believe he had reckoned on my accompanying him; but when I gave him a hundred pounds he was resigned."

Mrs. Loudon gazed at her with blank surprise.

"You gave the fellow five hundred dollars? Do you imply that you have got some more?"

"When I left Banff I had a thousand dollars. The lawyer thought he might risk it, but some of course has gone. Perry got five hundred, and I bought clothes. You see, my relation's estate is not yet wound up; I think John said *wound up*, and he meant they had not yet sold my sheep and the auction company's shares. Then I believe there's a lime-kiln, and a share in a claypit where they make pipes for farm drains."

"My dear—" said Mrs. Loudon, rather breathlessly.

Li Wen carried in supper and got a light. They went to the table, and over the meal Alice told her tale.

"Walter Hodson died some time since," she said. "The trustees knew I started for Toronto, but the Canadian lawyers inquired for Alice Thorne, and but for Perry they might not have found her. Then I imagined it might be hard to satisfy them Ruby Desmond was the girl they wanted, and before I wrote to you I resolved I'd wait. When they were satisfied, I did not see my line. I had no home. If I went to England, Tom and Miriam would try to rule me, and I'd had enough. There was no use in going home to fight my relations. The money old Walter gave me was mine. You see, they never imagined he had so much, and they left him alone. I expect the old fellow liked the joke."

Mrs. Loudon inquired discreetly if her inheritance was large. Alice said it was not. When all was sold, John reckoned she'd be lucky to get five thousand pounds. For Walter to gather up the sum on his bleak moorland farm implied determined labor and stern frugality.

"His school was the old school, but the farmers and shepherds between the Cheviots and the Solway are yet a remarkably hard and stubborn lot," she said. "The country's the bleakest in England, their habit is to go without, and where a city workman would starve, I expect they'd thrive. For all that, they are proud. They hold fast all that's theirs, but they do not take from others what they can get for themselves."

Mrs. Loudon imagined the people Alice talked about would make good in Canada. One knew another sort of emigrants who expected to be helped along by the Government and wanted a soft job. Moreover, she thought Alice had inherited something of the moorland folk's stern qualities. The girl had toured the Pacific slope with a fourth-class show, but was not tainted. Had she been weak, Mrs. Loudon knew where she might have gone.

"If you are not bored, I will tell you a tale about a widow and her two sons," Alice resumed. "The story is typical, and I rather think it's true. The boys helped their mother at a little barren farm, and the evening before a fair at a market town ten miles off, they asked if they might, for once, take a holiday. The widow agreed, with the stipulation that before they started the day's work must be done. The boys got up at daybreak—I suppose about two o'clock—and at breakfast she gave them half a crown, something like fifty cents. The motor-bus was not yet invented, a bicycle was a reckless

extravagance, and the boys set off, and got back at dark, on foot. After a holiday like that, they were content to labor for the next twelve months.

"Twelve months went, and they planned a fresh excursion to the fair. Their mother was willing, and when she had seen all the chores for the day were properly carried out, she again gave them half a crown. The boys refused. They had, they said, a shilling left from the sum they got last year! One is now a rich flockmaster, and the other chairman of a prosperous seeds-merchant company."

Mrs. Loudon laughed. "In the circumstances, it is not remarkable! Men of their sort are conquerors, but, perhaps fortunately, they are not very numerous.

"Well, Larry Bethune, for whom you have not asked, is in the woods about Sentry Peak. Soon after you vanished he started for his friends' camp upriver, and I imagine he was angry. At all events, his remarks about M. Lacoste were violent."

Alice gave her a calm glance. "Lawrence is kind, but he is not, in any sense, my guardian. Do you think he'll marry Miss Trent?"

"On the whole, I do not. For one thing, I doubt if a woman could move Larry from his ranch, and Isabel Trent is not the girl to be happy in the wilds. Since you are back, it looks as if they had not daunted you."

"That is so," Alice agreed with a baffling smile. "Had I married Lawrence Bethune, I should not have feared the woods, or whatever we might be forced to front. However, I refused, and Isabel has some charm. I think she is better stuff than Trent."

"George agrees, and sometimes he's rather keen. He declares Mervyn Trent is superficial; his best qualities are all on top. George's perhaps are not, but he wears well. Good stuff is still good stuff when the surface gloss is gone—"

Li Wen carried off the plates, and Mrs. Loudon put out the lamp and turned the flaming logs.

"After my labors in the orchard, I'm pleasantly tired, and we do not need a light," she said. "Then to sit by a log fire helps a quiet, confidential talk. Very well. To begin with, why did you come back?"

"For one thing, I engaged to stop for the winter, and I thought you wanted me. To know I was wanted was something fresh."

"I hope you will stop for the summer," Mrs. Loudon rejoined. "Your help in the orchard is useful and I'm resolved to make my fruit-growing pay, particularly since George thinks I can't. Your feeling you mustn't let me down was nice; but you had some other grounds. Since you imply you reckoned on Larry's marrying Isabel Trent, he was not the grounds."

"Your argument is logical," said Alice with a smile. "I admit I hesitated, but I had nowhere to go and your house is home. Now I'm rich, Tom and Miriam might forgive my escapade, but they'd control and exploit me. Perhaps I'm shabby, but one hates to be used."

Mrs. Loudon nodded. "I do not know your brother, but I do not see him, or another, controlling you."

"Oh, well, I suppose the drawback was, I knew he would try and Miriam would support him. To go home and fight for my freedom did not attract me. I bought my independence, and it perhaps cost me much."

"I wonder—" said Mrs. Loudon, in a thoughtful voice. "It's possible you gained something, besides independence, you might not otherwise have got. To roam Canada with a vaudeville company is not the sort of experiment I would risk for a number of girls I knew; but girls who, like some fruit trees, grow straight only where they are sheltered are perhaps not worth the care one gives. A sound shoot from a strong stock can stand the battering wind, and when I philosophize George is my bored victim. But since I was a schoolma'am some time has gone, I suppose the John you talked about was the lover you refused. After all, his going to Banff, from Toronto, was kind."

"He did not know he would be again refused. To persuade John it was possible would, I think, have been hard. After I had wandered about with Perry, I'd seize the chance to be respectable, and his being willing to marry me was generous. It looks as if I'm meanly spiteful, but I believe John did argue like that. Then at Toronto he let me go. I was not the happy girl he had known in England. For three years I had watched my father fight and knew he must be beaten. I had helped at

the dairy and sometimes herded sheep; when he was ill I interviewed his greedy creditors. Well, I was tired and moody; my freshness was gone, and my clothes were cheap. John implied that he was rather noble, but since I had crossed the Atlantic to join him, his engagement stood. In the circumstances, I went off with Perry Lacoste. John may have thought it the proper phrase."

Mrs. Loudon nodded, as if she understood. Alice's eyes sparkled and the blood stained her skin. Although some time had gone since the girl was hurt, she knew the hurt was deep. After three years of romantic illusion, she had known her lover for the man he really was.

"You refused Larry. He, at all events, was not selfish."

"Lawrence is another type," said Alice in a gentle voice. "I think John saw where he could use the money I would get; Perry frankly wanted me to finance his show, and of the two he was the honestest. All Larry wanted was to help. In a way, there was the obstacle. He was satisfied with his ranch, but since our adventure had entangled us, he would not let me down. Well, I did want to be respectable, and I wanted a home, but I did not want a husband who might think me an embarrassment he must bear for conscience' sake."

Mrs. Loudon smiled. She knew the girl's fierce independence, and to some extent she sympathized.

"Lawrence is lonely, and he's flesh and blood. Perhaps if you had wisely used your charm—"

"I wonder—" said Alice, and although her brows were knit, she blushed. "Well, if I must be frank, I weighed the plan. If I had loved Lawrence, I might have risked it; but I didn't know. He is the best man I have met, but that's another thing. And I don't yet know—Anyhow, it's done with, and we might talk about something else. I suppose you are cutting back last year's apple trees?"

Mrs. Loudon played up. For a time they talked about the orchard; and then Alice said she was tired, and went off.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE WRECKED CANOE

Behind the rock at the end of the orchard, the sun was warm, and Alice and Mrs. Loudon picnicked in shelter. Loudon was not yet back from the coast, and Bob had gone across the mountains to the settlement. Mrs. Loudon declared to feed two men left her cook no time for other work, and now both were away, Li might seize the opportunity to clean the house. Moreover, the days got short, much must be done in the orchard, and as she and Alice were women, they would not bother about lunch.

Alice did not grumble. Sometimes, when the show played to a nearly empty house, she had gone without breakfast and supper, and she thought the lunch the China boy had put up might tempt a duller appetite than hers. Her occupation braced and soothed her. Her muscles got firm, for all her knee-boots she moved with a buoyant step, and she knew the Chinook winds had touched her skin with delicate bloom. She did not claim to be beautiful, but she had some charm. Then, besides physical well-being, she enjoyed at Qualichan a serenity she had not known for long.

She looked about. Walled by forest, and crossed by even rows of fruit trees, the orchard sloped to the lake. Along the rows, torn red soil marked the cultivator's track. Not far from the spot where she picnicked a stack of weeds and dead fern burned, and the smoke floated by in a smooth, flowing curve. Alice noted the moist, pungent smell. In autumn, when one burned the potato haulm, a dale she knew in England smelt like that. She pictured the long, brown moors and the mist on the high fells. Mrs. Loudon remarked her brooding look.

"Are you tired?" she asked.

"Not at all," said Alice. "I expect the fire accounts for my soberness. Perhaps you have known a smell you remembered carry you away? At Rainshope on a day like this they burn the potato shaws and the sheep move up the hill. I felt, if I but allowed it, the smoke would float me back to the Old Country, and I did not want to go. I'm satisfied at Qualichan, and I'd sooner look in front. I might buy a ranch. After all, to cultivate the soil is our most useful, and in a way, our cleanest, job."

"What about cutting fir roots at the bottom of a muddy trench?"

"Our clothes are the worst embarrassment, but when you undertake a man's work, you're entitled to use his clothes. I could chop roots and dig a trench, and I do know something about sheep. I bought the knowledge expensively. His experiments with heavy sheep ruined my father."

"Larry is rather proud of his sheep. He and Colman dispute about them. Jim does not think they pay."

Alice laughed. "What has Lawrence to do with my supposititiously buying a ranch? However, it's not important. The queer thing is, in England, manufacturers and shopkeepers think the farmer a dull, plodding fellow, and an educated land-girl a subject for a joke. Really, a good shepherd and cowman must know as much as an office clerk. To build a stack at a windy spot, and draw the water in a field drain where the fall is light, is harder than to take down an engine. Then, in a modern dairy a girl can use all the brains she has—"

She stopped, and looked the other way. In the background, Sentry Peak's remote white top cut the sky. Lawrence and his friends were in the forests at the mountain's foot. Alice pictured Larry breaking the trail for Isabel, chopping a smooth path for her, and pitching her tent. Unconsciously she frowned.

Yet if Isabel had reached Sentry Mountain, she had shown some pluck, for the way was hard and dangerous. Sometimes the Siwash poled and dragged their canoes upstream to a fishing camp, and sometimes a prospector pushed through the thick woods. That, however, was all. The woods were hostile to civilized man; he could not carry his mechanical inventions into the wilds. All he could use was his muscular strength, and his civilization was a handicap. If he miscalculated, the wilderness destroyed him.

Alice's glance traveled back across the long sweep of rock and forest, and rested on Lonesome Lake. Under the trees, the water shone like a looking-glass; farther out, the wind swept dark-blue smears across its sparkling surface. Not long since torrential rain, carried inland by a warm Chinook, had beaten the woods, and the distant throb of rapids

proclaimed that a freshet was coming down. A wrinkled line marked the current's track across the lake, and where eddies revolved behind a point, broken driftwood swung slowly round. Some, however, had gone past the spot and floated down the bay. Alice saw battered trunks and ragged, white branches; and then a curved object fixed her glance.

The curve was smooth and symmetrical, and at its higher end a sort of beak stuck out as if from a flat bird's head. One could see where the neck joined a long, indistinct body that was in the water.

"A Siwash canoe!" said Alice. "It has come downriver with the flood. But the Indians are not fishing."

"I think none are in the woods," Mrs. Loudon agreed. "They stop fishing when the salmon spawn, and wait for winter before they set their traps for animals whose skins they sell." She got on her feet. "All the same, the thing is a canoe's bow."

"It's *Larry's* canoe!" said Alice. "Still, we must be sure. I think it will ground on the pebble bank, but it might drift past. Come on!"

She sped along the cultivator's track, and the torn soil stuck in large lumps to her boots. Mrs. Loudon did not think the girl felt she carried weight, and when she plunged into the slashing she certainly did not bother about her clothes. The days when Mrs. Loudon could jump logs and branches were gone, but since she thought the canoe was Lawrence's, she made the best speed she could.

When she stopped by the pebble bank, the canoe was a hundred yards off and twenty yards from land. Mrs. Loudon thought it might go round the point, but she saw Alice clenched a long fir branch. For two or three minutes they waited, and then Alice ran along the beach. The canoe was yet four or five yards from shore, and began to swing farther off on a slow eddy.

Alice plunged into the water, and the branch touched the bird's head bow. The rotten wood broke, and the canoe, propelled by the eddy, went faster. Alice did not stop. Mrs. Loudon saw the water run into her long boots, and then her legs vanished under her floating skirt. The stick, however, did not break again; Alice seized the bow, and floundering and splashing, pulled the canoe to land.

The stern was smashed, and on one side a rock had ground the wood to woolly splinters; stones had smashed the round bilge, and only the high bow was whole. Mrs. Loudon studied the wreck.

"Yes," she said, "the canoe is Larry's. She's slightly larger than the common river type. The Trents had an unusual quantity of camp truck."

"She carried the party's supplies," said Alice. "If Miss Trent's sleeping-bag and rubber bath went down a rapid, it would not matter much; but suppose the flour and blankets and so forth were on board? If they had unloaded the canoe, Lawrence would pull her properly up the bank. He is not the man to lose a canoe by carelessness. You see where it leads us?"

Mrs. Loudon saw Alice argued shrewdly, but she hesitated to admit she was unconvinced.

"Trent might have pulled up the canoe before the water rose, and he is not a river-Jack."

"No," said Alice firmly. "Lawrence would not trust a beginner, and if he did not himself make sure all was safe, it's because he'd got hurt. But I rather think the canoe broke away from them in a rapid, when the food would be on board. We do not know how far she floated downriver, but I believe they lost her near the Sentry."

It seemed possible, for the broken hull carried numerous marks. One pictured her shocking against bowlders, and plowing through gravel where the flood swirled across a point. Mrs. Loudon remarked that Alice's brows were knit; she herself began to feel the wreck's arrival was a call for help.

"I'll get our canoe, and look up Colman," Alice resumed.

"To begin with, you must go to the house for dry clothes," Mrs. Loudon rejoined.

Alice shrugged impatiently, and went off at a pace Mrs. Loudon could not emulate. For all that, when they got to Colman's an hour and a half had gone and the rancher was not about. Mrs. Colman, plump and red-faced, kneaded dough

by the stove, but when she heard the news she rubbed the stuff from her arms and lifted a Marlin rifle from a peg.

"I think Jim ought to know," she said.

A crashing explosion echoed in the woods and ten minutes afterwards a tall, thin, brown-skinned man arrived. When Mrs. Loudon told him about the canoe he nodded.

"Larry *might* be up against it, and he's got to take care of two city folk. If he's all right when we find him, he might be mad; but I guess we'll chance it." He turned to his wife. "You don't mind, Minnie? Put up all the grub we've got. I reckon I have to go."

"Yes, Jim," said Mrs. Colman. "Larry's a good neighbor. I won't grumble."

"You might be away for some time," said Alice. "If the canoe was loaded when they lost her, the party's stores are gone, and you must carry up all you think they might need—"

Mrs. Loudon signaled. Alice must not talk about payment, and she could not engage Jim Colman as one engaged a packer.

"We have a useful stock of food. You cannot start before daybreak, Jim, and you might come across in the evening and pick the stuff you want. Then you will need two or three Indians, and I believe old Pechack came up the Inlet. I expect James would go."

"There's another thing," said Alice. "Mr. Bethune may not come downriver. The Trents wanted to cross the mountains, and if they found they could do so, he meant to steer for the settlement. Well, if he lost his stores near the Sentry, he might be forced to try the shorter line. In consequence, two parties ought to start, but Mr. Loudon and Bob are away."

Colman got up. "Sure! I'll go look for James." He turned to Mrs. Loudon. "We'll be along in the evening, ma'am. Maybe you can find Pechack."

He went off, and when Alice followed him to the door his wife gave Mrs. Loudon a meaning glance. Mrs. Loudon said nothing. She had thought she could front a crisis and, if necessary, move fast, but Alice somehow had seized control and pushed her along at rather a breathless speed.

In a few minutes they took the trail for the lake, and as soon as they landed Mrs. Loudon sent the China boy to look for the Indian, Pechack. Then she pulled an easy chair to the fire in the living room. She was not as young as Alice, and she felt she was entitled to a rest. By and by Alice came in, carrying a new and rather ornamental pocket wallet.

"I do not understand Chinook," she said. "You might negotiate with Pechack at my cost."

"He cannot be *hired*," Mrs. Loudon rejoined. "The old fellow's not *hiyu Tyee*, but he is a Tyee of a sort. Then the Siwash are proud, and when they sell skins, smoked salmon, and so forth, their *clooch-men* squaws carry out the bargaining. However, since I am George's *clooch*, they might go for me, and I dare say they will take a present. But you mustn't meddle, and I must use some tact."

"Very well, but we mustn't be shabby. Then the men at the settlement do not know Lawrence, and ought to be compensated. Mr. James will perhaps fix their reward and his. I gave Perry five hundred dollars from the thousand I got at Banff; and then I bought some clothes, besides railroad and steamship tickets. However, when my trustees in England get the lawyer's report—"

"In the meantime, you want me to take and use all the money you have got?"

"Of course," said Alice. "If there is not enough, Mr. Loudon will perhaps be my banker for two or three weeks."

Mrs. Loudon reflected that the girl was generous. Until she got her recent inheritance, she had never had money, but where her friends needed help she kept nothing back.

"You cannot give James and Colman money," she said. "Then you must weigh things. We do not know if Lawrence is in trouble; after all, the canoe might have gone adrift when nothing was on board. He is a clever woodsman, and to some extent I suppose all men are vain. When he found out that while he comfortably pushed along, two rescue parties

searched for him he might, as Colman remarked, *get mad*. In fact, their efforts to reach him might be thought an excellent joke, particularly if the boys knew a young woman had financed the search. Minnie Colman is, of course, a good sort, but a woman loves to talk, and you were not remarkably discreet."

Alice's face went red, and for a moment or two she looked straight in front.

"I would hate to make Lawrence ridiculous. I do not want to be ridiculous, but it is not very important. If help is needed, it is needed badly. We do not know; Colman doesn't know, but he thinks it possible. We mustn't run the risk."

"Very well, but before Larry was your friend he was our friend. If the search is expensive George will not grumble about the bill."

"Ah," said Alice, "the argument does not go. I expect you owe Lawrence nothing. Because he was alone, you were kind, but I cannot calculate my debt. When he found me asleep by the trail at the settlement, I was hopeless, beaten, and *desperate*. I could not keep my post at the hotel, I did not know where to get another, and I'd found out long since I could not sing. Perry had gone, and I was done for. I saw myself drift helplessly—"

She stopped for a moment with a shiver, and the blood leaped to her skin when she resumed:

"Lawrence arrived. He wanted nothing. All he felt was pity. He gave me back my confidence, and for his sake, you gave me an honest, useful occupation. Then he was willing to marry me. He knew nothing about me; he was recklessly trustful. After all, a splendid fool like Lawrence is cheated less than some calculating men. Now perhaps he's starving in the woods; perhaps he's hurt. If I can help, all I have is too little to pay my debt."

Mrs. Loudon was moved. She had not known Alice let herself go before, and she took the wallet.

"I will account to you," she said. "Colman knows the mountains and he'll move fast. We will ask him to send back an Indian as soon as he has news for us."

Alice looked up in surprise. "But don't you understand? I'm not going to wait. When Larry perhaps is starving, do you think I'd be satisfied to send help? To *hire* somebody to see him out?"

"Now you are absurd! If you went, you would hinder Colman, and if he is to be useful, he must push ahead."

"Where Isabel Trent can go, I can go," said Alice scornfully. "A professional dancer can use her feet and is not allowed to get soft. Anyhow, I am going to start. If I cannot keep the others' speed, Colman must build a hut for me and I'll wait for him to come back."

Mrs. Loudon said nothing. Her youth was gone, and she, at all events, would delay the men. In the meantime, she must think about provisioning the party, and she went to her storeroom. She was occupied for some time, and soon after the supplies were packed for transport, Colman, James, and the Indian arrived.

CHAPTER XXV

UPRIVER

Gravel rattled under trampling feet; the canoe slipped down the bank and Alice got on board. Balancing while the long hull rocked, she crept to a box amidships; Pechack shoved off, and Colman dipped his paddle. On the bank, Mrs. Loudon waved good-by and melted in the gloom.

With three passengers and some stores on board, the canoe floated deep; a smaller canoe carried two Indians and soon forged ahead. On one point, Colman and Alice agreed: Larry was embarrassed by two tenderfoot tourists, and if his supplies were shipwrecked, he would soon need food, blankets, and other stuff a white man in the wilds could not go without. In consequence, Colman resolved to use two canoes. For some distance, they could move the stuff upriver faster than they could pack heavy loads through the woods, and when navigation got difficult they might pull up one canoe and cache part of her freight. Moreover, when they reached headwaters, where Lawrence was supposititiously held up, to put his friends on board with an Indian pilot and shove them off would be a convenient plan. Alice saw Colman would sooner she had stopped at Loudon's, but she rather sympathized with his annoyance.

For a few minutes the ranch windows shone, and then vanished behind the pines. Day was breaking, but the morning was cold and dark. The woods murmured in the dreary wind, and angry ripples splashed the canoe's side. Colman, glancing at the torn clouds, said something in Chinook; the Indian grunted, and they paddled faster. Alice imagined they meant to reach the river-mouth before the wind got strong. The big firs by the house had vanished and all she saw was indistinct forest and lead-colored water, ominously flecked by white. The adventure on which she had, perhaps rashly, embarked had begun.

To justify her starting was hard. She could not help her companions, but she was resolved she would not keep them back. At Qualichan she had recovered her health and nerve, and a vaudeville girl must keep her body fit. An Apache tango and some tricks on the swinging bar demanded perfect muscular control. In fact, where agility and balance were needed, she imagined she could beat a city man. But Jim Colman and Pechack were not city men; they were expert *voyageurs*. In the wilds when summer is gone, one must be an expert. Where a merchant miscalculates, he pays in dollars; a bushman pays with his life. Very well, if she could not keep the others' pace, they must leave her behind.

Alice admitted that her excursion might after all be thought a first-class joke. If the stores were unloaded when the canoe was wrecked, she was going on a fool's errand; but she did not know. Nobody knew! Colman said a bushman could stand a winter in the wilds, so long as he had some flour and bacon, a blanket, an ax, and a rifle; but these were the articles Lawrence used the canoe to carry, and if the canoe were lost—The consequences were obvious, but were not to be dwelt upon.

If Lawrence and the packers were alone, they might by some means cheat the wilderness. Alice saw Larry conquering difficulties that would daunt another; she knew him resourceful, cool, and stubborn. But he was not alone; he was hampered by his companions, and so long as they were in danger, he would not think of himself. In a way, it looked as if Alice had undertaken to rescue Isabel Trent.

It was frankly not her object. She had refused Lawrence. To be firm had cost her something, but she perhaps had felt she might, if she wanted, afterwards call him back, and Isabel's arrival was something of a knock. Yet since she knew Lawrence loved his ranch better than he might love his wife, she had tried to be philosophical. Besides, she doubted if Isabel could separate him from his ranch. To picture him gone where no call of hers could reach him was another thing. In fact, she dared not picture it! All the same, he might be broken by hunger or accident, and speed must be used. Colman and old Pechack, however, were experts, and by their help she would save Lawrence, although she perhaps but saved him for Isabel.

She glanced at the Indian, who, swinging his paddle with a measured stroke, inscrutably fronted her. Mrs. Loudon stated the Siwash were gentlemen, and Pechack carried a sort of stamp. His clothes were cheap store clothes, such as white packers used, but his slicker coat was beautifully made; Alice understood from the intestines of a seal. He was short, and not remarkably strongly built; his face, of Chinese type, was deeply lined, and his fixed glance was cold and keen as an eagle's. Alice knew, because at Qualichan eagles were numerous and not much afraid of men. Studying Pechack, she sensed strength of mind and body and stern endurance. The old fellow was some sort of Tyee, but when Mrs. Loudon

asked for help he himself had gone. George Loudon dealt justly with the Indians, and it looked as if justice paid.

A noise like surf echoed in the woods and tossing branches cracked. The canoe swung across a circling eddy, and Alice saw they were at the river-mouth. A blast whipped the lake and touched the lead-colored waves with snowy foam. Had they been a few minutes later, she imagined the canoes could not have labored round the point against which churning driftwood beat. The woods, however, cut the wind, and although the muddy stream ran fast, the flood was sinking. So far, their luck was good!

For some distance the valley was level and the river crept sinuously through the dark woods. The pine-tops roared, and sometimes the throb of rapids pierced the turmoil. Driftwood floated down the thick, green current, and here and there splashing waves marked large, covered stones. At the bends the stream ran, deep and fast, along the entrant curve, and the Indian steered for the slack on the other side. In the shallow by the salient bank, he could use the pole, and Alice tried to help.

To hold the canoe straight against the current's thrust was beyond her power, but so long as the others steered she could push, although she must use caution and some skill. She must not push the unstable canoe's topside under water, and when she thrust, her recovery must be swift and smooth. If she were slow, she might follow her pole and go overboard. Where the water was deep and calm she paddled, and by and by the branches in the canoe's bottom began to gall her knees. Since she had used the weeding-fork and grubhoe at the orchard, her hands were not yet blistered. For the most part, she did not look about. Her business was to concentrate on pole and paddle.

Greasy green water and muddy foam rolled by. Sometimes for a moment or two a rock in the channel hung level with her, and then drifted back. But for the strain on her muscles and the canoe's forward surge, it looked as if only the river and forest moved. The illusion got strong, and Alice began to feel that all she and the others could do was to hold on in spite of the swift eddies, rocks, and boulders that rushed down stream and threatened to carry her away. Her knees hurt, her hands were getting sore, and her mouth was parched.

At noon, they pulled the canoes on to a gravel bank, and for five minutes Colman used his ax. When he stopped, he built, with a few springy branches, a seat for Alice, and threw resinous wood between two narrow logs on which the kettle and frying-pan could rest. When the kettle boiled, Pechack put some cured salmon on a slab of bark. The stuff broke up in dry, pink, crumbling flakes, and Alice admitted that salmon, cured by Indians, was a delicacy. Colman said no white man he knew could smoke the fish like them. He raked some cooked venison from a deerskin bag in which the meat was packed in salt. The salt had softened the muscular fiber, but Alice used her fingers, for she had found out that one cannot cut venison with an American nicked knife. Colman brewed green tea, thickened by sweet condensed milk, and she admitted she had been satisfied with much worse meals when the Lacoste show went broke.

She inquired if Pechack had tried to sell the salmon at Victoria, and when he replied rather scornfully in Chinook, Colman said the Indians were not storekeepers. Alice knew the Siwash were not greedy. When one got old and, for an Indian, rich, he called the clan to a *potlach* and gave away all he had. Since his goods would some time be his friend's, to scheme and cheat was not worth while. In fact, one knew old Pechack for a gentleman.

Commerce, of course, was useful, and in North America attracted the keenest brains. Manufacturing nations lived by the exchange of useful goods; but Alice had known some commercialists—Perhaps they were not good examples. Anyhow, she would sooner trust the men who made things, and particularly the men who made things grow. If, for instance, one contrasted John at Toronto with Lawrence Bethune—But comparison was absurd!

Then she liked Jim Colman. He certainly had not wanted her to join the party; she had noted his efforts to hide his vexation, but he had used some effort. As a rule, when one annoyed a Canadian he was not at all reticent. She noted that although they had not got far upriver Jim and Pechack rested calmly. They knew the need for haste, but Alice imagined they knew the strain they could bear, and used their bodies as a competent engineer uses a machine. They refused to be hurried, like a tenderfoot, and she pictured them going, at the end of the journey, as steadily as they went at the beginning. Well, she hoped Colman would find her less of an encumbrance than he had thought. In the meantime, he was perhaps entitled to an apology.

"I'm afraid I have been something of a nuisance ever since I arrived at Qualichan," she said. "To begin with, Mrs. Colman was forced to leave your homestead in order to nurse me. I don't know if you grumbled, but she did not."

Colman gave her a quiet smile.

"You were pretty sick, and it was awkward for Larry. Anyhow, I guess Minnie liked the job. She reckons she's some doctor, and she don't get much chance of practicing. The only time I was sick I was knocked down by a tree."

"When I got better Mrs. Loudon felt obliged to give me a post," Alice went on. "Now, to some extent, I'm hurrying you upriver. At all events, I insisted on going with you. Well, you see, Larry's my pal. When I was sick and forlorn he saw me out."

"Why, for sure," Colman agreed.

Alice imagined her explanation, so to speak, miscarried. The rancher was primitive, and did not know an up-to-date young woman might be a man's pal although he was not her lover. Colman took it for granted they were lovers and approved her stanchness. The queer thing was, she was not much disturbed.

"Larry, of course, may not need us," she resumed. "He is a good bushman and the canoe might have been washed off the bank. When they stopped for the night, I expect they would unload the stores."

"We don't *know*. Larry's not the sort to put a canoe where she would wash off. Anyhow, if he does need us, he needs us bad. Between us, we're going to get him. In about three days, James will pull out from the settlement with another gang."

"Very well. If you find I stop you, you must build me a hut, and push on."

"You're a city girl. You'd stay there, alone?"

"I might be afraid," said Alice. "But I would stay."

Colman's glance searched her face, and Alice sensed a sort of respect she had not before remarked.

"All right. I reckon nothing would hurt you, but you surely have some sand."

Peachack signaled, and Colman helped the Indians launch the canoes. Pine branches tossed, and dark clouds sped across the sky; the river's channel got straighter, the stream went faster, and the ground began to be broken. For a time they laboriously poled and paddled; and then Colman and the Indian landed, and stumbled along the bank, at different sides, with the tracking-lines. When they stopped at a spot where steep rocks went down to the water, Alice thought it was four o'clock. The river, foaming and splashing, poured tumultuously down the gorge. The other canoe carried Peachack across but Colman stopped on the bank.

"We have got to dump our loads," he said to Alice. "I reckon you couldn't make it across the rocks and the timber's thick and full of devil's club. Well, I thought Larry's outfit might have chopped a road for the dame, but they have not: the water would be lower when they went through. I could chop a trail, but I would be busy for two or three hours."

Alice reflected that Isabel had risked the canyon.

"You mustn't," she said. "If you mean to track the canoe through, I will stay on board."

Colman spoke to Peachack, whose grunt implied that he approved, and when they had carried up the loads, two Indians, seizing the tracking-line, took the rocks. Alice imagined only a mountaineer or a Siwash could have crawled across the awkward slabs. The others took the river and, with Peachack poling, the canoe forged ahead. By and by she stopped. For eight or nine yards, the current, rebounding from the stones, leaped and broke in angry waves. The men, helped by the trackers on the bank, must force the canoe up the incline. Alice thought it impossible, but Peachack shouted and they again advanced.

Spray blew across the turmoil, and a wave leaped on board. Alice, kneeling in the canoe bottom, felt the water steal into her long boots. Since the boots were horizontal, their gaping tops were low, but she dared not get up. A Siwash canoe is not the sort of craft in which one rashly moves about. Colman, nearly waist-deep, strained and sweated. His face was dark red; he braced his inclined body like a post against the canoe's stern. Two Indians splashed in shallow water on the other side, and the torrent broke against and leaped up their legs. They strained and gasped and stumbled, but the canoe slowly went ahead.

When she lurched out from the turmoil Alice thought they had won the hardest fight. In front, for about twenty yards, the water was silky green. One saw the green belt was an incline, but it foamed only where a rock pushed through, and its

noiseless, smooth descent, somehow, was comforting. Pechack shouted to the men on the bank, and Colman, pushing hard, sank to his waist.

For a few moments the tracking-line was rigid like a bar. Alice remarked that it did not, as one might imagine, pull the canoe obliquely to the bank. A bridle went from bow to stern, and the line, fastened a little in front of the loop's center, rather swung the bow the other way. For all its silky smoothness, the green current ran as fast as the other, and was deeper. The Indians were obviously bothered to keep their feet, and Pechack's mouth was tight. Yet the canoe went up the incline, and she was near the top when a tracker stumbled and rolled down the bank. That was all Alice saw. The canoe was going back, downhill, and if she went sideways, she must capsize. If one were flung into the leaping turmoil, one could not get on one's feet, and perhaps one could not swim.

She stopped. The tracker left on the bank had thrown his line round a broken tree, and when the other rejoined him the canoe again went ahead. By and by they tracked and pushed her to a deep revolving pool, where Colman got on board, and half an hour afterwards ran her on the gravel beyond the rapids.

Colman and the Indians went back for the other canoe and Alice squeezed the water from the bottom of her skirt. In about an hour, they had gone four or five hundred yards, and before the loads were carried across dusk would begin to fall. To move the stuff upriver was obviously going to be a slow and laborious undertaking.

CHAPTER XXVI

THE RAVINE

The second day was much like the other, but Colman was forced to portage round a long rapid, and for three or four hours tremendous rain beat the woods. Alice, crouching on the branches in the canoe's bottom, pulled her oilskin coat across the top of her long boots. Water trickled in through the button-holes and some went down her neck, but so long as she did not move she escaped most of the flood that rolled down the slicker. Although she was horribly cramped, she did not want to move. The noise and cold and gloom were stupefying. The deluge numbed her body and dulled her brain.

It looked as if her companions were harder stuff than common flesh and blood. They plunged into water melted snow had chilled; harnessed to the tracking-lines, they crawled along precipitous rocks, and crashed through rotten driftwood on the gravel banks. They paddled like machines, and where Pechack could use his pole his braced figure swung with the rhythmic smoothness that marks the beat of a connecting-rod. His yellow face was as inscrutable as the carved head on his totem pole at the rancherie. Alice began to think him rather a Robot than a man sensible to cold and fatigue.

For all the fury of the storm and the river, the canoe crept ahead and the blurred rocks and trees drifted back. To feel one advanced was something, and Alice reflected that Isabel Trent had borne all she was forced to bear. Where Isabel could go, she could go. She had used the argument before, but when she was downhearted it helped her brace up.

Alice had begun to reckon Isabel her antagonist. Isabel had carried off Lawrence, and she had, from one point of view, advantages Alice had not. Yet Alice, so to speak, had taken up the other's challenge. She was going to Lawrence's help because he had first helped her; but the statement, although accurate, did not cover all the ground. She was frankly going to fight for her lover. But suppose when she found him he did not need her help? She pictured Isabel's scornful amusement, and the blood came to her skin. All the same, if Lawrence were but safe, whoever would might laugh.

At length, the rain stopped and the clouds rolled away. Behind the forest at the valley's end, pale sunshine touched Sentry Peak. For a few minutes the mountain's snowy top gleamed against a blue rift in the sky, and Alice saw the tapered white belts run down to the streaming mist. The mountain looked very far off. She dared not calculate in terms of a day's laborious progress how far it really was. Then the mist rolled higher; to see the picture melt was some relief.

Alice pulled off her slicker. While the deluge lasted she had but added to the load the men must move. Now she could help them paddle, and when they landed at a portage she seized a light pack. The portage was half a mile long, but where one must take the woods Lawrence's men had roughly slashed a track and the big fir roots were the worst obstacles. Alice imagined her load weighed twenty pounds and Colman carried seventy pounds; but at the end of the portage she was tired and he was fresh. At all events, he went back cheerfully for the canoe, and after some time she saw the craft, supported by four thin legs, lurch across an opening in the timber. The men's heads were inside the capsized hull, and it looked as if some strange reptile had crawled up from the river.

When dusk began to fall Alice's arms and back hurt and her hands were blistered, but she stopped Colman, who threw down his load at the top of a rapid.

"The bread Mrs. Loudon gave us is gone," she said.

"That's so. When you can carry flour, you don't load up much bread."

"Yes," said Alice. "There's no use in carrying *water*, which you can get where you camp. Well, I'd like to feel I pulled my proper weight, and some modern young women claim they can do all a man can do."

Colman leaned against a tree and gave her a slow smile. Alice imagined he thought the boast foolishness! Colman was not up-to-date, but at a job he knew, he was competent.

"You will not argue about it?" she said. "At one time, I thought it possible, but now I begin to doubt. There are, however, some things a domesticated young woman does better than a man. I'm not remarkably domesticated; but if you will light a fire, I'll try to convince you."

Colman got to work and in about five minutes the wood he cut began to burn.

"To-morrow you shall have a bannock," Alice remarked. "Now you must put up with something I can cook before the light goes. Do the Siwash eat flapjacks?"

"Sure," said Colman, smiling. "They'll eat all you can make. I've known them eat fern roots and salmon when it was bad."

He went off and Alice got busy. She hated to feel she was a passenger; since she had forced herself on Colman, she ought to join the *crew*. When his exhausting work was done, he had cooked her supper and pitched her camp. To allow him to do so was not just. Well, not long since she was a waitress, and, to some extent, she could cook.

On the whole, she thought the fried pork and flapjacks pretty good. Anyhow, nobody grumbled, and, when Colman carried up water for the morning she asked him to split some wood.

"If half an hour after daybreak is soon enough, I will call you for breakfast," she said. "You can use the effort I've saved you to shove the canoe along."

"Well, well," said Colman, with a doubtful smile. "We can try it, anyhow."

Alice soon afterwards went to her small tent. The branches Colman had cut for her bed were softer than the polished shelf on which she had sometimes slept on board a colonist car, and the H.B. blanket was not remarkably damp. Then to know she might be useful was soothing. For a time she heard the river and the men's low voices. Red reflections pierced the tent's wet side, but soon the flickering light got indistinct, and she was asleep.

At sunset on another evening, Alice, sitting on her blanket, plucked a wood-pigeon Colman had shot. Since he had used a rifle, the pigeon had no head. Alice admitted she must not be fastidious, but when he shot a blue grouse, through its body, she allowed him to dress the bird, and so long as she was cook, she hoped he would not find a deer.

In the meantime, she was alone. A long spur pushed out from the mountain and the river curved in a wide loop round the obstacle. To portage across a neck would cut out six or seven miles of angry rapids, and Colman had talked about leaving the canoe and pushing on on foot. They had already left the smaller canoe and cached part of the stores. The Siwash, however, are river-Jacks, and Colman, seeing them resolved to keep the water, had carried them off to look for a line across the neck.

Lawrence had followed the river, but when he went up, Colman reckoned the water was not so high. They had found his trail at the portages and marked the spots where he had camped. Pechack knew where the packers had landed with the line, and the number of their journeys when they relayed the loads at a portage. Alice imagined he followed the others' advance as if from a time-table.

One thing was obvious: Colman went faster. The camps did not coincide, and his were in front. Lawrence, no doubt, was hindered by his passengers, and Alice saw the implication; she was a better woodsman than Isabel Trent. Well, that was something! Still, she did not altogether like to be alone. The men had been away for three or four hours, and dark would soon fall. The pigeons were plucked and she had made dough for a bannock, but before she lighted a fire she must carry water. If she first pushed the resin knot into the pile, the kindling stuff might go out while she was away.

Where snow lies on the height-of-land, the rivers of the North are not pellucid, and Alice used the green water only when she was forced. Near the camp, a creek splashed in a ravine, but the rocky bank was steep and the easiest way down was on the other side. She must get across, and if she followed the bank, she might find a tree that had fallen across the gap. She knew a bushman often uses a log for a bridge.

Her luck perhaps was good, but she found a big uprooted fir whose top rested on the other side, and close by, terraced ledges down which she could climb. Although the dead lower branches were broken off, the stumps stuck out from the trunk, and she thought the ravine thirty feet deep. If she slipped from the mossy bark, nobody would know where she was. Her shouts would not reach the camp, and she might not be able to shout.

But she mustn't be afraid because she was alone, and she was not going to brew Colman's tea with river water. A vaudeville girl could balance on her pointed toes and must cultivate her nerve. Anyhow, Isabel Trent could not walk along the awkward, branch-studded trunk. Alice frowned. It began to look as if Isabel haunted her.

Treading cautiously, she crossed the log. For a moment or two, when a slab of bark broke off, her heart beat, but the

exploit was not really difficult, and she filled her kettle at the creek. To climb back was hard, because she could not use both hands, and at the top she sat down in the stones by a big trunk and got her breath. When she got on the log, she must be steady.

The evening was calm. Alice was tired, and for a few minutes she might watch the sunset melt from Sentry Peak. Its snowy top, flushed by warm orange, shone against pale ethereal blue. In the thick woods the rapids beat a soothing rhythm. Alice stopped longer than she knew, but by and by she heard another noise, and sharply turned her head.

A stone rolled, tinkling, down a gravel slope, fifty yards off; and then a large dog, rather like an Alsatian, stole from the gloom under the trees. Alice thought it strange. Had a dog followed them from Qualichan, they would have known. Then she braced up sternly and tried to be as still as the trunk behind her. The animal was not an Alsatian dog; it was a timber wolf, and in North Ontario the fierce brutes sometimes pulled down a lonely trapper. Loudon declared the wolves of the Pacific slope were less savage, and Alice hoped he was accurate. She got some comfort from the thought that the wolf might not see her. Her clothes were not conspicuous, and the big fir trunk was a good background. But she mustn't move.

Alice thought the brute suspicious. Perhaps it scented somebody, for it stopped and tilted its head. She had seen a dog turn its head like that. Then its body seemed to stiffen and she imagined the hair on its neck and back got erect. She must have imagined she did so, because the light was going. All the same, the wolf knew somebody was about, for it advanced stealthily and stopped near the log. It wanted to get across, but it hesitated. The big gray animal knew its sternest enemy had recently used the bridge. It perhaps knew a rancher's habit was to carry an ax or a gun. Alice, however, was a woman, and she carried a battered kettle.

She felt her skin get cold, and the wolf and trees seemed to waver. The blood was going from her head; she had known it to do so when a girl acrobat's hand slipped from a swinging bar. The wolf hesitated, as a nervous man might hesitate on the pavement where fast traffic crowds a street, drew back a yard or two; and then, again advancing, jumped on the log. For a few moments it went cautiously, but near the other end it leaped for the bank and vanished, without a sound, in the thick timber.

For five minutes Alice waited. She was horribly slack and hated to follow the wolf, but the light was going, and she must get across. She dared not crawl; it really was not much safer, and if she admitted her nerve was shaken, she might slip. Besides, she could not push the kettle.

Alice walked across, and on the other side plunged recklessly and noisily through the brush. In a few minutes she saw smoke, and went slower. The men were back and Colman must not know how much she was alarmed. When she arrived he gave her an inquiring glance. The girl was breathless and water from the kettle had splashed her clothes; moreover, he had heard her first headlong flight. Alice, as coolly as possible, narrated her adventure, and Colman, seizing his rifle, signed Pechack.

"One shoots a wolf wherever one can, but I expect the brute is beating it for the thick woods," he said.

In about ten minutes he returned and gave Alice a smile.

"It was a wolf all right, and a big fellow. We measured up his stride where the ground was soft. He'd got your scent, but if he saw you, I guess he was the worst afraid. All the same, *you didn't know*."

"In a way, I did know. Mr. Loudon and Lawrence said the wolves did not bother people, but somehow, when I saw the brute fifty yards off, I couldn't believe them."

"Sure," said Colman, in a sympathetic voice. "Nobody will allow he's scared of a panther, but when you hear something brush through the leaves behind you in the dark, you sweat—"

He stopped. Although the girl's nerve was pretty good, he was perhaps not taking the proper line. He and Pechack had checked up her tale. They found the spot where she had waited, and the wolf was *thirty* yards off. Then the log was a blamed awkward log, but she had gone across, after she had seen the wolf.

Colman noted that her look was getting strained; he had shoved along as fast as possible, and he did not believe a woman could do all a man could do. Anyhow, not in the woods. Her skin was brown, but he thought her face thinner than when she started. Her long boots were battered, and thorns had torn her clothes. Although she did not grumble, he knew something bothered her.

"Have you found a line across the neck?" she asked.

Colman said he had. At some spots they must chop a path, but to cross the spur would pay. In fact, but for Pechack he might cache the canoe.

"You expect to portage oftener?" said Alice in a thoughtful voice. "Where we land you must move my stuff, and I cannot carry a useful load."

Colman saw a light. She was not afraid of the effort she must use. Since she had seen the wolf she was afraid to be left alone.

"I reckon you will make it. We'll help."

"I'll try," said Alice quietly. "But if I stop you must push ahead. The others' canoe is gone. They may be starving."

"We are on time," said Colman, and gave her a slow smile. "My aim's to stay on time. And *you're going through.*"



CHAPTER XXVII

ISABEL TURNS BACK

Trent's party crossed the pass and found, as Lawrence predicted, the timber less thick than the woods on the other side. The valley was high and bleak, and the mountains cut the Chinook winds that carry warmth and moisture to the coast. Indeed, for some distance, the forbidding slopes were covered by broken rocks and gravel in which the mountain juniper could hardly grow.

To see open ground in front was something fresh, but Trent's advance was slower than he had hoped, and to reach the first thin pines cost him nine hours' determined labor. On the way upriver he had carried a load only when they made a portage. Now he must pack like Bill and Steve, and at awkward spots the loads must be relayed. It implied his twice crossing belts of splintered rock and sometimes a creek, with, for example, a bag of flour on his back. Moreover, they had not Lawrence's help, and Trent found out that Bill, like himself, would sooner another moved the heavy stuff.

For all that, Trent pushed ahead. In the high valley, one knew winter advanced, and in a sense the loads he hated were ominously light. They had dumped some clothes and blankets, and since they had not found the food Lawrence cached, Steve began to ration bacon and flour. Sometimes the fellow consulted with Isabel, but one knew him boss, and he did not inquire if Trent approved. Since Mervyn came back without Lawrence, Steve and Isabel, rather scornfully, left him alone.

The packer was his servant; he paid for the excursion, but in the mountains money lost something of its power. It did not buy obedience, and it did not buy pretended respect. Canadians certainly were not a servile lot; Mervyn had met a number who refused to be civil.

All the same, Mervyn brooded, his sister and Steve were unjust. He had held on to the rope as long as his holding on was useful. Only a fool would allow himself to be pulled down. The proper line was for one to stick to the ledge, and then go to the other's help. Mervyn had taken the proper line, but when he reached the gully's foot Lawrence was gone.

He had weighed it all before. The argument went round like a wheel, and carried him back to where he started. He did hold on, and so forth. What he really wanted was to get away from the blasted mountain. When its top vanished behind the rocks he would be happier, and although he hated the strain and fatigue, he must shove Steve along. Moreover, food was getting short, and unless the valley soon got smoother, it might be awkward. One could not make much speed across the horrible stones.

The valley did not get smoother. Although the woods were thin, landslides had smashed the trees, and splintered trunks and branches strewed the rock and gravel. Then the small river the party followed was fed by creeks that foamed down deep gullies and one must search for a spot where one could cross. Trent, carrying a heavy pack, slipped from a boulder into a pool and hurt his foot. He did not, at first, think much about the accident, but his boot perhaps galled the sore spot, for by and by the hurt got worse. All the same, he dared not stop, and he moodily plowed along.

They camped one dreary evening in the thickest timber they could find. After the stones, the dead needles were like a soft carpet, and the clustering trunks cut the wind. Thin snow sifted down between the branches, but Steve doubted if proper snow would fall. The thing that bothered him was, their supplies got very low.

Fuel, however, was abundant, and Bill cooked a parsimonious supper by a splendid fire. Trent sat in the dead needles, and with his leg pushed out straight in front, smoked his pipe; he hoped the tobacco would blunt his appetite. Isabel rested her back against a trunk. She had not grumbled about the long marches; but since they crossed the mountain Trent had thought her queer. At all events, her temper was not good.

"I've got some hard canned beef," Bill remarked to Steve. "If you give me another cupful of flour, I could make a hot-dog."

"You can't," said Steve. "You'll get some flour for breakfast. If your supper don't fill you up, you'll have to wait."

Bill shrugged resignedly. Trent might indulge him, but there was no use in trying it while Steve was about, and he reached for a stick and poked the fire. Flames leaped up and the wood crackled noisily, but Steve motioned him to stop.

"Somebody's coming!" he remarked.

All the others heard was the dreary wind, and Trent waited in nervous suspense. Sometimes when the night was quiet and he was half awake, he heard Lawrence's boots scrape the rock; once or twice when dusk fell before they pitched camp, he imagined somebody stole along behind him. He knew the illusion sprang from fatigue and strain. Besides, the other had no grounds to haunt him. Yet he did not think Steve cheated, and if the fellow did hear steps, Lawrence was, after all, alive. He ought to be glad, but he admitted he was not keen to front his comrade. Then Trent himself heard sticks crack and a shout. Strangers were coming *up* the valley, from the settlement.

In a minute or so, James, the Qualichan rancher, Bob, Loudon's hired man, and two more arrived. Their wet slickers shone in the firelight, and when they threw down their loads James knocked the soft snow from his hat.

"We saw your fire," he said. "Your canoe washed up at the lake, and Mrs. Loudon and Miss Thorne were anxious. Looks as if you were all right. But where's Larry?"

Isabel told him. To do so was Trent's business, but he did not want to talk about the accident, and somehow his sister had seized control. When she stopped, James knitted his brows. James was at one time a London stockbroker's clerk. Now he was altogether Canadian, and he sternly disliked people who belonged to the circles in which most of his employer's customers had moved. He thought he had some grounds, and for all her stained and ragged clothes, he knew Miss Trent's type; he had marked her direct glance and the poise of her head, and frankly thought it arrogant. Trent was, of course, a fashionable loafer. James wondered why the fellow, ostentatiously, stuck out his foot.

"Then you did not find Lawrence's body? I suppose you searched?" he said.

Trent replied that Lawrence was obviously under the stones and he doubted if a gang of navvies could move the blocks. Moreover, to disturb the pile might start a fresh slide. Then the party's food was getting short and they dared not linger about the mountain. They were, in fact, strictly rationed.

James turned to Steve. "You're a packer. Since you have brought this outfit over the range, I expect you are competent. What do you think?"

"I hated to quit," Steve replied in a thoughtful voice. "All the same, I reckoned Mr. Bethune's chance one in a thousand, and if he wasn't buried, we couldn't see where he'd gone. Then my business was to steer these folks to the settlement before they starved."

"That's so," James agreed. "If Larry had but had two or three men of your sort—"

Isabel looked up sharply. Trent's face got red.

"Blast you!" he exploded. "Do you imply we might, or ought to, have done something we did not do?"

"I don't know; I wasn't there," James said coolly, and turned to the others. "I promised Miss Thorne and Mrs. Loudon we'd find Larry. You'll help me make good?"

"Sure," said Bob, the hired man, and another added: "We're all going."

"Then, Miss Thorne sent you to look for us?" Isabel remarked.

"She and Mrs. Loudon," James agreed. "I think Miss Thorne was keener; Mrs. Loudon perhaps reckoned Larry was not in much trouble. I don't know, and it doesn't matter. Colman and two or three Siwash went upriver, and I picked up the boys and Bob at the settlement. We packed all the food we could move and we can give you some. You ought to get down the valley in five or six days."

"You are going on?" said Isabel. "You will, of course, find the pass, but I doubt if you will find the gully. In fact, I do not think you could get there, unless you had a mountaineer for a guide."

"We'll try. We have food, and by and by Colman will join up with us. If it's necessary, we can stay for a week."

"It will not be necessary," said Isabel in a quiet voice. "I know the mountain and I will take you to the spot."

James gave her a surprised glance. He had thought he knew the girl's type; she was coolly self-centered, arrogant, and

hard. He had reckoned that all she wanted was to make the settlement. Yet she meant to turn back and again front the wilds from which she had escaped.

"The plan has some advantages for both of us," she resumed. "You will get a guide who knows the ground, and I—Well, let's be frank. When we gave up the search I felt I was shabby, but we thought Mr. Bethune dead, our supplies were melting, and the accident had perhaps broken my nerve. Now you have brought fresh stores, the main difficulty vanishes. I do not think there is any use in our pushing on, but I am going."

James nodded. "Very well. If you are willing to risk it—What about Mr. Trent?"

"I cannot go," said Trent. "I hurt my foot and must be satisfied to limp to the coast."

"Bill can tote him there," Steve remarked. "You'll take me, but you don't need the gang. Anyhow, you don't want to *feed* the gang."

James did not. The smaller his party, the longer he could stay on the mountain, and the men he had engaged had occupations at the settlement. One said if he had no more use for them, they would be glad to return at sunrise with the cook and Trent, and James arranged to let them go. Then he unfastened his pack and ordered Bill to take the stuff he needed and cook a bully meal.

Bill got to work. He knew where he belonged, and when winter advanced a mountain valley was not the spot for him. For Isabel's supper was the most cheerful function she had known for some time. Only Trent was moody, and when Isabel was going to her tent he stopped her.

"You frankly baffle me," he said. "James is an uncouth, insolent brute, and Steve rather delights to humiliate us. Yet you are going back with the fellows. There's no reason in it, particularly since you know Lawrence is dead!"

Isabel smiled, a dreary smile.

"I do not claim I'm logical. Although it's rather late, I may perhaps save something of my self-respect. If I knew Lawrence was alive, I think I dare not go."

Trent gave her a queer, frowning glance, and shrugged. Isabel went to her tent.

In the morning James' group started for the North. They crossed the pass in a snowstorm, and when they reached the cairn by the gully the stones were covered. Isabel, studying the long white pitch, felt that search was hopeless. Small snow cornices masked the edges of the crags, treacherous snow bridged the ravines, and the hollows were leveled up. Now and then a rippling mass of snow and gravel slipped downhill with a muffled roar. For all that, where one could go without a rope she and the others went, and when they stopped in the afternoon they had occupied five or six hours by risky labor.

"Looks as if we are beaten, but Larry was a good pal and I'd hate to feel I'd left him," James remarked. "A Chinook might melt the snow, and we could wait for two or three days down by the timber line."

Isabel saw he was satisfied Lawrence was dead. She herself did not doubt, but she felt, like the other, that they ought to know. Besides, Lawrence was entitled to such funeral honors as they could give. The queer thing was, she could think about it coolly. Fatigue had perhaps blunted emotion, and she was supported by a dull mechanical resolve. In the meantime, Steve pondered.

"The chance is one in a thousand, but Mr. Bethune might have got away with it," he said by and by. "If he did, he knew where he cached some food, and he'd reckon on our leaving his turkey at our last camp. All the same, he ought to have got there before we quit. We'll take the chance, and I'm for the south ridge."

He started for the ridge. The others went down to the timber line and camped by a fire under the first small trees. Isabel was not embarrassed. She knew Bob, Loudon's man, for an honest and rather dull fellow, and since she turned back with him James was laconically polite. Isabel imagined he did not like her; anyhow, he did not like the school, or caste, for which he thought she stood. It explained his reserve, which she, on the whole, approved. She reflected with a touch of humor that he had certainly not expected her to turn back.

For all the cold, her sleep was sound. In fact, when she afterwards reviewed her adventures she imagined that cold and

muscular strain did not bother her much. One's body perhaps reacted and one's sensibilities got dead. Nothing was very important, and one plodded along like a machine.

Some time after breakfast smoke curled up from the trees. Steve signaled, and they went downhill. When they joined him his look was excited.

"Somebody was at the south camp! I reckon he stopped for most a week!" he said.

"Larry was there," said James. "Colman could not have made it and nobody else is in the woods."

For a few minutes Isabel fought a disturbing emotional thrill. Since Mervyn came back, alone, from the mountain she had allowed nothing to move her much, and she must not be carried away. The queer, cold dullness was her best support. Besides, she must concentrate on reaching the south camp.

When they arrived she sat down slackly, and for a time Bob and James, directed by Steve, moved about the spot. Isabel had watched foxhounds search the ground like that. Since she knew them experts, she waited, and by and by Steve told her where they agreed.

The soaked rags were Lawrence's clothes; he had got a fresh lot from the turkey he had left in camp. The clothes were obviously torn by stones, and the stains, which the rain had not altogether washed out, indicated that he had taken some ugly knocks. He had stopped for four or five days; one could guess the time by the quantity of ash between the hearth logs, for Bill had cleaned out a pile of the stuff in order to get the fire under his pans. Lawrence had opened and used a can of pork-and-beans and two of condensed milk. Some watered milk and flour was yet in an old fruit can.

"You think Mr. Bethune was ill?" said Isabel. "He did not bother—he was perhaps unable—to cook?"

Steve agreed. It looked as if Lawrence had gone backwards and forwards between the fire and the hut; they knew the marks of the spikes in his boots. Moreover, they had found the floury milk splashed on the branches in the shack, besides two half-burned cigarettes. A man who was only hurt might smoke; a man who was hurt and sick would not.

"But he's *gone*," said Isabel. "He must have got better."

James thought Larry dared not stop. He had not, Steve reckoned, a large stock of food, winter was advancing, and he did not know Colman was going to his help. So far as they had marked his track across a soft spot, it looked as if he had walked unsteadily. All the same, he had carried off the food and his blanket.

"You do not know where Colman is," Isabel remarked. "Lawrence may have joined him, but it's possible he could not go far. If he was forced to stop, he would not find another shack and wood for a fire."

"That's so," said Steve. "I've known a man so used up that he'd drop his pack and lie down in the wet brush."

Isabel conquered her fatigue. The men, like Lawrence, would not find another camp ready for them to occupy, and they had moved an awkward load across the mountain. She saw they waited; they did not want to hustle her, but they imagined she would see they must start. With something of an effort, she got up.

"We ought to get three or four miles downriver before dark falls; I think we'll push on," she said.

James nodded. Steve pushed his arms through the pack-straps, and they took the trail.

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE LAST PORTAGE

Alice sat down by the river. She was tired, for she had carried a good load over the long and awkward portage. The men had not yet moved all the stuff and she had meant to go back, but between the trees one could now and then see Sentry Peak, and in order to get a clearer view she had pushed on beyond the spot where Colman meant to camp. Where she stopped there was a small open space.

The mountain dominated the wide basin at the valley's end. At its top the snow, touched by the setting sun, glimmered behind curling wreaths of mist. Under the mist, long slopes, streaked by white veins, ran down to the dusky timber's broken edge. Alice felt the mountain's beauty was sinister. She had labored to reach the lonely peak, and now she was afraid. Disaster had perhaps overtaken the party at its foot.

She would soon know. The mountain was not far off, but when her glance swept the river's loops and the trackless woods, to calculate her party's speed was hard. Colman, however, had sent back an Indian to the lake, and cached another lot of food. Now he and Pechack carried the canoe round a rapid, and he had declared it was the last portage he would make. One canoe carried all their stuff, and when he was again stopped by a rapid they must take the woods.

Colman was not going beyond Sentry Peak. If Lawrence and his friends had crossed the mountains, he could not overtake them and they would meet James in the valley on the other side. If they were unable to front the climb, one might reckon on their returning downriver as fast as possible. Lawrence was not the man to lose all his stores, and if he had been stopped by some accident, he would at once send off a man to ask for help, in which case Colman reckoned they ought to have met his messenger three or four days since.

It looked as if Lawrence had climbed the pass, and his being able to do so implied that all was well. Alice hoped Colman argued accurately, but when she thought about it her face got hot. If Lawrence was safely across the mountain, when he met James his friends would be justified to think her firmly resolved to secure a husband. All the same, she had pictured their doing so before, and by contrast, it was not important. If Lawrence was safe, she was willing for them to sneer. Besides, she had refused him—

Alice shivered. The late afternoon was cold, and she ought to go back and cook supper; but she did not go. For a time she stopped and brooded, her eyes fixed on the forbidding mountain.

A stick cracked in the woods, and a few moments afterwards stones rattled. Alice hoped it was not another wolf, but a wolf moved noiselessly. A black bear, perhaps? She would frankly sooner it was not, although Colman said black bears were harmless. Anyhow, she could not run as fast as an animal. The noise got louder and she got on her feet. Although she yet saw nothing, she knew a man broke through the brush. Larry's messenger?

Alice's heart beat painfully. She pressed her hand against her side and waited, rigid and still as the quiet pines. In a few moments, she might know the worst she feared was true. She could not shout; her lips got cold and her mouth was dry. Then her stony calm vanished and she went slack. Dead raspberry canes smashed, and Lawrence himself broke through the thicket.

A dark scar crossed his forehead and went down his cheek. His face was pinched, and Alice noted his strained look; the queer thing was, his clothes on the whole were better than hers. For a moment she thought he did not see her; and then he stopped, and balanced awkwardly, as if his pack pulled him down.

Pity and reaction from suspense carried Alice away. Her swift advance was in a sense mechanical. She did not know she ran, but her arm was round Lawrence and she steered him firmly to the log she had occupied, and pushed him down.

"Oh, Larry! Oh, you poor, tired thing!" she said in a low tender voice, as if she soothed a child. "But let me pull off that dreadful heavy pack."

He bent his arm behind his shoulders and fumbled clumsily. When Alice leaned over him, he looked up.

"I'm sorry, but I can't reach. Perhaps you could pull out the nail that holds the loop."

Alice did so. A strap slipped down his arm and the pack dropped in the stones.

"You mustn't begin to apologize," she said. "This time, I am captain and I must think for my passenger, as you once thought for yours. When you have rested I'll help you to our camp. Your head is horribly cut, my dear, and I'm afraid you are ill."

She sat down, her hand yet on his shoulder where she had loosed the strap, for she felt that if she let him go he might vanish and she herself awake. When Lawrence turned and kissed her the thrill she got was rather tender than passionate. Somehow, for him to kiss her was altogether right, and the emotion he aroused would stand when passion melted, and, she thought, when both were old.

"I was rather knocked about, and for two or three days I expect I was ill," he said by and by, in a languid voice. "However, I couldn't stay on the south ridge. I hadn't a large stock of food, and I wanted to look for you—"

He stopped, as if his thoughts wandered, and Alice was puzzled. He knew she had gone south with Perry, but in the meantime she must let it go.

"But where are the others?" she inquired.

"Oh, yes," said Lawrence, "somehow I'd forgotten them! I expect they got across by the Northwest Passage, and are not far off the settlement. Although I believe I did tell somebody about the cache, they did not get the food on the ridge. However, they loaded up all the stuff in camp, and they ought to be all right. But I don't yet understand why you are here."

"Sometimes," said Alice with a smile, "you are not very keen. Your wrecked canoe floated down the lake, and since we thought you might be starving, we went off to look for you. Colman and Pechack are at the portage where we camp. James started for the settlement, where he would pick up Bob, and I expect they are now searching the other valley."

Lawrence's eyes twinkled. "Two gangs took the trail? Looks as if I was a greater favorite than I knew. Colman, James, *and* Pechack! Could you not have found George a job?"

Alice said Loudon was away on the coast. Lawrence, however, was exhausted, the wind was cold, and she gently got him on his feet. When they had gone a few yards he stopped.

"My pack! All the way, the fear that I might forget it haunted me."

"It's behind the log," said Alice. "By and by I'll send Colman. If you lost the pack, it would not matter now."

She thought he hesitated, but she steadied him along. His alarm moved her. She pictured him jealously guarding the load without which he would starve. Sick and battered as he was, the galling straps had urged him forward because he knew his burden's melting must measure his speed.

When they reached the camp Colman had not arrived. Alice gave Lawrence a cigarette and a blanket.

"Rest your back against the tree," she said. "I hope you'll like the tobacco."

Lawrence smiled. "The tobacco is better stuff than one smokes in the woods. Looks as if you were extravagant! Then you didn't break a packet. This lot was in a box."

"Yes," said Alice, "I bought a box or two. The make was popular at the Banff hotel, and I thought George Loudon might like some. If you think them good, I might give you another by and by."

She saw Lawrence was interested. A hotel at Banff was not the sort of lodging he would expect her to use. Well, she was not yet going to talk about her mended fortune. In fact, she was not going to talk about anything important. Lawrence must first get better, and in the meantime she thought him satisfied to know she was about.

"Will you not smoke?" he asked.

"I think not," said Alice. "As a rule, you know, I don't. Ruby smoked and sometimes swore, but she was forced to play up. Play up is the word, although I suppose it's two. You see, the men who haunt the shows really fix the conventions her sort must use. However, Ruby went overboard, and we agreed that she was better dead."

"I did not agree," Lawrence declared.

"Oh, well," said Alice, "we will not dispute, and I am going to make a fire."

She seized an ax, and Lawrence, moving as if he tried to get up, again leaned back against the trunk.

"I'm sorry—"

"You mustn't!" said Alice firmly. "You're rather a dear to want to help, but to be apologetic is not your part. Still, I suppose the strong, silent man is not as popular as he was, and I've known you talk at large."

Swinging the ax, she smashed a dead branch; Lawrence noted that the heavy blade rather broke than cut the wood. After a fresh erratic stroke, she jumped back.

"For Heaven's sake, stop!" he said. "I thought your foot was gone, and I haven't yet met a girl I'd trust with an ax."

"It's possible," said Alice. "You are horribly out of date, but if you think a modern girl is a soft and helpless creature, you can ask Colman. When he knew I was going, he was mad, but since he's a bushman, he's no doubt truthful. I expect he'll tell you I poled the canoe, carried a load, and cooked, like a man. My cooking's plain, but not conspicuously good."

"Your talents are numerous, but I'm hanged if you can chop," Lawrence rejoined.

His twinkle was comforting, and Alice felt as if her heart sang, but the song melted in happy nonsense on her lips. Larry did not talk like a lover; he talked like her husband. Well, romantic love-making was old-fashioned, and to picture Larry in a passionately theatrical part was hard. Anyhow, until he got better, he was hers to command and care for, and afterwards she was his for good.

"Colman ought to know I found you," she resumed when the fire began to burn. "I don't think he's far off, but I'm afraid to go. I feel as if you might vanish before I got back."

"Not at all," said Lawrence with a smile. "You can reckon my stopping where I properly belong."

Colman and the Indians presently arrived. Their satisfaction was sincere but not demonstrative, and by and by Colman picked up the ax.

"We are pretty well stocked with all we need and you are going to take a rest for two or three days," he said. "Since we'll be here that long, I'll fix a snug camp."

He and the Indians got to work, and thin trees crashed. The Siwash do not use tepees; they are house builders, and when the poles were firmly driven, Pechack superintended the roofing with sliced bark slabs. Another laced branches between the poles for walls, and an open-fronted shack soon was up. Alice concentrated on her cooking pans. She was happy to be Lawrence's servant, and at supper she watched and waited on him as if he were a sick child. His appetite was not keen and by and by he pushed back the food.

"Might I have another cigarette, nurse?" he asked.

Alice gave him a cigarette and a light.

"You may have *one*. When you eat properly, you may have two. But all we know about your adventures is, you fell down some rocks. And how did you get food when you were ill?"

"I did not need much, and for two or three days a can of pork-and-beans with tomatoes carried me on. Then I tried watered condensed milk."

"You poor dear!" said Alice. "Pork-and-beans, with tomatoes, for a sick man!"

"Larry must be shot. You can't knock out a rancher by dumping him over the rocks," Colman remarked. "But how long were you sick?"

"I don't know," said Lawrence. "I expect I could calculate, but I don't want to bother—"

"Well, maybe you do know how you fell off the rocks?"

Alice thought Lawrence shivered. She gave him a blanket, and sitting at the end of the hearth logs, he told his tale. Dark had fallen, but when the flames leaped up the men's faces got distinct. Alice saw Colman frown as if he pondered, and noted Pechack's fixed aquiline glance. A story moves an Indian, although he may not know all the words. He perhaps senses the narrator's emotions, as one feels beauty in music that has not a tune. Alice thought the picture the sort of picture Bret Harte drew, and she recaptured lines one of Perry's girls sometimes recited:

*"The river sang below ...
Above, the Sierras lifted minarets of snow."*

Well, one heard the river, and modern pioneers were as indomitable as the men of forty-nine. The camp fire, however, did not paint the hues of health on Larry's face. One saw the lines pain and fatigue had marked. Then, although his voice was even, one knew he hated to tell the tale. Lawrence could not cheat a woman, although she thought he tried. She knew he was ashamed, for another. She wanted to be just, but she did not like the Trents, and anger and pity for Lawrence carried her away.

"Trent let you go?" she said.

"My foot slipped from the rock and all my weight was on the rope. I believe he held on as long as possible."

"I wonder! He didn't know—he could not know—how long it was possible to stick to the rope. If he was afraid for himself, he'd refuse to run much risk."

"That's so," Colman agreed. "Until Larry pulled him down, he could not find out. So long as he was on the ledge, he might make good."

"You would have risked it," said Alice. "Larry, of course, would. And Loudon and Bob and old Pechack! One does not see them let down a man who trusted them. There is no use in pretending to be modest. You know you would not. You're bushmen. Trent's a cultivated, fastidious loafer!"

"Some of his lot have gall enough," Colman remarked. "I guess they're like the rest of us, sort of mixed."

"I think they are not like you," said Alice. "If you discipline your body, you discipline your brain, and you command all your nervous force. I'm a woman, but I know. When you undertake a risky stunt on the flying bar, it isn't muscular force only that carries you through."

Lawrence stopped her. "You mustn't blame Trent, Alice; I dare not. Nobody knows the ultimate strain he can bear. I believe Mervyn did not consciously let me go."

"Oh, well, he stopped on the rock, and soon afterwards the others went off up the pass. They *left* you."

"In the circumstances, I think they took the proper line, and I had ordered Steve to see they did go," Lawrence replied, and resumed with a twinkle: "At all events, they stopped to build me a nice monument. You see, since they did not get the stuff at the north spur cache, their supplies were short. I'm afraid they'll be severely rationed before they reach the settlement."

"You mustn't bother," said Alice. "They will soon meet James, who engaged to carry up all the food he could pack, but to think Trent's breakfast might be short would not grieve me much. However, the night gets cold and you ought to go to bed."

Lawrence went, and two or three hours afterwards Alice pulled back the flap of her small tent. All was quiet but the river, and the low fire burned red. Then a dark figure stole from the shack and noiselessly pushed branches between the logs. Alice shook the tent canvas, and when Colman advanced she noted that he trod as softly as a cat.

"All's right. He's sleeping like a log," he said, and stole away.

CHAPTER XXIX

LAWRENCE TAKES A REST

In the morning about ten o'clock Alice, mending clothes in her tent, heard a young tree crash. She knew the tree was young, because its fall was light, but she was puzzled. When they resolved to camp for a few days, Pechack went off to carry the news to Qualichan; Jim and the other Indian searched the woods for a deer. Lawrence was supposititiously resting in the shack. Anyhow, after breakfast, for which he was determined to get up, Alice had ordered him to rest. Somebody, however, had chopped a small pine, and she must see who it was.

Lawrence, standing across a fallen tree, put down his ax. His face was red, his hands shook, and Alice saw he was breathless. Fetching a blanket from the shack, she sent him to the fire.

"When we allowed you to get up for breakfast, you promised you would rest," she said severely.

"One ought to be accurate, and I don't think you did allow me. What happened was, I got up," Lawrence rejoined. "Then you did not stipulate how long I must rest. As a rule, women are not exact. Where a man would say twenty minutes, you say by and by, and when you mix dough for a biscuit or a bannock you use a *handful* of flour. A man would use a cup; the same cup every time."

"Yes," said Alice, "you are a methodical lot. The queer thing is, Colman admits my bannocks are better than his! But you ought not to have cut that tree."

"Oh, well, I wanted to experiment, and the thin top would make a good canoe pole; but I admit I've had enough. Will you give me a cigarette?"

"You smoked two. You shall have another when we noon."

"Then I must use the tin-flag plug I got from Jim. When you feel you enjoy a smoke you are more or less all right."

Alice smiled. Lawrence was getting better, and to see him humorous was comforting. But he had not yet altogether satisfied her curiosity, and she had pondered a remark of his.

"You stopped at the camp by the mountain because you were ill?" she said.

"I suppose I was ill. Anyhow, I was knocked about, I'd lost some blood and slept on the rocks without a blanket for two nights, and so forth. Now it's done with, it's not important."

"You poor dear!" said Alice. "But, Larry, why did you not stop until you were properly fit to take the trail? You had food, and a hut where you could sleep."

For a few moments Lawrence said nothing. He and Alice must talk frankly, but he had thought to wait. In a day or two he would be steadier, and he would sooner she weighed things when she was less moved by compassion. Yet she had inquired and waited his reply.

"If I had stopped at the ridge for long, I might not have made Qualichan before my supplies ran out. Then I felt I must get there as soon as possible and begin to search for you. I think I yesterday told you something like that."

"You did not state why you wanted to find me," said Alice, in a quiet voice. "Since I went off some time had gone, and as you started up river soon after I did go, it looks as if you were not very keen."

"I'd got a knock that hurt, and when you are hurt you're savage. Then I tried to be logical. You had refused me, and if you were resolved to go off with the theatrical mountebank, I was not entitled to object. In fact, I was not going to object. An angry man's argument! All the same, I knew the fellow was not your lover."

"Thank you, Lawrence," said Alice meekly. "Perry is not a mountebank; if you make some allowances, he's rather a good sort. But if you were not at all jealous, I do not see why you were angry."

"Then I'll try to enlighten you. You had a useful occupation, and I thought you were happy with the Loudons."

"You thought I ought to be happy, because you had got me the sort of job you yourself approved?"

"It's possible. I suppose a man does argue like that. However, in order to be accurate, Mrs. Loudon gave you the job; and, if you'll allow me to go ahead—Well, I thought Lacoste had worked on your ambition, and although you knew you could not be a really first-class singer—"

"I do know," Alice agreed. "Your frankness is bracing; but if you had been as frank with Ruby she might have thought you a fool. However, I suppose, like a man, you have got entangled by your labored reasoning, and I will carry on.

"Although I couldn't really sing, I could put across little vulgar songs. I could dance, and so forth. In consequence, Perry had persuaded me to undertake some reckless fresh experiment? You were quite satisfied the experiment was reckless. You believed we would soon go broke, and when Perry deserted me I'd drift downhill, past the point where I stopped before. In fact, I might not stop until poverty had pushed me right across the track? Sometimes to be vulgar is soothing, and if Ruby had not gone overboard and you were not ill, I believe she'd have *smacked* you—"

Lawrence stopped her. Faint color touched his thin face, but his eyes twinkled, for he knew Alice's moods.

"When one's temper gets control, one exaggerates. If you'll allow me about a minute, I will state all I really did think. I imagined the woods got dreary; sometimes, at the beginning, the quiet and the effort I must use disheartened me. As a rule, women love excitement, hustling life, and crowds. Your pluck is good and you would not admit you might be beaten another time. If I was accurate, for Lacoste to persuade you would not be hard, and when the show again went broke you might not find another as kind as Mrs. Loudon."

"Or Lawrence Bethune? But I know your modesty, and you *are* kind. Well, so far as you have stated your object, you were not selfish! Then *you* hate to be beaten, and if you had hit my track at Vancouver, I expect you'd have kept it until you found me. While you searched, however, your ranch might go down. Did that not weigh?"

"By comparison, it was not very important," said Lawrence, with a smile. "I *was* selfish; I'd found out I wanted you, and although you had refused me I hoped my luck might turn. When I joined the Trents I was hurt and savage, but I began to see I was a fool: I ought to have gone the other way, after Perry Lacoste. Then we lost the canoe, and I was forced to stay with my friends. If I left them in the mountains, they might starve. Soon afterwards, I fell down the rocks, and when they went on they, so to speak, released me. I was free to start for Qualichan and Vancouver, as soon as I was fit."

"You started before you were fit," said Alice, in a gentle voice. "But did you not see the obstacle? Since you thought me afraid of the woods, how did you expect to persuade me to come back?"

"I did not mean to bring you back. If you could not be happy at Qualichan, I meant to sell the ranch. After all, I'm perhaps not much duller than others who have made good at the cities on the coast, and the sum I ought to get would give me a useful start. I might, for instance, put up my sign at a real estate agency and sell trustful emigrants fruit-growing blocks. Since I know something about good soil and you know something about fruit trees, we might be honest brokers, and by and by, specialists. Are you willing to risk it?"

The blood leaped to Alice's skin. For Lawrence Bethune to give up his ranch was perhaps his greatest sacrifice. Yet she saw he would not hesitate, and he was not conscious of his nobleness. He waited, with the crooked and rather apologetic smile she loved.

"For my sake, you would live in the cities and start on a career you heartily dislike?" she said.

"Oh, well, sometimes one dislikes things one really has not tried. Then, of course, I might have talents for business, I haven't yet exploited. After all, the fellow who holds on wins, and I really think we'd have a fighting chance."

They occupied a log by the fire. Lawrence was about a yard off, and Alice leaned forward and kissed him. He tried to seize her, but he was encumbered by his blanket, and pushing him back, she slipped away.

"You will perhaps never know how you have moved me, and I cannot properly tell you, my dear," she said. "You are not cheaply romantic, and one loves you because you don't protest; but you are the sort to seize a fighting chance and hold on until all cracks! For my sake, you did so when you were sick and crawled away from your camp. I believe you'd have made Qualichan. Rocks and woods and rapids could not stop a man like you—"

"Jim declares I must be shot," Lawrence remarked. "I do not see why you're resolved to keep the other end of the log."

"I want to talk. Sometimes, if one is frank, it helps, and you have plainly, and laboriously, stated the objects you had in view. All you need have said was the finest thing you ever said, *I meant to sell the ranch*. Well, to begin with, I am not afraid of the woods, and I can be happy without excitement, noise, and crowds. If you had gone on tour with a show like Perry's, you'd understand why I hate the lot! Then I do know I'm not much of a singer and I'm not ambitious to dance at vulgar cabarets. The queer thing is, you seemed to think I was—"

"No," said Lawrence, "I really did not. I did, however, think—"

"I know! You are rather obvious, my dear. You were sorry for me? You thought I ought to have a chance to be *respectable*, and you persuaded Mrs. Loudon to try me out. In fact, since you had carried me off, you thought we ought to be married—"

Lawrence looked up. His face was faintly red and his glance was harder.

"I did not persuade Mrs. Loudon to engage you. The plan was really hers; I imagined I had satisfied you about it before. And I did not want to marry you because I thought I ought. If you are not very dull, or remarkably modest, you might see I had some other grounds."

Alice laughed, a happy, gurgling laugh.

"You talk like a lawyer, Larry, but I keep the floor. I did not want a husband who would reform me; I am not conspicuously meek. At all events, Ruby was not; I have known her smash a bottle on an indiscreet admirer's head. Then it looks as if you are not always philosophically calm. A few moments since your mouth got tight."

"If I'm allowed a moment, your statements, so to speak, are negative. You have been satisfied to explain why you *did not*—"

"That is so, Lawrence dear. Now I'm going to be positive; shamelessly positive and frank. I love the lake and the woods round Bourlon Ranch, and if I did not already love them for themselves, I'd love them because they were yours. When, like a man, like Lawrence Bethune, you asked me to marry you, I refused. I knew you then were satisfied with your ranch. Besides, I thought, when you knew me better, you might ask me another time."

"I'd have done so," said Lawrence. "But you went off—"

Alice stopped him. "You must use some tact, Larry. Still, you have not inquired why I did go, and if you are interested, we will talk about it again. At Loudon's I thought about you much, and I wondered—You see, I am willing to seize a fighting chance, but unless I was sure I loved you, to carry you away might be rash. And, until your canoe stranded, I really didn't know. Then I sent for all the men at Qualichan, and I sent James to the settlement. All I wanted in life was to find you. The men were splendid, but they had not my object, and I went myself. I, of course, knew Mrs. Loudon and Mrs. Colman knew why I did go. Well, I found you, and I found you had planned to sell your ranch. It was tremendously important; but, for my sake, you must keep the ranch."

Lawrence got up resolutely. Alice did not retreat, but after a moment she signed him back. Sticks cracked, stones rattled, and Colman, carrying a rifle, pushed through the dead fern. An Indian behind him carried a deer, its legs fastened across his shoulders.

"Hello!" said Lawrence. "Where did you get the deer?"

"About half a mile back. The timber was pretty thick and I used two cartridges."

"We did not hear you shoot."

Colman smiled. "The rifle's a forty-four, but maybe you were not listening."

"I was talking," said Alice. "If you want venison, Jim, you yourself must cook the stuff, and by the time we reach Qualichan it might be fit to eat. My limit is bacon and beans."

In the late afternoon, pale sunshine stole across the woods, and Alice and Lawrence went slowly through the brush to the

opening by the river. Touched by yellow light, Sentry Peak towered above the valley's end, but when Lawrence's glance searched the rocks and snow Alice put her hand on his arm.

"You have done with the forbidding mountain. We are going the other way. Our home is by the lake."

"So long as you are happy," said Lawrence. "But what about our wedding? At Victoria we could be married at a church, but I rather think one must stop in town for two or three weeks. George Loudon, however, has authority to register marriages, and I believe he'd like the job. Then I expect we could bring the Presbyterian missionary across from the settlement."

"Very well," said Alice, smiling. "We have had a strenuous holiday, and Mrs. Loudon might think we ought to be married before we start on another. Since I'm going to marry a frontiersman, I'll be married like a frontierswoman. And, after all, I'd sooner quietly *go home*."

Lawrence kissed her, and they went back to camp.

CHAPTER XXX

ISABEL GOES ON HER WAY

A cold wind shook the pine-tops and carried the noise of the rapids across the murmuring woods. The evening got dark and rain began to fall. Colman, however, had pitched camp at the bottom of a rock, and thick branches locked overhead. Only now and then a few big drops splashed in the fire, and the cheerful blaze held back the advancing gloom.

Lawrence smoked a broken pipe and rubbed Colman's ax. A good chopper hates a dull edge, and after searching the river bank for a proper stone, he had occupied himself happily rubbing out a small notch. He remarked that only fools and city folk bought all the stuff they used, and one could *find* a stone as good as the factories supplied. Colman said one could not, and he pulled out a small stone shaped like a watch. When he did so he put down the venison steak he roasted on a stick, and Alice smiled. While Larry and Jim disputed she hoped the steak would burn. In order to eat venison one must be a frontiersman, and when he carved the stuff with his hunting knife she had heard Jim swear.

So long as they rested in camp, she was willing for Jim to cook. On the march, the chores were burdensome to a packer; Alice reflected that she began to think in Canadian terms, but chores might properly be translated *fatigues*. Since she was not a loafer, when they broke camp the odd jobs would be hers. In the meantime, Colman and Lawrence argued, and the venison began to burn.

"If you hadn't been so blasted obstinate—" Colman remarked, and examined the charred steak. "Well, only the outside's singed and some folks like it black."

"I do not," said Lawrence. "Alice is not attracted, and you can have the lot. When Mrs. Colman does not cook for you, I expect you use your unbeatable sharpening stone on your teeth."

Alice laughed. "Nobody really likes venison, but when you shoot a deer you feel you must eat it. An industrious rancher does not hunt for sport!"

"Not altogether," said Lawrence. "In the woods, you must like the stuff you can get; but you begin to know us. A rancher never takes a holiday. Sometimes he goes prospecting, but as a rule, he does not file a claim for the minerals he finds. Once Jim did locate some copper—I believe Minnie saw he did not squander useful dollars on the record fee. All the same, you can sometimes sell a supposititious mine to a trustful English tenderfoot."

"Not long since you were English," Colman remarked.

"That is so, Jim," said Lawrence. "I am perhaps trustful, but I have pretty good grounds to think I trust the proper folk."

"Now," said Alice to Colman, "I hope you are flattered."

Colman concentrated on his cooking. For a minute or two branches tossed and the noise of the wind in the pine-tops was like the roll of surf. Then the turmoil got farther off, and Lawrence, signing the others, turned his head. In the gloom a dead branch snapped, dry brush rustled, and somebody swore. Alice jumped to her feet, and Colman allowed another steak to slip into the ashes. Lawrence was quiet, but he braced up firmly.

Isabel Trent broke through the dead fern and went to the fire. Her wet slicker coat was torn, and her Stetson hat had lost its shape. Stones and thorns had broken her long boots, but she carried herself gracefully, and when Lawrence got up she gave him a calm friendly smile. Alice imagined Miss Trent moved like that when she crossed the dining-room at a fashionable hotel. She had rather obviously not yet seen Alice, who was in the gloom.

"To find you much better than we hoped, Lawrence, is some relief," she said. "For the last two or three hours we rather recklessly shoved along."

"You saw the smoke?" said Lawrence. "You thought I was alone? Well, you had not an easy road. But where's the rest of the party?"

"James fell over a rotten branch and I expect he is looking for the articles he scattered about. Bob and Steve are farther back. I was not loaded, and when your fire began to shine I got in front."

"Then you met James?" said Colman. "Looks as if you made pretty good time!"

"I expect our time from Sentry Mountain was near the record," Isabel replied, and turned to Lawrence. "When we reached the south-spur camp, we knew you were hurt, and we doubted if you could carry a blanket and the food you would need. We did not know where Mr. Colman was, and we imagined we must overtake you as soon as possible. We got here in two and a half days."

"I was five days," said Lawrence quietly.

Isabel gave him a pitiful glance, and Alice knew her pity sincere. The girl was tired. She had obviously used all the effort of which she was capable, and now she tried to conquer a reaction that sprang from relief. Yet Alice refused to sympathize. For all that Lawrence had borne Isabel and her brother were accountable.

Colman threw some branches on the fire and Isabel sat down. When she did so she turned her head and, for the first time, saw Alice. She gave her a queer, swift glance, and laughed. Alice thought she fronted something like an anticlimax. For all her speed and strain, she had not helped Lawrence, and when at length she found him, she found another at his camp.

"So you rescued Lawrence, Miss Thorne?" she said. "We knew another party had gone upriver, but James reckoned ours was the shorter line. It was a close race, but you have beaten us at the post! However, one must be philosophical, particularly since the advantage is Lawrence's. And I really think our speed was good."

Alice thought Miss Trent's pluck was good.

"Mr. Colman led the party," she rejoined.

"Miss Thorne sent us off," said Colman. "But for her, we might have waited. However, I allow she was right."

He went for some more venison, and Alice felt he had not used much tact, but Jim, and very possibly Lawrence, did not see the ground was awkward. Then, announced by cracking sticks and rustling brush, Bob and James and Steve arrived. For a minute or two they occupied Lawrence with inquiries and humorous congratulations, but by and by he asked where were Trent and Bill.

James said Trent was lame and had gone to the settlement with the packer. Lawrence turned to Isabel.

"Then Mervyn was hurt when I went down the gully?"

"He slipped from a stone in a creek," Isabel replied. "The accident was not romantic, and Mervyn, no doubt, would sooner he had got hurt at the gully."

Lawrence looked up. Although Isabel smiled, her ironical humor jarred. "Anyhow, you recrossed the mountain in order to see me out."

"Our object was really to bury you," Isabel rejoined. "You may think it a grim joke; but when we started up the pass we believed you dead. If you reflect for a moment, you will see it's important."

"The important thing is, you were not forced to carry out your plan," said Lawrence. "Then you stopped to build me a rather nice monument."

"But where did you get?" Steve inquired. "We saw where the stones went over the rocks and we found your torn pack and hat. Looked as if the landslide had carried you right down."

Lawrence saw Bob and James were interested. Moreover, they must be satisfied, and he lighted his pipe. They had heard Trent's narrative; the trouble was, he had not, and he could not consult with Isabel. They would weigh one tale against the other, and his must correspond exactly with the one he had already told Colman. In fact, since his audience was larger, it must be a sort of official bulletin. In the circumstances, he must use some caution.

"Sit down, boys, and take a smoke," he said. "Supper's not quite ready, and I'll try to put you wise."

Studying their faces, he began to talk. The narrative commanded the men's keen interest, and Lawrence thought that was all, but when he glanced at the two women he knew their interest was rather in him. Alice's brows were knit, and when a flame leaped from the snapping wood he thought she frowned, as if she did not altogether approve his generosity. But he

was not generous; he was trying to be just, and the others must not know he tried. Isabel's face was very quiet. He felt she studied him with a touch of sympathetic humor. In the meantime, all he wanted was for her and Alice to leave him alone. He had got an awkward job, but he could carry the boys along. By and by he stopped and knocked out his pipe.

"That's all," he said. "I want to forget it. You are a bully gang, and your rush upriver, and over the pass, are exploits to talk about."

Isabel's glance swept the group. But perhaps for Steve, she thought none doubted the tale. Lawrence, as she expected, had played up.

"Thank you, Larry," she said, and her voice carried a hint of meaning. "Your luck was good, and perhaps only a frontiersman could survive the knocks you got. However, I suppose all's well that ends well. To-night we will use your camp, but Mervyn waits at the settlement and Mosscrop expects us to rejoin him soon. In the morning we must get on our way. You, no doubt, will rest for a few days before you again take the trail?"

"He is going to rest," said Colman, and turned to the packers. "You don't want to get up, boys. I'll soon be ready to serve out the hash."

Supper was a cheerful function. For some time all had used their highest speed, and strained endurance to the utmost limit. Now the strain was over and the hard job was triumphantly carried out. Colman bantered James' group because he had got through first; Loudon's Bob rejoined that Miss Thorne was a crackerjack and had seen Jim did not loaf. Lawrence steered the talk to less awkward ground and hoped his efforts to do so were not obvious. Then Steve began to talk about the cairn they had built, and the gang's laugh drowned the noise in the trees. Larry's monument moved the frontiersmen's humor.

For some time after supper Alice and Lawrence and Isabel occupied themselves with languid talk in the bothy; the others drowsed and smoked by the fire. Alice had thought for Isabel's comfort, but when she spoke Lawrence remarked a note of reserve. Then she was rather obviously host; in fact, one felt that she was in possession!

By and by Isabel indicated the group by the fire. The men's clothes were old and stained by soil; their slack poses were uncouth.

"There are your friends, Lawrence. Are you satisfied with them? You might, you know, have had another sort."

"I suppose that is so," said Lawrence in a quiet voice. "They are a first-class lot, and my best pals 'went West' in France. Yes, I am satisfied with them, and all they stand for. Then I don't know if I'm remarkable. You have visited with the Loudons."

"George is charming. Well, I dare say the simple life has attractions for men of a certain type. At one time, you meditated in damp caves and wore hair shirts. A ranch house is much more comfortable, and in summer one might, for a few weeks, stick it by Lonesome Lake. But for good? Nothing's doing! A modern woman is exotic in a hermitage."

"George Loudon is married," Alice remarked.

Isabel laughed. "And Lawrence will soon be married? Since Mrs. Loudon does not grumble, you imagine you will not! It's possible, and I like your pluck. Something depends on your object. Mine is to seize all the expensive pleasure I can get; Larry's, I suppose, is to be useful, and so long as he's happy chopping, his satisfaction does not cost him much. Our points of view don't coincide, but since he believes his is the proper point, we will not dispute. Anyhow, I'm tired, and I think I'll go to bed."

Alice went off with her, but presently came back.

"You are marrying a girl from a variety show and our wedding presents will not be numerous," she said. "I want mine to be useful. Would you like a flock of sheep?"

"Sheep are expensive, my dear," said Lawrence. "In winter, they must be fed, and I have not much hay."

"One can buy machines for pulling stumps, and one can hire choppers to clear fresh ground."

"That, of course, is so," Lawrence agreed with a crooked smile. "The drawback is, one must pay the choppers."

"When I give you a present, Larry, the bill is mine. You have not yet really bothered to find out why I went off with Perry Lacoste. One likes your trustfulness, but you thought you knew! Well, you were cheated, and I thought I'd wait. However, if you will say nothing for about a minute, I will tell you why I did go to Banff."

She told him, and when she saw his surprise she laughed, a soft, happy laugh.

"After all, I'm not much of an heiress, but I'm glad I'm not altogether the forlorn beggar maid you carried off. Still, you're not greedy; and if one must be accurate, I rather carried you off."

"So far, I'm resigned," said Lawrence, and tried to seize her.

Alice stepped back. "We have an audience, Larry, and we can talk about my fortune another time—" She stopped for a moment, two or three yards off. "You shall have the sheep, my dear. In fact, whatever you want is yours, so long as it's mine to give."

Then she vanished in the gloom, and Lawrence rather thoughtfully filled his pipe.

Breakfast was served at daybreak, and when Bob and Steve and James made their packs Isabel got up. She had fastened her rolled-up slicker coat and some other articles on her back, and carried a long, pointed stick. In her jersey, breeches, and battered long boots, she looked like a slim young man.

"I am sorry I cannot stop for your wedding," she said to Alice. "Since you are marrying Lawrence, to wish you luck is perhaps superfluous, and I think his is good. I dare say you will allow us a last word or two."

Alice signaled Lawrence, and he and Isabel moved a short distance from the camp. When the others were hidden behind the trees, she stopped.

"I expect you will stick to the tale you told last night."

"Of course; particularly since, so far as I can remember, the tale is correct."

Isabel smiled. "Your resolve is typical. I suppose you know Mervyn durst not meet you? His wrenching his foot was a fortunate accident."

"The other was an accident. I don't know if it was fortunate," Lawrence remarked.

"Oh, well, for me to be altogether honest is something fresh, but I reckoned on your refusing to let us down. We ought, of course, to have left you alone; Mossdrop was a fool to think his experiment would work. Still, I doubt if we really disturbed you much, and I can, at least, engage that we will not come back."

Lawrence said nothing. He imagined Alice did not want the Trents for guests; but Isabel had recrossed the daunting mountain. She was better stuff than her brother. It looked as if she saw his embarrassment, for she laughed.

"It is not important, Lawrence. My habit is to take the easy road, and yours to take the hard. Yet I believe you will be happy. The girl you chose is a better sort than I."

She gave him her hand and they heard the men advance. Isabel joined them, and the group, drawn out in file, took the trail. Rotten branches cracked and dead brush snapped. James shouted to Colman; Isabel turned and waved. Then they vanished in the timber, and their trampling steps got indistinct. Lawrence turned and saw Alice by his side.

"She is gone," she said. "You have turned down your last chance of a soft job and you're a frontiersman now for good. I hope you will not be sorry."

"So long as you are there to see me out, no job will be very hard," Lawrence replied.

"Ah," said Alice, "you are trustful, but you are perhaps not altogether rash. Where men like you trust us, we try to play up."

She put her hand in his and her glance swept the woods. Standing braced and rather proudly, she resumed:

"For all the quiet, I'm not going to be lonely, and I shall not be afraid. My folk were North-country yeomen, the hardest,

strongest sort England breeds. The woods are for the stubborn, and when we are done with, I believe we will have carved our mark."

THE END

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

LARRY OF LONESOME LAKE
THE FRONTIERSMAN
MYSTERY REEF
THE LONE HAND
THE DARK ROAD
THE GHOST OF HEMLOCK CANYON
THE BROKEN TRAIL
PINE CREEK RANCH
PRAIRIE GOLD
CROSS TRAILS
CARSON OF RED RIVER
GREEN TIMBER
THE WILDERNESS PATROL
THE BUSH-RANCHER
NORTHWEST!
THE MAN FROM THE WILDS
THE BUCCANEER FARMER
FOR JACINTA
KIT MUSGRAVE'S LUCK
LISTER'S GREAT ADVENTURE
THE LURE OF THE NORTH
THE WILDERNESS MINE
WYNDHAM'S PAL
HARDING OF ALLENWOOD
ALTON OF SOMASCO
THE GREATER POWER
THRICE ARMED
THURSTON OF ORCHARD VALLEY
THE CATTLE BARON'S DAUGHTER
THE DUST OF CONFLICT

[The end of *Larry of Lonesome Lake* by Harold Bindloss]