

*** A Distributed Proofreaders Canada eBook ***

This eBook is made available at no cost and with very few restrictions. These restrictions apply only if (1) you make a change in the eBook (other than alteration for different display devices), or (2) you are making commercial use of the eBook. If either of these conditions applies, please check with an FP administrator before proceeding.

This work is in the Canadian public domain, but may be under copyright in some countries. If you live outside Canada, check your country's copyright laws. **If the book is under copyright in your country, do not download or redistribute this file.**

Title: Empty Hands

Date of first publication: 1924

Author: Arthur Stringer (1875-1950)

Date first posted: December 20 2012

Date last updated: December 20 2012

Faded Page eBook #20121231

This eBook was produced by: David T. Jones, Mary Meehan, Mardi Desjardins & the online Distributed Proofreaders Canada team at <http://www.pgdpCanada.net>

Empty Hands

By ARTHUR STRINGER

AUTHOR OF "The Diamond Thieves," "The Hand of Peril," "Silver Poppy," "The City of Peril,"
"The Prairie Child," "The Man Who Couldn't Sleep," etc.

A. L. BURT COMPANY Publishers New York

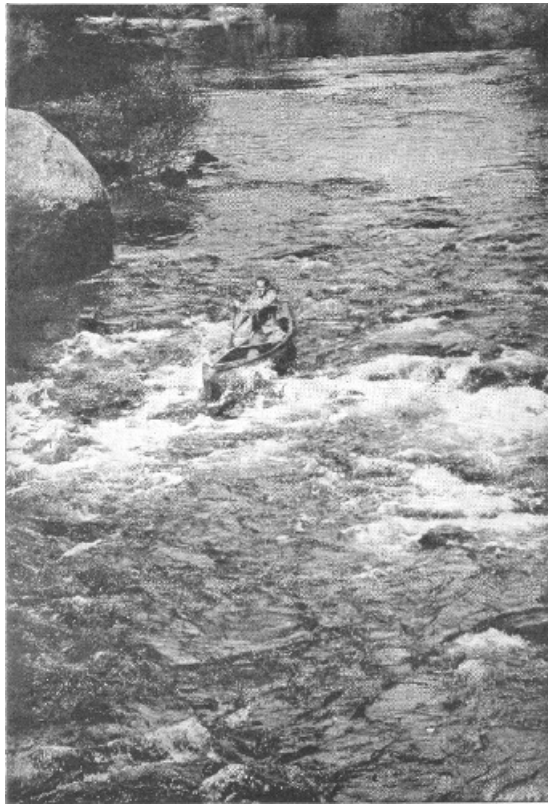
Published by arrangement with The Bobbs-Merrill Company

Printed in U. S. A.

COPYRIGHT, 1923, 1924

COPYRIGHT, 1924

Printed in the United States of America



He hoped to the last that he might overtake the girl.

EMPTY HANDS

CHAPTER I

Endicott, oppressed by the silence of the house, dropped his bags on the Sarouk rug at the foot of the cascading wide stairway and went on to the twilight living-room. Finding that empty, he wandered out to the sun-room, where he hesitated a moment, then stepped through the double screen-doors to the garden terrace. There he turned abruptly south. He followed the leaf-filtered gloom of a pergola until he came to the Etruscan seat that overlooked the swimming-pool. And there he sat down.

It was a hot night. It was more than hot; it was stifling. Not a breath of air stirred the syringa leaves that hung on either side of him. Somewhere back of the faded tamarisks a pair of katydids had already begun their nocturnal antiphony. A cricket shrilled from time to time, in the parched grass-parterres behind the grape-arbors. There was no moon, as yet, and even the stars were shut out by the tepid haze that seemed to blanket a burned-out world. It was so close and sultry that Endicott, as he stared down at the pool, found something consolatory in the mere thought of water.

There was a time when he had been inordinately proud of that pool. He had planned it himself, on the hillside where a spring had bubbled out below the twisted root of an umbrella-elm. He had tamed and harnessed that spring, and had built his basin of cement, eighty feet long and thirty feet wide, lining it with Tennessee marble and fashioning seven marble steps to lead into its shallower end. Along its full length, on either side, ran a marble colonnade shaded with wistaria, with Tuscan urns at the four corners. At its upper end stood the arched grotto which he had built of field-stone, after landscaping the higher garden-slopes. He had thought of it as an arena of sane and healthful pleasure. But life had taken the savor out of it, as life took the savor out of so many things. For all its trellises and vines and tubbed greenery, for all its double beauty of jade-green water reflecting unwavering flowers and foliage framed in their milky oblong of marble, it was now a pool of bitterness to him.

As he stared down at it, through the lifeless hot darkness, Endicott remembered how Erica, his wife, had once loved it. He could almost picture her sitting on the Roman bench at the far end of the pool. The wistaria vines were thinner, in those days, and the sun would strike slantingly down on her drying hair. It was wonderful hair, like spun gold, and she had an incredible amount of it. She had always claimed that the water from his spring was not like other water, nursing the purely personal belief that it was slightly radiumized, since it had the trick of leaving one's skin so satin-like in its smoothness. But the blight had fallen with the Osborne affair, when Erica and Bertie Osborne had drifted into the habit of swimming alone there, after dark. Endicott had objected to that, had finally taken his stand and forbidden it. When his wife had laughingly defied him, and proclaimed that she and Bertie were going to swim at midnight, he had as grimly proclaimed otherwise. To establish his authority, he returned to the pool and opened the valve that let out the water. Then he went to bed.

At midnight his wife and Osborne slipped down to the pool, without switching on the lights. Osborne dived, laughing and light-hearted, from the carpet-covered spring-board. It was one of his swan-dives, of which he was so proud. His skull crushed in, like an egg-shell, against the floor of the empty cement basin.

Endicott, as he sat there, fancied he could still hear Erica's scream through the midnight quietness of their garden. He even fancied that he could see her, sitting crouched on the Roman bench at the pool-end, staring down into the depths of the jade-green water. Yet she had been dead for five long years. And that second tragedy had always seemed to Endicott as gratuitous and as ironic as the first. For as they were motoring through northern Georgia she had drunk from an abandoned farm well, after he had warned her not to. Three weeks later she had died of typhoid. She had been a beautiful woman. But some women, he told himself, were not to be controlled. They remained untamed and intractable, always seeming one page late in reading the lesson of life. And they not only suffered themselves, but they brought suffering to those about them. He had built up his fortune, as he had built his pool, for her good. And the one now stood as futile as the other. He wondered, as he stared down at the vaguely opalescent oblong of water, if she ever came back there, in the stillness of the night, and brooded over that one place that had once seemed alluring and beautiful to her.

Endicott, the next moment, caught his breath sharply. For as he stared down through the gloom he saw by the sudden flare of a match that a woman was sitting alone and silent on the Roman bench, on the bench where Erica used to sit and dry her hair. He started up from his seat. Then he sat down again, being able to breathe once more. For he saw that it was merely his daughter Claire, striking a match and lighting a cigarette; Claire in a bathing suit, obviously trying to keep cool.

He could see the slender oval of her thin face, the heavily-lashed eyes under the thoughtful brow touched with petulance, the dusky tone of the sun-tanned skin as the momentary light-flare played on her bare shoulders, forward-thrust and boy-like in their slenderness. He could make out the mass of her bobbed hair, framing the intent, narrow face, darker and more girlish-looking than her mother's. He could see the curved and short-lipped mouth holding the cigarette as she drew the flame in against its end. Then the light went out, with an impatient shake of her hand, and the glowing match-end circled through the darkness and fell into the pool at her feet. All that remained was the tiny glow of the cigarette, growing intermittently brighter as the air was sucked in through its shredded leaf corseted in rice-paper.

What impressed Endicott was the passiveness, the isolation, of the figure on the Roman bench. It amazed him to think how little he understood the girl, if she could still be called a girl, for he remembered that she must be well past nineteen. Perhaps she was more; there was a great deal he could not remember about his Clannie. But he wondered if she too sat oppressed by the loneliness of life, if she too found Hillcrest, this huge house on the hillside, an empty place. She had been left a great deal to herself this last year or two, he recalled, for a man can't run copper-mines next door to Alaska and northern Quebec and at the same time hug his own fireside. Then he wondered why his heart could remain so unmoved at the thought of her. She was his only child; she was all he had. Yet they lived in worlds of their own, with interstellar æons of space between them, with so few discernible ways of signaling across that gulf.

He was startled, the next moment, by her clear soprano voice calling through the darkness.

"You'd better switch on the lights, Baker."

Endicott could see that she was speaking to one of the servants who carried a flash-light as he wheeled a loaded tea-wagon to the arched outer end of the grotto. He could hear the servant's respectful reply and could see the pencil of light waver about the stone wall in search of the switch. A moment later a sudden garden of color flowered out of the gloom. The dusky oblong of water flashed into incandescence as the current ran through the strings of bulbs enclosed in their huge globes of many-colored Japanese lanterns, globes of beryl and orange and rose and yellow. They fused and merged in a misty crown of light above the mirroring pool where the water, now green and lustrous as malachite, reflected the motionless globes, line for line and color for color, making the tubed arbor-vitæ and the cerise phlox in the long flower-boxes as fantastically unreal as the paper foliage of a stage-setting.

And at the edge of the pool, with her bare feet trailing in the limpid water, sat the motionless girl in her attenuating dark bathing-suit, alone in her little world of light and silence. She seemed to be waiting for something.

Endicott realized what this was when he looked up and saw the wide-wheeling twin-ray of motor head-lights as a car circled into the lower drive. Down the valley-side opposing him he could see a second pair of head-lights groping their way. A horn sounded, abrupt and insolent and sonorous, as the first car drew up below the pool, bathed for a moment in the clear light of the car that followed it. To Endicott, in that momentary illumination, it seemed like a car full of white legs. It was filled to overflowing with men and girls in bathing-suits, and from it rose a careless babel of voices, singing voices, shot through with laughter and the sustained chant of a musical-comedy song from the motor behind them.

"Hello, Clannie!" cried a bare-armed youth almost as dark as a Nubian. He leaped the flower-boxes to the pool-edge as he spoke.

"Oh, boy, to get cool!" cried a pale girl in black satin with angel-fish painted on her skirt.

"And Blinkie's bringing some bubble-water," announced a large girl with butternut-brown shoulders and arms.

They crowded and clamored along the pergola until they surrounded the impassive Claire. A girl's voice cried: "Here goes—a jack-knife, everybody!" And that challenge was followed by the repeated splash-splash of straightening bodies striking the dark water, the shouts and gasps of swimmers, the careless screams and laughter of contending couples.

Endicott could see them, when they emerged, sitting side by side along the marble lip of the pool, flesh against flesh, brown against white, while they smoked and chatted and a fat youth, prematurely bald, passed among them with glasses and a glistening cocktail-shaker. Endicott noticed that Claire drained her glass, drained it silently and impersonally, and still without speaking held it out to be refilled. She tossed away a half-smoked cigarette and stood poised, for a moment of abstraction, as a chorus of laughter followed the sound of a sudden splash. The fat youth with the shaker had slipped and fallen into the pool.

"Go after him, Jappie, and save the hooch!" cried a round-armed girl in a one-piece suit.

"What's the use, Nicky, when we all know fat must float," was Jappie's indifferent retort as chocolates from a brocaded carton that passed from wet hand to wet hand were thrown at the youth swimming with one hand and clutching the shaker with the other. There was a second chorus of laughter as some one tossed him a wine-glass, which, after turning on his back, he poised on his protuberant stomach and solemnly filled from his shaker. Then a car honked from the outer darkness and somebody called: "Here's Blinky with the champagne!"

But Claire, Endicott noticed, was not thinking of Blinky. She moved moodily on to the diving-board, where she stood for a moment, to speak to a youth whom she addressed as "Milt." Then she turned and faced the pool. She balanced, for a moment, on the end of the spring-board, with her bare heels together and her hands above her head, as brown and slender as a dryad, assured, indifferent, insolently impersonal. Then she rose in the air, incredibly, with her knees drawn up against her body, straightening miraculously at the precise moment of her descent, so that she struck the water taut as an arrow, and disappeared below its surface with scarcely a sound. She stayed under for what seemed an alarming length of time to the watching man. He was on his feet, in fact, before her head slowly emerged within a foot of the marble steps, where she shook her bobbed hair with a casual dog-like movement and swam lazily back to the deeper end of the pool. She seemed as much at home in the water as a young seal might have been. She reminded Endicott of a seal, in fact, as she lowered her head and doubled her thin body and disappeared below the surface again. She came up and went down again, giving the watcher an impression of wallowing, making him think of a porpoise at play. He could see where her lazy movements broke the water's surface into eddies, many-colored under the magnifying light, indescribably lovely in their transmuting tones that merged off into opal and amethyst and broke away again into beryl and still again brightened under one of the swinging globes into orange. Lovely, too, seemed the languid figure floating on that tissue of intermingling colors, so competent and close-muscled, so slender and assured, so passive and yet so poignantly alone in the midst of its noisier companions.

"Can't she," gasped Endicott, "O God, can't she be saved from all this?"

For he could see that glasses were being once more passed from hand to hand. He could see the cool and deliberate stare of men, neither young nor old, scanning the half-clad bodies of women. He could see a brown arm about a stooping white shoulder and above that shoulder the laughing face, reckless with alcohol, that stared into the solemnly hungry face beside it. And it came home to Endicott, as he gazed down at them, how they were so pallidly and yet so persistently steeping themselves in sensation. That, as he saw it, seemed the one end of this younger generation. All their lives, apparently, were a quest for sensation. They were being catered to, as they idled there in the enervating sultriness, by an appeal to every sense, to taste and touch, to smell and sight. Color was about them and the soft flow of water from the bronze dolphin's mouth was beside them and the body-cooling depths of the pool was below them. They had the scent of flowers floating above the heavier scent of their own perfumed cigarettes. They had sweets for their caprices of appetite, waiting food for their hunger, fantastically flavored drinks for their thirst, and for those darker wants of the spirit the casual contact of velvet skin with velvet skin.

It sickened Endicott, at the same moment that it confronted him with a sense of his own helplessness. It filled him with a passion to snatch the blood of his blood from their midst, to stride down amongst them, scattering them from side to side, and carry his child out of their reach. But where, he asked himself, could he carry her? Where could he take her beyond their influence? She announced herself as one of them by having them about her. And even in carrying her to the end of the world he could not carry her away from herself.

He groaned, without quite knowing it, as his unhappy eyes once more sought out his daughter. She was floating at the far end of the pool now, idly watching the man called Milt as he dove with a lighted cigarette between his lips. This cigarette he adroitly kept alight by reversing it between his teeth and holding it there until he was above water again. Thereupon he floated triumphantly about on his back, side by side with Claire Endicott, puffing smoke up toward the many-colored globes. The father, watching from his seat above them, moved restlessly when a careless wet hand passed the cigarette over to his daughter, who inhaled a lungful or two of the smoke, luxuriously, and lay floating on the pool-surface, as motionless as a drifting cadaver facing the sky.

There even the man named Milt deserted her, when he found the pool abandoned for Blinky and his bubble-water. The ensuing laughter grew louder, in the remoter shadows, and the voices dreamier. Back in the grotto a music-box was started up and the wet-clad figures fell to dancing, two by two, about the splashed marble floor.

"Say, Clannie, when do we eat?" an impatiently casual voice called out. And Endicott, a minute or two later, could see the impassive Baker behind the laden tea-wagon. Then couples emerged from the shadows, fantastically like wolves from a forest, and the noise became general again. They shouted and laughed as they ate. And when the music-box was once more started up thin-clad couples with capon-wings in their hands started to dance again.

"These crumpets are cold, Baker—get hot ones," the daughter of the house commanded in her clear and reedy voice. "And some fresh coffee."

Then the scene was blotted out, at a breath, for some one had switched off the lights. A soft pedal fell on the noise about the pool.

Endicott, starting up from his seat, heard a stifled scream that ended in a bubble of laughter. As he stood there, breathing hard, he could see the significant twin-glow of cigarettes from smokers side by side in the darkness. A girlish voice called out in mock terror. "Make this cave-man stop biting me!" From the pergola-end came a deeper male voice, careless and mocking: "No necking, you two!" Then some one dove into the pool and an indifferent-voiced girl called out: "There goes poor Baker!" Then Claire's voice again, reedy and quiet but strangely penetrating: "Milt, I want the lights on!" Scattered groans of protest arose at this command. But the girl disregarded them. "I said I wanted the lights on."

"Why so solemn, Clannie?" demanded a drawling contralto voice.

There was an echo of the drawl in the girl's voice as she retorted: "King Langford says my dad got home to-night!"

CHAPTER II

Endicott waited until the last voices had died away and the last noisy car had circled insolently about the lower drive. He waited, watching the crawling twin-lights as this car mounted the opposing valley-slope, oppressed by the silence hanging over the home that seemed no longer home to him. He stared down at the pool where the mocking globes of radiance still swung, pondering the dark problem as to why man's happiness is so often destroyed by the very things with which he seeks to perpetuate it. He had fashioned this pool for innocent pleasure, yet he found himself, for the second time, nursing nothing but hate for it. He would be glad, he told himself as he stood waiting for his daughter, when she and he had seen the last of it. It would be better for them both.

Endicott's daughter, however, showed no signs of returning to the house. So he pocketed his repugnance and made his way down into that region of revelry left doubly obnoxious by the mockery of its over-colored lanterns and the memory of its over-hectic hours. He moved slowly, mysteriously touched with age, down through the darkness toward the gaily-lighted oblong of refracted colors framed in drooping shrubbery, feeling utterly and incommunicably alone in a world which had in some way outlived him.

He realized the gulf of time between them as he caught sight of his daughter in her wet bathing-suit, on one end of the Roman bench, staring down into the water. She sat quite motionless. She seemed as remote from him, staring with odd grotesquery from her lonely perch, as a gargoyle of stone staring down from its medieval tower. Yet some humanizing touch of wistfulness in her face prompted Endicott to wonder if she too could be shadowed by a trace of that same isolation which clouded his own heart. He asked himself why he should suddenly think of her as a child, as a lonely child surrounded by an aura of pathos. For she looked ridiculously small and ridiculously youthful in her trivial wisp of a suit. And she gave him an impression of careless fastidiousness, with her sinewy young body, slender as a dryad's, leaning listlessly forward with the narrowing brown chin cupped in the palm of her hand.

Surely, he felt as he moved so wearily toward where she sat, she was worth saving, worth saving in some way or another?

"Hello!" was all she said, without any trace of emotion, as he came and stood beside her.

"Hello, Clannie!" was his reply to her, equally casual, equally barricading.

"When'd you get back?" she asked as she stooped to wring the water from her trunk-leg.

"To-night," he told her. He sat heavily down on the other end of the Roman bench. "Hot, isn't it?"

"Like hell!" she said in a small voice flat with weariness.

He resented that, yet it gave him a point about which to centralize still earlier resentments.

"It doesn't seem to have interfered with your fun," he retorted.

She looked languidly up, at the barb of bitterness in his voice.

"Oh, *that!*" she scoffed with a small hand-movement of indifference. "You heard us, of course?"

"Most all the countryside did, I imagine!" Then he added, gathering momentum as he went: "Yes, I've been both hearing and seeing you. And it's been giving me a great deal to think over."

She gazed directly up at him, for the first time, with her limpid and fearless eyes fixed on his face. She had courage, the man looking so intently down at her was forced to admit; she had courage and a something beyond courage. He would have found it hard to define that added something, but he tended to the belief that it was a stubborn quality akin to sportsmanship, a sort of skeletonized code of ethics evolved out of the one normalizing phase of her existence, her athletics. Whatever she did, she would at least sullenly prefer to have it known as the sporting thing to do. But life, Endicott was remembering, was a trifle more complicated than a squash-court.

"And what did you think about us?" his daughter was asking him, almost insolently.

Some instinct, kenneled deep in his indignation, warned him to be calm. Tragically little, he remembered, was to be

gained by passion, with a girl like that. So he waited a moment or two, determined to have his voice a steady one.

"They impressed me as a pretty rotten lot," he finally asserted. But the casualness of his tone was discredited by the granitic grimness of his jaw.

"Yes, I know," said the girl, with quite unlooked-for quietness. "But it seems the only way out."

"Out of what?"

She emitted a ghost of a sigh, before speaking.

"Oh, I don't know. Out of being bored, I suppose."

A second tide of indignation rose and ebbed through Endicott, rose and ebbed without her knowledge, before he spoke again.

"Have you any idea what you're heading for?" he suddenly demanded of her.

She laughed, quietly and indifferently. But there was bitterness about the youthful lips bent over the pool.

"That's the trouble," she complained. "I'm not heading for anything." She felt about on the wet bench until she found a gold cigarette-case. "I'm just drifting."

"Then I imagine it's about time somebody interfered with your movements," said the man at her side.

"Who?" she asked, audaciously abstracted.

"Your father," he announced, refusing to countenance the tide of frustration that was creeping through him.

"How?" she inquired in her indifferent small voice. And with that one word, in some way, she had been able to reaffirm the fact of their remoteness, their astral remoteness, from each other.

"To begin with, this pool swimming is going to be stopped, and stopped right now," he heard his own irate voice proclaiming.

"Isn't that rather ridiculous?" demanded the girl in the wet bathing-suit.

"No, it's more like getting back to sanity."

"You mean," she challenged amiably enough, "you're telling me I'm not to swim in this pool?"

"Precisely!"

"But Montie and Gypsy Bowers and Milt are coming back a little after midnight, when the moon's up. And it would be rather humiliating, to have to leave word that I'd been scolded and sent up to bed, wouldn't it?"

He stared at her, wondering what would have happened to her if she had lived in an earlier and more rudimentary generation. He stared at the two brown hands buckled over a bare brown knee, realizing how small and helpless she would be in the face of physical violence. But physical violence, he remembered, would never tame her, would never altogether break down her spirit.

"You are not going to swim in this pool to-night," he announced with a fierceness which brought her narrow face slowly around to his.

"Nor any other night?" she studiously interrogated.

"Nor any other night," he just as studiously asserted, with the thought of history so ironically repeating itself making his face more haggard than he imagined. "Is that clearly understood?"

"I heard you the first time," she said with her barricading flippancy.

"There are a number of other things you're going to hear!"

"What?"

"Things we've got to talk over."

"Isn't it horribly hot," she complained, "for that sort of thing?"

"There are worse misfortunes than mere heat," he reminded her. And he was reminding himself, at the same moment, that she would not be easily driven, that she was not even bridle-wise. She had never bowed to authority. She was his daughter, his one and only child. Yet they had no points of contact, apparently, except that of brute force. And he suspected that she would break, under force, before she would yield.

She surprised him by getting languidly up from the stone bench.

"Then I'd better phone Milt and the others," she casually announced.

"And what are you going to do after that?" he demanded.

"I don't know," was her listless retort. "It seems so hot in the house."

His scrutinizing eyes followed her as she moved moodily away. Then he went to the valve that emptied the pool. Still again, as he turned the brass wheel and heard the rash of the escaping water, he was oppressed by the sense of history repeating itself. His heart was heavy as he moved slowly on to the grotto and switched out the lights.

"I've emptied the pool," he announced as he passed the slim figure of his daughter groping through the half-lighted sun-room.

"I know," she said in a neutral voice.

"Then where are you going?" he demanded.

"I want to sit outside for a while," she answered in her insouciant cool way.

"We understand each other, don't we?" he challenged.

"I wonder if we do?" she countered in her careless soprano.

"We'd better!" he called out with a harshness which arrested her, for a minute or two, in the outer doorway.

Endicott watched her as she passed down the balustraded terrace into the garden. Then he went up to his room.

CHAPTER III

Endicott went up to his room, but he did not sleep. He sat at his open window overlooking the pool, which took on fantastic shadows under the filtered light of the late moon. Claire, he saw, had gone back to the Roman bench. He could make her out only vaguely, in the broken shadows, sitting inert and motionless, with her hands clasped over her knee. The solitariness of her figure distressed him as he watched it. She had grown away from him, calamitously, just as he had grown away from her. She was all he had, he remembered for the second time that night. She was all he had, yet of late he had seen little of her, had known tragically little of her companionship.

That, in some way, would have to be corrected. Yet he could see no immediate promise of change in his mode of life. And he could anticipate still less in hers. Before another week was over he would be once more on the wing: this time it was the Little Elk Lake project that was demanding his presence. Within two weeks he would be well beyond the rail-head, half-way up to the Circle itself, trafficking by canoe and york-boat toward the Barrier Camp on the fringe of the Barren Grounds. There Shomer Grimshaw held disturbingly ambitious plans to lay before his attention. That restless-souled young engineer even wanted a portable saw-mill and a hydroplane and a shallow-draught side-wheeler sent up in sections to his wilderness outpost beyond the Pas. And there was a showing of gold in the pre-Cambrian to the east of Barrier Lake. And the sooner Endicott was on the ground to look over his claims the better for all concerned.

The thought suddenly occurred to him that he might do worse than take his Clannie along with him. That would get her out of the welter into which she had drifted. It would lift her out of that cloying mess, the same as one lifts a drowning mouse out of a cream-pitcher. She was ear-deep in enervating softnesses that were smothering her, the same as so many women of to-day were being smothered. And the other thing would rather shock her into some sort of reason. She would find herself confronted by raw life, up in that mine camp. She would face sterner conditions and stabilizing roughnesses and a man or two with a backbone. And that would do her good.

Endicott stopped short, trying to picture Shomer Grimshaw, his field-engineer, confronted by a girl like Clannie. She would be new to him, for women had never seriously entered into Grimshaw's scheme of things. He had not permitted them to. It was not without reason that he had been called Shomer, the Watcher. But Endicott had no wish to bring that old story up out of the depths of the past. He preferred to think of Grimshaw as functioning like a Diesel engine, efficient and silent, as self-contained as a Salteaux, but by instinct and training still a woodsman, a man who preferred always to go ahead of the steel and map the lonelier frontiers for those who came after him. He had seen much of the world, but he preferred to remember only his woodcraft. He had a working knowledge of seven Indian languages and could shoulder a barrel of flour over a broken portage, but in his sleeping-tent he read Pater and Francis Thompson. No, a man like Grimshaw could never grow into an understanding of a girl like Claire. She would be something undecipherable to that single-track mind of his. She would probably knock his camp discipline into a cocked hat and criticize the grub-tent cuisine and announce that the smell of fly-oil was objectionable to her fastidious young nostrils. It would, ten to one, result in trouble. For Clannie, of course, liked to have her own way. And Shomer, on the other hand, knew a grimness of purpose that had proved not without its value. In his rough young veins ran that commendable enough thing that has been called the blood of the conqueror. And Endicott, lounging at the open window, wondered half idly which of the two would win out, if it ever came to some final contest of will.

Then he noticed that the low-hung moon had gone under a cloud. He heard a growl or two of distant thunder and felt grateful for what he accepted as a promise of relief from the heat that was making even midnight intolerable. Men didn't think straight in such weather. And what he needed was sleep. But before turning back to his bed he stared once more down at the vague outlines of the pool.

Claire was smoking there. He could see the small cherry-glow of her moving cigarette-end and the dark blur of her body against the pale marble bench. Then his eye wavered on to the other end of the pool, attracted by what seemed a movement along the trellised foliage. He thought, for a moment, he saw a figure in white, a woman's figure, walking slowly along the wistaria-covered pergola, in the direction of the Roman bench. He pressed his face against the bronze screening, staring out with an odd quickening of the pulse. Then, with an incredulous upthrust of the shoulders, he rubbed his eyes and looked out again. He could no longer decipher that drifting white shadow. He turned back to his room with what was almost a grunt of impatience.

"This heat's getting on my nerves," he said as he switched on his oscillating fan and pushed the bed out so that it would stand in the fuller play of its current. He lay down and covered himself with a sheet. But he did not sleep. He was

thinking about his daughter.

He was still thinking about her, inconsequently and barrenly, when his wakeful ear caught the sound of his bedroom door being opened. He sat up at once as the vague blur of a figure crept in through the door.

"Father!"

It was his daughter Claire, calling to him in a voice thin with terror.

"What is it?" he asked as she groped, cowering, toward him. "What's happened?"

She sat down on the edge of the bed, feeling for his body in the darkness, craving, for the first time he could remember, some sustaining contact with him.

"What's happened?" he repeated as he became conscious of the tremor of her hand, which felt cold through the sheet.

"Something terrible," she said in a strangled whisper.

"But what is it?" he demanded. "Are you all right?"

She drew a long and quavering breath.

"Yes, I'm all right," she finally asserted. "But it—it was terrible."

"What was?" he insisted, letting his hot hand close about her cool small fingers.

"*Mother came back to the pool,*" the girl said in a quiet voice.

There was a silence of several seconds.

"You've been dreaming, child," Endicott was finally able to say. Yet an odd tingle of nerve-ends ran through his body as he spoke.

"She came to where I was sitting on the bench there," asserted the quiet but tremulous voice so close to him. "She was in white. I could see her distinctly, even before she spoke to me."

"You've been dreaming," repeated the girl's father.

"I tell you she came and spoke to me. She came and sat beside me and asked me not to go."

"Go where?" asked Endicott, reaching for the light-switch. But for some undefined reason he declined to turn it on.

The girl on the edge of the bed sat silent for several moments. Then she spoke, even more quietly than before.

"Milt Bisnett and I were going to run away to-night. We were to motor over to Morristown and then take a morning train in to New York to catch the steamer for Bermuda. We intended to stay there until Milt's wife could—could arrange about the divorce."

She moved abruptly in the darkness.

"Good God!" gasped Endicott, out of the silence.

"That's off now, of course," she said in her incomprehensibly quiet voice.

"Off? I should think it *is* off!" cried the man on the bed, startled by the vastness of his suddenly revealed inadequacy. "Do you know what you're going to do, Claire?"

"No," she said, almost indifferently.

"When I go north on Saturday, you're coming with me."

"Going with you?" she repeated, her thoughts obviously not on what she was saying.

"Into clean, hard life, out of this muck," he announced with unlooked-for vigor.

So prolonged was her silence that he felt she was casting about for excuses, searching for some avenue of escape.

"All right," she said in her small voice. "I'll go!"

He found it hard to articulate a question obscurely clamoring for expression.

"It's—it's not too late?" he exacted.

She sat silent a moment, letting the full significance of his question filter through to her brain.

"It's not too late," she replied. The listlessness of her tone would have disheartened him, but for the tightening of the small fingers about his moist hand. Then she asked, almost dully, out of still another silence: "Why should she come back, like that?"

He compelled himself to stroke her shoulder reassuringly.

"You must have fallen asleep, child, and dreamed it," he valorously contended. But he felt the shiver that passed through her thin body.

"Do you mind if I leave the door open, between our rooms?" she asked as she rose to her feet.

"Of course, Clannie," he said, doing his best to control his voice, shaken as he was by the unexpected forlornness of her tones.

She groped toward him in the darkness.

"Good night, father," she cried, with her thin arms clinging to him.

And Endicott, with his hand on her childishly bobbed hair, kissed her for the first time that he could remember.



CHAPTER IV

Claire Endicott's first meeting with Shomer Grimshaw at Barrier Lake was not an auspicious one. Grimshaw, in fact, disapproved of the entire arrangement. He objected to women in camp, just as he objected to the foolish paraphernalia which had been brought along with them. While still unable to spare men to bring up his thirty-foot shallow-draught paddle-wheeler, which had arrived at the rail-head in sections, he had been compelled to "pack" in effeminate double-walled silk tents, collapsible army-cots, aluminum cooking toys and silver-plated fishing-rods and rifles. And while he detected an unlooked-for self-reliance in the close-muscled and cool-eyed girl who so casually inspected his grub-tent and his sleeping quarters, he remembered that a person who traveled with a French maid was not to be easily absorbed into his established order of life.

Mademoiselle Lamer, it is true, retired promptly and disdainfully to the privacy of the double-walled silk, where she applied countless unguents to a sun-burned cuticle and railed volubly against black-flies and mosquitoes. But the slim-legged girl with the butternut-brown skin gave evidence enough of a more active interest in her new world, promptly commandeering old Napoleon Faubert and directing him to show her everything from the canoes and the york-boats to the assay-tent and the burned-over lands where the blue-berries grew thickest. She studiously avoided Grimshaw, who looked unnecessarily rough in worn corduroy and flannel and spiked river shoes. But that young man was busy enough with Robert Endicott, explaining how they needed a hydroplane and an expert flier, a portable saw-mill, and sheet-iron pontoons for trying out the Malign Canyon rapids.

It was not until Endicott had started back to the rail-head to inquire into his delayed chemical shipments that Grimshaw came into actual contact with the brown-skinned girl. He watched her with a silent frown as she lighted a cigarette and smoked it. But he made no move until she tossed the lighted end into the underbrush.

"Put that out!" he commanded.

She turned and inspected him with a cursory eye.

"What do you mean?" she asked quietly enough.

"I want that cigarette butt put out," he said with no perceptible softening of the voice.

"Why?" she indifferently inquired.

He strode over to where she stood, towering thunderously over her.

"Because if you knew anything about this country, in the first place, you'd know you were breaking the law. And because, in the second place, I don't want these woods set afire. And if you want a third reason, because I said so!"

His force seemed quite wasted on her.

"Who are you?" she mildly inquired, as their glances met and locked.

"I'm the boss of this camp," he announced, knowing that this information had already been imparted to her. "And I want that fire put out."

She glanced about to where a small drift of smoke rose from the dried moss and pine-needles into which she had thrown her cigarette-end. But this, apparently, did not greatly disturb her.

"And supposing I prefer not putting it out?" she speculated aloud, with her appraising eye on his tightened jaw-muscles.

"You are going to put it out," he said, achieving a semblance of her own quietness. And again their contending glances meshed together.

She studied him for a tense moment or two and then turned and walked away. Grimshaw's eyes followed her, but he said nothing more. He strode over to the creeping blaze and stamped it out with his spiked shoes.

He saw nothing more of her for the rest of the day, but the next morning when he emerged from the grub-tent old Napoleon showed him where Claire Endicott was swimming far out on Barrier Lake. Grimshaw, as he watched the bobbing dark head on the sunlit water, did not greatly relish the situation. The girl, whatever her own attitude, had been

definitely left in his charge, and he realized that she was disagreeably close to the sucking open mouth of Malign Canyon, where the waters of Barrier Lake, breaking through the Height-Of-Land, roared and rushed for miles down a series of rapids where not even an Indian would venture. It was there that the wilderness began, guarded by a line as abrupt as an international frontier, a seven-mile barrier of rock-wall and crevice and upland muskeg which reserved from man the virgin forest beyond. Through that barrier twisted and lashed and whitewatered the wasted power which Grimshaw ached to harness, and behind it lay the *terra incognita* which he longed to invade. But there was much to be done, he knew, before Malign Canyon could be charted.

So he climbed to higher ground, to make sure the swimmer was not advancing toward that point of treachery where the water, dark and smooth like fluid steel, poured silently out into the *Grande Décharge*. He saw, to his relief, that she was more than holding her own. So he lighted his pipe and walked down to the camp-landing, where he waited for her to win back. He could have gone for her in one of the canoes, but he stood there, grimly watching her as she fought her way to shore.

He waited until she drew herself up on one of the landing-planks and sat there, obviously out of breath but otherwise unperturbed. Her body looked ridiculously small in its abbreviated bathing-suit of knitted blue wool.

"I suppose you know you were within an ace of going down," observed Grimshaw, with studied quietness.

"Down where?" she asked, without even looking up at him.

"Down Malign Canyon," he retorted.

"That *would* have been a swim for me!" she gaily announced.

"And your final one," he solemnly amended. "No one ever went and came out alive."

He waited for her to speak, but she sat silent. So he added, as he refilled his pipe: "It would be just as well if you kept away from that part of the lake."

She turned about on the wet plank so that she confronted him.

"Don't imagine I'm made of Dresden china," she reminded him.

He did his best to make his glance a disparaging one as he looked her over.

"Nothing so fine, I imagine!" he curtly amended. And he was rewarded by seeing the color deepen on her already dark face.

"You seem to be worrying a great deal over my welfare," she retorted, by way of reprisal.

"I need to," he announced.

"But I'm rather a decent swimmer," she said with her hands linked over her upthrust knees. "I imagine I'm as much at home in the water as you are."

"Not in these waters," he told her.

"Then apparently I have a great deal to learn," she observed.

"I think you have," asserted Grimshaw, not putting too much faith in her momentary parade of meekness. And he cut their colloquy short by turning on his heel and striding back to camp.



CHAPTER V

It was early the next morning that Claire Endicott took her silver-plated casting-rod, appropriated one of the canoes at the landing, and paddled out into Barrier Lake. She fished desultorily along the open water, using a small brown trout-fly on the thinnest of gut. She had no luck, however, until she drifted closer to the *Grande Décharge*, where a three-pound black bass gave her a fight which taxed her over-fragile rod and left her little thought for other things. She noticed, once she had her fish safely aboard, that she was drifting disagreeably close to the entrance of Malign Canyon. So she promptly dropped her rod and caught up her paddle, remembering what Shomer Grimshaw had told her as to the perils of that neighborhood.

She swung her canoe leisurely about, in the smooth and oily water, deciding to head for the western side of the lake. It disturbed her a little, as her eye followed the rocky shore on her right, to discover that she was not making the headway she had expected. She noticed that this same rocky shore seemed to be expanding, towering closer and closer over her even as she paddled in an opposing direction. This worried her. And her worry became acute as she caught sight of the clear-cut rock-cleft of the Portal. She knew then that she was on the fringe of the Malign Canyon current and she knew that she must bend every effort to get out of it. So she swung sharply about, deciding to strike back eastward. She paddled with all her strength, with her small jaw set and her eyes on the rocky silhouette above her. But she seemed to make no headway. She paused for a moment to confirm this alarming suspicion, and then bent once more to her work. But still she did not advance. She was in the clutch of a current stronger than her rounded small arms. She was being sucked, inevitably, ineluctably, into the narrowing maw of the canyon.

She called out, just once, as the truth of this flashed over her. But she continued to wield the paddle with all her strength, her strokes growing quicker and shorter as the struggle continued. She kept on fighting that smooth and silky current, even when she saw that to do so was useless. She was still threshing the lake-water, amber-tinted in the slanting morning sunlight, when she heard an answering call and looked up to discover a pointed york-boat bearing down on her. In that boat, she saw, was Grimshaw, rowing recklessly toward the jaws from which she was striving to tear herself free.

For Grimshaw, emerging from his tent with a bath-towel over his arm and a tooth-brush in his hand, had paused for a moment, on his way to the Back Cove for his morning dip, to study that distant canoe which was skirting so closely the margin of safety. His face clouded as he watched the movements of the frail craft and made out the bare-armed brown figure in its constricting bathing-suit of knitted wool. He stood in a momentary stupor as he watched the struggle of that bare-armed figure against the current which was proving too strong for it. Then he flung away his brush and towel and ran, clad only in his pajamas, straight to a small york-boat lying beside the landing. He leaped into it and caught up the oars, shouting over his shoulder as he rowed.

He hoped, to the last, that he might overtake the girl. He even nursed a ragged tatter of faith that the two of them, once paddling together in the lighter canoe, might fight their way out of the current. When that hope was no longer reasonable, he prayed that since they were to be flung down the tumult of the canyon, they might at least be flung there together, side by side, with his stronger arm to help the other when help would be needed.

But even this, he soon saw, was not to be granted him. For as he swung toward the portal he noticed that the girl was already in the head waters of that narrowing chasm. And she herself must have realized it, for he saw her turn her frail birchbark craft sharply about, so as to face the racing tideway that awaited her. He tried to shout to her still again, but the roar of the cataract must have been already in her ears. So he stood up in his boat, catching at one of the oars, for a steering sweep, as he saw the dark and ominously boiling water take possession of him.

He knew that the run had begun. He saw himself swept in between overhanging rocks, with a sudden roaring in his ears and a thin drift of spray against his face. He felt himself being flung forward, down a narrow raceway of seething white stippled with dark-green boulders. His first duty in life, he knew, was to veer off from those dark-green shadows with the tell-tale crown of spume, to avoid them as he flashed past them. The canoe, he could see, was still afloat, and the girl with the paddle was still cool-headed enough to make an effort to keep her craft to the center of that raging torrent, which she rode as one rides a runaway horse with a broken rein. To Grimshaw it seemed as though he were careening along on the very back of that river, for the racing waters, toward the center, piled up into an ever-churning ridge several feet higher than the water-line along the broken shore. And their only salvation lay in keeping to that central ridge which swept them along like corks. He even nursed the forlorn hope that they might in some way make it, that with luck they might keep afloat through all that boiling and seething hell.

This hope grew stronger as the narrow gorge widened into a brief fan of gravel-shallows threshing from bank to bank into white foam. But the fan closed in again, and again he found himself being hurled along a boiling cataract between dark green walls. He could see the canoe dance down ahead of him, like a brown feather on a flat-blowing wind. He saw it shoot down the incline and take the great swell of "the cellar" below, where the over-driven water reared on itself like a horse falling back on its rider, take it in a cloud of spray and smother of foam that for a moment completely shut it away from him. The girl still had the paddle in her hand, when he caught sight of her again as the racing white horses once more snatched her up and dashed her along. She impressed him as a tragically passive unit in the midst of that power. For she, like himself, sat immersed in forces which dwarfed the puny strength of a puny human body. She seemed incredibly small under the great green rock-shoulders that shadowed her. Yet she still used her paddle, now on one side, now on another.

"That woman has grit!" Grimshaw muttered aloud as he braced himself for the cellar and brought his bow sharply around so as to strike the great swell at right angles. He went through it, clean as an arrow. He went through it and twined and twisted onward, wondering how much more of such hell lay before them, hoping that in some way they might still ride that lashing madness until it wearied of its roaring and plunging and rearing back on itself. But hope wore thin as he found himself swept up to the brink of another violent descent. For one brief moment the staunch little craft steadied itself, paused, and seemed to take breath. But the next moment the pointed bow dipped, the stern went up like a kicking burro's, and Grimshaw found himself plunging down another foaming gorge where the roaring and hissing water broke amber and white over huge boulders that strove to block its way. It took all his strength to sheer off from these ominous patches of amber and white. But he knew, as he strained and tugged with his oar, that the birchbark canoe was still dancing on ahead of him. And again amid the roar and the tumult the hope grew up in him that all might yet be well.

Already, he felt, they had raced down miles of rapids. Sometime soon, he contended, there must be an end to it. And it was only reasonable to feel that the worst was already over. He nursed this delusion, forlornly, as they rocketed, for a mile or two, along a smooth-walled canyon which reeled past them with express-train speed, but the moderating roar behind him soon merged into a crescendo roar in front of him, and still again he saw a widening fan of shallows and the racing and frothing channels and the ominous green boulders that seemed to snarl, that seemed to snap like fangs, at the speeding flood they could not stop. Yet shallow as that water appeared, he knew that a human being could not hope for a footing in it. Immersion even to the knees meant being whisked off like a feather, meant being tossed helplessly along like a pebble on a thresher-screen. So he did not dare to look up until he had emerged into a darker and deeper run of the narrowing channel. Then he noticed, to his relief, that he was drawing closer to the birchbark canoe, which was riding lower in the water. It seemed loggish, less resilient, and it no longer danced lightly along the boiling inclines.

That worried Grimshaw, for it implied that the canoe had either sprung a leak or had shipped considerable water in one of the "cellars." Then all thought on the matter went from him in another racing and churning rapid spangled with white foam, with spray once more in his face and the booming roar of wasted power once more in his ears. He caught sight of a green-shouldered rock under his bow in time to sheer off from it. But in doing so he worked too far to the other side. A curling amber wave lifted his boat-bottom and thudded it down on a sharp-angled stone that held him like a spear-point. The yorck-boat swung slowly around, end for end, as the water boiled up through the rent in its bottom. Then it released itself, and went careening on, as Grimshaw half-stumbled and half-fell to its tilted rear-end. For one stupefied second he stared at the hole in the bottom. To sink in that maelstrom, he knew, meant death. And he did not want to die. So he tore off his pajama-jacket and with his oar-handle tried to plug the hole through which a disturbing amount of water was still seeping. Realizing the need for more wadding, he stripped off his drawers and tamped them into the crevice.

His own craft, he saw, was already low in the water, but he had no time for bailing. For still another cataract boomed ahead of him, a cataract over which hung a curtain of spray. He saw the birchbark canoe ahead of him draw closer to this curtaining mist. He saw the girl make a movement in the air with her paddle: whether it was meant for a signal to him or not he could not tell. But the next moment the mist engulfed her and he saw her no more.

He found, as he raced into that white turmoil after her, that his half-filled boat no longer responded to his prying-oar as it ought. But he did not give up. He struggled to keep to mid-channel. He fought to maintain his pointed bow headed downstream. He strained every muscle of his naked and drenched body to sheer off from the rock-fangs that fringed and fashioned his course. Then in the veiled light he felt his bow dip, and rise, and dip again. A sensation of incredible speed, of being projected helpless through watery space, chilled his body. A stupefying roar filled his ears. He catapulted, down, down on a tumbling amber-green flood that fell away and rose again and threw him dizzy and helpless against solid rock.

He could feel the boat going to pieces, under his very feet, as he tried to stand in that boiling tumult. He felt the oar snatched from his hand as he was tossed and tumbled along. He felt his body thrown against stones mossed with velvet slime, stones on which his foolishly clutching fingers could retain no hold. He knew a second sensation of incredible speed, only this time he was plunging under uncounted depths of writhing green water, which spewed him again into the shallows where he was carried on between boulders worn smooth as ice, rounded and slimed so that his helpless body rolled against them and over them and was swept stunned into a whirl-pool which he circled twice before he found the strength to clutch at a dead spruce leaning down to him from a shore of sloping wide sand on which the morning sun shone yellow and warm.

He clung there, fighting to get his breath back, re-marshalling his scattered senses, telling himself he was still in the world of the living. And as he clung there, panting, he caught sight of a mottled blue and white mass on the surface of the circling amber flood flecked with splashes of cream-colored foam, a mottled blue and white mass that twisted a little as it swept toward him.

It was close beside him before he realized it was a woman, a drowning woman. He reached out with one hand and hooked his fingers in under the shoulder-strap of her woolen bathing-suit, ragged and torn from its long fight with the river-rocks. The current tried to take her away from him, yet he held firm. He held firm, but the upper portion of the bruised wool fabric came away in his hand and the faintly struggling body eddied off on the current.

When the whirl-pool brought it toward him for the second time he clutched frantically at what was left of the torn suit. But as he clung to it a white body slipped out of it, like a sword out of a scabbard. He flung away the sodden fragment of wool and let the current take it, for his mind was clearer by this time and he realized that no woman could live long with her head half-under water. So he dropped back into the eddy and swam after her.

It was not easy, for his body was bruised and strained and sore from end to end. He was weak, too, so weak that when he caught up to her he no longer had the strength to swim with only one hand, but was compelled to hold her up by taking her hair in his teeth as he struggled with shorter and shorter strokes to sustain himself on the circling current. And just as he realized that he could breathe no more, that any further movement was beyond him, he felt sand under his feet.

He staggered ashore, dragging the inert body after him and letting it lie where it fell as he stumbled full length on the sloping warmth of the white sand.

He lay there, moment by benumbed moment, without moving, letting the sunlight soak into his chilled body. He lay there until the will to live slipped back on its shaken throne. And then he remembered that he had more than himself to remember.

CHAPTER VI

Grimshaw struggled to his feet heavily, and stared down, for a helpless moment, at the huddled white body on the sand-slope. He was not shocked at its nudity. What startled him was its air of fragility, its impassiveness, its resemblance to a body from which life had already slipped away.

That both terrified him and spurred him into action. Remembering his first-aid to the drowning instructions from his earliest army days, he promptly turned the woman over on her face. Stooping above her, he grasped the lean ribs and lifted her waist as high as he was able. When sure that her throat and bronchial tubes were clear of water, he turned her on her back, with a flat stone under her shoulders to expand her chest. Then he began a rhythmic upward and downward movement of her arms, pressing sharply on the lean-ribbed torso at the end of each downward sweep of the arms. Much sooner than he had expected he saw the lungs fill and empty of their own accord. When he looked into her face, at a small and throaty sound from her, he saw that her eyes were open.

He took the stone from under her shoulder-blades and pillowed her wet head on it. He was foolishly disturbed, when he looked at her face again, to find that her eyes were once more closed. But under the firm flat breast he could feel the languid beat of her heart. He could see by the rise and fall of her bosom that she was breathing regularly. He knew that heat was the one thing her bruised and water-chilled body now needed and he knew that this was being beneficently poured into her by both the sun overhead and the warm sand on which she lay. But that untempered sun, he remembered, would soon burn the skin of her body, so disturbingly white from her shoulder-blades to her thighs and so amazingly brown about the neck and arms and legs. He stood momentarily bewildered by this odd contrast in coloring until he remembered her bathing-suit and realized how little of her body, in days gone by, that flimsy attire must have protected from the sun. He found something vaguely fortifying in the thought of how such exposure had already partly Indianized her, just as he found something intimidating in the thought of her tenderness, her vulnerability, as revealed by the milky whiteness of the pathetically denuded torso. The one thing essential, he felt, was to protect that tenderness, was to restore its violated reticences, was to shield it from roughness of wind and light.

So he turned away and crossed the wide slope of sand, clambering up the broken rock-wall beyond until he came to a stretch of swampy ground where alders grew. From these he tore away a number of the smaller branches.

It was not until he carried these back to the figure lying so incredibly flat on the sand that he realized his own body was altogether unclad. He knew by the regular rise and fall of her bosom, as he covered the white body from shoulder to thighs with the aromatic leafy branches, that strength was returning to her. But he was grateful for the drowsy stupor that kept her eyes closed and her face turned indifferently away from him. So he left her, without further loss of time, and climbed to a region of upland muskeg where swamp-willows grew in profusion. He picked his way with the utmost care, guarding his feet against injury, knowing only too well how calamitous a foot-wound might prove, under the circumstances.

From the young shrub-willows along the swamp-edge he broke away the long and pliant wands festooned with velvety leaves. Then with a flake of slate-stone, to which he had given a cutting-edge by chipping with a boulder of quartz, he tore away strips of the inner bark of the larger willow-trunks. These he plaited hurriedly together. When he had enough of these improvised thongs made ready he selected his willow-branches and laid them side by side, almost touching each other at the butts. Then with his braided bark-thongs he knotted the serried wands together, first at the heavier ends and then half-way down. After securing heavier strands of the tough-fibered willow-bark, he wove them patiently in and out through the sappy willow-sticks, making a rough but pliant wicker-work which ended in a pendent fringe of leaves. Then he double-braided still heavier thongs of bark-fiber and wove and knotted them into the sides of his rough fabric, for tying-straps.

When he had bound this closely about his body and pulled it in at the waist-line by still another thong, he found himself covered from the armpits to almost the knees with a sort of flexible basketwork which served to keep both the sun and the black flies from his skin. But that, he knew, was not altogether the reason why he worked so feverishly and yet so stubbornly at his weaving. For, once he saw himself even thus primitively clothed, he found a new sense of fortitude creep back into his tired body. He was no longer a helpless being stripped bare and tossed aside by the forces of nature. He was once more man the artificer, confronting those forces and demanding that they restore to him his lost dignity. He was a man, with his nakedness covered, clothed against sun and wind.

With the consciousness of this first small conquest over helplessness came the knowledge that he must make similar clothing for his partner in destitution. She, too, must promptly know the taste of that recovered dignity. But a glance at the sun told him that precious moments were slipping past. And he was averse to the thought of remaining long away from the figure he had left huddled so helpless on its bank of sloping sand. So he gathered an ample supply of willow wands and bark-fiber and hurried back to the river-bank, resolved that the rest of his wattling should be done closer to his companion.

He called to her, reassuringly, as he clambered down the rock-wall. But she attempted no answer to that call.

When he dropped his burden and ran to her, alarmed at her silence, he found her half-turned on her side, with her head resting on one brown arm. Her eyes were open and her glance met his as he kneeled down and stooped over her.

"Are you all right?" he asked. Those, he remembered, were the first words he had spoken to her. And, once he had uttered them, they impressed him as foolishly inadequate words.

She looked up at him, studying him with oddly impersonal and meditative eyes. But still she did not speak. Her embittered gaze merely continued to study his face. Then she emitted a small sound that was neither a gasp nor a sob.

"Why didn't you let me die?" she demanded in a voice flatted with hopelessness. "Why didn't you?"

"Why should I?" he countered with studied curtness as he replaced some of the alder-boughs which she had thrust aside in turning.

"It—it would have been better than this!" she said with a small hand-movement of abandonment, of utter hopelessness.

"This may not be so bad as it looks," he valorously contended. And she lay silent again, studying him intently, her face puckered with perplexity.

"But what can we do?" she finally asked, out of the abysmal silence that hung between them. Her voice impressed him as thin and singularly humbled.

He sat back on his haunches, at that question, and stared up at the open sky. They were alone in the northern wilderness, as much alone as though they had been cast up on an island in mid-ocean. They were alone in the untracked forest, without food, without fire, without clothing or shelter, without arms or tools. To the southwest lay the great barrier of rock and muskeg, of cliffs and upland tundra pierced by its one impassable seething canyon, which cut off all mortal help from them. And there could be no going back the way they had come. To the east, where the spent river still ran in foam-flecked tumult and a loon was crying desolately among the reed-grown backwaters, a *terra incognita* of woodland and rock and swampland lay empty before the lengthening shadows of the waning afternoon sun. And to the north, where a wolf howled and was answered from a farther hill by a fainter howl, the dark ridges of the pinelands stretched inimitably off toward the pale green horizon of the Sub-Arctics. Somewhere, beyond those uncounted leagues of solitude, lay the watery desolation of Hudson's Bay. There was, he knew, a post on that bay. But it was hundreds of miles away. And there was no road open to it, and no paths leading to it.

"What can we do?" repeated the woman, her voice made tremulous by the gravity of his face.

He looked down into her eyes again. And inappositely, as their glances met and locked, he knew a glow of gratitude at the thought that he had human eyes to look into. Yet they were eyes touched with panic and protest and a mute questioning which made him think of a doe brought down by a rifle-bullet. His mind had been too occupied to give much direct thought to his predicament. He knew, however, that it was anything but promising. And he knew she wanted the truth, that she would insist on the truth. But he was without the courage, as yet, to confront her with it.

"We ought to thank God that we got through alive," he told her with a glance back at the river.

"Ought we?" she demanded in her listless small voice. The hopelessness of it roweled Grimshaw's dormant courage into restiveness.

"And we're going to *keep* alive!" he said with sudden and strident vigor as he took a deep breath and folded his sinewy arms over his chest.

"How?" she asked almost indifferently, as she studied the interlacing muscles of his bronzed biceps and shoulders.

He sat back for a moment or two of silence, as though confronted by the necessity of picking his words.

"We've been flung out here," he told her, "we've been flung out here between the knees of Nature, and we've got to meet her on her own ground. And we'll live, as other people have lived through the same predicament."

"Without food?" she challenged. "And without clothes?"

"I'll get them," he retorted.

"How?" she demanded.

"I've lived enough in the woods," he asserted, "to learn a trick or two at this business. I tell you, we'll get clothing. And we'll win out, and be waiting for them, when they come through for us!"

"Will they even know we're here?" she disconcerted him by inquiring.

"Of course they'll know!" he mercifully dissimulated. "And they'll keep at it until they find us."

"Until they find us!" she repeated meditatively, with her face turned down into the hollow of her crooked arm.

She lay silent there for several minutes. "I wish we'd drowned, in those rapids," she finally said, without looking up at him.

"That's not fair," he contended, with a protective show of anger. "You want to live, don't you?"

She lifted her face, at that, and studied him. Then she slowly moved her head from side to side.

"I don't believe I do," she finally asserted.

"Well, I do!" proclaimed Grimshaw. "And the time will come when you'll feel the same way about it." He rose to his feet. "But it isn't what we feel that's going to save us; it's what we *do*. And we need every minute of this time we're wasting."

Still again she fell into her habitual silence. The look of mute protest was no longer on her face when she glanced up at him.

"I understand," she said in little more than a whisper. "What must I do?"

"Believe in me!" he exclaimed, with an unlooked-for up-gush of emotion. "Will you do that?"

"I'll try to," she murmured, without meeting his eye.

"You *must* do that," he contended. "It won't be easy, at the best. And without your help it might be impossible."

She misread the meaning of his words, for she made an effort to sit up, an effort that ended in a gasp of helplessness.

"I'm afraid I won't be of much use to you," she quavered as she let her bruised shoulders sink back on the warm sand.

It was her humility more than her helplessness that disturbed him.

"Time will take care of that," he maintained. "You'll be better, after a good night's sleep."

He stood over her, puzzled by the involuntary shudder which passed through her body.

"And after the good night's sleep?" she queried.

He caught the touch of mockery in her question. But he decided to ignore it.

"Our first problem," he told her, "is to get covering and shelter. And we must get that before the sun goes down."

So he left her there, after a quick glance at the western sky, and hurried back for his willow-wands and bark-thongs. Then he fell to weaving a second *surtout* of pliant wicker-work, profiting by his experience with his first effort and producing a more closely woven mat. The upper part, where the willow-butts stood thick together, he bruised and

shredded and shaped between heavy stones. And before placing this odd garment beside her he double-braided and attached two shoulder-straps, to hold it in place after it had been bound and tied about her body.

"You'll have to use this," he told her, "until I can get something better."

He noticed her listless eye as she studied the roughly wattled tunic.

"There won't be much warmth in it," he explained. "So the next thing I must do is to build a shelter, a shelter for the night. We've got to keep warm. And we've got to have food."

"Food?" she echoed in her half-indifferent voice. "Where is there food to get?"

He forced a smile, at the forlornness of her voice, though it cost him an effort to do so.

"It's all about us," he proclaimed, "waiting for us to take it. This country is teeming with it, with fish and hare and game."

"It may be there," she admitted. "But with nothing to—with nothing but our naked hands?"

"I'll get you food," he proclaimed, for once sure of his ground.

"But food without fire?" she objected. "We haven't even a match."

"I don't need a match," he told her. "Before to-morrow night you'll have your fire. And before the next night you'll have something more, and before the next night, still more. We're going to get through this. But to do it you've got to believe in me."

She sat back, apparently pondering his words.

"It's not you I'm afraid of," she finally confessed. "It's—it's this terrible North."

"There's nothing terrible about it, if you meet it right," he said to the unhappy-eyed woman as she gazed about at the lonely hills.

"But if we don't get away?" she ventured. "It can't be always summer like this!"

"When the cold comes," asserted Grimshaw, "we'll be ready for it. But first of all we must get ready for to-night. As we are, we're rather at the mercy of the weather. So even before I look for food I'm going to throw a night-shelter together."

She gazed away, drearily, to where a heron called from the midst of the wastelands before her.

"I dread it," she said with a slight cringing movement of her body, "the thought of night!"

He turned back to her, solemn-faced.

"You'll sleep as warm as you would in your own bed," he asserted. Then, observing the stricken light that had crept into her eyes, he was prompted to add: "*And as safe.*"

CHAPTER VII

Grimshaw, after a hurried appraisal of the territory close about him, decided that the best place for his night-shelter would be against an overhanging rock-wall a few hundred paces lower down the river. Here the sand-slope was both harder and higher than at the spot where he had first landed and the concave back-wall offered a ponderable shelter against wind and a complete one against landward approach. Twenty paces away lay an abundance of small and large stone, for which he had already figured out a future use, and down a fissure in the rock-wall flashed and sang a rivulet of clearest spring water. Below him, on the near-by gravel-bar of the river itself, lay a long tangle of driftwood, higher than his head. And he decided, after looking over this matted hillock of spruce and pine and tamarack and birch logs, worn smooth by their descent down those miles of rock-lined rapids, to build his first shelter, not of stone, but of wood.

So without further loss of time he fell to work, dragging from that lavish store the poles and timbers best suited to his purpose. These he carried up across the river-slope to the back-wall that shut in his little amphitheater of sand. Then selecting smaller birch-poles that would serve as stakes, he drove a double row of uprights into the sand about five feet apart. Between these uprights he piled his longer and heavier logs, one on top of the other, strengthening his structure with shorter cross-pieces, on which he piled a close-fitting layer of roofing logs. Then, circling lower down the river, he made trip after trip to the higher ground, carrying back pine and spruce boughs, which he piled closely along his timbered roof to make it tighter. Then, venturing still farther into the uplands, he gathered moss and dried grass and carried it back to his shelter. But, not altogether satisfied with this, he made his way back to the muskeg along which bulrushes grew and there gathered armful after armful of the ripened cat-tails. After bringing these, together with still more spruce boughs, back to his shelter, he went to his pile of driftwood and selected two knotted tamarack poles, which he placed lengthwise along their constricted sleeping quarters, decently dividing the enclosure into two narrow berths. Each of these he carefully bedded with a layer of spruce branches, feathering the needled twigs so that the coarse ends lay next to the sand. Over these again he spread the dry grass and moss. And he was busy piling the silky floss stripped from the bulrush catkins, piling it knee-deep along the narrow berths, when he became conscious that he was no longer alone.

He peered out from his low-roofed cabin to see a brown-armed figure in a willow tunic watching him intently, with a look of wonder on her face. And that look of wonder deepened as he called her to his side and explained how she could nest in the core of that feathery mass of down without fear of the night's chill reaching her.

"But I want flat boughs for top-blankets," he pointed out, "and a few short timbers to place across the entrance. Then we'll be secure, except for the roof. That I'll have to thatch or cover with bark before the rains come."

But before his task of finding short timber for his shelter-end was over Grimshaw was disturbed by the discovery that he had to sit down and rest. His growing weakness, he realized, was due more to the lack of food than to mere fatigue. And food in some form or another, he also realized, must be promptly obtained.

So, after thinking the matter over, he concluded that his readiest source of supply, all things considered, would be the river. Rallying what was left of his energy, he made his way down to the water's edge, where he mounted a boulder and carefully studied the contours of the winding and twisting shore-line.

When he clambered down from that boulder an odd change had crept over him. He became man the hunter, desperately in search of food. He slunk quietly along the broken river-bank, crouching low, studying each shallow and bay and cove for some sign of life in its depths.

When he came to a backwater pool little more than waist-deep at the center, widening out into a sandy shallow toward the shore and connected with the river by a shallower throat not more than twelve feet wide, he felt he had come to the likeliest spot for his purpose. As he stood intently studying it he could see flies hanging over its shadowed surface, and even as he looked a sudden flurry of flying minnows foretold him some larger fish were feeding there. But he drew back from the pool, making his way cautiously down-stream until he came to a water-logged tree-trunk below the limpid surface. He pried this free from the accumulated sands about it and found that by supporting it a little he could float it into deeper water. So, moving with the utmost caution, he dragged the heavy timber toward the pool-mouth. He knew that any fish within that pool, when alarmed, would promptly seek deeper water, and his intention was to shut off that shallow throat before his purpose would be disclosed. His log, he found when he had warped and rolled it into place, fell a foot short at either end. So he completed his dam by quietly piling river-stones along these shallow water-gaps and

along the base of the log itself, to anchor it more securely in position.

Then, arming himself with a spruce-bough, he waded into the pool, sweeping the bottom as he went. His object was to drive any fish imprisoned there into the shallows, where it could be stunned or killed. And he was rewarded, in the end, by catching sight of a dodging dorsal-fin or two. He even caught the flash of silver bellies as he worked his prisoners into ever narrowing quarters. One of the larger darting shadows escaped between his very knees, though another, a small perch, he kicked frantically ashore with his bare foot. But his eye, all the while, was on a heavier-bodied form that fought and floundered through the muddied water. On this, when his chance came, Grimshaw flung himself bodily, disregarding its poisonous spines as he pinned and held it against the sandy bottom.

When he had three fingers hooked through its gills and could hold it up he found it to be a muskalonge of at least five pounds in weight. And he knew that food had been given to them. It was not the best food in the world, perhaps, but it was sufficient.

His first impulse was to shout the good news aloud and bring Claire to his side. But on second thoughts he decided to clean and dress their meal before confronting her with it. Searching along the river-side gravel-beds, he found the bleached rib-bone of a deer, which he sharpened and pointed on a piece of sandstone. With this he was able to scale and gut the two fish, which he tore into small sections and carefully washed at the water's edge. Then, carrying his bone-knife and his precious food with him, he climbed the river-bank and found a white birch from which he could peel a large enough piece of bark to serve as a platter. With still another plaque of birchbark, artfully folded and held together with thorns, he fashioned a rogan for a drinking-cup. Then with his laden platter and his rogan filled with water he staggered in triumph back to their elongated igloo of logs.

"Are you beginning to believe in me?" he demanded, oppressed by the impassivity of Claire's face, which now seemed bleached almost to a cheese-color under its tan.

She looked at the fragments of white meat for a long time. Then she turned away.

"I don't think I'm worth it!" she asserted in her quietly dispirited monotone.

He put the bark-platter down on the sand between them. He resented that dashing of his momentary enthusiasm. His first impulse was to retort: "Supposing we keep alive to find out!" But a glance at her face, with the shadows of fatigue under her brooding eyes, reminded him of what she had passed through that day.

"I want you to eat," he said. He said it very quietly, but there was a note of authority in his voice which was not to be mistaken.

Her gaze swung slowly back to his. She did not speak, but something fell away from her, in that brief clash of wills. An alteration, small but subtle, took place between them. The man, who was stronger, rose slightly in some ghostly balance of life, and the woman, who was weaker, went down as he rose. It was, she remembered, the way of the wilderness, where all things were made over.

"We'll eat," he repeated as he placed the food more immediately before her.

She did not look up at him. Instead, she turned her face a trifle away, that he might not see the returning pucker of misery which quivered about her mouth.

So they squatted down on the sand, in the slanting sunlight, naked-limbed man and woman, and ate the raw flesh together.

When they could eat no more Grimshaw carefully tied what was left of the meat up in the square of birchbark and stowed it away in the upper corner of their shelter, for with the break of another day, he knew, they would be hungry again. Then he looked up at the sun, which was dropping ominously down toward the sky-line.

"We'll lose this warm air," he explained to her, "during the next half-hour. And that, of course, means bed-time for us."

"Bed-time?" she repeated, with a catch of the breath.

"Until we have fire," he told her. "Then it will be different."

She sat staring toward the black-fringed hills that shut them in. The opaqueness of her eyes disturbed him.

"Are you afraid?" he asked.

"No," she told him.

"Then shall I cover you, or can you do that as well yourself?"

He asked it as casually as he was able to, looking away from her and staring in through the narrow opening of their shelter. But she stood with her intent eyes fixed on his face.

"I can manage it," she said in an impersonal small voice which reminded him of a child's.

He turned away, still avoiding her eyes.

"I want to have a look over the lower reaches of the river," he told her. "From the lay of this land there ought to be a caribou-crossing somewhere in the neighborhood. And I want to find some iron pyrites, if possible, and open up the dam in my fish-pond again. It's just occurred to me another meal might wander into it before morning."

"Would you mind not being away too late after—after the light goes?" she asked with a humbled quietness which brought him up short. He turned back to her as she stood at the shelter-end, a strangely solitary figure in the slowly graying light. Their eyes met, directly and openly, for the second time. Yet on this occasion the woman's eyes were the more tranquil of the two.

"I'll be back well before night sets in," he told her.

But he had much to see and many paths to explore before the waning light reminded him of his promise. He inspected the lower river-valley and then climbed to the uplands where he examined rabbit-runs and the spoor of larger animals. He studied the timber-growth and the cropped branch-ends that told of moose. At a swale-side he saw the footmarks of a black bear. Then he busied himself in grubbing for a handful of cedar-roots and a supply of dry punk from the core of a rotting log. He also gathered together a handful of small bird-feathers which indicated where a shrike had recently dined. Then he turned homeward in the twilight, conscious again of his weariness and of the sharpening air against his uncovered shoulders.

Utter silence reigned over his narrow shelter as he crept into it. His wilderness mate, he knew, was already in the nest he had made for her. And it impressed him as odd, while blocking the opening with his shorter pieces of tree-boles, that he should already regard this strange habitation as home. He listened intently, after burrowing down under the dry moss and leaves and covering himself with what remained of the spruce-boughs, and heard the silence broken by the occasional sound of a fox-bark. And it seemed to him, as he lay there with the tides of weariness ebbing and flowing through his body, that he could vision and feel life in every degree in every corner of the world, yet with all his accumulations of that world's knowledge he had, at a stroke, been flung back into the barbaric beginning of things. Then, nesting deep in his bed, he felt a comforting warmth creep over quieting tides of fatigue. From beyond the two barrier tamaracks he could even hear the regular breathing of his companion, of the woman it was his destiny to sustain and guard and deliver back to her own. He knew by the sound that she was asleep. And he found a vague consolation in the thought that sleep was possible to her, just as he found a ghostly and wayward satisfaction in the thought, as he ebbed off into slumber, of her nearness to him.

He awakened, during the night, at the cry of some forest-animal within a biscuit's toss of his shelter. The anesthesia of exhaustion was slow in slipping away from him, but when he came into full consciousness of his surroundings he sat up in the midst of his mattressing moss and tree-boughs and listened for the breathing of the woman beside him.

He could hear nothing. So with a small tingle of alarm he reached over the two barricading hemlocks and thrust an interrogative hand through leaves and moss and catkin-down.

Then he withdrew his hand, as promptly as though his fingers had come into contact with living fire. For at the core of that rustling mass he had found sudden warmth, like the warmth of a ptarmigan's body under its plumage, the reassuring warmth of bare flesh.

"What is it?" she asked sharply out of the silence.

He knew then that she was wide awake. And the discovery, in some way, left him singularly discomfited.

"I wanted to make sure you were all right," he explained to her as casually as he was able.

She lay silent a moment.

"Was that a wolf that howled outside?" she finally asked.

"No," he assured her. "More likely a fox."

Still again she lay silent for a moment or two.

"But there are animals—"

She did not finish her question. Grimshaw, however, caught the drift of her thoughts.

"I know these northern woods better than you imagine. I've traveled them, night and day, hundreds of miles, without even a knife. And there's not an animal in them that will deliberately molest a human being. Do you believe me when I tell you that?"

"Yes, I believe you," she finally acknowledged. He heard her small sigh, in the darkness, followed by indeterminate nestling movements which persuaded him that she was again settling down to sleep. But when he listened for the sound of her breathing, the deeper breathing of slumber, he could hear nothing. And he himself lay there for a time, oddly wakeful, once more oppressed by the feeling that all life as he knew it had gone out like a lamp, that all life, with the coming of day, would begin again as it had begun at the birth of the world.



CHAPTER VIII

When Claire Endicott awakened, the next morning, the sun was high in the heavens and oblique rays of Roman gold, penciling from mysterious chinks between even more mysterious logs, lay across the narrow gloom that encompassed her. She emerged from a sleep so profound that it was a full minute before her dazed mind could fix itself in time and place. Then, sitting up bare-armed in her smother of catkin-down, she realized exactly what lay about her.

But sleep had restored that resilient young body to its customary vigor and it startled her a little to find a wayward surge of well-being flow through her rested limbs, still warm with slumber. For the first time she thought of her deliverance, and thought of it with a gasp of gratefulness. Then two small troubles intruded upon her moment of meager contentment. One was that she was inordinately hungry. And the other was that Shomer Grimshaw was no longer in his narrow shelter-berth.

Through the opening that faced the river, however, she soon caught sight of him. But so strange was his position and so remarkable his movements that she sat arrested, staring at him with wondering eyes. For he was squatted on the sand between a pile of small sticks and a cairn of stones which he had thrown together. Between his knees he held a slab of tamarack wood with a depression ground in its center. In his mouth he held a piece of stone, also with a small hollow at its center. Upright between the hollows in wood and stone stood a thin shaft of pointed tamarack on which, at first, she assumed the man to be fiddling with a roughly-made bow. But as she looked closer she saw that the fiber thong of the curved bow was looped around the tamarack-shaft, so that as the bow was drawn frenziedly back and forth the shaft revolved at an amazingly high rate of speed. On the slab of wood about the lower end of the spinning tamarack stick she saw a sprinkling of powdered punk, a pile of dry moss, and a scattering of small bird-feathers. She could see the bent head wet with sweat and the knotted arm flying back and forth in its uncomprehended exercises. But she had no inkling of what it all meant until she perceived a thin vapor of smoke float up from the wood-slab between Grimshaw's knees. And then she understood. She saw that he was struggling to produce fire by means of friction.

She leaned forward, intently watching him as the signs of smoke drove him to redoubled efforts. He pressed down with his clenched jaws until his face grew brick-colored, his pumping hand flew back and forth, and with a sudden throaty cry he tossed away the bow-drill and dropped to his hands and knees above the punk-strewn slab, on which he began to blow with long and steady breaths.

Claire could see the wisp of wreathing smoke increase in volume. She saw it thicken and darken as he added a bird-feather or two and scattered a handful of moss about the center of the slab. Then from him she heard a sudden shout of triumph, startlingly savage in note, as he fell to blowing with all the strength of his lungs and the small smoking pyre showed a glow of ruby at its core. He added more moss, holding it close down over the pathetically small jewel of incandescence and never once stopping his blowing. Then, as he added still another handful of moss and on this placed a slender spruce-twigg or two, the smoldering mass burst into a sudden small flame. He nursed that flame. He fed it tenderly. He added to it and built it up and fanned it to wider vigor, coaxing it on until its life was assured.

Then he stood upright, with a second rough shout, as he mopped his brow, for the miracle of fire had been achieved. And Claire, as she watched him throw wood on the growing flame, awakened to the fact that she had never before, in all her life, thought fundamentally of this thing called fire. She had never realized what it meant to the sons of man, how its gift of warmth and light marked the first step upward from the jungle, how it separated the emerging mortal from the brute. She remembered, vaguely, how the Egyptians and Greeks had once enshrined it in their early temples and how savage tribes had once worshiped it as a god. And she began to understand why it had been regarded as holy, why, when by mischance it went out in the Temple of Vesta, all Rome had stood still, all business had stopped and all state affairs had hung forgotten, just as she realized why the armies of the Cæsars, when marching into the unknown countries of the North, had always carried along with them their altar-litter of living coals. For with fire, no matter what tangled hinterlands he pierced, the *voyageur* was never quite homeless.

She watched Grimshaw as he enclosed the fire in a circle of stones which he selected from his near-by cairn, making a sort of hearth about the flames. She watched him as he added heavier pieces of wood to the coals and then turned away and disappeared toward the lower reaches of the river.

She took advantage of his absence to emerge from the shelter. Then she ventured down to the water's edge, where, after a moment's thought, she turned and made her way up-stream until she came to a rocky pool with a pebbly floor. There she

bathed and dried her chilled body in the warm sun and banded her tunic of wattled branches about her waist again. There was still a vague stiffness in her joints and innumerable small aches about her ribs and shoulders and thighs. But the depressing dull ache that had hung about her heart was no longer there. And as she made her way back to the rough hearth before the shelter she found at least one thing to be grateful for, and that was the fact that with all she had not been she had at least been a bit of a sportswoman. Physically, at least, she was not a weakling. And her athletics had given her a boy-like disregard for the human body undraped. Yet she was womanly enough in her eagerness to get her tangled mat of hair in some sort of order before her camp-mate's return. She was busily raking it with her hooked fingers when she happened to glance about and catch sight of Grimshaw as he made his way up from the lower river. In one hand he carried a fish, half as long as his arm. In the other, she saw to her surprise, he carried a limp-hanging hare.

She called to him, but he did not answer her. He seemed preoccupied and impersonal as he crossed the sand-slope to the fire. But after dropping his burden beside the hearth he swept the waiting girl with a quick scrutiny. The frown went from his brow after that hasty study of her face.

"You look better," he said quite simply.

She told him, as she stood watching the fire, that she felt better. "I was hoping that I could help you."

"You can, in time," he said, "but not to-day. I want to get sandals, first, to protect your feet, for if those give out, we're helpless. Later on, of course, we'll have moccasins."

"Made of what?" she asked.

"Moose-hide," he answered as he dropped on his knees beside the dead hare, with his bone knife in his hand. He caught up the belly-skin of the animal with his knife-point and tore a rent in it well back between the hind legs. He elongated this until he could get a grip on the skin-flaps, then with a quick series of tugs and twists he dragged the hide over the hare's head and turned the bald carcass out of its covering.

"I knocked this fellow over with a club. I had better luck there than I did with my twitch-ups. I set out three last night, in their runs beyond the second muskeg. But my root-fiber wasn't strong enough. It was broken in both loops that were sprung. But we'll cure and twist some of his own gut, after this, and then it may be a different story. In the meantime I'd like you to watch me as I do this," he added as he hacked off the head and opened and dressed the carcass, "for we'll have many a rabbit to take care of, once we've got the right sort of traps."

She winced perceptibly as his strong fingers tore the entrails from the slim-ribbed body. But by the time he had come back from washing the carcass in the river she was again entirely composed. She watched him as he broke the small bones by forcing the body flat, skewering it open with two sticks, ready for broiling before the coals.

"This jack-fish was all our pool brought us this morning," he explained as he fell to scaling and gutting his capture. "But before the week's out we'll be doing our fishing in a better way."

She continued to watch him as he prepared the fish for cooking, skewering it flat like the rabbit's body and poignarding it on a green twig which he stuck in the sand, inclined toward the fire. When he had done the same with the rabbit's carcass he raked the live coals closer about them, in a glowing bank. And in a minute or two Claire's nostrils were assailed by the altogether consolatory smell of broiling flesh. He asked her, as he watched over that cooking meal, to bring what was left of the muskalonge-flesh from the shelter. And while he cooked this on a stone over the coals, Claire placed a flat piece of timber, bleached bone-white by sun and water, on the sand as a table, and to it carried two rogons of water from the rock-spring.

"I hate to see that good fat going to waste," said Grimshaw as he watched the jack-fish dripping grease over the coals.

"What good would it be?" asked the puzzled girl, stepping back from the river with her fresh-washed birchbark platter.

"We'll have use for every ounce of fat we can harvest," explained her companion as he deposited the well-browned hare on the waiting bark platter. Beside it, a minute later, he placed the cooked fish. And while this food cooled in the morning air he raked back the coals and replenished his fire. Then they knelt, side by side before their sun-bleached timber, and ate.

"You'll have to tell me when to stop," cried the famished girl, picking her second leg-bone clean. She smiled as she said

it, though it was rather a wintry smile. But it was the first time, Grimshaw remembered, that she had been capable of any such thing; and the moment impressed him as a memorable one.

"Don't stop until you have to," he told her, "for there's plenty more where this came from. And once we get things properly organized we'll have less trouble in taking possession of it."

She sat back, at that, staring off at the lonely horizon that melted away into tier after tier of wooded hills.

"That makes me feel that you've decided we're going to be here a long, long time," she finally said. "Are we?"

He drank from his rogan of water, with his brow knitted, before he answered her.

"That," he said, "is something we can never foretell. We can only hope—hope and keep a stout heart."

"But does that mean we have to stay here, without trying to get back?"

"It means we have to stay here until we're equipped to travel," he explained. "And when we travel I don't think it can be back over the Barrier. The fact that this country we're in has remained a wilderness argues that it's been cut off, even from the Indians. So when we go, we'll have to go eastward, until we win through to Hudson's Bay. For our only lanes of travel, of course, are the rivers. And all our rivers here flow either east or northeast."

"But that," she objected, "only takes us farther and farther away." She sat staring at the receding spruce-tops, picturing the unmapped North where the fir-ridges dwindled off into bare and broken land-waves strewn with lonely lake and slough where the musk-ox drank, and these low land-waves again merged into lonelier savannas of lichen and moss, and these again melted off into tundras that stretched out empty arms to endless meadows of Arctic ice.

"It will take us to human beings, who have frontier posts there," Grimshaw was pointing out, depressed by the desolation in her eyes.

"But how can we reach—even them?" she asked after a moment of silence.

"It will be done, all right," he averred with studiously achieved valor. "But before we can travel we must have clothing, warm clothing, and we must also have tools and weapons. We'll get those things, in time. But until we get them there are certain other things to remember. We are not in the tropics. We are in what people regard as the Far North. That means we have to build against the weather. It may even mean we'll have to prepare against winter. But whatever happens, we've at least got to insure against want by accumulating more than our daily needs, in the matter of food-stuffs. It will be slow at first, in spite of all the material that lies so close about us. But we'll improve at that. Even now, though, we have one thing to remember: and this is, that time is precious."

He reached out for the rabbit-skin, which he laid flat on the log-top and began to scrape with his bone knife.

"These," he said as he held the moist-skinned hide in the smoke of the fire, "are what we will have to dress in, when we get enough. I'll make stretching-frames, for every scrap of fur must be saved and cured. Then I'll show you how to sew them together, with a bone awl and sinew. Or they're even better if they're cut in strips and plaited, for that gives ventilation and more air-anchorage. The Eskimo can live through an Arctic winter in clothing like that, and live comfortably."

Her brown fingers caressed the soft fur that he had placed on the timber beside her. Then she looked up at the face of her companion, darkened with its two days' growth of beard, crowned with its mat of uncombed hair. Yet she found no trace of coarseness there. All she saw was a strength to exult in, a quiet fortitude to wonder at.

"But there are so many other things," she reminded him, with her hand still on the rabbit-skin.

"Yes, there are many other things," he agreed, "but those will have to be met as they crop up. The one thing to guard against now is wasted effort. We've got to show ourselves intelligent enough not to go maundering over the same ground again and again and undoing to-morrow what we did to-day. And as the first thing we need now is a home, a permanent shelter, our first decision will have to be where to put it."

He did not tell her that early that morning, beyond the third tier of spruce-slopes, he had caught sight of a lean-bodied timber-wolf skulking through the shadows. Yet the discovery of this unwelcome prowler had worried him more than he

would have been willing to admit.

"Half a mile down the river," he went on, "is a pool, and in the center of that pool is an island. It's wooded enough for shelter, and in many ways would make an ideal situation for us. You'd be secure there, shut away from practically all trespassers. But once the river freezes up we'd lose that protection. And until it did we'd have to ferry back and forth on a raft made of logs. On the whole, after looking over this district, I don't believe we could hit on a better spot than where our shelter now stands. We are well protected from winds, we have water and wood in abundance, and by running a stockade down from the cliff-side to the water-edge we can shut this home-corner of ours completely off from the outside wilderness."

She turned and looked at their small log shelter, wondering at the minute yet mysterious tendrils of feeling which were already striking into the soil, which were already making the place seem like home.

"Then we can have a better house than this?" she asked as she watched him once more smoking the rabbit-skin over the fire. And for the first time he also could afford to smile.

"That," he retorted with a glance over his shoulder, "is only a make-shift. Whether we make our real home of wood or stone I can't yet decide. Wood, with a stone fireplace at one end, would in many ways be preferable, but to build it of wood we must have an ax, a metal ax. And I'm not yet sure if I can manage that. But there's plenty of limestone about us here, and by burning that in a kiln I can make a mortar and work my stone into walls. Then I can roof it either with a weather-proof thatch or by overlapping spruce-logs split with stone wedges. Our only tools, at first, will have to be stone. For we've been flung back, here, into the Stone Age. We'll emerge, before long, into a Bronze Age, and I'm hoping in time that we can even advance into our Iron Age."

His intent, obviously, was to hearten her. But his words only brought more blankly before her the extent of their empty-handedness. She remembered how vast a part the various metals in one shape or another played in the world she had left behind her.

"But where are we to get iron?" she demanded as she stared down at the inadequate bone knife that lay on the sand beside his knee.

"That," he retorted as he rose to his feet, "depends on a number of things I haven't yet had a chance to investigate. And there are countless other things I have to look into. So it means I must get to work. For even this eighteen-hour day is going to be a trifle short for the things I want done before darkness comes. When I'm away, if you feel able to, I'd like you to plait this green willow bark-fiber into strings. Twist it tight into three-ply before braiding it, and then take the rougher braids and rebraid them into rope. I'll need that for tying the cross-pieces on our *starchigan*—that's what the Indian would call his stores-platform. One of the first things we must have is a stage to cache our skins and food on."

"What is there to protect them from?" she asked him as he banked the fire with sand and ashes. And he stopped short at that unexpected question from her.

"A wolverine or some other small animal might prowl about at night," he told her, without meeting her eye. Then he added, as he gathered what was left of their food together: "By to-morrow I'll have a good sharp spear-head of flint bound in the end of a six-foot poplar shaft for you. That will help when it comes to spearing fish—and also make you feel less defenseless. I'll be back at midday, when the sun's highest. If you get tired of rope-making before I get back, it would be a good thing to carry up some of the smaller timbers, for our fire here. Is that all right?"

If she was conscious of his blunt matter-of-factness she did not openly resent it. She even sensed something dissimulative and protective about it, remembering that they were skirting emotional abysses which should never be too minutely examined. They were alone, on the loneliest peak of Time. And that was not the place for heroics.

"I intend to do my part," she said with an odd twitching of the lips as she crossed to the different layers of bark-fiber which he had placed beside the shelter wall.

When Grimshaw looked back he could see her kneeling in the strong sunlight, beside the store of bark-strings he had gathered for her. He could see her with lowered head, as she stooped over the three slender withes which she had knotted at one end and looped over a timber-point and began industriously to twist together. And as he headed down the river, through the shadowy slopes of pointed firs, he felt singularly like a cave-man starting off on his day's hunt while

his half-clad mate labored frugally about her pre-Adamitic camp-fire.

CHAPTER IX

Claire found her morning a surprisingly busy one. When she had completed her fiber rope-making she turned to carrying up smaller pieces of driftwood from the bleaching piles along the gravel-bars. She placed these in an orderly row along the outside wall of the shelter, seeing it grow tier by tier until her unprotected feet became too bruised and sensitive to tread longer over a path so rough. So she turned then to sweeping her dooryard clean with a spruce-bough and raising on two low piers of stones the flat timber they had appropriated as a table. After replenishing the fire she stood studying the sun-steeped woodlands above her. Then she ventured down-stream until she came to a place where it would be possible for her to mount to the higher ground.

This she did slowly and cautiously, with many stops and many studious glances about her. It had been her intention to search for fresh birchbark for food platters, but when she came to a whispering parliament of bulrushes along the edge of the first muskeg, she decided otherwise. Instead of venturing farther, she gathered as big an armful of the half-dried bulrushes as she could carry and picked her way back to camp.

Her intention was to weave these pliant rushes into a sort of basketwork, as Grimshaw had done with the willow-withes. Her efforts, however, were not crowned with great success. She tried again and again, but her weaving in some way failed to hold together. And when she looked up, in despair, she caught sight of her wilderness companion slowly advancing along the river-edge. He moved guardedly and wearily, with a huge pack slung over his stooping back and a number of wooden shafts clutched in his left hand. Hanging from the fingers of that hand, too, was a fish even longer and thicker than the arm which swung it.

The fish and the slender wooden poles he dropped on the sand beside the fire, but his pack he lowered more carefully beside the waiting woman. She saw, as he put it down, that it was a well-filled container made of wattled reeds, somewhat similar to the thing she had been trying to fabricate with her own fingers. But the coarser fingers, in this case, had been more cunning than her own.

Still without speaking he lifted from the top of his pack two covered birchbark bowls held together with spruce-fiber, and handed them to the woman kneeling beside him.

Claire lifted back the bark covers and saw that one was filled with blue-berries, with a sprinkling of wild currants, and the other with raspberries so deep-colored and so aromatic that she stooped over them, sniffing them with a gasp of delight.

"That's only a part of my good luck," he told her as he sat down in the sand at her side. "It's important enough, however, for we must have fruit and starch, along with our meat, for a balanced diet. And I find there are acres of berries to the northeast of us here. Our one trouble is going to be the matter of containers, to hold them for winter when we dry or preserve them."

Claire lifted some of the berries to her lips. The taste reminded her of her forgotten hunger. But she watched Grimshaw as he removed article after article from his wattled carrier.

"For that reason," he went on, "I've brought these samples of clay from different cut-banks. One of them, I hope, will give us something we can fire into pottery and later glaze into a sort of porcelain. Then I've brought these bulrush roots. They're farinaceous and plenty of the northern Indians use them for flour. They also make a sort of sirup out of them. If you taste one you'll find it's quite palatable even in the raw state. I also stumbled across some cranberries, which we can gather later on. But my best finds were along the river. That seems the quarry that will give up most to us. These are pieces of sandstone, for sharpening and polishing. We have lots of it. And this is iron pyrites. If we had steel, or even iron, it could give us fire at any time, though I've seen Salteaux who've managed to get fire by striking it with quartz. I haven't succeeded at that, but it will at least give us sulphur, to help later on in drying our fruit. I was hoping for a glimpse of some ferruginous rock, to get the iron out of, or even some outcroppings of copper, which ought to be plentiful in this district. But that was one of my disappointments. I did find, though, this spruce-spar, into which I'm going to fit a flint head, to make you a spear. It will be tougher than poplar. And this longer shaft I've already polished and sharpened on sandstone, for myself. I speared this pike in one of the lower river-pools with it. But it's hardly strong enough as a spear for animal hunting, for the big game we'll have to get."

She looked up at him, with her characteristic pucker of perplexity on her face.

"Do you mean we've a chance of—of ever getting big game?" she demanded.

There was no hesitation in his head-nod of assent.

"And this is what we'll do it with," he said, as he lifted a larger piece of timber from his collection. "I intended, at first, to use swamp-elm which is both tough and wiry. But I'd the good luck to find this along the lower river-bank. I thought at first it was ironwood, but I can't be certain. At any rate it's been brought here by high-water, from heaven knows how far away, and left high and dry on our drift-pile. That means it's well-seasoned and ought to be almost as good as second-growth hickory for making each of us a bow. We'll have to use these pointed stones, for splitting it, and these shards of flint I'll have to chip into arrow-heads. The one thing still missing is sinew strong enough for bow-strings."

"And these other things?" asked the girl, stooping over what remained of his precious collection.

"The heavier flints are for ax-heads, to be bound on wooden handles. And that longer shred of flint I'm going to shape and polish into a knife for you. And that pointed bone will make us a fairly good awl. We'll need it when we trim and bind these tougher slabs of bark together for sandals, for we must have protection there before another day goes by."

The girl kneeling on the sand looked over their newly acquired store.

"All this," she finally said, "looks like—like success."

Grimshaw, with his bone knife, was already attacking the body of the huge pike.

"We can't call it success," he reminded her, "until we are sure of metal. For we can't campaign against bigger game until we have metal, or until we have animal-sinew for our bow-strings. And it's the larger game we have to count on. We need both their fur and their meat. And that reminds me that I was also looking for some traces of salt. There must be salt, for no animal, tame or wild, can live without it. But so far I've seen no sign of it."

They cooked and ate their meal more hurriedly than before, since Grimshaw found so many tasks awaiting him. Yet he stopped long enough to watch Claire as she knelt on the warm sand licking her fingers clean. It came home to him, with a small sense of shock, as he stared at her loosened hair and sun-browned skin, that she was already the victim of some vague process of barbarization. Yet as he fell to working on his spear-head and sat up to study her stooping figure while she struggled to bind the bark-sandals together with her bone-awl and fiber, he was oppressed by the innate defenselessness of the slender figure. She was without great strength; she was tender of skin; she was without teeth or talons for fighting; she was the most defenseless of all living creatures in the wilderness about them. Yet in that small and tragically vulnerable head of hers, he remembered, she had cunning. And that, he recalled as he shaped and bound his spear-head of flint into the split end of its seven-foot shaft, was the one thing that might save her and save him alike. They had the cunning to make tools, the wider knowledge, perhaps faded and fragmentary, of the wider world they had left behind them. And as they worked side by side he tried to make their situation clearer to his companion.

"This pole with the V-shaped branches at the end and the center point that makes it look like a Neptune's trident," he explained to her, "reminded me of the Eskimo's fishing-spear. The center point I'm going to divide with this flake of flint. I've chipped it into a sort of saw and with it can rasp a deep enough notch to bind in this polished tusk that I found in one of the lower clay-banks. It would be more permanent if I could do the binding with rawhide, for rawhide shrinks as it dries. But we must do the best we can, until we get our rawhide. These are virgin waters and there's fish enough in them to keep a camp of a hundred souls going. But we must get ahead of the game by drying and smoking as many as we can. When we get salt and I've a firing-kiln big enough to bake and glaze decent containers, we'll pickle them in brine. In nearly every instance here we have to remember what the Indian has done, and follow in his footsteps, for his situation, where he has survived in territory like this, has been exactly the same as ours."

"But have we the chance the Indian had?" asked Claire as she stopped in her work.

"In one way, we have a much better chance than the Indian, for we have a knowledge of things he never dreamed of, and we can take advantage of it. Our spears and traps and snares and bows and arrows will be like his, at first, but we know a good deal more about metals than he does, and once we've got them, of course, we can step up out of his Stone Age. But in another way we're weaker than the Indian. We haven't his primitive endurance. We can't survive a winter on his narrow diet of meat and fat. We must have greens and fruit and meal. But we've got them all, in some form or another, right about us. Our one problem is to prepare them and preserve them."

The woman kneeling on the sand sat back to think this over.

"It's not those things that are weighing on my mind," she acknowledged. "It's more the question of clothes. I've been trying to believe in you, in what you tell me, but I don't see how we can ever get along."

He sat back, with an understanding nod of the head.

"At first," he explained, "you'll have to wear rabbit-skin. But you'll have all you want of them, once we get our bows made and our trap-lines set out. Even your footwear and leggings can be made of that. But later on we'll have the softest of doe-skin for your under-clothing, and double-ply moose-hide lined with hare-skin for your moccasins. For your outer clothing you'll have buckskin sewed with the strongest of deer-sinew, and faced with fur if you like. Before the cold weather comes you'll have an entire suit made out of fur. And before winter sets in we'll have warm mittens and caps and sleeping-bags made of doubled rabbit-skin interlined with duck feathers."

This seemed to give her a great deal to think over. She sat silent for several moments. Then she looked up at Grimshaw with solemn eyes.

"I think you are wonderful!" she said with a small quaver of emotion in her voice. And her solemnity brought, for the first time, a deepening color of embarrassment to his dark face.

"No, there'll be little that's wonderful about it," he corrected. "There'll be a great many things we'll fail at. Some of our schemes, you'll find, won't quite work, and some of our traps will fail us, and some of our weapons won't prove of much use, perhaps. That's why we've got to have so many irons in the fire. We've got to have enough resources so that if one thing fails we can fall back on another. But our most pressing need now is weapons. So I'll have to ask your help in splitting this shaft of ironwood, or whatever it is, for our bows."

They carried their shaft and their carefully selected stone wedges to a flat shelf of rock. Then Grimshaw searched along the cliffs until he had found a heavy-ended slab of stone suitable as a mallet. Then after a careful study of the grain of the ironwood, he made an incision for the placing of the first wedge. As it required both his hands to wield the awkward sledge it was necessary for Claire to hold the pointed stone-shard in place, by means of a loop of willow-rope, until it was well-fixed between the widening fiber of the wood. Then another and still another wedge had to be added along the deepening split. But the wood was dishearteningly tough, and sometimes a wedge would break, and sometimes the uncontrolled cleavage of the tissue would spoil what promised to be a presentable bow-shaft. After an hour's hard work, however, Grimshaw had two rough bands of ironwood, one considerably thicker than the other, which he pronounced adequate for his purpose. Yet even more tiring work was their slow shaping and charring and grinding down by means of his supply of sandstone. Long before they were tapered and smoothed, in fact, he put them aside to show Claire how to bind the tying-straps on the sandals which she had so roughly fashioned. They were not altogether appealing to the eye, but when once adjusted to his bruised feet they proved such a relief that he announced his intention of at once carrying up the timbers for the making of a *starchigan* on which to cache their stores.

This stage he prepared by planting eight-foot poles in two rows before their shelter, with a running-piece lashed to the top of each row and lighter cross-pieces connecting the two. These poles Claire held in place while Grimshaw bound them together with his roughly-plaited ropes, making a sturdy pergola which, he explained, would place their possessions beyond the reach of forest prowlers.

"But we don't seem to have many possessions," objected Claire.

"We'll get them," was Grimshaw's confident reply.

They fell to work again on their bows, the girl taking the lighter strip of timber and the man the heavier. Patiently they ground down the rough edges with the slabs of sandstone, laboriously they wore away the tough-fibered wood to the desired thinness, carefully they preserved the symmetry of the tapering ends. Yet before their task was completed the sun swung low and the pangs of hunger once more assailed them.

It was as Claire stooped to place fresh wood on their fire that she stopped short, uttering a faint cry of excitement as her glance fell on one of the boulders which had formed a part of their primitive hearth. This boulder was dark and vitreous-looking. The heat from their coal-bed had shelled off a huge flake of the stone, a keen-edged fragment several pounds in weight, not unlike an antique battle-ax in general contour.

"Why wouldn't that make a hatchet-head?" asked Claire, as she caught up a stick and pushed the hot stone away from the ashes.

Grimshaw promptly joined her, and together they bent over the heavy flake of stone with the scimitar-like curve to its rough cutting-edge. He turned it over in the sand, studying it from every side. Then he studied the boulder from which the heat had shelled it.

"I don't know whether that's obsidian or a tachylyte," he said as he went back to the knife-edged fragment. "But it's the one thing we need. It reminds me of the *itztli* the Mexicans used to quarry at the Hill of Knives, near Timapan." He found a smaller flake and tested it with one of his larger flints. "It may even be meteoric. But at any rate it's tough enough for our purpose. And by chipping the butt of this piece we can bind it into a split haft and make a weapon that isn't to be despised."

He hesitated as he turned back to her.

"I'd like to get this done at once, and done while the light is good. Do you think you could cook supper, this time, while I'm working on a handle for our broad-ax?"

She smiled at his hesitancy.

"That's my duty, isn't it?" she said with a shortness which brought his eyes around to hers.

"Only when I've provided you with the proper means," he amended as he took the bone knife from her fingers and knelt before the huge pike that lay between them. Instead of scaling it, however, he went to the river and returned with a mass of wet clay, which he molded about the fish from end to end. "This fellow," he said, as he added still more clay to the mass, "we'll bake in a bed of coals. Then when we knock off the dried clay you'll find that the scales come with it. And baking will give it a somewhat different flavor. We need that, for we've been running to fish more than I care for. Tomorrow I intend to vary things by having some Canada grouse."

But it was not Canada grouse with which they varied their diet the next day. For as they sat in the gathering twilight quietly finishing their meal Claire was puzzled by a sudden change that crept over her companion. He stopped short, in the act of lifting a rogan of water to his lips, and sat staring ahead of him. Then his eyes narrowed, and with a motion for silence he waited again, moistening a forefinger in his mouth and holding it above his head.

Claire had no knowledge as to the meaning of this strange rite, just as she knew nothing of the sound that had crept to his sensitized woodsman's ears. But she saw a sudden change in his demeanor. She saw his face harden and his breath quicken as he swung noiselessly about and caught up the unfinished stone ax, which he studied for a moment with a look of frustration. He dropped it on the sand again, reaching for his wooden spear and his knife-blade of pointed bone. Then, crouching low, and still without a spoken word, he crept along the base of the cliff, toward the lower river.

Claire stood watching him, amazed by a change in him which she could not comprehend. She watched him, stunned by the thought of how he had merged from a companionable human being, quietly talking of how they could boil water by filling large-sized rogans of birchbark at the spring and dropping into them hot stones from their fire, merged into a crafty and crawling animal groping its guarded way through the pale northern twilight. He looked pre-Adamitic and paleolithic as he crept cautiously down between the shadowy river-rocks, suddenly barbaric and brutalized, a prehistoric hunter drunk with blood-lust and intent on a kill. She watched him as he snaked, silent as a shadow, upon the rough rock-shelf that overlooked one of the bigger river-pools. She watched him as he advanced, inch by inch, along the top of this rock. And when he lowered his body, flat along the rock-top, so that she could no longer catch any glimpse of him, a thin fear took possession of her with the passing of the prolonging minutes, and instinctively she looked about for a weapon. She reached for the lighter spear into which Grimshaw had spliced the head of pointed flint. Then step by step she followed after him.

She stopped once, as she caught sight of him again. He had drawn back and risen on all fours, apparently to change the position of his spear-shaft. She could see that as he advanced stealthily, inch by studious inch, he held the pointed wooden shaft poised in his right hand, in a position for striking. She tried to picture the animal above which that spear swung suspended, the unsuspecting animal in the brown waters under the out-jutting rock-shelf. She knew, from the intensity of the hunter's momentary poise, that it was no trivial creature he was tracking. She concluded, with a small chill of horror, that it was a black bear or a silver-tip, overtaken as it fished lazily in the quiet water fringed with lily-

pads. She had heard that bears did such things, recalling broken scraps of talk, of hunters' talk, about the fireplace of her country club. But she knew, too, that a pointed wooden shaft was no adequate weapon against any such monster of the wild.

Then all speculation on the matter ended abruptly, for she caught Grimshaw's hoarse shout as he lunged with his spear, lunged with all his strength. Before she knew it she was running forward, with her own spear poised above her head, calling shrilly as she ran. Both her cry and her movements were unwilling, infected as she was with the excitement of her mate. Yet for the second time that mate startled her. For before she had even reached the rock where he stood he had leaped bodily into the water below him, shouting again as he went, with his bone knife clasped in his hand.

She heard a guttural sound, half a grunt and half a roar, as she ran to the rock-edge. And then she realized her mistake. For in the water already stained with crimson she saw not a bear, but a wide-antlered head with ugly small eyes and an even uglier thick snout. She knew at once that it was a moose, a bull moose. And she knew the man was fighting it, fighting it almost barehanded, as they threshed together in the bloody water where Grimshaw's ineffectual wooden spear had already wounded it in the shoulder. She saw the man's sinewed hand close on the twisting antler as man and beast went together under the surface of the water. She saw the heave and strain of the huge shoulders as the man struck and struck again at the thick-haired neck. She saw the striking fore-paws as the beast lifted itself almost bodily from the water, with the man tossed aside and the wattled tunic torn from his body, leaving his back and shoulders white in the twilight as he clutched at the ruffed neck and again closed in on his enemy.

It made her think of Pleistocene beasts in the twilight of time, primordial things out of some more brutal age engaged in primordial combat. She saw a runnel of red on the pumping white arm as the hand that held the trivial bone knife smote against the thick-hided monster. She saw two heaving and gasping and grunting hulks, one white and one dark, writhing and battling in what might have been antediluvian slime. Then the thing became sickening, for she saw that Grimshaw, in his desperation, was aiming his knife-strokes at the eyes of the infuriated bull, who roared again as the thin blade struck deep and a thicker runnel of blood oozed down his head. But a sudden shake and twist of the heavy neck sent the clinging white body catapulting through the air. The watching girl saw that body go under the water. She saw the flailing pointed hoofs beat down upon it and send it still deeper. She waited, with her heart in her mouth, for Grimshaw to emerge again.

Then she could wait no longer. She screamed, without knowing she was doing so, as she clutched her spear closer to her body and dove into the reddened water, even as the hand holding the bone knife showed above its surface. And she knew, the next moment, that Grimshaw had not succeeded in blinding the animal, as he had intended, for she could see the huge antlered head swing about on the weakened swimmer still gasping for breath.

She cried aloud for the second time as a strong stroke or two carried her toward the long-haired wide rump rising out of the water. She caught at that writhing wide rump, clung to it, drew herself up on the sloping furred body and sat astride it as it battled with the white-skinned swimmer now clinging to one of its antlers. Then as she balanced herself there she grasped her spear-shaft midway in both hands and brought the pointed flint head down against the ridged backbone directly under her. She felt the point sink into the flesh, she felt the warm blood ooze up against her leg. But again and again, with an ever increasing savagery, she stabbed along the bony spine. She was still vaguely wondering why she could not strike deeper when a sudden tremor passed through the grunting body under her. It subsided into passiveness. It lapsed away under her, an inert mass, as Grimshaw caught at her arm and supported her to shallow water, where he had to exert all that was left of his strength to wrest the spear from her hand.

"Is it dead?" she gasped as she clung to him, panting.

"Are you all right?" he asked instead of answering her question.

"Yes, I'm all right," she told him, breathing deep. "But you're hurt!"

"Nothing but a bruise or two," he pantingly assured her. "You—you struck him through the spine and paralyzed him. And you kept him from killing me."

"But why, why did you take a risk like this?"

"We needed him," was his brief retort.

"Not as much as I need you," she reproved, conscious for the first time of the coldness of the water in which she was

standing knee-deep. Then she cried out as he turned and waded into the deeper pool-end with her spear in his hand: "What are you doing?"

"I've got to finish him off and get the carcass into shallow water," he called back, once more master of himself. "It's safe enough, after this!"

She turned away as she heard the sounds of that unlovely execution, feeling that she had seen enough of blood for one night.

When she looked back she saw that Grimshaw had recovered his tattered willow tunic and was once more tying it about his wet body. A moment later he came wading through the shallow water to her side.

"We must go back to the fire," he said as he took her hand and led her up to solid ground again.

"But your moose?" she objected, glancing back to where the furred dark mass lay half-submerged in the shallows.

"You're more important than the moose," he asserted curtly enough, as he picked his way back over the broken rocks, leading her after him as he went.

"But I don't see how you could do a thing like this," she said with a glance back at the inert antlered body in the pool-water. She noticed that he had lost his sandals in the fight and that blood oozed from a broad scrape along his forearm.

He did not answer her until they were in front of the shelter again and he had thrown fresh wood on their fire.

"Do you realize what that bull means to us?" he demanded as he seated her in the glow of the flames and found the unfinished stone hatchet, which he fell to binding more securely to its roughly shaped hasp. "That means moose-hide, enough moose-hide for a complete suit for you, and moccasins for us both. It means warmth and comfort again. And it means sinew for sewing, and strong cords for our bows, and decent thongs for our rabbit-snares. It means strings for fish-lines. And from the gut-walls, properly cured, we can twist threads for gill-nets. But, more than all, it means meat for us, several hundred pounds of meat which we can cut up and smoke and dry. It's bull meat, and not the best in the world, but it's something to know we have that store between us and starvation, until our other plans are well under way."

"But that great hulk—" she began.

"Yes, it must weigh nearly half a ton. There were two of them, at first, two bulls fighting. One got away. But we got the other, and he'll keep me busy enough to-night. For before I turn in I must have every pound of him up on our *starchigan*. That's why I must have this ax, to hack him into quarters after I get the hide off him."

"Then I must help," asserted the girl kneeling beside the fire.

But Grimshaw shook his head.

"No, it'll be too wet and too bloody down there for you. And there may be wolves prowling around, after they sniff the kill. I'll take a burning stick from our fire here and build a fresh one on the rock above the pool. These northern nights never grow entirely dark, and a good blaze will give me all the light I want. It may take me a long time. So the best thing for you to do, after you're warm and dry, is to turn in and get your night's rest. You've done enough, it seems to me, for one day!"

She sat beside the fire watching him as he picked out the sharper flakes of flint from his store and took up his stone ax and a burning brand from the fire and made his way once more down the shadowy river-valley. She saw the light of the glowing brand-end diminish as the distance widened between them. She saw it, eventually, disappear entirely from view. But as she stared through the gloom she soon saw an answering flame leap up along the rocky ledge of the river-bank. She saw it grow as the shadow moving about it flung fresh wood across it. And she found something consolatory and heartening in that companioning fire as it wavered and glowed across the deepening night and the figure that moved now and then across its radiance reminded her that she was not utterly alone in that high-vaulted silence which seemed to engulf her.

She had intended to sit there and await Grimshaw's return. But that day of strange toil had left her heavy with undreamed weariness. Once, in fact, she fell asleep as she sat there on the sand with her back against a warm stone.

She wakened, what seemed to her hours later, and sat up in her shelter couch, to see Grimshaw stagger past the fire with a huge mass of flesh that dripped red as he walked. This impressed her as occurring many times, though she was too drugged with drowsiness to keep any conscious tally of his trips. When she did fully awaken it was to see him with the last of the gore decently washed from his arms and shoulders in the river. He was kneeling beside the bed of coals with a long stick in his hand. The pointed end of this stick was thrust into a red slab of moose-meat which he held over the coals and watched intently as it browned in the heat.

Claire also, as she sat up in her couch, watched that frizzling slab of meat. She watched it with an unwilling and unstudied eagerness, wondering at the sudden disquieting ache of hunger which took possession of her as the night-breeze wafted an aroma of cooking flesh in to her nostrils. She saw Grimshaw draw that flesh back and solemnly inspect it. She saw him just as solemnly wave it in the night air to cool it. Then she emerged from the shelter and knelt down on the sand beside him.

"What is it?" he asked, alarmed by that unheralded appearance.

"I'm hungry," she said quite simply.

And they smiled together not unhappily, as he placed the slab of meat on a stone and divided it with one of his flakes of flint.

"This is the lip I've cooked," he explained as he handed one piece to the waiting woman. "It's the most palatable part of a moose."

She held the chunk of coal-browned flesh in her hand and sank her teeth into it.

"It's good," she said with child-like satisfaction as she shredded the warm meat between her strong young teeth. But her cave-mate did not answer her. He was too intent, at the moment, on the appeasing of his own hunger.



CHAPTER X

Grimshaw was up before the sun, the next morning, for he knew his day was to be a full one. By the time Claire was ready to sit down to a breakfast of blue-berries, and bannock made of parched bulrush-bulbs pounded between stones into flour, and moose-meat broiled over the coals he had rewashed the heavy furred skin and laid it out for scraping. He had also split the skull of the moose and saved the brains, to be used in curing his portions of hide, and had washed and stretched certain sections of the intestines which he wished to steep in lye and prepare for binding and fishing fiber. He had also worked over the broad band of precious white sinew which he had dug out along the huge creature's spine. This tough fibrous tissue, he knew, he could cure and split again and again until it was as fine as linen thread and many times as durable. Even Claire uttered a cry of delight as he showed her a strand of this sinew which he had soaked and shredded and smoked over the fire and rubbed with fish-fat until it was as pliant as a thread of silk.

"This," he exultantly told her, "is our life-saver. For with it now we can sew clothes together, and make moccasins, and bind on our arrow-heads. Some of it, too, we can tie on to the ends of our rougher fish-lines."

But that was not his only cause for exultation on this particular morning. For when he was scouring the lower river shallows searching for stones which might break with a sufficiently sharp edge to serve for scraping-knives, in cleaning his moose-skin, he stumbled on a find which brought a shout of triumph from his throat.

Claire, who was carrying bank-clay to a scooped-out hole in the sand close to their shelter, to make a puddle-basin in which to soak the green hide in a lye of wood-ashes, looked up in wonder at that sudden shout. She saw Grimshaw staggering toward her with a ragged triangle of ribbed planking on his shoulders. She realized, as he came closer, that what he carried was a pointed fragment of dressed boards with broken ends; and she thought, at first, that his joy arose merely from the discovery of something which might serve them as a table. But she knew different, once he had dropped his burden on the sand beside their shelter.

"Look!" he cried with shining eyes. "Another life-saver! That's a piece of my lost york-boat. I found it wedged under a tangle of driftwood!"

The girl stood staring down at it, with an odd fluttering of the heart. It was all that remained to them, she remembered, of their lost world, all that connected them with the life they had once lived.

"This is what counts," exulted Grimshaw as he turned the pointed ribbed planking over on the sand. "See the metal on it there! Thank God, it's brought us metal!"

Claire gazed down at the converging boards of the bow banded with a strip of two-inch wrought-iron as thick as a wagon-tire. It met in a V-shaped angle of metal, twisted together at the point to form a loop through which a hawser could be passed. But Claire failed to see to what use this odd-shaped piece of metal could be put.

"I had that forged and bolted on last year," explained her companion, "for hauling dunnage across the lake. Altogether, there should be nine or ten pounds of metal there, counting the bolts. And there's the nails, besides. There should be at least three dozen of them. Do you realize what that means?"

"But they'll be crooked and rusted," she complained as she stooped closer over the ribbed planking.

"What difference does that make?" asked Grimshaw, laughing almost drunkenly. "I'll build a forge and weld them over. That means arrow-heads, metal-pointed arrow-heads, and all the fish-hooks we want. And this iron ring means a knife for you, a knife that I can hammer out and point and whet to the sharpest of cutting-edges. And this heavier piece means an ax, a real ax for me, an ax into which I can put a haft and cut trees and shape timbers and fashion boards. Think of it! That means a house for us, a white man's house made weather-tight and rain-proof, a house we can be proud of, a house with furniture and comfort. And there'll be enough metal left over, by using the bolts, to make us a good-sized hunting-knife, a knife that I can point and temper and polish and fit a heavy horn handle to."

Instead of staring down at the metal, Claire was staring into her companion's face. That face, at the moment, was contorted with fantastic joy which waywardly impressed her as holding a touch of the pathetic. He was exulting over a few pounds of rusty iron as rhapsodically as though he had stumbled on a second Klondike. Yet as she watched him while he fell feverishly to work, with all his older plans for the day forgotten, she grew into a vague realization of what

Grimshaw's find was going to mean to them. It meant tools for the fashioning of other tools, knives for the cutting and trimming of hides, for the making of better bows and arrows, for the gathering of wood and bark, for the manufacture of weapons of offense and defense, for the blazing of trails, for the shaping of snow-shoes, even for the making of a boat to carry them away when the spring break-up came along. At a bound, she began to see, they had leaped from the Stone Age of man at his most primitive into the Age of Iron, the age where man stood clearly triumphant over the brutes which surrounded him, over the forces which had held him in thrall, which had made him so namelessly afraid of the night and the fanged things that haunted the night.

Although she failed to see just how this rusty metal was to be converted to their uses she insisted on a division of labor in preparing for the task ahead of them. And it was not a simple task. For after finding and placing a flat boulder which would serve as an anvil, Grimshaw had to equip himself with a pair of tongs for handling the hot metal and a hammer for pounding it. The hammer he made from a flat-headed stone which he chipped about the middle so as to hold firm in a split wooden haft to which he lashed it. The tongs, which had to be both sturdy and fire-proof, he fashioned by taking two long and narrow flakes of slate-stone, which he ground smooth and bound with strips of his green moose-hide to the ends of two slightly curved pieces of birch-wood, so that the stone points protruded some eight inches beyond the wood. The two pieces of wood he then crossed and lashed together, scissors-like, in the center. When he took this rough instrument in his hands and closed the slate jaws on a piece of stone lying in the sand, he found that he could lift the stone up and place it where he wished.

His next task, he explained to his companion, was to build a forge, for he saw that he could not obtain a fusing heat without a forced draught. But before he went about this he instructed Claire in the process of securing charcoal, by piling billets of wood on their ends so as to form a conical pile, with a central shaft to serve as a flue and an opening at the bottom sufficient to admit air. The cone was then covered with wet earth and sand and a fire was started by placing a few coals from the hearth-blaze at its bottom.

While this was slowly burning Grimshaw set to work on his forge. He built it of stone carefully chinked with wet clay, leaving a hollow coal-basin at the top and at the bottom a small vent for his bellows-pipe.

It was, however, the making of the bellows that caused him the most trouble. He hoped, at first, to find a hollow bough to serve as a draught-conductor to the bottom of the fire-basin. But after a fruitless search for something to fill this need he was forced to go back to the carcass of his moose. There he hacked away a leg-bone, burned off the flesh and sinew over his coals, and with Claire's flint-headed spear forced the marrow out of the hollow shank. Then he rimmed it clean and ground the ends smooth on chunks of sandstone which the girl carried to his side. Then after a long search through the piles of river-side driftwood he found two short slabs of split tamarack, thin enough for his purpose. These he charred and chipped and ground into a smooth-edged oval-shape, tapering to a point at one end. Then, while Claire ventured into the wooded uplands to gather spruce-gum, he reluctantly turned to his store of moose-hide and cut away enough of the green skin to make a bellows cover. He resmoked the hide over the charcoal fire, scraped away what was left of the mack and hair, washed it again, dried it, dressed it with a mixture of fish-fat and brains, and worked it over the sharp edge of a near-by timber until it took on some degree of pliancy. He next drilled holes through the narrower ends of his wooden slabs, ground away a groove into which to fit the leg-bone of the deer, and lashed one slab hinge-wise to the other. Over this, after adjusting two handles to the wider ends of his slabs, he fitted his disks of moose-hide. When he had them fashioned and trimmed to his liking, he made a narrow vent in what would be the back end of his bellows, carefully stitching on the inside of it a flat oblong of slate-stone enclosed in rawhide, swinging free on its hinged top, so that when the bellows were compressed it would act as a valve to prevent air from escaping through the vent, yet when they were expanded would permit air to be sucked in through the same vent.

When he had made sure this would work with reasonable freedom, he whetted a fresh point on his bone awl, made ready his strands of sinew, and with infinite patience sewed the overlapping edges of moose-skin together. Then, in an effort to render it air-proof, he carefully covered every awl-hole with hot spruce-gum into which he had stirred a trace of rendered moose-fat, going over every inch of the seams again and again and coating the entire surface with a water-proof sizing of Canada-balsam pitch. Then he just as carefully bound and gummed the holes through which the handles protruded and also the point into which the hollow leg-bone had been inserted. While this was placed aside to set he proceeded to build a framework for holding his bellows in position at the side of his fire-basin, adjusting to it a rocking-lever and connecting-rod which could be lashed to his lower bellows-handle.

When he went back to his bellows and took them up Claire, who had been building a smaller fire under the fragment of

boat-siding to set free the nails and band-iron, promptly stopped her work and joined him. Together they held their breath as he took the strange-looking contrivance by its two handles, compressing and expanding them as he pointed the tip of the leg-bone toward the sand at their feet.

A blast of air blew aside a little cloud of sand-grains and Grimshaw huskily muttered: "I've got it!"

So his next task was to fit his bellows in place beside the fire-basin, inserting the leg-bone into the hole he had left at the basin-bottom and mortaring it carefully up with well-kneaded clay.

"This may look like a heavier and bigger forge than we need," he explained as he worked. "But by running up these outside walls with clay bricks, after we've finished our iron-working, I'm hoping to make a kiln where we can fire our pottery under forced draught. For the next thing we're going to need is pots and dishes. And if we have heat enough, after they're fired, we can refire them with sand silicates and get a glaze on them. I want to get something we can safely cook in. And we'll need fair-sized storage-crocks. But once we've got our ax, of course, we can make pails and tubs out of wood."

"You mean *you* can," corrected the girl, as she carefully pushed the burning boat-timbers together, where the protruding nail-ends showed her the harvest awaiting them.

"You'll learn," said Grimshaw as he fashioned a second basin of clay on the sand close beside his forge-wall. This, when filled with water, was to serve as a tempering-basin.

When he had finished this he gave his attention to Claire's ash-pile, from which he rescued the liberated V of band-iron and found it to be slightly lighter than he had expected. From the ashes, however, he raked out thirty-three medium-sized nails, most of them bent, and five larger spikes. He announced, after a study of the latter, that from them he could make his companion a pair of scissors and two table knives, reserving one nail for himself. This, he surprised her by saying, he intended to beat out into a razor-blade, to be tempered in oil, when he had enough fat saved up for the purpose, and whetted on an oil-stone until he had given it the right cutting-edge.

But the morning had slipped away, as they worked, and they were compelled to stop and eat a hurried meal. Then they turned to firing a second kiln of charcoal, Grimshaw explaining that they must have an abundance of fuel to keep their metal hot, once they had begun to work it over on their anvil.

His first difficulty, however, was to get the bolts free from the perforated band-iron, for the nuts, he found, were rusted tightly in place and he had no tool for unscrewing them. So he decided that he would first have to make and temper a chisel from one of these bolts, which he thought he could heat and cut in two by means of a sharp-edged stone. The latter he fashioned by taking a pointed flake of flint and lashing it at right-angle to a short stick, testing it with a hammer-blow or two to make sure it was strong enough for his purpose.

When all was ready he filled his fire-basin with live coals, piled charcoal on top of them, and showed Claire how to work the pumping-lever so as to supply a continuous forced draught. When the forge became an incandescent mass of coals he thrust into it the end of his band-iron.

Sooner even than she had expected the girl beheld the edges of the metal turn red, beheld it brighten to a cherry glow. She saw her companion take it from the forge, bed it securely on his stone anvil, and by holding his flint-chisel across one of the glowing bolts, pound off its head. Then, resorting to his slate-tongs, he lifted the freed bolt back into the forge-coals, reheated it, restored it to his anvil, and with studied blows from his square-headed stone hammer flattened and pointed one end. Seeing it was impossible to draw it to a sufficiently fine cutting edge with his rough hammer, he once more heated his stub of metal, ground down the point with a slab of sandstone while it was still incandescent, and plunged it hissing into the water-basin beside the forge.

When it had cooled there he took it up again, polished its cutting-edge on a larger piece of sandstone, and with a smile of triumph handed it silently to the watching girl, who stared at it with curious eyes, weighing it in her wondering fingers and testing its edge against the palm of her hand.

"And that's only the beginning," asserted her companion as he made ready to go on with his work.

Claire, pumping dutifully on the bellows-lever, saw him cut the glowing band-iron into desired lengths, chisel free the remaining bolts, reheat two of the larger portions, and gradually shape the incandescent mass into the rough semblance of

a long-bladed knife.

It was not easy to do, and once the brittle point of his tongs broke off and had to be replaced by a heavier slab of slate. He had to stop, too, to fashion one of his precious spikes into a metal punch, to make holes in the hot metal haft over which a heavier horn handle might be riveted. And even when he had gone as far as he was able with his smithy work, and had straightened and ground and tempered his tapering blade, it took a disheartening amount of grinding to reduce it to a satisfactory cutting edge. But gradually the hollows vanished from the hammered metal and the long blade took on the polish of completion. Even the contemplation of it, as Grimshaw stood with his prize balanced in his blackened hand, seemed to go to his head, like wine, and he turned exultantly back to his work.

While his metal for the ax was heating he drew out two of the smaller nails into sewing-awls, fashioning them so that they could be later fitted with handles of polished bone. Then he turned to the making of fish-hooks. Finding that he could not work his metal wires fine enough with his stone hammer, he lashed his flat-topped steel chisel to a handle and used that for turning the points and welding a rough barb on their ends. These, after perforating the stems with one of his new awls and tempering by immersing red-hot in the cooling-basin, he placed to one side for later polishing and sharpening by hand. And, by the time he had shaped a dozen arrow-points, the metal for his ax was ready for the anvil.

It was the making of the ax-head, however, that gave him the greatest amount of trouble, for here Grimshaw had to face not mere shaping of hot metal, but its actual welding together. He was compelled, in the first place, to keep a careful watch on the fire, so that his metal would come from it in a pasty condition but not over-oxidized by too much heat. He had also to make sure that his joints were free from scale or ash, and in uniting his semi-fused fragments it was necessary to see that the direction of the fiber was so arranged as to secure the maximum amount of strength. Being without borax to use as a flux, he had to resort to the expedient of sprinkling his joints with fine sand. And with all his care it was a rough-looking thing when he had finished.

Yet, when he took it from the cooling-basin, he studied it with a satisfied eye.

"It's nothing to be proud of," he admitted to his helper. "But we can grind it into shape at our leisure. It will never be hard enough to keep a permanent edge, I'm afraid, but with it I can always carry a whetstone for pointing it up again. And when I attach it to a good stout handle, to-morrow, it will fell any tree in this forest and shape any timber we are able to carry."

Then he noticed, for the first time, that the sun had dropped down behind the pointed firs and day had vanished as he worked. So once more they were compelled to stop and eat.

Grimshaw took up his long hunting-knife, smiled down at it contentedly, and with it proceeded to slice thin cutlets of moose-meat. These Claire broiled over the coals.

They consumed their cutlets and what was left of their berries and bulrush bulbs, washed down with spring water.

"This is the last day we'll have to stick to an Indian diet like this," announced Grimshaw as he inspected their bare bark platters. "After this we are going to select our fish and game and waterfowl, and we're also going to have a little more variety in our diet. As soon as I can get my pottery made, in fact, we'll have hot tea with our meals."

"Ordered up from the corner grocery," suggested Claire, accepting his last statement as of purely ironic intent.

"No, gathered here in the wilderness," explained the other. "Labrador tea grows thick in our muskegs, and I've known Ceylon that tasted worse. And even roasted dandelion-roots make a fairly palatable beverage, though I suppose we ought to call it coffee rather than tea. Some Indians use spicebush for tea and the Crees have always steeped green willow-bark in hot water and drunk it with zest. And it was a nice instinct drove them to it, since a decoction of green bark like that was the one thing healthful for a race of steady meat-eaters."

Claire did not answer him, for the twilight silence was broken by the prolonged and dismal howling of a wolf. Grimshaw noticed her face shadow, at the sound. But he forced a laugh as he looked out over the hills.

"And before the week's over, O Seeker of Carrion, we'll be tanning your hide in one of our stretching-frames," he called out across the darkening hills. But the sound seemed to remind him that he still had work to do. For he rose to his feet, threw a prodigal amount of fresh wood on the fire, and replenished the banked coals of his forge.

"While we're at it," he announced, "I want to get your spear-head made. When our fire burns up here it will give enough light to work by. And once you've got a good spear with a seven-foot shaft you'll know you're protected from prowlers like that."

So he set to work, marshalling what was left of his larger pieces of metal and selecting the likeliest portion for the spear. But by the time the fire-basin had been pumped up into a white bed of coals, and the metal had been heated until it threw off a shower of sparks under the hammer-blows of the hairy-faced man in the ragged wattled tunic smeared with ashes and scorched with flame, night had deepened about them. Claire, as she stood at the bellows-lever and studied the uncouth figure bent over the uncouth stone anvil, was prompted to think of him as a prehistoric Vulcan adventuring along earth's earliest paths in metal-working. She did not know whether it arose from sheer physical weariness, or from something profounder, but as she abstractedly inspected that swart figure intent on his labor he took on a ghostly air of pathos, an aura of wistfulness, which she found it hard to understand. He seemed the last man left in a lonely and life-forsaken world, a world which had wandered out of its accustomed orbit and had gone circling down desolate meadows of space, never to return to the ways it had once known. He seemed a being infinitely remote from her, as incomprehensible to her as she herself stood and must stand incomprehensible to him.

And as this thought crept over her it was followed by a sudden surge of lonesomeness which swept the warmth out of her tired body and the gladness of living out of her heart. She drew a sharp breath at the sting of isolation immeasurable and, for the moment, overwhelming.

Yet when he turned to her, a moment later, with small runnels of sweat glinting along his heat-flushed face and the light of conquest in his solemn eyes as he showed her the pointed spear-head in his hands, a returning surge of hope, as unexpected as it was unwilled, brought warmth back to her wearied body. She was startled by a great gladness at the knowledge that she was not as utterly alone as she might have been.

"It seems odd," she said as they rested beside their fire that midnight, "but you've never told me anything about yourself."

"We don't seem to have had much time for going into those things," he acknowledged with a none too encouraging curtness of tone.

"What is your name?" she asked with cool deliberation. "Your name beside Grimshaw?"

"Shomer," he told her.

"Are you married?" she next inquired, equally deliberate.

"No," was his prompt retort.

"But things must have happened to you," she persisted, "things of importance. Surely there's something worth mentioning or knowing out of your past?"

Grimshaw leaned forward to bank his fire. His movements, as he did so, seemed to take on a touch of the symbolic.

"We have no pasts, out here," was all he said.

CHAPTER XI

"You're killing yourself," averred Claire the next morning as she studied Shomer Grimshaw's face while he struggled to fit a haft to his ax-head. She noticed the increased temporal hollows above the ursine-looking jaw now covered with its growth of beard, the shadows under the prominent cheek-bone, the stringiness of the thick neck reddened with sun and wind and mosquito-bites.

Grimshaw laughed, but there was small trace of merriment in his laughter.

"I'm doing exactly the reverse," he proclaimed. "We've got to make hay while the sun shines. And until we've made our hay there's going to be no holiday."

"But you'll overdo it," protested the cloudy-eyed girl, "and get sick."

"People, I've noticed, don't get sick at this sort of thing. They harden up. And even a wound, in this clean air, heals without infection. It's your city people who suffer from that, the softlings who have no endurance because they never endure."

And often, during her work that morning, Claire found that sentence of his returning to her mind: "They have no endurance because they never endure." Time and time again she found herself thinking of Hillcrest, of her home with its unconsidered luxuries, with its bewilderingly complicated apparatus of service, with its illusory banishment of actuality. Homes like that had taken the gift of labor away from the modern woman, had left her pathetically idle and empty-handed. She was no longer bothered by this frontier business of wood-getting and water-carrying, of weaving and stitching and tanning, of the grinding of meal and the gutting of animals. Their grandmothers and their grandmothers' mothers had done that, she remembered, the pioneers of a century ago, the sturdier men and women who came to a new country and built houses for themselves and found ore and smelted it and made plows and axes and felled trees and cleared their own land and cut their timber into planks and grew grain and ground it into flour and tanned hide for their footwear and spun wool and wove it into clothing. Yet their happier children's children, immured in their latter-day machinery of comfort, had to turn to play, to play like the play of children, to keep from going mad. Their toil and their tasks had been taken away from them and to avoid dying of inertia and *ennui* they desperately invented games and fashioned trivial little pastimes and turned to cars and cards, to games and clubs and clan-rivalries, to the end that they might not remember their own helplessness.

She thought of those things in a way she had never thought of them before as she fared forth into the deeper forest at Grimshaw's side, to help him at his pressing new task of building a bear-trap. It was to be a dead-fall, he explained to her, and she would be of use to him in steadying the timbers while he fixed them in place. "They have no endurance, because they never endured," she repeated as she watched his corded neck swell under the strain of lifting an especially heavy timber into position.

Grimshaw constructed his dead-fall, she noticed, by first placing what he called his bed-log so that it lay a trifle less than knee-high on the ground. Then on each side of this bed-log, about eight feet apart, he drove two heavy stakes. In the slots between these uprights, above the bed-log, he placed the heavy drop-log, as large a piece of timber as he could possibly handle. One end of this timber he lifted and supported by a prop, made in the shape of a figure 4, with releasing trigger attached. Then over the adjusted drop-log was carefully placed half a dozen load-logs, further weighted with flat stones.

The bait for this huge trap was placed inside and well to the back of the dead-fall, which was already walled in at the sides and rear by brush and small timber so that a bear, in looking for a meal, would be compelled to step in over the bed-log before reaching the jack-fish with which Grimshaw baited the trigger-stick. And any disturbing of this fish meant the releasing of the prop and the springing of the trap. And that, Grimshaw pointed out to his thoughtful-eyed helper, would crush the invading animal under a sudden descent of weighted logs.

He did not tarry long, however, over that ominous instrument of death. A few tools of sharpened iron may have somewhat transformed life for him, but they did not appreciably lessen the tasks awaiting him. And one of his earliest duties, he explained to Claire, was to finish the work on their bows and arrows.

This, with the help of metal, he could do more adroitly than before. He could now refashion the tough wooden bow into

a flat "back" and rounded "belly," with a five-inch handle a little below the center where the timber was heaviest and where he sought to improve the "grip" by wrapping the wood with moose-hide. Then he notched the tapered ends and made a bow-string of fine-cut moose-skin plaited together. It was the arrows, however, that gave him the most difficulty, for not only was it hard to find seasoned wood with a perfectly straight grain, but even after heading and pointing his arrows with nail-iron he found it no easy matter to feather the ends, since wind-feathers with a natural curve were needed to impart the required rotary movement to the loosened shaft. His supply of these was still limited and as he was without the utensils for making a proper fish-glue he was compelled to fix the divided heron pinions in place by indenting the wood, covering the countersunk feather-rib with hot spruce-gum and wrapping the end with a few turns of fine sinew while the gum was still warm.

When he had completed this none too easy task he called Claire from her work and led her to a second cove farther down the river where a small cut-bank of soft clay provided them with a target which threatened no injury to their arrows. On the face of this clay he marked a rough "buffalo-eye." Then he showed Claire how to fit the notched arrow-end into the bow-string, how to hold the bow firmly in the left hand and pull back with the right until the arrow-head was drawn up to the stave, how to take aim by varying the position of the back-drawn left hand, and how to release the bow-string and deliver the bolt, once the target had been determined.

She cried out, in astonishment, at the trueness with which the feathered arrow sped through the air and buried its head in the moist clay. When Grimshaw pointed out to her, however, that she was only twenty paces from her target and that most of her shooting would have to be done at a distance almost ten times as great, she grew more solemn-eyed over the new toy which had seemed to balance itself so pleasantly in her outstretched left hand.

"It can never be done," she announced with decision.

Grimshaw, without answering her, took up his longer bow and fitted an arrow to the string. Then he walked back forty paces, turned, and drew the arrow back to its full length.

It sank deep in the clay, a little more than a foot away from the outer ring of the "buffalo-eye." And a small gasp of admiration broke from the watching girl.

"No, it's not wonderful," countered her fellow archman. "It's not even respectable. But we'll improve with time, for every spare hour we have, now, we must put in practising archery. It was with a thing like this, remember, that the Plains Indians used to bring down a buffalo. And over two thousand years ago the Cretans could send an arrow through an ox-hide shield at a hundred and twenty paces. Even the earlier Welsh archers could put an arrow through a four-inch door of seasoned oak, and I remember reading about some Japanese bowman of the seventeenth century, whose name I can't remember, who in one day shot over eight thousand arrows down a test-corridor four hundred feet in length. Even in ordinary sporting archery, I know, they think nothing of a range of three hundred feet and there are recorded shots of a thousand feet. We can never expect to match that, naturally, but day by day we'll grow better at the trick, and before a month is gone you'll think nothing of knocking over rabbits and waterfowl at fifty paces."

He paused to watch Claire place another arrow, draw back the string, and send the head into the wet clay, a little deeper than the first.

"Even that is better," he said as he watched a third and a fourth, with the girl dropping back a pace or two at each shot.

"It *seems* vicious enough," acknowledged the brown-armed figure with the bow in her hand, "but I can't help feeling it would never be effective against bigger animals."

"Against what, for instance?" he asked as he studied the Artemis-like poise of the little lean body, with its one coffee-tinted shoulder thrust back and its rounded arm stretched out to the slowly flexed stave.

"Well, against a bear or a bull moose," she said as she let the arrow fly toward its target. "Or even a wolf. What chance would I have against a wolf with only a wooden bow like this?"

"I once saw a Chippewan boy of eleven kill a wolf that was robbing a cache. He did it with a bow like yours, and he did it at fifty paces. You'd scarcely believe what you can do with that bow, even in one week's time. But, on the whole, I'd prefer that you left the bigger animals to me."

She stopped short, at that, and turned to him.

"Then you expect them to find you?" she queried.

"No," he retorted, "I expect to find them."

This seemed to puzzle her.

"And you'd face a bear, in the open, with nothing more than a bow and arrow?" she demanded.

"Yes; with that, backed up by my spear, I'd face anything in these northern forests. I'll be compelled to face them, in fact, for that's how we're going to live. We've got to have bear-skins before snow flies. And before the moon changes I want another moose-hide. And before the week is out I want to see a pot full of Canada grouse stewing over our fire."

Instead of bringing any touch of relief to the studious brown face confronting him, his words merely deepened the solemnity of the girl's abstractly unhappy gaze.

"There's one thing I want you to promise me," she said, apparently speaking with difficulty.

"What is that?" he asked as he gathered up the arrows and tied them with one of his withes of willow-bark.

"I want you to promise me that you'll always be careful," she quietly responded, without meeting his glance. "I want you to remember that if anything happened to you there—there would be no hope for me."

He laughed shortly as he took up the bows and turned back toward camp.

"There's certain things I'm not likely to forget," he said with a self-protective brusqueness which seemed scarcely necessary to the occasion. For the brown face beside him deepened in color at the thought that his thrust was possibly designed to be a double-edged one.

She remained silent for the rest of the morning as she helped him complete his tests with the different samples of firing clay. She was equally withdrawn when he took the remaining portions of moose-skin and schooled her in the long and laborious task of dressing such things. She helped him, after the skin was thrown over a flat timber, to scrape what was left of the "mack," the fat and flesh, from the inner surface. She worked beside him at the still harder task of removing the hair from the outer side. It would have been easier, Grimshaw explained, if they had left their hide to soak for a week. But they were too much in need of footwear to wait that long, and moose-hide, properly dressed, made the best possible moccasins. The wood-ash lye, however, had helped to break down the fiber, and, by following the grain of the hair, the larger pieces of skin were finally scraped clean. They were thrown over the smooth log again and the fleshy surfaces rescraped and worked until they took on a semblance of pliancy. But the rawhide was still far from perfect. It required, in fact, first repeated washings and later an almost incredible amount of twisting and stretching and massaging and working over a sharp timber-edge to break down the fiber and leave it sufficiently soft for the application of mixed moose-brains and fat which Grimshaw proceeded to rub into the hair-side of the skin. This malodorous concoction, he explained, would be absorbed by the hide and after a day or two of drying in a cool place would show no slightest evidence of grease.

The rest of the day they devoted to attaching their fish-hooks to lines of rawhide, to fashioning rabbit-snares, and to the completion of their firing-kiln for the pottery making. And with Grimshaw's efforts to achieve dishes and pots of earthenware began a long and at times a disheartening struggle.

He found, by experiment, that a darker blue clay from a lower cut-bank gave him the best material for his purpose. It baked as hard as fire-brick and took on a reddish gray tone that was not unpleasing to the eye. But imbedded in this clay, unfortunately, were troublesome fragments of slate which all had to be removed before the moistened mass could be made ready for molding. And it was a long and tiring portage from the cut-bank to the kiln-side. His feet, illy protected by their worn-out sandals, began to trouble him, and even Claire, engaged in the lighter task of cleaning and working up the wet clay, found an increasing ache of weariness creeping into her overtaxed finger-flexors. But she knew that it was a battle against time they were waging, and no complaint escaped her.

It was Grimshaw, in fact, who looked up with startled eyes at the declining sun and realized that another day was slipping away.

"This," he suddenly announced, "is work which can be done by firelight. While the sun's still up I want to go out after

food, for we've been skirting the margin of safety a little too closely."

"Then I'll try my hand at fishing," suggested Claire, "while you're away. That's one of the few things I know something about."

His eye met hers, for one short moment, and then he looked away. She detected, or thought she detected, yet another deliberate effort on his part to maintain an impersonality of relationship which tended to reduce every accidental contact to the commonplace. But he, after all, was the master and she was still the incompetent help-mate.

Yet, when he had left her to her own devices and she had found and hacked down saplings for her lines and baited her crude hooks with moose-meat and taken up her position beside one of the more promising-looking river-pools, she could not keep her thoughts from wandering back to other and happier fishing days, to the care-free and indolent days when gay-sweatered groups fished for flounder and snapper from the burnished fore-deck of Milt Bisnett's cruiser-launch as they drifted along the pale green shallows of Fire Island Inlet. It seemed a long time ago. And the thought of it brought a tightening of self-pity to her throat as she anchored her shorter poles and cast her baited hooks one by one into the shadowy pool beyond which a bittern was calling forlornly through the twilight.

Then her thoughts scattered, like frightened birds, at the sudden tug on the longer pole which she kept in her hand, the tug that sent an electric thrill through her arms and reminded her that the teeming life in those northern waters was hungry life, ever ready to snatch at its passing meal. She felt the pole bend perilously and she held her breath, fearful that the line would part under the strain. All she could do was to keep it taut, surrendering a few feet when the pull became threatening again, recovering a few feet when her straining captive once more rose toward the surface. She was experienced enough at such things to know she could never safely land a catch of that size from where she stood, so with her left hand she reached for the stone hatchet with which she had cut her poles and circled slowly along the lower rock-ledge until she came to a gravel-bar at its end. Then, still holding her line taut, she slipped down from the rock and waded knee-deep into the chilly water, shortening the hold on her pole and drawing in her line foot by foot until the thrashing and tugging life on its end floundered about her knees.

She refused, now, to surrender an inch of line, tightening her hold on him until he gaped wide-mouthed before her. She waited, with her stone hatchet poised and a fantastically fierce scowl on her small face, until the flashing long body was in a position for striking. Then with a little cry of ferocity she brought the sharp-edged stone down on the widening green head.

The blow fell true, for the next moment all struggle ceased. With a gasp of triumph the girl dragged the huge body up through the shallows and lifted it to the rock-edge, where she stood over it with a glow of conquest in her chilled body. She was no longer lamenting the past. She was functioning too busily in the present even to remember that past. For with her own skill and her own cunning she was reclaiming food from the wilderness. She was accomplishing something of moment. She was playing her part in wresting her living from nature, in demanding her essential human share in the bounty of Providence. And for the first time since her deliverance from the rapids she felt that she was an integral part of the newer scheme of things, that she was doing something to justify her existence.

This feeling was temporarily checked when she had the ill luck to lose not only one of her bigger fish but also one of her hooks and lines, in making a landing. Yet even in the face of this loss, at the end of an hour, she was the proud possessor of two larger fish which she recognized as muskalonge, six flat-bodied black bass, and a needle-toothed pickerel as long as her forearm.

Two of the larger black bass, once she had tugged her load back to the shelter, she scaled and dressed and washed with her own hands. And by the time Grimshaw came panting wearily home through the ghostly light his meal was broiling over the coals of the camp-fire. Claire looked up in wonder as he came, for over the arm of her hunting-mate hung the bodies of five limp rabbits, two muskrats, and the trailing gray skin of a larger animal.

She noticed Grimshaw's nod of approval as he knelt beside the fire and warmed his chilled body in the grateful glow. She caught his sober smile as he inspected the array of fish and sniffed appreciatively at the two trussed bodies broiling over the coals. Then he looked down at the furred mass which he had dropped on the sand beside him.

"We're getting this stuff none too soon," he said as he unbound what was left of the tattered sandals from his wet feet. "Even now the night air is getting a chill in it which shows we must have clothing and must have it right away. But what I've seen to-night convinces me there's fur enough all about us, once we can get possession of it. Only, I've got to range

farther and shoot stronger. This lynx I knocked over when he was trying to get a rabbit still kicking on one of my tossing-poles. The skin will be the best thing possible for a pair of leggings. Three of the rabbits I brought down with arrows, the fourth put his head through one of my snares half an hour after I'd set it up, and the fifth I got from the pole where the lynx was watching it."

"This means six rabbit-skins," said the girl appraisingly, as they began to eat.

"We'll need them!" ejaculated Grimshaw. "I had a shot at a fox, but he got away with one of my arrows in his shoulder. I've also spotted a beaver colony, but it was too late to go after any of them. But the most important thing I've seen are the evidences of caribou. Hundreds and hundreds of them, perhaps thousands of them, seem to have the habit of crossing our river a mile or so below us here."

"Will we have a chance at them," asked the girl, "without a rifle?"

"If we're clever enough," was the other's matter-of-fact reply. "If we can match up with the Indian, who used to build his teepees out of their hides, we ought to have all the caribou skins we can handle. And their meat will dry better and make a trifle better eating than this bull moose of ours."

Claire, having finished her meal, leaned against the heavy timber at her back, watching the fire. About that fire, with its wide bed of coals and its crackling birch-wood, was both a compact sense of competence and a sustaining sense of comfort. Her eye followed the line of the red-tinged smoke as it floated upward in the cool quiet air, followed it until she saw the high-arching dome of the northern heavens; and the magnitude of the vision once more brought to her troubled spirit its recurring sharp ache of desolation. Then, as she turned and abstractedly watched her camp-mate as he set to work on the puddled clay, she began to realize how step by step they were stubbornly advancing out of their nakedness, how day by day they were slowly pioneering into a miniature and hand-made civilization all their own. They were confronting life, life at its rawest and wildest, and out of the knowledge housed in a human brain and out of the cunning and strength of a human hand they were fabricating their fragile barriers against want and death.

She had no knowledge of what the future held for them, just as she had no knowledge of how long they were to keep up their blind fight against the blind forces of nature. But as she sat in the light of the great fire Grimshaw had built in front of her to fling back the night which sought to engulf her, that island of warmth in the chill immensities of silence seemed to her a symbol of all her newer existence. She knew a sudden deep but indeterminate surge of gratitude at the thought that the man she was destined to face the wilderness with was so truly a man. And as she went to his side, where he stooped swart and sinewed over his rough potter's wheel, she startled him by placing a small hand on his shoulder and saying, in a voice slightly tremulous with incommunicable feeling: "I want to be worth it all!"

He sat back, at that, with a slightly barricaded look on his face as he stared, not at her, but at the light of the fire.

"*You are!*" he said, in a somewhat thickened voice, out of the silence that had swung between them.

CHAPTER XII

It was in his efforts to make pottery for their household use that Grimshaw realized, more than ever before, how he and his camp-mate had been flung back into the very childhood of the world. Man, he remembered, had been forced to become a potter even before he became a smith, had left behind him in trivial yet timeless shards of earthenware his first groping steps up toward civilization.

But Grimshaw, with all his knowledge of woodcraft, had never ventured into the field of ceramics. So every step of his advance into that new territory was more or less in the nature of an experiment. Yet out of the crowded store-house of half-knowledge, as he worked, crept hearsay memories and pallid ghosts of facts, so that before he had been long at his new labors he was groping less erratically in the dark than he had expected. After finding a clay with the proper amount of plasticity, easily kneaded and molded while moist, and also capable of kiln-baking into a ware that was both hard and tough, he even imagined that the greater part of his troubles were over. But in this he soon saw his mistake. For his first models, simple as they were in design, betrayed a uniform tendency to sag out of shape, if molded with too moist a batter, and to crumble under his hand, if formed with too stiff a mixture.

He made a distinct step forward, however, when he fashioned a block of wood which could be made to revolve on a pivot, to serve him as a potter's wheel. And he achieved still another advance in the discovery that it was expedient, especially in his larger pieces, to work his clay into long ropes and then build up his desired form, layer by layer, puddling and welding the fabricated wall together by the use of "slip" as he centered the piece on his wheel. He also blundered into the knowledge that it was profitable, when he advanced into designs beyond those simple cups and saucers and plates, to support his side-walls with withes of rawhide or braided bark while standing apart to be sun-dried, before facing their final ordeal by fire.

This final ordeal by fire, he soon discovered, was the one uncertain feature of his process. Being over-impatient to get a glimpse of his first dishes, he opened the kiln too soon, with the result that his pottery, deprived of the slow cooling essential to toughness, betrayed a disheartening tendency to crack. Most of it, too, was stained a dull ashen-gray by smoke which had seeped through to his oven. A great deal of it was warped out of shape.

But Grimshaw did not give up. He renewed the battle, with additional courage, when he found a silicate sand which under test showed the power to impart a surface glaze to his earthenware. He even collected feldspar, which he reduced to a powder between stones, and mixed this with the fine sand which he sprinkled over his models of clay. When this was fired he found, to his joy, that his pottery came from the kiln coated with an iridescent and water-proof shell. When Claire, busy with the twin task of burning charcoal and carrying molding-clay from the cut-bank, came and stooped over the array from the opened kiln, she gave a little shout of delight.

"Dishes! Real dishes!" she cried as she turned the handleless glazed cup over in her fingers. "Thank heaven for at least a tea-cup!"

But Grimshaw wanted more than dishes. He wanted tough-bottomed pots which could be swung over the fire without cracking, pots in which meat could be stewed and water could be boiled. He wanted baking-dishes and wash-basins. But most of all he wanted large crocks with close-fitting tops, crocks to hold their winter's supply of food-stuffs, crocks for their fruit-pemmican, crocks for their stores of wild rice and starch-bulbs, for their dried berries, for their smoked fish, for their jerked deer-meat, for the high-bush cranberries which he intended to stew down into a jelly mixed with boiling marrow-fat, for the green lichen and Iceland moss which he proposed to dry and stow away, in place of vegetables, against the lean months of their forest year.

He found, as he worked on these heavier containers, that it was best not to build up such high-walled vessels all at once, but to advance them five or six inches at a time, let them sun-dry, and then add another section to the ever rising walls. And as he did this he became more and more expert at "coiling," at turning his thin ropes of well-kneaded clay round and round upon each other in the desired form and then smoothing them down with "slip" into a compact whole. He discovered, too, that his binding withes left permanent indentations in his fired pottery, so he fell into the habit of deliberately distributing these binding fibers, fashioning them into simple patterns more or less pleasing to the eye, so that the finished product took on a touch of the ornamental. And as he garnered his elementary lore as to glazing mediums he learned that some sands gave a certain tone to his pottery and other sands still another tone, so that by combining or contrasting these he could roughly determine the coloring of his utensils. He even found a lighter-toned clay which, when

fired, burned into almost a cameo-white, and by imposing this on his walls of duller clay he was able to produce a naively ornamented vessel which brought a smile of admiration even into the eyes of the woman who had once handled Coalport and Sèvres.

But he had to turn away from the more decorative phases of his work, for time was still a vital factor in his plans. And later on, he explained, they could indulge in the luxury of climbing up to a porcelain-finish in their pottery and a Grecian contour in their water-jugs. For, as he pointed out to his wondering-eyed companion, security must be achieved before beauty could be pursued.

While waiting for his kilns to cool, in fact, Grimshaw had already completed the curing of his moose-hide. This had been done, since he had neither salt nor saltpeter, by repeated smoking over a green fire, by tedious manipulations to break down the tissue, and by patient rubbing dry after immersion in river-water thickened with powdered punk-wood, until the different portions of hide were as soft as Shetland wool and as pliable as home-spun cloth. Then, putting the coarser and heavier pieces of skin aside for moccasin-making and reserving a narrower strip for withes and binding strings, he handed over the best of the hide to Claire for the conjuring together of clothing.

She decided, after much study over the problem, to make herself a two-piece garment, a short-sleeved war-shirt that laced up at the throat and knee-length breeches looped for a draw-string at the waist. After much measuring and adjusting she marked out the required pattern with a piece of charcoal. Then Grimshaw with his knife cut the skin as directed. And while the intent-eyed girl with awl and sinew laboriously stitched her seams together, her companion set to work on the making of their footwear.

He designed their moccasins after the Ojibway model, with a puckered front, using the heavier portions of the hide for his double-ply soles and stitching tying-straps to the front corners of the uppers. To the tops of the smaller pair, which he made of softer hide for the girl, he stitched leggings of cured rabbit-skin capable of reaching to her knees, and, when laced on her legs, protecting them both from the brambles of the woods and from the mosquitoes that still swarmed about the swampier lowlands.

Grimshaw found it hard to share in his companion's strange joy in this acquisition of apparel. He found it hard to understand her hunger for such things, a hunger which kept her at her sewing until her fingers ached and even when darkness ended her day brought her close beside the camp-fire so that she might continue her work in the light of its flames. And when he returned from one of his hunting-trips, the next day, and found her arrayed in her aromatic moose-hide tunic and her loose-legged gray-brown breeches and her close-strapped leggings and moccasins, he detected in her a minute yet unmistakable difference of bearing. She seemed mysteriously removed from him. She was, in some way, no longer impersonal and sexless. This simple gift of clothing, he felt, had at one stroke swept her back to womanhood, had barricaded her off into a domain of her own, had reestablished some indefinite privacy of life beyond which it was no longer his prerogative to trespass.

She was doing her best, he could see, to accept the change without comment. But there was an exceptional luster to her eye when his moderated glance of admiration met her half-timid glance of inquiry, just as there was a flutter in her voice as she explained that she intended to sew longer sleeves of rabbit-skin on her tunic and add a fringe of buckskin to its bottom. And later on, when they could kill a porcupine, she proposed to ornament her coat-front with quill-work and attach rows of dyed quills to her moccasin-tops. And still later, when they could afford the skins, she intended to sew together enough rabbit-fur to make a *capote* to throw over her shoulders.

It was then, for practically the first time, that Grimshaw became directly conscious of his semi-nudity. And what he regretted, oddly enough, was not this nudity itself, but his newly acquired consciousness of it. He resented this discovery, just as he indeterminately resented the air of remoteness which a couple of roughly made garments had thrown about his camp-mate.

So obsessed did he become by some vague new sense of incompetence, of uncouthness, that that night beside his fire he took what was left of his tanned moose-hide and, instead of sewing it into quivers and carrying-bags as he had intended, fashioned it into a sort of Chippewan coat-shirt and a pair of fringed trousers that reached almost to his moccasin-tops.

"This means," he said, as he sat over his sewing while Claire attended to the smoking of the last of the cut-up moose-meat, "that we've got to bring down some big game before the end of another week. For we must have extra moccasins before there's a change in the weather. And before the nights grow cold we must both have sleeping-ropes."

Claire complained that she found her buckskin clothing almost too warm for comfort. She even confessed a fear that she was already partly Indianized in the matter of her resentment toward too much skin covering.

"Buckskin," explained Grimshaw, "for its bulk and weight has more warmth than any cloth in the world. And even when wet through, if you take ordinary care in the drying, it will rub as soft as a glove. But nothing is quite as delicate and fine as a summer-killed fawn. That is what we'll make your under-clothing of, when the winter weather drives you to the wearing of furs. And that's what you'll make your hand-towels of, when we get it, and your pillowcases that I'm going to stuff with Canada-goose feathers for you."

Yet it was not Claire alone who changed with the accession of clothes. Grimshaw himself, once shod and clad in skins, found himself less anchored to his camp-fire locality. He became impatient for exploration, eager to look over the remoter areas of their forest neighborhood. If there was a limit to the time he could spare for such wandering, he took advantage of his camp-keeping periods to tutor his mate in the trick of setting tossing-poles and rabbit-snares, in archery and animal stalking. When Claire bowled over her first snow-shoe rabbit, with a well directed arrow, Grimshaw looked for some revulsion of feeling as she stooped to gather up the still kicking animal. But he was surprised to see nothing more than the casual triumph of the hunter on her intent young face. For that limp body, she remembered, would not only give them a stew for their brand new boiling-pot, but would also provide her with the needed skin for her arrow-quiver. She had made a kill; and she would make others, as her newer mode of life demanded.

Grimshaw remained slightly perplexed by this seeming strain of hardness in her. He had further evidence of it when, the next day, they ventured deeper into the lower river district and he pointed out to her the "blind" of jack-pine which he had already built there at the caribou-crossing. She was unexpectedly interested in his proposed plan for lying in ambush behind his screen of pine-boughs, to wait there hour by hour, until the first timid traveler should venture within arrow-shot. When he told her that the caribou herds of the Barren Grounds sometimes numbered ten and fifteen thousand animals, making a spectacle which, once seen, was never to be forgotten, Claire asked him if there was any reason she could not join him in his ambushade.

"Only that it is tiring, and may keep you up all night," was Grimshaw's answer.

"I'd rather be where you are," she said with a directness which left him slightly nettled.

So he changed his original plan as to hunting alone. But while waiting for a favorable wind, for it was essential that the wandering caribou should not scent them from the opposite shore, Grimshaw and his slender-bodied helper went busily on with their camp-work. While the man built a rain-proof covering of bark over their temporary shelter and another rough roof over his forge and kiln so that he could still work there in wet weather, the girl polished the rough spoons and forks he had fashioned out of bone and wove for herself and her mate carrying-hampers of tough basketwork. They made hide slings for holding their spears and bows across their shoulders and arrow-quivers that could be strapped to their sides. They smoked a huge salmon which Grimshaw speared at the foot of the rapids, and then turned to gathering a more ample store of both raspberries and the farinaceous rhizomes of water-lilies, to be dried and stored away for the future. Grimshaw also wove gill-nets of split moose-gut, washed clean and twisted and cured over punk-smoke, and prepared night-lines for the river-pools, and even concocted a box-trap with a ratchet door for the snaring of smaller game. Then, having resharpened his ax and his spear-heads and put his arrows in shape, he went scouting along the lower river and returned with the news that it seemed a favorable night for their deer-hunting.

So they set out side by side through the pale green twilight of the northern dusk, man and woman dressed alike in gray-brown moose-hide, each with spear in hand, each with filled quiver at side and long-bow strapped to back. Silently they picked their way through the shadows, keeping as well under cover as they could. Once Grimshaw stopped and unslung his bow, sending an arrow into a porcupine which he cached high in a jack-pine, well out of the reach of wolverines. Once, too, Claire stopped to shoot at a rabbit, but missed, startled by the second arrow which her companion sent through the running animal's ribs.

It was not until they were secreted in the "blind" above the lower river-bank that the beauty of that prolonging summer twilight came home to the wondering woman. Before her lay the open reach of the river, with no outward sign of the oily current sweeping along its bed, with blue-green shadows framing its opalescent center in gloom. And beyond the river lay lightly wooded hills, lonely tier by tier, stretching away into the illimitable distance and overhung by a thin rind of opal light which assured her that the twilight about them would never, even in the dead of the night, be complete darkness. Somewhere, out of the gray silence, a fox barked, and then, from regions still more remote, came the thin

howling of wolves.

Grimshaw moved uneasily, as that far-off chorus increased in volume, then stood up in the shelter.

"That sounds like a run," he said as he peered across the gray slopes beyond the water.

He remained there for several minutes, staring off into space. Then his eyes narrowed and he touched Claire on the arm.

"They're coming!" he said quietly enough, yet with a note in his voice which brought the woman to her feet.

"What is it?" she asked, following the direction of his gaze across the ghostly reaches of the river.

"Caribou," he said as he placed his spear and then his bow and arrow carefully in position. "Watch for them! It will be a sight rather worth seeing!"

He turned back to show her how she could stoop at one of his sight-holes and see without being seen. And as she kneeled there, staring across the wide valley with the dividing river-bed that looked like pooled quicksilver at its center, she saw what seemed to her still another river. It was a river of flowing fawn and gray, mingling and changing as it advanced out of the wooded gloom into the ghostly light of the open hills. It was a river of moving bodies, of crowding bodies, of surging bodies so pressed together that they advanced in one mistily pulsating army of movement. They came on, not by the dozens, not by the hundreds, but by the uncounted thousands, fretting the sky-line with the forest of their prong-like horns, coloring the long slope of the hillside down which they surged until it became only a dun-tinted tideway of movement stippled with tawnier neck-markings as the rhythmical avalanche narrowed and slackened while it poured down the trampled bank-slopes toward the water's edge.

The watching woman could even make out the leader as with uplifted head it looked to the left and the right and then plunged into the river. She could see it wading out across the shallows until the current caught it up. She could see its outthrust nose and its back-thrust horns as it swam with churning fore-feet across the beguilingly mercury-like channel, heading up-stream as it went. Then she saw it followed by others, and still others, as that compact army continued to roll down the trampled hillside in one loping and crowding mass which broke at the water's edge and merged into a cloud of spray as the impatient polished hoofs swept out on the deepening bars. And as they came the entire valley was filled with an intermingling confusion of sounds, with the echo of churning fore-legs, with the hog-like grunting of straining throats, with the flatted cries of frightened fawns calling to the does. And as the countless antlered host poured down the opposing hill and crowded after the hundreds already threshing the twilight waters the sound grew in volume until it became like the continuous roar of a rapid. But there was no stop. On and on those surging battalions of swimmers came until the threshing hoofs struck gravel again, until their writhing backs emerged from the flood, until their hurrying feet once more trampled the shallows and their crowding horns clashed together and threw a sharper volume of sound against the nearer valley-side.

Then the watching woman no longer thought of the strange noises ringing in her ear as she noticed her companion, crouched low in his blind, fitting an arrow to his bow. She saw him, as the first pair of tawny shoulders climbed the hill-path that led close beside their shelter of jack-pine, draw back the bow-string until it touched his ear. She saw him wait until the leader, suddenly arrested in its ascent, threw an inquiring nostril up in the air and half wheeled on its haunches. And at that moment she realized that Grimshaw had loosened his arrow. She saw the flying shaft half bury itself in the tawny body, followed by a second arrow that struck deep into the startled shoulder.

Three times the stricken deer leaped, without sense of direction. Then it fell sprawling along the ground, where its mates stood for a moment arrested and bewildered. While they still sniffed and trampled about in disorderly half-circles the unseen killer behind his screen of jack-pine loosened another and still another arrow. And as a second and third body leaped in the air and fell heavily to the earth Claire herself caught up her arrows and let them fly, one by one, into the near-by startled bodies that came trampling and crowding to their destruction.

She had no knowledge of how true her shots were striking. But she drew back her arrows with every jot of her strength. She shot grimly, mercilessly, infected with her comrade's primordial lust to kill, to possess while the power to possess was still in their grasp.

When a wounded buck charged blindly into a stunted spruce on the right of their screen she leaped after it with her spear in her hand. Without being quite conscious of what she was doing, she thrust the pointed iron spear-head deep in the

rebounding body. Against that body, after her stroke, she had to place her moccasined heel before she could withdraw the shaft. And as she turned she beheld Grimshaw spring from the blind and hurl his own spear head-on into the neck of a second buck which had fallen to its fore-knees, wrench free his weapon again, and plunge it into the flank of a doe that blatted like a malleted steer as it went down. And the handle of the spear, she noticed, was wet and crimson to its hilt.

But the army of tawny-colored bodies had broken by this time. The advancing river of antlered heads had wavered and recoiled on itself, had dispersed through the wooded hills and vanished in the twilight, with a threshing of tree-branches as it went. And two panting figures stood in the gray light confronting each other, two hide-clad figures stained with blood, leaning on reddened spear-shafts as they stared about at the strange battlefield strewn with flat-lying bodies mottled with widening blotches that looked black in the uncertain light.

Grimshaw, peering about him, saw that it had been a good kill. He took a deep breath and mopped the sweat from his bearded face spotted with red. Then he stopped to unbind his long-bladed knife from the grooved shaft to which he had fitted it.

"Are you all right?" he called out to the woman above him, as he bent low to cut the throat of a pale-bellied calf lying beside a jack-pine.

"Yes, I'm all right," she said with a quick shudder at the gush of blood from the knife-slit. "Are you?"

He did not answer her. He was too busy cutting throats and bleeding his carcasses.

"We've got seven o' them!" he called triumphantly out to the woman leaning on her spear-shaft and staring down at the dun-colored bodies about her. "Seven in one kill!"

Then he stopped short in his task of gathering up what he could find of his arrows. For clear and ominous out of the forest silence echoed the howl of a wolf.

"It was a good kill," he repeated as he wiped the blood from his thick-sinewed forearms.

And the girl who had lost her world remembered, as she stooped to take up a handful of moss to wipe away the red fluid thickening between her own fingers, how it was only by killing they could survive.

CHAPTER XIII

There was much more than mere killing, however, before Claire and her companion could be assured of the fruits of their victory. For, obviously, there were other killers in that northern wilderness, killers with the aroma of blood already drifting to their nostrils. And the increasing wolf-howls out of the surrounding forest reminded Grimshaw that he would soon have to prepare to defend what he had won.

So without further loss of time he and Claire talked the matter over.

"It's out of the question," he explained to her, "to do anything with these carcasses before morning. We can tug and roll them together here on the hillside, but that's the most we can hope to manage. And to protect them I've got to have fire. And that means one of us has to go back to the camp and fetch coals and my ax."

Claire listened to a long-drawn-out howl that echoed dismally out of the midnight stillness.

"What would you like me to do?" she asked as quietly as she was able.

"That," he told her, "is what I want to figure out. I'd prefer that you did the thing that's less dangerous. There's a chance you might get lost by night, even with the river to mark your way, if you go back. There's also the chance some wood-prowler might startle you, though I don't think it would be more than that. On the other hand, these carcasses are going to draw here any wolves that are about. They mightn't bother you much but they could very easily destroy a lot of our meat and skins before they were driven off. So, after all, it simply comes back to which you'd rather do, go or stay?"

"But you could protect these caribou bodies better than I could?" she inquired.

"I think I could," he admitted. "It's only in mid-winter, when hunger makes them desperate, that these gray wolves could be really dangerous to us."

"Then I'll go back to camp," she asserted without further hesitation.

"I hate to ask this of you," said the man at her side. "But it seems the only way out."

He showed her how best to follow the broken river-trail and explained how she could safely carry fire-coals buried in a handful of their own ashes. But he watched her with a frown of anxiety on his face as she slipped away through the vague light, a disturbingly slender figure with an iron-headed spear in her hand.

Claire herself, for all her showing of bravery, picked her way along that intimidating forest-fringe with her fingers clenched and no joy in her heart. It was a different story, that night forest, when one was alone in it. Her blood curdled at the sudden screech of a night-owl. A thousand unformulated fears horripilated through her body at the sound of a soft tread over dried brush. As she felt her way through a darkling grove of spruce the sudden vision of two fiery eyes set in a framework of impenetrable gloom, of two coal-like eyes staring at her through the momentary midnight silence, brought her heart up in her throat and her poised spear into position for striking. But the luminous eyes vanished in the darkness and she started suddenly at the snap of a twig under her own moccasin-sole. She was grateful when she was again in the open, closer beside the river, though still again her blood chilled at the sudden scramble and splash of what must have been a muskrat and nothing more.

Her heart lightened, however, when she again found herself in the familiar neighborhood of their camp. The bark of a fox beyond the opposite river-hills no longer sent small chills up and down her spine. She groped her way toward the dark shadow of the shelter, before which she knew their banked fire to lie, grateful for the gift of light which she remembered that fire would hold for her.

Then she stopped short, arrested by a prolonged and pulsating whine not unlike the *meowing* of a cat, magnified many times. She stared in wonder toward the source of this sound. From beneath the farther end of their meat-stage she beheld two baleful green eyes staring at her out of the uncertain light.

As she stared more intently back at those eyes she made out a crouching bob-tailed body, with a four-cornered face, striped and whiskered and surmounted by pointed ears set well to the rear. Between its fore-paws lay the ghostly gray body of a rabbit which Grimshaw had that evening brought back to camp and which in the excitement of the hunt had not been cached beyond the reach of forest trespassers. A wave of resentment even swept through the staring girl as she

realized that this midnight marauder was robbing them of their precious stores. She made no effort to advance farther. But quietly she unslung her bow and drew an arrow from her quiver. Quietly she placed the arrow in position and drew back the string. She made her aim a deliberate one. She shot straight for the staring green eyes and with all her strength.

There was a sharp yowl of pain followed by a sudden circular movement of the bob-tailed body. Claire, under the impression that the wounded animal was about to escape from her, ran forward with her spear ready for striking. But as she did so a snarling body catapulted against her, a cluster of keen-hooked claws tore away the rabbit-skin sleeve of her jacket, and she felt a sharp sting of pain in her forearm as she swerved and wheeled about.

Her first impulse was to fling her poised spear, javelin-like, at the motionless glaring eyes so low on the sand. But on second thought she realized this involved too great a peril. So slowly she backed away, retreating toward the spot where she had dropped her bow. When she felt it under her moccasined foot she stopped, still watching the baleful green eyes, and took it up in her hand. Then guardedly she fitted a second arrow to the string and still more guardedly she took aim, creeping forward step by step with her spear trailing loose from her quiver-strap. She advanced on the snarling crouched body until she feared the margin of safety might be overstepped. Then, with a little shout of defiance that mingled with the cry of the springing animal, she shot her iron-headed arrow straight at the tawny throat.

She leaped back and to one side as she did so, snatching up her trailing spear as she recovered her balance. And this time, with some strange wine of combat running hot in her veins, she charged on the body before her. Then she stopped short, awakening to the fact that its movements in the sand were merely the tremors of its death struggle.

She could see her second arrow buried deep in the furred shoulder. And an ancestral sense of triumph crept through her body at the thought that she had been able to defend her threatened hearth against invasion.

Deliberately she recovered her arrows, cleaned them, and restored them to their quiver. Then she went to the shelter-end where the spare willow-thongs were kept, took enough of these to tie the dead animal's fore-feet together, and remembered that this new kill would give her enough fur for heavier leggings and a shoulder-cover. Yet she was astonished at the weight of the thing she had killed, as she lifted it up to loop the tied fore-legs over a cross-timber on their meat-stage. And she realized, as she felt the needle-points of the long relaxed claws, how easily that frenzied wild thing might have torn her to pieces.

But she gave little thought to the matter, for she still had her night's work to finish. Already, too, she found herself reacting less acutely to these side-issues of bloodshed which seemed an essential feature of her newer existence. She even disregarded the still bleeding scratches along her forearm as she half-filled a bark rogan with wood-ashes, nested therein a dozen live coals from the banked fire, and carefully covered them with another layer of ashes. Then she took Grimshaw's ax from its keeping-place in the shelter, drank from the spring, and started back to her companion.

She made the return trip with less trepidation, persuaded that she had touched bottom in the matter of wilderness night-ordeals. But when she arrived at the blind she discovered, with a renewed chilling of the blood, that Grimshaw was no longer there. She saw the heaped-up bodies of the caribou and close beside them a pile of dry wood, apparently thrown together for a fire. She called and listened and called again, but no answering sound came to her straining ears. Then, with a ball of lead where her heart had been, she remembered her coals and decided that her first duty would be to build a signal-fire. So she gathered dry moss and birchbark and spruce twigs and bedded her coals in the center of the little pile she made of the bark and moss, blowing on them until the bark burst into flame. On that flame she piled the dry twigs, and on that again the fire-wood which Grimshaw had left behind him. Then with a burning brand she went to the river bank, calling through the night air. When no answer came to her call she climbed the long slope up into the wooded country beyond, with a great fear growing up in her as she called and called still again through the echoing night. Her frantic mind even fell to dramatizing strange contingencies that might have swept Grimshaw away from her side. She pictured him as lying bleeding and helpless in a thicket of jack-pine, with green-eyed shadows skulking about him in the shadows. She imagined she could see him groaning under the brutal fore-feet of a bull-moose. And just as the terror of this picture was imparting a shriller note to her call she caught an answering call from the remoter regions of the lower river-valley.

A minute or two later she saw the dun-clad figure swinging up the slope with a limp gray mass suspended over his shoulder. She heard his repeated reassuring shout as he advanced toward the fire and she was once more able to breathe without that sharp pain of utter horror tightening about her heart.

"This fellow led me a fine chase," he said as he flung the fresh skin of a wolf down beside the flames. "He tried to get away with two of my arrows in his hide. But I couldn't afford to lose them. So I had to keep after him."

He stretched the still warm skin out beside her.

"Look at the size of him! No wonder he died hard!" exclaimed Grimshaw as he lay back against a tree-trunk and rested his tired body in the glow of the fire. It had been a long day and a full one, and fatigue showed plainly on the lean face with its darkening fringe of beard. The woman beside him also sat momentarily passive before the solace of the glowing timbers. It was not until she looked up and saw his eyes studying her that she ventured to speak.

"I thought that something had happened," she said with an inadequate small movement of the hand that lay nearest him.

"I'm sorry," he told her. "But I intended to get that skulker if I had to follow him all night."

She sat silent for a space of time, with her eyes on the fire.

"If anything should happen to you," she said, with her eyes still on the flames, "what would be the best way of ending things?"

He looked up sharply, at that quietly uttered question.

"But nothing," he protested, "is going to happen to me!"

"But simply supposing it should."

"We've troubles enough, without sitting up and imagining morbid possibilities."

"But, as you admit, it *is* a possibility. And I'd like to know the simplest way out."

"Out of what?"

"Out of my misery."

He pondered this with a shadow on his firelit face.

"You'd have to keep on, until they came for you. And day by day the keeping on is going to make itself easier and easier."

He blinked a little at the vehemence of her sudden small gesture.

"But I wouldn't want to keep on!" she told him.

"Where's all this courage we were talking about the other day?" he demanded.

"There wouldn't be any left," she responded, "if I were alone here."

"That," he asserted, "doesn't sound like you."

"But it's the truth," she protested, for the first time finding the courage to face him.

"Then we'll make it a truth that never needs to be dug up," he replied, slightly abashed by the intensity of her gaze. His color even deepened as she reached out a small brown hand and let it rest on the muscled firmness of his forearm.

"In that case you must always take care of yourself," she said with a quiet wistfulness of tone that brought a wayward warmth about his troubled heart. "Whatever happens, you must always be careful, for if you go, remember, I must go too!"

That was the end of their talk on the matter. But it was not the end of his thoughts on it, nor of those of the brooding-eyed woman who sat at the edge of his wilderness fire wondering what the future held for her.

CHAPTER XIV

When Grimshaw, the next day, failed to return from his trap-line inspection at noon, Claire, who was both tired and hungry, waited for an hour and then ate her meal alone. She suspected that her camp-mate's absence was a deliberated one, for she had been ungracious enough, that morning after Grimshaw explained to her how they might keep free from the nuisance of mice and flies by abolishing a kitchen-midden and doing away with all refuse, to ejaculate "Yes, teacher!" in a tone of unmistakable mockery.

His face had hardened at that one small word of derision.

"What I'm trying to teach you," he slowly proclaimed, "is the knowledge that may some day save your life."

"From mice?" she demanded, with her innocent wide eyes on his darkened face.

"From conditions you weren't faced with when you were merely an idler," he promptly retorted.

"*Mushwa!*" she called out after him as he turned away. That, she remembered, was the Indian name for bear.

So she worked alone that morning, scraping mack and smoking hides and digging spruce-roots. The latter, after being soaked for an hour in hot water, were barked and scrubbed clean and carefully stored away for future use as fiber. And as she lingered over her open-air meal she studied her tired and reddened fingers. They ached in every overtaxed joint and strained flexor. They were growing stronger, she admitted, but they were not built for the tasks that had been imposed upon them. They were too small, too civilized, too characteristically the property of what Shomer Grimshaw had denominated as an "idler."

A spirit of restlessness crept over her as she sat thinking of her older life. That spirit prompted her, after she had absently tossed some meat-scrap to the whisky-jacks that hopped about the sand, to wander westward along the river that had so abruptly spewed her into a new world. She climbed the broken rocks as far as she was able toward the lower rapids, where she watched the boiling water and found her spirit quieted by the roar of power that filled her ears. And there the somewhat perturbed Grimshaw found her, standing immobile on a great rock. About him, as he joined her, was an air of concession, a hint of penitence, which left her thinly and perversely relieved.

"No bucking *that!*" she shouted above the roar of the water.

He nodded understandingly.

"It's insurmountable," he called down to her.

"As destiny," she added, stirred by the mist-shrouded tumult confronting her.

"As ours, anyway," was her companion's curt-noted comment.

"I rather like it," contended Claire, laughing a little as she stretched herself above the cataract-edge in a convulsive small movement of ecstasy. "It's like the *Second Rhapsody* being played to you by water-power!"

He stood silent a moment before speaking.

"I'm going to harness that, some day," he proclaimed. "And then it'll be singing to some purpose."

"Then you still think there's a chance for us?" she asked in a forced lightness of tone as she turned back toward camp at his side.

"I've always thought that," he said as he helped her over a break in the rock. "But it never pays, out here, to toy with one's troubles. And I've something more important to talk about: We've got a black bear in our dead-fall."

She stopped short, remembering that this meant fur and meat and fat.

"Then you'll want me to help," she said, recalling the length of the carry from the dead-fall to their camp.

"If you don't mind, fair pupil," he retorted. There was the faintest trace of humor about his eyes as he spoke. And the girl at his side was tempted to accept this as a sign of great promise.

It was three days later, after another of their campaigns of toil from sun-up to sun-down, that Claire stopped in her sewing to ask a question of Grimshaw.

"What day is this?" she surprised him by inquiring.

He was of the opinion it was Sunday, but he could not be sure.

"Then how long have we been in this wilderness?" she demanded, startled by the manner in which old habits had fallen away from her.

Together they made an effort to count up the days, but one seemed to have merged mistily into another and their final tally remained a thing of uncertainty.

"What difference does it make?" asked Claire as she gazed down at the sleeping-bag of elk-skin she was sewing together. Grimshaw, in one of his rambles, had discovered a many-islanded lake which had served as a moulting-ground for wild-fowl, and blown up along its reedy shore he had found drifts of the finest and softest feathers. These, after being washed and sun-dried before their camp, she had stuffed into fawn-skin pillows, and with what was left of them she was making a warm inter-lining for the two double-skinned sleeping-bags which would be called for with the coming of colder weather.

"It makes every difference," he protested as he paused in his labor of pouring hot fat over the dried deer-meat which he had pounded to shreds and mixed with dried berries. About him, in an orderly row, stood a semi-circle of earthenware crocks filled with this solidified pemmican, ready to be stored away for the winter. "And to-morrow I'm going to make a calendar out of birchbark. I'm also going to cut some goose-feather pens and concoct some ink out of berry-juice and stitch together a journal so that we can write down in it day by day those things that ought to be recorded there."

"For whom?" asked the girl, waywardly opposed to that methodical instinct of his which was calculatingly turning their days into days of ceaseless toil. Yet that same cold-blooded method, she knew, was day by day widening their margin of safety.

"For ourselves," asserted Grimshaw, refusing to be stirred by her passing note of protest. "We ought to know exactly what our season is and how ready we are to face it. For in this territory the freeze-up comes some time in October and we've got to be prepared for it. Among other things, before the snow flies, I've got to have a cabin built, a home where we can live in comfort."

For several minutes the brooding-eyed girl sat staring at the fire.

"How cold does it get up here in winter?" she finally asked.

"It will probably go to sixty below zero," announced her companion, "perhaps more." He smiled, however, at the shudder that passed through her stooping body. "That sounds much worse than it will really prove to be," he went on. "I don't even believe we'll need to face an hour of actual discomfort, because of the cold. It's not the sort of cold, in the first place, that depresses one. I've always found it, in fact, rather exhilarating, dry and tingling and invigorating. But it calls for proper clothing—and that we're getting. It also calls for strong food, for heat-giving food—and that too we're getting. And it demands, of course, adequate shelter. And that we'll have when I get the cabin I'm figuring on put together."

"But what sort of a cabin can you put together?" she asked as she went on with her sewing.

"It's going to be of trimmed logs, dove-tailed together and chinked with moss and blue clay. It will have two windows, made of oiled deer-skin to let the light in. And since clay that makes earthenware can also make bricks, at one end it will have a bake-oven and an enclosed fireplace. It will be roofed with overlapped split spruce and floored with the same, held in place with wooden pegs. We can have curtains and rugs of elk-skin and later on I can put together what furniture we need. One end of the cabin will be divided into two small sleeping-rooms, so that you can have the privacy every woman has a right to, and directly back of the cabin I intend to build a store-house of stone. If I do that we can abandon the idea of a stockade."

Claire listened quiet-eyed as she went on with her sewing. She had long since given up the tendency to amazement at either the magnitude or the minuteness of his plans.

"But what," she asked, "will hold your stone together?"

"There's limestone all along our river valley here. We also have sand. So we'll make a bigger kiln, burn our stone, and have the best of mortar. As for stone, we have it in abundance. And once our four walls are roofed and shelved and floored we'll have a cool-cellar that will hold all we need and nothing can get into. And that will leave us set for the winter."

Claire, as she stared into the companionable glow of the fire, was moved to admiration at the placid and unpretentious valor of the man. It was through two things, she saw, that life was being won back to them, that a promise of safety was being coopered together about them. And those two things were thought and toil. They were the two things, she began to feel, of which all existence was compounded. Yet she had never thought of life in that light. Never before these last few days, in fact, had she even thought of life fundamentally. She had forgotten, as she rode about in her suede upholstered landaulet, that grimy men had delved in the bowels of the earth for iron for her, that forges had clanged for her, that oil had been sucked up through rock for her, that the gum of tropical trees had been molded into tires for her, that skins had been dressed and dyed for her, and cunning tools had been devised for the creation of still more cunning machinery, all for her, all that she might ride at her ease and from behind sheltering glass view an army of workers who seemed as phantasmal as ghosts in a world of ghosts.

She stared down at her hands, with a small frown of meditation on her tanned brow. They were stained and reddened hands now, hardened and roughened by labor. They were calloused and checked and covered with small scars. They could no longer lay claim to beauty. But they were now capable of accomplishment. They had learned to do things. Their appeal was no longer a pictorial one. But through service they were achieving a new significance, a new dignity. And as she gazed down at her toil-roughened fingers she wondered if she too had not undergone, was not undergoing, somewhat the same insidious alteration. In a day all life had changed for her. And now that the initial shock of that fundamental readjustment had worn slightly away she fell to wondering if she too had not changed as her hands had changed. Her woman's final gift of dignity had been swept away from her. Her body, like her hands, had roughened and coarsened. Yet at the same time, through the sanities of sun and wind and open air, it had snatched up some perverse spirit of well-being, of abundant and sustaining vigor. It had become stronger and more competent, more adroit and more adaptable. It stood important now through what it could accomplish and not through what it appeared to the eye. And, whether it implied a coarsening process or not, she had also grown more courageous, more self-reliant. In the beginning she had recoiled at the sight of blood, of fresh-skinned carcasses, just as she had sickened at the thought of killing. Such things took place, she had always vaguely realized, but they had taken place comfortably remote from her sight. Once, during a childhood visit to her uncle's farm, she had seen a spring lamb killed, and for years the thought of roast lamb had been distasteful to her. She had seen fowls killed and had watched fish die, but never without some momentary physical aversion at the sight. But now, she found, an odd but essential process of brutalization had armored her against these earlier reactions. It was necessity, she assumed, which was day by day remodeling her to its uses. A dead rabbit dangling from a tossing-pole no longer seemed revolting to her. She could cut up a bloody loin of caribou, or gut a fish, or lift aside a steaming doe-skin trailing raw tendon and flesh, without a quaver of the nerves. There was, in fact, eagerness in her step and expectancy in her eye as she now set out, day by day, to go over some particular portion of their trap-lines, just as there had been exultation in her midnight hour of slaughter at the caribou crossing. She bowed to the need to acquire. Man, through his cunning, was the one over-lord of all nature; all else was his prey. The passion to possess, to accumulate reserve against the threat of want, to commandeer at a stroke the garnerings of humbler forest workers, fixed in him his tradition of mastery. For only through such mastery could he survive.

And all life had begun to impress her as a game, a gigantic and grimly fought game, to survive. But, with all its grimness, it was singularly engaging. It had carried and still carried her thoughts into the future, where, at the end of all speculation loomed a great Perhaps. It fortified her with the knowledge that she was functioning, and functioning to the full, so that labor became a sort of narcotic and she no longer openly fretted about the softer things that had been swept out of her life.

Yet the fact that she no longer winced before what she once would have considered degradation, that she no longer felt concern over duties that bore an aspect of barbarity, prompted her to question the source and sincerity of her older world's civilization. More and more she fell to wondering if it stood for anything more than a mere veneer of manners, an inherited habit of outlook, a passing expediency dignifying itself as finality. Man, after all, had to be a law unto himself. And his actions and his relations with others were governed by tribal conditions and tribal demands. For here in the wilderness, Grimshaw had told her, there was no need to respect the Game Laws. Such laws did not even extend to

them. They were answerable only to themselves. They were man and woman, working out their own destiny. They were two forlorn units of life, lost in the night under the immitigable stars, afraid of the cold and hunger and loneliness, swayed by the same forlorn hunger for happiness.

She looked up, with still abstracted eyes, as Grimshaw, with his work done, came and settled himself on the other side of the camp-fire. The actuality of their relationship came home to her sharply, as it did only in her moments of idleness. She and a man of whom she knew so little were there, alone in the northern twilight, handcuffed together by accident. And she wondered, as she gazed at him, if he too was troubled by any such consciousness. She also wondered if conditions would change with the building of their cabin. For that, she remembered, would be an actual home, with an atmosphere of permanency about it, a home into which they would have to settle and withstand the prolonged siege of winter, together, most intimately together. They would at least know each other, at the end of that winter. They would have time, then, for thought and speculation—perhaps even for *ennui*. And, remembering the life she had left behind her, she was wordlessly afraid of *ennui*. A little of the exhilaration of triumph would be lost; the question of survival would not be so acute; and with the coming of bodily comfort, of even comparative comfort, would come unrest, would come the awakening of things which daily toil, like an anesthetic, had drugged into slumber.

Yet as she studied the man confronting her she found something fortifying in the thoughtful solemnity of his face. It was unlike any face she had ever before known or studied. About it were the barricades of a reserve which she thinly resented even while she found herself without the courage to override them. But it was a face to be trusted. It was without guile, and, with all its animalizing environment, it seemed without animality. There was, too, a slightly disturbing sort of strength about it. This puzzled her even while it disturbed her, for her earlier experience with men had tempted her to divide her friend the enemy into two classes, the strong who were bad, and the good who were weak. Yet this man who had saved her from the rapids, who was saving her from the wilderness, was neither weak nor bad. And an unexpected wave of gratitude welled up through her body at the thought that she was exiled with a camp-mate who would never shake her trust in him.

She colored perceptibly as she looked up from the firelight and found Grimshaw taking his own turn at studying her face.

"What," he surprised her by asking, "are the things you miss most?"

She smiled a little at that question, it seemed on so much a lower plane than the line of her earlier thought.

"Sugar and salt," she coolly replied, determined to meet his own carefully deliberated pose of impersonality.

He nodded his head understandingly.

"Yes, we need both of them," he acknowledged. "And in time we'll have both. No animal can live without salt. And where there are so many of them about us, there must somewhere be a salt-lick or a salt-spring. In time we'll find it, and that will make our food more palatable. As for sugar, I'm hoping to stumble on it in the form of honey, for bees live and work as far north as the Arctic Circle. In the early spring, of course, we can do as the Indian does and get it from tree-sap. We're too far north for the sugar-maple, but I've noticed a few box-elder in some of our valleys up here and from that we can get a fine whitish sugar almost as good as the maple. The Indians also tap the birch and the ash and get a dark and rather bitterish sugar. But there'll be no flow of sap, of course, until our winter is over."

"It seems odd," acknowledged Claire, "that I've never really wanted coffee or cigarettes here. I tried to reason it out, the other night, and I concluded that the closer you get to nature the more natural your appetites are. The artificial stimulants seem to belong to artificial life."

For the second time she colored under his quietly appraising eye, disquieted by the discovery that she was being less impersonal than the occasion called for.

"I'd give a good deal for a frying pan," she announced with a protective air of flippancy. "In fact, I can think of nothing more tremendously important than a frying-pan."

If he fathomed the source of her levity he made no acknowledgment of that discovery.

"I think you'll have one, before the winter is on us," he solemnly asserted. But she paid little attention to that promise, for she was wondering, at the time, just how much of her older life he had recalled to mind.

"Isn't it odd," she finally ventured, "that you should know so little about me?"

He smiled at that, with his first assuaging show of warmth. "I have known you a great deal longer than you imagine," he quietly acknowledged.

"In what way?" she asked almost sharply.

"Through your father," he said as quietly as before.

She studied the fire for several moments.

"Then I was right," she ventured, "I was right in feeling from the first you—you didn't respect me?"

"I have a great respect for your father," he acknowledged. And she stirred a little at his obvious evasion of the issue.

"And for me?" she exacted.

It was his turn to color a little under her candidly questioning gaze.

"I know of no man I like more than your father," was the clumsily adroit evasion of her camp-mate. "I am very fond of him."

"Why?" asked the girl confronting Grimshaw.

"Because he is one man in a million," was the reply. "And also because I am under a great debt to him."

Again a momentary silence swung between them.

"I understand," finally acknowledged the wistful-eyed woman.

"Understand what?" he challenged.

"Why you've done what you have for me," she said with a slight *vibrata* of bitterness in her voice. "But there are certain things I want you to remember. I want you to remember that always, before this, I'd only lived life at second hand. I'd never thought about things from—from the down-to-earth side. I'd never been asked to, for some reason. I don't think women in my position ever are. And I can see, now, there's so little I know. So little, outside of Wells and Shaw and Brieux and Heywood Broun! Yet I don't think it's altogether my fault, for nowadays life, the sort of life I've always lived, seems to shut women away from reality. And when they haven't the real things to confront them they try to save what's left of their self-esteem by building up a make-believe world of their own, a world that drugs them into thinking they're getting their human share in this tangled-up business of living!"

He stared at her, with a vague wonder in his eye, a wonder like that of a drinker at a spring catching glimpses of depths he had not imagined there.

"Don't look at me like that!" she imperiously commanded. "I've at least got a thought or two of my own!"

"Do you mean you didn't find existence as comfortable as you'd like it?" he asked, ignoring her little outburst.

"It wasn't comfort I wanted," she more decorously acknowledged. "It was something beyond comfort—at least beyond comfort of the body. It was a sort of comfort of the mind, which in some way or other I always just seemed to miss."

"Don't you think we've all been daubed by that same brush?"

"You had your work," the woman reminded him.

"But very little else," he said in a slightly hardened tone.

"It has at least made you strong," she found the courage to assert. "But I've been wondering if it didn't also make you a little hard."

"Have I impressed you that way?" he demanded.

"To be quite frank, you do."

"Perhaps I'm not so much that way as you imagine."

"I hope you're not," she said with a candor that brought a small movement of unrest from him.

She saw it, and was able to smile at its source.

"Whatever I may be," she went on with a studiously achieved quietness, "or whatever I may have said, I don't want you to think I'm so empty-headed I'm afraid of realities. I haven't altogether escaped knowing a little about at least one side of life. I've had it beat in on me, with all its littleness, the same as it must beat in on any human being who has a brain and a well-fed body. And I've known men, a great many men, though never one of your type before."

"Then I'm to be regarded as a curiosity?" interpolated Grimshaw, ill at ease before the meditative and impersonal gaze with which she regarded him.

"No, I mean that you're a type that seems unknown in that world of idlers I used to live in. I suppose I ought to thank God that you're a thoroughly good man. And I do, remembering what that means to me. But, to be quite frank, you rather frighten me."

"I'm afraid," said the swart-faced man in the firelight, "that you'll find I have many redeeming weaknesses."

She smiled at the acidulated note in that statement, but her face quickly sobered again.

"Out here," she proceeded, following a line of thought essentially her own, "one is apt to think of this sort of thing as life in the raw. But I can't see that it's any more pagan, any more barbaric, than the life I used to live. It was pagan because it was so purposeless. And it was barbaric because it was so cynically self-centered. But don't imagine a week or two in the wilderness has made me over. For even when I was in that old life, in it up to the ears, I knew it wasn't exactly what it ought to be. It seemed a machine that couldn't be stopped, a machine going too fast to be studied and understood. And all along there seemed no way of simplifying things, of getting down to bed-rock, as I heard you express it the other day."

"But the situation still has its—its complications, even though we are down to bed-rock," he reminded her.

"That," she said after a moment of thought, "is why I feel we ought to be entirely honest with each other."

"I have tried to be that," he said, without meeting her gaze.

"But besides being honest we ought to be candid and open. And also kind. I realize what we're confronted with. And I'm ready to play my part. I'm willing to work, as the squaw of the Indian has always had to work. But there are certain conditions where this sort of thing could be—could be unbearable."

"I don't think I quite follow you there," admitted Grimshaw, screening a vague constraint by throwing fresh wood on the fire.

"You believe, don't you, that somebody will eventually get through to find us here?"

"Or we'll eventually fight our way back to civilization," amended the other. "Yes, I'd never give up the hope of that."

"But supposing neither of those things happens?"

"That," asserted Grimshaw, "is a bridge I refuse to cross until we come to it."

"But we're here, alone, utterly alone, in a world of our own. And there's every likelihood that we may have to stay here a long time?"

"That's quite true," he admitted.

"Then it seems to me we're losing something out of what's left of our lives," she proclaimed as her level gaze met his.

"In what way?" he asked.

"In a way that reminds me existence like this can be either a heaven or a hell. And I'm terribly afraid we're going to make it more like the second than the first."

Stronger even than before the look of constraint crept over his face.

"It won't be so hard," he protested, "once we're properly housed. And it won't be such slavery, once we're sure of our food and shelter."

"No, no," she cried. "It's not the work I'm objecting to. That's been a sort of blessing. It's kept me from thinking. It's the other thing I'm afraid of, the idleness that gives me time to remember I'm only an empty-headed woman without much hope of ever being much else."

"You are proving that you are something else," asserted her companion.

"Then we'll say an empty-hearted woman," amended the buckskin-clad figure in the softening glow of the camp-fire.

"There are certain things," Grimshaw said after a moment of silence, "that we must not even approach."

"Why do you say that?"

Grimshaw looked from the fire to the wistful face confronting him, and then back at the fire again.

"I wonder if you remember in *Marius the Epicurean* how the Roman youth there regarded his soul as a white bird which he must carry unsullied through the market-place of the world? Well, that is what we must do. When we go back to the world we must go clean-handed."

Slowly she moved her head up and down.

"But we may never go back," she murmured, without looking up at him.

"Of that, of course, we can never be certain. But until we *are* certain, we must remember what we still owe to life."

"I'm afraid I was thinking of what life still owes to us," ventured the woman beside the camp-fire, with her face turned away from her companion.

CHAPTER XV

So studiously impersonal was Shomer Grimshaw's attitude toward his wilderness companion, during the next few days, that Claire found something provocative in his quietness.

"Isn't this spiffy?" she flippantly demanded of him after making a jelly of fawn-knuckles and tinting it pink with raspberry juice.

"It's very good," he conceded.

"And I'm not altogether a bone-head, am I?"

"You are a very wonderful woman," he acknowledged as his cogitative eye met hers.

"In what way?" she inquired. And if beyond her mask of flippancy he detected a deeper human craving for approval he betrayed no evidence of that discovery.

"You have a quick and restless mind," he told her, "and you learn things easily. And inside your burr of audacity you still have the milk of good breeding."

She swept him with a quick glance. Then she sat silent, for a full minute.

"I wish you wouldn't be so stilted," she suddenly announced, with an unlooked-for touch of sharpness.

"It's hard," was his deliberated reply, "for an old dog to learn new tricks."

"You don't impress me as overpoweringly old."

"But there are times when you impress me as devastatingly young," asserted her solemn-eyed companion. He seemed impervious to her raillery.

"That's something time will cure," she asserted with mock meekness.

"Along with other things, I hope!"

"Are you lecturing me?" she demanded, letting an indolently hostile eye meet his. She had the satisfaction of seeing his color deepen, though he remained silent. And she resented that silence.

"I wonder," she said with an achieved dreaminess of tone, "if you are really nursing a broken heart, or if that solemn manner grew out of being a camp-boss for so long?"

When he spoke, he spoke very slowly.

"It's going to be hard for us to get along out here, even by observing all the rules of the game. And if we keep up this sort of thing and get on each other's nerves—"

"It'll be just plain hell," she cut in, her solemnity once again touched with insolence. And it was not until she saw that his fingers were trembling, for all his quietness, that she grew repentant. "I don't want to gum the game, of course, but I do wish you'd warm up a trifle."

She did not altogether discard her mask of flippancy, during the days that followed, but she did her best "not to gum the game." For conditions soon justified Grimshaw's impatience to see his cabin built. A change came in the weather, bringing with it a cold northeast wind and a steady downpour of rain. And during this downpour the two castaways found themselves practically confined to their shelter. Grimshaw, it is true, worked steadily enough on the smaller tasks before him, such as regrinding his knives and fitting a better haft to his ax-head and fashioning for Claire a cross-bow which, he concluded, would be more effective in the shooting of small game. As for Claire herself, she found plenty to do in the patching of torn footwear and the shaping of fresh moccasins and the sewing together of rabbit-skin clothing. But it was work done under difficulties, for the slanting wind drove the rain in under their inadequate bark roof, filling the shelter with a continual drip of water. It was only by the most prodigal use of wood that they could keep a fire going in the open.

So, even before they went scouting for further supplies, with clearing weather Grimshaw fell to work on his log *karmak*. Following a plan he had drawn with charcoal on a plaque of birchbark, he measured out his distances and prepared his site. Then he felled spruce along the upper hill, laboriously cut the logs into desired lengths, trimmed them, and hauled them bodily down to his river-cove. Some he split, and split again, with the aid of hardwood wedges, and some he roughly squared and shaped for dove-tailing at the ends. But it was not easy work. His ax, he found, was not heavy enough for the purpose before it and to keep a cutting edge on its blade required constant whetting. The smoothing of the split floor-timbers, too, was a matter of infinite labor, and the burning of holes for the binding-pegs took much longer than the house-builder had first reckoned.

Yet after the base-logs had been set in position and Claire had helped as best she could in placing timber after timber in its allotted place, she cried out in open admiration as she saw the walls rising foot by foot above the ground and the compact little house taking on to itself definite outline. From dawn to dusk they worked together, startled at the unrecorded flight of time. When, after finishing his roof of split spruce, Grimshaw decided to make it doubly warm and doubly water-proof by covering it with a heavy thatch of muskeg reeds held in position by lashings of braided willow-bark, Claire maintained the balance of toil by carrying in moss and clay and carefully chinking the vents between the wall-logs. About two small frames which her companion had prepared for her she later stitched oblongs of deer-skin, well oiled with bear-fat and marrow to make them translucent. These, when fitted into the apertures which Grimshaw had left in his side walls, made weather-proof window-frames which admitted an unexpectedly agreeable amount of light. A door was fashioned by lashing and pegging ax-smoothed boards of spruce to a "Z" of cross-pieces, two pivot-pins protruding from the outer edge of the last board, to serve as hinges when fitted into two holes burned in the top and bottom corner of the frame into which the door was finally set. And while Claire sanded and rubbed smoother the floor her companion proceeded to work on the bake-oven and the fireplace chimney. This meant the tugging and lugging of stone, the carrying of clay from the river cut-bank, the molding and baking of brick, the burning of limestone and the mixing of mortar.

But again Claire cried out in delighted astonishment as she beheld the rough bricks shape themselves into a double-chambered bake-oven on either side of a half-enclosed fire-hearth hooded by an arch of roughly-made tiles. This narrowed into the throat of a brick chimney which in turn raised itself day by day to a yard above their roof-timbers. Into the lower neck of this chimney Grimshaw fitted a draught-control made of a flat slate-stone chipped into shape and pivoting on one end so that it could be raised or lowered at will, by means of a crotched stick. Across the deep maw of the hearth, capable of holding large-sized pieces of fire-wood, was fitted a temporary cross-bar from which their boiling-pots could be suspended. And when the structure was completed the interior was incredibly brightened and lightened by the application of a coat of whitewash, made from slaked lime dissolved in an embrocation of fish-glue and applied with a brush fashioned from moose-neck hairs tightly lashed and glued together and bound to a birch-wood handle.

Yet, oddly enough, it was the woman more than the man who seemed stirred by the acquisition of an adequate abode, of a structure that could take on the semblance of a home. A strange light of exultation shone in the woods-girl's eyes as Grimshaw carried in coals from their open camp-fire and on these threw a handful of kindling and on this again placed an armful of wood. An odd look of triumph touched with gratitude showed on her intent face as she stood in the doorway and watched the smoke curl up the chimney-vent and the mounting flames lighten up the spotless four walls which housed in her tiny domain from the rest of the world, which so completely and so compactly walled her off from the wilderness without.

"We live again!" she said with a little gasp of emotion which her companion, for some reason, preferred to let pass unacknowledged.

"To-morrow," he said, "I'll put a table together. And when I have the two sleeping-rooms partitioned off we'll be ready to move in. But after this we can only give a part of our days to such things. We've got to get into the open again and build up our supplies. And there's not much time left to us now for gathering what we'll need of raspberries and wild fruit. And above all things I want to start exploring for a supply of salt."

"I think there's something quite as important as salt," objected his companion. "And that's a name for our house."

"That's something I'll have to leave to your finer judgment," asserted Grimshaw, not unconscious of some faint ring of reproof in her voice.

"I'm a trifle tired of being nameless myself," she surprised him by saying. "Would you mind calling me Clannie when it's possible?"

He smilingly agreed to call her Clannie, and the matter ended there. Yet he stopped short the next day on returning from building a fish-wier on one of the lower tributaries of their river, to find a broad band of birchbark pegged above their house-door. Carefully printed on this band with elderberry-juice were the words "CAMP RELIANCE." And the more he thought over that name the more he liked it.

But even the new *karmak* soon receded out of the foreground of attention, for once again they became nomads. This time, however, they scouted into the forest with the knowledge they had a firmly established base behind them, so that their reconnaissances became more and more extensive. They even marked trails by blazing trees as they went and at certain outpost points established small caches of food. And their wanderings were rewarded by both a better knowledge of the territory about them and unlooked-for accessions to their larder. Grimshaw failed to find, as he had hoped, a grove of birch trees big enough to supply him with canoe bark, confirming his fear that they were too far north for the true canoe-birch. Nor did he succeed in tracing out a salt-lick. But blue-berries and raspberries they still found in abundance. The latter in some places grew so thick that the berries, ripened and fallen from the stem, crimsoned the ground with a carpet of odorous fruit. Along some of the marshlands they found Indian tea, the flower of which Grimshaw carefully picked for later infusions. They found bracken-fields thick with partridge and Canada grouse, and a secluded lake already noisy with swan and geese. They also found a thicket of wild plum trees laden with small red fruit which proved very pleasant to the taste and promised a valuable addition to their winter stores. And still later they stumbled on a beaver pond, where Grimshaw pointed out to his companion the dome-shaped homes of this most industrious of animals, the cunningly built dam to hold back the water, and the gnawed stumps of poplars felled for their food supply. When winter came, he explained, they could return to that pond and without great difficulty possess themselves of a supply of fur which would prove invaluable against the cold. And even as Claire stepped closer toward the pond-edge her ears were startled by the sudden slap and plunge of a beaver taking to the water.

So, tired and hungry, evening after evening, they returned to the new *karmak*, loaded down with their wilderness harvests. And after replenishing their fire and cooking and eating they sat before the glow of their hearth, patching and sewing, weaving and curing, joining and carpentering, working side by side in strangely contented silence until weariness crept over them and the fire was banked and the door barred and the balm of sleep built up their strength for another day of effort.

Day by day, in fact, Claire found herself grow more resourceful and self-reliant. On returning to camp one night after an especially lucky day when Grimshaw had stumbled on some outcroppings of copper and a supply of brown hematite which he felt confident would give him metal for further tools and weapons, they found that the depredations of a wolverine had played havoc with an unprotected portion of their stores. This prompted Grimshaw to set about the completion of their stone storage-room. And with her camp-mate so engaged Claire set out alone to bring in a further supply of wild rice and berries and starch-tubers and cranberries from a neighboring valley. She went well-clad in furs and leather, with a knife in her belt and her spear and bow strapped to her shoulder, with a newly made wolf-skin turban on her head and a carrying-hamper under her arm. She went with a singularly light step, oddly exhilarated by the clear sunlight that warmed the hillsides and the beauty of the birch-groves through which she passed and a persistent sense of freedom from all human restraint. She wandered by reedy tarns noisy with the cry of waterfowl and threaded game-trails that wound through silent parliaments of spruce and mounted rocky crests from which she could see the laughing silver of little streams that widened into lagoons and narrowed into tinkling falls and broadened again into beaver-meadows fringed with poplar.

When she came to a spring she stopped and drank from it and when she caught signs of partridge in a bracken-field she rushed into the waist-high growth, knocking over two of the birds with her spear-handle. When she came to a raspberry patch she ate the ripened fruit, ate with the honest and healthy appetite of the young animal she was, until she could eat no more. Then she put down her hamper, made a rogan of birchbark, and began picking her store of berries for home purposes. When her rogan was full she carried it to the hamper and emptied it, picking her way deeper and deeper down the broken rock-slopes.

By midday her hamper was almost filled. She stopped, in the midst of her picking, to watch a varying hare scuttle through the bushes. She wandered on again, at the lip of a lazy little stream to gather a supply of what was unmistakably watercress growing in the limpid shallows. Then she started back to where she had left her hamper.

She stopped short, as she pushed her way through the bushes, at the sight of a heavy black form bent over her wattled basket. She knew, the next moment, that it was a black bear, a black bear with his hog-like snout rooting greedily down into her carefully gathered berries. A feral flash of resentment went tingling through her startled body and without being quite conscious of what she was doing she caught up an arrow from her quiver and fitted it to her bow.

She let the arrow fly, with a cry of anger as she shot. But the metal-tipped bolt missed its mark. Quickly the pointed snout was lifted, a pair of intent small eyes studied the fur-clad huntress with the bow in her hand, and then the lumbering big body wheeled about and went scurrying off through the bushes. And it was then, and only then, that Claire realized her good luck. For if she had wounded the brute he would surely have showed fight. He would have charged and attacked her—and on the result of that attack she had no desire to meditate.

She had escaped all injury, it was true, but the thought of that bulky black shadow took the careless joy out of her wanderings. She surrendered to an impulse to put as much distance as possible between her and the scene of that casual encounter, promptly gathering up her belongings and pushing on through the scattered shrubbery for higher and more open territory.

She came out on a narrow plateau overlooking a series of sunlit "hog-backs" with a limpid blue lake in the distance. She decided to examine that lake and detoured into a game-trail that led her westward through clean-floored groves of black spruce where, at the forks of a runway, she came face to face with a deer. She was too startled to use her bow, merely standing there and staring after the flying animal as it went bounding off over blow-downs and barriers. Her bow was still in her hand, however, when she debouched from her smaller trail into a still wider one and caught sight of a marten dodging into the shadows. She shot promptly and with all her power.

She thought, at first, that she had brought the animal down. But when she reached the spot where it had so suddenly leaped and circled about on the trail she saw by the showing of blood that she had merely wounded the marten. It had bounded and threshed away, leaving a thin trail of red behind it. It had escaped, with her arrow embedded in its body.

So she started after it, resolved that her arrow at least should not be lost. She followed the trail through a slashing of brush, over spruce-tuck and brakes, along a rocky hillside, across a divide stubbled with jack-pine, down a narrow valley-side and up another. And in the end she found it, quite dead, in a tangle of willow growth, with the arrow trailing from its torn flank. So without hesitation she cleaned and restored her arrow to its quiver and removed the stained skin from the carcass.

It was not until she had tied this together and put it away in her hamper that she became vaguely conscious of the fact that the earlier flood of sunshine which had been bathing her wilderness landscape had thinned to a cool wash of light with a touch of the ominous in its quietness. She realized, as she stood up and looked at the sun, that the afternoon was slipping away, that before the passing of many hours night would be falling along those northern slopes.

The knowledge of this surprised her, but did not greatly alarm her. She had familiarized herself with the conspicuous landmarks in the neighborhood of their camp and it would not be long, she felt, before she could beat back into territory where she could once more get her bearings. But she realized, as she looked about from a hilltop that stood strangely desolate in the waning light, that she had been less conscious of trail and direction during the latter part of her wanderings. She was persuaded, however, that the general trend of her advance had been eastward. So she turned her face toward the setting sun and struck valiantly out through the forest.

She remembered, as she went, certain admonitions of Grimshaw. One was, in case of uncertainty, always to keep cool-headed. Another was, when one had missed the way, always to travel down-hill, for this customarily brought one to running water, just as the smaller stream in time brought one to a river. But the most important thing, she remembered, was to keep from traveling in a circle, and to do this one must, wherever possible, keep two trees in line as one travels. Or if trees could not be made to serve this purpose, then rocks or any other conspicuous landmarks should be made use of. But the great thing, she reminded herself, was to keep up one's spirits and not lose confidence. Grimshaw had told her that no man lost his way in the woods without losing his nerve first. And she intended to be a worthy pupil of her tutor.

Yet her heart sank a little as she emerged from a ghostly stretch of black spruce and found herself overlooking a valley that held nothing familiar to her eye. The sun had already swung low along the serrated rim of the world. Purpling tiers of woodland stretched off into the distance, indescribably lonely, indescribably forlorn of all life. And along the twisted trails she had pursued was no familiar ax-mark, no stone cairn, no sign that a human being had ever before passed along

those ghostly aisles of shadow. She felt like a wanderer on a prehistoric earth. She seemed alone in infinite and unfathomable space, as alone as though she stood the last point of life on a burned-out planet swinging about its orbit in a burned-out universe. She stopped short, with her breath catching in her throat, choking back a cry which was as unexpected as it was unwilling. For she knew now that she was lost, hopelessly lost in a wilderness that was without limit and without succor.

She thought of the cabin in the river-cove, the sheltered and home-like room lighted by its glowing hearth, filled with its companionable odor of dressed furs and its sharper smell of game-meat broiling over the coals. She wondered if Grimshaw would be worried by her absence, if, later on, he would venture out along the familiar trails to meet her. He was a good tracker. It was almost uncanny, the manner in which he could trail an animal or read the record of what had gone before him along a woodland path. Perhaps he was already pushing through those gloomy valleys in search of her.

This prompted her to stand on the rocky brink of her hilltop and call aloud, call at the top of her voice. That call seemed to fill the twilight with a choir of shouting voices as her cry echoed cavernously across the valley and rebounded and was caught up and tossed on from woodland to woodland, with an accompaniment of still remoter echoes as though the sound had been taken up by a roll of drums and spread like signal-fires from lonely peak to peak into the greenish-gold horizons that finally drank it up. Then, cupping her hands to her mouth, she called still again, sustaining the note until it grew shriller in her throat, until it cut the twilight, sharply, like sword blades, with a deeper urgency in the countless echoes that ricocheted along the glooming valleys and the spruce-tops that bit like teeth into the thin rind of the afterglow.

She listened, intent and motionless, but no answering sound came to her ears. The silence of the windless dusk seemed supernatural. It seemed an arch of desolation that ached for noise, that must crumble of its own enormous nothingness without the relief of sound. And as though in answer to that demand, leagues away across the darkening hills, a lonely wolf-howl rose and widened and died away on the quiet air. And then the silence and the night deepened together about the listener on the hillside.

She realized, as she stood there, that she must spend her night in the wilderness. She saw, too, that darkness would soon set in about her. And before everything else, Grimshaw had once told her, she must keep her wits about her. It was essential, in such a predicament, to remain cool. She must drink and eat, she remembered, and then she must make for herself a shelter for the night.

She recalled, with a slight chilling of the blood, that a camp-fire would be out of the question, since she carried none of the implements for the making of such a fire. It was her mate, she remembered, who now always carried at his belt the little "fire-bag" of moose-hide, the precious little pouch holding a piece of iron-pyrites, from which to strike sparks with a knife-back, and a handful of powdered punk and a clump of shredded birchbark to catch the tiny flame blown from the smoldering wood-dust. She recalled that her companion had suggested equipping her with such a fire-bag, but in her brief wanderings about camp there had seemed small use for it. And now she would be without the protection and comfort of fire. She would have to sleep alone in the forest.

She did not quail, at the thought, but she was conscious of a small tightening of the throat as she remembered the far-off wolf-howl and the shaggy-haired wanderer that had thrust a nose into her berry-hamper. So she decided, even before stopping to eat and drink, to make sure of her sleeping quarters. Yet it was not until she came to the upthrust roots of a blow-down that she found a place that seemed in any way suitable to her purpose. Under the protecting arms of these roots stood a narrow recess against which she could easily build her *pukivan*. When she had walled and roofed this recess with as heavy pine-boughs as she was able to cut away with her knife, along it she made a bed of smaller branches and moss, fortified by the knowledge that her den could be approached only from the front. And this front, she decided, she could further protect with a screening of boughs, so placed as to shut her completely in from the night.

The twilight had deepened into night by the time her *pukivan* was completed. So, with her spear in her hand, she made her way down to a small stream beyond a grove of poplars, where she drank deep of the running water. Then, returning to her wind-break, she took one of her partridges from the hamper and ate it raw, saving the second bird for her breakfast. When she had picked the bones clean she devoured handful after handful of her sadly crushed raspberries, eating until her hunger was gone. And then she crept into her narrow *pukivan*, closing the doorway after her and placing her spear and bow so that they would be ready, if need be, for immediate use. She nested her tired body deep in the dry moss, assuring herself that she could sleep there both warm and safe until daybreak.

But she did not sleep. Her mind, for all her weariness of body, remained painfully alert. The silence of the forest seemed to weigh down on her, like something ponderable. It impressed her as odd, as incredible, that she of all women should be immersed in a life as barbaric as that lived by prehistoric man. Yet all men and women, she remembered, had sprung from that common ancestry, had derived their power and cunning from those countless generations of savage bodies pitting their strength against the strength of nature. She herself housed the ghosts of them in her own bones. Her own bosom was the abiding-place of dormant savageries which could never be completely kept under cover. And during all the days of her wilderness life there had been an odd impression of return, of return to something she had once known beyond the mists of time.

Then she thought no more on the matter, for her blood curdled and her hand went out to her spear as she heard a near-by thump and flutter of feathers followed by a small squeak of pain. It was a horned owl, she concluded as she lay there listening, descending on a deer-mouse. And that brought back to her the thought that all the trails of the open were tragic trails, that the Nature from whom man expected mercy and justice was immitigably savage at heart, with tooth and talon eternally at war with fang and beak, with the stronger forever preying on the weaker, with the never-ending battle going relentlessly on, by day and night, by summer and winter. The children of civilization talked glibly enough of the great clean spaces of the open. But life in the woods was not clean of murder and rapine and savagery. It teemed with such things. It demanded its harvest of the weak and the unwary, sweeping them away with the casual claw of hunger. Yet it was not altogether malign, she insisted as she lay there listening to the minute small noises of midnight, for these creatures of the open, after all, knew their careless span of living in the sun, knew the joy of sharp appetite and sharper conquest, and went to their death promptly and in the prime of their lusty strength. And wasn't that, in the end, quite enough to ask of life? Perhaps. But there was that perplexing something beyond. There were those precious moments that came into the lives of men and women, lifting them, in some way, above the muck of savagery, the hope of being exquisitely happy, the craving for crowding into life something which life could not easily contain.

She asked herself what, of all the things she had lost, would at that moment bring the deepest happiness to her heart. And it startled her a little to find that her fancy, in this connection, continued to paint one picture, the picture of Grimshaw's buckskin-clad figure striding toward her through the filtered light of a spruce grove. She tried to recall the intonations of his voice, the movement of his lips as he spoke, the lines of strength about the mouth which had the trick of always leaving her slightly perturbed. She was not afraid of him. But there was something about his habitually barricaded eyes, the eyes that could be both honest and clear and yet retain a touch of hardness, which vaguely intimidated her even while it vaguely stirred her. And there had been times when she felt that he was in some way afraid of her, that during all their days of intimate contact he had been holding himself under a strong leash. Perhaps, in his secret heart of hearts, he still hated her. Perhaps, remembering what her thoughtlessness had thrust upon him, he had nothing but contempt, generously concealed contempt, for her and her folly.

But that she could not entirely believe. He had fought and toiled for her. He had guarded and shielded her. He had bluntly respected those reservations which most men would have left unremembered. Tenderness she had not asked for, she had not dared to ask for. He himself, she felt, had been afraid of that, had abstained from it with all the strength of his will. And in that respect he stood unlike any other man she had ever known. He was bigger and nobler than all the rest of them. She needed his strength, to make her forget her own weakness. She was alone in the night, and she could not go on without his guidance. He had not failed her in the past; and in the future, surely, he would not fail her.

She nested deeper in the rustling moss, reassuring herself that he would soon be out in search of her, that he would find her and save her. She tranquillized herself with the thought of his resourcefulness, his stalwart pertinacity, consoled with the conviction that he would patrol those lonely forest trails until he came upon some trace of her. For she, after all, was his one and only comrade. She even fell to wondering, as drowsiness crept over her, if he were missing her, if he were finding his wilderness hours more empty without her. And she fell asleep, warm with the thought that with the coming of light she might hear his friendly *halloo* along the hilltops that engulfed her in their immensity.

She woke early, startled by the strangeness of her surroundings, oppressed by a sense of deprivation which she could not quite define. Then like a drenching wave the knowledge of her predicament broke over her and her teeth chattered in the morning chill as she emerged animal-like from her narrow-walled sleeping-lair. She sat on the needled ground staring listlessly at the checkered light of the rising sun above the valley mist. She sat there for a long time, staring across the hill-tiers, without the strength of will to rise to her feet, benumbed by the consciousness of her puniness in the midst of such uncharted immensities, devastated by the thought of her remoteness from all human contact. Nothing in all her earlier career had prepared her for isolation such as that. It was like death in life. And without companionship she could

not go on, she could have no wish to go on. Yet the only companionship that could come to her, she remembered, was Grimshaw's. And if he was to find her, if they were ever to meet again, she still had her part to play in that effort.

Slowly she rose to her feet, with her teeth set. She went down to the stream and washed and drank. Then she returned to the *pukivan* and devoured the remaining partridge, after which she ate what was left of her raspberries. Fortified by this meal, she set about planning her next move. As she had no knowledge of her whereabouts, or the whereabouts of their camp, she nursed a dread against blind travel in any one direction, knowing that every step might be taking her farther and farther away from deliverance. There was no need to starve to death, at such a season, for even though her bow failed to bring down a rabbit or a waterfowl during the day she could live on berries and birch-buds and rush-roots. And if need be, by carefully marking her trails of exploration, she could return to the *pukivan* which had already seen her safely through the night. She could thicken and strengthen its walls and make it practically impervious to weather and marauder. And if Grimshaw did not get to her, before the end of the second day, she could fashion a fire-drill, as her camp-mate had once done, or find quartz from which she could strike sparks with her knife-back. Then she could go to the different hilltops and set signal-fires alight, signal-fires which could be seen for miles around. And that surely would bring some answering signal from the man who would be seeking her through the night. That surely would bring to her listening ears the *Halloo* which would float in to her as the sweetest music ever sounded.

So she tightened her belt and gathered up her belongings and started out on her journey. She was methodic about it all, carefully marking the site of her bivouac, carefully leaving a periodic tree-blaze behind her as she went, carefully piling a cairn of stones where a tree-trunk was not near-by to scar with her knife. At times she stopped at a higher point along her path and called and called again through the morning quietness. But she remembered Grimshaw's injunction about always, under such circumstances, trending toward the lower land. So she shunned the upward slopes as much as possible and worked her way along the deeper valley bottoms. When she came to a noisy brook studded with rocky pools she studied one of these pools and saw fish darting about in its amber depths. They were not large fish, but she knew that she would need food before the day was over. So she once more followed the course of the stream, hoping to find a point where she could divert it by building a dam of stones.

But in her search for this she stumbled on a small beaver pond, without, however, any sign of beaver still living in it. So she made her way to the dam of mud and sticks and laboriously tore a vent in the barrier that held back the water. She stood with spear poised as the water rushed through the opening. Again and again she struck at the white-bellied bodies of fish as they went hurtling past her. But each and every stroke was a failure. It was not until the pond was drained and she beheld half a dozen finned bodies struggling helplessly in the muddy shallows that she realized an ample supply of food had still been given to her. Each of these fish she killed and captured, after which she dressed and washed them, packing the largest in her hamper and stringing the remainder together and caching them high in a jack-pine, knowing only too well that a mink or marten or wolverine would very quickly rob her of her store if left within reach of such hungry prowlers.

So she took up her journey again, fortified by the knowledge of her own resourcefulness, reassured by the thought that she had the power of obtaining food for herself. But along with food, she remembered, she must have fire. And before she could have fire she must have quartz or flint or pyrites. So she followed the brook that sang beside her, persuaded that it would lead to some larger waterway where she would find gravel-beds. It was rough going, at times, and she realized she had been injudicious in letting her rabbit-skin leggings and moccasins get wet through. She could feel the draw of the moistened fur and hide on her skin, leaving her feet disturbingly tender. And she saw, to her added consternation, that holes were appearing in her moccasin-soles. But she kept on, solacing herself with the promise that she could cure the marten-skin in her hamper and with it patch her shredded footwear. And she could procure fresh stockings, if need be, by shooting a couple of rabbits and wrapping the green pelts about her feet, to shape themselves there inside her tightly laced moccasins and to keep her protected for at least another three days. When her brook widened to a reedy pool she approached it in silence and studied it with care, warned by a splash that some amphibian was sporting along its surface. She was rewarded, a minute later, by catching sight of a muskrat swimming along the rush-lined shore. So she quietly unslung her bow and fitted an arrow to the string.

She shot carefully, at short range, sending the arrow through the short furred neck. Yet she had to wade hip-deep through the soft-bottomed bank-mud before she could recover her arrow and her quarry. She did not stop to skin the wet body, but stowed it away in her hamper, to be disposed of later. Muskrats, she remembered, were eaten with relish by Indians. And she was now little more than an Indian.

She plodded on again, troubled more than ever by the tenderness of her feet. She stopped, from time to time, to drink from the brook, and once she stopped to dig bulrush-roots, which she washed and ate raw as she walked. She saw few signs of life. The silence of the valley oppressed her. And her spirits rose as the wooded hills above her widened and flattened and her quieted brook merged into a brawling and noisy stream that went churning and whitewatering over gravelly shallows. It was a stream she had never seen before. About it she could find no sign of a familiar trail. But its movement and its briskness consoled her. It made her feel less alone in the world.

She worked her way down its occasional small rapids, searching along their edges for her essential fragment of flint or quartz. She even caught up some of the dry stones about her feet, striking them oblique blows with her knife-back. But from none of them could she obtain the spark that she needed. So when she came to a quieter reach of the stream she waded out into the shallow water, remembering that both quartz and pyrites were heavy and likely to bed lowest in a channel such as that. She grubbed and puddled along the shallows, like a clam-digger, peering down at the worn fragments of rock as she held them to the light. Then she dug still deeper, determined to find any heavier-bodied pebbles that lay there. When her crooked fingers brought up three or four bean-shaped objects that shone yellow in the sunlight she gave a gasp of relief. She had found, she felt, some fragments of iron pyrites. She noted the heaviness of these bean-shaped metallic pebbles, and the dulled luster of the rounded corners. She remembered what Grimshaw had once told her about pyrites sometimes being spoken of as "fool's gold." And she could quite see the reason for it, she acknowledged, as she grubbed and pulled about for some larger fragment of her fire-bearing compound. She was successful, at last, bringing up to the light a large yellow crystal with abraded edges, angled like a moose-horn and almost the size of her thumb. And this, she felt sure, would be large enough for striking.

Yet when she carried it to the bank and held it up to the sun to dry she was again impressed by the luster of the metal. But fire was the one thing on which her mind was set. So she sat down and held the metal fragment between her thumb and forefingers, resting on her knee, and struck it repeated slanting blows with her knife-back. She found, to her disappointment, that no sparks flew from it. She even saw, to her annoyance, that the metal was much softer than iron pyrites, more impressionable and malleable, for where her knife had struck the worn edges she had left slight bruises in the bright yellow surface. So she turned it over in her hand, trying it with the point of her knife. She stared down at the mark which her knife had made in the metal, she stared down at it with perplexed and narrowing eyes. And then she understood.

It was gold, pure gold. What she held in her hand was a nugget of native gold, the same gold that in a far-off world she had once worn as rings and chains and bracelets. As to that, she knew, there could no longer be any mistake. There, in the heart of the wilderness, she had found gold. Already, with her own bare hand, she had dug up enough of it to make a dozen watch-cases, rings for a hundred fingers. And that was not an atom compared to what must be about her. If it was in one place, it would be in another. The promise was that the entire stream-bed would be yellow with it. And she knew what men had suffered and endured for such gold as this. She knew that it meant wealth to the finder, exorbitant wealth, ridiculous wealth. It meant wealth, that was to say, in most cases. But in this case it meant nothing. It was of no value to her. It was, in fact, a disappointment, for above all things she wanted pyrites, a precious spark or two that might fall into dried moss, to be blown into a flame against shredded birchbark, to be nursed and fed into a camp-fire, so that in the end she might have a bed of coals over which to broil her fish and satisfy her hunger and dry her damp clothing. It was not a gift; it was a mockery. She had asked for pyrites, for quartz, for flint. And all she had found was gold, ironically useless gold.

Yet it was metal, she remembered, and there were many things for which they needed metal. Out of such stuff, she knew, her camp-mate could make buttons and rivets and buckles, spoons and arrow-heads, hinges and mack-chisels. It was a metal incredibly ductile, unimaginably malleable. They might even find enough of it to fashion the frying-pan of which they were so sorely in need. And she stopped in the midst of storing her nuggets away in one corner of her hamper, to smile at the thought of a frying-pan of pure gold. She could keep it well burnished, and it would cook their river-fish to a turn. That yellow metal for which men slaved and fought and died might become something more than ornamental. It might even become useful.

So she marked the spot where she had found the placer nuggets by building a cairn of stones on the stream-bank, well above the high-water mark. She made it a big cairn, discernible from every side. And as she started on her way again she looked back at it, from time to time, to make sure it could be seen by the casual eye. But she forgot about it before she had traveled far, for a bend in the stream confronted her with an over-flow swamp fringed with rush and willow. And along the edges of its watery center she made out a flock of mallard noisily feeding. So she strung her bow and crept up

on them with infinite caution. She hid patiently in a blind of rushes while they rose and wheeled and returned to their feeding. And one of her arrows buried itself in a heavy drake before the startled flock finally rose and circled off.

Her need for fire, however, only increased with the acquisition of this additional food. So she kept testing the stream-side pebbles as she went. Then she sat down, foot-sore and weary, and listlessly took up a fragment of mottled quartz that lay between her heels. She looked at it for an idle moment or two and then struck at it indifferently with her knife-back.

She cried aloud, the next moment, for distinctly she had seen a small spark of fire fly from its rough edge. And she forgot her weariness in the sudden revival of spirits brought about by the knowledge that a camp-fire was no longer an impossibility. But before she could have that, she knew, she must have wood, and wood in abundance. So after a careful scrutiny of her surroundings she decided to leave the stream and cross the wide lowland on her left to where the farther hills were thick-wooded with spruce and birch. There, she remembered, she might come upon a patch of cranberries. But as she advanced into this tangled level she found the going more difficult than she had expected. Shrub-willow barred her way and the ground became spongy under her feet. But she pushed on, picking a trail where the marsh-grass grew thickest.

She realized, when she came to small tussocks islanded by mucky-bottomed pools, that she was in the midst of a northern muskeg. She thought, at first, of turning back, but she could see the higher woodlands before her and the worst of her journey already seemed over. So she pushed on, seeking for a footing along the soggy tundra which grew spongier and spongier under her guarded steps. Instead of walking, she was finally compelled to leap from hummock to hummock of wire-grass, to veer from sustaining willow-clump to willow-clump, stepping over open water which bubbled with marsh-gas at the weight of her body. She stooped over one of these black-bottomed pools and tested it with her spear-handle. The wooden shaft, she found, sank into the ooze as far as she could reach with it, sank into it with no promise of coming into contact with anything solid. This filled her with a momentary small horror that sharpened her eagerness for solid ground under her feet. She knew, as she started forward again, that she could get none too soon out of that floating and bubbling quagmire which was more treacherous than open and honest waterways. Her advance even took on a touch of the frantic, her close-bound hamper pounding on her shoulders as she leaped and dodged from sedge-tuft to sedge-tuft. With another hundred feet, she could see, she would be safely on wooded ground. But she was less deliberate, by this time, in her choice of stepping-spots. She landed on a larger island of turf which subsided slowly under her weight, as a raft might. She could feel it go down, sickeningly, as she ran across it. And as it went she leaped from it to a smaller hummock which seemed to dissolve like a melting chocolate *mousse* under the impact of her feet. She went floundering down through it, knee-deep in the ooze which blackened with her struggles as she fought to release herself. That ooze received her and held her in its velvety softness, drawing her deeper inch by inch as she fought to free herself from it. Then terror took possession of her. Her wolf-skin cap fell from her head in her struggles. She shouted aloud as she gave way to wildness, lashing the muck with her flailing arms and churning it with her foolishly struggling legs. But slowly, inch by inch, she continued to sink. She went down until she was thigh-deep, waist-deep, in a batter that sucked at her as greedily as quicksand might have done. And her struggles against it resulted in nothing more than exhaustion. So she rested there, panting, forlornly trying to marshal her scattered lines of reason. She rested, momentarily passive, with the chilling marsh-liquid rising almost imperceptibly along her heaving body, rising slowly, rib by rib, but rising inexorably. And she knew that the end, whatever it might be, could not remain long an uncertainty.

Her eye fell on the end of her spear-shaft, which she had dropped in the struggle. That, too, was slowly going below the surface. So she withdrew it from the sucking batter. Reaching out with it, she was able to pole closer to her body the floating island of turf through which her feet had first broken. Across this she placed her arms. But when she attempted to impose her weight on it the sodden mass invariably sank. It supported her shoulders, however, so that she could lean forward without being sucked entirely under the surface. And when she held the end of her spear-shaft in her outstretched right hand she found that she could just reach a clump-willow on a soil-knoll ten feet in front of her. She anchored the lashed spear-head in a crutch between the willow-withes, and on testing it found that it held true. It held in place as she pulled and tugged on it, slowly working her way through the sucking muck toward the knoll. She had not the strength to pull herself free. But her shaft was a life-line which kept her in touch with something stable. And inch by inch she maneuvered her way toward the willow-clump. By the time she had clasped at the withes with her muddy fingers she found an approach to solidity in the slime under her feet. She rested her tired body on the root-bound knoll. When sufficient strength returned to her she dragged herself, first by one freed foot and then by the other, still farther up out of the slime. With her body fallen forward across the tangled wire-grass she made a supreme effort to get free. But to

liberate one foot meant the imprisonment of another. So she was compelled to hook her spear-head into a still more distant clump of willows, take a fresh hold on the shaft, and pull with all her strength. Slowly, reluctantly, the engulfing muck yielded its clasp, released her, left her free to clamber up on the matted willow-stalks and lie there drinking in deep breaths of reviving air.

She rested until she felt a chill creeping into her wet body. So she started on again, advancing more cautiously this time, using her spear-shaft as a support, as a pike-pole, as a harpoon to link her with anything substantial. Through the remaining dank league of the muskeg she fought her way, scarcely daring to breathe until she had left the last of the bog behind her and she was able to fling herself exhausted upon a slope of gray caribou-moss across which the afternoon sunlight slanted its yellow beams.

She lay there for a long time, indifferent to the slime that encased her, indifferent to her wet clothing, indifferent to the lengthening shadows cast by the yellow sunlight. But the returning chill that crept through her stiffened body reminded her of the need for action, of the need for the fire she must make before nightfall. So she staggered to her feet, dragging her mud-covered hamper and quiver, her bog-stained bow and spear, after her. She climbed past willow and alder until she came to stunted jack-pine and then to clean-floored groves of poplar and birch and spruce. She stopped before a rocky barrier from which a spring went tumbling down between mossy boulders. From this spring she drank deep. Then she took her knife from its moose-hide sheath, and the fragment of quartz from her hamper, cleaning them on a handful of caribou-moss and leaving them in the sun to dry. And while they dried she searched and found a dead tree-trunk, at the core of which she discovered quantities of the powdery punk she required for her ends. Then she gathered dry moss and equally dry bark from fallen birches, which she shredded fine. Then she circled about the neighboring wood-slopes, carrying twigs and branches and tugging dry timbers to the shelter of a high-shouldered rock against which she had decided to build her second *pukivan*. When she saw she had all the wood she required she prepared a layer of twigs and branches, spread out her punk-dust and shredded birchbark on a flat stone and took up her knife and quartz-fragment.

Her first blow sent a small spark into the waiting punk, but it went out as it fell. So she struck still harder, until small showers of fiery particles fell into the dust. But each time they failed to bring fire, blow as hard as she might on the scattering dust. So, after resting a minute or two, she deepened her punk layer and struck a more vicious slanting blow on her quartz-edge. A heavier spark flew into the waiting powder, nested there, crowned itself with a tiny spiral of smoke as she blew on it.

She covered that smoking fragment with a deeper pinch of powder, fanned it with her breath, saw the smoke reissue from its blanketing small hillock, nursed it as a jewel-setter nurses a precious stone, fed it with shredded bark, and saw it smolder higher and finally break into a tiny flame. And with that flame she knew that she had conquered. Alone and unaided, by her own human wit, she had achieved the transforming gift of fire, she had emerged from the prehistoric into the modern.

By nightfall she had washed and dried her clothing, had built and bedded down her wind-break, and had dressed and roasted her mallard. After restoring her strength with a substantial meal, she washed and scraped and smoked her animal skins over her camp-fire, knowing that she could no longer go without material for the mending of her moccasins. And when utter weariness put an end to her labors she added fresh wood to her fire, crept into the shelter of her wind-break, covered her tired body with an aromatic mattress of pine-branches, and fell asleep, with her weapons at her side. That sleep was both deep and dreamless, and out of it, at sunrise, she awakened with an indeterminate feeling of depression which ebbed away from her, however, as she listened to the singing of a white-crowned bunting from a near-by spruce-tree.

CHAPTER XVI

Grimshaw, impatient to complete the roofing of his store-room, paid little attention to Claire's absence. He worked solemnly and unceasingly, unconscious of the passing of time, startled to find, when he looked up, that the afternoon sun was already low in the west. He stopped short at the discovery that so little of the day was left, vaguely depressed by the quietness about him.

He revived the hearth-fire, with a frown of perplexity on his weathered face. Then he ventured along the river-trail as far as his first fish-traps, scanning the higher land for some sign of his returning camp-mate. He even climbed to the first muskeg, cupping his hands and calling aloud through the twilight as he went. But no answering call came to him through the cooling woodland shadows.

He made his way morosely back to camp, struggling to revive his drooping spirits with the belief that he would find her there beside the fire. And when he found she had not returned, he argued with himself that her excursion had been an unexpectedly rewarding one, that she would come back overladen and belated, with her habitual small smile of triumph lighting up the weariness of her tanned face. She would come back, hungry and eager, companionable yet quiet-eyed, ardent yet strangely composed, and the gloom would go out of the evening silences and desolation would vanish from his cabin.

He waited for another hour, eating cursorily between his repeated visits to the cabin door. When he finally looked out and saw that night was falling over the black-valleyed forest he became genuinely alarmed. He tied his knife and fire-bag to his moose-hide belt, put on his wolf-skin cap and outer hunting-jacket of caribou, looped his bow and spear across his shoulder, and started out in search of his missing companion.

He knew, by this time, that something was amiss. He had no definite knowledge of the direction in which she had wandered. He had no light to help him in trailing her through the wilderness. But he consoled himself with the claim that she could not have penetrated far into that *terra incognita* of the wooded winterland, that she must be somewhere within hearing. So he called, from time to time, with all the strength of his lungs, stopping and straining his ears for some echoing faint call out of the silence. Once, a bobcat screamed within a biscuit-toss of where he stood. And again a wolf barked back an answering cry from beyond the lower reaches of the river. But he caught no sound of the one voice he most wanted to hear.

But he did not give up. He struggled on, from divide to divide, from hilltop to hilltop, calling and listening as he went. On a balder height of land he even stopped to build a fire, hoping that this might serve as a guiding-light to any one wandering about the lower levels. He waited until the fire burned low again, his hopes subsiding with the flames. Then he tightened his belt and once more started on, studying the stars over his head and making a mental note of each change of direction as he altered the line of his advance. He went on, until he saw the first opal glimmer of light along the eastern horizon. Then he turned wearily back toward his river-side camp, once more struggling to console himself with the belief that the familiar gray-clad figure would be there when he returned, would be waiting to fling this deadening weight of despair from his shoulders.

The sun was up by the time he had fought his way back to the cabin under the cliff. Its low walls took on a look of strangeness in the early light, a look of aloofness which sharpened into desolation as he staggered in through the cabin door and saw that Claire had not returned.

He sat down on the ax-hewn door-step, saying her name over again and again, moaningly, as his mind busied itself with tabulating the different possible calamities which might have overtaken her. Then he slumped forward, with his head in his hands, shaken by the thought that through his carelessness he had lost her. A treble call from the river brought him to his feet, at a bound. When that call was repeated he saw that it was nothing more than the shrill cry of a blue-jay. In it was even a note of mockery which angered him. So he pulled himself together, with an effort. He coerced himself to calmness, deliberately cooking and eating his breakfast and reminding himself to accomplish his ends he must conserve his strength. And having eaten, he surrendered to the brief luxury of resting for ten minutes on the sun-warmed sand outside his cabin. He told himself that it must be for only ten minutes. But his eyes drooped and the toxins of fatigue dulled his brain. He fell asleep, without knowing it, and when he awoke dreaming that he had heard Claire's voice calling to him he started up in alarm. He had slept for three hours, too exhausted to remember the task confronting him.

"I must find her—I must find her!" he kept muttering to himself as he thrust a supply of pemmican and smoked meat into his hunting pockets, took up his weapons, and once more started out on the open trail. He had the advantage of daylight, this time, and he could plainly see her moccasin marks in the loose soil as he followed the path she had taken the day before. He could see where she had stopped to drink, where she had stepped aside to pick raspberries, where she had clubbed and killed two partridges in the heart of a bracken patch. He found himself fortified by this evidence of her ability to supply herself with food. But his optimism withered away as he studied the bear-tracks so perplexingly intermingled with the moccasin prints, to revive again as he followed her trail out on a narrow plateau and about a blue lake into clean-floored groves of spruce. Clearly he read where she had encountered and wounded and trailed a marten. And with equal definiteness he could decipher along the path she had taken the precise point where she had hesitated and started about, plainly conscious of the fact that she no longer knew the way home. Then he lost her trail, lost it completely, where she had crossed a series of rocky ridges. But he did not give up. He searched until darkness overtook him, and camped in the open, and resumed his search at the earliest break of day. When he came to a clump of white birch he wedged as wide a section of the bark as he could from one of the larger trees, shaping and binding it in the form of a huge megaphone. This horn, he found, amplified his voice many times, and again and again, during his wandering, he put it to his lips and hallooed through the forest stillnesses. But no answering call came back to him. So he took up the search again, beating systematically back and forth, threshing through the forest for some sign of the lost trail.

His food gave out, at the end of the third day, and he was compelled to divert a stream and capture what fish he could from the half-emptied brook-bed. On the fourth day he brought down a rabbit with his bow. And on the fifth day, when he came to a noisy stream boiling down over fan-shaped rapids he turned eastward along its course and came unexpectedly on the stone cairn which Claire had built beside its bank.

That brought new life to him. He dropped to his hands and knees and studied the sand, the soil, the moss-patches through which the moccasined feet had passed. He followed the broken trail down through patches of shrub-willow. He saw where it advanced to the edge of a muskeg. He noticed the sunken foot-prints, still filled with marsh-water. And his heart sank as he saw that those foot-prints led only in one direction. He could see where she had hesitated and turned momentarily back on the soggy tundra. He could see where she had so frantically leaped from hummock to hummock, where she had veered from willow-clump to willow-clump, even where she had tested marshy islets with her spear-shaft. And when he found he could advance no farther in that bubbling quagmire he beheld tell-tale fragments of torn wire-grass floating on the open pool water. And lying sodden against a small sedge-hummock he caught sight of a wolf-skin turban.

Hope went out of him as he saw it. He knew, in that black moment, the fear that day by day he had been unable to face, the horror that he had been unwilling to articulate. She was lost to him. For all time, no matter what the turns of destiny might be, through the useless days or the empty years that stretched ahead of him, she was lost to him.

He could not reach the cap of wet skin with his hand and he dare not advance farther along that quaking bog. So he was compelled to reach for the sodden gray turban with his spear-end.

He shook the water from it and turned it over in his hands. He held it there, staring at it for a long time. He noticed the ptarmigan-feather that had been stitched into one side of it. It still carried a forlorn air of jauntiness. He remembered her smile as she had added that touch of ornament to her headgear. "Here's where I show the white feather," she had said with a laugh. He recalled also, her equally companionable laugh as she had sat decorating her moccasins with dyed porcupine quills. "This, I suppose," she had said as she held the worked moose-hide up before her scrutinizing eyes, "is really the birth of art."

But that, now, all belonged to the past, to the irrecoverable past.

He stood, clutching at a willow-withe, with his eyes closed. Then he took a great breath and turned away. His mouth was grim as he folded the banded fur up and put it in his pocket. He had lost her. He was alone. For all time, after that, he would have to face life alone, inexpressibly alone.

CHAPTER XVII

When Grimshaw went back to his cabin in the river-cove, at the end of the next day, he found the hearth cold and the fire out. It was dead, he saw as he stirred the ashes, dead as the fire that had once burned in his own heart.

He ate a savorless meal, slept the deep sleep of exhaustion, and awoke to a purposeless day. From force of habit he made the rounds of his traps, carried in an unexpected amount of flesh and furs, and stopped suddenly in the midst of his work to demand for whom and what he was laying up such altogether unnecessary stores. It was only slowly that he awakened to the extent to which life had changed for him. He wandered disconsolately about the cabin, oppressed by its quietness. He stopped short before the small earthenware vessel that held Claire's hand-soap. It seemed a symbol of his wilderness achievement. He had made that soap for her with his own hands. He had leeches the wood-ashes and mixed the lye with rendered animal-fat and solidified that emulsion with ground pipestone, as fine as talc, from a cut-bank on the lower river. He had even scented it with the oil of pounded winter-green leaves. And as he took up the rough cake and sniffed at it he found something faintly feminine emanating from it. That bitter-sweet aroma prompted him to turn to Claire's garments that hung on their orderly wooden pegs along the wall. He touched the soft rabbit-skin and doe-skin with his hands. He lifted the folds of them up to his face. Beyond the vague creosotic aroma that clung to them he could smell a subtler perfume, the fragrance of the vital young body that had worn them, that had left with them something poignant and precious, something unimaginably mysterious.

It would be impossible, he suddenly realized, to live in the midst of such things. Instead of being a consolation, they would prove a mockery. They would stand a never-ending reminder of what had been lost out of his life, of the emptiness that surrounded him. And there was nothing, now, to hold him to this wilderness camp. He no longer had that frailer lost body to think of. He had only his own meaningless life to gamble with. And since the winning or losing involved only his own fate, he would hurl himself against the Barrier and see if he could break through to civilization. And if the Barrier flung him back he would stake his last throw on the river and let it carry him through the unknown, toward the great bay where white men sometimes trafficked. He would hazard what was left of his life to get out of this wilderness that had grown hateful to him.

He would have to travel light, he knew, just as he would have to be prepared for defeat. There were reasons more substantial than superstition why generation after generation of red-men, who so sedulously parceled out their hunting grounds, had been held back from this untraversed corner of the North. They had found it inaccessible. And to escape from it would be no easy matter.

His first decision was to leave a letter of explanation in his cabin, addressed "To Whom It May Concern." But on second thoughts he saw little use in any such message. He pictured it as lying there, moldering with dampness, paling into nothingness with the passing of time. It concerned only himself, now, whether he won or lost. And, winning or losing, he could not see that it would make much difference to him...

Claire Endicott, marshalling the fragments of woodcraft she had gleaned from her camp-mate, made her rock-side *pukivan* a headquarters from which day by day she blazed trails at different directions into the forest. On the sixth day of her exile, advancing along a trail which looked the most promising, she came unexpectedly out on a river where she saw a moose standing knee-deep in the water. She paid scant attention to this animal as it fed on the lily-pads about it. She was more impressed by the fact that the river before her was reassuringly similar in size and appearance to the stream on which she and Grimshaw had built their cabin. So she turned sharply to the left, making her way up-stream along the broken timber-slopes, sometimes skirting the stream-edge and sometimes circling about cut-banks that rose sheer from the current. She fought her way on, mile by mile, torn between hope and fatigue. When she felt that she could go no farther she sat wearily down on a boulder of granite. Her morosely roving eye, as she sat there, wandered on to the stump of a small birch, which had plainly been cut off with an ax. She stared at it heavily, remembering that she herself had not passed that way of late. It came home to her, slowly, that that timber must have been cut by Grimshaw. And in that case she must be within striking distance of their cabin.

Her lethargy vanished, at a stroke. She started up, with a crazy quickening of the pulse, running from point to point where she saw evidences of her camp-mate's activities. He had cut timber there-about, to build one of his lower river fish-traps. And along the trail, near by, were a number of rabbit-snares, with a dead hare swinging from one of the twitch-ups. That meant she had blundered back into home territory, that she was within striking distance of one of the forest trails leading to the cabin, to the comrade awaiting her there, to delivery from loneliness that had threatened to take her

very reason from her.

She started to work her way up the broken river-path, oddly revived, almost light-footed again. She called aloud, from time to time, not despairingly, but elatedly, jubilantly, making the wooded hills reecho with her triumphant halloo. She got no answer to that challengingly glad call, but silence did not depress her, remembering as she did that Grimshaw was probably out on the trail in search of her. She could see still further signs of his labors along the shore, his foot-prints in the bank-mud, his tree-blazes at every turn in the narrow path. She came to a heap of ashes where on one of their wider excursions they had once built a fire. She came to the blind he had built at the caribou-crossing. And she knew then there could be no mistaking the way. She was heading for home. She was once more on familiar ground. She was no longer a forest wanderer uncertain of her way. She was winning back to her mate.

She no longer called aloud as she pressed on. She had a longing to hug the secret of her return, to treasure it to the last moment, to taste the savour of it to the full. She dramatized that final moment when she would appear suddenly before Grimshaw as he stepped heavy-eyed to the cabin door. She pictured a moment of disbelief on his face, followed by a cry of gratefulness. She even imagined him as reaching out his two great arms to her and enclosing her, contentedly, in their clasp, as crushing her tired body to his leather-clad breast and surrendering to a feeling which he had so long and so studiously repressed.

Her heart beat high as she came to a turn in the path and caught a glimpse of the cove-sand that held their lodge. Her knees became slightly tremulous as she half-ran down the sloping trail, worn smooth by the coming and going of his moccasined feet. A pain grew about her heart as she came within sight of the cabin itself. There was no smoke going up from its squat stone chimney. There was no movement about the dooryard. But everything stood there as she had left it, the bark-roofed forge, the fuel-pile, the stretching-frames, the smoke-racks, the stage for holding furs, the stone store-room under the shoulder of the rock. They were there, the same as ever. They lay before her, crowned with a misty halo of loveliness, blurred in outline by the foolish tears which she could not keep from her eyes.

She stopped for a moment, to obtain better control of herself. Her camp-mate, she remembered, was not given to emotionalism. And she must be self-contained, quiet and self-contained, as he himself would be at such a moment. So she swallowed hard, trying to get rid of the lump in her throat as she rounded the path into the cove and stepped across the trodden dooryard. She could hear her own heart beating as she raised her hand to push open the door. A great deal had happened to her, in that immediate neighborhood. She had been close to death there, and had been snatched back by a timely hand; she had forgotten all her own world, and had learned to look with steady eye on a new one; she had been humbled by her uncounted weaknesses, and had learned to take pride in the gathering of a new strength; she had been confronted by desolation, and had found that loneliness was not a thing to be afraid of.

She held her breath as she opened the door, which swung back heavily, creakingly, in answer to her weight. Then her breast filled and emptied itself as her widened eyes stared about the narrow room.

It was empty.

She crossed to the hearth, and thrust her fingers deep into the ashes that lay there. They were cold, cold to the core.

That, she knew, meant that no fire had burned there that day. Her heart sank, in spite of all her resolution, as she turned and once more inspected the room. It was as neat as a ship's cabin, with everything orderly, everything in place. But about it was an air of the valedictory which she could not quite decipher. She crossed to the door, and looked out. Twice she called aloud, before turning back to the shadowy room. Then she remembered that perhaps there might be a message for her, so she went over the cabin, point by point, in search of some sign that Grimshaw might have left. But there was none.

She sat down, tight-lipped, to think things over. There was, after all, nothing to become tragic about. Grimshaw, naturally, was out on the trail in search of her. He was where any real man would be, under such circumstances. And in due time he would return. He was a master-woodsman, sure of himself in any such surroundings, and even that night, or the next, or the next, he might head back to make sure if she had returned or not. So, in the meantime, it was her duty to carry on. She must maintain their lodge as he would like it maintained. She must do her part, no matter what happened, she reminded herself as she set about making a fire on the hearth and proceeded to cook her solitary meal. She had much to be thankful for. She was alive and well, as hardened and resilient as a track-runner, as capable of providing for her wants as any girl of a Chippewan tribe. And here she was protected; she was insured against cold and hunger; she had

little to fear beyond her own morbid thoughts. She tried to laugh, as she banked her fire and made ready for bed, at her own timidities. She made an effort to ridicule herself back to fearlessness. But loneliness weighed heavily upon her. And she missed, more than she was willing to acknowledge, the camp-mate who had failed to return to her.

But she carried on, as best she could. She made the round of Grimshaw's traps, the next morning, and brought in what fur and flesh she could find along the game-trails. She scraped hides and smoked meat, she scaled and gutted fish, she gathered fuel and swept clean the dooryard of their lodge. Remembering that their sleeping-bags had proved unsatisfactory, showing a tendency to gather dampness and presenting difficulties in the matter of their proper ventilation, she took them apart and restitched them into open robes, to which she added blankets of plaited rabbit-skin, incredibly warm and appealingly light in weight. A sort of terror of idleness grew up in her, for when she was idle she found thought most active. And when she fell to thinking she found her spirits ebb low and her courage subside. There was a great want in her life which she found herself afraid to dwell upon. There was an unanswered and unanswerable question which she dared not even articulate.

Then unexpectedly and unmistakably the great question was answered for her.

It was at high noon, on the fifth day after her return to Camp Reliance, when Claire was carrying her hamper filled with starch-bulbs back to the store-room. She had stopped to rest at the edge of a hilltop grove of white birch which dappled her with its spotted shadows. She was gazing with abstracted eyes at an eagle circling languidly over the black-topped hills, ruminating on the ease of its flight, speculating on how readily such wings could reach and mount the Barrier which hemmed her back from the world she no longer knew. But as she watched the planing bird she became vaguely conscious of movement of another nature and in different direction.

She thought, as she turned quickly and stared across the narrow valley, that she saw a wild animal slowly making its way along the open trail. Yet as she looked again it seemed like no animal she had ever encountered in those northern woods. It moved slowly and painfully, like a wounded bear. It crept forward on all fours, and rested for a time, and crept forward again. It took on a grotesqueness, in the shadow, which both perplexed and alarmed her. When it emerged into the open sunlight, crawling still closer to where she waited, she leaned forward, with a quick cessation of breath.

For the thing that crawled toward her, on all fours, was a human being.

It was a battered and bloodstained human being, with matted hair and tattered clothing and trailing footwear, with one leg dragging oddly behind it as it lumbered forward. It fell forward on its face, and lay panting there, from time to time, flattening down on the forest trail until it seemed to merge into the soil about it. And as the woman stared at it with widening eyes she became conscious of still another movement behind it. This was the furtive advances and recessions of a gaunt timber-wolf which slunk about and circled from side to side behind the crawling figure that rested and crept on and rested again. A chill crept through her blood as she watched that companioning shadow which advanced and waited and advanced again. Her first impulse was to string her bow and hold an arrow ready for that hateful faltering shadow that trailed after the other. But a vague inertia held her there, spellbound. A benumbing mingling of horror and happiness kept her from moving. For she realized that the battered figure creeping closer and closer to her was Shomer Grimshaw's.

She wanted to cry out to him, but she seemed without the power of speech. She was swept by a desire to run forward and raise him to his feet, but her legs, for the moment, were without the power to support her. She merely sat there on her shelf of lichened granite, with her hamper fallen between her knees, staring helplessly at the man who moaned a little, from time to time, as he advanced quaveringly along the winding trail.

She called out just once, in the end, with a cry that seemed stifled in her throat. The crawling figure sat up, at that sound, and blinked abstractedly through the tangle of hair that matted the mud-stained forehead. Then, with a dubious movement of the head from side to side, he fell to advancing once more along the trail. But for the second time he stopped, staring directly at the dappled figure against the dappled granite, the figure that looked so phantasmal in the filtered light of the fluttering birch-leaves above it. A look of perplexity crept into his lean face, followed by a look of incredulousness. He passed the back of his bloodstained hand across his brow, and shook his head from side to side. Then he looked still again, and he saw the two half-helpless arms outstretched in a mute gesture of appeal, of welcome, of gratitude.

Slowly he rose to his feet, with his eyes still fixed on that gray-clad figure in the uncertain gray shadows.

"*Clannie!*" he cried in a husky quaver which brought a gush of tears to the waiting girl's eyes.

She ran to him then and fell to her knees beside him on the trail. For he had sunk down again, with a return of weakness, a singular look of pathos in his eyes as he studied her.

"I thought you were dead!" he muttered, thickly, heavily, as his hand reached out to touch her. His groping fingers closed on her arm, as though he hungered to make sure a material and tangible woman leaned above him. "I thought you were dead!" he repeated as his tremulous hand clung to her shoulder.

She subsided slowly toward him, under the weight of that clinging hand. She sank down, with a small cry of helplessness, until her cheek was pressed against his and she was clasping his matted head against her bosom. She held him there, in an attitude oddly maternal, murmuring, "My dearest! Oh, my dearest!" She held him hungrily, repeating foolishly as she felt his arms tighten about her stooping shoulder, "My dearest, you've come back to me!"

Then her arms fell away from him and she sat back, with a brief quiver passing through her body. She stared into his face as though she had viewed it, closely and comprehendingly, for the first time in her life. And in the lines of that face and in the shadows about the stricken eyes she saw the plow-share of pain had cut deep. She saw there a great loneliness and a great weariness, a look of revolt that made her breath catch in her throat.

"You're hurt?" she said, as her eye wandered on to the ragged-moccasined foot that lay inert along the trail.

"It doesn't matter," he protested, disturbed by the tears that still welled to her eyes. "Nothing matters any more!"

"Why do you say that?" she asked, struggling against a recurring impulse to enclose him in her arms.

"I've found you again," he said as he recaptured her hand. "And that's all that counts, now."

"Then you thought I was lost?" she inquired forlornly, perversely happy at the misery in his face.

"I thought you were *dead*," he amended. "So I saw no use in staying on. I tried to get through the Barrier. I took what food I could carry and tried to fight my way back—back to that other world. But there is no way back."

"There must be," proclaimed the woman beside him, disturbed by his dulled note of hopelessness.

Grimshaw shook his head from side to side.

"It can't be done, by way of the Barrier. There's a sea of sink-holes, two days of mire and muskeg. And beyond that are rock-cliffs, walls that only something with wings could get over."

"Something with wings!" repeated the girl, remembering the eagle she had so recently watched above the western hills.

"I fell from the face of one of the cliffs," the man beside her was saying. "It seems to have broken my ankle. I crawled back. But my food gave out."

"Poor boy!" she said, unconscious of the hand that reached out to his shoulder.

"But nothing matters now," he repeated, with a faint grimace of pain as he moved his body. "Nothing matters—but us."

Never before had she seen him thus given over to hopelessness.

"But they'll come for us," she averred, staring up at the pale blue sky that thinned to opal along the lonely reaches of the spruce-tops. "They'll come—in the only way they can come. They'll come with wings!"

"With wings?" he repeated, apparently not following her line of thought.

"Yes; in one of their air-ships," she maintained, with her eyes still on the lonely hilltops.

"They're being a long time about it," countered Grimshaw. He spoke in a note of complaint that was foreign to him.

"My father will come," asserted Claire, remembering that her companion was not quite himself. "I have infinite faith in my father. He'd never give up, so long as he was alive."

Grimshaw did not seem to be listening to her.

"We can't get through!" he repeated to himself, with his hands fallen between his ragged knees, bloodstained where the rawhide no longer covered them. This man with the stricken eyes, Claire remembered, was sorely in need of food, of food and warmth and rest.

"We can at least get back to the camp," she asserted as she rose to her feet. "Could you walk, if I helped you?"

"I might," he conceded, "but I'd be too heavy for you."

"Try me," she retorted with her quiet smile.

"All right," he finally agreed, fortified by a new note of authority that hung about her. "I can manage, I think, if I get an arm over your shoulder."

She helped him to rise, holding him up with her hard-sinewed young body, sustaining his weight as best she could while he adjusted himself to a method of advance which strongly reminded him of a three legged race. She staggered a trifle as he limped along at her side, with his briar-scratched arm half-circling about her neck. But spell by spell they hobbled their way toward the cabin, limping forward and resting and limping forward again. She left him, once, to bring water from the spring, and twice he emptied the birchbark rogan which she held up to him. Then they moved forward again, in silence, until they circled about into the sandy-floored cove where their lodge stood.

"Does it seem like coming home?" she asked as she waited at his side while he stood studying the low-roofed cabin under the dwarfing shadow of the cliff-face.

"It's all we have," he said with a *vibrata* of feeling she had in no way expected from him.

"We have each other," she contended, resenting that estranging tide of impersonality which his utter weariness was once more throwing between them.

"Have we?" he demanded almost gruffly, as he startled her by taking her thin face between his two hands and staring almost savagely into her eyes.

"Haven't we?" she countered, wondering what that stare of appraisal was trying to unearth from her inmost soul of souls.

"If we're not afraid," he said, with his hands falling limp to his side. And still again she was impressed by the silent misery of his listless-eyed face.

"I'm not afraid," she told him very quietly, as she lifted his fallen arm and placed it across her shoulder and directed him, slow step by step, in through the cabin door.

CHAPTER XVIII

Claire, during the week that followed, was disturbed more by Grimshaw's apathy of spirit than by the injury to his foot. For the latter, it is true, they together made a pair of crutches and a cast of brick-clay which they baked and hardened in the forge-fire. And after a few days of rest and forced feeding he was able to be about again. But with his return of strength there was a return of his earlier impersonal attitude toward his camp-mate. Claire fretted in secret over this sense of withdrawal. His studied coolness left her with the impression of being cheated. She sat beside him, during two days of autumnal driving rain, stitching together the moccasins which he had cut out of rawhide, sewing on the fresh caribou clothing which he had fashioned, waiting for him to reveal something which obviously lay on his mind. She showed no excitement when he explained to her he had found a salt spring on his journey toward the Barrier. They could make evaporation-pans, he went on, and obtain sufficient salt for curing all the fish and meat they might need. It would give an added savor to their food, he pointed out, and would even help in tanning their hides and hardening their soap. He could bring her back a supply of it when he went out for his spear and bow and quiver, which he had lost along the trail.

"When *we* go out for them," she corrected, without looking up from her sewing.

"Aren't you going to trust me alone again?" he asked, with a slightly embittered note in his voice.

"It's not that," she protested. "But after this I think we ought never to separate again."

He looked up sharply, at that, only to find her barricaded eyes bent placidly over her sewing.

"I wasn't exactly myself, the other day," he remarked, after a prolonged silence.

Her color deepened a little.

"Are you sorry, for anything you said?" she finally asked.

"I'm sorry, if it's going to make our being together more—more difficult."

"I was hoping it might make it just the opposite," she found the courage to tell him.

His face grew hard.

"There are certain things we can't afford," he announced in a flatted voice.

She looked up from her sewing at that, studying him with slightly luminous eyes.

"Are you afraid of me?" she quietly demanded.

"I'm afraid of myself," he proclaimed, preferring not to meet her gaze.

She looked at him long and steadily. If she accepted his speech as a rebuff, she gave no outward sign of having done so. She drew back into her shell, it is true, but in her eyes remained a vague light of patience touched with triumph. It was to escape this, she suspected, that he finally hobbled out of the lodge and seated himself on a rock down by the river. A late afternoon sun broke through the scattering rain-clouds, throwing a pale shaft of radiance across the cool autumn air. She could see him distinctly as he sat on the rock, with his chin in his hand. She at once thought of Rodin's *Thinker*, of man troubled by an awakening soul, of the jungle-fighter confronted by conflicts which must be won by something beyond mere muscle and sinew.

She betrayed no surprise, the next day, when Grimshaw spent an hour in carefully honing his roughly-made razor-blade. Patiently he passed it back and forth along a flake of slate-stone oiled with fish-fat. Then, having cut his beard as close as he could with his companion's scissors, he lathered his face and scraped and dragged at it until he was once more clean-shaven. Then he made an effort to cut his hair, which now fell almost half-way to his shoulders.

To do this without a mirror, however, was no easy task. And Claire stopped before him, laughing a little at his struggles.

"Couldn't I do that for you?" she asked, watching him as he stopped to hone his scissors-blades.

"Could you?" he inquired, trying to dislodge hair-ends that nested under the neck of his rawhide jacket.

"Of course," she replied, as she put down the crock of smoked meat she was carrying to the store-house.

Her eyes were solemn as she brought out a towel of fawn-skin and tucked it carefully about his neck. They were equally solemn as she took the scissors from his hand and thrust them into her belt while she passed her rough wooden comb through the thick mat of his hair. Then she stood close over him as she held clumps of this thick hair between her fingers and snipped at them with the inadequate scissors which seemed without the power of keeping their point. His face remained equally solemn as she stood off to inspect her handiwork.

"That's going to look more civilized," she said, as she turned his head a little and started work on the other side. She was standing so close over him that her slender body was pressing against his shoulder. She even held his head firmly against her ribs as she trimmed the thatch that shadowed his sunburnt forehead, so intent on her work that she remained unconscious of his wince as she stopped and blew the loose hair-ends from the hollow of his throat. Then she fell to clipping again, squinting a little as she studied the effect of her slowly repeated strokes.

She put the scissors down, with a small sigh, blew the loose hairs from the bronzed column of his neck, and shook out the skin of fawn-skin. Slowly and meditatively she replaced the towel about his shoulders and with her bare hands she just as meditatively brushed down the uneven thatch of his head. Her movements became slower and slower, until the passing of her fingers through his sun-bleached hair became as gentle as a caress. Then she closed her eyes, and with a little gasp of abandonment pressed his head close in against her cheek, straining it there in a momentary hunger that was neither willed nor understood.

He turned about where he sat, at that, and the hands with which he imprisoned her wrists were unsteady. So savage was that clasp that she thought, at first, it was anger that was about to break from him. For one moment he held her back, staring into her face. Then the cry that he uttered was as uncontrolled as her own had been.

"It's no use," he said in a husky whisper. "It's no use," he repeated almost mournfully, as his arms crept about her and he drew her close in to his side.

"Do you care?" she murmured, shaking a little in his clasp, her breast rising and falling sharply against the fringed roughness of his rawhide jacket.

"I love you," he cried as he thrust back the dark mass of her hair and stared into her eyes. "I love you," he repeated as he drew her upturned face slowly toward his own, closer and closer, until their lips met and locked together.

She opened her eyes at the sound that broke from his throat. It was almost a sob.

He was once more holding her away from him at arm's length, with his tragic eyes intent on hers.

"What is it?" she asked, disturbed by the bitterness of his face. But it was her arms this time which clasped about his neck. And it was she who drew his unhappy face down to her own.

"Are you afraid?" she murmured as she stroked his hair. But her second question, like her first, remained unanswered. He took her in his arms again, more quietly this time, and once more his lips were pressed against her cheek stained brown with wind and sun.

"I've fought against this," he said with a sudden gesture of helplessness, of surrender. "I've fought against it blindly, from the first. But I know now that it's no use. It's no use because there's nothing else in the world that counts. It's all we have left to us. Oh, Clannie, Clannie, I've wanted you all along. My heart has ached for you. But I was afraid to show it."

"Why should we be afraid?" she asked with her hand attempting to rub the frown from his stooping forehead. She spoke quietly, but the color had almost gone from her face.

"Because we are so entirely alone. And being alone leaves us so defenseless. And there are so many things we have to remember."

"My beloved," she said with her repeated gesture of hunger as her hands once more clasped his stooping shoulder.

"There's only one thing, now, I want to remember. You've said you loved me. And I love you more than you could ever love me. And we've a right to our happiness. They've taken everything else away from us. But they can't take that."

She lay warm in his arms. He was about to stoop and kiss her again. But he stopped short, studying her with his troubled stare.

She suddenly drew away from him, her gravely assessing eyes intent on his.

"It's *me* that you're afraid of," she cried out, with a slight deepening of color.

He tried to deny that, but she stopped him with a gesture that was almost imperious. "You think that I'm nothing but a child, a child that accident has entrusted to your care. But I'm more than a child. And I've thought more about life than you imagine. I know more about it than I ought to. I know men much better than you know women. I think it's because I've come to know them so well that I love you for your bigness, for that strange gift of purity that has kept you what you are."

"Don't say that," he contended. "It's not true. It's—"

"But I must say it," she interrupted. "We've shied away from these things and left them unsaid for too long. And truth isn't going to hurt either of us. In all this world, I don't suppose a man and a woman have ever been thrown together as we've been thrown together in this wilderness. Everything, everything was taken away from us. We were given a new life, a life of our own, an earth of our own to walk in our own way. But we haven't had the courage to live as we wanted to live. We've carried along with us the ghosts of all the old things that used to surround us. We've—"

"They are more than ghosts," said the man at her side.

"No, no; they are only real in the world where they belong. It's as foolish to carry them about with us here as it is to carry a police-whistle about with us in these woods. There's nothing behind them now, nothing organized to come to our protection when we need that protection. We are answerable only to ourselves. Whatever we do, God will understand and forgive us. Knowing what I know, God will forgive us: I've no fear about that."

"But there's a world of men and women back there that might not be as charitable as God," he quietly reminded her.

"When we face those men and women we can face what they demand of us," said the thoughtful-eyed girl with her brown hands clasped over the leather-clad knee of her camp-mate. "And I'm not thinking of them. For we've found, now, that there's no way of getting back to them. You've said that yourself. But I don't think I could endure what we'll have to face here, week after week and month after month, without the thought of your love to keep my soul alive."

He took her clasped hands from his knee and held them firmly in his own.

"That's exactly what I want to do," he told her. "I want to keep our souls alive. We are more than animals. I too know something of life. And I know there must be beauty and truth in love if it's to last, if it's to be what it ought to be."

She looked at him with her face shadowed with wistfulness.

"Then can't we keep beauty and truth in it?" she asked.

"Only by being strong," he reminded her. "By being stronger than I could without your help."

"I don't understand what you mean by being strong," she said as she rose to her feet after a moment of silence. "After this, I'll always want to be near you. I'll want to touch you, to feel your arms about me, to know that you care for me. Is to deny all that—being strong?"

"No, no, Clannie, we can't deny that now," he cried with his arms about her knees. "It's not love that I'm afraid of. It's only what love, in our blindness, may lead us into."

She drew back a little, with a wintry smile on her face. Then, for the first time, she laughed.

"We really ought to be married, oughtn't we?" she said with a quiet candor which struck him silent. "Oughtn't we?" she repeated, after a meditative moment or two.

"That's impossible!" he said almost harshly.

"Would you marry me, if you could?" she asked with child-like directness.

"God knows I would, if I could," he cried out in a tone so embittered that she fell to studying his unhappy face once more.

"Did men and women really marry, ages and ages ago, away back in the Stone Age?" she surprised him by asking.

"They mated," conceded Grimshaw.

"As you and I have done, in this little inland Stone Age of our own?" she suggested.

"Life is not so simple for us as it was for those savages," he reminded her.

"But the Indians of this country, the Indians of to-day who live as we've been compelled to live—do they marry?"

"Yes, they marry, after their fashion. They have tribal rites they go through, that make them man and wife."

"And it's only where they're in touch with the white man's world that they adopt the white man's way of saying they belong to each other, of having a priest or a minister read some different form of service out of a little book?"

"Yes, since they still live a great deal like animals they still mate a great deal like animals."

She smiled at the note of reproof in his voice.

"But aren't we all really more animal than anything else?" she solemnly demanded.

"I can't help wondering if your father would care to have you regarded only in that way," he said, bringing her up short.

"You don't seem to be able to get the thought of my father out of your head," she said with a softness of voice which took the harshness out of her charge.

"Perhaps that is because I know you are always in his thoughts," he reminded her. And her eyes, at that, grew shadowy with thought as she once more sat down beside him. She sat there without speaking, for a long time. Then, with a gesture of infinite tenderness, she placed her sun-browned hand on his shoulder.

"I love you for that," she told him. "For that loyalty. And I can see it's loyalty to something more than a mere man. And I want to help you to keep it. The only thing I'm afraid of is that life may leave us nothing but ourselves to be loyal to. Oh, my dear, my dear, what can we do if we have to stay on here, just you and I, as utterly alone as we are now? Just you and I, growing older and older in this awful northern silence, with life escaping us day by day, with the hope for anything else sinking lower and lower?"

She crouched against him desolately, with a shiver going through the entire length of her body. The forlornness of her uplifted face frightened him. And responding to a sudden impulse of protection, he placed his arms about her and held her close to his side.

"But I can't let hope go out like that," he protested. "That would be a sort of suicide, the suicide of our souls, something as unspeakable as the suicide of our bodies. They'll come for us, Clannie! You'll see, they'll come for us yet. And until we know the world has forgotten us, for good, we can't afford to forget the world."

She drew a great breath, comforted by the sustaining arms about her.

"But if they should never come? If, for some reason, we should never go back?"

His voice, as he spoke, quavered in a momentary clutch of passion as he held her unhappy head close against his breast.

"Then we'd have to remake our own world, in our own way."

CHAPTER XIX

Claire was never quite sure what marked the beginning of the new era in her wilderness life. There were times when she identified it with the coming of a strangely poignant period of Indian summer weather after a fortnight of wind and sleet and frost that crusted the northern pools with ice, a stretch of tranquil days with the echo of quiet migrations in the windless air, with a wash of tawny gold over all her world, with deepened color along the thinly wooded slopes, and hazy afternoons that veiled hill and valley and muskeg with a softening mist of unreality.

There were other times when she identified it with something growing out of Grimshaw's final confirmation of their exile, a surrender to the inevitable, a quietude of spirit born, not of her soul's struggle up toward some sustaining idea, but of her resignation to a fate accepted as unalterable. And still other times there were when she felt that this new mood of hers was born of the newer understanding that had grown up between her and Grimshaw. It was an understanding not completely understood—but it was enough. She loved and was loved, and there seemed little else to ask for. It could bring, she knew, no altered condition in their actual relationship, no outward change except those oblique results born of candor touched with tenderness.

Yet that alteration seemed enormous enough. In the midst of a loneliness no longer drugged by labor she seemed to have found an emotional refuge, a shelter and a habitation for her soul as definite as their cabin of tree-logs stood a habitation for her body. With their earlier mad scramble for sustenance already a thing of the past, with a more leisured outlook on the life into which she had so abruptly been tossed, she seemed for the first time to taste the full savor of their strange isolation. Like her race before her, she emerged into an era of self-consciousness. She was no longer unable to see the forest because of the trees. She speculated less about the future and was more preoccupied with the present. She struggled to drain from each passing hour all of its fulness that she could harvest. She loved and was beloved; she lived and walked and had her being side by side with the man she loved. And that, surely, was enough.

There were times, it is true, when she thought of the past. In some unexpected gush of memory the color and warmth and crowded movement of her earlier life would return to her, arresting her with a chilling sense of its remoteness, arrowing her with the thought of its ease and opulence. She saw it, at such times, more sharply than she had been able to see it when she stood immersed in its trivial intensities, its purposeless and crowded complexities. But its memories brought with them no enduring pain. She thought, occasionally, of crowds and crowded places; she recalled the Plaza at the tea-hour, with its mingled odors of furs and Turkish cigarettes and hot-house violets and cinnamon-toast shot through with the softly wistful sobbing of violins. She thought of the carriage-entrance of the Metropolitan at the end of a Jeritza night, with the crush of cloaks and sables and white necks hung with whiter pearls, and the slap of landaulet doors closing on laughing figures in cream and gold. She even thought of the Grand Central concourse of a Saturday afternoon, that incredibly gigantic and ceaselessly humming beehive of interweaving humanity coming and going on their tides of uncomprehended desire. She thought of that crowd as hungry children think of a confectioner's window. Yet if she regretted the loss of such things, it was a regret so pale that it refused definitely to color her present existence. And that newer world, with all its restrictions and wants and deprivations, eventually by some trick of thought turned into the larger and freer of the two worlds. She remembered herself in her city life as being in some way smothered in clothes and clan prohibitions. Her forest life, on the other hand, seemed more and more to take on the dignifying values of a splendid crudity, of a strangely adventurous hazard, of something fantastically complete in itself. She moved about with an odd impression of having been reborn.

She attributed this feeling of wonderful newness, however, less to the magic of a splendid adventure than to the magic of a splendid companionship. Twice over, she felt, this strange friend of hers had saved her. He had saved her bruised body from the rapids; and from a turbulence equally menacing he had saved her unstable woman's soul. He had restored her faith in strength. And she knew moments of exaltation when life itself seemed a small thing with which to repay such a debt. Sometimes, when walking through the opaline northern air at Grimshaw's side, she would stop on the trail, with an impulse she could not control, and crush his leather-clad arm against her side.

"I love you!" she would say with her abandoned little side-movement of the head. "Is it wicked for me to tell you that?"

The bronzed face above her would soften.

"I love to hear you say it," her fellow-vagrant would admit.

"But is it wicked?" she would insist.

"Not when you say it."

"But *you* never do!"

"I would, often enough—if it wasn't against the rules."

"But *would* you, if we didn't have to remember rules?"

"I'd do more than say it; I'd prove it."

She would think that over, solemn-eyed. Then her hand would seek his arm.

"You *are* proving it, my own," she would finally say, with one of her uninterpretable small gestures. "You are proving it by being strong."

So widely did this subjective life of feeling over-spread their outer world of actuality that things which at other times would have seemed momentous betrayed a tendency to scale down to the trivial. Thus, when Claire showed Grimshaw the nuggets she had found in the stream-bed during her blind wandering through the woods, and he had confirmed her belief that they were fragments of native gold, he merely smiled down at them with an impersonal sort of interest.

"Yes, they're gold," he acknowledged. "But what good is gold to us?"

"Gold is wealth," objected the girl.

"Not in our world."

"But it's at least metal, a metal that should be easily worked," she contended.

"That's true enough," acknowledged Grimshaw. "But I'd much rather have a harder metal, something that would take an edge and keep it. We'll find your stream where this came from, of course, and from what you say about it there ought to be plenty more of such stuff there."

"And wealth like this won't do us any good?" asked Claire as she turned one of the nuggets in her hand.

"Oh, yes; if we get enough of it," was the other's casual-noted reply. "If we get enough of these pepites we can make your frying-pan for you! I can concoct a blow-pipe and crucible and pour the melted metal into a clay mold. And it'll help out with our household utensils, of course. You said you'd be needing hair-pins before long. And you can have a better comb. And I can make other things as we need 'em, such as buckles and buttons. I could even take the outer coating of deer-gut and prepare it for gold-beater's skin. With that we could have gold-leaf for decorating some of our pottery, if we cared to use it."

Claire was gazing down at the pepite in her hand.

"Could you make me a ring?" she asked. "Just a plain gold band?"

"Quite easily," he told her. "You mean, of course, one to wear on your finger?"

"Yes," she acknowledged.

He took her hand in his and studied it. Then he lifted it to his lips and kissed its weathered surface.

"Poor little hand!" he said with his solemn smile.

"Isn't that against the rules?" she questioned as she studied her water-chapped fingers.

"Why should you want a ring on it?" he asked instead of answering her. She looked up quickly, at that question, as though to discover some deeper meaning to his words. But she saw only tenderness in his eyes.

"It's merely a woman's reason," she told him as she turned away. And nothing more was said on the matter. Yet two days later they set out on the trail and came to Claire's stream-side cairn and worked the bed of the creek and carried home a

quart of the rounded yellow pepites tied up in a square of doe-skin. They carried home their casual wealth and burned fresh charcoal and prepared a mold and melted their precious metal and fashioned it into a none too symmetrical frying-pan. They handled it with reverence, for a day or two, and then it became merely a utensil, half-forgotten in the excitement of a still more stirring discovery.

For Claire and Grimshaw, while tracking a caribou-cow which the latter had wounded with an arrow, unexpectedly stumbled on a hollow tree filled with honey. They marked the spot and returned with pottery jars, smoking out the hive and carefully garnering every pound of the precious combs filled with cloying sweetness. And as the savor of that strange sweetness melted on Claire's bewildered tongue she realized how great a want the absence of sugar had been leaving in her life.

"This is heavenly," she cried with the gusto of a child, as she sat licking the amber fluid from her finger-tips. Grimshaw had been explaining how by straining it and storing it away in containers they could have enough sweets until the next flow of sap, to say nothing of the beeswax which would be so useful in their sewing and net-making. And perhaps in building a canoe. So he sat down beside her and ate some of the honey from the point of his knife.

"I never knew the world held anything as sweet as that," he light-heartedly exclaimed as he once more dipped his knife-blade into the syrupy mass.

"There's just one thing sweeter," said the girl as she lifted her honey-stained mouth up to his face.

"What's that?" he asked, remembering at the moment what pools of soft light her eyes were.

"It's love," said Claire, with her head against his shoulder.

His arm was about her slender waist. But he sat momentarily lost in his own thoughts.

"Yes," he finally said. "We have to do without things for a long time before we know their value."

When, before their fire that night, she asked Grimshaw what he had meant by his reference to building a canoe, he explained that their one remaining hope of heading back to the outer world lay in following their river by boat or canoe until they came to some bigger stream that might eventually lead them to Hudson's Bay. But that could not be done now, he pointed out, until spring. It meant a voyage of hundreds of miles, perhaps, down to tide-water, and probably another journey of equal length before they could find a trading post or a white man's settlement. For such a trip they would have to have adequate equipment, a well-made kayak of water-proofed deer-skin if they could not find birch big enough for canoe-bark, a shelter-tent, weapons that could be relied on, clothing that would keep them covered, food enough to insure them against starvation, no matter what the nature of the country through which they might have to pass.

"That means, of course, that we must winter here," he told her.

She moved her head up and down comprehendingly, as she stared into the fire.

"It will be a long winter," she said, more to herself than to him.

"But it doesn't mean we must den up like a bear," he explained. "We'll be quite free to come and go, even freer than before the freeze-up. And next week I intend to start work on our snow-shoes, so as to have them ready when we need them."

"It ought to fill me with horror, I suppose," said the gray-clad figure before the hearth-fire. "But it really fills me with a crazy sort of happiness."

"Then you're not afraid?"

"The only thing I'm afraid of," she answered, "is that I may no longer be with you." She crept closer to him, with a nestling movement, and crouched close in between his leather-clad knees. "Do you ever stop to think just what will happen to us when we go out, when we get back to that other world?"

He stopped short at that question, with a faint narrowing of his ruminative eyes.

"I've scarcely thought that far ahead," he acknowledged.

"Neither have I," she confessed. "I don't even think I want to. If I woke up in the morning and saw a motor-launch at our landing with a *metis* guide to pilot us straight down to that settlement on Hudson's Bay, wherever it may be, I really think I'd be sorry."

"But I wonder how long you would feel that way?" he ventured.

"As long as I knew you loved me," was her quiet reply. "Do you?"

He did not answer her in words. But he bent low above the upturned face until his lips met hers, even as he murmured: "This is forbidden." He held her body close to his, bathed in the glow of their hearth-fire. He held her there until he saw the thick-fringed lids droop heavily over her eyes. He could feel the small quiver that sped through her relaxed body as her arms tightened about his neck.

He unlocked them, abruptly, and rose to his feet. She could hear his quickened breathing as he crossed to the cabin door and flung it open.

She followed him to where he stood staring out into the night, perplexed by the look of pain on his face.

"What is it?" she asked.

"We've—we've got to settle on some sort of armistice out here," he said, without turning toward her as he spoke.

"But an armistice is something arranged between enemies, isn't it?" she inquired. "You're not my enemy, are you?"

"I might be."

"How?"

"By forgetting what I can't afford to forget."

"Ah!" she said, her lips a little awry. "Then you're sorry you love me?"

"I don't want to be sorry," he amended.

"I see," she murmured, standing meditative-eyed in the wavering firelight. "You feel it wouldn't be fair and honest to either of us, to reach out for happiness, in shipwreck like this?"

"It wouldn't be happiness," he corrected.

"Then you don't care for me?" she demanded. "You don't like to be near me?"

"God knows I do!" he cried out with unlooked-for passion.

"But you don't do it willingly."

"I want to do it honestly."

"You mean you're my—my guardian, out here, and that it would be a sort of breach of trust, when the two of us are so terribly alone, to take what our hearts cry out for, to—"

"I can't even talk about it," he gasped, like a swimmer spent by struggle.

She stood, for a full minute, in silence beside him.

"You are so different!" she said at last. "Dearest, you are *so* different! But I think I understand. And I love you for being strong, for being loyal, though I can't quite understand what you're being loyal to."

"It's you who must be loyal," he said with his face turned toward the night.

"To you?" she questioned, leaning closer to him.

"To life," he retorted. And still again she stood silent beside him.

"But if there's nothing left of life?" she finally questioned. "If we've nothing left but ourselves, and this?"

"We can't be sure," he reminded her.

"Then when are we to know?"

"That's something I can't answer."

"But while we wait, even though we know we love each other, you don't want me to make love to you?"

"I want it too much!"

She thrilled perversely at that cry which attested to her woman's power over him.

"I wish I had your courage," she said out of the silence that had fallen between them.

"You have something better," he asserted. "You have honesty."

"I don't understand that."

"You will, some day," he told her.

He reached out, to close the door. But she arrested him, with her hand on his outstretched arm.

"Kiss me," she said with a sudden quiet ardor that startled him. "Kiss me good night, beloved, before we go back."

He took her in his arms and held her head close in against his shoulder. Then he stooped and kissed her on the forehead.

"Not that way," she complained almost drowsily, as she drew his bent head lower down to her face.

"That's our good-by," she said as he staggered back and leaned against the log-ends of the rough door-frame. "For after this, my beloved, I'll keep on my side of the naked sword. I want you for myself, always, forever. And something tells me the only way I can hold you is to leave you free. So there'll be no more of this, no more, my dear, until you and your loyal soul can come and ask for it!"

He noticed a trace of tears in her eyes as she turned back to the light. But there was a smile about her slightly tremulous lips as she crossed the rough floor to where the dressed deer-skin partitioned off her rug-strewn little sleeping-room.

"And to-morrow, O King," she said with a faint tang of *diablerie*, "we'll draw a chalk-line down the middle of this our humble abode, and on the one side shall repose my Sovereign and on the other side shall rest thine hand-maiden!"

He saw her take her candle made of bear-fat and at the hearth fire light the wick made of the pith of club-moss. He heard her quietly murmured "Good night" as the deer-skin portière fell in place behind her vanished figure. And as with troubled eyes he later banked the fire behind their hearth-stones he heard the unsettling faint confusion of sounds which told him she was making ready for bed.

CHAPTER XX

Claire, during the Indian summer days that followed, found a strange harmony between that briefly ironic season of peace and her own tranquillized spirit. It was a peace made poignant by its very transiency, a momentary passionless lull in the season before stronger forces marshalled and asserted themselves. But she did not stop to question what was to follow. She surrendered to an immersing lethargy that was something more than lethargy, shot through with rhapsodic moments which came as unheralded as they were unwilling. She found strange beauty in the world about her, a transporting glory in the dark yellow of the poplar groves painted gold by the frost, in the more brilliant yellow of the birches, in the crimson of the willows. She seemed alone in a painted world of her own, a world aloof from all others, a world mysteriously complete in itself. That sense of isolation seemed heightened by the haze which covered their hills from horizon to horizon. It was not strong enough to shut away the sun. But it muffled midday in a ghostly mist of gold and draped their valleys with a softening curtain that left them strange to familiar eyes.

Claire could not tell how much this phantasmal sense of beauty was objective and how much it was subjective. But she nursed a suspicion that it was due to some change within herself, some newer sense of well-being which she could not quite account for. Of her bodily health she had no doubts. The euphrasy of open air and constant physical exertion crowned with contentment had apparently worked a miracle of its own. She was hard-limbed and wiry, red-lipped and vigorous. She had in some way lost her more girlish contours. Her body had broadened and flattened and the line of her jaw had sharpened. She seemed larger, more caesthenic, than of old. Her neck had grown more columnar, her bosom, with its doubled reservoir of lung-power behind it, had deepened even as it had flattened, giving to her torso an air of athletic hardness accentuated still again by the sinewy slenderness of the buckskin-clad leg and the Indian-like narrowness of the hips. But about her, for all these de-sexing influences of attire and activity, was an inalienable aura of womanhood, of womanhood ripe with feeling and touched with wonder. Sometimes, when Grimshaw would come upon her in those pearl-misted autumn mornings, posted on a stand and watching for deer along one of their runways, the sense of her beauty would catch his breath. At other times, as he watched her, gray-clad, in the gray light of evening, quietly stalking the snow-shoe hare between lonely aisles of bush-willow, standing poised and Artemis-like with her arrow-tip drawn tensely back to her cheek-bone, the sense of her loveliness would break over him like a wave, leaving him indeterminately chilled and wretched and driven in on himself. He was happy enough as they worked side by side, during the long autumn evenings, but he knew none of that unquestioning well-being which in his camp-mate amounted almost to intoxication.

He was under a strain which she could neither understand nor fathom. More and more he found himself watching her, secretly watching her, arrested by some momentary accident of light on her bared brown throat, held tense by some unconsidered grace of pose as she stooped over a stretching-frame, stabbed as sharply as with a knife-blade by the beauty of her idly brooding eyes as she crooned above their camp-fire. During the quietness of the night, when he heard her turn on her bunk-bed made of wattled willow and poplar-poles, the sound of such movements filled him with a trouble which he dared not articulate. And once, when he unexpectedly invaded the cabin and saw her standing bare-shouldered above a fawn-skin slip she was warming at the fire, he turned and fled to the woods, walking on and on without sense of direction or destination, walking on at a great pace to keep thought away, until warned by the lameness of his foot that he was fatiguing himself for nothing.

He grew thinner as the season advanced and a newer restlessness showed in his movements. If his wilderness mate detected any changes in him she did not comment upon them. She walked, to all intents and purposes, satisfied with what life was giving her. If, after an exceptionally happy day with Grimshaw in the open, she sat before the hearth-fire with the air of a child hugging a secret to her breast, that secret, whatever it may have been, remained her own. She was happy. And happiness, in her straitened philosophy of life, stood the final gift of fearlessness. She was not without the impression, in fact, that she had earned this happiness, that she had achieved it through her own secret readjustments. For, when all was said and done, everything about her was not idyllic. She was still surrounded by countless anxieties and cruelties. There was Fear always in the shadows, fanged and prowling forms, skulking marauders, timber-wolves to distress her homeward steps and the night-call of a stalking wild-cat to chill her blood. There were owls to visit their snares and wolverines to rob their traps. There was blood to be faced, elbow-deep, after a kill, with a carcass to cut up and a hide to dress. And in her own more intimate life there were deprivations too great to be entirely overlooked, roughnesses of raiment and the incompetencies of household makeshifts and the absence of those countless small luxuries with which life had once so prodigally surrounded her. But she consoled herself with the thought that she still had the essentials of life. Just as, during this wilderness exile, she had become an enforced meat-eater, and in doing so had found

her teeth and tissue and sinew take on the strength of the carnivorous, so, in another way, her spirit had adjusted itself to some sturdier diet and had grown stronger through what it had been denied.

This, however, did not altogether account for the winy intoxication of happiness that filled her body. There was nothing, she began to feel, that could account for it. So she accepted it, as one accepts good weather. She accepted it, without more self-probings, as a part of the ghostly splendor of the season. It could not last, perhaps. But while it lasted it was wonderful to behold. It had come on her, whatever it was, as quietly and as unexpectedly as a deer breaking cover, not with a crushing and crashing burst of speed, but wondering-eyed through gently parting greenery, incredibly silent, incredibly gentle, so that she had not the will to raise a hand against an intruder so fragile. Sometimes, it is true, the ghostly shadow of a ghostly fear troubled her. As the days shortened and the season advanced the polar displays of the Northern Lights increased in volume and vividness, often touching the wondering girl into an awe which stood a framework for that silent inner fear of hers. One night, as she stood watching the pomp and majesty of the intermingling colors along the northern horizon, counter-marching pennons and banners of gold and rose and orange and opal paling down to glacial green, she called Grimshaw to her side to see the Lights.

"They rather frighten me," she acknowledged as she linked her fingers over his arm. He sighed deeply.

"They are very beautiful," he finally admitted.

"But why should they make me feel so small and lonesome?" she asked of the man at her side.

"Because we *are* small and lonesome," he averred, with his gaze not on the wavering Lights but on the questioning limpid pools of her upturned eyes.

"Yes," she abstractedly agreed, after a silence, "we *are* terribly alone, aren't we?"

"A thousand miles of emptiness, between them and us," he said in little more than a whisper. "Cold and silence, right to the Pole, and just you and I, alone, in this pitiful little circle of warmth!"

He stood staring out, unconscious of her quiet movement of withdrawal and the second huddling movement, almost a shiver, that passed through her body.

"Let's shut it out!" she cried in a slightly strangled voice as she drew Grimshaw in under the lintel and swung the rough-timbered door back against the frame. But neither of them spoke. Her hand still rested on his worn buckskin sleeve, where it slipped down inch by inch until her fingers were clamped within the grasp of his great hand. She looked up, startled, at a half-articulate cry in his throat, a cry strangely touched with want, with protest, with despair. He caught her up, the next moment, with a savagery that was as sudden as it was unexpected, and half twisted and half flung her about until her body was pressed against the rough edge of their lodge-table. There the huge leather-clad arms wrapped themselves about her, crushing her close to him, pinioning her panting breast against his own panting breast while he kissed her ruthlessly, abandonedly, on her relaxed and unresponding lips. He even lifted her from her feet, holding her without effort as he buried his face in the soft hollow of her throat.

That movement, so oddly sustained, puzzled her beyond words, until, with the passing moments, she found her shoulder wet with his tears and felt faint convulsive movements of his body which told her he was sobbing there.

Then slowly, with her hands in his hair, she lifted his shamed head up to the light. She held his face to the wavering firelight, tenderly, between her two hands, staring long and pityingly into the eyes made haggard by remorse.

It had come and gone, a storm out of the silence. Slowly his arms relaxed and fell to his sides.

"You'll hate me for this!" he gasped. "You hate me now."

"No, no," she said in a voice so small it seemed almost a dove-coo. "I don't hate you. I couldn't do that. But I think I'm beginning to understand you."

He winced perceptibly before a gesture from her that had much of the maternal in it.

"But I don't even understand myself," he protested, puzzled by the quiet radiance of her face.

"I know you don't. And that's why you make it so hard for yourself. You're still afraid of life, just as I am, but in such an

entirely different way. It's love that you're afraid of, this thing that can spring on you out of the dark, and take you by the throat. And it does that because you're denying it its right to live."

"But it has no right to live," cried the man beside her.

"Well, it lives, at any rate. And the more we come to know the cold and desolation, out here, the more we'll hunger for its warmth, for that little fire to stoop over when we've so terribly little left. But what I'm afraid of, dearest, is something so different. I'm afraid of life slipping away from us, of slowly growing meaningless. I'm afraid of being cramped and cooped up by a lot of precautions and timidities and taboos that are supposed to keep evil away but only succeed in keeping life itself away. For it's only once, after all, we can live—and there's so much to lose, when we die. And it's only once that love comes to life, real love, the love that makes everything else like straws on the wind."

He made a gesture of helplessness, in no way quietened by these words so quietly spoken.

"I don't think you're helping me very much," he cried with a note of bitterness in his voice.

"I don't think I can help you. And I don't think I want to. For when we pass the frontiers of pain we ought to step into the country of peace."

"What do you mean by that?" he asked.

She sat silent for several minutes.

"You once said that out here we could never be far wrong when we followed the Indian. And there are times when I feel we're trying to be too civilized. We still keep those old chains of social habit and tribe fetich dragging at our heels. We're trying to be so unnecessarily respectable. We're still thinking in the foolish old forms that have nothing whatever to do with the way we're living. We're—"

"You're not arguing for mating as an Indian would mate?" demanded Grimshaw.

"How would an Indian mate?" she asked, untroubled by the harshness of his voice.

"That would vary with the various tribes," was the other's answer, after a moment of thought. "There would be isolation and ritual bathing. A flour cake would be baked and divided between the bride and groom. Or two arrows, broken for the purpose, might be spliced together. That, of course, is to signify the new union. Then the marriage would be publicly proclaimed. Sometimes, in fact, it's done in writing. I've even seen a buck and squaw tattooed, announcing the one to be the mate of the other."

"Oh, I like that!" cried the brooding-eyed woman beside the hearth-fire. "You could tattoo on my shoulder, in mulberry-colored letters, 'I am the wife of Shomer Grimshaw.' And somewhere on you, where it could never, never be changed, would have to be the words: 'I am the husband of Claire Endicott.' That would make it seem so final and authentic."

"Authentic," he contended, "only to ourselves."

"But even though we had to consider other people, people who read their morning paper and pay taxes, wouldn't a contract like that be really legal? Wouldn't that make us belong to each other, for ever and ever? Isn't that just about what our American common-law marriages are?"

"I am not an American," he reminded her.

"Then what is the law in your country?" she asked.

He explained, that in so far as he understood it, English law accepted as valid a foreign marriage duly solemnized according to the *lex loci*, provided it resulted in a monogamous union.

"You wouldn't want more than *me*, would you?" she startled him by inquiring.

"I think I'd always ask for beauty and dignity, in a rite like that," was his slowly enunciated reply.

"But isn't the beauty and dignity put there by the people who take part in the rite?" she quietly inquired. "And think of the weddings we've seen back in our world—could anything be more barbaric and foolish and meaningless?"

"They've endured, I suppose, because they serve a purpose of their own."

"But with us—what purpose could they serve?"

"None whatever," he said after another of his meditative silences.

"Then that's the way I think we ought to be married," she announced. And it was only the silence, prolonging itself between them, that finally caused her to look up.

"I was wondering if that's the way your father would prefer to see us married," he said as his glance met hers. And it was her turn to sit silent.

"Do you love me?" she asked, with her quiet eyes once more studying his face.

"More than life itself!"

She smiled, in spite of herself, at the solemnity of his words. "But there's something you're vaguely afraid of?" she prompted.

"I want to protect you," he conceded.

"From what?"

"From a world that would never understand, that would never be charitable."

"Why are you so afraid of that world?"

"My past has taught me to be afraid of it."

"Ah, your past!" she said as she watched him add fresh wood to their fire. "You have told me so little about that."

"It doesn't seem to count, out here."

"But if we're to live and die here, alone—" she began, and broke off with one of her uninterpretable small gestures.

"That's the one thing we can't be certain of."

"But if in some way we broke through to our old world, you wouldn't feel the same toward me? You wouldn't care for me as you say you do?"

"I'd rather be here, with you, than back in that world without you."

She turned on him with an upward movement of the hands that translated itself into a gesture of endearment.

"I wonder," she said in a dreamy intonation as she faced the rising hearth-flames, "how I'm ever to repay you for what you've done for me? For what you saved me from? For all the loyalty and service and tenderness you've given me? For what you lost and suffered through my foolishness?"

"You have repaid me!"

"In what way?"

"By just being *You*—by just being here."

She turned on him, more impulsively this time, and drew his face down to hers, pressing it to her shoulder with a convulsive little gasp of happiness that both quickened his pulse and brought a look of trouble to his eyes. Then she drew slowly back from him, as though the specter of something unforeseen had also crept in between her and her happiness.

"You speak of protecting me from the world," she broke the silence by saying, "but do you realize how it's already too late for that? My good name's gone, forever. We've stood naked in this wilderness, side by side. We've lived here together, alone. We've lived under the same roof and slept side by side at night. And what will the world you're so afraid of say to *that*?"

"We can face that when it comes," he slowly asserted. "And it will be easier to face if we know that our hands and hearts are clean."

She sat in silence, thinking this over.

"You are right," she finally acknowledged, without turning her face from the fire. "You are right, only I need your strength to make me see it. A woman, in some way, is so different. She seems to live so much more in her feelings. And sometimes, at night, I feel that terrible sense of isolation, of being unutterably alone in an unutterably lonely silence. I feel it so keenly that it seems to shut off my breath and smother me. Yet I don't think I'd ever have that, if I felt your arm about me, just a warm, sustaining, human arm to remind me there was something breathing, something alive and conscious, between me and the wilderness. I've—"

"Don't!" interrupted the man beside her, with what was almost a gasp of pain.

"But it's true. And we shouldn't be afraid of the truth. One night, after lying awake for what seemed an eternity, I felt that I couldn't stand it any longer. It seemed crushing me, the silence and everything. I got up and groped my way toward your bunk. I was going to wake you up and tell you I was cold and frightened. I didn't care any more. I suppose I was hysterical. I *must* have been that way. For when I lifted the elk-skin to step into your little sleeping-room, I thought I saw my mother there, barring the way. My poor mother, all in white. And she's been dead for years!"

There was a dewing of moisture on Grimshaw's dark brow as he rose to his feet. He walked to the cabin door, wheeled slowly about, and returned to the fire. There he stood with his unfocussed eyes staring into space.

"It was the same thing," he finally admitted, "that happened to me. It was one night, weeks ago, after—after something had occurred. I couldn't sleep. But I could hear you breathing. I'd a longing to be nearer you, to see you, to touch you. I fought it, for an hour. But in the end it conquered me. It seemed like a chain, dragging me, that power that drew me toward your sleeping-place. And when I got to the entrance there was the same figure, a white arm stretched out across the elk-skin curtain, holding it in place."

He stared down at the intent dark face looking up into his. He could see a little of the color ebb away from it.

"What does it mean?" she asked, a quaver in her voice, as her hand sought his.

"It means," he said with an odd gesture of humility as he pressed her hand against his lips, "that life is deeper than our own feelings."

She stood up beside him, looking about with widened eyes, like a child uncertain of its surroundings. Then she shrank in closer to him, clinging to him, as though in need of the sustaining thought of his strength.

Unwilled, his arms closed about her and she lay in his ample clasp, quieted and consoled. She lay there until she heard a sudden sound out of the night, high above them. It reminded her startingly of Milt Bisnett's motor-horn, in the old days, sounding from the east drive of Hillcrest.

"What's that?" she asked as the sound was repeated, again and again. And Grimshaw was able to smile down at the startled wonder in her eyes.

"Those are the wild geese, going south," he told her.

CHAPTER XXI

Claire, when she awakened the next morning, was oppressed by the unnatural quietness of the cabin. After lying for several minutes without hearing any sound from her camp-mate she threw her loose *parka* of deer-skin and swan's feathers over her shoulders and stepped out of her fur-hung *boudoir*.

The fire, she found, had not been made. The customary pottery-pail of water had not been carried in from the spring. Grimshaw's hide-curtain, usually looped back to air his sleeping-quarters, hung disconcertingly in place.

Claire listened at this curtain for several minutes. Then, hearing nothing from within, she called aloud. When she got no answer to that call she pushed the curtain aside. Grimshaw, she saw, was not there. And his bunk had not been slept in.

A tremor of alarm sped through her, at this discovery, but she tried to quiet her mounting fear with the claim that he had heard an early moose-call and had hurried out without waking her. The discovery that his bow and quiver, together with his spear and his newly-finished moose-horn, were not in the cabin seemed a confirmation of her claim. But she was troubled in spirit as she uncovered a bed of coals on the hearth, added kindling, and fed the widening blaze with sticks of driftwood. Then, after putting water on to boil, she took her clothing from its wooden pegs, fresh rabbit-skin leggings and re-soled moccasins, her tooth-brush of shredded quills set in a fawn-rib handle, her precious small cake of home-made soap, and her absorbent big bath-towel of sun-bleached moose-hide. With these over her arm she followed the firm-trodden small path to her bathing-pool, where with her bare foot she broke the crust of ice about its edge. Then she slipped out of her *parka* and night-dress of fawn-skin fringed at the throat, tossed them on the rock beside her, and with a deep intake of breath plunged into the limpid water, along the surface of which little needles of ice still floated. She swam noisily and briefly, making little dog-like noises as she threshed the water that drove the color from her skin. Then she clambered out, caught up the soap, lathered her hard-muscled young body, and once more plunged into the pool. She made no sound this time, beyond the quick swish of her movements as she ducked and emerged, but her jaw was set tight as she caught up the rough towel and rubbed her tingling flesh dry. It was a rose-pink by the time she had finished, glowing above the fawn-skin chemise and the moose-hide hunting-shirt which she drew over her head. By the time she was dressed even her finger-tips were tingling and the thought of broiled elk steak with hot Labrador tea and cakes made of wild-rice meal was far from repugnant to her.

But her momentary elation vanished as she hurried back toward the cabin. Her mate, she remembered, was not there. And life, without that mate, no longer had much meaning.

Then, while she was still struggling to buoy up her spirits with carefully devised reasons for his absence, she caught sight of him approaching along the upper trail. Across his back he carried the body of a cub-bear, apparently captured in one of the trap-line snares. She called to him, with a sudden lightening of the heart that made her voice bird-like in its reediness. But instead of answering her he turned and hung his bear carcass at one end of their *starchigan*. She saw then, for the first time, the abject weariness of his face. It carried the look of a man who had been beaten, who had fought hard and been worsted.

"Where have you been?" she demanded, stopping short before the half-averted haggardness of his eyes.

"Walking," he said, without meeting her gaze.

"All night?" she queried.

"I couldn't sleep," he acknowledged almost brusquely.

"Why not?"

"I think you know why," was his slightly retarded answer.

"But I don't," she protested.

"There were too many things said here last night," he said, standing back from her.

"What kind of things?"

"Inflammatory things."

"I don't understand."

"There are certain things you can never let loose and hope to kennel up again. *I'm only human.*"

She stood startled by the protest in his cry.

"But we're all the better for talking those things out," she claimed with her wounding wide gaze on his troubled face. "It's through such talks as that we come to understanding, to peace."

"It brought no peace to me!"

"But you blame me for that?"

"I blame myself."

She moved toward him, with her palms upward and her fingers outspread, in a singularly eloquent gesture of surrender. But she stopped short at the solemnity of his face.

"Then what am I to do?" she asked. And her tone of utter humility brought his haggard eyes to hers.

"I know now that you were right and I was wrong. I've been trying to do the impossible. I've been trying to fight nature. And nature is stronger than I am."

"What do you mean by that?" she asked, her color waning a trifle.

"I mean that destiny or accident or whatever you want to call it has already mated us, has flung us man and woman together, and there's no use our trying to fight it. I can't be near you, now, without knowing it. I can't sleep under the same roof with you without—without this new torture nearly driving me mad. And we can't go away from each other. We're tied together here. We're tied together as closely as though we were handcuffed wrist to wrist."

"Would you want to go away?" she asked, her eyes wide with wonder.

"I've been thinking about that," he confessed, "but it leads to nothing. No, I don't want to go away. God knows, I want to be near you. But I want it made honest and aboveboard, in some way. I want it as open and legalized as it can be made. So that's why I say you're right when you claim we should follow the Indian in such things.... We must have a ceremony.... I think it ought to be as beautiful and as dignified as we are able to make it."

They stood face to face, their attitude oddly suggestive of hostility.

"But how do you think I could face such a ceremony," she finally asked, "knowing that you were entering it under protest?"

"No," he cried out with a gesture of helplessness, "no longer under protest!"

"But without one touch of the happiness that could make such things holy," she amended.

He stood silent before that charge. The pathos of his face moved her to pity. She crept toward him, with a throaty little cry, and leaned weakly against his shoulder. He was trembling, she noticed, as he held her body close to his. But he did not stoop to her tear-stained face.

"I want to go away, for a day," he told her. "I want to go away and think things out. I'll try to decide what form the ceremony ought to take. At any rate I intend to cut white birchbark and prepare a document, to post a public announcement, of what we are doing. Are you willing to see that done?"

"Only if you are willing," she said, smiling for the first time at the severity of his face. But her smile was both brief and wintry.

"And it will be for life, whatever happens?" he demanded.

"It will be for life," she repeated.

He stood silent for a moment or two.

"I'd like to be able to remember that we did this soberly and quietly and with dignity. For, after all, we're more than animals. We're even more than the Indians we're pretending to be. That's one reason why I'd like to be alone to-day. I want to get the whole thing readjusted in my own mind. I want to come back to you with a clean heart, in some way. Does—does this sound strange to you?"

"I think I understand," was her quiet response.

"Then I'm going to leave you," he proclaimed as his arms dropped away from her.

"Would you mind kissing me good-by?" she asked quite humbly.

"I'd rather not," he found the courage to tell her.

"Of course," she concurred, observing that his hand trembled as he turned away. She still stood there as he moved about with a coerced matter-of-factness, gathering up what he might need out on the trail. "You'll be careful, this last day?" she asked, as her eyes followed his leather-clad figure to the doorway.

"Careful?" he asked, not catching her meaning.

"Of yourself," she explained. "For after this, you know, we don't altogether belong to ourselves."

He swallowed hard, half-way through the door, at the wistfulness of her voice. He seemed, in fact, on the point of turning back. But that impulse he caught and throttled before it could possess him.

"And there's one other thing," she added, now in complete control of her voice. "I'd like you to do what you spoke of last night. Somewhere on my body I'd like you to tattoo a sentence, a sentence that will never come out, saying that I belong to you."

He did not speak as he turned away. But he made a gesture which she accepted as one of assent.

For a long time she stood leaning against the door-lintel, watching him as he strode along the twisted trail that followed the river-bank. She saw him stop at the crest of the hill and look back toward the cabin. The clear morning light picked him out with the distinctness of a silhouette, the only point of life in that undulating wilderness of rock and spruce and birch-grove. It magnified his dimensions so that, with the pale green light behind him, he looked momentarily giant-like.

She waved to him, but he apparently did not see the movement.

"*Beloved!*" she said aloud, with her hand on her heart.

CHAPTER XXII

Claire, having set her house in order, mechanically turned to the *starchigan* where Grimshaw's bear-cub hung. She whetted her knife, made a quick cut about the vent so that the rectal tract was entirely freed, and made another cut along the plump belly well ahead of the hind legs, dexterously opening the body only to the edge of the ribs. As her mate, in bleeding the animal, had already severed the wind-pipe, the viscera, freed at each end, came away easily enough, after a little cutting and tugging at the heart and liver and lights. It bloodied her bared brown arm to the elbow but there was neither hesitation in her movements nor repugnance on her face as she dressed and skinned the carcass and flung the entrails into the river-current. Work such as that was now hers to do and she did it without thought. Her brave had made a kill, and she, his squaw, had her housewifely part to play in this constant battle for supplies.

Yet she stopped short, as she thought over that strange division of labor, and instead of proceeding to scrape the moist bear-skin with her mack-chisel, she sat back on her heels staring up at the robin-egg blue of the sky above her. She sat there so long that the Canada jays came closer and closer about her, feeding almost at her feet. Their raucous calls annoyed her and she flung pebbles at them. When she had driven them away she sat equally oppressed by the quietness of the camp. She was restless and perplexed by feelings which she could not satisfactorily coordinate. So, with a gesture of finality, she decided to strike out into the open where she could best commune with her own soul. Life, that day, was pyramiding up into one of its Great Divides. And she wanted to think things over.

She promptly stowed away her hide and bear-meat, washed at the river-edge, and proceeded to dress for the trail. She looped her bow and quiver over her shoulder, belted on her new fire-bag and knife, and in the game-pocket of her hunting-blouse stowed away food for a midday meal. She also carried a sleeveless over-jacket of lynx-skin rolled up and tied loosely about her waist, for the air, with all its windless quiet, held a sword-blade of cold muffled in its misted velvet, with a promise of increasing frost before night.

Yet when she sought the open, oddly enough, she turned in a direction opposite to that taken by the man who had gone forth to reorganize his own life to its newer vistas. And as she beat her meditative way up the broken river-valley toward that half-wooded promontory which they had once christened Lookout Point she was not entirely unconscious of the fact that she was creeping a little closer toward the world that had rejected her. She was shut out from that world as definitely as though the last bridge had been burned between her new life and her old. And from that day forward she was acknowledging the breach as final. She was a wilderness woman now, with nothing to hope for from that world that was receding into the mists of memory.

She turned from Lookout Point and followed a winding game-trail that circled the inner hills and led into a shallow valley carpeted with moss. This moss was dry and soft. Claire, as she invaded it, found that she sank almost to her knees in its mattressing layers of timeless growth. The frosts had long since turned its greenish surface to a warm brown, as inviting as a lion's skin spread in the sun. She flung herself down on it, staring idly up at the sky which had paled from a robin's egg blue to a misted turquoise. Then she studied the small black spruce that framed her tawny amphitheater of silence, the congress of lonely-looking sentinels, each as straight as a ruled line, each tufted with its witch-broom top that gave a distinctive air to such northern landscape. From far away, across the black-fringed hills to the northeast, there came to her the call of a moose, infinitely lonely, infinitely mournful. It was a bull, she knew, calling for its mate. She was idly remarking how the passing of this sound seemed to accentuate the silence which came after it when she became thinly conscious of still another sound growing out of the silence. It was a faint drone like that of a summer bee heard through an open window, a scarcely audible drone that increased oddly in volume as she listened. But it seemed to come from nowhere about her. She let her inquiring gaze rove for a moment about the windless air. Then she turned partly on her side, her face puckered with perplexity as she stared thoughtfully down into the bedded moss about her. For the drone, by this time, had taken on a vague rhythm, a pulsing rise and fall of sound shot through with a second sharper rhythm that made it almost a throb. Then the throb grew stronger than the sustained drone, dominating it, drowning it out with a mounting noise that became in turn almost a rising and subsiding clatter.

The listening woman sat up, her lips falling slightly apart. She had heard sounds like that before. She had heard them above Hillcrest on summer nights as the mail-planes arrowed the darkness high above the Jersey hills, heading for Washington. She had heard them on lazy afternoons above the shouts of the polo players as Gibbie Hauser stunted in his De Haviland high over the Country Club. And she had heard them through happy Long Island twilights above the Hempstead Aviation Fields, as some homing flier caught up the mooring-lights and maneuvered for a landing.

They were the sounds that an air-ship made, the incredible, the unbelievable, sounds out of another world.

It was a mistake, an illusion of loneliness, she told herself as her heart stopped and skipped a beat and raced on again. It was a dream born of too much brooding over the things that had been taken away from her, an echo of older days to scatter her carefully built-up card-house of contentment.

But, a moment later, she saw the plane itself. It was drifting toward her, flying low, apparently following the valley of the river. Its wings, by some accident of light, were momentarily cut off from her vision, but distinctly now she could see the gondola which distinguished it as a seaplane, the floating black body that looked like a shortened canoe with upturned bow and stem. She saw it veer and turn in the misted light. And as it came closer the noise it made increased in volume and grew higher in note.

It floated gracefully forward, only a few hundred feet above the whitewatering channel of the lower gorge leading out of Malign Canyon. She realized, as it rode down on her, that it was swimming into hailing distance of where she lay. And she gathered her breath to shout to it, to make signs that might be seen from it, to arrest its flight while she still had the chance.

And then a strange thing happened.

She tried to call out, but her breath came only in short gasps of excitement. She struggled to rise to her feet, but a palsy of helplessness took possession of her. Her arms shook with an ague like that of the "buck-fever" of green hunters. Her muscles refused to obey her over-tensioned mind. Even as she thought of her fire-bag, and knew that a smoke-signal would be easily recognized by the flier above her, she found her inert fingers unable to take the flake of pyrites from her belt or her knife from its holder.

She saw the advancing plane loom over her, wide-winged and black. She saw it pass with a slight *diminuendo* in the sound of its racing propeller. She saw it, as it receded, once more turn into a floating black gondola with blunted ends. And she fell forward on her face, beating the muskeg-moss with her hands, in a child-like hate of her own helplessness. Odd tremors still tingled through her body. But she grew quieter as she lay there. There was a lump in her throat, however, as she sat up and stared into the empty sky.

"That was an air-ship," she said aloud. "An air-ship, from beyond the Barrier!"

And she had been helpless to signal it. She had let it pass on into those lonely hills without a sign.

But hope revived in her as she thought of Shomer Grimshaw. He was somewhere in the midst of those hills. He was a man of will and brawn, a man of resource. And he would never lie helpless while those careless traffickers from another world flew over his head.

The memory of this quieted her, strengthened her. Yet when she tried to rise to her feet she found that she could do so only with the greatest difficulty. She had once prided herself on her poise, on her parade of indifference to things about her. Yet here she was with still tremulous fingers, with knees that were none too steady as she picked her way along the uneven path. Nothing in life, she had imagined, could upset her as that aerial visitor had upset her. It had come and gone tranquilly enough, leaving her little tangle of forest pathways untouched. Yet it had threshed its way through her newly organized world like a winged giant in a rage of destruction. It had reopened wounds she had thought healed. It had made a bonfire of all her older achieved contentment of spirit. It had blown out the pitiful small flame of her resignation.

She sat for a long time on the topmost granite shelf of Lookout Point. She sat there scanning the opal green horizon beyond the lower river, hoping that she might yet see the slow-tilting black planes return along their course. She went so far as to gather moss and twigs and wood for a fire, to make a smoke signal when the time came. She even unrolled her lynx coat and lashed it flag-like to an alder-shaft, to wave under the wings that might again hover over her.

But she saw no sign of life above the pointed black fringe of the spruce-tiers. The North into which she looked with soliloquizing sad eyes seemed very still, very still and dark and full of desolation.

She must go back, she realized as she saw the lengthening shadows about her. She must go back to Camp Reliance. But she could no longer think of it as home. It was nothing more, now, than a bivouac in the night, with a touch of the abandoned already about it. It had been a momentary shelter between the knees of forgetfulness. It was merely a lonely outpost on the fringe of an even lonelier wilderness. It was a cell, a cell of wooden logs where two lost wanderers had

tried to live and tell themselves that they were satisfied with life.

Then she stopped short as she thought of Grimshaw. There was a chance, she remembered, that he might not have seen that low-flying plane. And if not, she would never tell him. She would spare him the pain of that knowledge. Some time before nightfall he would come back, solemn-eyed and foot-weary. He would come back to the house she had set in order, to the fire that blazed warm on their hearth, to the roast of bear-meat that would stand hot on their crockery platter. He would come back, knowing she awaited him to make his life complete in the only way in which it could now be made complete.

And as she thought of that return a small warmth came to life at the core of her being. It grew bigger, like one of her own hearth-fires, until the chill of the northern air no longer depressed her. She at least owed him that much. It was for her, after all, that he had given up everything, had lost everything. And if into what remained of his life she could bring any shadow of happiness she would fight with all her strength to make him forget what she had done to him. He was her mate, her man. And she was his woman.

CHAPTER XXIII

Robert Endicott, who had once prided himself on being impervious to strain, found himself singularly unsettled as he saw his three months of effort about to culminate in action. This was a new sort of battle he was fighting, demanding weapons with which he was none too familiar. It was a battle in which he felt acutely alone. And now that it was approaching its end, and destiny was about to say whether it should be a winning or a losing battle, he vaguely resented that conspiracy of forbearance with which his frenzied last weeks had been condoned by those about him.

Yet much of his impatience vanished as he watched the careless-eyed young pilot climb into his seat and snap on his belt and pull the heavy goggles down from his forehead. He knew a sense of finality as he felt the helmeted youth throw the breath of life into his engine, "give her the gun," as that youth flippantly expressed it. It seemed like sudden emergence from dull fogs of uncertainty as he heard the roar of the propeller and caught the resultant blast of cold air against his face. There seemed something purposeful in the very vibration of the cowling to which he clung with his two gauntleted hands as the seaplane schooned along the surface of Barrier Lake. It schooned much farther than he had expected, taking off with a tardiness for which he was inclined to blame young Platner. For Endicott had no love for Platner just as Platner obviously had no great admiration for the impatient old autocrat who had been the cause of having him switched from his pleasant forest-ranging routes to go body-hunting over the Land of Little Sticks. To Platner, he was an absurd old bird with more money than brains. And Platner, to Endicott, was a sulky young cub with the soul of a taxi-driver and the manners of a bohunk.

But Endicott forgot about Platner as the plane rose in an appeasingly long and graceful sweep, tilting indolently as it ascended and turned and took the air. He knew, as he saw the amber-blue surface of Barrier Lake fall away from them, that his hour had come.

It startled him, as they continued to climb, to see the Barrier, that had loomed so forbidding from the camp landing, dwarf down into flat-shadowed insignificance. He knew, as they straightened out and swung into line with Malign Canyon, that they were crossing what was most definitely a frontier. But there seemed nothing definite left to mark that frontier. It was another world, from where that foaming small ribbon of whitewater began, but there was little to mark it off from the less mysterious world behind them. It seemed a world over which the roller of God had passed, flattening it out, a dun world mottled with darker patches of spruce-lands, threaded with uncertain small streams, eyeletted with pools, studded here and there with the soft blue of some larger lake. He could see crowns of mist above the rougher steps of the cataract and the shadowing rock that in places made the canyon a streak of black.

"Lower—go lower!" he shouted to the pilot.

He thought, at first, that Platner had not heard him. But as he repeated that shout he saw the sullen side-shake of the pilot's helmeted head.

"I say go lower!" repeated Endicott at the top of his voice.

Sulkily, wilfully, Platner let the plane dip until the earth seemed to leap up at Endicott's staring eyes. Then they suddenly flattened out above a fan-shaped network of rapid-shallows that looked like runnels of whipped cream, flattened out and rose again before the rocky shoulder of the world could fling its weight against their flimsy gondola. But they advanced, this time, at a considerably lower level. The river, Endicott noticed, looked bigger. He could see the spray-cloud, gilded with sunlight, above the last plunge of the rapids. He could see the long tangle of driftwood that fringed the black-water pool at its base. And he saw something else.

He saw something which brought his heart up in his mouth and his gauntleted fist thumping against the leather-covered ribs of the pilot bent forward with his hand clutching the control-stick.

"Land!" shouted Endicott at the top of his lungs. "Land quick as you can!"

If Platner heard, he paid no heed. The older man, bent over the cowling, stared down at an oblong of roof-thatch between a rock-wall and a slope of sand that ran to the water's edge. Beside the pallid rectangle of thatch stood a tiny structure of poles, poles too regularly placed to be there by accident. And between the roof-thatch and the pole-structure something moved and fluttered, as though swung from an invisible line.

"O God!" said Endicott, swallowing hard. "O God!" he repeated, foolishly, again and again. Surely he was not mistaken. The hand of man had made its mark on that valley. There was life there. And where there was life there was a promise of hope.

"Land—land somewhere quick!" repeated the frantic man in the enmuffling coonskin coat. And the phlegmatic Platner, with his leathered arm, pointed toward the distant steel-blue surface of a lake, a lake broad enough to take care of his plane. Already they were a good two miles past the black-water pool, and the lake, Endicott estimated, was another two miles ahead of them. That meant at least four miles away. But it was the best they could do.

The plane took the water like a mallard heeling into its pond, with the wind dying out against the struts. They drifted into the shallows.

"Your feet'll give out, if they get wet," warned the placid-eyed Platner as he poled closer in to the bank. "What'd you think you saw back there?"

"I saw a shack," cried Endicott as he scrambled ashore, wondering why his heart should be pounding so crazily.

"And what're you going to do about it?" demanded his pilot.

"I'm going back to it," asserted the older man.

"And get lost before sun-down," countered the younger.

"You leave that to me," said the other, with spirit. "I'm no fool. I'm going to strike straight north to the river, and then up the river the way we came. You stick to this plane. You've got your outfit and food enough for two days."

"And how long am I to wait here?"

"Until I get back. That may be to-night, and it may be to-morrow. I'll blaze a trail as I go, and give you three signal shots from my automatic when I hit the river. All you've got to do is take care of yourself and this plane. And don't worry about me, young man. I've traveled the north woods before you were born."

Endicott, as he headed for the river, had to warn himself to be calm. He was not so young as he once was. The hard going had a tendency to take his breath away and leave a wobble in his knees as he fought for an opening through spruce and birch and alder thicket. It was farther to the river than he had imagined. He thought, for a time, that he was off the track, but a glance at his pocket-compass put an end to his doubts. As fatigue took the place of elation he even found himself questioning his earlier impressions. Perhaps, after all, Platner was right and the thing that had looked so like a lodge-pole *starchigan* was nothing more than a tumble of blow-downs carried over the cliff-edge in a snow-slide. He had made the wish father to the thought, likely as not, and translated a drift of bulrushes into a cabin-roof. He had built too much on the flimsiest of hopes. They had told him, from the beginning, that he was bull-headed in this matter. And he was still insisting on the incredible.

Yet he stopped short as he caught the flash of the river through a downward sloping grove of spruce, for there, at his feet, where a trodden game-trail crossed his path, stood a cluster of three stones. And those stones, a small one placed on a larger one and another small one on the left as he faced it, had not come there by accident. They were the woodsman's signal of "Turn to the left here." And on a tree-trunk, a moment later, he caught sight of three blazes, one above the other, with a "slice" to the right. That, he remembered, was forest language for "A trap to the right."

There was no longer any doubt in his mind. He was not alone in those woods. A human being had been trafficking up and down those lonely trails. He could see knife-cuts on a white-birch where the bark had been taken away. He could see ax-marks on a sapling where a shaft had been cut. He could even see moccasin-prints on the undulating worn pathway that more and more definitely followed the line of the river.

"God help us!" he said aloud as he caught sight of a fish-trap in the water not thirty paces from where he stood. But he went on again, no longer conscious of fatigue. He noticed that the trail became more firmly trodden, that the signs of human activity became more numerous. His heart sank, for a moment, when he picked up the whittled shaft of a broken arrow. That made him think of Indians. Perhaps, after all, it was nothing more than a renegade redman hiding out in this No-Man's Land of sinister legend. But Endicott thrust the arrow-shaft into the pocket of his worn coonskin coat, which he unbuttoned as he became overheated with walking. He was thirsty, he remembered, and he decided to go down to the

river to drink.

But he did not drink. For as he forged ahead, looking for a path to the water, he came in sight of a curving slope of sand. And against the rock-wall at the back of this he saw a cabin built of logs, a cabin with a squat chimney abutted by a store-room of stone, with a *starchigan* and a bark-covered forge in front of it. And stretched between the cabin-corner and the *starchigan* was a line of braided rawhide from which two towels of deer-skin swung.

Endicott shouted aloud as he advanced toward the cabin. But no answering voice came to him. So he sat down on a neat pile of fire-wood, beside what had every appearance of a charcoal pit in the sand, muttering over and over again: "God help us!"

Then, when his strength came back to him, he advanced studious-eyed to the cabin door, which he pushed open. He called again as he did so. But the cabin, he saw, was empty.

He stood for a long time in that narrow doorway, his face furrowed with thought as he studied the place, wall by wall and point by point. It was not the lodge of an Indian. It was a white man's home. It had all the ear-marks of a white man's occupancy, he proclaimed to himself as he stepped outside again and re-surveyed the worn dooryard. There was a neatness and order there that belonged to neither redskin nor *metis*. No Indian built bellows and forges and baked clay and glazed pottery and dove-tailed wall-logs together in that fashion.

Agitation returned to Endicott as he threw off his coonskin overcoat and studied these wall-logs. The unweathered ends showed they had been cut but a matter of months. And that fitted in with the stubborn hope that still bolstered up his heart. So he ran from point to point, studying the foot-prints in the sand. There were two sizes, large and small. Yes, there must be a man and a woman there—or a man and a boy, he amended, as he mopped his moist forehead and sat back with a shadow of doubt on his face.

He could make sure of this, he told himself, by a closer study of the cabin. So he once more went inside. There he stood in the center of the small whitewashed room, with its intimate aroma of life, with its residuary odors of cooked meats, with the animal-like smell of its dressed furs. He drew back the caribou-skin curtains and inspected the two sleeping-bunks, one large and one small. He noticed the two pairs of snow-shoe frames, still again large and small, with the smaller pair already partly strung with rawhide. He noticed the orderly array of clothing, the sinew-stitched jackets and leggings and hunting-shirts. He noticed the softness and fineness of a fawn-skin shirt, fringed and embroidered with dyed moose-bristles about the throat. He sniffed at it, inquisitively, detecting a vague aura of the feminine about it. He noticed a sewing-basket made of birchbark, holding a few fish-bone needles, a few polished bone awls, a few coils of sinew softened with fish-oil, a small pair of scissors roughly fashioned out of iron, even a half dozen round disks pierced by two holes, intended for use as buttons. But the arresting thing about these disks was the fact that they were roughly made of native gold. He frowned over that fact, heavily, but he forgot it in the discovery of a pottery saucer filled with powdered soap-stone and a second saucer holding a cake of soap faintly aromatic of winter-green.

He found something fortifying in the discovery of these trifles. He read history in them, eloquent as they were of ordered life, the pathetic makeshifts of the indomitable, the courageous subterfuges of the valiant. He could read history there—but he could not read everything. There was still a margin of doubt. So he continued his investigation, with sober and meditative eyes. He invaded the store-room and lifted crock-lids and appraised shelf-loads and inspected strings of smoked fish and containers of pemmican and dried wild-rice. Then he went back to the cooking-hearth and examined the bake-oven and the smoke-stained cooking utensils.

He stopped short at a metal frying-pan, clean and polished, beside the crockery pail of spring-water. For that frying-pan, he saw with wondering eyes, was made of solid gold. It had been roughly cast in a mold and ground down later, apparently, with sandstone or brick-dust. And attached to it by two gold rivets was a smoothed handle of elk-horn.

Yet he forgot about it, the next moment, for the sight of the water-pail prompted him to thrust his fingers down into the ash-pile on the hearth. And at the core of those ashes he found live coals. And live coals meant that the occupants of that wilderness lodge could not be far away from their home.

The thought of their nearness left him strangely agitated again. He even ran out through the open door and called into the echoing quietness of the afternoon, startling the Canada jays that clustered about the *starchigan*. But his excitement, in the face of that all-pervading calm which filled the shadowy river-valley, began to impress him as foolish, as childish. So he walked more soberly to the water's edge, where he drank. Then he sat on the sun-bleached driftwood, studying that

strange wilderness home.

He was still studying it, with his eyes puckered against the slanting sunlight, when he was startled by a sign of life along the upper trail. He sat, shocked into a momentary catalepsy, as he saw a gray-clad figure striding toward him. It was the figure of a youth in brownish-gray hunting-jacket and breeches, a brown-faced youth wearing a wolf-skin cap and carrying a bow and quiver at his shoulder.

Endicott watched that youth. He could see the weathered face with the strangely resolute poise of the head, the brown shoulder above the paler gray of the fur throw, the firm quick stride of the moccasined feet.

It was not until this youth stopped in front of the *starchigan*, and, lifting an intent face, searched the pale gold sky above the pinelands, that Endicott realized his mistake. *It was a woman.*

It was not a youth that he saw, but a woman. And that woman was his daughter Claire.

It was not dream and delusion, this time. It was reality. He rose to his feet, gropingly, with a strangled small cry that brought her gaze slowly about to him where he stood staring at her.

Her first movement was to shrink back a step or two, with her arm thrown up across her eyes, as though to protect herself from a vision that was too wordlessly terrifying to be faced. But her arm sank slowly down and she stood without further movement, studying him, studying him with a dull intentness as silent as his own. She did not move until he slightly advanced his trembling hands, crying out "*Clannie!*" as he did so, and repeating insanely as he staggered toward her: "O God, O God, it's my Clannie!"

"*Dad!*" she said at last, in the huskiest of whispers.

Endicott could see her hand go up to her heart. He could see a spasmodic breath or two that was almost a sob as she leaned forward where she stood, a little round-eyed and incredulous. Then she ran toward him over the loose sand, with her arms up.

He stood with his arms locked about her, repeating his muttered little "Oh, my God!" over and over again as he patted her fur-clad shoulder and held her pumping breast hungrily in against his own. Then he lifted her chin and held her off at arm's length and studied her face, on which there was a trace of tears. Then he noticed her hands, hard and rough.

"You poor little devil!" he said, scarcely conscious of the words. "You poor little devil!"

"Don't pity me," she commanded, stricken by the deepened lines in his face, by the frosty look the whitened gray about his temples had given him.

"Oh, Clannie!" he said, his chin trembling.

"I knew you'd come. I knew it all along!" she said as her looped arm clung to his neck.

"And you're all right?" demanded Endicott, staring into the sun-tanned face with the strangely resolute air about it, with the happy eyes that held their look of inalienable youth, vital youth, to mock the maturity of the sober brow, the wistfulness of the firmer-lined mouth.

"He saved me," she said as she looked away into the lower reaches of the river.

"Who?" said the old gentleman with the suddenly clouded eyes.

"Grimshaw, of course," was the other's answer.

"Grimshaw, of course," repeated Endicott. Then he asked, after a moment of silence: "And is Grimshaw all right?"

"Yes, yes—he's wonderful," murmured the girl as she once more clung to her father's shoulder.

He drew back a little, studying her face. Then he let his eye travel down her fur-clad figure. It was a vaguely anxious, a vaguely questioning eye. He seemed afraid of something, yet foolishly afraid to articulate his fear.

"I always trusted that man," he finally observed. "Can I still trust him?"

Her speech, her intonation, even her gestures, he was disturbed to discover, had in some way grown like Grimshaw's. Yet he moved, uneasily, at the quick glance which she leveled at him. In it he seemed to detect a shadow of reproof.

"You're—you're about all I have, you know, Clannie," he hesitatingly reminded her.

She laughed, at that, for the first time, laughed briefly but naturally. "Oh, dad, what do people do when they're too happy? I'm going to drop dead, or blow up, or something. It's—it's almost too much for me!"

She was crying a little, now, crying as easily and gently as rain falls. Endicott stopped in the act of patting her back and stared once more at the cabin and forge and stretching-frames leaning against the *starchigan*.

"You know, this is all rather incredible," he observed weakly, blinking his eyes. "It—it sort of upsets one's applecart. You can't quite swallow it in one gulp. After all that hell of doubt and anxiety and despair, I've got you here, alive, safe and sound. It's—it's like a grave opening and giving you back your dead."

She noticed, for the first time, the shadow of weariness under the slightly faded eyes, the uncertainty of his step as he moved beside her. And a swift indeterminate pity brought a lump up into her throat as she linked her arm through his.

"Let's go in," she suggested with a newly acquired quietness. "I've got supper to get ready."

But Endicott stopped short, half-way to the cabin door.

"Where's Shomer?" he demanded with a second puzzled stare about him.

She stopped short for a moment.

"He's out on the trail," she said without meeting her father's eye.

"For game?"

Her head-movement was one of assent.

"And when does he get back?"

"At nightfall," was her answer.

"Ah!" murmured the frosty-templed man in the coonskin coat.

Claire's color deepened a little at the clouded look that had come into his eyes.

"And I must have supper ready," she said with a quietness which obviously cost her a struggle.

Endicott watched her as she raked the live coals from the hearth ashes and blew a handful of shredded bark into a blaze. He watched her as she added kindling and wood to the fire, and put water on to boil, and brought earthenware jars of food-stuff in from the store-room. This did not seem like his Clannie of old.

"Now tell me what happened," he demanded as he sat back on a creaking chair of willow and wicker-work. And as she busied herself with her housewifely duties she told him briefly of her flight down Malign Canyon, of her rescue by Grimshaw, of their fight for life and food, of the building of the *karmak* and their campaign to meet the winter.

"He was the man to do that!" observed Endicott as she came to a close.

"And there's much more than that he's done," said the woman beside the hearth.

She looked about, disturbed by her father's silence. Then she too stood silent for a moment or two. "Tell me what—what *you* did," she finally said.

So Endicott told, as quietly as she had done, of how they had been seen that last day from the Barrier Lake camp, of how even the Indians claimed no one could go down Malign Canyon and live. He told of his refusal to believe in their death, of his fruitless search to find whitewater-men who would be willing to explore the rapids, of his efforts to try to get a message up to York Factory and a boat out before winter closed the bay channels. Then he chartered an Imperial Oil Company air-ship, intended for flight up to the Mackenzie Basin, but the plane was wrecked in a forced landing north of Clearwater. Yet he did not give up. This time he went to the Canadian government and the premier himself cut the red

tape by arranging to have a forest-ranger and his seaplane sent out of northern Quebec. Platner, the pilot, had followed the line of the National Railway from Abitibi Lake, but had lost his way between Winnipegosis and The Pas and another two weeks were lost while runners carried gasoline out to him at Moose Lake. And the day before he had arrived at Barrier Lake, where Endicott awaited him. And Platner, at the moment, was just over the hill, guarding his plane and probably cursing everything that bore the name of Endicott.

"That means," said Claire, stopping short in her work, "that we can go back, any time?"

Endicott looked up at his daughter, perplexed by the meditative light in her eyes.

"You don't mean there's anything that keeps you from wanting to get back?" he suddenly demanded.

"I don't know," she replied, without meeting his gaze.

"It's—it's not Grimshaw?" he challenged.

"I have him to think of," was the answer of the quiet-eyed woman beside the hearth-fire.

"In what way?"

"In every way," was the equally low-toned reply.

"You mean you owe him something, for what he has done?"

"I owe him everything. And if I tried and tried, all my life long, I could never quite repay him!"

Her father sat silent a moment.

"And you—you care for him, that much?" he finally inquired.

Claire did not answer, in words. But the slight movement of her head was one of assent.

"And he cares as much for you?"

That question arrested her in her work. She stood for a full minute, motionless and thoughtful-eyed, before speaking.

"That's something I'm not sure about. Fate, you see, hasn't been quite fair with him."

"What do you mean by that?"

"It's rather forced me on him. He could endure me, I know, in a background like this. But he would feel different, I'm afraid, on the other side of the Barrier."

"Good God, Clannie, you don't feel that you're not good enough for him, do you?" demanded her somewhat startled parent.

Instead of answering that question she turned slowly about and asked one of her father.

"What is it about Shomer makes him so afraid of himself? That keeps him so guarded where other men would shut their eyes and let themselves go?"

"Then he *has* been guarded?" observed Endicott, with an audible sigh. It might be accepted as one of relief.

"Wouldn't he have to be, dad, with a wild woman like me?" asked Claire, with a touch of her old-time mockery.

"Perhaps he had his reasons," conceded the other, sober in the face of her smile.

"But what were they? What *are* those reasons?"

Endicott's movement, as he sat back in his chair, was one of withdrawal.

"That's a part of his life I've never cared to talk about," he protested.

"But haven't I a right to know something about that part of his life?"

"On the whole, I suppose you have. But it involves more than Shomer. It involves his mother as well."

"What was she like?" was Claire's quiet-noted query as she seated herself at the end of the rough-timbered table.

"She was one of the most wonderful women I've ever known. And also one of the most beautiful."

"She would *have* to be that," murmured the girl with her chin cupped in her hand. "Tell me the rest."

"About thirty years ago she married a man named Ruddy, Grantland Ruddy. You wouldn't remember, of course, but Ruddy was one of the greatest financiers of his day. He was one-half genius and one-half satyr. Perhaps that isn't strong enough a word. For with all his gifts he couldn't keep from leading the worst of double lives."

"Shomer's father!" said the girl, with a gasp of wonder.

"It came out, like a thunderclap, when he was murdered in one of his Love-Nests, as the papers called them. He was killed by a young rounder, a rounder half-crazy with heroin, who forced his way into Ruddy's apartment and put a bullet through him. That, of course, was before your time. And it unearthed enough rottenness to make even New York sit up for a season. But it broke Mavis Grimshaw's heart. She had her one child, a boy who in the bitterness of her heart she christened Shomer. Shomer, I believe, is Hebrew for the Watcher. And she had her world suddenly cut from under her feet. So she took her maiden name and intended to hide away from it all, for the rest of her life. She was on her way to South Africa, but I stopped her at Vancouver. I took her up into the Klinaklini Valley and showed her an Arden I'd found, the loneliest and loveliest Arden in all western Canada. She built a home there, a hundred miles from nowhere, with two old Chinks for servants and a consumptive Oxford curate to act as a tutor for her boy. She kept that boy there, utterly away from the world, watching and guarding him every moment of his life, dreading, always dreading, that some trait of his father would show up in him. She would have kept him there always, I believe, if I hadn't interfered. For the boy had brains. And he was headed right, after all his mother had taught him. But in one way he was half Indian, growing up in the open that way and knowing more about animals than human beings. So she took him to England for three years, where he studied hard but wasn't any too happy. When he came back I had him enter McGill and take the engineering course. The year after he graduated his mother died. I was there at the time—and she asked me to look after her boy. He was still a boy to her, and she was still afraid of what some woman might do to him. He promised her, that last hour, he promised her on his knees, that he would never make the misstep she was so afraid of. That's why he asked me for this outpost work I've given him this last five or six years. It's given him a world of his own. It's kept him out on the frontier, away from the things he was afraid of. And he was well named; for all that time, I think, he's been the watcher. He's been the one real man I've ever known who went straight and wanted to go straight!"

Endicott thought, as he stopped speaking, that Claire's interest had lapsed, for he noticed her slow movements as she drew the sleeveless lynx-fur jacket from her shoulders and as slowly hung it on its wooden peg along the cabin-wall. There seemed something so casual and collected about that action and her further movement as she crossed slowly to the hearth-side that he was startled by the slow runnel of tears that dripped down her sun-darkened cheek as she abstractedly lifted fresh wood to the fire and as abstractedly turned and stared down at her toil-roughened hands.

"Poor, poor boy!" she said in a quiet whisper of mingled pity and tenderness. "I think, now, I understand!"

"Understand what?" asked her father, standing arrested on the threshold of some newer privacy which perplexed him.

"How I was making it so hard for him," was the answer of the abstracted-eyed girl.

"But won't it be equally hard for you, when you have all that old world to face again? What, for instance, will you have to say to the bunch at Hillcrest?"

She turned on him, with the abstraction vanished from her face.

"What will that bunch have to say to *me*?" she demanded with a vigor that her father had not expected of her. "Whatever I've done, I've at least been *living*. And they've only been playing at living. They don't even know they're alive. Everything they do is so futile and foolish it seems pathetic. They've never once got back to bed-rock. Life's taken about everything worth while away from them without their knowing it. No; they don't bother me. And I don't think that kind of living will ever bother me again. It would seem like being smothered."

Endicott, with his eyes studying his daughter, absently reached for his worn coonskin coat which he held across his knee

as he thrust a hand deep into one of its capacious pockets. From that pocket he drew forth a thick-bodied chocolate-bar covered with silver-foil. Mechanically he pulled away the wrapping tissue and broke off a piece of the dark brown bar.

Claire watched him with a troubled look in her eyes. She watched him intently, with the look of trouble turning to one of distress. She moistened her lips and stood motionless before him.

"What's that?" she asked almost sharply.

"Sweetened milk chocolate," casually retorted her parent. "I've been carrying a few bars as an emergency ration."

"Oh!" she said, retaining her unconsidered attitude of expectancy.

"It's something they make rather well back in that old world you've no more use for," explained her father as he broke another piece from the thick brown slab. "By the way, what have you missed most up here?"

"You," answered Claire, but with her eyes still on the chocolate-bar.

"And what else?"

"A looking-glass," acknowledged the foster-child of the forest. "*Am* I a fright, dad?"

Endicott's inspection of her was discreetly noncommittal.

"You might be worse," he conceded. "But what came next in your list of wants?"

She paused for a moment, returning his look of appraisal as she wondered whether or not he might be probing deeper than he pretended.

"Sugar, I think. And after that, bread, bread made out of wheat flour. And I'm not sure whether it's cow's milk or safety-pins come next."

She smiled, but her smile was an abstracted one. Her attention seemed fixed on her father as he innocently and industriously appraised the precious stock of chocolate-bars from his overcoat pocket. She even advanced slowly toward him, with one hand held out in front of her. And Endicott glanced up, apparently mystified by her attitude.

"What d' you want?" he demanded, keeping his face solemn.

"One of those chocolate bars," she retorted with a grim hunger that left her face almost tragic in its child-like intensity.

It was not until her fingers had closed on the confection and she had backed away to the table-edge and torn off the wrapper and sunk her strong white teeth into the oblong of compressed sweetness that the tyranny of appetite over dignity came home to the man watching her. It disturbed him to behold her and her old-time sophistications thus swept back to the rudimentary. And he wondered if there were other hungers in the transmuting circumstances of solitude that had asserted themselves under the thin veneer of civilization, if there were deeper impulses that had extricated themselves from the pallid tapestry of isolation and asserted their right to existence.

"That sounds more like my Clannie of old, more like the girl who always wanted what she wanted," he said with a smile that was not without a wintry sort of wistfulness. "And I've been wondering about this other thing you want."

"What other thing?" she asked, busy devouring the last of the thick-bodied brown bar. She was thinking, at the moment, of how one hungers for a thing with one's whole body, how it is not any particular organ that calls out for appeasement but the indivisible sum-total of nerve and tissue and cell making up the entire apparatus of life. And her father, as he studied her, was wondering at the vast yet subtle changes that must have taken place in her, the changes that had made her more mysterious even while they had made her more comprehensible.

"Grimshaw," he finally admitted.

"What about him?" she asked with a quickness which left a thin fog of jealousy hanging about her father's heart.

"That's what *I* want to know. What about him? And what about this whole terrible situation?"

"Is it terrible?" she countered, with suddenly thoughtful eyes.

"They'd regard it as terrible back where the chocolate-bars are made."

She sat silent a moment. Then slowly her clouded face cleared.

"Shomer'll straighten that out," she contended. "He'll straighten that out the same as he straightened out this other hopeless muddle!"

"Is he *that* wonderful?" demanded Endicott, envious of the light in her eyes.

"No more wonderful than you, dad," she replied, softening at the wistfulness of her father's face. "Only different! He believes in conquering. It's in his blood. And he'll conquer in this."

"But how can he?"

"That all depends on one thing."

"What one thing?"

"On whether or not he still wants me."

Endicott moved abruptly, disturbed by the unlooked-for humility of her voice.

"And what *I* may have to say about it isn't of much importance?"

"To whom?"

"To you!"

"No, dad; it's too late!"

"But you don't view this thing as I've got to view it. You don't face it honestly. Down at the rail-head is a telegraph operator named Keaton, who acts as correspondent for a news service. He's perched there like an eagle, ready to pounce on any stories of prospectors or Indians or hunters that are worth revamping to suit his own ends and put on the wire. Imagine what he'll do to you and your Shomer, once he gets hold of this situation!"

"Shomer will attend to that," she said with an unqualified faith that seemed child-like as she crossed to the hearth and took up the yellow frying-pan that threw back the light of the fire. "That's something that belongs to him, the same as the knowledge of where this thing came from belongs to him. For can't you see, dad, that there's going to be a gold-rush up here next spring and that Shomer and you have got to be in on the ground-floor?"

It was with an indifferent eye that Endicott inspected the pan of yellow metal.

"I'm not thinking about trifles like that," he protested. "I'm thinking about your future, your happiness."

"That's in Shomer's hands," said the grave-eyed woman as she crossed to the door and swung it open.

Endicott threw up his hands, with what seemed a gesture of helplessness. He was about to speak as he followed Claire to the door, but the words died on his lips. For, out of the pale northern twilight there drifted down to him a growing sound which he could not at first understand.

"Listen!" said the woman, in a voice slightly touched with awe, as the sound mounted to a steady drone.

"Good God!" cried her father, "that's Platner!"

High in the pale heavens they could see the dark mass of the beetle-like thing that hummed over their head. They could see it tilt and veer and head into the southwest, high above the lonely ridges of rock and pineland.

"What does it mean?" asked Claire as the drone died down on the dusk.

"That's our plane, going back," said Endicott, with a look of bewilderment on his deep-lined face. That look of bewilderment was reflected in the more limpid eyes beside him as the girl stood staring into the band of green-gold light above the horizon. Then she smiled very faintly, as she shook her head from side to side.

"He wouldn't go without me," she finally said, with quiet conviction.

"Who wouldn't?" demanded Endicott, resenting the estranging impersonality of her gaze.

"My Shomer," she said, unconscious of her movement as she pressed her clasped hands against her breast. Then she stopped short in the doorway, with her unseeing eyes on the paling band of greenish gold. "Now I know," she suddenly exclaimed. "I know what has kept him away. He's found your plane and sent Platner back!"

"Back for what?" asked Endicott as he watched the rapt-eyed woman hurry into the cabin and catch up her lynx-skin coat and cap.

"That's what I've got to find out," was her resolute-noted reply, as she strapped on her bow and quiver and flung her looped spear-shaft over her shoulder.

"What in the name of God are you going to do?" demanded her startled father.

"I'm going to find my Shomer," she said as she thrust her knife and fire-bag into her belt. She seemed, of a sudden, a being remote from him, a being of elder time, a dark and hairy thing that belonged to a world other than his, a half-savage thing with incommunicable impulses and a touch of wildness about her.

He stood in the doorway a moment, as though to stop her, as though about to point out to her the impossibility of wandering through such a wilderness alone at night.

But he moved aside, bewildered by the imperative light in her eyes, disturbed by the discovery that she was beyond the pale of his will.

"Don't wait for me," she called back from the doorway. "Eat your supper and go to bed when you're tired. I may be late."

The sound of a wolf-howl echoed down from the hills beyond the river.

"Then for God's sake take this," cried Endicott as he ran after her, holding out his gun-metal automatic.

She looked down at it. Her laugh was almost curt.

"It's no use to me," she said over her fur-clad shoulder. "That doesn't belong to my world now, any more than the other things you spoke about!"

And the next moment she was gone.

CHAPTER XXIV

Endicott, as he waited that night in the lonely *karmak* beside its lonely northern river, nursed the impression of having been swept by tidal-waves of emotion which had receded and left him desolately alone on a sand-slope of helplessness. He had a sense of being overlooked, of being negligible in the midst of a movement in which he remained vitally concerned. But he had found his Clannie, he kept repeating to himself as he sat smoking before the tranquillizing hearth-fire; he had found his lost girl. She had changed. She had changed incredibly. But she was still his Clannie. And she would go back, in the end, and adjust herself to the world which she had merely forgotten. And if Shomer Grimshaw should fail him, in a crisis like this, that was the end of his field-engineer, his end, for all time.

But this younger generation was beyond him, he admitted as he blinked wearily into the glow of the birch-wood flames. They had their own rules and went their own way. What they were after was more than he could comprehend. And the end of it, after all, lay in the lap of the gods. And it was a very creditable bed this wilderness Crichton had made out of his poplar poles and wattled bark and deer-skin and duck-feathers. And Endicott, wearied by a trying day and still further narcotized by the quietness of the cabin, decided that it would do no harm to have at least forty winks while he waited for those unaccountable forest children to return. So he made sure the fire was all right, and gazed long and meditatively at the frying-pan of smoke-stained yellow metal. Then he unlaced his shoes, and gazed even more meditatively about the crowded small cabin with its evidences of a forlorn efficiency. His face was puckered with thought as he stretched himself out on the creaking bunk and covered himself with a robe of interwoven rabbit-skin. It was more comfortable than he had expected, that bunk, and his wrinkled brow relaxed at the thought that perhaps his Clannie had wrung a sort of comfort out of such discomfort, that perhaps in her sheer empty-handedness she had found some stranger sort of wealth. But he was too tired to think it out as he wanted to. His eyelids drooped, and he fell asleep. And when he slept he slept like a man who had been drugged.

When he awakened from that sleep he imagined for a moment that he was lying in his private car, side-tracked below a water-tank on some timber-limit side-line. For he could catch a sound that was unmistakably the running of water. Through a perplexing square of parchment he could see the pale yellow of filtered sunlight. And that was as pleasant to the eye as the water-tinkle was to the ear. But the narrow bed which became vocal at his first body-movement was strange to him. Its creak was disturbing. And disturbing, too, was the creosotic smell of the furs that hung about him.

He lay there for a moment, staring at the whitewashed walls that shut him in, puzzled by the broken chatter of the whisky-jacks beyond the dooryard. It was not until he heard the bark of a fox, sharp as a repeated gun-shot, that the veil of mystery collapsed and he remembered where he was. He sat up, oppressed by the quietness that once more engulfed him. But it was a good old world, he reassured himself, with the immediate past re-marshalling itself along the frontier of consciousness. He'd have his Clannie back with him. He'd have her again, safe and sound. He even called her name aloud, in husky high spirits, as he threw back the hare-robe and looked about for his shoes.

But there was no answer to that call. He emerged from his curtained sleeping-quarters, with a frown of perplexity on his face. He examined the cabin and found it empty. The second sleeping-bunk, he saw, had not even been occupied. Grimshaw, apparently, had also failed to return.

Endicott went to the door and looked out. But there was no one in sight. He beheld no sign or movement to assure him his fears were as foolish as he wished to rate them. He was unmistakably and most mysteriously alone. And he did not altogether like the looks of things.

The sun was already well up above the purple-misted hills, tempering the cold air that had thrown a sheet of ice about the margins of the river-cove overnight. The morning was not windless, but the softness of the azure sky gave a beguiling air of quietness to a world still further etherealized by the countless trceries of frost so miraculously silvering every twig and leaf and frond. Above that diamond-like interwoven mass of brilliance, which tended to make the eyes ache, brooded a wash of opaline air with an ozonic tang carrying the prophecy that the Northern Lights, that evening, would be both active and intense. The earth seemed a baldachin of time-mellowed velvet spangled with jewels that threw back the pallid sunlight in an illusion of splendor. Even Endicott, as he drew in a deep breath, was touched into a momentary awe before that accidental magnificence of frost and light.

Yet he gave no prolonged attention to it. He could feel its tug at his spirits, as though it strove to elate a puny atom of life preoccupied with puny ends. But a feeling of desertion touched with frustration had already taken possession of him. He

wanted to hear human voices and know human contacts again. He wanted to understand the secret of Platner's flight. And above all he wanted to know what had become of his Clannie.

So after hurriedly drinking a rogan of spring-water he put on his cap and his coonskin coat, munching a slab of roasted bear-meat as he took to the close-trodden trail that followed the line of the river. Several times he stopped and called across the echoing valley. But no answer came to those calls. And instinctively he pushed on to the inland lake where Platner had landed the day before with his plane. It seemed, to Endicott, a long time ago.

He stopped short when he came to the height-of-land overlooking that egg-shaped body of hooker-green water. For floating on its surface, with its great wings magnified by the dissimulative refracted light, stood the returned seaplane. It took on an air of efficiency, of silent but static power, of elaborately achieved purposes, bringing back to the man from the world of machinery an assuaging sense of restoration. It was his link with life. And he was glad to know it stood within his reach.

Then for the second time he stopped short. He stopped short in the midst of a covey of jack-pine half-way down the hill-slope, for he found himself confronted by still another scene that arrested his eye. Between him and the lake he saw a grove of white-birch, a cluster of ghostly white boles roofed by a mass of ruffled gold that deepened and brightened like moving water in the morning sunlight. That suspended sea of gold, he saw, was nothing more than the massed foliage of the whispering trees that had been yellowed by frost. And through them, in ragged patches, the slanting morning sunlight struck in bands of Roman gold, leaving the mottled floor of the woodland indescribably warm and rich in color. The entire inland valley, in fact, was a bewildering panorama of color framed in the lonely purple of ever-receding hills, wild crimsons and browns and greens and yellows, royal reds and pallid blues and consoling grays, stained leaves and ruddy cones and emerald-shadowed basins of evergreen and tawny reaches of marsh-grass and silvered bayous of foliage that shocked the eye with their rioting prodigality of tone. It impressed Endicott as unnatural, as unlikelike, as too vivid a pageant for the every-day world as he knew it. And to add to that sense of the ethereal, as he watched, he saw a small movement at the far end of the lake, where the hooker-green water, catching the sun, turned to a molten silver touched with opal. Through a low-lying mist that hung like lamb's-wool along the brown-green sedge he saw a moose walk majestically down to the water's edge. He saw the antlered black head emerge from the retreating fog as though it were emerging out of the mists of prehistoric time. He saw the great head dip and rise and dip and rise again, oddly solemn and measured in its movements, and then turn and recede into the mists as though once more trafficking back into the childhood of the world.

But Endicott gave it no further thought, for his attention was now fixed on the Corot-like grove much closer to him.

In that grove, from the ruffled gold roof of which stray flakes of yellow fell indolently through the sunny air, he could see a group of figures, human figures. They too took on an unearthly air in that mysteriously transmuting light. He was, in fact, compelled to creep closer, meditative step by step, before they became definitely fixed in his vision. Then he realized that the slender-bodied figure standing arrow-straight beside the taller figure under the wavering canopy of gold was his daughter Claire. Beyond them, with his back against a birch-bole, stood Platner, Platner with his goggles thrust up over his leather aviator's helmet and an incongruous-looking cigarette between his lips. He seemed to be smiling half-cynically at the pair who waited side by side, bareheaded in the clear light, with their hands linked so confidently together. And for the first time, as he looked, Endicott definitely distinguished the fourth figure in that oddly arrested group, the fourth figure that had come from Heaven knew where.

It was a lean and gaunt figure in faded black, who stood immediately confronting the two gray-clad figures still so confidently clinging to each other's hands. This man in rusty black also was bareheaded, his pallid face shining intent in the fulcrum of light that temporarily irised it.

There was nothing savage and superb about that figure, as there was about the tawny-clad pair so silently facing him in the filtered soft sunlight. But as he stood there, with a small book edged in gold held ceremoniously before him, he took on an air of the hieratic, an aura of the pontifical. And at the inclination of his bony head as he apparently began to read from the abraded small volume in his hand Endicott realized that the newcomer was the "black-robe" from the Little Elk Lake mission, the solemn-eyed young minister from the frontier settlement beyond the Barrier.

It was then that the somewhat restive Platner caught sight of the older man standing so immobile at the edge of the grove. The youth in the aviator's helmet sighed with relief. Step by cautious step he stole away from the self-immured trio so intent on the words from the little black book edged in gold. He stepped gingerly over the carpet of rustling yellow, like

a man walking slightly abashed in a house of worship, until he came to Endicott's side.

"How's that for a hook-up?" he said in a husky whisper. His voice, for all its parade of carelessness, was a tacit bid for companionship. But Endicott did not answer him. His ruminative and slightly misted eyes no longer rested on his daughter. They strayed to the deeper shadows of the birch-grove, where he became indeterminately conscious of yet another figure, even as the restive Platner had become conscious of his own. It was the figure in white, so insubstantial that it merged at times into the ghostly white of the sheltering birch-boles.

"And that Wild Man made me fly back and bring in a sky-pilot," the husky-voiced youth at his elbow was complaining.

But Endicott did not seem to hear him. The older man's eyes were still on the uncertain white figure with the beseechingly outstretched arms. Yet as he looked those ghostly outstretched arms lost their air of imploring unhappiness and the two pale hands, clasped gratefully together, were pressed against a heart that no longer seemed to ache.

"And now," muttered the husky but not irreverent Platner, still angling for companionship, "I've got to bring 'em in flour and sugar and tea. For they've told me they don't intend to come out for a month. But, gee, here's where the chain goes on!"

Endicott motioned sharply for silence, for he was remembering how like his dead wife Erica was that paling shadow with the two white hands pressed against its heart. And when he could see it no more he turned back to the sun-mottled trio in the foreground, where he saw Shomer Grimshaw take from the fire-bag on his belt a ring roughly fashioned out of gold. He could see the uneven band flash red in the sun. And at the same time he could see the intent side-glance of the woman as her fur-clad mate thrust the ring on the finger of the reddened small hand which she let rest for a moment on his darker and larger hand. He noticed the two heads, irradiated with an odd dignity as they bowed together, remain passive, and remain receptively motionless, while the figure in faded black stood with arms extended, as though uttering a blessing on them whom he and his strange rite were uniting.

Yet it did not strike the older man as barbaric. It impressed him more as taking on an air of pathos through its simplicity. And his throat tightened as he saw the smaller figure enclosed in the appropriating corded arms of the larger and the upturned sober face of the woman held against the stooping sober face of the man. There was a hunger in that movement, an intensity in that contact, which belonged to a world where Endicott felt himself to be merely a trespasser. It brought back to him a sharpened sense of his remoteness from his own. And even their indifference to him, as he stood thoughtful-eyed at the edge of their grove where sun and shadow patterned the leafy ground, saddened him with a sense of his isolation. Before him stood the two to whom he would and could have given all that life had left him to give. Before him were the two who, in all the world, should have stood closest to him. But already they seemed embarked on an end prodigiously their own.

THE END

[The end of *Empty Hands* by Arthur Stringer]