

*** 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: A Sourdough Samaritan

Author: Gibbons, Charles Harrison (1869-1931)

Date of first publication: 1924

Edition used as base for this ebook: London and Toronto: Hodder and Stoughton, [1924] [first edition]

Date first posted: 7 November 2015

Date last updated: May 18, 2016

Faded Page ebook#20160530

This ebook was produced by Al Haines

Publisher's Note

As part of the conversion of the book to its new digital format we have made certain minor adjustments in its layout.

A SOURDOUGH SAMARITAN

BY

CHARLES HARRISON GIBBONS

AUTHOR OF
"AT THE GATEWAY," "THE GHOSTS OF THE GREAT MOGHULS,"
"THE LADY OF THE TAJ," "SIXTY BLACK SHEEP,"
"THE WELL IN THE DESERT," ETC.

HODDER AND STOUGHTON LIMITED
LONDON AND TORONTO

*Made and Printed in Great Britain.
Wyman & Sons, Ltd., London, Reading and Fakenham*

Dedication

TO

LILLIAN

"Some day—somewhere—She will come to You,
Her soul in Her small white hands;
God grant that You measure up to Her—
The Woman who Understands!"

Preface

Long years ago, in the dim Victorian age, when men at least thought themselves Men, and Women were content to be women, no book was considered complete without its Preface and also its Appendix. Then doctors arose in the land, more wise in their own conceit than the Great Maker-of-All, to discover that the sole use and purpose of an appendix was to be removed; and Contemporary Writers promptly went Science one better by cutting out appendices in advance. The Preface still halts hesitant, often superfluous and usually unread, between the title page and the score of chapters or list of illustrations. It is assumed to afford a vehicle by which the Author may apologise for or explain what he had really meant to say by and in his Book, in case the casual reader fail to discover the same.

Therefore let me be frank in claiming the precious privilege of the Preface: This tale primarily is told in hope that it may pleasantly entertain. Incidentally some of the people and scenes of those strenuous days of the Great Rush insistently linger in memory, pleading for perpetuation. Perhaps I shall sleep better do I but get them out of mind—"off my chest," to adopt the vernacular.

The story substantially is one of typical men and women and actual happenings. If there be any high purpose in the disjointed whole it can only be, subconsciously, to invite consideration of the fact that most folks of this commonplace, everyday world are neither plaster saints nor diabolical villains. There is some streak of good, some golden vein of sterling manhood or beautiful womanhood in every human atom. Let us recognise and applaud it. Even Soapy Smith, arch-fiend of that mimic hell of Skagway in '98, possessed courage.

Then again, the Klondike of its halcyon days never yet has had justice in story or play or picture. It has ever been misrepresented as an "American" mining camp of the Bret Harte era and type. In truth it was diametrically different: A unique frontier community of marked individuality with its own golden rule of Fair Play for everyone, hard working and as hard playing, liberal minded, generous, law respecting and law obeying. It was no sophisticated city of smug hypocrites and tricky concealments, of Pharisaism and pretence; neither was it any wide-open rendezvous of rough-and-ready roisterers staging maudlin melodrama and miscellaneous murders. Gun-plays were rare as roses within its borders.[1] The cheat, the sneak, the pimp, the sharper thrived not long where the clean winds of the wide spaces winnowed the chaff from the wheat and the men of the Royal Mounted ruled with firmness and sage discretion.

[1] "A man carrying a six-shooter would be as great a curiosity in Dawson as in Ottawa."—Report of Superintendent Perry, November 30, 1899.

The Sourdough Samaritan I think is in Dawson yet. No one names him so. I claim to have christened him thus. His neighbours who with him year after year have watched the great river go out merely agree that Old Joe is "a damned good scout and square as ever they make 'em." When he dies, as some day he must, I cannot imagine him accepting a harp and crown. It would be much more like him to wave them aside with his frying-pan and modestly ask the Recording Angel to give him a job in the kitchen.

C. H. GIBBONS.

TORONTO, Canada,
November 30th, 1923.

Contents

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCING DACEY'S MEAL-TICKET AND CERTAIN OTHERS

CHAPTER II

IN WHICH CLUBS ARE DRAWN TO "HIT THE TRAIL"

CHAPTER III

SOAPY SMITH, TZAR OF SKAGWAY

[CHAPTER IV](#)

A SAMARITAN TRAVELS INCOG.

[CHAPTER V](#)

PLUCK OF A MOUSE

[CHAPTER VI](#)

IN WHICH MAUDE "MAKES THE GRADE"

[CHAPTER VII](#)

A NEW ANGLO-AMERICAN ENTENTE

[CHAPTER VIII](#)

"THE BEAR THAT WALKS LIKE A MAN"

[CHAPTER IX](#)

"THE HONOUR AND PRIDE OF THE FORCE"

[CHAPTER X](#)

THE CABARET COMES TO DAWSON

[CHAPTER XI](#)

THE MIRAGE MINES OF MOOSEHIDE

[CHAPTER XII](#)

WATERS OF LOVE AND HATE

[CHAPTER XIII](#)

WHEN CHRISTMAS CAME

[CHAPTER XIV](#)

THE MENACE OF SWIFT-FOOTED DEATH

[CHAPTER XV](#)

HABIT, STRONGER THAN HATE

[CHAPTER XVI](#)

A MAGDALEN'S GETHSEMANE

[CHAPTER XVII](#)

FRIENDSHIPS OF THE FAR FRONTIER

[CHAPTER XVIII](#)

THE MEASURE OF A MAN

CHAPTER XIX

DEEP WATERS

CHAPTER XX

A MISFIT PARABLE

CHAPTER XXI

THE JEW IN THE JUDGMENT SEAT

CHAPTER XXII

SOLDIERS: OF MARS OR OF MANKIND?

Chapter I Introducing Dacey's Meal-ticket and Certain Others

Ever since an invisible sunrise—scheduled by the almanac for 4.23 a.m., and it was now 9.40—the big *Cleveland*, laden to the guards with Klondike stampedees from Seattle, had been cautiously feeling her way in to the ramshackle Skagway wharf, nosing for the unfamiliar harbour and trying for location by timing the echoes of her hoarse whistle, the blasts now shorter, loud and raucous, as she grew "hot" in the pilot's game of Blindman's Buff.

"Sounds like a fool cow bawlin' fer her calf," Pat Dacey declared comprehensively to the waiting shore-crowd of which he made one, standing mid-leg in the black muck Broadway of the brand new Gateway City of the White Pass. "Wonder what lucky guy she's a-bringin' this time t' buy th' old meal-ticket," he added for his own exclusive benefit, voicing his thought of the moment.

A half-dozen yards away in the heavy fog identities merged in a composite of shifting shadows. Close behind chunky red-poll'd Pat a large and listless mule fixed lack-lustre eyes abstractedly on the spot where the webbing of Dacey's suspenders crossed at the back. A lead-rein from the halter formed the line of communication. Although the Lady Maude had both expansive ears cocked to the discordant din, her air was that of bored indifference to aught the future might hold for her. She had learned to pin her faith on Dacey and the cardinal virtue of mulish obstinacy that in other walks of life than stable society quite frequently masquerades as firmness of character. The Future would be but the Past—warned over.

"That mule's sure been a gold mine fer you, Pat," came from out the restricted radius of blurred vision. "How many times hev yeh sold her since you an' her struck th' burg?"

The mule magnate gave a jerk to the slackened line, assuring himself of contact. Lady Maude's eyes thereat opened suddenly, in pained surprise. Dacey grinned.

"'Bout twenty I guess," he answered, "not countin' that 'Frisco outfit that made me blow back, th' cheap pikers! Hope th' lot a' them busts through th' ice——"

His reply was a tonal study in quick transition from prideful glee to bitter resentment of crass injustice.

"An' she always comes back! Can't they none a' them make 'er take th' grade?"

"Not if th' Lady knows it! Kin they, yeh old anarchist."

The inflection of endearment carried praise, obviously for the mule. She received it with studied unconcern and well-simulated ennui. Pride was paramount none the less in Dacey's look as he half turned to give an affectionate yank to a flea-bitten ear of his well-beloved.

"No, sir," said he. "Yeh can pack half a ton onto th' old girl an' she'll shassay round Skagway under it, steppin' high an' haughty like a box-house jane with a string a' ice t' show th' world.... But hit th' old up-trail with it! Not any, thank yeh, fer Maudie!"

"How you an' her gets away with it beats me!" There was wondering admiration in the admission. Dacey accepted it as due tribute. "Yeh'd think some a' them'd get her number, er else hike back here an' get you."

"Aw fergit it!" The mule impressario waxed slightly peevisish, though tersely philosophical. "Ain't they all a' them in one helluva hurry t' make Th' Pass? An' Maudie here won't pack one single solitary pound when it comes t' th' upstairs goin'. She's made up her mind about that, an' she ain't nowise changeable. She ain't never learnt th' meanin' a' hurry. An' she can take more lashin' an' larrupin' an' more hammerin' an' poundin' than a raft a' them Barbary Coasters, can't she now? Once't er twice they've tried fire under her an' she blame near wreck their outfits.

"No, they got t' be on their way an' Maude here don't feel no call t' mosey along with 'em when th' human-fly stunt begins. They jest cuss her a' plenty an' move on once they gets it through their think-tanks she's so damn hidebound an' set in her principles like she is. An' long about feed-time nex' mornin' here's good old Maudie back fer her oats an' laughin'.... Say, that there mule's human! Her an' me sure understand each other. I wouldn't part with her fer a half a' Big Alec's pile——

"Hello! Here she is at last.... Think likely she'll have any Vancouver mail? ... Stick 'round, youse guys, an' watch me git jewed outa th' best mule in Alaska!"

Pat's "she's" were a bit mixed, but understandable. The bulking shape of the *Cleveland* loomed spectrally out of the fog curtain. It now revealed progressively the sharpening outlines of the ship, the silhouetted pilot-house and the conspicuously marshalled boats and life-rafts, mixed up with shrilly vocal dog-crates and surplus freights; then decks in tiers, the darker border of each finally resolving itself into massed humanity of both sexes, every race, colour, age and class—all sorts and conditions of men and clothes and outfits—a fantastic cosmopolitan conglomerate each unit of which, however, stood out distinct, individual, striking. All were fused by singleness of objective into that new and amazing product of the Northland—a "stampede outfit." Each and all were rushing blindly forward in response to Gold's beckoning finger—pushing, jostling, struggling, fighting to get behind and beyond that inscrutable, majestically silent saw-toothed range shadowing the raw new city, from which a crazy zig-zag trail climbed perilously to and over The Pass to the upper Yukon and its far-away auriferous affluent, the magic KLONDIKE.

Five and a half days from Seattle was good time even for the *Cleveland*, that had now carried a bedraggled broom at her masthead four successive voyages. Yet Captain Rogers scowled as he leaned half-way out of the wheelhouse window to verify deck reports of "All fast!"

"Good trip, Capt'n?" sang out the Company's Agent, foremost of officialdom's reception committee. "We wasn't exactly lookin' fer yeh till noon or thereabouts, when all of a sudden yeh started hootin'."

"Hell's own country for fogs!" The wheelhouse response was a growl. "Had t' put in t' Wrangell too—that damn hole Noah got his flood yarn from. There was *one* day there it didn't rain, they tell me—summer of '67. Like as not it's just another a' their booster lies though.... If it hadn't a' been fer Wrangell an' th' fog we'd a' made it by daybreak——"

"Who yeh got this time?" This from the Agent.

The skipper's big hand swept an illuminative semi-circle.

"All sorts an' then some," he declared with a throaty chuckle. "Four hundred an' eight, countin' deadheads an' stowaways. Darn'dest mixed bunch ever—schoolma'ams an' sourdoughs an' every mortal thing in between. Quite some flock a' th' pretty girls an' slick card people an' show folks an' that sort. Nigger Jim's aboard an' Cameron an' Berry an' some more a' th' old gang, goin' back Inside fer a spell.... An' say, yeh want t' see th' lord er duke er whatever he is we

brought up! Keep a lookout fer him, George; he's an eyefull. But he ain't quite no one's fool at that I take it.... Half th' lot a' them sick 'fore ever we cast off. Christian Science, eh? Soft fer th' steward?

"Look alive an' hustle them outfits off—mails an' passengers main deck for'ard. Get that cargo movin' 'midships an' aft! Got t' make th' tide.... What yeh got fer us out, George?"

One more north run safely accomplished, the captain climbed heavily down from his post of honourable responsibility and was swallowed up, together with the Agent, by the little rickety wharf shack displaying the signboard "OFFICE."

Pressing compactly forward, close on the purser's heels, the motley stream of passengers poured itself onto the unstable wharf that shrieked of recent completion with its virgin orange-yellowness and pungent odour of fresh-sawn fir, trembling on spider-legged piling. From the wharf the stream debouched into the morass of the street, with instant chorus of inquiry for latest news from the creeks. The majority of the human drops unerringly followed the lines of least resistance toward contiguous saloons that all but came down to the water's edge to meet them. Four-fifths of Skagway's business was done in and by the bar-rooms—principally by. Dance-halls and gambling-houses naturally counted in the same family, their night watches working double shifts "while the getting was good." There were also the inevitable real estate agents, plus mine brokers, promoters, whispering or argumentative counsellors, eating-houses that with one accord had adopted the *alias* of café or restaurant. Legitimate business shrank unobtrusively a little out of the picture. The steamship and trading companies, of course, had the larger and more pretentious establishments, holding themselves aristocratically aloof, with the indisputable pre-eminence of solid old banks or historic public institutions in developed centres of civilisation and population Outside.

It was Skagway's brief day in the sun. The golden message from Bonanza and Eldorado had weeks before circled the globe, and out of the undisturbed hush of the ages had sprung another crude, noisy, bustling mushroom "city" of tents, log huts and clapboard shanties, its name peppering the pages of the whole world's newspapers.

"Growing by hundreds a day—Outclass 'Frisco or Seattle in less than five years!" exulted enthusiastic pioneers of three weeks' residence qualification. "Sure she wants some little fixin's yet," they grudgingly conceded. "She's jest a-sheddin' her shell, ain't she? Watch her grow now!"

Chapter II In which Clubs are drawn to "Hit the Trail"

Skagway's warehousing facilities in the early spring of '98 were about as commensurate with public requirements as street car services in eastern cities twenty years later. There was available accommodation equal to possibly one-tenth of one per cent. of the extra-urgent demand. Sacked goods hung pendent from the rough-hewn rafters like swaying urban strap-holders of the later period in Canada's metropoli. Quite naturally "Company stocks" had precedence; and as these, save on rare occasions, overflowed the long, low log buildings, individual imports and the outfits of the multitude of gold-seekers going Inside by the lakes and up-river route perforce were dumped by the owners on the first unpre-empted ground presenting itself. As each incoming steamer disgorged its quota of Klondike pilgrims with their belongings, the narrow flat dividing the frowning mountains from the sullen sea took on all outward and visible signs of a community salvage camp after fire has fed on a town. One looked instinctively for blackened home-sites and tottering chimney-stacks. The illusion was supported by the glaring newness of the few score hastily run up business houses of logs or more often whipsawn lumber adorning (?) the one stragglng thoroughfare.

Cautious and canny ones among the daily arrivals formed partnerships at the outset, frontier fashion, pairing off in defensive and offensive alliance against the rude enmity of the wild, everywhere presenting itself. There was close kinship to the marriage bond at its best in many of these Damon-and-Pythias, David-and-Jonathan unions. Partners were partners under the dancing lights: for better for worse, for richer for poorer, in sickness and in strength. Others light-heartedly trusted themselves and their all to luck; hurriedly pyramided their belongings with the exasperating inefficiency of *cheechakos*; threw over the pile a tarp' if one chanced to be handy, and forthwith hiked for the nearest saloon, there to

listen, wide-eyed and open-mouthed, to the latest apocryphal reports from the treasure zone and (according to individual man-worth) fit themselves into the hectic life of a boom town riding the crest of its intoxicant wave. Sometimes their outfits remained intact where they dumped them. As often they disappeared between two suns and never more were heard of. The North is a mystery land.

Among the countless piles a regiment of dogs yapped, howled, whimpered or growled morosely; fought, conquered, suffered defeat; stole, gulped the loot; tangled themselves in their bonds; submitted themselves, unwillingly and protesting, to training for the trail; rebelled at the course of discipline and instruction; leaped, snapped and acquired acquaintance with lash or butt of the dogwhip or earnest kicks in the ribs, and, reflecting the varying characters of their masters and themselves, acquired wisdom and capacity for usefulness or the reverse. To have the whole accepted scheme and scope of dog life as previously understood and experienced suddenly shattered to bits and peremptorily reconstructed on a totally new and foreign plan was their confusing fate. The reorganisation brought incredibly hard unfamiliar work, and more than plenty of it. Instead of bones and biscuits came frozen fish diet. Each fish, they speedily learned, must be deftly caught in transit or a meal be skipped. Eternal vigilance was essential to self-defence against semi-wild huskies knowing no sporting code—half-wolves that leaped unexpectedly and causelessly, snapped fiercely, and were away with the speed of thought. The club, the biting cold of the northern night, snow and ice, bleeding and torturing feet, homesickness, fear of the unfamiliar, strange forms and faces and odours everywhere, constant misunderstandings, bulked large in the new order of things.

For although there were horses in the country, a few scattered flocks of broken-spirited goats, and of mules and burros possibly a score, these larger live stock were as exceptional as in the twentieth century automobilious life of American cities.

"Dogs for the river trail," declared the oracular old-timers, whose words were pearls of price. To "make The Pass" and get over the trail and down river before all the good claims were gone meant just the important difference between success and disaster, with more than possible death—between fabulous fortune and ignominious failure. There is no explicit commandment against coveting a neighbour's dog team, or if there is, Skagway's hazily reminiscent Biblical knowledge did not extend that far. Therefore the owner of a crack string such as that of Jack Carr, the mail courier, was followed by worshipful eyes and whispered adoration akin to that bestowed by Wall Street small fry on the Morgans and the Schwabs, the Rockefellers and the Carnegies. It's all in environment. Any low-caste water-carrier would be a prince in Hades.

Getting to Skagway (or to Dyea for those essaying the dread Chilkoot) was merely the preliminary and simplest part of the Klondikers' Great Adventure. One had but to produce the passage money and the price of an outfit. Steamship companies and obliging San Francisco or Seattle or Vancouver business folk gleefully did the rest. They did it enthusiastically and up to the limit. There were quicker and easier methods of extraction applied to the Yukon gold (either actual or prospective) than panning or cradling or sluicing the paydirt of placer or bench or bar. The pilgrim accordingly was landed at Skagway with everything he in his innocence might have been induced to buy. There he was told to "go to it." Results were "up to him."

Camp followers, possessed of the same commercial instincts as the outfitting houses, had sagely predicted a boom in the trail-dog market, and Pacific Coast towns and cities had been promptly submerged by a wave of calamity for owners of collies and setters, Newfoundlands, Great Danes, St. Bernards, mastiffs and any sizeable mongrels, irrespective of age, sex or previous condition of servitude. These unsuspecting and ill-starred housedogs were safe in their cosy kennels or somnolent on the doormats when father evicted the cat and wound the clock. Next morning the places that had known them knew them no more forever. Skagway's miry street concurrently teemed with strange dogs and strange dogs teamed on Skagway's miry street, thick as spawning salmon in the stream during a quadrennial "big run."

"There's no use talking about it forever! We got t' have dogs, and good dogs—dogs that'll get us through! What's more, we got t' make Dawson before th' bunch that's there cleans up all th' live ones.

"Sure th' prices are fierce! They're all highway robbers up here. But it's *their* graft, ain't it? What's th' sense of us

hollerin'? ... Besides, you girls should worry. Watch your step an' we'll like as not get it back in a night or two off th' first bunch that blows in from th' creeks. Yeh got t' remember these guys haven't seen white girls in years, some a' them. Just work th' tutti-frutti on that. All yeh've got t' do is handle 'em right an' we'll all wear diamonds this time next year."

"The Count" was doing the talking. As Count de Maurin he had introduced himself on making his debut in Coast sporting circles a few short months before—Count Ivan de Maurin, champion Russian swordsman and wrestler of renown, of the ancient but temporarily embarrassed aristocracy of his mysterious fatherland. Handsome, debonair, unquestionably an athlete, a prince of fashion, too, he had quickly proven himself a democratic mixer and an enthusiastic admirer and patron of the minor drama. Soubrettes, acrobatic mam'selles, artistes of song and dance, "muggers" and "ladies in the act," a working majority of vaudevillainesses in all lines of the business had "fallen for him" with true temperamental abandon and professional speed. These variety queens of the strenuous days of The Rush may not have been extremists in constancy, but neither were they laggards in love. Quite literally they had welcomed The Count with open arms. Subsequent rivalries were keen, high-pitched, intense, undisguised and frantically pursued, disastrously to business as certified by disgusted managers. Jealousy needs no matches to locate a dressing-room door and introduce ubiquitous Mr. Trouble.

Nor was Count Ivan in the smallest degree insensible of his charm. He capitalised it. Also his blue eyes would have been read by a judge of humankind as cold, cruel and calculating, although the handsome mouth beneath the trim blond moustache was ever ready with charming phrases. His magnetism, too, was undeniable—another valuable asset by no means unconsidered by the swaggering possessor.

He had staged an impromptu dressing-room serio-comedy at a small Victoria theatre a month or so before his arrival in Skagway. Therein, of course, he played the hero part; and both a *première danseuse* and the "world's favourite comedienne" (their own billing modestly so proclaiming them) without rehearsal had essayed emotional roles on his announcement that he was off for the Klondike—in fact had "just dropped in to say good-bye."

Why was *he* going? Well, he should have no trouble getting on a few matches or exhibitions. There would be big money in it "up there." Wasn't there money in everything at Dawson? Why, only two days before, he had had a letter from an old friend in the business, a little variety cat of not so much class or shape or beauty either. She had gone Inside by St. Michael, the last boat of the season, to work at Nigger Jim's when the strike was made up the river. It was an off night that she hadn't pulled down a hundred or two!" And no rough stuff or drops or anything—the house wouldn't stand for it." Now she had landed in 'Frisco, a clear twenty thousand to the velvet!

"Why not come along, girls?" the Count urged, as though seized of an inspiration. "Great idea! Why didn't we think of it sooner? You'd make your fortunes up there!"

Well ... so they had.... Been thinking some about Alaska ... just talking, of course, like everybody else.... Perhaps they might take a chance ... if he was really going.... How much would it cost? ... What about wardrobe trunks? ... What route ought they to take? ... Which was the quickest way? ... What girls were up there now? ... Had anyone a map?

They talked and they talked and they talked, with no thought of the clock's performance—elated, excited, thrilled. It was the dashing blonde, M'lle Bernice, "toe-dancer supreme," who at last broke the spell.

"Lord, folks, but I'm starving—an' I'm tired as a dog!" she declared. "What time's it gettin' t' be, anyway?"

The grey light of a new day had been peeping through the sides of the drawn blinds for some time. It was a little past six. The conference closed and the trio adjourned to a restaurant. It had been decided they would "hit the trail" together. The girls handed in their notices and would "close" at the week's end. Count Ivan had gallantly promised to wait over for another steamer. Bernice and Gertrude had to have a few days to shop and incidentally to "touch up th' folks at home" for all the available cash in the family purses. The former expressed rank scepticism as to the results so far as she was concerned, but she knew of a number of friends she "sure would call up tomorrow." One of these, she opined, "ought t' be good fer a few hundred" if she could "get him going." They were to pool resources, and the Count had been tacitly elected manager, courier and personal conductor of the crusade of conquest. He assumed the triple role as a matter of course. Neither of the girls thought to question the obvious arrangement. He privily proposed to annex the treasurership later on.

"You know, Ivan, I wouldn't think of this if you weren't going!" Dark-eyed, langorous Gertrude Dale, whose risqué little stories "went over big" because of her seeming utter ignorance of any naughtiness in this funny old world, whispered it in a chance moment of opportunity as they parted at the chop-house door. "No, I wouldn't either, not fer all th' gold in that god-forsaken country.... But with you goin' in too it's different. You know how you stand with me, Ivan?"

And Count Ivan had given her arm a meaningful little squeeze, for M'lle Bernice was turning toward them inquiringly. The dusky comedienne interpreted the light companionable pressure of finger-tips as inclination and her whispered confession suggested. A new song all her own was singing itself in her heart.

Less than a month later the *Cleveland* had decanted the three into the muddy, littered one street of feverish Skagway. Their first necessity, it was agreed, was to get themselves and their outfit forward. The outfit was a good one, well chosen, complete and packed in a fashion inviting approval from returning sourdoughs met on shipboard. A "gentleman friend" of the dancer had joyously looked to this detail, revelling the while in the sunshine of smiles for long weeks denied him—ever since he unluckily had gone broke. As to how to proceed from Skagway was the business now before the meeting. They had been tempted with the offer of a fine upstanding mule by a red-headed young Irishman who found he must wait for a brother expected by later steamer.

But the Count would have nothing but dogs. Therefore the Irishman and his mule were now in conference with "an honest-to-goodness Johnnie escaped from Piccadilly," as the girls had indexed him. This six-foot, clean-cut Englishman had come up by the *Cleveland* also, with his monocle, five trunks, a collapsible rubber bath-tub, hatbox, much ornate fishing gear, rifles and shot-guns, abundant ammunition, likewise a case of Scotch and quite six weeks' supplies of miscellaneous "eats." The complete incongruous collection was now fairly neatly stowed not many yards away. Skagway, passing by, divided its laughter between that outfit and its owner, whose carefully adjusted neck-stock, knickers and spiral puttees were the first sartorial accessories of their kind to have burst on the city's delighted vision.

The Count and his companions had lost no time and were at the moment employed in close but uninformative inspection of six sad-eyed assorted dogs, the leader alone of which had ever pulled at a trace. Two setters, their brown eyes registering misery and poignant regrets; a half-bred mastiff; a miscellaneous offering, one of whose ancestors had been of Irish terrier stock; and a surly collie made up the disconsolate string. On the solemn assurance of their enthusiastic vendor, the team for speed and stamina had all others in the north country outclassed a thousand ways. They even were punctilious as to fast days, and one fish per diem would be for them, he certified, "an elegant sufficiency."

Undoubtedly on their billing they were head-liners, their prospective purchasers concluded. But they didn't seem to have exactly the right professional poise—distinctly the reverse. Perhaps it was "just that first night feeling in a strange town, you know," and yet——

"Eight hundred looks awful big fer a dog act!" Gertrude's brown eyes proclaimed secret misgivings. "I'd jest like t' be sure they're th' big-time thing," she hastily added, anticipating reproach.

"Not another team like 'em in Skagway, or in Dawson either, for that, or along th' trail," cut in the prideful owner. "That's what Big Alec'd tell yeh if he was here—only he's up Bonanza right now. I'll tell yeh this," he added, the voice dropping to an arresting whisper: "I'm only lettin' yeh have 'em—they're a gift at th' price—because I see as how you two are perfec' ladies! Yeh got a tough old trip ahead a' yeh, an' I'd hate t' think I might a' helped yeh out—if anything was t' happen t' yeh an' me hear of it after."

The hint of foreboding disaster was played as a winning card. Nor was it misplayed at that. The "world's favourite comedienne" forced a smile, though swallowing once or twice, as she surrendered.

"Guess we better book 'em," said she.

M'lle Bernice had been a mere onlooker.

"You folks go ahead an' talk dog t' him," she had suggested. "Me, I don't know a dog from a duck 'nless it's cooked—th' duck, I mean, of course.... We ought t' had Madeline La Rose along. She was on th' Orpheum circuit las' season with a dog act that had Barnum an' Bailey's shebang skinned forty ways—t' hear her get away with it."

Only once had her voice been heard after the bargaining began. She had followed, with professionally smiling eyes, the laudation of the team, collectively and individually.

"Some little press agent I'll say," she had murmured approvingly. "He's sure up in th' part."

The "world's favourite comedienne" passed over to the Count a roll of bills, with a carefully casual "Here's that money yeh asked me t' keep fer yeh, Ivan."

Ivan took it. He counted off eight beautiful centuries—re-counted for safety's sake, and a third time as though he could not get too much of the exercise—relinquished them with a sigh—asked for and got a receipt—consigned the diminished roll to his own inner pocket. And the syndicate of three had their first thrill of real identification with the new life and its lure.

Half an hour later "Gertie" and "Trotters," as known to professional confreres, had rounded up "the bunch" then sojourning in the camp and talked them to exhaustion on "our dog-team's" super-excellencies, forgetting no trivial detail of their immeasurable individual and ensemble superiority over all other created quadrupeds.

Despite the chivalrous impulse impelling Matt Burley to part with his incomparable team to oblige the ladies, the astounding fact remains that he had offered the same sad-eyed sextette elsewhere not half an hour before. Mr. Lawrence Hammond Fitzmaurice, late of Portman Square, London, W., and later of Campbell River, Vancouver Island (where he had been killing a few king salmon in disproof of the current theory that these will not rise to a fly), had stood contemplatively gazing at his young hill of luggage. He was blissfully oblivious to the trifling circumstance that by adorning his face with a single-barrel eyeglass he was outraging the North's traditions and challenging its contemptuous hostility. Even with the anathemised window-pane screwed into his eye he could not clearly see how it would be possible to transport his impedimenta even as far as The Pass, to press the issue no further.

Six into one won't go, he had about decided. The process of elimination, therefore, had begun, hat-box and golfing bag having first gone into the discard. It had been adjudged necessary to take out of the first two rather disreputable hats and to carefully brush each with light affectionate touches. The mashie, the driver, the lofter also had to be individually polished and caressed ere they were laid away. Mr. Fitzmaurice in cold fact felt somewhat in sympathy with a friend whom he had once surprised in the burning of sundry long-treasured letters on the eve of his wedding day. It was peculiarly a wrench to part with the good old faithful bawth, but remorselessly it had followed. Just at this tragic moment appeared Mr. Matthew Burley, an even half-dozen contrary-minded dogs in unwilling attendance.

"Say, you!" hailed Burley cheerily, "I guess mebbe we could do some business together this fine an' frosty mornin'.... See them crack-a-jack dogs a' mine there?"

The monocle swept the team casually.

"Wrong number, old chap," quoth its wearer. "Th' vet's dump is three piles farther along."

The process of selection and rejection was resumed. Mr. Burley watched proceedings and spasmodically sought to reopen conversation. Mr. Fitzmaurice was engaged and did not respond. Presently Mr. Burley withdrew himself and his escort.

"Loony as they make 'em," he soliloquised, with a parting glance toward industrious Mr. Fitzmaurice. The latter seemingly had forgotten his existence.

Ten minutes later a towering pile of sacked and well-roped chattels, apparently moving miraculously under no visible power, traced a devious course among the piles of stores and leisurely came to anchor. A placid and patient mule was revealed as the base of the perambulating mountain. In its wake tramped a red-headed Irishman.

"That's all right, Maudie girl," he assured the mule. "Take a breather av yeh feel like it. Yeh're knowin' what's t' come!"

Easing his own pack-straps, he also rested, leaning back against the growing pile of superfluties.

"Morning!" said he, as Mr. Fitzmaurice approached, favouring the laden mule with swiftly appraising glance.

"Morning!" responded the Englishman, further honouring the motionless beast of burden with more critical inspection.

"Fine morning!" observed her owner during the process.

"Beastly fine morning," Mr. Fitzmaurice amiably agreed.

"Well—Morning!" quoth the other, hitching up his pack-straps, ostensibly preparatory to moving on. That would have been about all had not the caravan proprietor appeared to find his straps pinching. He stopped to readjust them. The mule stopped too, unconcernedly.

"Quite a heap a' junk yeh got there t' shift over th' Ridge," her owner suggested, taking stock of the twin piles. "Ain't got no chewin' about yeh, hev yeh? Must 'a' put mine in one a' th' packs."

"Sorry—don't use it. Won't you try a fag?" A monogrammed cigarette case was extended.

"Thanks! Don't mind if I do." A match changed hands and was put to use.

"I'm Dacey, er Pat er Red, whatever yeh like t' call me," he volunteered, inhaling.... "Come up on th' *Cleveland*, didn't yeh? Thought I saw yeh comin' off, with a sort of a survey outfit?"

"Yes, I came by the *Cleveland*. Just sorting over my traps a bit now. Fancy I've brought rather more than one can manage up here. My name's Fitzmaurice—Lawrence Hammond Fitzmaurice."

"Ham-and's sure short an' easy remembered," suggested Dacey, extending a hand.

The Englishman laughed lightly.

"Amendment's accepted," said he. "Rather a goodish beast you've got there for this sort of thing?"

"Who? Maudie? Bet yer life she is. Nothin' in this rotten country anywheres in her class.... See what she's a-carryin' now? All uv half a ton? An' it don't bother her no more'n a surcingle.... Sure-footed like a goat, an' no more pertick'ler feeder neither.... Got her sharp-shod fer this work," and Dacey lifted a forefoot for approval.

"Happen to know of any pack animal one could get at a fairish price?" ventured Mr. Fitzmaurice.

Pat appeared to ponder. "Well, of course they're mighty scarce, an' most anybody that's got 'em counts on gettin' about their weight in dust," said he. "Yeh in any special rush?"

There were grave reasons for getting on quickly? Well, now, he wondered, could he help out a friend? He again considered, as he puffed and inhaled.

"Look-a-here, Ham-and," he at length suggested. "I've kinda taken t' you.—Tell yeh what we'll do: Brother a' mine's comin' along b' th' *Ningchow* 'n two er three weeks—bound t' hev a dog-team.... Guess I might as well wait an' hitch up with him! ... Yeh can hev Maude here at four hundred, an' I give yeh m' word she's sound in wind an' limb.... That mule's made me considerable since we been up here, a bit more'n she cost me, so I guess she don't owe me nothin'.... That's how we'll fix it up: You take Maudie here an' I'll wait fer Denny t' come along."

Mr. Fitzmaurice protested promptly. He righteously declined to take advantage of the good nature and generous sportsmanship of his chance acquaintance. To be sure it was "jolly decent of him"—but he really couldn't think of it.

Mr. Dacey insisted. Upon self-communion he found he had really missed brother Denny sorely. They were "closer'n most brothers somehow." He yearned for him as a partner. Wouldn't have come without him only he'd "kinda lost his

head with th' excitement an' all." Just remembered too, they'd both promised the mother they'd stick together....

Well, if such were really the case, Mr. Fitzmaurice counted himself in rare luck. He would of course gladly accept, and begged Mr. Dacey to oblige him by taking possession of anything in his own too-extensive outfit for which he might find a use.... Would he take what might be of service and ship the rest south for storage?

Mr. Dacey would. Four hundred passed from F. to D. Maude may have winked as she witnessed the transfer. No one was watching her. Mr. Dacey, richer by \$400 but poorer one loving mule, assisted in a juggling of outfits. Then he made camp. Mr. Fitzmaurice had decided that he would next day bid Skagway a fond adieu, proudly conveying toward the Pass a perhaps overladen but incomparably philosophical mule. Before pulling out, however, he insisted upon having the pleasure of playing host to his good friend Dacey, who had placed him under lasting obligation.

"Right-o," Pat had agreed, giving the fire a poke. "I'm on fer anny little thing fr'm marbles t' manslaughter.... An' let me tell yeh, Ham-and; in a cold country like this here Alaska is, a good stiff snort once't in a while's saved many a life _____"

"Ripping good idea to take precautions," Maude's new owner interrupted, in comprehending concurrence.

A flask was disinterred and the resolution carried unanimously, with gurgling applause.

Chapter III Soapy Smith, Tzar of Skagway

Soapy Smith, had he happened to live in New York when the decrepit nineteenth century was tottering out, most probably would have been a minor power in Tammany's practical politics, proprietor of the toughest saloon on the toughest street in the toughest ward of New Gotham, ready to deliver his solid block of votes whenever called upon, as well as paying his prescribed proportion of the campaign fund and his regular protection assessments. His obligations to Society thus being satisfied, he would successfully have insisted upon being left severely alone, to run his precinct and collect its various revenues exactly as suited his fancy. Being in Skagway among the first, and not in New York, he had lost no time in establishing himself as a sole and exclusive Tammany there, for all practical purposes, instead of serving a ready-made Tiger. Municipal or other organisation for local government had been wholly overlooked or out-distanced in the stress of the Great Rush. Events marched too quickly for the unwinding of government red tape. Besides, only the vultures regarded the White Pass seaport as aught but an iniquitous way-station—a den of thieves to be passed through as promptly as possible to the wide, wind-swept spaces and the treasure fields beyond Soapy, as King of the Vultures, assumed dictatorship, supporting his decrees by organised gang-rule: Purchase or reward, knife-thrust, bullet or preferment. The decent elements, though in a strong majority, were too hurriedly pressing on to challenge his reign of terror in the nightmare town they hoped never to see again. Therefore the hub of such civic administration as existed was Soapy Smith's saloon. It was his prideful boast that his bar, with its natural and inevitable adjuncts, the dance-hall and the games, was "taking in bigger money than the Waldorf-Castoria."

A long, rough structure of logs and unpainted lumber, its exterior held no hint of charm or lure of mystery. It looked just what it was—a rude frontier carousal hall created on the spur of the moment out of the first materials at hand. Those who knew catalogued it mentally as a devil's raffle-box to catch all the gold of the ebbing and flowing human tide—the minted coin of excited inbound adventurers, the virgin dust of the few outcoming sourdoughs. Its ground floor was a single great room, the inevitable bar running three-quarters of its length along the one side, the dance-hall at the rear, the space fronting the bar and extending to the opposite side-wall (with only a ten-foot aisle for the dusty-throated) devoted to tables and lay-outs from which patrons might make their choice of faro or chuck-a-luck, craps, poker, roulette or Black Jack—old "Twenty-one or Bust" ruling prime favourite.

On a raised platform toward the front two lynx-eyed gunmen sat, each facing a tiny table, revolvers at either hand—silent, sphinx-like spectators of all proceedings. Ostensibly these were the accredited guardians of law and order. In fact, their business was to safeguard the house and its various interests and all concerned therewith, shooting—and

shooting to kill—at the first bleat of active protest from any shorn victim of card shark or dance-hall doll or any sign of imminent violent ruction. The bar back-wall was a dazzling plate-glass mirror, the counter of mahogany—both from the Outside, of course. The special pride of the gang, as well as its chieftain, were these accessories, in shrieking discord with all else about the place. Of the many who eased their feet on the long brass rail, four-fifths demanded whisky. Those of the minor fraction were feeling like millionaires and therefore called for wine, at ten dollars per. In this gaseous gold of the vineyard they assiduously pledged fickle fortune or toasted the bright-eyed, red-lipped sirens of the scene, possessors of thirsts unquenchable.

Where the throng packed most densely, in little human knots before the bar, the centre of the circle invariably would be a rough-clad miner, confused and queerly elate at finding himself courted and lionised and fêted—he who had fought the lone wilds, the cold and the belly-pinch, the scurvy and constant toil, for wearing month after month, and had now come "Outside," to have big business men (lawyers, and doctors, and bankers even) hang on his every word as something oracular, a golden grain of wisdom—and every man he met desirous to buy him drinks.

At four in the afternoon the "Big Swede" Sorenson, from Eldorado, was the pivot of one such group—that nearest the door. He had entered by that door at a quarter to one, intending to have "just one drink" and then "beat it for the boat." He had had that drink, and more than a dozen encores had been pressed upon him. The drinks and the new and undreamed-of prominence into which he seemed thrust as a man of note, had got him elated and "rattled." He relished the thrill of his new status.

Yet all these so-friendly people! They asked so many questions on things he knew nothing about! How was he to answer them? He very much wanted to be polite, but also he wanted to get away. The room was stifling to one inured to the Arctic's chill. Down at the rickety dock a steamer was waiting that would shorten by one more link the chain binding him to that North Dakota home he had not glimpsed in four long years, and from which letters had come to him only twice—the first with a snapshot of a little Sorenson he had never yet seen.

"Ay tank you ver' mooch," he managed to say as the bombardment of questions ceased for a drink period. "But Ay bane go now to the boat."

"Oh, you've all kinds of time," a chorus assured him. "Just one more! She don't sail till six an' you can easy make her in five minutes from here.... Say, what about this Too-Much-Gold Creek they're talkin' about? What was it them *Siwashes* said?"

"Ay taal you Ay bane on Eldorado! Ay never hear taal of that creek tal Ay get to Dawson."

"But didn't th' *Siwashes* say there's so much gold there yeh've got t' chuck gravel in with th' dirt t' wash it?"

"That bane yoost a yoke.... That Indian he bane yoking, for to have fun with the *cheechakos*."

"But th' Indians 'd know, wouldn't they? ... My gawd, boys, think a' it—too much gold t' wash it! Whereabouts 's that creek, did yeh say, Mr. Sorenson?"

"Ay didn't say," protested the Swede emphatically. "Ay don't believe me there bane such creek.... Them *Siwashes* yoost bane yoking."

"Course he don't want t' give it away!" This petulantly from some sorehead on the fringe of the circle. "Guess he won't be hiking back there himself though, soon as he's had his little whirl Outside!"

"But Ay taal you it all bane a yoke," Sorenson persisted with racial patience. "Nobody know that creek. Them *Siwashes* say they not taal—too far away, and white men yoost die if they try to get there——"

"So *that's* th' big idea, eh? *Siwashes* think they're goin' t' hog it fer themselves! Well, we'll fool 'em, by gawd! We'll foller 'em till hell freezes, but we'll find that creek!"

"P'raps—mebbe." One of the Big Swede's shoulders hunched up in a shrug of helplessness. How was he to make these soft-handed hot-house people even dimly comprehend the multiplied terrors of that polar hinterland?

"If haal up there she sure enough freeze," he conceded.

"But 'bout this here Hunker Creek strike?" another urged, elbowing into the ring. "What they doing there now? I hear they been takin' four-five dollars t' th' pan? An' a feller'n Seattle was tellin' me——"

"Oh, leave th' poor man alone, can't yeh! Don't you boys see he's tired t' death? Give him a little peace."

A diminutive dance-hall fairy had wormed her way through the crush and laid a detaining white hand on the rough sleeve of the sourdough's tattered mackinaw. "Come on back here an' talk t' me a minute," she urged, blue eyes coaking, cherry lips smiling invitation. "Yeh must be 'all in'? ... An' so you're goin' Outside now, with a fortune t' show th' home folks what *you* can do?"

Deftly, skilfully, swiftly she piloted the big miner to the almost deserted dance-hall, chattering as they went, the too-golden-to-be-true head bobbing coquettishly. The Swede lumbered astern, childishly gratified, a weather-worn giant hulk. He hadn't seen a white woman in all of twenty months, and this little girl was so soft and pretty——

"You don't mean t' tell me there's eleven thousand dollars in that old sack?" was the last fragment of one-sided conversation from the pouting red lips that was caught by the listening crowd as the odd pair drifted.

Two of the house gang, who had been keeping close to the Swede from the moment of his entry, unostentatiously followed up the Butterfly and the Bear, as someone had promptly dubbed them. Half-way down the long room they passed Soapy Smith, idly watching the chuck-a-luck game, a long cigar clenched between the black moustache and the equally black beard. Both his men looked inquiry.

"Leave him to Lallaine," the Chief remarked casually but decisively, responding to the glances—resuming then his contemplation of the play.

The men turned and sauntered back to the bar. Two others had just come in. Red-headed Pat they recognised at once. His comrade of the moment was obviously very new to the Northland, and at him they stared in amaze. A tall, well-set-up young Englishman, with puttees on his legs, "a sort of a soft scarf-collar thing" neatly folded about his throat, and—ye gods of all the Arctic!—a single-barrel eyeglass!

The stare resolved itself into grins of amused contempt.

"Lo, Pat!" they called in greeting. "What yeh got with yeh?"

"Hello there!" Dacey responded. "Meet m' friend 'Ham-and'.... He's just been an' bought Maudie off me."

The grins broadened.

"Put 'er there," said one of the introduced, extending a hand. "Maude sure is some grand mule."

"Charmed, I'm sure," was the murmured rejoinder. "We were just about to take aboard a B-and-S. Won't you join us?"

They would ... With pleasure ... Certainly! But brandies-and-soda were not forthcoming. Instead of responding swiftly to the call, the white-jacketed master of ceremonies gazed, grinned in his turn, and dexterously spun four squat glasses along the board, supplementing the performance by setting forth a bottle of rye, uncorking it as he served.

"Two dollars," quoth he succinctly.

They drank and they drank again, with mine talk in between drinks, interspersed with much inquisitorial questioning that Mr. Fitzmaurice could not in the least understand and inwardly resented. Yes, he had come from England—some time ago, however. Been doing a bit of shooting up in the Skeena country—mountain sheep and silvertips—one *Ovis Fannini* and an *Ursus Kermodei*—fairish heads. Campbell River afterwards—salmon, of course. Now he must try the Klondike. Really must make a bit of tin somewhere. Rather weird sort of place, one would judge—all ice and snow and

what not? Frozen ground would be jolly hard to mine, too, would it not?

"Oh, it's got t' be thawed," he was told. "Lots of timber everywhere—light stuff. Keep a fire goin' in th' bottom of th' shaft all night—dig out th' soft dirt in th' morning and hoist it up. So on, till yeh get t' bedrock——"

"But isn't there danger of the gold melting?" he asked in his innocence. "I know nothing yet of such mining, of course."

At which there rose a storm of laughter—the laughter of thinly-veiled contempt rather than good-fellowship.

"Well, of all th' blame fools," guffawed one of the twain who had been presented, punctuating his cachinations.

"I say, why not let me in on the wheeze?" Fitzmaurice suggested. "I don't see anything so deuced funny in what I said. P'raps you'll enlighten me?"

"Well, of all th' society damn fools——" the previous commentator began.

The Englishman's cheery smile had suddenly disappeared. His lips set in a thin straight line. Grey eyes showed cold and hard through narrowed slits.

"I don't specially care to be made an ass of," he sharply announced, taking a forward step.

The man who had clinked glasses with him mere minutes before reached toward his hip. The Englishman's fist shot out simultaneously, beating the gun-hand and finding the point of the jaw, whereupon the jaw and he thereunto attached went down suddenly, a black .44 clutched, but not out.

There was an instant scramble for places of sightseeing vantage or greater safety. Business halted as though by signal, at bar and gaming tables.

The nearer gunman on duty was standing now on his platform, a businesslike steel-blue weapon in either hand.

"Fer gawd's sake, Ham-and—beat it quick!" counselled Dacey in a rushing whisper. "That's th' Montana Kid! He'll get yeh sure——"

The Kid was rising shakily. But as he straightened up his gun had come free away, and the crowd fell back yet farther, tensely still. There was no time for the Englishman to fall in with Pat's advice had he heard and heeded. The Kid's eyes blazed and his wicked gun pointed true at the Londoner's head.

Fitzmaurice's monocle looked just as straight into its black muzzle.

"Make damn sure of it," he drawled languidly. "If you miss I'll jolly well trounce you."

Soapy Smith broke the tableau.

"Put th' gat up, Kid!" he ordered sharply. "It was comin' t' yeh in a way.... Get him some other time if yeh want t'.... But not in here!"

"Mebbe he *is* a fish—but he ain't no jelly-fish," he added approvingly.

The gunman-guard, yawning, resumed his lookout's pulpit. No call for him to cut loose. Soapy turned to the Englishman.

"By rights yeh'd be goin' outa here feet first," he calmly observed. "But if yeh've got any business 'n Skagway before yeh hit th' trail, yeh better be at it quick.... Yeh got yer nerve with yeh, I'll say, an' yeh pack a punch, but don't go overplay 'em. Luck's like t' switch any old time.... An' I'll give yeh a word of advice: don't go lookin' for scraps—not in this here country. Yeh got all Alaska t' fight if yer headed fer th' creeks—an' she'll keep yeh plenty busy."

Dacey and Fitzmaurice passed into the street, silence between them. The Montana Kid moved snake-like in their wake. He was halted by a low-spoken word:

"Jest a sec', Kid," said Soapy silkily. "Yeh aimin' t' go out an' start somethin' right after I've settled it? If yeh do there'll be no Kid around when th' dance starts t' night! Get me?"

The Kid nodded sullenly. Five minutes later he was throwing down an ace and a queen, faces up, at the second table.

"Black Jack!" he shouted gleefully. "Guess I'll take that deal!"

Chapter IV A Samaritan Travels Incog.

Pat Dacey and his conspicuously British acquaintance had walked without interchange of speech virtually the length of Skagway's miry street, after their exit from Soapy Smith's headquarters. Both, seemingly, were thinking. The stocky Irishman plainly was ill at ease. From time to time he shot glances at his companion's face, which betokened nothing—no slightest trace of anxiety, excitement or concern. These English are so inscrutably self-contained. When Fitzmaurice halted to locate his cigarette case and find a smoke, his self-appointed guide and counsellor detected no tremor of fingers as he fired up.

"Have a lung-destroyer, Pat?" he inquired casually, extending the case and holding the ready match. "D'you know, Dacey, I've been thinking," he resumed, "that it's jolly well time we were snatching a bite somewhere.... Whereabouts in this hospitable hamlet might one go for some muffins and tea?"

For a moment the irrepressible Irishman was speechless with amaze. Muffins and tea! In Skagway! Even the monocle was nothing to this! But the tension of late events had been happily broken.

"Muffins and tea!" he echoed. "Why, man, they'd about slaughter yeh if yeh asked fer them things in this country. This here outdoors Alaska ain't no pink tea-parlour—not a'tall! What they hoots most fer here's jest good plain grub—an' lots of it. An' some a' these Skagway chow-shops sure can deliver th' goods. There's th' Trocadero an' th' Poodle Dog an' Delmonico's—all a' them pretty fair dumps. They can easy get in supplies here in Skagway, so why shouldn't they be? Once yeh hit th' old trail though, an' it's bacon an' Yukon strawberries t' th' end a' th' chapter."

This time it was "Ham-and's" turn to betray bewilderment.

"Bacon and strawberries! Really?" he murmured incredulously. "My word, what a weird combination!"

Dacey stopped in his tracks.

"Look a'here, Ham-and," said he. "Are yeh stringin' me, er what? Yukon strawbs? Why, they're jest good old-fashioned beans a' course. Anythin' fer a change 'n th' bill-of-fare. It's bacon an' beans fer breakfast an' beans an' bacon fer dinner, so it's natch'lly got t' be bacon an' Yukon strawberries come supper-time. Let's slide in here t' th' Paris if yer feelin' peckish—they few drinks does coax an appetite.... They're great on th' wheatcakes an' cawfee at this here joint. Got a reg'lar French chef, too—gink b' th' name a' Eckstein."

The Café Paris surely would have seemed like home to a true son of France's gay capital! Canvas-walled and roofed, its most conspicuous furniture was a long table or counter of rough boards, running the length of the place, its supports sturdy saplings driven deep in the earthen floor. This counter-table separated the proprietor-cook-waiter-cashier from his voracious patrons. Along the public's side was a single-plank bench about the height of a book-keeper's stool. The counter or table was equipped for business with granite-ware plates and mugs, tin spoons, iron knives and forks; likewise pepper and salt, sugar and milk, the latter condensed, of course, commonly saluted by customers as "the

canned cow." All things were in the original containers, converted into table accessories by the simple process of punching holes in the tops. Back of the counter, a cooking range held the place of honour, flanked by shelving from floor to roof, piled high with tinned stuffs of all sorts in generous abundance. Smoke flavoured every dish. Even the air was blue. A once-white cap (but that once in the long ago) perched on the head of the chef. His single upper garment, a heavy woollen undershirt rolled high on the sinewy arms, would have caused a strike even in a Chinese laundry if offered for purification. The sidewall facing the counter gave the completing touch of Parisian atmosphere with such compelling admonitions as:

```
+-----+
|      |
| BACON & BEANS----50 CTS. |
|      |
+-----+
```

```
+-----+
|      |
| TRY A CUP OF COFFEE LIKE YOUR MOTHER |
|          USED TO MAKE                 |
|      |
+-----+
```

and, more peremptory and sinister in suggestion

```
+-----+
|      |
| WATCH YOUR OWN THINGS--WE AIN'T    |
|          RESPONSIBLE                 |
|      |
+-----+
```

Fitzmaurice removed his eyeglass, polished it carefully, returned it to its habitat and favoured the Café Paris with leisurely regard, as he and Dacey climbed to the elevated bench. There they awaited service. The presiding genius of the place was close in confidential chat with a patriarchal friend, evidently, like himself, of the Chosen People.

"Looks quite like a bit of all right—what one can see through the bally fog," the Piccadilly exile cheerfully decided.

"And what's it goin' t' be, gents?" Eckstein inquired, acknowledging their presence from his own side of the counter. Then he stared at the Englishman and, recalling his manners, turned away, rubbing his eyes. Yet smoke had long since ceased to affect them.

"S'pose I must live up to the name, old chap. Make it ham and eggs for me," the host of the day and occasion remarked, with a grin for his red-headed guest. The latter, in loyalty to his own propaganda work, declared for "a stack a' wheats." Having performed the legerdemain preliminary to filling the orders, Monsieur Eckstein resumed his interrupted *tête-à-tête* with his friend from Outside.

"Not for anythings would I go for to make interference with any man's business, Joe," he insisted earnestly. "But for you this is a foolishness. For a young man, and strong—why, good! But you, Joe? You are not so young no more. That country, it will get you. You couldn't never stand it. And for why should *you* go Inside, I ask it? Have you not now a good place to make the money? Why, you're an old-timer down the Coast. You got plenty friends. I bet you the bank, too, it don't make no faces when you go in? For you, then, to go into this Klondike? Is it gone *mishiga* you have?"

The old man had offered no word of protest or correction, no interruption of objection or denial. Silent, he stroked his strong chin with work-calloused hairy hand. His eyes studied the dirt floor. He seemed scarcely to listen.

"Is it crazy you've gone, Joe?" Eckstein repeated. "Why, then, should you go Inside—at your time of life? Ain't yeh making the good money where yeh been so long? Ain't yeh got property there? Ain't it yer home, I ask it?"

The old man got up from the bench. Grizzled six-footer, he must have been a man among men of his generation.

There was yet abundant evidence of more than normal strength in the rugged frame. The slumbrous black eyes under stress of crises still bespoke power, in harmony with the jutting jaw and the massive nose. The eyes now were limpid pools, reflecting memories.

"You ask me, Isaac, why I should be going where all these others are rushing," he answered in the voice of habituated patience. "I have the good business, you say—and property—and a home. The money? It is not so much I have, but never have I been a waster. But home, since my Naomi died, what makes it then 'home' to me? ... In every room"—the sonorous voice dropped almost to a whisper—"in every room I see her still and hear her voice and her laughing at her old 'Papa Bear.' Never am I alone in that empty house. She is everywhere there with me—the *pitzale kind* in her cradle; a prattling four-year-old, climbing up on my knee, coaxing for stories and candy; the schoolgirl with her thick braids of hair, so long and black, like silk; the fine, straight young woman almost, like you yourself knew her—so beautiful to me, her old father—asking me do I like the new dress she has made for the party! ... And then—still and quiet, just like she is asleep, in her white coffin, with lilies in her hands that never move.... All the time in that house she is there with me, just as she grew from tiny bud to flower, and then withered and died with the winter. And I—I that have seen so many winters—it is I that live and am left alone.

"Isaac, my good friend, I think it true I should go *mishiga* if I stay there in that house. Up here is the peace of the mountains—always the same—so calm and patient and strong.... The cold and the storms and the dangers? I'm glad you have talked about them. Of *them* I am not afraid. It will do me good—fighting them. Just for that almost I would go. But, man," and he seemed to shake off the poignant past—"but, man, it will be like old times come again! Wasn't I there in California when they came pouring in to the beautiful Sierras? On the Fraser, too—and again in the Cariboo? Why, Isaac, it was me staked right next to Discovery on old Antler Creek. My, what a creek that was! And then, once more in Cassiar! ... Let us forget that I grow old. The long trail stretches ahead. I must see what is over the hill."

The old campaigner was quite himself again, cheerfully smiling, the note of haunting sadness vanished from the vibrant voice.

"Why, Isaac," he said, laughingly reproachful, "why, Isaac, I'm just a boy beside some of these stampedeers! I'm not even quite seventy yet! Besides, don't I know the game? And I am strong—oh, stronger much than you think. I don't count on trying the creeks myself, though. I'll leave that for the youngsters this time. No, I'll just take it easy and comfortable, watching things from behind my counter. If I make Dawson with the stock I've brought up with me I'll have me a fine café this new camp will be right proud of. And I'll make money, too! Where cannot our people make money?"

"Now tell me, how about meats? Are there bear and rabbits, Isaac? And caribou? Are they still in the hills? Sheep and cattle? Can they not be driven in slow in the summertime? Peavine should grow along the trails?"

Dacey's excited rapping on the counter interrupted the quest of knowledge. The wheat-cakes were sending up smoke signals of distress. Disaster threatened, as the spirals testified. Eckstein flew to the rescue. To let an order burn—and right before Old Joe! Customers, too, they must always come first!

Duty done, the thread of the discussion was picked up again. Again came interruption. The patrons, having eaten, desired to pay. Was ever an Eckstein laggard in meeting good money half-way? No other guests claimed attention. It was not yet the busy hour. Ways and means to meet the emergencies of catering in places remote from supply centres were discussed from every angle. Old Joe, with his past experience of mining camp whims and fancies, had outfitted wisely and well. His confrere of the Paris conceded the fact approvingly. Joe even had cased beer among the liquid supplies.

"But why pack in cheap stuff like that?" Eckstein had protested. "It'll cost you ten times what it's worth to get it inside."

"Well then, will it not be worth ten times more when we have got it in?" Joe countered, eyes twinkling. "The boys always want their beer most where it is not, eh? That wine—it is for 'occasions.' Beer is the good old friend, Isaac. And you are wrong, my friend, for to call it 'cheap stuff.' If I alone have it there, think you I will not make the price? Perhaps also, if I come Outside again some day, the newspapers they print pieces about me, eh? 'The man that took the first beer into that Klondike country?'"

"Getting everything In is what is bothering me," he confessed, as dinner customers began to appear, and he moved toward the street. "I've all three teams can handle and only two have I got yet. These Outside dogs? What good will they be on the long trail? Poor brutes! ... Besides, there's a girl that came up on the steamer. I have promised I would see her through safe. Couldn't turn her back. I tried hard to. How was I to tell it to a young lady why a mining camp's no place for the good woman?"

"Well then, good luck if you must go!" Eckstein gripped hands with him across the little showcase, sacred to poor cigars.

"And to you also, Isaac," the patriarch replied, backing toward the entrance.

As he did so the door was flung fiercely open and an uncouth giant catapulted in—wild-eyed and gasping. Staggering to the bench, he flopped down on it exhaustedly and his head dropped on his arms, sprawled over the counter. His disreputable coon-cap fell to the floor unheeded. No word was spoken. Only the huge hulk shook spasmodically and choking sounds came from the twitching throat—half groans, half sobs.

Eckstein stared in nervous bewilderment. Old Joe, turning back from the door, placed a hand on the heaving shoulder.

"What is it, *tillicum*?" he questioned gently. "Sick? Or some trouble? Come, pull yourself together! We are all friends here. Isaac! Some coffee, black and strong!"

Twice was the old mackinaw shaken futilely.

"Come, drink this good coffee now! Then perhaps you tell us what is wrong?" The words were quietly spoken, yet none the less a command. The Big Swede lifted his head and shakily obeyed. His face, they saw, was drawn and contorted, the eyes half-crazed and bloodshot.

"Ay—tank—you," came in a husky whisper from the blue lips.

Old Joe patted the big shoulder reassuringly.

"That goes to the spot, eh?" said he, as the coffee was gulped. "No, rest a bit! Don't try to talk yet, old sourdough—time enough."

Sorenson suddenly sprang to his feet. The sum of his wrongs had come back to him with a rush. He raised clenched fists and shook them toward the town.

"Them devils—Ay kill them," he screamed as he rushed for the door.

Old Joe barred the way. The Swede's rush halted.

"Steady, boy! Steady! You, who are young and strong, would not strike down an old man? ... Where is the cap gone? Here," as he picked it up, knocking it free of dust against his leg. The Swede reached a trembling hand and the cap dropped again to the floor.

"See—you are too excite! Wait, and we go together. I, too, must some coffee have."

Black eyes held dreary blue, compellingly. The voice was calmly insistent. Big Sorenson hesitated—and sat down.

"Ah, that is better—much! And now, perhaps, you tell us what it is that has happened? You have just come Outside and you buck the game? Well, better luck next time! No? Well then, perhaps you get drunk? Plenty good men they get drunk sometimes. Not so? Only just a few drinks? And then?"

In a rush came the disjointed story—the bar-room hospitalities—the steamer that waited—the girl with hair like a doll's—the talk he had had with her—the photograph she had asked him to show her, of that baby boy back in North

Dakota—just the one small whisky, while they talked! And then he remembered nothing till he had wakened, very sick, and found himself quite alone, down by the creek back of Soapy Smith's big dance-hall. His head was pounding yet! He didn't know how he had got there—and all his dust was gone! Eleven thousand dollars—and he'd worked for it two long years! He "had had it when he went out" they'd told him at Soapy's when he'd gone back there. But he couldn't remember starting from there for the boat, though they all said he had.... He knew now they'd all been lying! They'd doped him and then they'd rolled him! But he'd make them give back every ounce——

"Wait! Wait!" Old Joe insisted, clinging to the ragged mackinaw. "You don't know who took it, do you? You don't know who's got it now? Can you fight twenty gunmen at once? Did your partner come Outside with you? No? Then what have you done with the dogs?"

"By yimminy," he admitted, astonished and contrite. "Ay bane forget the dogs. Ay go feed them now."

"*We'll* go," corrected Joe. "It is bad to forget the dogs.... You have not sold them then? How many in the team? Good dogs?"

Five malemutes, a three-year-old husky leader! It was Joe who was now excited, almost exultant. The dogs' feet were bad and they had been left with the Company's agent till they were fit for the trail again. Then they were to be sold. A day or so would put them in shape.

Here was luck! Together they started out, nor did they pause at Soapy Smith's saloon, although the night's dance had begun and the place was ablaze with lights and they could hear the music and noisy laughter. The Swede had pulled himself together once more, stolid and taciturn. He was listening half indifferently as they hiked along. Joe was doing the talking.

Half an hour later in the Company's shed they had come to an understanding. Three hundred dollars the Swede had pinned in his inner pocket. He would send it to North Dakota, with a letter, next outmail. The dogs had changed owners, but their old master would drive them Inside again and Joe would grubstake him when he went on to the creeks. It would only mean one more season perhaps! Then he would come out by Dalton's Trail—and pass up even "just one drink" when he went through Dyea!

"You bane goot falla, Yoe," he had said. "Ay go back Inside with you!"

Chapter V Pluck of a Mouse

Mr. Lawrence Hammond Fitzmaurice had intended to rise with the sun, brew himself a dish of tea, pack his goods and chattels on the faithful Maude (with Dacey's expert assistance) and hit the trail by noon. He would make camp by dark, he promised himself, at the foot of the hills. From there he would advance his outfit by relays to the head of The Pass.

But man proposes and Providence grants injunctions. The morning proved so foggy as to unkindly remind one of London. The sun forgot to rise. Fitzmaurice therefore "slept in." It was ten ere the tea was brewed. No serious matter, he thought. To-morrow would do as well. Besides, he'd begun to doubt that cigarettes could be procured along the trail. He would get himself pipe and tobacco. The Paris Café sold such things he had noted. High noon accordingly found him again a customer of Monsieur Eckstein.

As on the yesterday that gentleman of varied responsibilities had a visitor, his old friend Cariboo Joe, with whom, however, were now two others. Nor could a more grotesque contrast have anywhere been found than the pair afforded. A huge and husky Swede, "sourdough" from coon-cap to muck-a-lucks—and a demure, diminutive young lady, low-voiced, daintily feminine, each detail of bearing and apparel proclaiming unfamiliarity with earth's rough places. She seemed, the Londoner thought as he covertly regarded her through the inevitable monocle, as much out of place in Skagway as a

stray lamb in Lombard Street. Mechanically he removed his cap. Eckstein came forward to serve him. Two short, squat pipes he selected with infinite care. Of tobacco he decided to take four pounds—old John Cotton Mixture.

The Café Paris had never heard of it.

"You also are going Inside?" the survivor of four great mining fevers moved nearer to ask. "Will you let me advise you, friend? Take this T & B plug instead. It is best for the trail. No waste weight to pack; and slicing your own tobacco is pleasant occupation and teaches patience. That often is needed. It takes the mind off its troubles, too. And after the camp-fire or the cabin meal it makes the smoke taste all the better if you've whittled off the tobacco yourself.... The old knife, the old plug of tobacco and the old companionable pipe—they're the miner's Three Graces."

"Good sense and poetry—that's another 'uncommon mixture,' what?" commented the Englishman, addressing himself to Eckstein. Old Joe he thanked with a smile.

"I fancy we've met before," said he—"in your restaurant back in Victoria? Visiting Skagway long?"

"Not 'visiting,'" was the reply. "I, too, am for the trail. The restaurant I sold out more than a month ago. I shall get me another place in this Dawson. Drop in there some day and see me.... Yes, now I remember your face. You often came in of an evening?"

A nodded confirmation answered. "Pardon me if I'm rude, but isn't the trip a hard one, for one of your years?"

"Just what I been trying t' tell him!" interjected Eckstein, exulting in support.

The veteran shook his head. "I'll make it all right," he declared. "The trail and me, we are old friends.... Besides, I have good companions. My friend here, Mr. Sorenson, he is of the country. And this, Miss Brooks, my mascot so far as Dawson! There she will sing for them songs."

Unconventional introductions were acknowledged. The Swede thrust out a great paw that, after an instant's hesitant surprise, was cordially gripped. The Englishman turned to the girl.

"You are a singer—a concert artiste? Perhaps I have heard you at Home?"

Mischievous brown eyes were raised in quick appraisal, then dropped demurely. Both flushed.

"I'm afraid not—indeed I'm sure not," she responded. "I've never been in England. To tell the truth, I've never before been out of Oregon in all my life. You'll think my voice very crude, I'm afraid, if you ever hear it. I've always loved to sing, though—church music it's mostly been.... I'm just a church choir contralto, with high soprano ambitions."

She laughed, and again the golden-brown eyes were lifted for a flitting space and as swiftly lowered.

"I really don't know how I've dared to do it," she added, soberly reflective. "But when this great strike was made (the papers were full of it) I just couldn't stay behind where everything is humdrum and fixed and settled. There's neither a future nor money in my little old home town. I'm greedy for both, you see. And so I'm risking it all. It's sink or swim now."

"And jolly plucky I call it," the Londoner heartily commented. "My word, yes—frightfully plucky!"

The tobacco had been approved, parcelled and paid for. Yet the purchaser lingered.

"I say," he questioned hospitably, obeying inspiration, "why not some muffins and tea?"

Eckstein regarded him blankly.

"——Or some coffee and strawberries, what?" he hastily amended.

But even the famous coffee was politely declined. Mr. Fitzmaurice reluctantly withdrew, having produced a visiting

card with his unabbreviated name neatly engraved thereon and "Savage Club" in the lower corner. The bit of pasteboard passed from hand to hand as soon as the door closed, for such puzzled and minute inspection as naturally might have been claimed by a suspected counterfeit.

"I hope we shall meet again," the Englishman had said in leaving.

"I hope so, too," Old Joe had acquiesced. "Good luck to you, anyway, Mister."

The Swede had answered nothing. The lady had bowed and smiled.

Yes, she had really smiled! Fitzmaurice assured himself of this highly important fact with undisguised satisfaction. And how pretty she was when she smiled!

"Deuced plucky little mouse!" he remarked approvingly. "Shy as a mouse, too."

He greatly admired pluck.

Dacey was waiting for him at camp. So was Maude, who tentatively threw back one stringy ear at his approach, decided that all was well, and resumed the reduction of her ration of oats.

"Thought yeh was goin' t' make a start this mornin'?" greeted him. "Here I been waitin' half th' day fer yeh!"

"'We should become perturbed,' as the Yankees say," was the airy rejoinder. "Had a bit of shopping t' do, and I'm not sorry—though I shouldn't have kept you waiting, old chap.... I say, Pat, you know everyone hereabouts? Have you by any chance met a Miss Brooks—tremendously fine singer—going on Inside, too, she tells me."

No, Dacey decidedly had not.

"One a' these variety floozies?" he casually inquired. "Coupla them's camped jest up creek a bit. Varnished-hair sort a' chap in glad rags got 'em in tow."

Fitzmaurice was emphatic. Neither of those persons could possibly be the lady of whom he had spoken. "Not at all that sort—*absolutely* not," he declared. "Quite evidently a lady. Sang in a big choir in one of those eastern states. Voice is her fortune, she thinks. Going North to collect.... Awf'ly plucky thing, what?"

"Aw, don't yeh go get tangled up with no skirt now," counselled Pat disgustedly. "Yeh'd be a mark fer 'em. Steer clear, man—rocks ahead!"

"But you don't in the least understand——"

That he was offended showed in the altered tone. He relapsed into chilling silence. Regard for his chance companion had gone down like the mercury as he had journeyed north. The Irishman considered him quizzically.

"It'd be jest like him t' go an' fall fer one a' them janes," he assured himself. "Wonder which one's got her hooks into him?"

His speculations were short-lived. His gaze wandered trailward and was arrested.

"Look who's here!" he urged. "There's them show-folks now, a-tryin' out their dogs. Either a' them yer op'ra queen?"

Fitzmaurice deigned to look. Two girls, a man and a bewildered dog team were headed along the trail toward the makeshift camp. The dogs appeared inextricably tangled and very badly rattled. The male party was plying a busy whip, making matters worse. They were fifty yards away, but the dancer's laugh carried, metallic and shrill, with the wind. What she was saying also was distinct.

"Not up in their lines a bit," she commented disgustedly. "Prompt-box for 'em all th' time!"

"You would lie down on me, would you!" the Count's voice rang angrily. "Get up, damn yeh, and pull!"

The lash fell furiously, cruelly. It was the part-Irish terrier, they could now see, that had been knocked over and was in dire distress. He made no whimper when the lash wrapped itself round him, each stroke indelibly recorded in a quick-reddening welt. Choking with passion, the amateur breaker rushed at him as he lay gasping, kicking at the small dog with heavy boots. Suddenly the terrier sprang, sinking sharp teeth in the enemy's leg. The weighted butt of the whip came into play. The dog rolled over, unconquered but out of action with a smashed hind-leg. De Maurin regarded the bleeding and broken wreck, the while swearing fluently. That dog, that he had paid good money for, most certainly was done. The damned stubborn, lazy brute! The Count cut him out of the team and booted him aside.

"Take your time about dying," he growled. "I hope it takes yeh a week."

One's wife and one's dog are one's own in the sportsman's code. Fitzmaurice watched, with clenched fists but silent and strictly neutral, as the shortened team passed on.

"Rotten brute—that bounder!" he confided to Dacey. "Hope th' pup took a good bite out of him while he was at it—though it's prob'bly poisoned him."

Attention was so focused on the dog-training scene that neither he nor Dacey had noticed the approach of other teams swinging joyously up the trail, three strings of six dogs each, running in straining delight. Sorenson drove the first sled. The others followed. The trail was good and no use for the gee-pole presented.

"*Mush, yeh malemutes! Mush!*" carolled the Big Swede.

"We make camp to-night up trail a piece," old Joe shouted as they passed at a run. "You'll pick us up maybe to-morrow? The dogs' feet not quite right yet." This last they just managed to catch.

Fitzmaurice waved, comrade-fashion, but his gaze was fixed not on the lead sled, driven by Sorenson, nor the last, on which rode the old man. A little crimson-toqued person, half buried in furs, reclined on the middle sled. As they turned a curve of the rising trail, she waved a mittened hand. The Englishman's cap came off and was frantically waved in return. He stood with it in his hand as they passed from view. His face glowed with sudden-born satisfaction. But he offered no explanation of the cause.

"Come to think of it, Pat," he remarked some ten minutes later, "no use my getting lazy. I might as well peg on a bit too.... Lend a hand with this dunnage, old chap. I can make the foothills by evening, I fancy."

Dacey quite possibly would have been left to do most of the packing had the other but known that Cariboo Joe's three teams had been halted just over the nearest rise, where the dogs had at once sprawled out, awaiting further orders. The Swede, running behind his sleigh, had noticed something red-brown by the side of the trail. Halting the team, he investigated. It was a pitifully mangled terrier of mixed-Irish breed, its hair matted with blood and dirt, eyes wild with agony and mutely appealing, the right hind-leg badly broken, as Sorenson saw when it tried to drag itself on into the dark of a stunted salmonberry bush.

"Poor leetle falla," said the Swede compassionately. One rough hand caressingly stroked the head of the crippled dog. With the other Sorenson drew his old-fashioned .44. "It bane only thing Ay can do," he said—to himself, or perhaps to the pup.

"Oh, don't! Please don't!" The appeal came from the second sleigh. All three had pulled up. Beatrice Brooks tumbled out of her rugs and was rushing forward, white-faced. "Poor little chap," she faltered. "Perhaps we might save him?"

Cariboo Joe bent over and with experienced fingers explored the extent of damage. The eyes of the dog were fixed

on the old man's face, seeking and finding friendship. A small pink tongue feebly licked the investigating hand. There was no whimper nor hint of objection. The game Irish terrier blood is that of brave gentlemen.

"The leg—it is broken," announced Joe, crude diagnosis completed. "But I think we may fix it up. We try, anyway."

He picked up the battered dog, scarce more than a well-grown puppy, and bore it to the second sled. The girl followed and was tucked in.

"Put him in here on my lap," she urged, covering the sufferer with the robe. Her mittened hand crept under it also, to lift the weight.

"We fix him up first thing when we make camp," the patriarch said to Sorenson. The Swede nodded agreement and cracked the long whip. His team sprang into action.

"*Mus-s-sh! Hyack, yeh malemutes!*" he sang cheerily.

Old Joe resumed his place and the third sleigh also raced forward.

"Both have the good heart," he confided to the straining huskies. "Through eyes quick to see and succour we peep into the so beautiful soul."

Chapter VI In which Maude "Makes the Grade"

It was three o'clock before "Ham-and" hit the trail, in exalted spirits. Maude's legs only were visible beneath the pyramided "luggage," over which Dacey had thrown the diamond-hitch with applauded dexterity. The Irishman grinned broadly as the mountain moved.

"See yeh later!" he shouted, then laughed uproariously. The Englishman, taking to himself the friendly assurance, cheerily responded "Right-o!"

The trail—one of twists and turns, with variants in occasional knolls and gullies through which, in the later spring, cream-crested torrents would boil—led with imperceptibly increasing elevation across the Flat. Light-hearted Maude, despite overweight, was feeling her oats and forged forward blithely, in tune with her new master's mood. It was not yet even dusk when they reached the foothill camping ground, and Fitzmaurice, whistling, halted the one-mule caravan.

"Save our legs and bellows for the climb to-morrow, old girl," he explained to Maude as he stripped her of the impedimenta, hobbled her professionally and turned her adrift to graze. There was little enticingly edible along the well-worn snowy trail. Water and oats she was told she might look for later, reward for the afternoon's progress.

Having brought no tent over which to worry, her owner contented himself with arranging his primitive sleeping quarters, first felling four young firs and building a hunter's couch. Meticulous attention was paid to the foundational stratum, large boughs being laid shingle-style, the "bones" carefully inthrust; on these, smaller branches; on that again, a top-dressing of ferns and moss; last of all, the blankets and robe. A toppled sapling overhung the primitive dormitory. Across it a tarp' was thrown, and the thing was done. The bleeding trunks of the sacrificed firs were hacked into six-foot lengths and stacked for camp-fire back logs; lighter and drier small stuff assembled for cooking requirements. Kettle and frying-pan were located and soon bacon was sizzling—water for tea a-boil.

"Not half bad," Fitzmaurice thought, with quiet self-satisfaction. "Really not half bad at all."

The bacon duly crisped, it was washed down, accompanied by bread and marmalade, in huge mugfuls of freshly-made tea. Out came the new pipe and the plug, the latter to be clumsily mutilated with the hunter's knife and the slices orthodoxly blended by hand-rolling. The pipe soon was drawing famously. Seating himself astride an inclined fallen

tree-trunk, he again voiced emphatic approval of the situation.

"Top-hole I call this—rather! ... A pipe for the bush every time!"

Presently he got up. His improvised Chesterfield had developed a vexing knot. His pipe had gone out or demanded re-stoking. He was about to renew the assault on the inoffensive plug when confused vocal murmurings came to him from the one large tent in the halting-place—the last stop before the grand attack on The Pass. Something was going on that had drawn thither a very substantial part of the transient population.

Curiosity is not monopolised by womenfolk or fatalistic cats. He must investigate. Besides, those sombre mountains, now that night had swiftly fallen, were "enough to give one the hump." Crossing with long, swinging strides the intervening few yards, he lifted the flap of the tent and faced a motley congregation surrounding an improvised table along the sides and ends of which logs had been dragged for seats. A card game was in progress—precisely what he could not at first determine.

Standing well back, his head scraped the canvas roof. He had served a sufficient novitiate to know that many frontiersmen hold it blackly unlucky for a stranger to stand behind them. He watched as the game progressed.

Presently an ace and a face-card were turned up by one of the players. "Black Jack!" was shouted exultantly.

"No good this time," drawled the dealer. "Got one a' them boys myself."

"I've heard the name somewhere before," the Londoner soliloquised.

"Well, if that ain't hell's own luck," grumbled the late jubilant one. "This ain't my night, that's all. Guess I better quit."

As he left his place, the hatchet-faced man who was dealing glanced swiftly and appraisingly at the Englishman.

"Set down an' rest yer legs," he counselled, proceeding to business.

Fitzmaurice pre-empted the vacated seat, and for a few deals closely watched proceedings. His nearest neighbour meanwhile volunteered cryptic explanations:

"He deals 'em round twice, see? ... Ace counts one er eleven, whichever yeh like.... All face-cards is ten.... Yeh draw t' yer hand—many as yeh want.... Trick is t' get twenty-one or near it, but not over, mind yeh. If yeh go over, yer busted.... Ace an' a face-card natch'ral's Black Jack. Counts twenty-one, a' course, an' first one as turns a Black Jack, he gets th' deal—that's unless th' dealer's got one too. Then he cops everything in sight: No argument.... 'Tain't safe as a rule t' 'stand' short a' sixteen.... Far's I'm concerned I'm too scart t' draw past.... Jest my way. Everybody's got his own way a' playin' her—an' most likely losin'.... Comes easy as lappin' up beer."

"Count me in this time, old chap," Fitzmaurice instructed the dealer, laying down a two-bit piece, as settlements were completed on the last round played. The dealer nodded agreement—then stealthily studied his hand, peeping cautiously underneath his downturned cards on the table.

"First gent?" he inquired, when the cards had twice made the circuit. The Londoner found himself possessed of a queen and an humble five-spot.

"Hit me!" his right-hand neighbour demanded amiably.

The monocle focused upon him expressed bewilderment.

"Hit me again! ... That's good! ... No, darn it, one too many!" With a sigh of resigned disgust, the player threw into the discard a seven, trey, deuce and king—passing over his staked half-dollar.

"Well, what yeh doin' next there?" queried the dealer impatiently. "Want cards?"

"Ah, yes," he was answered. "You might strike me too, I fancy—not too hard."

The blow was, however, disastrously forceful. The drawn card, a knave, together with the original queen and five-spot, made twenty-five—four more than plenty.

Fitzmaurice doubled his bet on the next deal, following the amateurish "system" of those who believe themselves wise. Sometimes he won. More often his deposits went to the bank. When occasionally he turned a Black Jack, as several times occurred, he declined the invitation to "take the bank" if he wanted to. He didn't quite understand the rules sufficiently, he explained. Also his capital was scarcely adequate, as to which he said nothing. As bank odds run strong in Black Jack he therefore was marked for slaughter. When finally he decided to "pull out" he had but \$50 left, out of a bit more than \$200 reposing in his pocket when he entered.

"This really won't do," he chided himself as he strode back in the frigid moonlight to his primitive wickiup. "But that Black Jack does give one fast action on one's tin!"

His losses weighed but lightly. The clean, pure air of the hills—the wind's droning lullaby—the labours of the day—the aroma of the fir couch—all worked their narcotic spells. He slept the sound sleep of one at ease with conscience, till dawn and the mingling camp noises of early morning wakened him. A few minutes he lay considering, for the air was chill and the blankets' luxury seductive.

"Wonder how far that old Joe's outfit's ahead now?" he propounded in self-communion—and thereupon sprang to attack the problems of a new day. Breakfast was rushed; the dishes indifferently washed; Maude captured, fed and re-loaded, with all the inevitable vexations and incidental delays. After half an hour's trying, he decided that he could not achieve a diamond-hitch after the Dacey model. That sort of thing takes practice. But the packs were secure, well balanced and fair for the mule.

"Here we go, Maude!" he chirruped. "What's that they say hereabouts? 'Porridge!'"

But the level flat of yesterday and the mountain trail of to-day were altogether different in mulish Maude's opinion. She stopped at the first stiff rise, ears stubbornly laid back. Her eyes registered obstinacy in the *n*th degree. It didn't suit her at all. Fitzmaurice coaxed and cajoled, patting the barely moist neck, stroking the long and angular head.

No use! Maude backed away, her long teeth bared vindictively.

"By Jove, the brute's laughing at me!" Her owner resorted to sterner disciplinary measures. The lash fell fast and hard, Maude grinned again, hatefully. Adamantine stubbornness could be read in her attitude. Fitzmaurice recalled the Scriptural injunction as to sparing the rod. Maude's childhood was remote, but the maxim appealed to him. He acted accordingly.

"Oh, you Simon Legree!" a girl shouted mockingly. "Please don't go for t' beat up poor Uncle Tom no mo'."

The Count and his outfit were passing, the dogs straining in their traces, stumbling and slipping, doing their desperate best. All three of the party were riding, though everyone else moving forward was "hoofing it," saving their stock. Whenever a dazed dog went down, de Maurin's whip hissed swift punishment.

"Waitin' for th' penny 'bus?" he flung back as his team took a bend in the trail.

The Englishman combed his mind for scathing reciprocal sarcasm. Before he could think of a ripe retort the outfit was lost to view. Maude remained, however. Her head drooped dejectedly. Her eyes were closed as though heavy with sleep. They opened, questioningly alert, as he returned to the contest. He studied them long and curiously. Then he sat down to ponder the problem.

"Looks as though I'd been *had*, and had deuced thoroughly," he remarked to the watching mountains. "She's a bally inveterate baulker—too old to be cured of th' trick, too. That Irishman's had me properly.... I need a governess, what?"

Again and again he essayed the wooing of Maude to the ways of duty, cave-stuff and society diplomacy alternating,

alike barren of any result. After a time pipe and tobacco came out. Laboriously a fill was sliced from the diminishing plug. He struck a match. "Don't know but that old Johnnie was right," he philosophised as he puffed. "Cutting one's own tobacco" (Puff! Puff!). "Good for the rising temper" (Puff! Puff!) "Preaches a practical patience" (Puff! Puff!) "Gives one the truer perspective—rather neat that?" (Puff! Puff!) "Been acting the bally goat—Might as well come to it!"

The pipe was held in hand, *en route* again to his mouth. A half-smile grew to a grin.

"No, come to think of it," he reflected, "that redhead *didn't lie* about her! She's 'sound in wind and limb,' and he said so. And, I take it, he's made his money out of her.... My word, it was dashed clever! ... Yet not precisely sporting.... I do need a governess.... Demme, I hate to be had!"

Five minutes more of self-communion. Then he rose from the straddled log and again stood by the mule, revolving the situation. Maude laid back her ears, expectant. He began to remove the packs. Occasionally he chuckled grimly during this proceeding. Out of one of the turkeys he retrieved an old Smith & Wesson—also cartridges. Maude, with bored disinterest, awaited developments. At length he addressed himself to her:

"If a man will not work, neither shall he eat," he quoted sententiously. "You're not a man, you four-legged fraud. Wish you were for about ten minutes. But you're just as bally stubborn as some I've met. And I've a cure for stubbornness right here!"

His left hand gripped her forelock. Maude looked inquiry. Something hard and cold was pressed against her head. It tickled. The revolver barked. Maude toppled shakily over. She had come to the end of the trail.

Fitzmaurice noted the filming eyes. The single shot had done its effective work. But hunter's habit holds. He drew his knife for the *coup de grâce*, then stuck the revolver in his belt, relighted his pipe and proceeded to cache his supplies. This done, he'd explore a bit. He had noted the wreckage of many abandoned outfits where the mountain trail climbed skyward. An hour later found him again in camp, towing as treasure-trove an ancient toboggan sled. He whistled cheerfully. The whistle ceased abruptly as Maude, lately deceased, came into view.

"Poor brute! Too bad it had to be done," he observed self-defensively. "Wouldn't be sporting to let that sort of thing go on, though. These 'rushers' have enough troubles."

Out of the pack rigging was fashioned a clumsy harness of sorts, with a broad padded strap at its extremity. The reverse ends were attached to the old toboggan. The latter was loaded, but with only about a third of the obstinate Maude's original burden. Fitzmaurice first tried the pull of the makeshift traces. Then he set his head to the strap and, breathing heavily, scrambled up-trail.

Evening found him, desperately tired, at the head of The Pass. He flung himself, face down and head covered, on the snow, and for ten minutes, gasping, rested. Then, springing up determinedly, he cached his load and turned to the trail again. A few hours' light down-grade hiking brought him back to the foothill camp. The journey he duplicated the following day. On the third morning he had the last of his traps aboard the god-sent toboggan—the lightest load of any. Or was it that he was "catching on to the tricks of the trail"? He favoured the silent Maude with a farewell look. A new idea was born.

Horsemeat he had eaten before—not half bad at a pinch. The mule had been fat and in prime condition. Fresh meats were almost as scarce as finger-bowls in this benighted land!

With hunter's knife and skill he soon was at work. When finally he made his delayed start skyward he readily conceded his load the heaviest of all. Two hundredweight of frozen meat had been incorporated.

Not once had a thought of turning back suggested itself. A brother had fallen fighting with Wilson and his battered but unconquerable handful of gallant Britishers in that last hopeless stand against Matabelan hordes. It was not in the breed to surrender.

"They must be at Lindeman now," he regretfully told himself. "I'll have my work cut out to catch up with them."

As to whom "they" might be lay no room for argument.

* * * * *

For four days after Fitzmaurice's departure from delirious Skagway, Pat Dacey enjoyed himself. He had money again, and money is meant for spending. Else it burns holes in the pockets. Philosophers declare happiness unpurchasable. The great majority are not, however, philosophers, mistaking excitement for happiness. In "hitting all the high spots" they miss the cool, placid valleys of deep content. Each morning Red turned out of his blankets expectant, looking for Maude—"the good old meal-ticket"—but looking for her in vain.

"What th' hell can be keepin' th' old girl?" he asked himself the third morning of disappointment. "Never's took her so long before t' find her way back!"

The fourth day, and still no Maude, awakened anxiety and a vague misgiving.

"That plate-glass front boy? He'd never get her t' climb them stairs," he assured himself. "But what th' hello can be keepin' her?"

Anxiety grew with the day. He tried in the evening to drown it, thereby accumulating an oversize head, with consuming thirst in the morning.

"Walk'll do me good," he decided, recognising the symptoms. "An' mebbe I might run across Maudie comin' home. It's lonesome without th' old girl—too darn lonesome—damned if it ain't!"

A pair of Hudson's Bay blankets, a frying-pan, an old lard-tin and a day's supply of grub were all he determined to take. Going up light, he could easily make The Pass by late afternoon and hike back in the morning. There was a Black Jack game running at that last camp! Might be the Englishman was bucking the game there and his disillusionment had consequently not yet been accomplished. In that case Maude would be there too—the solemn old flea-bitten fraud! A sight of her would be good for sore eyes!

Late in the afternoon he made the base camp. The Black Jack game was still on. It seemed something of a continuous performance. He looked in, made a few bets, and went out. No sign of Fitzmaurice there. Foreboding possessed him.

"Any you fellas notice an English guy go by with that mule a' mine these last few days?" he casually inquired of one of the idling cappers for the game.

"'Bout a week ago? Not likely t' forget that John! ... Say, he was wearin' one a' them monocle things! Can yeh beat it? Had th' trick a' holdin' it in his face 'thout no springs er nothin'!"

"What become a' him?" The tone betokened worry.

"Blew by—after droppin' a fair wad. What else'd he be doin'? Goin' Inside, wasn't he?"

Dacey nodded affirmatively.

"What'd he do with th' mule?" he pursued. "D'yeh see what become a' Maude?"

The booster produced the makings and calmly rolled one of his own. He lighted it ostentatiously before condescending reply.

"Took her on with him, a' course. What'd yeh s'pose he'd be doin' with a pack-mule an' him goin' Inside?"

Dacey's little world spun dizzily. Maude had gone on! ... But then the climb didn't really begin for a mile or so up trail! He'd hike on a piece and kloshe nannitch.

The booster, fag in hand, watched his departure.

"Now, wha'd yeh make a' that?" he asked himself. "Wonder now did th' English guy go an' swipec his mule on 'im?"

Dusk heightened the gloom of The Pass when the anxious Dacey reached the scene of Maude's ultimatum. He sat down for a smoke. No use going farther.... It was then he read the signs, a few days old at most, of more than a breathing halt. Small bushes were bent and broken. What was that over there? Didn't look like the rest of the boulders?

And so it was he found Maude—all that was left of her. The glazed eyes held him accusingly, stunned for the moment by this undreamed-of solution of the mystery of her non-return. Mechanically he noted the brand on her off shoulder. It was Maude for sure!

"Poor old Maudie! Poor old Maude!" he chanted monotonously. "Poor, poor old girl!" He had never imagined such a thing possible. He tried to turn over the stiffened head to escape the reproachful eyes. As he did so, the bullet-hole told its tale.

"Th' damn cockney murd'rer, t' go shoot a poor harmless mule that never done no one no harm!" he yelled in a passion of rage. "Th' dirty, low-down polecat! Th' rotten butcher——"

The torrent of imprecations suddenly was shut off. Why, the body was all hacked up! Now, what th' hell was that for? At last the truth flashed on him.

"Th' murd'rin' beastly cannibal!" he roared. "Poor old Maudie! Poor old girl! I'll get even with him fer this—I'll get even with him, by God!"

Chapter VII A New Anglo-American Entente

From The Pass to Lake Lindeman—first navigable water on the upper Yukon short-cut between the Klondike and the great Outside—pioneer surveyors and geographers declared to be eighteen miles. But they were government officials, as such lingering leisurely, with all the portable comforts and pay on a per month plan. Besides, they themselves were men of the wilderness. The tenderfeet going Inside, hourly beset by unimagined difficulties and constantly-presented new problems, had long since classified all such scientific sharks as natural liars, among whom ancient Ananias, Baron Munchausen and even Dr. Cook ranked as mere prattling amateurs. The distance, as the rushers computed it through personal experiences by the way, ranged broadly from eighty to eighteen hundred.

"All downhill going now," they unanimously and enthusiastically agreed, having conquered The Pass. "Be at Lindeman easy to-night!"

Forthwith came hindering handicaps. The trail was "no better than a goat path." Packages broke and scattered. Dogs went lame. Rocks rolled disastrously. The family of the fates were all adverse. Unlike his fellow-travellers, Fitzmaurice rejoiced instead of repined as the hard going developed.

"These rocks will be hard on their dogs' feet," he assured himself, with apparent satisfaction rather than his habitual sympathy for suffering. "They'll prob'bly have to rest them again at Lindeman. Might pick 'em up there perhaps!"

With which hopeful conclusion he bent his head to the pull of the laden toboggan. Head down to the toil of the trail, easing the load on steep pitches, constantly on the look-out for lighter hauling or avoidance of mishap, his eyes were earthward save when he stopped at intervals to recover wind and strength. Had necessities of the way not thus controlled, his head would have been in the clouds. Bent to his task, he would have staggered on past the little camp half-way to the mirror gleam of the frozen lake, had not a shouted "Hello!" brought him up standing, suddenly smiling.

"That sounded like old Joe's voice?" He looked about eagerly.

"Over here! Under the Bluff!"

It *was* his voice! The dogs, then, had given out! They'd halted to rest the team? That old man had a heart in him! Hard luck for the poor chap. But Fitzmaurice chuckled rather than said it even to himself. The dogs! They should have a pound of mule steak apiece, with his compliments and his blessing!

Hauling out of the course of the continuous erratic traffic, he headed toward the voice. A long-trodden deer-run made the going easy. As the lightly-defined path rounded a giant boulder, the camp came into view: No, not one camp—two of them!

The nearer was that of the thespian crusaders—amateurishly and incompetently pitched and therefore augmenting discomforts and inconveniences for those to the city bred, for whom all the great outdoor wonderland had become an inferno of horrors. The tempers of the trio already had been strained almost to the snapping point during the climb from Skagway. The girls, utterly unused to the life of the wild, inured to the pampering comforts of urban existence, at first inevitably had thrilled to the novelty of it all.

"My, ain't them hills pretty!" the sentimental Gertie had exclaimed enthusiastically the calm first evening of their stay at the seaport camp, as the sinking sun crowned with crimson flame the crests of encircling mountains. "Ain't this jest one hell of a hole?" she had wailed disgustedly the first morning of the stop-over en route to Lindeman. "No bathroom—No hot water—No nothing!"

Besides which her cold cream and her lip stick were hopelessly lost! She had turned the outfit inside out in fruitless quest for these prime necessities.

"Trotters" exhibited greater adaptability. It "was hell," she agreed, "but why grouch about it?" She "guessed she could take her medicine" in view of the anticipated golden reward. When Gertrude had flopped down on the tumbled robes constituting the bed and moaned that she hadn't slept a wink, "with a young telegraph pole poking into her back," her professional sister had inconsiderately hummed "Ain't it Great to be on Broadway!" and tried out the bone-like supporting strength of her calloused toes.

They, too, had camped because of worn-out dogs. Even Ivan at last had conceded reluctantly that the brutes were "all in" and must be rested. He had thereupon ordered a halt and flogged the entire team impartially, in a black and voiceless rage. During the two days' camp he had nursed a smouldering frenzy that erupted at intervals, when the querulous whimperings of Gertie proved specially trying.

"What the devil did yeh expect?" he had demanded of her in exasperation. "Think you were going in Pullman, yeh little fool?"

And Gertie promptly had dissolved in tears, through which she pleaded penitently that she "hadn't meant t' make him mad."

"Well, see yeh don't keep up yer yapping," he had growled, dismissing the incident. "Or I might give you a taste of th' medicine I keep for these infernal dogs!"

The unexpected appearance of the Englishman rounding the big rock, de Maurin hailed with joy. Here was someone he could badger a bit, thus taking a partial revenge on the nerve-testing country.

"Why, if here isn't our little friend Gussie!" he shouted preliminarily as Fitzmaurice passed the chaotic camp. "Did yeh leave Sister Maude behind?"

"Oh, no!" came the placid rejoinder. "I've brought her along—in a way."

The pipe was drawing soothingly. The Sourdough's shipshape camp was not three minutes' farther. The day was one made for gladness. He felt happily at peace with the world.

"Say you, deah old chappie!" called the Count after him, for the long legs fast covered the ground. "Don't happen t' have any fresh meat, do yeh? I'm getting damn sick of this eternal beans-an'-bacon."

"Might help out possibly—later," Fitzmaurice smilingly assured him, without checking his stride.

Count Ivan renewed his attentions to his cringing, whimpering dogs, berating and abusing—at times administering a vicious kick at any coming near. Old Joe came up-trail, beaming welcome to the exile from Merrie England.

"Thought 'twas you," said he, "when I climbed to that fallen spruce for some solid dry wood for my fire." The friendly grin relieved of offence the conclusion of the explanation: "I didn't think there could be two men wearing those belts 'round their legs, even in this quaint procession. I'm glad my old eyes didn't fool me. Something told me we'd come together again, but I didn't look for the pleasure so soon. You're just in time for dinner.... Oh, Beatrice! Ole!"

The Swede emerged from his sleeping quarters, slipping on his mackinaw. From the main tent popped a curly head. Its owner recognising the approaching visitor, he was favoured with a smile so bewitching that it went to both head and heart.

"Hurry in out of the cold," she called cheerily. "Joe, you must put on your mackinaw over your sweater every time you go out, even if it's just for wood!" she admonished severely, with instinctive assertion of woman's right to command in domestic affairs.

"Baked grayling for dinner!" she whispered, delightfully confidential, standing tip-toe to assist the guest in unwinding his muffler. "We mustn't let it get cold, or Joe'd never forgive us."

Besides the baked grayling, stuffed and seasoned to a connoisseur's taste, there were rolls—hot rolls! Fitzmaurice marvelled. They certainly could have no stove! Out in front of the tent he had seen the frontiersman's fire, with the boiler suspended above it, hunter fashion. Yet these unexpected items of excellent fare were most unmistakably baked!

Joe, with merry eyes, marked his bewilderment.

"Why smother the question?" finally he chuckled. "How do I bake without the range? Is that it? Do I guess right? I thought so. It is by asking questions—and watching—we learn most in this world. Never heard of a reflector-oven for baking when you're on the move? Come then—I'll show you."

Just a sheet of bright tin, bent at a right-angle, making two sides of a triangle, closed at either end, with a shelf of light iron rods run lengthwise within! Set it up with the open side facing and close to the fire!

"Meat—Bread—Biscuits—Pies! Anything almost you can bake in it, once you get the knack! Of course not so good as the range—and sometimes you must look for a few cinders not in the recipe."

They turned again to the tent, both flaps thrown back that the camp-fire might gratefully heat its interior. Fitzmaurice's hand went mechanically to his pocket—and was quickly withdrawn. The girl interpreted the unstudied pantomime.

"Why, of course," she said, answering it. "I don't mind it a bit. Indeed, I like the smell of a good cigar——"

Fitzmaurice paused, knife in hand. He had begun to pare slices from the attenuated plug.

"Or a pipe," she hastily added, with instant comprehension. "A pipe really is more 'homey,' don't you think?"

"Perhaps you'd like better a good cigar?" Hospitable Joe was on his feet. "No, no. It is no trouble. They're right here in this pack I think—genuine Peg-tops! ... You know that cigar in London?"

His guest confessed unfamiliarity with the brand, but begged of him not to bother. He really "preferred the pipe."

"So?" Joe re-seated himself. "So! You like best the pipe, eh? It is for the man of the Outdoors his very good friend—sometimes his only comforter. A day comes, perhaps, when you find it so."

"I'm finding it out already," the guest assured him. The scene of the trail came back. "Gives one the truer

perspective," he added, inwardly patting himself. He had counted that rather neat when it first had occurred to him; hadn't dreamed chance would offer for him to bring it forth this way. He "talked so like a duffer," usually.

The "truer perspective" was, however, Greek to Joe. He looked to the Swede for a cue. Sorenson shook his head. Ignoring his own very late advice on the wisdom of questioning, he harked back to his original theme:

"That Peg-top cigar—you should try it," he said. "Some time in Dawson may be? I take me in ten thousand—A good big cigar, with a little wood peg in the small end! You pull out this small plug and you light your cigar! No cutting or biting off the end and then throw it away! No waste—only just the peg!"

Beatrice volunteered to wash dishes. Fitzmaurice at once offered to wipe them. Joe had withdrawn to his own special domain, intent on business as to which he said nothing. The Big Swede glanced at the volunteers for duty, smiling broadly.

"You bane entertain company," said he to the Girl. "Ay vash dishes. What else Ay bane got to do?"

Cards were found when the dish-washing ended and the old man had rejoined the party. Only the guest possessed any knowledge of Bridge. With straight Whist neither of the old-timers was familiar. Cribbage they claimed to "know backward." Euchre, accordingly, almost was Hobson's choice. The Englishman dogmatically insisted that to promote to precedence over royalty the knaves, disguised as "bowers," was really "all bally rot." But he was supremely satisfied nevertheless in addressing Miss Brooks as "partner" at frequent intervals.

About four Joe decided he had had enough of cards. The red pips were hard on old eyes. Besides, he'd some things to attend to. He withdrew to his sanctuary.... They talked for a time of trifles: The war of the States and Spain; Chances of trouble in South Africa—Fitzmaurice had an elder brother in the Inniskillings; The Mines and how long they might hold out—On this the Swede waxed eloquent, speaking with Authority's voice; Changes that might come while they were Inside; Music—and then more Music. Sorenson never had heard of Mascagni, but he certainly knew his Grieg. He even hummed "The First Meeting" in proof of old acquaintance.

"Supper!" Joe called from the tent door. "No ceremony now! Set up t' th' table. Eat 'em while they're hot!"

Sorenson and the hostess produced knives, spoons and plates. The veteran restaurateur entered pridefully, with—MUFFINS and tea and marmalade!

Fitzmaurice stared, eyes moistening. He polished the monocle vigorously.

"I say, old chap," he began, holding the glass in a hand that trembled slightly. "No, I won't try to say it—awful duffer at saying things." He broke off abruptly. "But I want you to know—how I *feel* this! ... So that's what you've been up to out there? ... Three cheers for the good old reflector-oven, and for Joe!"

* * * * *

Behind the everlasting hills in which the White Pass is set as an open door, the night falls swiftly—suddenly. One hour it is day. The next, the world sleeps, the sombre forests and the living stars its faithful sentinels.

Full justice being done the muffins and tea, short-lived dusk rested upon the camp. Again Sorenson asserted his rights as dish-washer, and as soon as his task was completed, with prodigious yawns betook himself off to bed. Old Joe built up the night fire and also withdrew to his tent. He had work to do in the morning, he explained. But before he left he had prevailed upon the unexpected guest to tarry until then. There were plenty of wolf robes and blankets, he asserted with vigour. The cook-tent "at least would be better than all outdoors." The invitation admitted of no refusal.

"If you don't stay with us till morning," had been his last word, "I'll think you're afraid of my flapjacks. And they used to say I could turn a flapjack with the best in Cariboo. What? Never ate flapjacks in England? And America sending missionaries to China all this while! Time your education began."

Left to themselves to find memory pictures in the camp-fire's light or follow the changing play of shadows, as some forbidding mountain peak took definite form in ebony silhouette against the white radiance of the moon, Fitzmaurice and his winsome companion said but little. That little was, indeed, almost wholly the lady's contribution to conversation so curtailed as scarce to deserve the name. She spoke of the wonderful country on the threshold of which they were paused; of the curious scene, looking back on the teeming trail—a line of burdened insects, black ants on a field of white; of the vast primeval stillness—the hush of the infinite.

Fitzmaurice smoked. Occasionally she ventured questioning glances, with birdlike perks of the curly head. Could he be blind to the grandeur—the mystery of it all? Deaf, as seemed others, to the myriad phantom voices of this land of slumbering strength?

At length the pipe seemed forgotten. Holding it in his hand, the Londoner stared before him into the velvet night. She studied his tense expression—herself hesitant, undecided, distinctly curious. Were his thoughts then leagues away, in some fair English home? The idea was not appealing. The silence grew awkward.

"A penny for your thoughts, me lud?" she bid, with tremulous laugh.

"My thoughts?" He started as though wakened from dreams. "They're seldom worth the penny. Forgive me for seeming rude. Didn't mean it; of course you know that.... It was just what you were saying.... Can't quite put the thing in words.... The immensity of the silence, up here underneath the stars.... It's in the Bible somewhere. I remember my mater reading it. Never could get the meaning then.... Seems to come to me here, though ... now ... in this wonderful night:

"And behold the Lord passed by, and a great and strong wind rent the mountains and brake in pieces the rocks before the Lord. But the Lord was not in the wind. And after the wind an earthquake. But the Lord was not in the earthquake. And after the earthquake a fire. But the Lord was not in the fire. And after the fire *a still, small voice*——"

"Somehow I feel that up here in the vast white stillness one gets very close to the Living God—No intermediary churches or priests or creeds—Just God and the naked Soul, the God of the 'still, small voice'—Conscience!

"I wonder do we really need all the sects and forms and doctrines? If we catch and follow the counsels of that 'still, small voice,' can we go far wrong after all? Here, in the vastness of space, we must hear it as in no man-built cathedral, however grand, that is set in a city's din.... Perhaps you'll call me a pagan, but that's what it makes me feel—A simple religion of the elementals—of the days when men 'walked with God.'"

Again silence fell between them. The Englishman shifted uneasily. He had never talked so before. Why now? And to Her—this Girl he barely knew? No, he felt that he really knew her as he never had known other in all his life. To be sure he knew nothing about her. But what matter, if he knew Her?

With a strange shyness he glanced toward her. Her hands were clasped in her lap. Her gaze was fixed on the everlasting hills.

"The still, small voice," she whispered. "Yes, it should be religion enough for us all."

The crash of a burned-through back-log broke the spell that had lain on both. In heart they had come very close together. The tension relaxed. The man at last refilled his forgotten pipe. The girl flitted out to the fire and returned with a blazing splinter that she held above the bowl. He puffed, smiling acknowledgment. What need of words between them?

A chorus of angry barking from the dogs—the creaking sound of walking on crusted snow—a muffled imprecation, brought them suddenly back to earth and earth's affairs.

"Whom can that be I wonder?" she questioned, instinctively drawing closer.

"Someone visiting at that next camp," he suggested. "Making his way back to his own now."

They talked in lighter vein of the curious folk fallen in with along the trail. The pure democracy of the frontier strongly appealed to him. He said so simply. Everyone now, she agreed, was "just Tom, Dick or Harry."

"Not I," he laughingly denied. "Did you know I'd been rechristened lately?"

She did not. What was it they called him?

"I'm 'Ham-and,'" he informed her. Then he told her of the name's bestowal and they laughed together.

"But I don't like it a bit," she protested. "And I'll never, never call you any such thing... Of course I wouldn't, Mr. Fitzmaurice," she added in blushing confusion.

"But I'm not quite *that* to my friends," he made haste to assure her.

"And what do those fortunates call you?" she plucked up courage to ask.

"My pals? Why it's mostly Jerry with them. No reason at all. Just happened—like little Eva or whoever it was in the play."

"But what does your mother call you?" The question was almost a whisper. Perhaps she should not have asked it. The answer was slow in coming.

"The dear, dear mater... I lost her ... when I was away at school. She always called me Larry. My first name's Lawrence, you know. It's a family name.... No one else ever called me Larry."

"Would you mind—would you care," she said softly—"if I call you 'Larry' then?"

His hand found hers and held it with a grip that caused physical pain. She suffered it smilingly. Women are that way.

"I should like it above all things—Miss Brooks."

"My friends—they call me 'Bee,'" she suggested, teasing.

"Why 'Bee'?" He was frankly puzzled.

"It's Beatrice, you know—Bee for short."

Instant and emphatic disapproval was expressed by a shake of the head.

"To rob such a name of its beauty!" he protested indignantly. "That's the worst of your hurrying country. No time to appreciate fine things. No ear for a chord of music—Do you mind—Might I keep it 'Beatrice'?"

Again a log crackled and broke and a geyser of sparks spouted upward.

"It's getting very late," she said, hastily rising. "I must run to my tent."

Ten paces away she stopped and, like Lot's wife, looked back. He was standing as when she had fluttered from him, his neglected pipe in his hand. His thoughts were all for her.

"Good night, Larry!" she called back softly, and dived into her tent. But she had not missed the answering:

"God keep you, *Beatrice!*"

When Larry drew the wolf robe about him, he'd forgotten how to go to sleep. What was it that poet chap wrote—if seemed to fit into his mood:

"And the Night shall be full of Singing."

Yes. That was it.

Chapter VIII "The Bear that Walks like a Man"

Mr. Lawrence Hammond, or "Larry," Fitzmaurice, otherwise "Ham-and," having sought his cook-tent couch and burrowed into the robes some time about midnight, did not, as was usual with him, forthwith close his eyes in slumber. Instead, he devoted the full live subsequent hours to gazing at stars and the firelight through the opened tent flap, while assuring himself at intervals that he was a "deuced lucky beggar." Intermittently he kept whispering "Beatrice!" so often as to suggest an experimental variant of the time-honoured counting of mythical sheep as they leap intangible fences. Such was the situation when big Ole appeared with the dawn and built up the dying fire.

"Sleep goot?" questioned Sorenson.

"Raw-ther!" he was answered.

Neither prone to be garrulous, nothing more seemed required. They smoked while old Joe turned out, observing wind and sky with weatherwise concern, and proceeded to the making of breakfast. Was it not his high duty, as a self-appointed prophet of the true Americanism, to prove that the genuine flapjack, like green corn or pumpkin pie, is one of the outstanding blessings of the New World democracy?

Breakfast was on the table when Beatrice made her appearance, more quiet than was her wont, but undisguisedly happy. Both Joe and Ole received customary greetings. As she turned to Fitzmaurice a wave of colour bathed throat and cheek. She managed it bravely, though:

"Good morning, Larry! I hope you slept well?"

He hastened to assure her that his rest had been "quite top-hole." Somehow his nerve balked at calling her Beatrice yet—before the others.

Old Joe paused in his batter-beating and caught Sorenson's eye. The eye winked back portentously. Neither appeared surprised or scandalised. They seemed merely merry, at the chuckling stage, over some mysterious joke shared in secret.

With breakfast, plans for the day were discussed. Fitzmaurice would have to push on. Handicapped by having neither dogs nor mule, he could not afford to dawdle. The two old-timers took turns in extending advice, which gained, it is true, but scant and broken attention. There was a fascination for the young man in watching his little hostess of the wild feed tit-bits to the terrier as she breakfasted. The dog's hind leg was in woodsman's splints. It had been repeatedly commanded to "lie down and not get up." Impossible order for an inquisitive dog! How, then, could he pursue his endless and urgent investigations about the camp? As a fair compromise he had achieved enough mathematical knowledge to put down three and carry one.

Breakfast was a second-act triumph for Cariboo Joe. The Englishman unhesitatingly agreed that flapjacks was or were something the Homeland must surely adopt—yes, even at risk of shattering the British constitution. He had ever before been staunchly conservative. It was part of the family creed.

By six he was ready for the trail. Ole amiably offered to set him upon his way. The Swede showed distinct surprise when old Joe interposed.

"You better look after the dogs, Ole. Bring them in, why don't you, and 'tend to their feet? Myself, I have much to do. Beatrice, she can see him off as well as you or me, anyway," he added in advance rebuttal of any suggestion of

inhospitality. "Nothing about camp for her to be doing, is there?"

The Oracle having spoken, no slightest objection was offered to this arrangement. Sorenson pondered it while the girl ran for her parka, the dog hopping after her. A grin, overspreading the Norseman's face, at last marked enlightenment. He slapped his leg and laughed:

"That old Yoe, he bane smart falla!"

The Girl, the Man and the Dog picked their way without haste along the old deer-run, scarce definable except to the habituated glance of a born woodsman. Beatrice had timidly withdrawn with her thoughts behind a protective hedge of silent shyness. The Englishman, too, seemed tongue-tied. There were scores of things he wanted to say, stretching opportunity like elastic. But where was he to begin, and how? It would come to him later, no doubt, when the chance was gone. He hoped She might understand and not think him quite the bally idiot.

Reciprocally, she was hoping He would guess her regret at the parting.

Mike, happily convalescent, subdued his inborn demon of unrest and did his loyal utmost to support the voiceless comradeship. From time to time he cast interrogative adoring glances at first one, then the other. He was behaving with all the staid and decorous gravity any Irish terrier could achieve with crisp morning air setting nerves tingling and the snow-covered path fairly bristling with scrub, fallen trees and mysterious rocks, each in turn demanding expert investigation. There was, indeed, so much to stimulate an inquiring mind that the hind leg cased in splints often was quite forgotten. Curiosity rather than Faith thus was helping a cure.

"Our neighbours are just getting up," Beatrice lightly remarked, making conversation, as they skirted the Count's camp. "There's the man now, coming over this way."

Fitzmaurice glanced casually. Something about this foreigner he certainly did not like. His brutality toward his dogs marked him lacking in sportsmanship. His barbarous grace of carriage, his easy fitting of himself into the garb and ways of the snowy wastes, the bizarre pair of scarves that he wore about throat and waist—all bespoke the swaggering Cossack, the illegitimate link 'twixt Orient and Occident. The Englishman—solid, straight-thinking, hard-hitting, honest, clean-minded, direct, open and aboveboard in his ways—held the sportsman's simple code his rule of conduct. Count Ivan was his antithesis—gracefully sinuous and agile of body and mind; tricky and brutal in his sports; tyrannical, cruel and dictatorial in his normal affairs. They had little at all in common. Both were brave in their different ways, but their courage bore rival brands. Racial antipathy ran in their blood.

The Russian did not concern himself to veil his easy contempt. He had not, however, left camp with any intention of looking for trouble with "that poor fool Englisher." It had only been another of Gertie's mornings of petulance and sighs. She no longer dared openly express her accumulation of woes. Her forced and obvious self-repression de Maurin found yet more exasperating.

"You look like hell, Gert," he had sourly told her.

"That's just how I feel," she had answered shortly.

He had thereupon flung himself out of the tent, raging inwardly. Now here, sent by luck, was this comedy Englishman!

"Didn't come back last night about that meat, did yeh?" he hailed, courting controversy, if not conflict. "Too busy with th' little jane, eh?"

Words and manner were purposely insolent. The girl paled and dropped back. Her companion stepped forward. The Count had not seen her before save merely as a feminine figure in the background. He now noted on the instant her rounded grace of form, the beauty and the purity of her face. Before Fitzmaurice, tight-lipped and seething, could resent the proffered insult, sensed rather than fully understood, the Russian was smiling apology—charmingly. His cap swung courtier-fashion.

"Pardon the rough jesting, mademoiselle," he was saying courteously. "I deplore my mistake. We've not met before, have we, though we're neighbours, too? Won't you run in and visit with my girls? They're only just breakfasting. Out here in the wilds at least we are free of formalities."

The cavalier's little speech was all for the girl, spoken with outstretched hand. Fitzmaurice stood silently by—tense, fists doubled up in his clumsy mittens. Instinctively he nevertheless obeyed a restraining touch on his arm. It flashed on him, too, she was right. She must not be brought into any vulgar trail brawl. But he'd meet this rotter elsewhere, very soon, and teach him proprieties. Chance assuredly must offer.

"We are going on almost any time now," said Beatrice, forcing an answering smile. "But thanks for the invitation.... I think I must run back now." She glanced and turned toward the Sourdough's camp. The crippled terrier barked joyously at the move and hopped eagerly from behind her, where it had crouched unnoticed.

"Well I'm damned if there isn't my dog!" The Russian's mask of manners was dropped in his sheer amaze. "And I thought I'd killed the brute.... Here, stop him, you girl!"

"You? It was *you* did that? Oh, you utter beast!" The words came in a rush—impulsive, scornful, contemptuous.... "No, I certainly will not call him back.... Don't let him catch him, Larry!"

She turned again, gathering her short skirts about her, and ran after the limping dog. Count Ivan essayed to follow. Fitzmaurice interposed. He was his own man now. Fate had hastened opportunity. And She had called upon him, lifting that finger-tip embargo on the action his heart desired!

The Count sprang eagerly and the Englishman nimbly sidestepped. Each longed to be rid of his cumbersome trail-clothes. As de Maurin wheeled, a left swing and a right-hand uppercut came snappily to meet him. The first connected with his ear, a trifle high. The uppercut found his wind. Down he went, gasping, with a grunt of mingled surprise and rage.... He had taken the Englishman for no more than a joke!

A thorough swordsman, equally wily in tricks of the mat, although not of the ring, he covered instinctively, sprawling face down on the snow. He must cunningly play for wind! That poke was a stiff one! ... Give him just time to get his breath, and when this fool piled in, as of course he would, most any wrestler's trick would serve! Alert for opportunity, he forced a second counterfeit gasping groan, stealing through half-shut lids a peep at his adversary.

Fitzmaurice, monocle in eye, stood not ten feet away. The smile was gone, however. His was now the fighter's face—chin out-thrust, lips set, eyes narrowed to twin slits in a mask-like countenance.

Fine! Fine! But he'd break this cocksure fool—smash him, cripple him, out here in the wilderness. Kill him if it came to that—make him squeal like a frightened rat....

His wind was coming back! That was a nasty wallop! But why didn't the fellow sail in? Again he groaned piteously, watchful for the effect, through eyes seemingly closed in unconsciousness. The merest crafty peep.... What was this? The Englishman had not moved, but now his cap, his trail-coat, mittens and muffler were off! He had gained a point of worth in being thus cleared for action.... Now what was he waiting for? ...

The unspoken thought was answered.

"Get up, damn you, and put your fists up!" The voice held a freezing contempt. "D'you think I'd let into you when you're down, you boulder? ... Think you've stalled long enough? ... Get up—or d'you want me t' kick you back to your kennel?"

Couchant, alert, nerves and muscles taut, arms extended, the wrestler rose, panther-wise, raging eyes boring into those of his enemy. The fool—the stark, drivelling fool! For that he would kill him! ... Yes, yes! These English—all mad on their "sporting code"! Serpent-like, he began to close in, still crouching, arms and hands outstretched eagerly, weaving about the icy snow-surface on his noiseless, soft-soled moccasins. He was smiling evilly.... This would be sport—better even than the big matches with money in them, and rules, always rules! Just to kill this English game-cock out here alone in the snows—hammerlock him, or perhaps try the Cossack strangling trick for a bit of practice—smash

an arm or a leg at least....

"You poor dude!" he snarled. "For that I shall presently kill you!"

Leaping sidewise, cat-like, despite hampering garments, he found the Englishman had whirled as swiftly, still facing him, grim and ready.

"I'm giving you ev'ry chance," drawled the steely voice. "Peel off now, and be smart about it!"

In fantastic jerks, never taking his eyes from those menacing pinpoints flashing cold contempt, the monocle heightening his rage, the Count's coat and mittens were shed. The neckscarf he kept on. It might serve a turn. He stooped, ostensibly to tie a moccasin thong, then sprang with leopard's swiftness. A straight jolt to the chin stopped him. But the scarf had served as planned.... He gripped, hands seeking a favourite hold. The Englishman strained to break clear—slipped on the glistening crust. With thought's speed the Count's chance presented—a chance for that horribly brutal stranglehold!

Fitzmaurice's fist drove impotently into his ribs—bored feebly into his stomach. The Englishman's wind was shut off. His eyes bulged from their sockets. Lungs gurgled agonised protest.... But his long hands were not idle! ... Blood spurted from nose, ears, mouth. His neck was cracking! ... But still his hands groped, clawed, gripped at the Russian's throat, mechanically tearing now at that muffler—convulsively clutching it on either side of the leering face.... That old kimona-clutch? Could he manage it? The hands gripped that woollen thing, crossed and tugged—held desperately on, and strained. Tighter! Tighter! Tighter! ... In his ears was the clanging of brassy bells. The white hills spun about and swam blankly. Strength seeped from him... A last throw of the die! Subconsciously, quite hopelessly probably.... That cloth thing had escaped him! His fingers now locked on something else.... He must not—MUST NOT let go!

Primal instinct had taken hold, rather than half-forgotten skill in the Japanese art. The long fingers tightened, tightened—gripped, squeezed, held tenaciously. No longer was there any feeling in them, but oh, the agony of throat and neck! The torturing, crushing, snapping, shattering pain! ... The torment passed.... Was this, then, death? Or what was happening? His neck surely was free? ... Tighter! Tighter! ... The hands were still doing their grim work—determinedly, convulsively, though the conscious brain had ceased functioning.

The locked forms rolled over the crust, mad dogs in the last gasps of a battle that had splashed with crimson the northern snow. Once again he began to see, through a film of red flooding the staring eyes—see things in grotesque outline—fire-hued shadow-shapes glimpsed as through ruddy smoke. He threw all his weight into one last spasmodic effort and broke free—the body only, not yet the talon-like hands. Still they clutched that Something—squeezing, twisting, grinding it down and down! ... Where was he, anyway? What was he doing? ...

The dull, blood-veiled eyes, void of comprehension, roved wonderingly. What was that? ... Who was it? ... Why, it was Beatrice! ... Beatrice? Who was Beatrice? ... And why was she standing there—so very still, so ghastly pale? Corpse-like? Yes, that was it—and silent as Death itself! ... This thing he was gripping and mauling at? ... What was it? ... A man? ... Couldn't be! ... Why, it was this Thing's neck he'd been twisting, twisting! ... His own hands? They were red with blood! So was this Thing they held—It looked rather like beefsteak, what? ... Why, he'd been grinding the Thing into the snowcrust that cut like a razor-blade! ... Now wasn't that jolly queer——

He laughed in his tortured throat—a horrible half-mad laugh.

Along the trail two girls came running, gaspingly, M'lle Bernice in the lead.

"Looks like one hell uv a fight!" she excitedly shouted back. "C'mon, Gert! Run, why don't yeh? *Run!*"

Gertrude ran as exhorted, trailing the dog-whip behind her. She always carried it with her about the camp. Those dogs were "such vicious brutes."

"It's th' English John!" Trotters panted over her shoulder. She had a twenty yards' lead. "Why, it's him an' Ivan, Gert _____"

Fitzmaurice was beginning to find himself. His brain was slowly clearing. Somehow he had killed a man! Who was it? He couldn't remember just yet.... The Man had tried to kill him? ... His throat and neck? What was wrong with them? ... Had he really killed the chap?

Stupidly he stared at the pulpy mass at his feet—the head he'd been grinding, grinding into the snowcrust——

"He's *killed him*—He's killed Ivan!" he heard wildly shrilled—heard it as one hears things in hideous nightmares. He grinned painfully, half stupidly, half exultant.... Ivan? Who was this Ivan? And he'd killed him, had he? ... Well, he'd come looking for it——

Then all went blankly black again. He fell as if dead.

Thus it was he saw nothing and knew nothing of Gertie's rush, the girl striking futilely at his head with the loaded butt of the dog-whip. Nor did he see that petrified ghost he had called Beatrice come suddenly to life and close in a frenzy with the half-crazed showgirl, both tugging with tigerish fierceness for the whip. Nor yet did he see Trotters as she mauled them apart, hitting out at them as men hit.

"F'r gawd's sake, hev you two gone batty too?" M'lle Bernice commented scornfully as she sent home left and right. "Can't you two kill-joys let a couple a' he-men go to it 'thout your buttin' in?"

Getting groggily to his feet, Fitzmaurice saw only a tumbled pile on the discoloured snow. All at once it came to him that that huddled heap was Her! He stumbled haltingly to her, consciousness coming back. Was She dead too? What *did* all this mean? ... Trembling, gasping, uncertain with a great indefinite dread, he tried to lift her. His strength was gone out of him! She was dead? ... No, not dead, thank God! She breathed! Her eyes were opening, wide with unspeakable horror as his battered face was bent over her.... But *He* was not *dead*, then, after all! ... Smiling ever so faintly, she managed to sit up and draw the blood-drenched head to her breast——

"Oh, Larry, Larry, my *dear*!" she sobbed. "I thought you were dead! ... But you're awfully badly hurt? ... You're all over blood! Why, you——"

The little dog barked sharply, in fierce excitement.

Fitzmaurice lurched to his feet just in time to see the crippled terrier leap for the wrist of a ghastly, battered, red-drenched parody of humanity, the eyes of which burned like a beast's. The hand held a poniard-like knife.... The dog was hurled off, with a Cossack's curse and a thrust of the blade. It fell motionless on the snow. De Maurin's voice came mumblingly through the mask of raw flesh. He was creeping toward them, shakily but determinedly.

"Not—quite—yet!" he snarled wolfishly. "My—turn—now!"

The Englishman waited, clenching his fists with curious pain. He wasn't dead yet, then, this devil? It still was "kill or be killed"! The spirit of the bulldog breed leaped to the call. He braced himself for the onrush....

"DROP THAT KNIFE, YOU!"

Unthought-of intervention at the crux of conflict! The tone brooked neither argument nor delay. The bloodshot eyes of the Count turned to it. They met stern, deep-set black orbs, unwinking behind a levelled Winchester, scarce ten yards away.... The knife fell from stiffened fingers, slithering over the snow.

"Now GO—YOU! Go quickly!"

The Sourdough stood issuing his orders with patriarchal stern authority. His rifle held steady on its horribly grotesque mark, finger touching a coaxing trigger. Behind him the Swede came running, pumping up a cartridge as he ran.

Slowly the battered Count turned toward his camp, his girls supporting him.

"I'm not through with you yet, English swine!" he bellowed hoarsely, rage choking articulation. "You'll never go

Outside alive!"

A few yards along the trail he stopped and turned, shaking off the women.

"You, Girl!" he screamed: "Don't yeh try pulling any more a' that virtuous stuff after las' night, d'yeh get me! ... Police'll be lookin' fer yeh down there an' they'll have yer number! ... Dawson don't stand fer your kind——"

Beatrice heard uncomprehendingly. Fitzmaurice's face went grey through its stains. The blood-lust sang anew within him—to kill! To Kill! TO KILL! He charged with ominous quiet. The big Swede threw himself upon him as he did. Over and over they went on the slippery snow. De Maurin waited exultant as he had stood when he hurled that crowning insult, a knife now in either hand.... *That* surely would bring his man! Gloating, he watched the tumbling pair, hoping for the Englishman to break free—— He would be badly winded after a tussle with that fresh giant——

"STAND THERE!"

He had forgotten the old Jew! He looked for him on the instant.

"One little move and I shoot!" The warning voice rang like a trumpet. Old Joe, black eyes ablaze, strode forward and faced the Russian, his rifle steady.

"Dog that you are!" he said coldly—menacingly. No passion was in the level, vibrant tone. Instead, it struck the note of scorching scorn, inexorable fate and judgment beyond appeal. "For you it is fortunate I am an old man and have learned great patience.... To speak what is worse than murder, of a good woman! ... Years gone there would have been no passing of words between us. Like a skunk or a coyote you I then should have killed.... Now listen—*listen well*, for it is your life or death! ... We go on to Dawson. So much as a whisper of that black lie, then you die! ... I make it just the worth of your bad life to guard her good name hereafter. One little idle word, then you I shall find and *kill*—without word, without warning, without mercy. *I swear it by Great Jehovah!*"

Silence fell.

"Now hike—*Hike on, you—to-day!* Else I and the Englishman and Sorenson, together we shall hunt you down for the mad dog you are!"

Finality rang in the warning. It was as sentence passed in a court of inescapable justice. The three, menace lingering in their ears, sped toward their camp, breaking it for departure in feverish haste. By nightfall they again were part of the trail procession. Trotters was handling the team. De Maurin lay huddled up on the sleigh. Gertrude tramped silent behind it, too shaken by grisly fear to think of aught but the old man's warning.

Cariboo Joe had watched till they entered their tent. Pacing slowly homeward along the incardined path, his foot fell on something soft. It was the terrier, not yet frozen stiff. He picked it up and went on.

"She will grieve," he soliloquised.... "But for you it was the good end.... A brave, faithful little dog! ... Perhaps for this were you sent into this strange land—For this we pick you up! I wonder now—I wonder! ... And I called that *goillam* a dog! It shames me to remember it that I did."

Chapter IX "The Honour and Pride of the Force"

Bobbie Burns, whom any Scot under pressure will admit to have been the greatest of poet-philosophers, might have considerably amplified his

"Oh wad some power th' giftie gie us
Tae see oorsel's as ithers see us."

By the same token, or one very similar, if we could know of events transpiring elsewhere, we would not unconcernedly be doing many things that we do, not being ourselves clairvoyant. Fitzmaurice, with almost the facility of animals of the wild to dismiss life or death crises with their passing, gave little thought to de Maurin or what he might do or was doing, once that treacherous foeman passed from view. He himself was confused, rage-stricken, torture-racked as to neck and throat, exhausted by his tussle with the bear-like Swede, so closely following his fierce engagement with the Russian. And yet he was elate, buoyant of spirit, happy beyond words. Dazed and subconscious as he had been at the time, he had caught and tenaciously retained as a blissful memory that self-betraying cry of Beatrice as she had drawn his battered head close to her heart—"Oh, Larry, Larry, *my dear!*"

He leaned upon her, she insisting, as they returned to camp. He submitted himself to her tender ministrations, her doubly-gentle touch, her frank solicitude, himself divided between a poignant joy and curious awkward shame at her finding him thus.

"I'm really quite all right now," he told her repeatedly. "Not a bit damaged, you know, though I must look a disgraceful wreck. I really am quite all right—— Be off in an hour or so."

Be off, would he? She'd not hear of such a thing! He would stay now and be taken care of until he was fit for the trail! Did he want her to fret herself ill?

And so, as she bathed his face and neck, massaged with tender fingers his blackened throat, and brought out for the cure of his ills all the appropriate contents of the medicine chest, his spirits were dancing a gallop, while torn lips formed a cheery if crooked smile.

Morning found him stiff, sore and shaky, but he decided that exercise would "loosen up the rickety joints," and he therefore would take a stroll. Beatrice promptly protested that he should not fare forth alone. Nor was their walk purposeless. Somehow—somewhere in the course of the conflict, he had lost his extra eye. Without the monocle he felt strangely incomplete, indecently half naked to the gaze of a critical world. To be sure, the astigmatism that had called for the use of the glass had been slight and his good right eye was true, even better than normal, accepting its increased responsibilities *sans* complaint. But the glass had disappeared, doubtless under the snow. He could not but miss it. They returned to camp empty-handed, however, and through all the rest of the day Fitzmaurice at frequent intervals discovered how strong is habit, even in little things.

He did not dream, nor did any of the Sourdough's party, that while he was being cared for—"petted and pampered, by Jove!"—de Maurin's company had halted at his cache, the Count crawling painfully out of his robes, to drag himself step by step toward it and then, with a sudden reaction of physical strength born of black rage, to cut and smash and tear and utterly destroy that heaven-sent old toboggan and all with which it was laden. The fresh meat alone escaped the cyclonic obliteration.

"We'll take this on with us," he had gloated, ironical laughter breaking a storm of curses. "Some change from beans and bacon!"

Neither had the Englishman or his friends any premonition, which the North country knows as a hunch, that not more than a scant half-hour behind de Maurin and his shock-sobered companions Dennis and Patrick Dacey followed them at racing speed with a two-team outfit, for Denny had been one of the stakers on that derided "pup" Eldorado, and he knew his Klondike. As they halted to breathe their dogs after a stiff bit of going, Pat again rehearsed his obsessing grievance.

"He's jest nawthin' but a low-down, dirthy, murd'rin' cut-throat cannibal!" he declared with fiery conviction. "I'm a'goin' t' get him, Denny—see if I don't!"

Denny grinned as he lighted up.

"Hev it so, boy, hev it so," he agreed good-naturedly. "Yeh've tould me all that afore.... It strikes me as dom funny.... But thin I wasn't no partic'ler friend a' this Maude."

Two days' convalescence at the Sourdough's camp had restored Fitzmaurice to fighting trim, though no beauty-show judges would have classed him a possible prize-winner. He declined to further trespass on generous hospitality. For reasons that may be guessed, he longed to linger. Those self-same reasons inconsistently urged him forward. If he could but reach the creeks in time—be one of the lucky brigade—visions of what might follow shaped themselves in alluring tableaux, in each of which Beatrice held a place well up centre-stage. Those two unforgettable days had not been without a strengthening of the bond of sympathetic understanding forged that first wonderful evening they had spent in the camp together, watching the tranquil stars through fitful firelight. The sum of their talks thereafter had witnessed a constant slippage of much conservative misconception, on the part of Fitzmaurice, of American institutions—most of all the American girl. Closer relations established, he found her "a bit of all right." He even admitted grudgingly (though he would not for worlds have breathed it) that he almost wished English girls had their cross-ocean cousins' adaptability, their bright, piquant alertness, their fearless defiance of conventions without surrender of modesty, grace or charm. Their utter disregard of smug artificialities was refreshing as it was amazing.

The girl, for her part, was learning to weigh Englishman versus Brother American, with candid admission that after all there might be something in this birth-pride, and in sure, sober, solid John Bull, with his steadfast, compelling loyalty and his rigid adherence to the fetish of family honour—an inborn and inbred acceptance of the paramount obligation to pass on an unsullied shield. The British reticence, too—the so foreign absence of brag, the self-contained moral and physical strength, the diffidence that forbade congratulations on things well done, and, of all things, abjured heroics!

In short, comprehensive sum-up, she found the Englishman altogether delightfully different from what she had imagined all Englishmen to be.

He capitulated unreservedly. The American girl was "top-hole."

He had planned an early start, insisting (indeed commanding) that she should not get up to see him away. Reluctantly she had agreed. It is hard to deny urging impulse. But, with the dogs, the Sourdough's party was certain to overtake him somewhere along the trail. So they played cards until nine that last evening. Then she thought she would go to bed. Her eyes held the light of dreams—not unhappy ones. She had been uncommonly quiet ever since supper-time. Her lips bore a quaint twisted smile as she held out her hand:

"Good night and good luck, Larry... I'm not going to say good-bye. We'll meet soon again."

"Just *au revoir* then, Beatrice," he had answered, holding her hand in his.

Reaching the location of his cache early in the new day, the Englishman stopped dumbfounded. This surely was the place? Or was it? That big square rock—not another like it in the miles of dazzling whiteness! And those twin twisted firs? Yes, of course it was here! Where then were toboggan and load? The "hide" was well off the beaten trail, out of sight of those rushing Inside. Besides, who would think of burdening himself by theft with excess trouble? Did not every pound count in this race for the golden stakes? Where then had his outfit gone?

He cast about for a clue to the puzzle. Light snow had fallen. There was therefore no sign of footprints. But a rib of sharpened ash protruded like an index finger from one of the grave-like, white-sheeted mounds. He seized and pulled it, scuffling away the snow. It was part of old friend toboggan! This first discovery shortly led to others.

An hour's scratching about, poking and probing and prying, and he visualized the story! ... So this was the pitiful poverty of the Russian's idea of revenge!

Fitzmaurice sat down on a snow-capped stump and faced the forbidding future. Toboggan gone, outfit gone, eyeglass gone, but fifty odd dollars in his pocket—the price of a few meals—the creeks and their promise of fortune four hundred odd miles farther into the heart of this land of ice!

Out came Old Faithful. Tobacco was cut with difficulty, under the sheltering rock. It was quite too cold needlessly

to expose sore hands to the searching teeth of the frost. Anon the pipe burbled consolation.... Oh yes, old Joe had been right! The Englishman chuckled:

"Rather a cropper to come at the get-away," he thought. "But buck up! No earthly use snivelling.... I certainly shan't go back and sponge off the Sourdough. It's just what he'd want me to do.... Made rather a ghastly show of myself in that quarter already. I'll just toddle along and trust luck!"

He bent his head to the cutting air, his face wrapped mummy-fashion, and again bucked the trail. He might still overhaul that Russian, he grimly reflected. Five hours later found him at Lindeman. Two of his precious dollars were transmuted into bacon and beans, with a steaming something disguised as coffee included gratis. The big busy camp at Bennett he reached by late afternoon. His legs, his back, his every particular nerve and bone and muscle shrieked protest. Confidentially he assured himself he "could eat a bally ox." Remembrance of the depleted exchequer intruded.

"About chequed out," he reminded himself. "Must play 'em a bit close now."

Still, somewhere to sleep and a bite to eat were prime necessities. He proceeded, head up, to prospect the transient town. He had made two "blocks" (had such existed) when he came to a halt. A flaring poster, amateurishly hand-lettered, adorned a ragged tent and attracted his good right eye. The left he screwed up comically as he gave this new matter attention.... Wished he hadn't lost the bally thing.... "Deuced awkward" it would be. These letters were large, however. He could make it out plainly:

"RECRUITS WANTED
"For the Royal North-West Mounted Police of
Canada,"

he read—with supplementary details as to necessary qualifications: British subject, age limitations, height, weight, chest, "must be able to ride and shoot," etc., etc.

"Looks like a *Times* personal," he finally chuckled: "Someone is paging me!"

He noted the final direction:

"Application may be made to Inspector Scarth, Lake Bennett, or to officers in command at other River Posts."

Lake Bennett? Here it was—the lake and also the town! Here he was, and doubtless here too this Inspector Scarth! He gave himself pause to think. Everyone had been piling into the country to wrest from it fortunes by mining, or by annexing those virgin fortunes later in other and devious ways.... The old Forty-Mile Patrol that had been Inside with Considine "at the time of the Great Strike" were now time-expired men, civilians, and by all reports soon would be Klondike magnates.... The temptation of "one-fifty a day," with forage and outfit added, was not a strong urging factor with men counting prospective winnings in nothing less than millions. Recruits would be hard to find, if any were found. Necessity pressed for efficient control of these mixed, excited multitudes—control now. Before the commands could possibly be strengthened by details assigned from Outside, the mischief might be wrought—the situation get out of hand and the Canadian mining camp fall under gang-rule such as that of Soapy Smith and his cut-throat herd at Skagway! ... And this British soil!

His eyes hardened as they turned again to the poster. *She* was going down to Dawson—must be even now on the trail! ... Beatrice in a gang-ruled, isolate frontier town almost within the Circle, and he not there to stand by! For obviously he could not win through in his present plight without serious time loss! ... In this sprawling poster he read, too, the old historic call that's never been made in vain to men of his blood and breed:

"England expects every man to do his duty."

No question of personal interest about that! Or of pay or prospects or material advantage? Fitzmaurice hailed a hurrying pedestrian.

"I say, old chap," he called: "Where could one find this man Scarth?"

The question remained unanswered by the person addressed, for the tent-flap was flung aside. A clean-cut, deep-chested man bulked in the frontier doorway.

"I'm Scarth," he said. "Come in."

The flap dropped behind them. Each looked at the other, satisfied with results.

"Fitzmaurice," the new-comer introduced himself—"Lawrence Hammond Fitzmaurice, Portman Square, London. The 'Lawrence Hammond' I got by baptism; 'Jerry' or 'Ham-and' in the way of courtesy titles. (He said nothing of the 'Larry.') English-born, six feet one, forty-four chest—ride and shoot; it's about all I'm good at—sound as a nut an' fit as a fiddle an'——"

The demands of the staring poster had registered on his brain. The Inspector threw back his black-maned head and laughed uproariously. At the same time he was digging into a kit, from which presently he produced a man's-size flask and two glasses of generous length.

"Say when, English!" he remarked as he poured. "Water's in the coal-oil tin back of you."

The wanderer felt at home. Here was one of his kind. He dipped into the water, not threatening exhaustion of the supply.... Rather a rum go, this? But quite distinctly right. Almost it looked top-hole.

"Cheerio!" quoth Scarth, *a propos* nothing.

"Kiora!" his guest responded.

"Australian?" ventured the Inspector at the word.

"No—English," came explanation. "Over there for a bit though—two years—station riding—shearing (awful duffer at it).... Some sport—back blocks of course.... Afterwards South Africa, India, Rockies—usual thing y'know."

Scarth nodded comprehension.

"Whereabouts you bedding down here?" he asked.... Just looking about for lodgings when that poster caught his eye? Good! It was a tidy bit of work if he (its creator) did say it himself! ... "Where did you leave your outfit?"

Fitzmaurice confessed that it stood revealed, complete except for a few sovereigns, a favourite Smith & Wesson, a pipe and a plug of tobacco.

"Sit down on the bed," said Scarth. "You're in camp."

The visitor sketched his tale—all, to his mind, material facts—in considerably less than five minutes. He included no mention of *Her*. Scarth nodded understanding.

"You ought t' be great on reports," he observed approvingly. "Just th' guts of th' thing, and th' signature. What more do they want, confound 'em."

He looked up to see worry written on his visitor's countenance.

"Rotten hand at reports," the new-comer forthwith confessed. "Do th' thing. Why waste paper?"

"My *tum-tum* exactly," Scarth concurred. "Now tell me, coming down to cases, what d' you come on for, after th' mule'd stalled on you and they'd looted your cache?"

"I'd started for this Klondike thing, hadn't I, and that thief's ahead?"

"But your outfit's gone?"

"I haven't got there yet?"

Again the Inspector nodded. He turned to a battered bag and produced attestation forms, likewise a scratchy fountain-pen that would write when not on strike. Pulling a box to his feet he proceeded to work with the pen, at intervals glancing up at the unexpected recruit, as if to study a model.

"'Nationality'?—English," he mumbled, writing: "'Age'—m'mm. 'Height'—six-one. 'Chest'—forty-four. 'Expansion'—m'mm. 'Religion'—Anglican of course—m'mm, m'mm, m'mm——"

"Any previous service?" This time the writing stopped.

Fitzmaurice flushed. "Only a few bits of chivvying about in Afridi an' out in th' Burma hills," he confessed contritely. "Elder brother in th' Army—couldn't manage it for two——"

Again came the nod of understanding.

"Sign here," Scarth directed, extending the recalcitrant pen. "No, wait a bit. What's that red ring 'round your left eye? Nothing wrong with the sight?"

"Slight astigmatism—perfectly all right for distance. Couldn't read much without th' glass—lost th' bally thing now—might dig up another at Dawson——"

Scarth's smile was reassuring.

"Oh yes," said he. "There's sure t' be tons of those monocle things down there! Meanwhile you're not likely to strain yourself with a whole lot of reading an' writing—plenty else t' do."

"Now let's get things all set," he continued seriously. "Quite know what you're up against? This is a man-size job. Never hear of an eight-hour day—mighty little in board an' lodging—no riding here, in th' nature a' things—plenty of crooks an' booze runners t' put th' fear a' God into when you can. Damn fools goin' In every day t' get froze on th' trail. Think they know it all, of course. 'Trooper, find the gentleman and bring him in.' That comes later. No lawyers or courts to fuss things up. Carry all th' law an' its execution packed in your head an' your heart—square deal all round an' no frills. Can do?"

"Get th' man you go after—get him Sunday-school style if it's feasible—*but make damn sure you get 'im!* ... An' when you're all in an' frozen an' famished an' th' game's quite all up, why then sail in and finish th' job! ... Be wet nurse and guide and adviser to every lost soul comes along. Be patient and kind and polite—like enough they'll write letters about you—nice red-hot roasts in th' papers.... Keep your outfit spick an' your boots nice an' shiny when you're knee-deep in gumbo.... Never shoot unless forced to it, and shoot, when you have to, to kill! ... Go through hell an' back again, snowblind an' starvin' an' half mad, for a lousy one-and-four-bits a day—*but if there's a yellow streak in you anywhere don't you touch that wreck of a pen!*"

Fitzmaurice squatted before the box and achieved a laboured signature.

"You're it now," said his future superior, "soon as we get th' harness on.... An' may God have mercy upon you," he grinned in benediction.

"But before we go look for th' rig-out," he added, the tone changing, "What say you to just one more?"

Consent taken for granted, the glasses again were primed. The recruit's eyes were bright. He seemed to have accepted his new responsibilities *prima facie*.

"To the Pride of the Force and its Honour!" he said, raising his glass—head held high.

Scarth's heels snapped together as he sprang up, soldier and gentleman.

"You've said it," he commented quietly: "To 'The Force'!"

Two hours later Trooper Fitzmaurice emerged from the police tent, to fill a long overdue engagement at some eating-house—any would do. The scarlet tunic, fur greatcoat, heavy service cap—everything made for the game! How different and how vastly more comfortable! Besides, there was something about it.... These symbolised service—not the glittering armour of proud knights-errant, but—They stood for the thing he felt—"The Pride of the Force and its Honour!" He must hold them both safe, with his life! ... He swung down the miscalled street—

"Oh, Trooper! Just a minute!" A worried little man ran by his side, plucking at his sleeve. "My partner," he grunted, recovering needed breath—"My partner's on it again—in that Eden dance-hall.... Been in there a good two hours.... You know what like it is! He'd had a coupla drinks an' they'll roll 'im soon as they get 'im goin'.... He's got all my coin too! ... They tell me they'd dope a man in there quick as they'd—"

Fitzmaurice brushed off the detaining hand. "Come along," he said. "Where is this place?"

They found it a little later—the partner sprawled over a table. The noise within was deafening as they opened the door. At sight of the tall trooper, grave-yard silence fell. They shook the lax form—no results. Trooper Fitzmaurice picked up a glass and sniffed it. The barman forthwith left his post, extending a roll of bank-notes.

"I was takin' care a' his wad fer him," he proclaimed with virtuous zeal. "Thought I'd best let 'im sleep it off!"

The trooper, receiving the roll, passed it to his anxious guide.

"Take better care of it after this," he counselled concisely. Then he turned to the server of drinks.

"That sort of thing isn't done," he assured that worthy. "Next time—Outside you go!"

He helped the little man tow their inert companion back to their camp. Of course it had to be the last in a long, long line. In was then too late for supper and, according to orders, "Report at eight." So he forged straightway for the police tent and passed in, stiffly saluting.

"Fitzmaurice?" The Inspector glanced up from a paper-strewn box. "We're moving our man down from the Bound'ry to Whitehorse—some trouble or other there.... Barney White's got a team to run you back to the line.... Want t' get th' switch made quick as we can.... How soon can you start?"

So he was not to be sent on to Dawson after all! The other way! Farther away from Her! His heart slid down into his comfortable boots. On the instant he remembered: Duty now came before all. Stiffening to attention he again saluted:

"Ready, sir!" he replied.

Another hour and he was taking the back-trail, "a-travellin' first-class Pullman," as his driver assured him, wrapped in his rugs on the police sleigh. In the sharp cold of early morning they reached the Boundary post where the Union Jack and the Stars and Stripes marked international distinctions of possession and jurisdiction. By eight that morning he had taken over from a brother trooper, who had minutely rehearsed the demands of the local situation and was now speeding down-trail: To assist the Customs folk, especially in preventing illicit whisky running; check names and addresses of everyone going Inside; and hold up and relieve of lethal weapons any known toughs or questionable characters. These were the sum of orders. He took position with his associate of the Customs by a rough table at The Scales, and the mixed

multitude began to flow by them with but few delays.

It was nearing noon when a noisy party pressed forward, scorning red-tape formalities. That black-eyed chap in the mackinaw doing so much of the talking? Surely he remembered that man? Why, yes, the Montana Kid!

As the new-comers reached the table they received with stormy laughter the information that "guns" must be left behind on entering Canada.

"Like hell we'll leave 'em!" said the Kid, pushing to the front. "Show me th' guy that's goin' t' take my gats off a' me! I want t' see 'im!"

He stopped short as he glanced at the trooper.... Was that—? No, it couldn't be! But he *did* look like that English guy.... But no, "*he* had had one of them monocle things!"

"Kindly place your weapons here on the table and take your receipts for them now!"

It *was* that English guy! That was his voice! ... The Kid's hands dove under the mackinaw.

"Don't try it, Kid," a quiet voice cut in sharply. "My hand's on mine—in my pocket—an' I shoot rather well from the hip! ... Put 'em up now! You're on British soil."

The hands went slowly skyward. By request the Customs officer collected the revolvers, making out formal receipts. The Kid's scrap of paper he shoved in that gentleman's pocket.

"Now pass along lively, please!" came the trooper's crisp command. "Don't be blocking the bally gangway!"

Rage fought with amazement in the Montana Kid. This same damned Englishman! One of the "Red Bulls"! He halted and swung round.

"S'pose yeh think yer th' whole cheese now!" he bellowed. "Lissen here—I'm a-goin' t' get yeh nex' time! I'll be waitin' fer yeh—other side th' Divide!"

"Meanwhile," purred Trooper Fitzmaurice calmly, "be a good boy and run along."

Chapter X The Cabaret Comes to Dawson

"Environment is everything," declares some anonymous philosopher. Had he lived in Pendleburg, Oregon, in 1898, and in the Yukon toward the close of that eventful year, he might have called on Beatrice Brooks to prove his case completely. Miss Brooks claimed Pendleburg as her old home town. Subconsciously she loved the somnolent little place, without definite realisation of the fact. One usually does so accept people and places coming naturally into one's life.

Pendleburg itself differed merely in minor details from a hundred other western villages pluming themselves as towns—hamlets of boomtime births with big city ambitions dwarfed in infancy. It boasted a Town Hall, of course, the seat of self-conscious municipal government taking its small responsibilities more seriously than the Senate does world affairs. The Town Hall was also the scene of all extra-important community social functions—the annual ball of the Knights of Pythias, the yearly flower show, the Christmas amateur theatricals for local charities, which permitted potential Booths and Barretts, Anglins and Mme. Fiskes to spread their sprouting wings for brief flights of triumph. The epilogue of such events was told in the Pendleburg *Planet* by that paper's one and only reporter, especially instructed by the editor-owner to "lay on the sugar thick." The injunction especially applied where performers' indulgent parents were regular advertisers.

The town had also and inevitably its two competing hotels, its livery stable, its blacksmith shop, the Post Office-General Store, the flour mill, the implement agency and five or six struggling shops. There were three churches, too—Catholic, Methodist and Presbyterian, with stimulative rivalry between the two latter. They were none the less ever ready to combine forces against the third denominational guide to righteousness. The Presbyterians, straying afar from the hard, straight path of their austere Scots forbears in the faith, vaunted themselves on the superiority of their choir. Particularly sinful was their pride in their solo contralto, who (on the authority of the *Planet*) "received a veritable ovation" on her every concert appearance, and was journalistically assured that the world would be at her feet should she at any time elect to give wider flight-range to her precious art.

These good-natured small-town newspapers! How fantastically is the skein of Life's intent snarled and twisted—later to be woven into unconsidered patterns for good or ill, for tragedy or for laughter—through their extravagant flatteries!

Beatrice blushingly deprecated each eulogistic reference to herself as it appeared. After humankind's habit, she then proceeded to scrapbook the notice, writing in with scrupulous care the name and date of the paper, although an audit would have cruelly disclosed the Pendleburg *Planet* monopolistically alone in the treasured tome. An "entertainment" was defined by Pendleburg as an evening of songs, recitations and dialogues perhaps, with fill-ins of piano and violin solos. Almost invariably "refreshments were served by the ladies." An entertainer was either a singer or an elocutionist, sometimes the twain in one.

When the electrifying news of Carmack's Bonanza strike and the fabulous fortunes to be won from the frozen heart of the Northland reached peaceful Pendleburg, filtering in through the Seattle and Portland dailies, with increased strength by essential condensation to fit the *Planet's* columns, the town experienced a thrill of real excitement. The desolate Klondike, however, was very far away, and small-town life moves in restricted radii. It was not until Dave Wharton, Will Smith and Bob Cameron, with two or three other of the more reckless and daring spirits, suddenly discovered to be such, decided to head out for the distant goldfields, that the actuality of sensation was brought home. All Pendleburghers knew Dave, Will and Bob. They were of the town family.

When Beatrice Brooks declared her intention to go North too, it came as a super-climax so astounding, such an undreamed-of thing, that the gossips simply "collapsed." They were stunned, shock-paralysed, dumbfounded. Nor did they recover speech and rise to the occasion until the lady most concerned had "passed from their midst"—a phrase as a rule reserved by the *Planet* for its obituary column. True, there had been a farewell social "arranged almost at a minute's notice by the Ladies' Aid." The choir had made the presentation of a fitted travelling bag, assuming this to be an essentially suitable gift for one faring into the wilds. Rev. Mr. Benson had "expressed in fitting terms" the cordial good wishes of the congregation and its "sincere regret at losing Sister Brooks, whose place in the work of both the church and the choir will not easily be filled"—all of which are found duly recorded, with fair embellishment, in the trustworthy files of the *Planet*.

The general amaze was, nevertheless, so complete that it was not until the *Cleveland* had safely delivered Pendleburg's favourite contralto in muddy, reckless, gang-ruled Skagway that the little Oregon town came out of its stupor and tongues began to wag. Record attendances of the King's Daughters for months thereafter may be entered to the singer's credit in the final reckoning. Why she had done as she had, in direct antagonism to everything in her previously ordered and orthodox life, and inexplicable by either the teachings or the example of her dead father and mother—how she had dared so unheard-of a thing she herself failed to fathom. Small wonder, then, that the stay-at-home sisterhood, content in their cottage squirrel-cages, were utterly nonplussed. Her decision had been made under stress of unprecedented excitement. Some subtle impulse had urged persistently, and long growing, if undefined, distaste of the stagnation of small-town life supported the mystic call. Even when the irrevocable step had been taken and Pendleburg, with its kerchief-waving throng, had been lost to sight of passengers on the Pacific Limited, this modest heroine of the Great Adventure was still so keyed up that she had neither the time nor yet the opportunity to reflect.

Second thoughts came later, and on the good ship *Cleveland* she bitterly upbraided herself as "a silly little fool." It had all seemed so very alluring, her plan to win fame and fortune by singing to the miners of this mysterious new El Dorado, when she had thought it out in the safe harbour of home. The madcap scheme unfolded vastly differently when she began to revolve it in mind, huddled up in her thirty-inch upper berth in a four-passenger cabin on the crowded vessel, herself one of but seventeen women passengers (most of them not her kind), among a swaggering multitude of

rough, hard-drinking, excited, boisterous men. Then it was that tears of hot repentance flowed freely and she gladly would have turned back but for fear of the laughter and ridicule of the drowsy home town. There was, too, that further cogent argument—Klondike steamers were not turning back for a woman's whim.

No, she was in for it, she decided. She must "go through."

Her decision again faltered at Skagway. She had never imagined such a place could exist, with outlawry, continuous carousal, murder even, accepted conditions of normal existence ever hanging by a thread.

And then, by merest accident, she had fallen in with kindly old Joe, and, naturally, undemonstratively, quite as a matter of course, he had taken her under his wing. Her spirits soared anew with the shifting of much responsibility. Assurance of a paternal protection heartened her. Confidence in herself and her "inspiration," in part at least, returned. The meeting with the Englishman and the awakening of emotions but visioned before as the stuff of which dreams are woven, had given to life new interest—the more than delightful zest of romance and high adventure. During the long down-river journey she revelled in happiness and all the variant moods that are woman's privilege—one hour gaily bantering "Papa Joe" and the silent Ole or blithely singing for them, the Swede occasionally joining in, as acquaintance ripened; the next, pensive but smiling over shadowy happy thoughts.

The old man watched with shrewd affectionate eyes, as he puffed his favourite pipe by successive camp-fires. He still smoked and pondered, but with anxious eyes fixed on the blazing logs, long after good nights had been said and she had disappeared behind the flaps of her sleeping-tent. For Joe knew mining camps and their conceptions of "lady entertainers," so vastly different from the innocent standard of placid Pendleburg. The knowledge troubled him.

Fitzmaurice's advent he had welcomed as providential. A keen appraiser of humankind, he had felt that his responsibilities at least might be shared thenceforward with a man to be trusted. He wondered, as day succeeded day on the long drive Inside, that they did not overtake the handicapped Londoner. Beatrice wondered too, and, with demure and unconvincing assumption of but casual concern, sought frequent explanations. To her the veteran advanced many specious theories, not one self-satisfying. At Bennett he wasted the whole of a precious day on pretext of further resting the dogs, in order to make special inquiries, the sole result being a perplexing confusion of the trail. A score of witnesses had seen the Englishman arrive. Not one of them had seen him go on.

"It don't look good to me, Ole," Joe had confided to that sphinx-like retainer. "It don't look good to me at all. But what can we *do*?"

"We bane go on," the practical Swede had replied. "Ay tank maybe, Yoe, that young falla he tak care of himself yoost so goot as we can. He'll look *us* up in Dawson, you an' me."

The Sourdough's worried expression was lost in a smile, answering the twinkle in the Swede's blue eyes.

"Guess you're right, Ole," he agreed. "Most likely he will look *us* up."

They chuckled in mutual understanding.

"Seems like I'm getting fidgety as a mother hen," the old man conceded. "He's a husky chick though, that lad. I shouldn't wonder if he can take care of himself."

* * * * *

It was afternoon of the thirty-fourth day out from Lindeman when Ole, whooping crazily, cracked the long whip over his leader and shouted back:

"DAWSON!"

The teams, sensing the end of the trail, forgot sore feet and aching bones. Yelping an excited chorus they ran like wolves, from troubles past, putting their hearts into a whirlwind finish. Where is the honest driver that will not, if he can, bring up spectacularly at his journey's end. The Swede let slip the cloak of his taciturnity. Leaping on the sled-tail, cap

off and long hair streaming, he might have been one of his viking forbears as he balanced himself and yelled:

"*Hyack! Hyack!* Mus-s-sh yeh *malemutes* now! There she iss!"

With a bend of the river, the wonder city came into view and Beatrice, eyes dancing and lips half parted in the contagious excitement, knelt on the plunging sleigh, risking catastrophe, to seize the first impression. She saw the arrested rivers where they merged in a broader plain of silvery-white, lost again to sight as it took a westering turn—The new-born city of tents, log shacks, raw lumber huts, makeshift store buildings, huddled together as though for protection or companionship—Straight-mounting spirals of smoke, long warehouses, multiplied saloons, dog teams and men like aimlessly hurrying insects dotting the glittering field—All sprawled over the Flat, beneath the perpetual guardianship of The Dome.

So that was Dawson! At last!

She sank back on the sled and Fear returned to companion her. What was to happen now? Here was a raw, new world, almost as unfamiliar to her as it might be to any Martian wanderer? Would she ever get back to the dear familiar Earth, that old-fashioned Outside, already seemingly thousands of leagues and hundreds of years away?

Half an hour later she and the Sourdough were at the hotel, primitively crude perhaps but palatial and luxurious after the trail's discomforts. They sat on factory-made chairs at a real table, while caribou steak and vegetables (the latter "fresh from the can") were served, with tea and bread and butter! A monstrous tabby, secure in his pre-eminence as the only domestic cat within hundreds of miles, accomplished a dignified entrance, purring welcome and hospitality. The girl stooped to stroke him and the grey terror dissolved. That cat was just like the home cats! This was the same old world after all! Joe smiled back at her when at length she smiled. He comprehended the difficulties of readjustments.

"To-night you will sleep in a room and a real bed once more," said he, noting her weariness—"A real bed! Think of it! With sheets, and a pillow perhaps! Isn't it wonderful? ... If I were you I would go to that room right now, and sleep the clock round. It has been for you a hard trip, but an old-timer couldn't have grumbled less.... It may come out all right after all, this mad idea of yours. True women as well as men there must be, I suppose, to push back these last frontiers."

Afternoon had not yet worn into evening but, having reached at last the end of the over-long trail, Beatrice suddenly realised that she was utterly worn. The incessant strain once relaxed, Nature claimed her revenge. An exhaustion little less than collapse asserted itself. She felt much inclined to "rest for an æon or two." That promised real bed offered foretastes of paradise. She did not, in fact, leave it for several days.

"Better she rest goot now," the Swede commented. "If she get seek on us, what we do?"

"She's not going to get sick," the Sourdough confidently affirmed. "She's just 'all in'—and no wonder.... We'll make her stick to the bed as long as we can, Ole. I need the time to work things out."

Not his own affairs so much as the adopted complex problems of his protégée were giving anxiety. The more the old man considered these problems, the more complicated they became, and the more baffling. Dawson's definition of an "entertainer" he quickly found to be, as he had known it would, far different from that of Pendleburg: To do a song and dance, the more popular if suggestive; to laugh and jest and drink with all-comers in rough-and-ready comradeship; to accept rude familiarities as a matter of course—to be a "good scout" in short—summed up the camp's conception of a "lady entertainer."

Dance-hall girls are not constitutionally over particular, and the Klondike's theatrical "artistes" were of the same sisterhood. They sang or danced or did their particular "turns" as the bills demanded, but even while on stage their bright eyes were lifted to the curtained boxes from which they had rushed on call, with promise of swift return to wine-buying gentlemen friends. To pile up a big percentage on the drinks had even a stronger urge than chronic professional hunger for applause and perfervid admiration. None were ever too tired (or would admit it) to smile or chat or bully or beguile, as long as drinks might thereby be sold. Even dressing-room jealousies and deadly rivalries of the far-away Outside were here subordinate to the ruling passion to "cash in big" at the end of the long night's revels. A good "box-rustler"

stood infinitely higher in managerial favour than an ever-so-talented performer. She who kept waiters busy by her seductive salesmanship might order her private life as lightly as she pleased. Cavil or criticism simply did not exist. It was the free and easy way of a careless community that worked hard and played as strenuously. To hail a box waiter was open sesame for lonely males to the soft, alluring society of smiling sirens, wondrous wise in the ways to masculine hearts and pockets.

For the girls, the entertaining of patrons in the close-curtained, dimly lighted boxes, offered a master key to the promised land of fortune. Sometimes a husband came, thrown in with tribute of treasure. If not the golden dust, matrimonially unencumbered, as graciously was accepted and the donor ditched as soon as his poke was empty. "Get the money and get it quickly" was the watchword of hectic existence.

To old Joe it was all familiar. The box theatres of Dawson, with their vampire rustlers and dances after the show, when the "ladies of the caste" cheerfully condescended to mingle socially with all, and as cheerfully promote frequent pilgrimages to the bar, were merely the modernisation of Barkerville's hurdy-gurdies. It chilled him even to think of Beatrice in such careless conviviality losing the matchless charm of clean young womanhood and becoming like these others, artfully playing the parody of every real emotion—for a money price. Better than that, he thought, for her to have died on the trail. Yet what was she to do? Sing in a church choir? Here? Where was the church? Give music lessons, as she had talked of doing? But to whom? Appear in concerts? Concerts were things unheard of!

His own affairs were shaping to his wish. He had never had better luck, he gleefully conceded. The 'Frisco Café had an ideal location, in the very heart of the theatre and dance-hall district, and therefore of freest spending and largest profits. Left to the care of employees while Louis Giroux, its founder and proprietor, disbursed the receipts at cards or scattered them among coquettish charmers, the place had run down to the point where even seasoned sourdoughs were beginning to steer clear of its worse than indifferent cuisine, its slipshod service, its drear untidiness and its extortionate charges. Even the cups and plates usually could be identified by the finger-print system as having but lately left the greasy hands of a careless dish-washer. Yet the location was ideal! He would look up this Giroux and see what could be done.

The business instincts of his race counselled patient diplomacy. Cautiously but persistently he accumulated information, piecing the scraps together. Giroux had been losing heavily. What was more, he had fallen under the spell of Gussie La More, the most insatiate excitant of free spending of all the theatrical tribe. For the fair Gussie's smiles he had now a dangerous rival in one "Swiftwater Bill." This picturesque personage had been orthodoxly christened William Gates, but no one thought to recall the fact since his daring skill as a river pilot had won him his Klondike title. He was a miner, too, and a "fool for luck"—as witness that while too drunk to know aught about it, he had been unceremoniously dumped into a canoe as so much ballast, when his boon companions stampeded to Eldorado. They had staked for him, too, with good-hearted loyalty, before he'd come out of his trance. And thus he found himself sole owner of a claim of phenomenal richness. Of course he proceeded to scatter the golden harvest, in demonstration of his constitutional right to the pursuit of happiness. Giroux, invisible to the fickle Gussie since Bill had appeared on the scene, sought consolation in the usual way, with much strong drink. He was shakily convalescent when old Joe fell in with him. Also the blue devils had lain hands on him. It was The Outside for him by the very first boat—that was if he had the price.... Why had he ever come into this rotten country? he asked of the world at large.

A few days later the 'Frisco had changed hands. Giroux, with \$5,000 in Bank of Commerce fifties in his pocket, dropped in through force of habit at the Trilby, where Gussie was heading the cast and gave him a warming welcome proportionate to his replenished purse. Cariboo Joe, possessed of a clear bill-of-sale, in company with the Swede was taking stock of his investment and planning reconstruction. He would re-make the place, he decided, "right from the grass-roots up." As earnest of this intent he ripped off the sagging sign.

"This we shall have repainted," he confided to Sorenson. "'Cariboo Café' is much better, for this is Canadian land. We will fit up the place with tables and keep just enough of that long counter for the cigar-case and an office behind it, with shelves for the liquor stock. Then we pull out the back here and we build us a lean-to—one room for kitchen, with swing doors, eh? And another room for sleeping? There still will be room behind, and there we will build her a cabin."

The Swede nodded comprehension and approval. Old Joe was excitedly running about, gleefully elate, as he visualised his café-to-be. It would "make them all open their eyes," would his Cariboo Café! He would pay the men to

rush things, to be ready when the river went out. Perhaps it might even be done in thirty days? What robbers these workmen were! But money was lost in the waiting... And of course there must be a grand "opening"—so much depended on first impressions. He would send printed cards to all the big men of the camp. They would call it the "Menu" too, instead of the "Bill-of-Fare."

"Music we also should have," he informed the Swede. "I know two men in camp that can play."

"Ay bane got concertina," ventured Ole, catching the enthusiasm.

"Good! Good! We have then the two to make music and also your concertina. That will be fine!"

It was then the Great Idea came to Sorenson. It "struck him all of a heap," as he later explained.

"Ay got id, Yoe!" he declared exultantly. "By yimminy, yess! ... Ay taal you what we do: We bane have singing too! Get Beatrice to sing to them! Eh, what, Yoe?"

For a long minute Joe stared, as the suggestion sank in. The Swede misconstrued his silence.

"That bane all right, Yoe," he urged defensively. "In Berlin and in Brussels also Ay bane hear them in the cafés meinsel!"

"All right? It's more than all right!" boomed the old-timer. "Ole Sorenson, long have I believed it that King Solomon was the wisest man ever lived, for so it is written in the Book. But never till now did I guess it that he was a Swede!"

Chapter XI The Mirage Mines of Moosehide

Friday was always dance night at Dawson's Trilby Theatre, just as it is choir practice night in the regenerate Outside. On Fridays the show was admittedly rushed. Encores were strictly taboo. Numbers were ruthlessly cut. The crowd was always large, and impatiently awaited the stage finale and the subsequent hurried clearance of the auditorium benches and the placing in commission of the emergency bar. Neither the regular bar nor the score of curtained boxes could be expected to meet demands of the waiter-worrying throng attracted by the weekly terpsichorean revel—with accent on the revel. Of course the boxes, early in the game, were pre-empted as favourite sitting-out nooks. Their occupants for the show jealously guarded their priority stakings, keeping bar-bells ringing and white-jacketed waiters rushing, lest possibly freer spenders dispute their locations. Later on, dusky corners on the forsaken stage, screened in and solely chaperoned by bits of dingy scenery, held their respective twos and twos from the overflow of the boxes. The dressing-rooms also were coveted, if drear, reception parlours, reserved for recognised patrons and very particular friends of the girls of the company. When hasn't a dressing-room held a mysterious occult charm for the average man?

The management looked to it zealously that no possible place for a push-button was inadvertently overlooked.

On one of these Friday nights the curtain had just rung down, its final thump to the floor being lost in the instant beginning of the clearing of the house. Gertrude had waited no longer than the wrecking crew "out front." Her rush for her dressing-room was exactly timed with the break of the closing "grand tableau." She found Ivan moodily smoking, having cleared her trunk for a seat, when she whirled in breathlessly, a smile on the cherry lips but anxiety obvious.

"Waitin' long for me, dearie?" she questioned. "I came jest as soon as I dared.... Ain't yeh goin' t' kiss me?" she added hesitantly, no endearment being volunteered. Her arms clasped about the Count's neck as her lips sought his. De Maurin's strong hands impatiently broke the embrace. He sprang up, morose and irritated.

"You always want t' be mushing," he growled disgustedly, turning toward the door.

The girl caught her breath sharply.

"Please don't go, Ivan," she pleaded. "Wait jest a minute—do.... Something gone wrong t'day? ... Push th' button, dear, an' have a drink with me. It'll mebbe cheer yeh up.... An' I do want t' hev yeh a little while before I hev t' go out there an' dance.... Here, you pay fer it when he comes. It looks better than fer me t' be signin' a tab"—and she crushed a bill into his hand. The hand at once closed upon it and the Russian re-seated himself, selecting a fresh cigarette.

"Whisky," he said, still glooming, as a perspiring waiter appeared.

"Ginger ale fer mine," the girl supplemented. The white-jacketed cup-bearer vanished and she turned to her companion. He eyed her blackly.

"What's gone wrong, Ivan? Tell me," she urged anew. "What's botherin' yeh?"

"How much did yeh cash in last night?" the Count barked back—"A mis'erable eighteen dollars! An' La More pulled down a hundred an' sixty! Yes, an' Trotters 'most a hundred! What th' hell's wrong with yeh, anyway? ... Think we're up here fer our health?"

Tears threatened to streak the make-up. They were checked only just in time.

"I was outa luck las' night," she pleaded defensively. "Yeh know I was feelin' rotten. Too much whisky, I guess, night before.... An' I didn't seem t' be able t' land a live one."

"Didn't, eh?" he interrupted. "How 'bout Nigger Jim an' old Gus Morris? Had *them* in th' third box, didn't yeh? I saw 'em go in an' th' Spider called you. Why didn't yeh *hold* 'em when yeh had 'em? Yeh know how that team can spend. Why didn't yeh make 'em loosen up? ... Bought jest two rounds fer yeh, didn't they? Then Gussie cops 'em off yeh an' they keeps th' corks poppin' till mornin'. Call yerself a box-woman an' let 'em get away from yeh that way!"

The girl had risen and faced him with pleading eyes. Her hands nervously clasped and unclasped.

"I *did* try t' hold 'em, dear," she told him. "Indeed—indeed I tried. I laughed an' I jollied 'em an' listened t' their smutty old stories an' made out I thought they was screams. Then that Gus starts t' paw me—yeh know how he is? ... An' I jest had t' beat it.... I ain't strong enough t' handle men like him when they start t' get rough."

"Rough?" he sneered. "Started t' paw yeh, did he? He wasn't tryin' t' kill yeh, I s'pose? D'yeh think a dump like this 's run like a Sunday school? You make me tired, you do. Why, if Trotters 'd been in your shoes——"

The coming of the drinks forbade disclosure of just what, in the gay Count's opinion, Trotters might or might not have done. He gulped his whisky, disdaining the proffered chaser. The waiter waited patiently. De Maurin made no move.

"It's on me, Spider," said Gertrude hastily. "Gi' me a tab an' I'll sign fer it."

"I wasn't goin' t' tell yeh, dear," she said when they again were alone, "but that beast, Gus, started t' get awful fresh. He wanted t' wait fer me after we'd cashed in an'——"

De Maurin laughed loudly.

"An' so th' virtuous little lady had t' beat it?" he mocked. "Why didn't yeh keep connin' him along that yeh'd go as far as he liked? He'd a' bought th' house dry if yeh had. That's th' way t' handle 'em—keep stallin' 'em along.... He wouldn't a' hurt yeh anyway."

"Why Ivan? ... Yeh don't mean—yeh wouldn't want me t'—No, of course yer jest foolin'——"

A scamper of light feet in the corridor. The door opened and Trotters breezed in, did an impromptu *pas seul* and flopped down.

"Hello folks—*alias* soaks!" she laughed in greeting. "Why all th' tragedy stuff in th' air? Hasn't our handsome Count

had a chance t' buy me a drink t' night? ... Well, we'll fix that right away!" Experienced fingers found the button and pressed it.

"I'm tryin' t' lose that Dacey," she rattled on, explanatory of her call. "He's been hangin' round this half-hour an' bought me jest two short drinks—th' cheap skate! Said he 'didn't like t' be rushed' when I wanted t' call th' waiter.... If he thinks I'm charity company he's got another guess comin'."

"Pat thinks a lot a' you," Gertrude ventured. She sympathised with Trotters' red-headed admirer.

"*Yes, he does!*" laughed that care-free young lady. "He's got t' show me.... Lissen here, girlie, men are all alike when it comes t' us girls. They want us t' rustle fer 'em er else——"

The drinks appeared and disappeared. The Count this time promptly paid the score and followed the waiter out.

"Yeh don't want t' be late gettin' on th' floor," he cautioned Gertrude at leaving.

"I won't, dear," she promised, closing the door. Sighing, she dropped dejectedly on the seat he had vacated and stared dully into space. Trotters regarded her with languidly puzzled interest.

"What's th' matter, Gert?" she questioned. "Got th' pip t' night? Th' dear Ivan been pannin' yeh?"

Answer came in a flood of tears.

"Now what th' hell *is* th' matter?" demanded Trotters, amazed. "C'm on now, take a brace on yerself," she added consolingly. "Dam th' flood, can't yeh? Yeh'll look a sight—an' it dance night too! ... Say, I got t' be hikin'—what's th' idea anyway?" Rough-and-ready sympathy spoke in the tone.

"It's jest about—breakin'—my heart," sobbed the sister soubrette. "I wisht I was dead—I do so!"

"Dead nothin'," declared Trotters. "Yer jest a bit off colour t' night, that's all. Throw a coupla shots a' hootch into yeh an' things'll brighten up."

"I don't want a drink," the comedienne wailed disconsolately. "I hate it—I hate it all.... Oh Trotters, my heart's jest about broke——"

The dancer patted a bared shoulder comfortingly. When she spoke it was to crudely philosophise:

"Shouldn't hev a heart. It's always givin' some kind a trouble. What yeh want in this business is a cast-iron tummy.... Look at me, Gert—no heartache stuff in mine. Never let 'em get anythin' on yeh. I don't. That's why they stick around. Kid 'em along.... Oh my gawd, here's that pest again——"

Dacey had half opened the door, his relief apparent.

"Been lookin' all over th' shop fer yeh, Queenie," said he. "What's wrong with Gert?" as he noted the third party present.

"Oh, she'll be all right in a jiff," the dancer answered. "Poke th' button there an' get us a drink.... Nerves I guess—whatever they are. Lot's a' women gets 'em.... Seen Swiftwater t' night, Pat? Gussie's watchin' out fer him."

No, he had not seen Bill. He'd been looking only for her.... There didn't seem such a crowd as usual, did there? He wondered why not? The door opened to admit the bearer of drinks.

"Here's th' handsome waiter with yeh once more!" announced that jaunty functionary.... "Party askin' fer yeh in th' top box," he added in an aside to Trotters. "Who gets th' check on that last round?"

"Give 'em all t' her," the dancer called back, making a hurried exit. "It was friends a' hers buyin' both times."

Whereat a scowl robbed Dacey's phiz of its customary good-natured placidity.

Trotters meanwhile had flitted into the top box, with a ready-made smile of gladsome surprise—to find the inquiring party no other than the Count.

"Oh, hello!" she said lamely. "What yeh doin' here? I thought somebody was lookin' fer me!"

"Can't I ask for th' prettiest girl in th' house occasionally?" murmured de Maurin, the famous smile in evidence as he drew up a chair for her. His free hand reached for the push-button. "You can spare a minute, can't you? Or have I offended you, Sweetness?"

She sank into the chair, smiling enigmatically as she leaned toward him.

"Offended me, Ivan?" she whispered. "You couldn't do that.... But yeh know how it is here—Gertie—thinkin' such a lot a' yeh? ... I got t' be careful an' not hurt her feelin's——"

"Oh, damn Gert!" the gallant Count exploded. "See here, Sweetness——"

"Anybody ringin' here?" demanded the alert waiter from the threshold.

"This is the right house," agreed de Maurin. "Make it a cold bottle this time!"

"On th' fire!" quoth the servitor, speeding barward and swiftly returning.

"To th' neatest and sweetest one!" toasted the cavalier, as he raised his foaming glass.

"To th' King of th' Jolliers!" she laughingly countered. As she put down her half-emptied glass her hand brushed the bell button. Once again the waiter materialised.

"Why, I guess I must a' touched it accidental!" she confessed with mock penitence.

"A fortunate mishap," the Count declared it. "Of course" (to the waiting waiter)—"Another small bottle!"

Dacey's red head showed at the door as that bottle came.

"Yeh promised me th' first dance?" he got in over the waiter's head.

"All right; all right," she snapped impatiently. "Wait downstairs."

A fourth bottle had gone the way of its predecessors and half an hour had flown before Trotters made her graceful, if devious, way to the floor, by the backstairs route. She was floating by in a waltz, grasped clumsily by the huge hands of an Eldorado prince, when Dacey caught his next glimpse of her. Another hour passed before he could gain her ear.

"Yeh told me t' wait fer yeh?" he reproached her.

"Why were *you* waitin' fer me?" she teased with assumed amazement. "I didn't see yeh when I came down."

And Pat stalked away angrily—to return a few minutes later and coax for a dance as a favour. Afterward, as they promenaded to the bar, a dark and dapper personage entered from the street, to be greeted with a welcoming chorus: "Late t' night, Kid! Been sleepin' in?"

The Montana Kid edged in to the hospitable board—whipsawn plank, to be literal.

"Hello, everybody!" said he. "'Lo, Trotters! How they comin'?"

"Fine an' dandy, Kid," she smilingly assured him. "We was all wonderin' where you'd got to.... Excuse me, boys—back in a coupla minutes——"

Left to their own devices, the Montana Kid and Dacey could think of no better weapon for the slaughter of time than another drink. They had it, while the Kid explained:

"Dropped in t' old Joe's place fer a feed," said he. "Good chow that ancient puts up! An', say, th' skirt he's got singin' there sure is some swell dame! ... Tried t' get her t' string along with me. Nothin' doin', she said. Hadn't th' time t' argue it out, but she'll be here with me next dance night, I bet.... Say, Pat, in less 'n a week I'll have that fluff follerin' me like a dog!"

The Count put down his glass, moving quietly nearer to face the confident prophet.

"You'll let that young lady alone," he said threateningly. "I'd advise you not to be talking about her in bars either. It's not healthy."

The Kid looked stark astonishment—then red rage.

"What licence you got t' butt in?" he demanded aggressively. "No one's askin' your advice."

"Just th' same, you take it!" de Maurin pursued. "Or you'll be damn sorry you didn't."

A hush fell about the bars. The manager pushed forward anxiously.

"Why, hello, Kid!" he sang out cordially, stepping between the two. "Good evening, Count! We're all set for a little drink, so what's it goin' t' be? ... It's on th' house this time, like a shingle."

"Now—what—d' you—know about that?" murmured the mystified Trotters as she reached for her glass. Gertrude was staring bewilderedly at de Maurin. Her look held a hint of jealousy—anxiety also.... Surely Ivan had forgotten that old Jew's threat? He couldn't be afraid of him? Yet— Whatever did it mean?

An hour or so later she peeped into one of the silent boxes, to find Ivan glooming alone in the semi-darkness. She stepped in soundlessly and sat down beside him. Ignoring her, he smoked in moody silence.

"What is it, Ivan?" at length she ventured.

The question went unanswered. She timidly tried again:

"What was th' matter with you an' th' Kid, dear? Out at th' bar a while ago? ... What made yeh jump him?"

He turned and stared blankly at her. The fire of his cigarette ate upward till it burned his fingers. Angrily he threw it away.

"Damned if I know what got into me," he at last confessed.

Out in the dance-hall the music abruptly stopped. Men rushed excitedly for their coats and the doors. An electrifying whisper passed from group to group—and the groups dissolved.

"What's on down there?" questioned the Count, darting toward the stairs. Gertrude, following him, all but collided with Trotters and Dacey in the dim corridor. The Irishman's arm encircled the girl's trim waist. His voice trembled with excitement.

"Big strike at Moosehide!" he was telling her jerkily. "Somebody tipped it off t' Nigger Jim.... He pulled out an hour ago. We'll be steppin' on his tail soon as Denny brings round th' dogs.... I'll stake fer you an' me—I sure will, Queenie girl! ... Goin' t' kiss me fer luck?"

Smiling, she pushed him toward the stairs.

"Get busy an' stake them pay-claims an' I'm with yeh like a hawk on a June bug," was her laughing benediction.

* * * * *

It was a rare week indeed that memorable spring in which Dawson did not thrill over at least one stampede. A miner would drift into town from the north, east or west, call on a friend or two—visit the post office to argue volubly and exit breathing irate conviction that that institution was maliciously holding out letters on him—perhaps drop in at the bank! That was enough! Unless he and all his movements were matter of general knowledge a "rush" in his wake would be on when he blew out of town again. Did he but buy some bacon, replenish his store of beans or flour or tobacco, and pay for the same in dust—the camp's standard currency: It crystallised conjecture and confirmed conclusions. It mattered little or nothing to the over-eager rushers that definite information was lacking of any sort of strike, authentication of the finding of so much as colours in new localities. They set it down to sage secretiveness on the discoverer's part. Hope bred blind confidence. Remotest possibility justified action. The stampede to Moosehide was but one of scores of such fantastic pilgrimages of excited, exultant men plunging madly into the shrouded stillnesses of the ages, the will-o'-the-wisp of real or imagined finds leading them on and on.

Only that rush to Moosehide was destined to live in Klondike history as supremely farcical—a practical joke of proportions not realised for weeks. For the creek proved a total blank from head to outlet, and no one ever knew who started the midnight migration thither in quest of virgin treasure. Nigger Jim, they said, had led the exodus. But Nigger Jim laughed loudly when so accused. He had been sitting in at a private poker session that particular night and knew nothing about the dash until first returning sourdoughs slunk shamefacedly back into town. Claims were staked, of course, by eager *cheechakos*, or on the optimistic chance that they *might* hold values. The old-timers grinned eloquent unbelief.

It was the second night after the Moosehide party when big Sorenson threw open the door of the Cariboo Café, closed it quickly behind him, and sheepishly shook his head to the unvoiced question he read in his friend Joe's face.

"Surely you not got all that dust so soon?" mocked that grizzled worthy in affected astonishment, as the Swede slipped out of his pack-straps and heaved his turkey into a corner.

"Go on, Yoe—yosh me!" he retorted. "Ay bane have a walk anyhow—plenty other fallas too."

"Stake anything?" Joe inquired.

The Swede nodded negatively.

"No use for to stake," he declared conclusively. "Enough *cheechakos* stake there for to waste all the wood in the country."

He slumped wearily down at a table. Joe laid aside his pipe and turned toward the kitchen.

"Something good and hot inside, eh, Ole?" he prescribed. "We forget about Moosehide."

To forget about Moosehide that night was, however, impossible. Scarcely had the Swede settled himself manfully to the extinction of an enormous mulligan, flanked by the inevitable beans, than others of the disgruntled rushers began to arrive, in twos and threes or singly—some merry, some morose.

"Another of their wild-goose chases!" growled one old stager savagely. "I'd like t' know who started *this* one."

"Who starts any a' them?" laughed back Beartrap Smith, his partner. "Look at th' fun we had! I could eat a horse!"

Business grew over-brisk and old Joe beamed as he rushed from tables to kitchen and reverse, dabbing his steaming forehead with a wilted service towel. Again the door opened, this time to admit Dacey and his favourite of the footlights.

Pat appeared exultant.

"Got 'em, Queenie girl!" he declared triumphantly—"Nine an' ten Above—yours an' mine! Goin' t' record first thing in th' morning. Left Denny standin' by while I run into camp.... No, he didn't stake nawthin' yet—Thought he'd *nannitch* 'round a bit first.... Looks like she's another Bonanza!"

The old-timers could not but hear. They grinned as they exchanged elaborate winks. Beartrap Smith nudged his glowering partner and turned to Sorenson: "Seems like she's a winner, that Moosehide?" he called across. "Us sourdoughs sure has th' *cultus* luck a' pickin' 'em these days!"

The Swede chuckled into his coffee-cup. Dacey's back was toward him.

"I'll work 'em myself this season," the Irishman, deaf to the general laughter, was elatedly confiding to his adored companion. "Then we'll sell—er else farm 'em out on a lay while we hit Outside fer a spell.... How much notice d' yeh hev t' give 'em t' quit that old show-shop, girlie? ... Here, Joe! Fetch us a bottle a' wine while our feed's a'comin' up. Guess we got a little celebration due t'night!"

"You strike it good somewheres, Pat?" asked Joe with cordial interest. "That's fine; that's fine! Out French Gulch way may be?"

"No—Moosehide! Best claims on th' creek. Good fer a coupla hundred thousand right now!"

"And Denny? Is Denny in on that Moosehide too?" The Sourdough knew Denny Dacey for a prospector not easily fooled.

"Oh, old Denny's gettin' too slow," laughed the younger brother. "He's dubbin' 'round there yet. Guess mebbe he's sore at me beatin' him to it, if it comes t' a showdown."

Hibernian enthusiasm is ever ready with explanations.

"Well, I'm glad for you, Pat, if she turns out rich," and the old man sped in response to other calls. The Irishman sought to capture the girl's be-ringed hands. She buried them in her lap.

"Behave, Pat!" she commanded. "An' shut up! I want t' hear what they're sayin'!"

Table-talk naturally focused on Moosehide, and listening soon convinced her that a Moosehide claim held in it no promise of glittering fortune. Pat noted uneasily the falling temperature.

"What's wrong, girlie?" he questioned anxiously. "Ain't yeh goin' t' drink t' our luck?"

"Luck? That's what yeh call it, is it?" she snapped back. "Guess they ain't worth recordin'—them claims yeh been ravin' about!"

Dacey's daydreams began to fade. His optimism evaporated. He felt flat as the neglected wine.

"Now don't yeh go an' fall fer them knockers," he ventured at length in rebuttal. "Like enough they're grouchy because they ain't in on the ground."

She shot him a glance of contempt.

"Yeh poor prune," said she. "It sure must be a' plenty dead one th' way them old sourdoughs pans it.... No, I don't want no wine.... I see m'self swillin' hootch when there ain't no percentage comin'."

The supper was eaten in silence, on the lady's part at least. Dacey's heart sank as each conversational venture provoked frigidly terse response. Merely a withering look answered his last bid for cordial relations:

"What d'they know about it anyway? 'Gold's where yeh find it,' ain't it? So mebbe it's there in Moosehide an' we'll

have th' laugh on *them*."

Ominous silence ensued. Pat sensed he was in wrong again and could think of no further appeal ground. The girl was already surveying the room for excuse to escape.

"Why there's Montana!" she exclaimed. "I was wantin' t' run across him."

And Dacey was left to his own poor company. He hoped she'd return to their table, perhaps in better humour. Apparently, however, she had forgotten his existence. Still he patiently waited. She *might* change her mind and come back.... It sure was a tough old world!

Deafening hand-clapping broke the black spell. Curiosity wakened. A young lady had entered, apparently from the kitchen, with an instrument in her hand that "looked like a big banjo" to Pat. She stood blushing and bowing acknowledgment of the noisily good-natured greeting. Then her fingers swept the guitar strings in a simple prelude. The room hushed and she sang, in a creamy contralto.

"She ain't got no show-off voice, just sweet an' easy—like a bird singin'," Dacey told himself. "An' none a' that op'ra stuff." He had heard of this singer at Joe's, but never had heard her before.... She sure could sing! ... He wondered casually whom she was and where the old man had picked her up? ... And, listening to half-forgotten but now well remembered melodies of Home and the far Outside, he forgot for the moment his troubles—even Trotters' desertion. He turned to face the singer, though his "Queenie" had seated herself companionably beside Montana.

Grieg's "Seagull" (for Ole's special benefit) failed to arouse Pat's interest. It "listened fine," he conceded, "but that classical stuff got by him." "Killarney?"—Now *there* was a *real* song! He clapped and pounded the table till all eyes turned toward him. Trotters marked his displayed enthusiasm with resentful surprise.... He was nothing to her, of course. But she'd teach him, she promised herself, to go crazy over this café singer! ... Perhaps he was trying to put up a jealous play?

Chadwick's sonorous "Allah," the "Three Fishers" of Hullah, Stephen Adams' "Island of Dreams": Pat voted them all alike "fine." But they "didn't come up t' th' Irish." "Caller Herrin'," too—a good enough song in its way, no doubt, but infernally Scotch. He clapped perfunctorily for it till elephantine Alec Munro gripped his shoulder:

"Noo then—Keep her oop, mon!" the Scot excitedly counselled. "Mak mair noise er I'll lam yeh one i' th' lug!"

A maverick Japanese, stolidly munching his beans, unluckily dropped his knife. He bent to recover it. Beartrap Smith leaned across his table:

"Jest do that again, yeh heathen," he promised savagely—"an' I'll fair rip yeh apart!"

"Them songs without no dancin', they don't make no hit with me," the diplomatic Montana whispered confidentially. To himself he approved his own earlier judgment: The singer "sure was there with the looks." He followed Trotters' lead in applauding.

"They oughta book her up at one a' th' show-shops," she decided judicially. "A' course th' woods 's full a' them balladists, but she gets it over good, an' plenty a' men's ready t' fall fer that home-sweet-home stuff.... Guess she'd be too up-stagey t' rustle though."

"What blew up between you an' Pat?" the Kid inquired. "You two looked inseparable, like them Siamese twins, when you come in!"

"Th' idea!" she sniffed, nose in air. "That four-flusher ain't nothin' t' me."

"Thought mebbe you'd hooked some capitalist when I sees him openin' th' bubbly-water," the Kid followed up. He was fond of a joke.

"A capitalist's jest anybody suspected a' havin' as much mebbe as fifty bones," retorted the fickle fair one. "Pat's

staked on that Moosehide thing somewheres—That's how much a capitalist he is."

They went out together laughing. It even escaped Dacey's attention, for brother Denny had just joined him. They were deep in serious talk.

"Sure there ain't nothin' doin' there?" Pat questioned anxiously.

In Denny's expressed opinion Moosehide "wasn't even Chinaman's diggin's."

"Course I'm sure," he replied. "Think I been knockin' round fer years an' not know th' makin's of a mine? ... Nev' mind about Moosehide, lad," he added, for Pat's face was a picture of woe. "Anyone that c'd sell one old mule, an' her baulky at that, often as you done, he ain't due t' git stuck nohow."

"Poor old Maude," sighed Pat. "Wonder now what did happen t' that English guy. Ever hear anything?"

No, Denny had not. He must go now, he said. "Time he was hittin' th' hay." Pat lingered. He wanted to turn things over.... Too bad about Trotters, he thought, "but she don't mean more'n half she says." ... Yes, he would record those claims in the morning. Chances were he could unload them on some of these new arrivals. They were always wanting to "buy in" somewhere as soon as they struck the camp. A perfectly legitimate and feasible easy-money proposition it seemed to him.... He got up and pushed back his chair. Might as well turn in too, he concluded.

Half-way to the counter he halted. Beartrap Smith was talking to that girl who'd been doing the singing. "Miss Brooks" was what he had called her. Now, where had he heard that name? ... Why, of course—back there in Skagway. "Ham-and" had been raving about her!

"Well, what do you know about that?" he asked himself, venting his surprise. "Like as not she'd know what become a' th' English guy!"

That he spoke aloud never struck him. Nor did he notice how old Joe stared as he paid his check. His attention just then was focused on the pair at the back of the room.

"I've et four times t'night, Miss Brooks," he heard Beartrap say. "If I eat any more I'll bust... Yeh see, I ain't got no place partic'lar t' go, an' I sure do like t' hear yeh sing.... Say, if it ain't askin' too much, it'd tickle me most t' death if yeh'd split a small bottle with me—jest for sociability?"

The girl felt embarrassed. But she had heard of Beartrap, and nothing to his discredit. She could see his attentions meant no more than good-natured friendliness.

"Let's have some coffee together," she smiled up at him. "I really don't care for wine. Once I tried to drink some. It got up my nose!"

"Whatever you say goes," agreed Beartrap enthusiastically, signalling for service. "I ain't stuck on no kind a' hootch myself. Coffee's more in my line."

Which—had they overheard—would have greatly surprised his many Klondike acquaintances.

Chapter XII Waters of Love and Hate

Sergeant Fitzmaurice, the sceptre of Scarth given temporarily into his hand, sat (figuratively) on the throne at Bennett and dispensed the high, the middle and the lower justice. As senior N.C.O., he, for the time, commanded the post, the Inspector being down river. His seat of administration was the brush bed in the weather-worn police tent, and he was at the moment vainly striving to fold his long legs under him (camel or Buddha-wise), having proven it

impossible to stretch them out under his official desk, the same being a battered box. Instead of "Sapientia—Justitia—dementia," this item of the wayside tribunal's furnishing displayed the English legend: "White Swan Soap." Exit bar of soap! Behold: the Bar of Justice!

State cares weighed heavily. Letters there were to write and documents to prepare—acknowledgments, vouchers, requisitions, indents, reports. And office routine he loathed as he loathed a quitter. Disgustedly he scowled at a neatly-typed headquarters communication and proceeded to satisfy its unwelcome demand for a detailed report on a recent duty order. A toilsome driving of the reluctant pen, and he complacently regarded the finished product:

R.N.W.M.P. Post, Bennett, 6/5/98.

File G18349.

To O.C., Regina.

Fm. L. H. Fitzmaurice, Sgt.

Sir,

Ack'g yrs. of 19/4/98. Obed't to orders & on inform'n rec'd, proceeded 28/3/98 to Caribou Crsg. & arrested Broken-nose Charlie & Tommy Church, bo. chgd. with liq. in possession, externally & internally. Arvd. here 27/4/98 and del'vd prisoners to Inspr. as per rec't attached.

Obed'tly yrs,

L. H. Fitzmaurice, Sgt.

"That ought to jolly well satisfy 'em," he assured himself, screwing up his refractory left eye, the better to admire with his right the accomplished task. "But why not fill up their bally pigeon-holes with nice clean cotton rags?"

He yearned to call it a day. Inclination nevertheless was vanquished on duty's command, and by early nightfall the file had been cleared and a dozen other as verbose reports awaited the up-bound courier. Supper prepared and dispatched, dishes washed and re-stowed, robes spread for the night, the sergeant stood at the tent door, meditatively smoking, with eyes fixed upon, but taking no heed of, the fitful lights of the straggling town, the lake beyond (a sheet of shimmering silver mirroring the round, full moon), or even the ominous mountains framing in ebony a now familiar scene.

"It was just such a night!" he mused. "I wonder where She is now!"

For long minutes he stood, statue-like, and as silent. Then he knocked the ashes from his neglected pipe, mechanically ground them under heel, and sought his backwoods bed.

At approximately the same hour Inspector Scarth, dinner over at the Dawson mess, relaxed in a supremely comfortable arm-chair and contentedly puffed an unaccustomed cigar. A sextette of brother officers were similarly employed or unemployed. At intervals someone spoke, but infrequently—a question in few words, an answer as concise.

"What sort—this chap Fitzmaurice?" lazily inquired one Spencer of the newly arrived up-river man.

"Ace-high," he was assured.

"Got Broken-nose Charlie an' his partner, didn't he? *Cultus* pair that! Any argument?"

Scarth's eyes twinkled. His cigar performed acrobatics as he manoeuvred it into a corner of his mouth.

"Some discord, I b'lieve," he answered. "Not them though—Behaved like little lambs, he tells me.... 'Twas when he was bringin' 'em in. Fitz didn't mention it.... They'd made th' cut-off when old Chief Joshua's outfit, sixty or so of 'em, tries a rush-an'-rescue act——"

The cigar was subjected to further lip-mauling and puffed back to animation.

"Well, what came off?" Spencer voiced the question, but five other pairs of eyes focused on Scarth, even Ballantyre looking up from his ever-lasting solitaire and neglecting to move a black ten pile to reinforce a red knave.

"Not a thing, as far as his report shows," Scarth resumed. "I got th' tale from Tommy Church. We chinned a bit at the Post.... Tommy says our lad jumped t' meet 'em—watch in one hand—gun in t' other. 'I'm giving you just one minute t' get out a' range,' he sings out t' Joshua.... That old chief thinks more of his mangy hide than it ever was worth.... He didn't use up the minute."

Again the cigar performed its contortion act and the end glowed redly. Scarth stretched out in his chair. He had made a long speech for him.

"Nice boy!" presently commented Spencer.

"Can do," agreed Ballantyre, again busy with his cards. "Wish we had him."

Scarth puffed reflectively.

"I'd hate t' lose him," said he at length. "But he's mighty keen for a Dawson shift... Keeps his teeth shut on *why*. Bit of a clam he is.... Jolly fine sort though——"

The O.C. nodded comprehension. "Have t' see about it," he observed, turning to Scarth. "Tell him to 'stand by' when you go Out!"

Eleven struck. Ballantyre threw down his deck after a twenty-fifth ill-starred attempt to "beat the Chinaman." The O.C. and two others went out, with kindred references to snatching a bite of sleep. Spencer upheaved from his chair, stretching mightily.

"Might as well take a *nannitch* 'round town," he announced to the emptying room. "Like t' give it a look-over, Scarth—or some other night?"

"Take care of me?" questioned Scarth facetiously, getting to his feet. "It's a long time since I been let loose among th' lights."

It was past midnight when the two sauntered into the Trilby, crowded with what might have been a congress of nations. Americans, Canadians, Britishers predominated, but a minor fraction was distinctly cosmopolitan. The tall pair shouldered in at the bar beside a red-headed Irishman who was devoting confidentially-pitched conversation to a newly arrived Chinese. The latter of course was talking gardening. Give a Chinaman a three-by-four rock in mid-ocean, a cupful of fresh water, a bushel of mother earth and a handful of seeds, and forthwith he starts a garden. He can't help it. It's his nature.

"Too muchee cold," the Cantonese was lamenting. "Callottee—onionee—ladishee, no can glow. Flaps mebbe-so potato? Him glow this top-side?"

"Potatoes? Sure they'll grow," Dacey assured him enthusiastically. "Jest yeh wait till summer comes—All time sun!—Flowers all over th' shop! Sabee?"

Ah Sing sighed incredulously.

"China lily, him velly plitty," he conceded diplomatically—"But no can eat um.... Potato—onionee—callottee—cabbagee—all velly good. They glow this top-side?"

"Grow? 'Course they'll grow," Dacey heartily declared. "An' th' spitunias, boy! They'll work in fine here along with th' salivas, yeh betcha.... All yeh want's t' get th' right soil. I know jest th' place fer yeh—out here ten miles er so—Moosehide way. Lots a' water fer irrigatin', an' th' gold growin' right there too! Yeh work th' mine winter times, sabee? Come summer, clean up th' gold—Then ketchum velly good garden! Get 'em comin' an' goin', see? ... Say, looka here, John, I'm goin' Outside myself—Sell yeh a nice mine that's never been worked a' tall. Not an ounce taken outa it yet—Give yeh my word! An' yeh can easy make a garden atop a' th' mine! ... Only a thousand t' you? I've kinda taken a fancy t' yeh.... Yeh can't pass up no chance like that?"

Almond eyes calmly searched the face of this benevolent one. But Orient eyes tell nothing.

"Me look-see bimeby, p'laps," said the yellow man. "Mebbe laundly—him velly good, too."

"Laundry?" The Irishman spat disgustedly. "Why, say, John, this town's plumb full a' wash-houses now, an' them starvin'. Folks up here don't want no duds washed till spring. They'd catch cold, sabee? An' th' dust c'lects in their shirts, see? ... What yeh want's a mine—a mine with a garden atop of it, see? ... jest yeh look round a bit an' see what yeh'd get fer fresh vegetables—all yeh can grow—right here in lit'l ol' Dawson. Any price yeh'd ask! ... Why, yeh'd make yer fortune an' be back there in China an' able t' buy up all them ol' Mandolins nex' year! ... Call it five hundred an' a deal if yeh say so!"

The Chinese, however, cannot be stampeded. "Me see you to-morrow, mebbe," said this one, sidling toward the door.

Dacey, disgusted, also withdrew from the bar, while the server of drinks grinned broadly.

"Thought sure he'd fall fer th' garden stuff," Pat growled, moving toward the boxes.

Scarth looked for explanation to the chuckling Spencer.

"That's Dacey," said he—"the brick-top. Got a no-good claim out Moosehide way he tries t' unload on every pilgrim that hits th' camp. Asked fifty thousand for it once. Guess he'd take a ten-spot now, if anybody was fool enough to give it.... That garden stunt, though? It's new. He'd most make yeh believe he had something, wouldn't he, now? Pat's got such a smooth line a' talk he'd convince himself he couldn't lie."

"Excuse me—won't you an' your friend have something with th' house? A small bottle, eh?" The manager's voice at their elbows was honeyed. He beamed hospitality. "You're off duty, yeh know!"

Spencer turned to Scarth questioningly.

"No bubbly-water for me," declared the up-river officer. "But I *could* go a glass of beer."

The manager looked his grief.

"Beer!" he lamented. "Why, beer's scarce as ostriches! Only one place's got any. An' old Joe's stingin' 'em twenty-five bones a bottle—an' extry-dry Mumms only fifteen!"

Whisky-soda seemed a rational compromise. Two rounds were adjudged sufficient.

"Like t' meet some a' th' girls, old man?" suggested Spencer. "Most of them's pretty good-lookers, an' they're no worse, I guess, than th' business makes 'em.... May as well stand 'em a round or two?"

Scarth concurred without argument. As they mounted the rickety stairs and passed down the narrow corridor, seeking an untenanted box, the tumult of strident merriment suddenly ceased. Questioning eyes appeared at doors scant inches agape. Spencer laughed.

"All right, folks!" he sang out to invisible whisperers. "Just me and a friend out for the evening—nothing official at all.... Any of you ladies disengaged?"

Whereat laughter and chatter and rough love-making resumed their wonted sway and call-bells sounded a chime. From one of the farthest boxes darted a little figure in abbreviated skirt and super-decolleté bodice, hands outstretched invitingly.

"Why, hello, boys!" she greeted them, all smiles. "C'mon in an' talk t' me. I'm sure glad t' see any a' you police boys—you're always so nice!"

"Some little flatterer, eh?" laughed Spencer, lifting her bodily to kiss unresponsive red lips. "How have you been all this time, Gertie? It's an age since I've been in, isn't it? Been true t' me all th' time? ... Miss Gertie, my *tillicum* Malcolm! Now, don't you go falling in love with him and break what you've left of my heart!"

"Half a sec' an' I'll find a box," Gertrude gaily promised, flashing back to the one she had just emerged from. It was promptly vacated, the Count discreetly effacing himself. Having waved them in, the girl coquettishly eluded Spencer's obvious move to seat her upon his knee. "Wait till I dig up another lady fer your big friend," she explained. "I'll bet he's strong fer th' blondes?"

"Give much trouble, these joints?" Scarth questioned, sotto voce, as she flitted away and they smoked companionably in the gloom.

"Not so much as you'd think. Always liable t' be something doing, though, where there's women—and not one to a hundred men. Some of th' miners—big business men, too—fall hard for these show-shop fairies. They're a wise bunch. Why, not a week ago——"

Conversation in the adjoining box became plainly audible through the flimsy partition. One of the voices was unmistakably the enterprising Dacey's.

"I'm tellin' yen, Queenie, it's comin' out all O.K.," they overheard. "Why, I'm negotiatin' right now fer a sale. It's a financeer fr'm Hong-Kong after it.... By th' end a' th' week likely——"

The sentence was not completed.

"I don't care what happens 'by th' end a' th' week'," the woman's voice interrupted. "I might be dead an' buried by then. Are yeh goin' t' buy me a small bot'l *now*? 'Cause if yeh ain't I'm goin' t' beat it.... A girl can't live on th' line a' hot air you're always peddlin'——"

"Aw now, Queenie! Don't go an' get sore," the male person pleaded. "Yeh know I can't go that wine stuff. Punch th' bell an' let's have a whisky."

A bell rang instantly.

"It's gettin' t' be like pullin' teeth t' coax a drink outa yeh, Pat," they heard her rail. "An' you pretendin' t' think such a lot a' me! ... Won't yeh make it small bot'l, dearie, when I ask yeh, pretty please? ... I ain't never seen no Irishman such a cheap skate before—an' you a rich mine-owner!" This last was a sarcastic touch.

"Aw now, lissen, dearie——"

A light knock and Gertrude interrupted.

"Say, Trotters, come on inta No. 6 fer a minute. Coupla th' police boys out fer a sociable—Spencer an' another guy——"

"Sure I'll come," agreed M'lle Bernice instantly. "Nothin' t' keep me here! Yeh can drink yer old whisky, Pat," she shot back as she made her exit. "Mind yeh keep th' check fer me!"

She was all smiles and dimpling when with Gertrude she joined the two officers, was duly presented, and took possession of Scarth's knee.

"Say, I'm goin' t' like you," she at once assured him. "My, ain't yeh big an' strong, though? ... An' I always do fall fer th' dark men!"

"Luck seems to be coming my way," the up-river man laughed in rejoinder. "Hope we're not taking you away from your friends?"

"Not a chance in th' world," she told him. "I been good as alone all evening." Which well-barbed feminine shaft she felt sure would carry to Dacey's ears. The immediate slamming of a door and the diminishing sound of footsteps convinced her that it had.

Half an hour was "all they could hold th' police boys," she confided to the manager later when cashing in. "It don't do," she sagely added, "t' pull no raw stuff with them, an' they're pretty wise t' our stunts, anyhow.... Good scouts at that, most a' them, for all they're 'bulls'!"

Gertrude meanwhile was losing no time in locating her Count. Excitement emboldened her, or she would never have called him from the bar, where he, the Montana Kid and Dacey were gossiping. He answered her beckoning, determined to "teach her a lesson."

"Oh, Ivan," she said quickly, anticipating censure. "Remember th' English guy that tried t' kill us all, back there on th' trail! I got a line on him t'night. An' what d'yeh think? If they ain't gone an' made a 'red bull' outa him! Sergeant he is, at that! ... His name's Fitzmaurice, an' he seems t' have made a hit with them robin redbreasts."

"That all yeh wanted me for?" He concealed active interest in her information with a fair assumption of cold indifference. "Wish he wasn't tied up with that outfit, though.... See yeh in an hour or so." And the Count achieved a hug and a kiss of simulated ardour as he added, lower voiced: "Say, slip me fifty, sweetheart. I feel lucky t'night."

She tingled with happiness at the unexpected caress. It wasn't so often now that Ivan was "nice to her."

"Jest a minute, dear," she whispered back. "I'll go get it." And another tab promptly went on the file against salary.

The night was still young by Dawson standards when the Count, the Kid and the irrepressible Dacey entered Cariboo Joe's together. They had discovered themselves, somewhat to their amazement, sharers in a common feud. Strangely enough, the community of enmity worked rather for disintegration of friendship than for union. Each looked at Fitzmaurice as his own particular meat. Each jealously warned the others against "butting in" till his own personal getting-even had been duly accomplished.

"Guess I got first call on that pretty boy," the Kid declared aggressively. "Ain't that right?" he appealed to Pat. "Didn't he up an' assault me in Skagway, there at Soapy's? Yeh seen it yerself?"

"Hell, that wasn't no assault—jest a 'poke in th' jaw," Pat hotly protested. "It was my mule he up an' killed, wasn't it? Et her, too, th' cannibal!"

De Maurin intervened, smiling. The Irishman's grievance gave him inward mirth—also a sinking sensation in the stomach, as he remembered certain steaks. He professed for Pat, however, deep sympathy and a lively indignation. Montana's feelings he could endorse. His semi-Oriental mind was busy with an appealing scheme of satisfying revenge these others would never have dreamed of.

"See here, boys"—he laid a restraining hand on an arm of each—"Don't get talking foolish now. He's up there at Bennett an' likely to stay there a while. We can keep track of him. One of us's pretty sure t' get him some time. But that's got t' wait, hasn't it? ... Well, listen then: Here's something perhaps yeh didn't know—Our fresh friend of th' eye-glass is crazy on a certain young lady——"

"Holy mackerel, ain't it th' truth!" Dacey excitedly interrupted. "He was gone on th' dame that's singin' here—that was when he pulled outa Skagway. Kep' ravin' about this here Miss Brooks, but I never got ont a who she was till in here t'other night I hear someone call her b' name.... Think he's likely t' chase down here after her?"

The Count appeared to ponder. "No," he presently said. "He couldn't quit his Post. But he'll try t' get moved, I'll gamble. If we could work fast don't yeh think we could rig up a scheme t' get her outa this beanery before he shows up? ... She oughta be workin' in some a' th' houses here. They'd pay her real mazuma. An' she wouldn't have any trouble gettin' in, either." He waited for the suggestion to sink in, then added significantly: "Seems a nice little lady? Pity t' waste her on that remittance lad? ... An' wouldn't it put a crimp into him if he was t' find her doubled up with some a' th' gang here, all cosy an' comfortable, when he does come down river?"

The Kid and Dacey stared. Then they grinned, the Irishman a bit doubtfully. They never would have thought of such a thing, but it would be one grand hurrah if it could be worked. The Kid at least thought so.

"Why not?" questioned Count Ivan. "What's t' hinder?"

Pat burst into gusty laughter. "Go in an' win, Count," he counselled. "Best wishes an' all th' rest!"

"Oh, I'm not eligible," de Maurin corrected. "Th' lady an' I don't speak," he added savagely. "Th' lovey-dove part's up t' you!"

Dacey's laugh was cut short. "Well say, I guess I'll hev t' renege," he awkwardly confessed. "Yeh know how it is between Trotters an' me? I dassent make no such play er I'd sure lose out with her!"

"So that puts it up t' me," the Kid admitted. "I ain't kickin'. I don't rightly know how good my stand-in is, but I was a'goin' t' date her up anyway. These here cards makes mine a tight."

"We'll leave it to the Kid then," said the Count, well satisfied. "You an' I'll boost his game from th' sidelines, eh, Pat?"

"Sure thing," Dacey responded heartily. "Yeh can see how it is with me," he added apologetically.

The trio parted soon after, the Count to return to the theatre. Dacey was on the trail of an apocryphal Outside capitalist who might want to buy a mine. The Kid remained at the table, topping off his late supper with divers and sundry whiskies, loudly applauding the singer when she appeared and striving to catch her eye. Presently he got up, a shade unsteadily, and lurched toward her.

"Them songs a' yours makes a hit with me, sister," he said, with a leer meant for a gallant smile. "But not such-a-much hit as you do.... Comin' along with me t' th' dance Friday, ain't yeh? I'm countin' on yeh!"

She glanced up, confused and startled.

"Why it's ever so kind of you," she faltered. "But you see—I dance very little. I'm afraid——"

She hesitated. The situation was trying. She was nervous. Then matters were taken out of her hands, as Beartrap Smith loomed ponderous beside her.

"I'm fearin' yeh'll hev t' excuse her," he lazily interrupted, addressing himself to the Kid. "She's got a date with me Friday, son."

Montana's black eyes measured the man. Their verdict was not reassuring.

"Well, some other night then?" he suggested, bottling his wrath and even managing a smile.

"Well, she's got th' old almanac pretty well scratched up, Kid," the big miner again answered for her. "An' I sort a' got a first option t' show her 'round if happen she should want t' step out."

The Kid's face whitened with rage. If he only had a gun! Without one he stood small chance with this great roughneck.

"I'll get that big stiff too before I'm through," he savagely promised himself as he made for the door.

Two R.N.W.M.P. officers at one of the tables had followed the scene with lazy interest.

"That girl looks too clean for a camp like this," said Scarth emphatically. "Damn shame it is—only a matter of time I s'pose before she goes t' pieces!"

Spencer grinned as he tamped his pipe.

"Mebbe so, mebbe not," he remarked judicially. "Looks like old Beartrap's a pretty fair watchdog, and Cariboo Joe rides herd mighty close on her. The Sourdough loves her like a daughter and, old as he is, he's a terror when he does cut loose.... Besides, yeh might give us boys credit for sense enough t' look after a comrade's girl if things got nasty for her."

"Comrade's girl?" Scarth repeated, puzzled. "Some of you chaps interested?"

"Not so," came rejoinder—"Though some of us wouldn't mind if th' coast was clear.... It happens to be your man—that chap Fitzmaurice—from what I gather from old Joe here. He's forever asking about him."

Scarth whistled softly—a low note, long sustained.

"So that's the answer!" said he. "Can't say I blame him either."

Chapter XIII When Christmas Came

Christmas was coming to Dawson—the first Christmas in its hectic, hysterical existence. Signs of approaching festival were everywhere. Dusty warehouses and drab provision stores blossomed overnight with marvellous millinery of many-coloured tissue wreaths, hearts, crosses, crowns and garlands, weirdly accordion-pleated, incongruous in their environment as a pink satin bow on a regular bulldog. Restaurants, dance-halls and theatres bedecked themselves with aromatic forest greenery, accentuating brave displays of flags and gaudy bunting. Behind the multitudinous bars, impromptu artists strove absorbedly to reproduce traditional Christmas scenes and seasonable greetings in soap and coloured chalks dimming the polished mirrors, the while bartenders pridefully competed in the concoction of the foundational elements of Tom-and-Jerry, according to recipes of individual preference. In the completed masterpieces of the back-bar Turners and Morans, unanimous devotion to country churches, arch bridges, snow-dripping evergreens and winding roads was everywhere manifest. Fires roared in rust-tinted barrel stoves. And just beyond the boundaries of stout log walls, diamond-clean stars looked down on a vast wonderland of far-stretching whiteness, while the oncoming of Santa's reindeer was heralded by the pistol-cracking of twigs touched by the frost-whip of northern winter.

Having completed, to his very evident satisfaction, a Christmas-cardy reminder of the advent of festival—the tiny church with its ruddy windows, the bridge, the twisting road, with a cutter and horse for good measure—Pat Dacey stood back from his picture in Nigger Jim's resort and critically studied effects. He had left space above the familiar snowscape for the inevitable: "Merry Christmas and Happy New Year." The ends, too, were reserved, for more topical touches. "Good Luck" was to be at the left—"Drink Hearty" on the right.

"She sure looks fane an' dandy, Pat," commented one of the shirt-sleeved barmen, coming around in front to admire. "Yeh ought t' be Outside, paintin' pitchers fer framin', 'stead a' up here doin' th' capper act."

The artist acknowledged the compliment with characteristic modesty.

"Aw that ain't nawthin t' what I c'd do if I had th' right tools," he averred. "An' as fer th' cappin', it's jest t' fill in till I

do somethin' with th' mine.... Fella was in las' night—that was him shootin' th' cubes—talks like he might buy."

The dispenser of refreshment returned behind the bar and again employed himself, assembling in a bucket a mixture resembling pudding batter, thick and yellowish. Into this he was putting eggs, or rather intending to put them when any were found not too evilly odorous. Four or five he had broken already and promptly consigned to the can with no further comment than a fervent "Whew-w-w!" He picked up another "prospect" and paused with it in his hand.

"That guy sure *was* tanked fer fair," he observed, *a propos* Dacey's last remark. "Here's hoping," he added sceptically, resuming attack on the egg. "No—'nother rank one," as it also went into the discard. "What's th' boss expect when he buys this hen-fruit—'Eggs, \$12 a doz.; Better Eggs, \$15'? Why don't he go down t' old Joe's an' get some a' them good aigs a' his, if it does set him back a few ounces? Can't make no Tom-an'-Jerry with them things—Th' gang'd stampede fer fair.... Fer gawd's sake, Pat—dump th' can out back!"

The time was afternoon, the slack hour for business, comparatively speaking. A score or so tempted Fortune at the tables or wheel. Others sprawled in chairs, "sleeping it off." Demands for bar service were intermittent. Nigger Jim came in, to a place of peace. He passed behind the long bar, exchanged a few words with its guardians, perfunctorily glanced at the cash register record, yawned heavily and inquired from force of habit: "Anythin' doin'?"

The dispensing chemist looked up from his baffling batter. Discouragement sat on his brow.

"These here aigs, boss," he said. "Yeh can't do nothin' with 'em. Six gone a'ready an' ev'ry one rank. We got t' get some as ain't quite s' meller.... Why not hev a try down t' old Joe's?"

The boss sniffed suspiciously.

"Does smell some like a polecat's boardin'-house," he agreed. "But darn'd if I know what t' do.... Them's th' 'Better eggs' yeh got there. What they're better than I dunno.... An' they was th' last in town—'ceptin' old Joe's lot."

"Can't yeh get none off a' him a' tall? Come Christmas time he oughtn't t' act *siwash* if he is a sheeny.... Jes' three er four mebbe'd fix us up?"

Anxiety spoke. Nigger Jim considered.

"It's one hell of a hole t' be in at Christmas," he conceded ungrudgingly. "Won't nothin' else do but aigs, makin' up that mess—mebbe cornstarch, eh? ... Yeh see, Joe's up an' sold his aigs, all but jest one case. Swiftwater got there first, 'bout a week ago. Since th' aigs begin t' run out, that there girl a' his discovers all of a sudden aigs 's her long suit. She craves aigs ev'ry meal! So 'course Bill goes out an' buys up th' camp fer her.

"'If Miss Gussie La More wants aigs, she eats aigs till further orders,' he lays down th' law t' Joe. 'I buys all there is in th' dump at two dollars per each,' he says. 'No skirt but her in this camp gets no aigs fr'm now on.' So that's how she lays, Jack.... Might be I could coax a few off a' Gussie. I'll drop round an' see her on th' chance."

The bar-tender sighed sympathetically. He knew, as did many others, that favours from Miss La More were not inexpensive.

"She *might* be a good sport—at Christmas," he ventured half-heartedly.

"Never can tell. I'll do my best," the boss answered. "It'll mean good-bye t' five-six ounces I s'pose.... Anything else on yer mind?"

Dacey's bar-mirror achievement was indicated with a sweep of the barman's hand.

"Pat's got her finished, all but th' motters," he announced succinctly. "Some pitcher, eh? Class t' it? Wouldn't think th' poor bum had it in him—but there she is!"

"What's th' pack doin' out in th' road?" asked the puzzled proprietor, viewing the soap-and-chalk scene from various

angles. "Er p'raps, mebbe, it's meant fer a dog?"

The bar-tender again came around in front to investigate.

"Naw, yeh got it wrong," he declared. "Stan' back farther here—see? It's a horse an' cutter—least Pat says it is—with a girl 'n her feller a kanoodlin'."

"Well, he ought 'a know—he done it," the proprietor-critic conceded. "When yeh stan' ten or twelve foot back, it might be et that!"

He turned, to find Dacey behind him, waiting anxiously for the verdict.

"Yes, sir, mighty fine piece a' work, Pat m' boy," came the cordial assurance. "It sure does yeh proud.... An' that idea a' yours, puttin' th' fella an' his girl in th' cutter an' them jest a hittin' th' high spots fer th' church 'fore th' old man comes along—that there's a touch a' genius!"

As he strolled over to the faro layout Pat was still at his elbow. He passed idly to the Black Jack table. Pat accompanied him, persistent, but saying nothing.

"Well, what is it, Pat?" he at length inquired. "Want t' see me?"

"C'd yeh spare a minute?" Dacey gulped. "There was somethin' I wanted t' ask yeh."

They found a deserted table.

"Spit it out," Nigger Jim invited. "What yeh got on yer mind?"

"It's jest a little matter a' business," Pat hesitantly began—"an' a favour too, yeh might say, I was wantin' t' ask yeh.... Yeh see it's comin' Christmas time an' I been an' shot m' wad.... I know yer payin' me good money. I ain't got no kick a' tall—but yeh know how it is yerself, come along Christmas? A fella likes t' have some dust about him so as he can do th' right thing by his fren's—not t' blow it in crazy-like, but—yeh get what I mean?"

"Yep, I know," the boss grimly admitted. "Guess th' blonde up t' th' show-shop gathers in about all your loose change.... Go ahead—shoot!"

"Well, it's this way," pursued Pat, thus encouraged. "Yeh know that mine a' mine, over Moosehide way? I ain't had a chance t' sell yet an' get nothin' like what she's worth.... I was wonderin'—I was wonderin' if yeh'd mind takin' it, fer security like, an' lend me a coupla hundred—till I c'n find me a buyer——"

The boss laughed boisterously. Dacey's hopes fell.

"Yer th' limit, Pat," his employer declared, having had his laugh out. "T' try an' work off that ol' blank on *me*! Why, dog-gone-my-cats, you know well as I do, an' yeh know I know, that there claim a' yourn ain't worth a hellitywhoop.... Wouldn't lend yeh a busted white chip on it.

"Hold on there—wait till I'm through, can't yeh.... But, seein' it's comin' Christmas, as I heard yeh say, an' yeh've made a mighty nice job a' that pitcher, I'll jest do this fer yeh, Pat—I'll slip yeh th' two hundred fer th' trouble yeh've took with it.... Yeh can say 'Merry Christmas' t' th' girl fer me if yeh think about it.... No, that's all right—yer welcome.... Jest one thing yeh might do fer me then: Stick 'round till th' rush's over this next week er so. Looks like business mightn't be too bad."

The interview ended there. Someone sought the proprietor. Dacey, pocketing the two hundred, experienced no qualms as to "prostituted art." He most heartily agreed that Christmas is one great occasion. The only cloud in his sky was the ordained "night stuff." That would mean neglect, on his part, of theatrical art. He foresaw complications. In hope of forestalling these, he raced over to Trotters' room. She was not at home.

"Gone visitin' somewheres, I s'pose," was his mental comment. "Tough luck." He lingered to pencil a note to slip under her door:

Don't you worry none, Queenie, if I ain't round to-night. Got a man on looks as if he might buy.— x x x x x x.

"She'll be feedin' her face down t' th' Cariboo after she cashes in," he comforted himself. "P'raps I c'd fix things then."

The night passed, leaden-footed to him. It seemed ages before he caught a nod from the manager and his "Better call it a day, Pat. Nothin' much doin' now." Ten minutes later the restaurant door closed behind him. Yes, there she was. Montana was with her, but that didn't matter. Dacey hastened to join them.

"Lo Kid!" he saluted genially. "Seems a year sense I seen yeh, Queenie—get my note? ... You folks ordered yet?"

His "Queenie" answered with an armed-neutrality air that they had not. Regarding the note she said nothing.

"Let me do it this time," Pat addressed himself to the Kid. "What's it goin' t' be an' I'll go rustle it?"

"Haven't sold th' mine, hev yeh?" Trotters questioned cynically, yet teasingly curious.

"Not exactly," he answered, flushing. "Prospec's looks good though.... I got enough t' go on with."

"Someone been fool enough t' option it?" she pressed, now alert. An option, she knew, would mean a trifle of cash in hand—and "nothing doing" later.

A diversion relieved the Irishman of reply. A merry party entered noisily. Necks craned. All eyes turned toward them:

"Hello, Swiftwater!" "Lo, Gussie!" friends roared in chorus.

The pair, in advance of their satellites, stood waving gay response. The girl, wrapped in sables and ermine, had thrown back her hood. They could see the flame of diamonds circling her white throat and all but literally covering her hands. A front tooth had even been drilled and "set" with a gleaming gem. Gussie's diamond-tooth smile was famous the length of the Coast.

"Christmas everybody!" she called cheerily.

"Same here!" came in echoing bass from her companion. He was big and carefree, bibulously boisterous. He believed in his luck and life. Gold was gained but for spending. Let everyone be happy! When one fortune was gone he would dig out another!

"Kept our table for us, Joe?" he addressed the Sourdough. "That's right, old-timer. Lead us t' th' eats—an' say, wine fer everybody!" He tossed a fat poke on the counter.... "All hands drinks th' limit, t' th' future Mrs. Swiftwater Bill!"

Cheers, shouts, shrilled and heavy congratulations, back-slapping and noisy laughter answered announcement and invitation. In the din and the subsequent cork-popping, the party located their table and were volleyed with "Luck!" and "Best wishes!"

"My gawd, d'yeh see that coat?" whispered Trotters, awestruck. "Must a' set him back ten thousand if it cost a cent! ... Some girls does have all th' luck!"

"Don't yeh mind, Queenie girl. Your time's a'comin'," Pat sought to comfort her. "What yeh goin' t' eat?"

"I—think—I—shall have——" The high-pitched voice was Gussie's. Curiosity bred sudden quiet. "I think I shall have *three poached aigs* an' some French-fried an' a bot'l a' beer!"

She turned again to Swiftwater, smiling up at him well content. She had scored the desired sensation.

Trotters leaned toward Pat. Malicious merriment possessed her.

"That'll do all right, too, fer me," she informed him.

With beer twenty-five dollars a bottle, potatoes a dollar a portion, and eggs unpurchasable, he sadly thought that it might. He stood up to the blow like a thoroughbred, nevertheless.

"I ain't sure we c'n get th' aigs," he ventured. "I hear Swiftwater's bought up th' crop, but we'll have a try, anyhow. What you eatin, Kid?"

His doubts on the question of eggs were fully confirmed by the harried extra waiter.

"Not an aig in th' place that ain't bought an' paid fer," said that worthy emphatically, "'cept jest one case th' boss's cached away, case a' sickness er th' like."

Trotters gloomed disgusted. Dacey sensed storm-clouds looming. The girl left him no time for doubts.

"That's th' kind a' man t' have," she shot spitefully at him. "He sure knows how t' treat a girl!"

Pat took the blow smiling, though it smarted. She had meant it should.

"Wait a minute, dearie. Don't get sore! P'raps I c'n fix it with Joe."

She stared in surprise as he got up and strolled to the counter. Montana also stared.

"I was jest joshin' him," she said half defensively to no one in particular. "I ain't crazy fer case aigs at no time."

She turned to watch proceedings at the counter, where Pat was in secret session with old Joe himself. She saw Dacey talking earnestly, in carefully lowered tones—saw the Sourdough's nodded emphatic negatives—saw Pat persistent—saw old Joe in the end laugh heartily and his head wag in good-natured agreement, as Pat turned to rejoin her. A glow of gratified pride suffused her. He *had* coaxed the old Jew for some out of that precious case! My, wouldn't that make Gussie wild and the other girls josh the life out of her! The town would buzz over it to-morrow; it would be the scream of the winter! ... And then, she didn't know why, her mind took a somersault. Pat was almost at her side again and about to speak. She cut in before he could:

"Nev' mind them aigs er th' beer, Pat. I've changed m' mind. I want hotcakes an' cawfee.... Yes, that's all I want t' night!"

The Irishman stared, bewildered. His ears must be playing him tricks!

"It's all right, Pat. Give th' order. Don't I always mean jest what I say?"

She smiled as she reassured him. He contented himself with recalling that there's no understanding women. Then he found his voice.

"Jest as you say, Queenie. Whatever you say goes!"

He did not, then, have to tell her, he reflected with vast relief (and tell her he never did), just what really had transpired in that heart-to-heart counter confab. True, he had asked Joe to broach that reserve case. Refusal had been immediate and absolute. Then a bright idea had struck him.

"Well, then, look a-here, Joe," he had said, "do me a favour, will yeh? Keep me th' shells a' them aigs th' La More's

got ordered? Yeh see, there's a fella comin' along t'morrow t' talk mine. Mebbe it'd help if I had them aigshells scattered 'round th' shack, careless like—make him think things was breakin' my way!"

It was this proposition Joe had accepted with that affirmative nod Trotters had caught with surprise. The Sourdough chuckled whenever he thought of it. M'lle Bernice, otherwise Trotters, never guessed the truth. How could she? And Dacey was sagely silent. He marvelled much over that mysterious changing of her order, for which he thanked Lady Luck.

Conversation at their table lagged inexplicably. To all he or the Kid might say the girl made mono-syllabic response, or but smiled enigmatically.

"This party a' ours 's most as excitin' as thawin' dirt," Montana was moved to remark. "Guess I'll go where there's somethin' doin'.... Tell me when th' trance's over."

"Good night, Kid—Merry Christmas an' all that," Trotters roused herself to say as he made his escape.

"What's th' matter t'night, Queenie girl? Yeh don't seem like yerself," Pat urged solicitously. "Hev I hurt yer feelin's er ennything?"

"Why, there's nothin' th' matter, a' course." She forced a light laugh. "Can't a girl be quiet once in a while? Guess mebbe I got a touch a' th' blues ... Think I'll go t' bed."

She hurried into her frost-proof wraps and passed out with a glance for no one. Dacey trailed behind, wondering.

* * * * *

How often is it said that one is never so alone as in city crowds! Much on the same principle, in the excited carnival throng of just-before-Christmas at the Cariboo, the "little brown wren" (as Beatrice had been whimsically christened by one of her Yukon friends) escaped notice almost altogether when, her programme for the night completed, she sought a secluded table far to the back, from which she could watch the crowd as a detached spectator. Almost, but not quite, was she lost to the noisy celebrants. She looked on and listened from her coign of vantage, with half-parted lips and sparkling eyes, for a time finding childish pleasure in the fantastic scene. It all seemed so like a play, piquant and picturesque, comedy element dominant. The roughness of the men, the gaudily-fabricated beauty of the over-dressed, shrill-voiced women, the rudeness of their merriment, from which a scant year before she would have shrunk in horrified terror, she was able now to tolerantly accept as meaningless of evil.

"They're just good-hearted, overgrown boys. They're rough, but there's not a speck of harm in them," she mused. She was learning to know gold in the rough. For the women, too, she had compassionate understanding, something rare to her sex. She was eager to find for them excuse or extenuation, in wayward circumstance or environment's influence. No inclination assailed her to regard them as creatures apart, lepers of society, forever beyond the pale. With a start she reflected how different her outlook and judgment would have been in Pendleburg twelve months before.

"What a little prude I must have been," she whispered to herself. "We were all a bit prim and narrow and pharisaical, I'm afraid. It's living the shut-in life."

Back there at home now they would be giving welcome to Christmas too, in the dear old-fashioned way! The churches would be trimmed with evergreens. In fancy she could see the shabby Presbyterian kirk, with the lettering back of the flower-decked pulpit: "Unto us a child is born"—hear the minister re-tell the wondrous story of the Star, the journeying of the Wise Men, and the manger-cradled Babe of Bethlehem! Day-dreaming, she caught the faint music of the carols, the "Gloria in Excelsis"! ... And in each cottage home the stockings would be hanging from fire-place or bedstead, awaiting the mysterious in-coming by the chimney of the roly-poly saint! ... The glittering Christmas-trees, she could see them too, with their wee candles and tinsel and packages all neatly tied about with bright red ribbons! ... All for the children, of course. Christmas was meant for them. Only by making-believe, tearing up the scroll of years, have grown-ups any right to a share in Christmas.

"Up here they're all just children," she urged defensively. She felt tears very near her eyes.

"What is it, little girl? Not unhappy and Christmas most here?"

With a start she came out of dreamland. Beartrap Smith had discovered her nook and was standing by her. She gave him a friendly smile as he drew up a chair. Good old reliable Beartrap! He was like an elder brother.

"It was just—just Christmas coming, I guess," she haltingly explained. "I got thinking about what they're all doing now, back home where I used to live—and mostly about the children.... Oh, I'm lonesome for the babies—just a sight of the soft, tiny tots. I want to have one in my arms, to cuddle and play with it——"

The big miner patted her hand.

"There, don't yeh go cry about it," he comforted. "Some day I bet yeh will. I get what yeh mean, though, for all I'm a rough old gopher.... But yeh mustn't fret no more, please.... Look at old Joe there, a-laughin'. 'Way back in his heart I don't doubt he's cryin' for that little girl a' his, her that died. You an' me's got t' brace him up——"

"You're right, Beartrap," she agreed, shaking off the spell. "There! I won't be silly any more. I've got my Christmas right here, with Joe and Ole and you, the best friends ever any girl had.... Why, I couldn't be happy without you three anywhere.... Whatever got into me?"

"That's better!" Beartrap agreed heartily. "An' now jest what would yeh like fer yerself fer Christmas? I been studyin'-like fer weeks what I oughta get yeh, an' darn'd if I get anywheres."

"Oh, I really don't want anything," she assured him hastily. "You're a dear just the same to think of it. But you mustn't get me anything. What more could I want than I've got already?"

"Think hard," the miner urged. "Shet yer eyes an' think. There's sure something—Make a Christmas wish!"

To please him she closed her eyes. What was it she really missed that would make this Christmas complete? It flashed on her instantly. She felt herself blushing.

"Hev yeh wished?" she heard Beartrap ask—heard subconsciously, for her thoughts were straying. She nodded in answer. "Jes' keep yer eyes shet then, an' wish three times—then it's bound t' come true!" He spoke with complete conviction—the conviction of a child who still *knows* there's a Santa Claus.

She obeyed, further seeking to please him. To her ears came the music of bells. It grew louder—clearer—then suddenly near at hand. The door was flung wide, and, opening her eyes, she saw a tall, uniformed man at the counter, shaking himself free of snow, like a great shaggy dog. When he threw off his heavy trail-coat she glimpsed a crimson tunic as he turned to old Joe, holding out his hand. The Sourdough's rugged face mirrored glad surprise.

"Christmas post from Outside," called out the Sergeant. "Rather fancied you'd like t' get it, what? ... Well, this certainly is top-hole!"

That voice! Were her eyes and ears both playing traitor? Upsetting her chair, she ran forward. Could she still be dreaming?

"Larry!" came in a queer little gasp as both hands went out to him....

And then she was close in his arms.

She had *got her wish*.

It is difficult (especially for an Englishman) to discard habits of thought, customs and standards of a lifetime, founded upon and supported by the traditions of generations gone before. Fitzmaurice discovered this in the days and weeks that followed his unheralded appearance in Dawson. It gave Life to him, a new and disheartening aspect. His reception in the camp had been enthusiastic. Had he not come, like Santa Claus, with the Christmas mail, when hope for it had grown dim? At the police barracks, congenial conditions and cheery companionship made strong, if scarce considered, appeal. His fondest dreams, too, had been more than realised in the welcome She had given him—the girl who had been always in his thoughts since their parting near Lindeman. She, in her delighted surprise, again had let drop the veil of heart concealment, betrayed by the totally unexpected into a second frank revealment. His own heart had leaped joyously, and there had been that breathless instant of ecstasy when his arms had claimed and held her and his lips found hers.

And then, with reflection and self-examination, had come misgivings and grave perplexities. That he had loved her almost from the moment of their first meeting he had long since realised. That She loved him was beyond all questioning. *But*—and how large that "but" loomed!—here was he, bound to duty's wheel. In that duty he must face constant risk—know no fixed abiding-place. With only his meagre pay to bring to her with an avowal, his lips were tightly shut on the words he so longed to speak and She (as he felt) to hear.

No, that would be caddish—contemptible under existing circumstances, he answered the urge of impulse. He must wait—keep a grip on himself and be silent until at least he could give her a home. Meanwhile—and here was his crumb of consolation—he was close at hand now, to give constant if merely friendly protection and be ready to serve her should she chance to need him.

Harshly he reproached himself that at first his inbred conception of the proprieties had revolted at finding her in such rough-and-ready company and surroundings. Reflection and one or two quiet chats with the Sourdough had brought a complete repentance and attainment of a new and truer perspective. He could now admit that environment changes what have seemed immutable laws. He must play the game man-fashion, he determined, till some whirl of the wheel of chance gave him right to speak, to claim the love he had read in her eyes. Meanwhile he must not see much of her or his rebellious tongue would be sure to obey his heart, to the sad confusion of right and fair play as his mind perceived them.

The girl in these passing weeks was puzzled too, and infinitely distressed. With burning cheeks she recalled how she had rushed to his arms that glad night of his arrival, baring her heart to him and to others as well. Did he think her shamelessly eager, bold, unmaidenly, bereft of all sense of propriety? With his English habituation to the masking of all emotions, what else was there for him to think? She grew quieter day by day, with long, pensive silences. Whenever Fitzmaurice came in she fled precipitately. When Fate brought them together inescapably both were nervously embarrassed and talked commonplaces almost feverishly. When she smiled at all in those dark days of bewilderment, it was with a pitiful effort that did not escape old Joe or his henchman Ole.

"Here we tank everything bane fine when he come," the Big Swede growled—"An' now everything go wrong! What that falla mean anyhow?"

"I do not myself understand," the Sourdough had answered. "But it will all come right. The boy is a good boy and they love one another. No matter how blue the sky, sometimes there comes a big cloud.... Then it goes, and the sun it shines all the more bright."

Nevertheless he too was worried. He wisely said nothing to Beatrice. There was only added tenderness in his protective care. Surely she would come to him with her trouble? He would aid opportunity. Her silent sorrowing weighed on him.

"What is wrong with our singing bird these days?" he asked one evening when they were quite alone. "Is it the homesickness?"

Her head shook in immediate denial.

"I'm all right, Papa Joe," over-eagerly she assured him. "How could I get homesick with such good friends around me? Why this is my home, right here——"

She stopped rather breathlessly. In the dark eyes fixed fondly on her, she read paternal solicitude and anxiety. Evasion halted.

"I don't really know what *is* the matter with me," she faltered. "I just feel—oh, all hurt inside somehow—and ashamed of myself." The tears would not be kept back. She crept to his arms.

"That is right, *tenas* one," said he, gently stroking the rippling hair. "A good cry it will help. Then may be you tell your old Papa what it is makes sorrow for you?"

In the shelter of his arms she sobbed out her perplexities. Eyes dewy with tears were lifted to his for comfort. He smiled reassuringly.

"It is not all quite clear to me," he told her. "But this I do know, that he loves you—loves you as you do him. And he is all a man. Why he has not spoken I do not know, but some strong reason there must be. It we shall learn in time.... Patience! It is so hard for Youth—yet I say, be patient! All will come right at length, for you and this man who loves you."

Of Fitzmaurice, in their next confidential chat, he asked no questions. He was none the less quick to note a subtle change in his English friend—a cloud on his wonted light-heartedness, intensification of his baffling British reticence. When he asked as to Beatrice, the old man sensed, however, wistful eagerness contradicting seeming coldness.

"She seems to avoid me these days," he confided to the Patriarch. "Have I offended her?"

"And you—do you come seeking her very often now?" the Sourdough reminded him, not unkindly. "Perhaps she, too, is asking that question."

Fitzmaurice flushed, hesitating. Explanations were difficult. Self-revelment was foreign to his nature. Yet he knew this old-timer worthy of all confidence.

"My word, man, can't you see how it is?" he at length blurted out, suddenly determined to break down the wall of his racial reserve—anxious also that this good friend should not misunderstand. "I daren't see much of her as things are.... Can't trust myself, y' know.... If I'd only got in on one of the creeks as I'd planned I'd be in a mighty different position.... What's a bally bobby to offer her? That's the short of it."

"A good man's love and protection, they surely are something," old Joe answered earnestly. "To women like her they are more than the gold of this Klondike. You love her, lad? There, no need to say it. I've known it all the time."

"But I've nothing now, you see, but my pay—You know how jolly small that is." The voice spoke settled gloom. "To ask her to share *that* would be a bit thick.... And if I see much of her that's just what I'm bound to do. Though I'd know myself for an utter rotter."

"Yet you say *she* avoids you? Isn't that just what you want then?" Joe insisted gently. "Well, she has other friends. Beartrap Smith, he is much about here. I do not think it is altogether my flapjacks——"

"You don't——think——She doesn't——You don't mean she cares for him?" His face had gone white. "I—I was duffer enough to think——No, by gad, I *know* she loves me——"

"Then put yourself in her place." The old man laid a hand on the scarlet sleeve. "You've never told her yet that you love her? How then must she feel? Think you she has no woman's pride?"

"Beartrap Smith? He's a bally Croesus," Fitzmaurice reflected bitterly.

"For someone her heart is very heavy," the Sourdough continued, unheeding the interruption. "You should know her too well to think money would count with her. Hers is not a soul for sale."

"I know, Joe—I'm something of a bounder, I'm afraid," the young man broke in contritely. "Didn't mean that at all...."

She'd not think of the money.... But he's sound as a nut, too, is Beartrap.... Could give her about everything——"

"Perhaps not the heart's desire," Joe commented. "And what weighs with that? I think, for both your sakes, you should talk plainly with her, Larry. If she loves you she'll wait for you—happier. An engagement, too, it will give you the more right to look after her. Is that not true?"

The officer squared his broad shoulders. Hesitation had vanished.

"By Jove, you're right," he agreed. "I've been acting th' blithering ass.... Jolly well ashamed of m'self.... Be in this evening."

He was, too—so early that he found he must wait some time before She would come. The waiting was hard on taut nerves. He ordered, but appetite lagged. The pipe for once held no comfort. He recognised some of the symptoms that prospective knights of old must have experienced as they kept their ordained vigils. But he felt very far from knightly, and the more he pondered what he should say when She came, the more it eluded him.

At long last the back door opened. It was still early evening and the place all but deserted. He sprang to his feet in confusion, half tempted to retreat. Her obvious weariness and the little crooked smile with which she greeted him, brought him up with a start.

"Why, Beatrice," he faltered. "You're ill! You're pale as a ghost! You're——"

"Oh, no," she hastily interrupted, colouring. "I'm quite all right. There's nothing at all the matter——"

"But there is," he insisted anxiously. "There must be—Why, dearest one——"

He pulled himself up sharply.

"Won't you have a chair," said he lamely, crimsoning in his turn.... "Weather keeps beastly cold? ... Real winter one gets up here? ... New music you've got there?"

He knew he was "acting the idiot." This wasn't at all as per programme. How on earth could he talk to her though—in a public restaurant, with two or three listeners too? Such a thing absolutely is not *done*.

She had seated herself demurely, regarding him quizzically. Brown eyes now twinkled with mirth.

"Won't you sit down too?" she invited.

"Oh thanks, awf'lly," he heard himself saying inanely. "Can't stay but a minute though.... Just dropped in for a bit of a snack.... Jolly fine t' see you again.... Looking awf'lly fit you are.... No, don't mean that, of course not. Looking tired an' ill.... What I mean t' say is.... Oh Beatrice, little girl—dear little girl.... Do you—Could you—Will you——"

He stopped in speechless confusion. There was no pallor now in her cheeks.

"Will I what, Larry?" she whispered softly, her hands meeting his, outstretched.

The words her heart hungered for, that were on his lips, were fated to go unspoken. The door flung open violently. Dacey's red head was inthrust.

"Fire!" he shouted and vanished—"Th' Pine Tree!"

The two or three early diners abandoned their places in haste, wriggling into out-of-door garb as they dashed for the street. Fitzmaurice was even quicker. One second he was crushing her hands in his. The next he was outside, pulling on his coat as he ran. The girl stood as in a dream arrested. Old Joe peered out of the window.

"Looks like quite a big fire too," he called to her. "It is well that the engine and hose they get here before the river closed." ... He too started for the door.

"Papa Joe!" she reminded him sharply—"Your parka and mitts and all! Why it's sixty below!"

Like a schoolboy reproved, he grinned and equipped himself.

"I forget for a minute," he admitted sheepishly. "The fire, it get me excite."

Left alone with her tumbled thoughts, she stood gazing straight before her. The fire was all but forgotten. She recalled it vaguely—resentfully—as a cruelly unfair interruption. Old Joe reappeared, to shout:

"There goes th' engine! They'll soon put it out now!"

Once more he plunged into the street. Minutes passed unheeded. In new-found content she could now almost bless the catastrophe that gave her these golden moments quite alone. The fire had passed from her mind when Joe, panting heavily, rushed back, banging shut the door. As he flung back his hood, grey horror was in his drawn face. Sudden terror clutched at her. She ran to him:

"What is it?" she cried. "Something's happened to him?"

"No, Larry's all right," he assured her, pulling himself together. His lips quivered. His voice was hoarse and strained. "It's the engine—the hose—this cold! It won't work at all, they say.... The water, it freeze solid before the engine can pump it! ... Here, daughter, we must work fast.... It is for our lives.... All the clothing and tents get together, rugs and blankets too! ... I myself will pack food——"

"Why, Papa Joe!" She could not understand. "The fire's not near us? There's no wind? There's never any wind when it's so cold?"

"It spreads fast, my child," he flung back. "Lose no time.... These big fires make winds of their own.... The town—it is burning down!"

As he spoke he was upturning tables, loading each (like a sled) with supplies. Shelves were stripped with incredible speed. Were not lives at stake?

Not yet fully comprehending, she took up her part automatically. Straining over bags and boxes, throwing into them blankets and rugs, she suddenly realised! It gripped like the cold hand of Death:

Cut off from the world completely, with the weather at sixty below! Should the town burn as old Joe predicted, its people were doomed—twenty thousand brave pioneers who had followed the lure of gold to this land of the frozen terror! Millions in yellow dust they had won from tenacious earth. What worth were those millions now?

A ship fire far at sea—what was even it by contrast? When ships burned there were boats—provisioned—a means of possible escape. There were chances of being picked up or of winning through safe to some haven. *Here* Winter had sealed every gate! Without shelter, all must freeze! At once—by their thousands! For a few it would be starvation! No hope of relief or rescue—no wire to summon help! Not the fleetest messenger could win Outside before aid would be all too late! If rescuers came at all they would find but a city's people sealed in an icy tomb!

Mechanically now—trembling—numbed with the glimpsed horror of colossal tragedy, she worked desperately and in silence.

A terrific explosion shook the stout log building, throwing her to the floor. Another crashed as she regained her feet and continued frantically to gather up and pack haphazard such things as she could lay hands on.

To the dual thunderous roars she gave no heed—salutes to onrushing Death!

Chapter XV Habit, Stronger than Hate

That overworked proverb as to the age of miracles being past could never have found support with the pioneers of the Yukon. Experience taught them better, with daily lessons. What about Dawson itself? Dawson, the magic city, sprung overnight from the wilderness, to be instantly talked of everywhere—in London drawing-rooms and Coolgardie diggings, in Paris salons and New York saloons, in Cairo cafés and Calcutta clubs? Was not Dawson itself a miracle? Unlike other mining metropoli, when it was placed on the map historical precedents were grotesquely shattered. The machinery of law and order was installed and smoothly running even before the advent of white population. When the first of the adventuring horde, the vanguard of the Great Rush, reached the head of the toilsome trail, red-coated police were there to welcome them and advise, to protect and to swiftly punish; to be all things to all men, assuming with unconcern innumerable governmental functions combined for emergency purposes; exercising quiet, efficient authority according to the unwritten statutes of common sense. As population expanded and the instinct of citizenship claimed expression, the R.N.W.M.P. serenely divested itself of extra responsibilities and quasi-municipal organisation came spontaneously into being. There had been from the first no need for miners' committees or vigilantes or lynch law, no chance for claim-jumping or outlawry or disturbance. British law prevailed; and, marvellous as it reads, the crime sheet of the greatest, richest and most isolate gold camp of the nineteenth century was, in those brave days of Dawson's infancy, the cleanest in proportion to population, of any town's in all America. Civic administration, originating automatically, concerned itself therefore with sidewalks and sanitation, housing and hospitals, fuel problems and fire protection.

Necessity for the latter was early recognised. Indeed, the first of many citizens' meetings debated this issue at length. The inflammable nature of the buildings, huddled close together; the Arctic winter's demand for roaring fires; the prevailing practice of running through canvas or shake-thatched roofs a spindling length of stovepipe in lieu of a chimney, all made extra-hazardous risk that was promptly admitted. The result was a call for funds and the buying and bringing in of a semi-modern fire-engine, with ample supplies of hose; and organisation later of a volunteer department, many members of which were veteran fire-fighters of their homes Outside. These were disciplined men, with capable officers. They pridefully drilled each week until team-play was perfected. A crude but sufficient alarm system was installed. The brigade took itself seriously—and no doubt privily prayed for a fire to prove its worth.

Yet, strange to say, one thing was overlooked, and that thing crucial. When the alarm bells jangled noisily that night of the "Great Fire," there was no delay in response. The steamer was rushed to its strategic base, a hole hacked through the thick river ice, and two lines laid and manned.

"Water!" sang out the nozzle-men, pushing close in to the blaze, all set to resist when the hose should become alive and wrestle like some great snake for anarchical freedom.

"Water! Water!" they continued to shout—bewildered, urgently, angrily. "Turn her on there, why don't yeh?"

"What's th' matter there?" bellowed the deputy chief, hurrying down to the steamer. Its perplexed engineer regarded him dazedly.

"She don't seem t' be gettin' no water," said he in helpless consternation. "Workin' fine, too, she was.... Must be something wrong with th' intake!"

They dashed to investigate. The big feedline was flexible for only a few feet. Beyond that it was heavy as lead and rigid as a poker.

"Froze stiff!" gasped the deputy.... "No, yeh can't work no line a' ice.... Th' water jest freezes tight 'fore she can suck it up."

Hastily they manoeuvred the engine to closer quarters, shortening the feedline. She took her toll of the river, but—— No sooner was water turned on than again she choked.... No pressure would that night carry a stream past the myriad watchful imps of the Arctic frost. The deputy ran back with the heart-breaking tidings.

"Form a bucket-line quick, men!" the Chief barked as he listened.

But buckets held solid ice ere they passed through a dozen hands. The fire was beyond such first-aid methods, had all been brimming.

Crackling, roaring, hissing, the flames rose to the sullen skies, breaking ruddily into dense smoke-clouds that lifted, eddied, floated and tossed, warring with the biting air.

"Lister's place's caught!" someone ran to report.... "Pete Austin's roof's afire!" came shouted from down the street. "Th' Bonanza's a 'goin' too!" they told the distracted Chief.... "My God, it'll get th' whole town! Ain't there *nothin'* we can do?"

The Chief hastily rallied his aides.

"Jest one thing for it now, boys," said he, "or th' town's a goner. We got t' blow up them warehouses. It likely won't jump that wide.... If we c'n turn th' trick quick enough we c'n stop her yet!"

The huge buildings of the A.C. Company loomed dark and massive in the lurid light. A mere half-dozen flimsy shops parted them from the chuckling flames.

"Th' powder-house's just back—touch 'n go if we can make it! ... Who's game t' get th' stuff out? It's a risky——"

Volunteers had sprung forward. They rushed for the little log outhouse. As they neared it they stopped, aghast! Tiny smoke spirals curled from the fireward eave. The explosives shed had caught! Beneath those corkscrew wisps of smoke, yellow flames danced playfully. Four men caught their breath and plunged on—the Chief, Hoseman Dacey, the swaggering Count de Maurin and one of the police. The latter outfooted the rest. He ripped out a sharp command as they came up:

"Grab this log, men! ... Now then, altogether!"

The stout door shivered and crashed with the impact. Dacey and the Chief sprang for the opening. They were thrown aside.

"My job, this!" declared Sergeant Fitzmaurice. "Stand clear till I get th' stuff out!"

Dacey profanely objected. De Maurin gripped his shoulder and he found himself flung in the snow.

"Let th' damn fool go!" hissed the Count. "Don't yeh see th' shack's afire? ... Beat it quick before hell breaks loose!"

He himself sprang back, hustling with him the Chief, but only for a few scant yards.

"By God, no!" the fireman gasped angrily, ploughing back. "I'll see th' thing through. It's our one last bet.... Get back there, yeh fool, Pat. Can't tell what minute—— My God, there she goes now!"

His voice spoke despair. The crash of a beam told the story. Flames framed the shattered door. Unmindful of peril, he stood staring into the heart of the fire—dumbly, impotent. Their last hope—Gone!

No? Was there still a chance? Dacey seemed to think so! While his Chief had been standing there, for the instant paralysed by the imminence of disaster, the irrepressible Irishman had been doing some lightning thinking. It was not of the grudge he bore the Englishman—his obsession that was now one of the jokes of the camp, but to him no laughing matter. He had told himself scores of times Maude should be avenged—that the Londoner would "get his, good and plenty." Then here, suddenly, out of all unimagined possibilities, Fate had taken his feud in hand. Fitzmaurice was penned in this burning powder-shanty, his grotesquely horrible death a matter of seconds. Yet Pat in that vital instant had in mind neither hoped-for vengeance nor his long-nursed bitterness. Fire challenged! A life was at stake.... Habit overbore sense of imagined injury and of nurtured hate. One thought drummed insistently on his consciousness, demanding of him action: He was a fireman, instinctively and by training, fearless in danger's face, in crises resourceful. Here was a superlative crisis that called to his fireman's pride! Deeds must be immediate. That salvation of the city rested with him alone was beyond his calculations of that fractional fragment of time while his Chief stood gaping in

horror at where lately the door had been. Pat's mind functioned swiftly on the one essential—to achieve impossibility in the clipped seconds in which the trick might be turned.... He dropped to hands and knees and crawled under the blazing beam, through the flaming doorway!

* * * * *

"I thought first off it was a dog," the Chief told them afterward. "He slipped past me an' into it jest like a dog. 'Am I seein' things?' thinks I, an' I turns t' Pat. I was goin' t' ask him does he see it too. But Pat's not there. Then I gets it right—that he's th' dog I seen.... Say, I clean forgets about this here dinnymite—Jes' stood there like a plumb idjit, askin' God t' take care a' that damn fool Irishman.... Guess I must a' been prayin', come t' think of it! ... Now what d' you know about that!

"I guess, too, I must a' got pretty close in m'self, fer first thing I knows my mackinaw's caught an' I smells hair burnin'. Don't even sabee it's mine. Seems like I stands there gawkin' fer hours—it's mebbe just a few seconds—when I hears Pat sing out, choky like an' queer. 'Catch,' says he, an' a box comes a-flyin' through what's left a' th' door an' hits me square in th' bread-basket. I grabs it an' lays it down, an' jest then he heaves out another. There's four a' them—that there dinnymite we're a-lookin' fer. I caches 'em over against a tree an' comes back lookin' fer Pat—an' no sign er sound a' him!

"Mebbe yeh think I ain't in one cold sweat! 'Pat,' I keeps hollerin'—'Are yeh all right, Pat?' Not a word does I get back, so I starts t' crawl into it too, m' nose down in th' muck, yeh betcha.... An' nex' thing I knows, I butts right into him, backin' out an' a-blazin' like a Christian martyr! He's a-draggin' somethin' with him an' I grabs hold an' hauls away as Pat keels over. Some a' th' boys come up an' they lugs Pat off an' souses him in th' snow, an' I sees then it's th' Sergeant he's salvaged. I turns him over t' some more a' th' gang an' th' rest a' us gets busy pronto an' blows up them warehouses—An' none too soon, I'm tellin' yeh. It's touch an' go—But yeh know all about that. Pat's th' boy yeh can thank. There's a *Man* fer yeh! ... How's he comin' along?"

From Dacey—weeks later, in his convalescence, for the call was a close one and he hung for days on the brink of the final mystery (double pneumonia, the doctor said it was, besides his being pretty well crisped all over, with one chance in a hundred that he'd pull through)—they got a less graphic account of the fight he had made for the town.

"Aw, quit yer kiddin'," the bleached wreck of the Irishman had protested from his cot. "I didn't do nawthin'—Jes' crawled in an' kep' feelin' round till I gets m' hands on them boxes an' heaves 'em out t' th' Chief.... Was th' fire bad in there? Say, what sense's there in that? Yes, I guess she was goin' some. Plenty smoke too. It kep' gettin' in m' bellows bad.... I sticks up m' head fer a squint round, case I'd missed some a' them boxes, an' that's when I sees th' Sergeant. Took his coat at first fer a log burnin'—It looks like it's covered with coals. His head, it's red like, too.... That was blood, where th' beam'd got him. So I gets hold an' snakes him out, crawlin' crab-fashion.... An' that's all there was t' it.... Wisht you fellas'd quit makin' such an ungodly fuss 'bout nawthin'."

Fitzmaurice, the third of the principal actors in the fast-moving drama of the fire, was even more laconic in retrospect. He had jumped into the shack when the improvised battering-ram had cleared the way, picked up two of the boxes and started out with them. The smoke was suffocating and half blinded him. His sense of direction failing him, he had bumped into a wall where the door should have been. He was still groping for the exit when something had dropped on his head with the weight of The Dome itself.... And then he had wakened, to discover by painful degrees that he was in bed and undressed, with head and hands bandaged. It hurt him a bit to breathe and "the old headpiece felt a bit wobbly."

What the town saw and remembered was a nightmare of kaleidoscopic, crowding incidents; hope alternating with black despair; brave deeds of unsuspected heroes; craven cowardice where men looked for courage and leadership; the

tragic and the comic fantastically interwoven as in Life itself.

It was the tumult of the explosions when the big warehouses were sacrificed for the town's salvation that hurried the Sourdough again into the street. His packing, as far as possible, had been done. He was ready for hasty flight should the worst befall. Beatrice, white-faced and shaken, had been his sole coadjutor, working swiftly and wordlessly, half numbed by the enormity of the impending catastrophe, by degrees comprehended. When the last rug and the final package had been stowed, she sank limply into a chair. Old Joe interpreted her unspoken question:

"We've done all we can," he said gravely. "Rest now. We may need all our strength. I must see how things are looking... Rest, child—We are in His good hands!"

The door closed behind him. She was alone with her tangled thoughts. Lurid rays played through the small-paned windows; the dancing lights of the aurora paled, faded and lost themselves in the reddened sky. Flames roared and crackled; walls toppled and crashed to earth; men rushed about, hoarsely shouting; dogs barked excitedly. She neither saw nor heard.

"God keep *him* safe!" her trembling lips whispered. "Dear God, keep him safe for me!"

How long she sat thus, alone, she had no idea. Months at least it seemed. What could be keeping Joe? Had anything happened to him? Swift panic seized her. She slipped hastily into her parka, running to the door. On the threshold she stopped abruptly. A crowd of a score or more was heading toward the café. And surely that was the Sourdough, half running, half walking, ahead? Yes, there could be no mistaking the patriarch of the camp. *He* had met with no mishap then! She drew a deep breath of relief... But what was it they were doing? They were carrying something, or someone? Was it Ole? Or Beartrap perhaps? ... Not Larry? O God, not Larry——

Her heart seemed to stop beating. One hand went to it; the other clutched at the door-frame. She felt strangely weak and shaken.

"Bring him right through to my room," she heard Joe directing as they came nearer. The men swerved to avoid a stump and she caught a glint of metal and a glimpse of scarlet as the firelight flashed on their burden. Then she *knew!* ... Her world spun dizzily... She felt herself falling. A strong arm was about her, steadying her. The old man's calm voice brought back her wits:

"He needs you—*now!* You *must not* break down! He is hurt!"

"Not *dead?*" she questioned piteously. "He isn't *dead?*"

"Not dead!" the old man assured her. "Perhaps not so badly hurt——"

She heard him as she ran to overturn the boxes so lately packed, tumbling out their contents haphazard to re-make the bed. Anxiety lent her wings. Almost as soon as the men had tramped in through the café the back room couch was ready and they were laying their burden upon it. She saw a set, rigid face—grimy, streaked with blood. The next instant she had edged through the group and was unbuttoning the bedraggled tunic with steady fingers. Scarcely she recognised her own voice as she took charge of the situation.

"Papa Joe, warm water—and lots of soft cloths! ... Run, somebody, fetch Dr. Richardson! ... Ole, the olive oil! The tin's there in one of those boxes. ... Here, boys, I must cut away his clothes."

Instantly they obeyed. Emergency had found the woman, ready and equal to it. They looked their vast relief.

"Mighty good thing she's here," Beartrap Smith commented, "Takes hold like a reg'lar nurse."

Deftly, quickly, efficiently, with the men's assistance—and none can be more gentle than the rough men of the far frontiers—she bathed the bruised and battered head, turning back the edges of a jagged scalp wound to carefully cleanse it. Tenderly she padded the face and hands with cotton wool soaked in the oil—inspected feet and body for frostbites, made poultices against possible call for them... The doctor came and she stood back in the friendly shadow while his

keen professional eye took note of abrasions and contusions, his sensitive hands explored for signs of fracture, running lightly over the body. His ear was laid for long seconds against the chest. Almost fiercely she compelled herself to a stoic waiting, seeking to read in his face the verdict.

"Well," he said at length, "He's had a mighty close call, but it might be worse. No bones broken—skull sound—nasty bit of a cut, but not dangerous. Lost plenty of blood, but he's young and strong.... If we can fight off pneumonia he'll pull through all right, with good nursing——"

He straightened up, looking sharply around. "Seems as though we had a nurse on the job already," he observed appreciatively. "Oh, you is it?" smiling as she stepped forward. "Well, your first-aid was just right, my dear. If you only could take charge for a while now it would mean a lot to him. Good nurses are mighty scarce in this neck of the woods."

He paused interrogatively. She managed a smile.

"I'll do my best, doctor," she answered. "I'll do just whatever you tell me."

"Better and better," he chuckled. "Not often we get hold of a nurse that don't think she knows more than the doctor... Clear out of here, you boys—— Nothing more you can do. Miss Brooks and I'll get along fine now."

They bent to the work of patching and poulticing, bathing and bandaging, with a running fire of explanation and instruction on the medico's part, the girl tensely attentive. Then the doctor reached for his coat, snapped shut his bag and drew on his gauntlets.

"He'll likely sleep now till morning," he predicted from the doorway. "I gave him a shot of morphia.... You know just what to do when he wakes? Everything clear now, is it?"

"I think so, doctor—yes."

"Well, good night then, Miss Brooks, and a thousand thanks!"

She smiled as she bowed in response. That he should be thanking her for this blessed boon—to take care of the man of her heart! She closed the door very softly and knelt by the rough log bed. Her head dropped to the bearskin coverlet. Her lips moved, but no human ear could have caught the words many times repeated:

"O God, I do—I *do* thank Thee, for letting me help Thee to save him!"

Chapter XVI A Magdalen's Gethsemane

Trotters and Gertrude, standing at the door of the deserted Trilby, shaggy in winter wraps, watched the fire eat toward them. The Count and Dacey had rushed at the first alarm. The blaze was not wholly regretted. It afforded diversion.

"Any little excitement's welcome in this dead hole," Bernice commented calmly. "If th' Savoy an' th' Louvre go," she remarked as an after-thought, "we'll pack 'em in clean t' th' roof fer to-morrow's show!"

Conversation was crisply curtailed. With the mercury seeking the cellar, open-air chat is trimmed to essentials. They noted the fire's progress with brightly curious eyes, surprised that the brigade Pat had talked of so proudly should not be more in evidence.

"Guess that department's another four-flush proposition or he wouldn't be mixed up with it," Trotters sneered. "Why don't they get that old engine workin' back there?" she called to a man rushing by.

"Hose freezes up—No good in this cold. You folks better git packed—Th' town's goin' sure," he flung back.

"Oh my gawd!" Gertie choked, clutching convulsively at the stronger sister. "What we goin' t' do?"

"They'll get it out somehow," she was assured. "Don't yeh go in fer no sob stuff now.... Fer th' love a' Pete, what's that?"

The thunder of a shattering explosion shook the ground, echoing back from the sentinel hills. The great storehouse of the A. C. Company seemed to quiver and crumble and tear apart, hurtling in dismembered ruin to the crimsoned sky. A second crash, and the rival store shook, separated, and soared crazily. The cutting air rained debris with the rattle of small-arms.

Gertie whimpered in terror: "My gawd, Trotters, what they doin'?"

"Guess they must a' blowed 'em up," quoth that lady succinctly. "Let's go an' see."

She pushed through to the heart of commotion, Gertrude trailing, tearful and terrified, after her. They stopped when their way was barred by a crowd moving silently from the scene. The party were convoying something covered with rugs and mackinaws that others carried. What it was could not be seen.

"What's doin'?" questioned Trotters, clutching at a man on the fringe. "Anybody hurt?"

"It's Dacey," she caught the answer. The speaker was Beartrap Smith. Suddenly, she felt strangely stricken.

"What's that fool been up t' now?" she heard herself asking mechanically. Contempt tinged Beartrap's response. She felt its sting and was thankful night and her hood screened her face. It was pallid, could any have seen.

"Don't yeh talk that way 'bout *him*!" The miner's tone held a hint of danger—"Saved th' town—That's what he done.... Like t' cost him his life."

"He's not—he's not—*killed*?" the girl gasped.

But Beartrap had gone, brushing off her detaining hand. Blindly she ran after the still company tramping up the straggling street.

"Where yeh goin', Trotters?" Gertie questioned querulously. "Let's wait here fer Ivan!"

But Trotters neither heeded nor heard. The throng about that bundled-up thing on a blown-out door was rapidly thinning now. She pressed forward, marching with them. "Pall-bearers!" flashed to her mind and she flinched and shuddered. Her hands clenched convulsively.

"He ain't *dead*, is he?" she whispered hoarsely to the nearest man. The question, unheard, went unanswered. They turned off the makeshift street into a twisting trail that led presently to a forlorn shack. Someone opened the rickety door. The burden was borne within. A match flared and the dismal cheerlessness of the place photographed itself: A broken, red-rusted stove—pitifully meagre array of cheap dishes—battered frying-pan, axe and billy—tumble of much-patched quilts, with a mangy robe, on the woodsman's bed—a cracked bit of looking-glass—her picture, cut out of playbills, tacked up in a dozen places!

A candle spluttered feebly. Someone wrestled with the stove.

"Not 'nough wood here t' last a week," a voice reached her vaguely. "Like enough though it'll be all Pat'll need."

Followed a trying silence. Then that voice again:

"Well, he sure lived th' simple life—not 'nough here t' feed a sick crow—— But cripes! Lamp th' aigshells!"

Bare minutes passed, years to her. She faltered to the bunk, tumbling down beside it while her trembling hand

sought the heart of this man she had long played with, carelessly cruel. A moment the hand explored, chill fingers probing fate, while her heart stood still.

"He *ain't* dead!" she screamed shrilly, springing to her feet. "Quick, some a' you fools run fer th' doctor. Bring him on th' jump whatever he's doin'—Get anything he says! ... Here!"—she flung down a heavy poke—"Fer gawd's sake git a move on yeh!"

The men fell back, awkwardly hesitant—anxious enough to help, but not knowing what to do.

"Git that fire a' goin' good," she commanded sharply. "It's colder in here than outside.... Put a can a' water on, too. Th' doc' mebbe'll need it."

Her hands again were busy with that unconscious hulk on the bed, unfastening, tearing at buttons.

"Here! We got t' turn him over," next came peremptorily.... "Easy there, men, easy! ... Hurt him an' I'll kill yeh, damn yeh! ... Now beat it t' hell outa here.... Christ! Why don't that doctor come?"

* * * * *

A tinny alarm clock ticked off the long minutes. The candles on the rickety shake table guttered and smoked, their thin wavering flames casting fantastic shadows on the moss-chinked log walls—the scant, makeshift furnishings—the bunk on which lay the unconscious Pat. A rat scurried across the dirt floor. The fire in the rusty stove roared stormily. A moan, scarce audible, brought the watcher back to realities. She had been sitting, statue-still, her staring eyes blind to material things, visioning a grimly sordid panorama of the past: Life as she had found and lived it—a mad pursuit of phantom pleasure in frenziedly flogged excitements. It all seemed suddenly to have collapsed. Vaguely there shaped to her mental sight fuller and worthier existence, rich in simplicity, truth, ready self-sacrifice, unselfish loyalty—such life as she had scornfully derided as "all story-book bunk." ... The hard eyes filled and a hand went out falteringly till it rested, instinctively mother-wise, on the brick-topped head.

"Pat, boy!" she whispered, choking—"yeh ain't goin' t' *die*?—yeh ain't—yeh ain't——"

Tick-tock! Tick-tock! Tick-tock!

Eleven-twenty by that little clock! The "boys" had been gone half an hour! She sprang up, terrified, moving swiftly to the door. Her hand found the latch. Then sounded crunch of snow.... At last they were coming! Flinging open the door, she rushed out, oblivious to the cold. The smouldering glow of the dying fire, behind it the Arctic ghost-lights dancing afresh, silhouetted three muffled figures against the snow.

"Now *what* th' hell!" It was the doctor's voice. His arm swept her back through the open door. "What's th' idea?" he gruffly demanded. "Want t' freeze, girl?"

Rebelliously impatient, she shook him off.

"Nev' mind 'bout me," she snapped. "'Tend t' *him* there!"

The doctor glanced at her quizzically, slipping out of his coat. A smothered whistle of astonishment escaped him as he marked the nervously intertwisting fingers, her deadly pallor. "Look out for hysterics," the signs read. The professional mind functions instantly to symptoms.

"Oh, you is it?" he dropped casually. "Hot water, eh? Good girl! Well, let's see how bad it is.... Busy night," he flung over his shoulder, apologetically, as he bent to the form on the bunk—"Got here quick as I could."

Silence followed, save for the fire's roar and the staccato impertinence of that tinny clock. The two who had brought the doctor stood, twin shadows by the door. The girl, poised ghost-like, was at his elbow——

"Look here, Trotters," came matter-of-factly to steady her—"take a brace on yourself. It looks touch-and-go for the

lad here.... Goin' t' help me pull him through? Play nurse for a change, can you?"

"Good shot!" he mentally congratulated himself, stealing a swift side-glance. "Comes right out of it, ready for action!"

She had taken a quick step forward and brought up, lips parted, eyes softly bright.

"Oh, doc', d'yeh think I could?" The training of the trouper stood her well. She slipped back into her accustomed pose. "Sure thing," she answered carelessly. "Deal th' hand!"

It was three by the watchful clock when the doctor left. The others had played messenger and long since departed. Time and again he had given it up. The case was beyond human skill, experience told him. Once he had said so to her, not in words—a mere shake of the head. She had turned on him, a rageful fury.

"Ain't dead, is he?" she had snapped. "We'll keep at it then. What th' hell sort a' doctor d'yeh call yourself?"

And he had kept at it doggedly, at first automatically, then buoyed up by a flicker of hope—just a spark, but it brightened and grew. Always she had been at hand, an invaluable aide, coolly capable, anticipating requirement or command, even suggesting drastic expedients. When he had done his utmost and outlined final instructions, she re-stoked the fire while he wriggled into his coat.

"He may lie like that for hours," said he. "Better get some sleep yourself."

"Like hell," she replied laconically. "Good fer a week, I am—an' he *might* come outa it, mightn't he?"

"Well, send me word if there's any change," he retorted perfunctorily. "But how can you?" he added lamely.

"Sure I will," she cut him off. "I'll find some way."

As he passed out and closed the door, he stopped to regard its whipsawn boards as though they had formed the Gateway of Mysteries.

"Well, if that, don't beat all," he philosophised. "But yeh never can tell," he added.

* * * * *

The shrill, forced gaiety of burlesque and dance-hall life holds no time for retrospect. Its pace is killingly continuous. Incessant egotistical "professional" chatter, never-ceasing excitement, drinks, smokes, beguilement of the male, strenuous pursuit of sudden hates and swiftly developing amours interdict any self-communion. Self-praise is always there—also self-pity, an abstract creed of vague resentment of indefinite injustice in the large. And better so, else despondency would take suicidal toll. *Think!*—and the tinselled butterfly pirouettes into the arms of Death.

Bernice was admirably nimble-minded, owner of a caustic wit ever sharpened for either defence or offence. Yet she had not, in years, *thought* to aught save the passing purpose. In common with her sisterhood, she was always planning vaguely to make a "big money killing" and then betake herself Outside, to some mysterious place where she would find the Bluebird—happiness o'erflowing the cup. Just how, or where, or when, were all alike nebulous. The multiple demands of the artificial night life, most of all the interminable battle of sex, gave her constant employ. To get—to win—to cajole—to take—to acquire—above all, to cheat the hunter, Man, made up the unintermittent business of flying days. It was engrossing, too—a desperate game in which life, wealth, paupery, violence, counterfeit love, inevitable jealousies, making swift-moving drama, ever were in enactment.

Here, almost in a moment, her tawdry world had been tumbled to bits, and stark, living tragedy, in which unexpectedly she found herself vitally concerned, had risen upon the ruins! *Thought* forced its unbidden company, and with Thought came Regret!

Tick-tock! Tick-tock! Tick-tock!

The clock checked off months and years as, crouched beside the bunk, with eyes of the soul she surveyed the procession of the past: Drab, fleeting childhood, in an average unambitious working-man's home of pinching and squabbling, ignorant, dull acceptance of drear existence, even mother love and counsel carelessly denied her—swift-flown girlhood, with its petty makeshifts and mortifications such as every daughter of the poor must know—pale hopes, empty aspirations, idle dreams, informulate ideals that instantly scorched and withered or oftener perished stillborn—stirrings of mating instinct—the allure of sweethearting days, bringing with them the Man, gallant, boastful, ardent, delightfully masterful—challenge of sex to sex—girlhood's pride in boasted invulnerability of self-defence—thrill of playing with fire—the mad excitement of that tempestuous climacteric defensive battle so confidently entered upon, to end in irremedial defeat—self-loathing, despair, repulsion, storms of scalding tears, hard cynicism born in determination for insatiate revenge on mankind! Though she had never heard of Buchanan, that minor poet had voiced her later creed:

"All men, each one beneath the sun,
I hate—shall hate—until Earth be done,
And all Mankind for the sake of One!"

Excluding men (?) of the de Maurin stamp, who flattered and fawned or bullied and berated, while living on the earnings of passionately devoted girls of the dance-halls or the most ancient of all professions, she had—since experience had opened her eyes—hated (or thought she hated) all men impartially, judging the sex by him.

"They make a lot a' fuss an' swear they'll do anythin' fer yeh, so long as yeh keep 'em guessin'," she was wont to declare oracularly. "But they're all th' same, take it fr'm me.... They're all lookin' fer jest one thing. Let 'em once get it, an' it's fare-thee-well, so long, good-bye!"

And now?

She gazed long, with softened eyes, at the insensible Pat. He had always been "kinda nice" to her—even asked her repeatedly to "really-and-truly marry him and cut out the show-shop stuff." He would have given her his last dollar, she knew, asking no reward. Often, she suspected, he had.

"Poor old scout!" she caught herself whispering with pathetic reiteration. "Poor, dear old scout!"

If only there were something she could *do*! Inaction irked her. To sit alone and idly, gave memory opportunity, and retrospect brought bitter self-reproach.

"If somethin' don't happ'n soon I'll go loony," she told herself, pacing restlessly about the cabin, noting amazedly its pitifully meagre equipment. Pat never had asked her to visit him. She read the reason now.

"My gawd, what a dump t' live in!" It was hard to believe her eyes. "An' him always carryin' it off so, with his big talk about mines an' millions! Why, he ain't had enough t' eat! ... An' me a-workin' him fer ev'ry dollar he c'd get hold of an' givin' him th' can when he couldn't buy—pannin' him fer a cheap skate an' a piker—th' poor old boy!"

Hot tears scalded anguished eyes and, overflowing, streaked the painted face. A long, long time she sat crying—choking, racking sobs that tore and tortured. The candles flickered and faltered, collapsing into mere spots of hissing grease, from which wick-ends, suddenly refreshed, flamed bravely for a fitful instant and died. Darkness compassed her. Grief tore her discovered heart. Kneeling on the dirt floor, she buried her head in the ragged bunk-covers and, in the gloom of the Arctic night, hovering Death companioning her vigil, passed through her Gethsemane. In the agony of her soul's pilgrimage through purgatorial fires, Womanhood wakened.

"He *will* live! He *must* live! God wouldn't be so mean an' wicked as t' let him go an' die now!" Monotonously she whispered self-assurances, when the storm had outworn itself—"But he mustn't never know! Never! *Never!* I ain't fit t' be no man's wife.... A bad girl can't never come back."

The faithful clock ticked off Time's flight, in the darkness unnoted and unconsidered. The doctor had said Pat would not "come to" for hours. A heavy shot of morphia also had figured in his treatment. For herself she preferred the enveloping mantle of night, symbolic of the empty future. Once or twice she made a fumbling half-search for matches and fresh candles, but quickly renounced the quest, groping blindly back to the couch and its unconscious burden. Time counted nothing. Not until she caught the crunching sound of footsteps did she rouse herself to serious search for lights. Nor had she located them when the doctor threw open the door, flooding the shack with the unearthly still glory of the long Arctic night. His little electric torch was in his hand, and another hooded and coated figure entered quietly with him. Instinct told her it was a woman.

"Hello!" called out the doctor. "All in the dark, nurse?" His flashlight shot a white beam about, held for a mere time-fraction on her pallid face, travelling to and along a shelf till it focused matches and candles. These he handed down to her, and passed with his light to the patient. In tortured apprehension she waited for him to speak, oblivious to all else. When at length he turned from the cot her hands were outstretched to him mutely. Words would not come, but he understood.

"All right, girl," he assured her kindly. "Couldn't hope to find him better."

"Yeh ain't foolin'? He ain't a' goin' t' die?" she faltered.

"We won't let him," he answered brusquely, heading off threatened "fireworks." "Guess we might as well have lights, eh? Here's Miss Brooks—would come along with me—thought she might do something. I told her it wasn't necessary—you were on the job. Been at it all night too, she has: The Sergeant's in th' same boat as Pat... Have 'em both on their legs in no time, with two such nurses," he added hastily.

It was Beatrice who had lighted candles as he was speaking; and in the fitful puny radiance she turned to the girl from the dive house. They had seen one another before, of course, but had never spoken. "Up-stagey little tin saint," Trotters had spitefully catalogued her, as women of her world will, to cover enduring secret envy. She regarded her differently now, all bitterness fled.

"I've wanted to know you before," the singer was saying. "I've so missed having a girl friend up here——"

Her hands reached out. She was smiling in friendly fashion. Slowly Bernice's hand went to meet hers. Her heart gave her a fresh surprise. Then Thought stabbed viciously. Her face flamed through the streaky make-up.

"Guess yeh don't know th' sort I am," burst from her, piteously half-defiant.

Then they were in one another's arms, worn and overwrought both. The doctor discreetly effaced himself.

"Don't talk silly," Beatrice comforted. "We don't any of us know what we are—till we go through the fire.... You're going to be friends, aren't you? I so want to be!"

Again came tears, this time comforting. Arms about one another, they sat on an upturned box and bared souls in confidences. Later, as Beatrice donned her wraps for departure,

"I'd like to stay longer," she said—"but *he* might wake up and need me."

And the girl who had thought herself heartless nodded instant sympathetic understanding.

"I know, dear—Yeh must go to him. I c'n trust yeh t' keep yer promise?"

The singer assented gravely. "I'll do it," she answered reluctantly. "But, Trotters, I'm sure you're wrong. You mustn't give him up that way, when you know you love him."

A wan smile curved carmined lips.

"Don't yeh see that's jest why? He mustn't never guess," came sadly but decisively. "It wouldn't be best fer *him*."

For Trotters had asked and Beatrice (protesting) had promised to nurse Pat as well as her own man, and to let fall no hint that the show-girl had been with him, watching over him, through the crisis—most of all no hint of the real Trotters and her love for him.

"I got t' make him think I'm no good—till he gets t' forget me er hate me," the girl had urged. "I got t' make him think I'm rotten as hell all through.... I got t' do it, fer his sake.... O God, I wisht I was dead!"

Chapter XVII Friendships of the Far Frontier

Early March in Dawson City: A Chinook had blown throughout the night, the mercury rising so that speculation as to available water for the spring clean-up on the creeks began to divide with conjecture as to the clean-up itself, and when the first down-river steamer might be looked for. The *Siwashes*, to their amazement, once more found themselves deferred to and consulted, almost as in those earlier days when they were supposed to hold keys to the Arctic treasure-house and a host clamoured madly to share golden secrets, largely mythical. Now, as accepted oracles of the weather, they attained embarrassing notoriety.

"When's th' river like t' break?" was a question they parried daily. They didn't know any answer. But the white men would not be content with their "*halo kumtuk*." Surely Indians *must* know, they argued.

"Goin' t' be th' earliest spring th' Klondike's ever seen—looks that way t' you, don't it, George?" they would say—and await confirmation of their own prophecy.

"*Nahwitka*," the native cheerfully would agree, and forthwith the camp rejoiced.

"George Cannack says th' ice's goin' out earlier than ever it has," the good word would pass. "Them *Siwashes* knows th' signs. They're sure th' wise birds when it comes t' weather!"

Activities forthwith redoubled on the claims, dumps rising magically against the great days of the clean-up, when men would discover whether winter's monotonous thawing and piling up of auriferous dirt had made them potential millionaires or winners of a paltry fifty or a hundred thousand. The clean-up would tell the tale. Meanwhile—thaw and dig and keep the windlass turning, praying always for plenty of water.

As the Ancients counted time from the Flood, local history dated now from the night of the Great Fire. Dawson folk long since had realised how close they had come to cataclysmic catastrophe, but the gambling spirit of necessity animates every mining camp, and post-mortems are not approved. The incidents of the fire and the drama of the town's escape had been worn threadbare conversationally and dismissed as an old story. The amount of the coming clean-up, the possibilities of getting ready for it, the over-driving of sluice builders till they dropped of exhaustion, the growing dread of and precautions against scurvy as supplies ran low, conjecture as to stocks holding out until navigation opened, mildly detached concern in affairs of the Outside world—engaged Klondike's attention. Pat Dacey and his night of glory were dropped from memory. The town had enthusiastically adopted a flamboyantly eulogistic resolution of thanks to its red-headed saviour, in which he was assured that his "brave deed would live, ever-green as the northern pine, in the Arctic's history."

And the Arctic forthwith forgot!

Curiosity and real gratitude had inspired practical questioning as to how Pat was "fixed," with further vague suggestion that "th' camp oughta do th' right thing by him." Temporarily, it became obvious, he was wanting nothing. His shack had been overhauled, floored, re-furnished lavishly, and stocked with the best and plenty of it. If Dacey felt the movings of curiosity as to his altered fortunes, while he slowly won back to strength, his belief in his luck but held and his final conclusion was that of the camp in general: Nigger Jim was accepted as his fairy godfather. Hadn't Pat worked for him? The fact that Jim entered heated and profane disclaimer only cinched conviction.

"Course he's got t' deny it," it was sapiently argued. "If he didn't ev'ry bum in th' camp'd be taggin' after him." It looked better, too, it was further conceded, for him to disown his good deeds. Thus Nigger Jim, previously unsuspected of any benevolent impulses, gained wide popularity for princely generosity plus insistent modesty. True, occasional incidents of the rehabilitation of the rough-and-ready Irishman caused the camp gasping wonder and excited mild speculation as to the continued sanity of his supposed benefactor—as when baby-blue silk pyjamas, monogrammed "P.D.", were discovered, neatly folded, at the foot of his new store bed. The convalescent found speculation as to their nature and purpose as diverting as a Chinese puzzle, finally "giving it up." Beartrap Smith thus was left to provide the favoured explanation: The silk things must have come from the undertaker's, through blundering prematurity.

As for Nigger Jim in the affair at large: He had denied that he had been playing angel, and had been disbelieved. Very well! If someone chose to deal him a fine pat hand, not for him to cross-examine Luck! It so came that just three in the camp—Jim himself being one of them—knew him unentitled to the community's lavish praises for putting Pat on his feet and "doing th' thing up t' th' handle." Beatrice was one in the know. She had promised secrecy. And the dancer, revelling in a riot of clandestine spending for "her man," hotly resented hints of extravagance, insisting on limitless luxuries for the bewildered patient, wearing down protests and arguments as her new friend advanced them.

"Ain't I got a right t' no happiness a' tall?" she would plead. "They all figger it's Nigger Jim's doin' th' spendin'—an' he's got a wad that'd choke a cow.... Got t' play up t' th' idea, ain't I?"

"But, dear," Beatrice timidly ventured, "you're spending so much. Those pyjamas? However did you get them here anyway? I can't see where you get all the money. You must have saved up a small fortune?"

The dancer's lips twitched. She burst into laughter. Bewildered, Beatrice awaited explanations.

"Them pyjamas makes a hit with me," the showgirl finally found breath for. "A real swell guy 'n Seattle give 'em t' me, but I never had th' nerve t' flash 'em.... I worked th' letters on 'em myself though.... An' th' money part? See here, Bee, d'yeh think I c'd ever save up th' coin I been spendin'? Where d' yeh think it come from? Why Nigger Jim really, honeybunch. I got him goin' strong fer me now, spendin' like a drunken sailor. An' any old time it looks like a holler's comin', I jest got t' mention Pat an' th' money he's spendin' on that no-good mick an' Jim's there again with th' poke, see? You bet I got him guessin', but he ain't takin' no chances on a showdown—seein' th' camp's made an angel child outa him an' it's fine fer business.... He'll get th' shock a' his young life once Pat gets his strength back," she added, chuckling. "Say, what he's goin' t' do fer that gran' boy'd give him heart-failure if he guessed it!"

There was no resisting the comedy of the situation. Beatrice laughed with her.

"But it's a regular hold-up," she faintly protested.

"Sure," came from Bernice in contented agreement. "Th' shake-down comes later. Now, don't yeh be gettin' fussed"—for her friend's face betrayed anxiety. "Jim can stan' it. He gets his easy."

"But what is it you're planning? Aren't you going to tell me?"

Bernice sobered instantly. Sighing, she sank wearily into a chair.

"I ain't figgered it all out yet," she answered. "But I want t' fix it somehow so as I know he'll be all right. Then I guess mebbe I'll hit Outside th' first boat."

"But where? Where will you go? What are you going to do?"

"I don't know—anything—anywheres. I jest got t' lose m'self so there ain't no chance a' him findin' me. If I stick 'round here, seein' him ev'ry day, why—why, I ain't so sure I c'd go through.... An' I got t' do it," she insisted with finality. "I got t' play square this once."

They had been chatting in Beatrice's cabin. Trotters was learning to count it "home." She came there with caution, fearful of being seen and the key to her secret discovered. Usually it was in the early morning hours that she found her way to this haven of rest and refuge, herself still reeking with the fumes of tobacco and wine, secure in an understanding

friendship and casting off her professional mask and pose with her outer coats. This was an afternoon call and therefore doubly dangerous.

"I jest had t' come," she had explained. "I was that doggone blue I'd a' made some break if I didn't.

"See if th' coast's clear so I c'n slip into th' rest'rant, will yeh, Bee?" she asked, their talk ended.... "Does he ever—does he ever happ'n t' say ennything about me?" was added irrelevantly, but quite understood. Heart-hunger showed in her face.

"Of course—every day," Beatrice told her. "Love can't be deceived, dear—and you know he loves you. Of course, he can't understand, but he couldn't forget you——"

"He's got t'—he must!" the girl declared passionately. "I ain't rotten enough t' let him go an' spoil his life.... Ain't yeh told him I ain't no good, an' he oughta keep away fir'm me?"

The little friend of all parties sighed as she shook her head.

"I never could do that," she said.

"It's all very well to talk," she added sagely, "but a good man's love isn't easily killed. And when a man loves, he has faith, no matter how things may look."

Perplexed, she again shook her head as her friend vanished through the Cariboo's kitchen door.

She would not so tranquilly have attacked her accumulated mending had she visioned the scene into which Bernice had stepped unobserved. A few were seated at the oilclothed tables in the café, but their interest for the moment was not on their well-filled plates. Both the Sergeant and Pat had advanced in convalescence so as to be about again. In Joe's this particular afternoon their trails by chance again crossed, for the first time since the fire. The camp being delightedly familiar with Dacey's ancient grievance against the Englishman, curiosity was aroused. There was, for listeners-in, more novelty in their meeting than even in bacon and beans.

Fitzmaurice had been reading. He laid down his two-year's-old magazine as Dacey made shakily in his direction. He did not attempt to rise, but grinned good-naturedly at the glowering Irishman.

"Lo, Pat," said he. "Camp an' let's chatter."

Overtures were ignored. Dacey scorned the proffered chair.

"Hello, yerself," he retorted.... "Looka here, Ham-and—I got a bone t' pick with you, an' I ain't smokin' no peace pipe, see? ... D'yeh know what I'd promis'd m'self, back there at th' Pass?—I'd kill yeh when I met up with yeh, first chanc't I got!"

Excitement and weakness halted him. He reached for the chair and slumped into it, breathing hard.

"That's quite all right, old chap," the Englishman told him soothingly. "But there's no beastly hurry, y'know.... You saved my life, so no one's got a better right to it, I fancy.... Might let me know what it's all about, though."

Pat, staring hard, told him—told him luridly. But Maude's memory had very considerably dimmed with the flight of eventful months. His fine frenzy of indignation somehow had cooled. The ashes of a virtuous rage were dull and dead. He could not convince himself that he had been as outraged as he wanted to feel himself. At snickers from the listeners he halted in some confusion.

Silence fell for a space of seconds.

"Had much experience with mules before you came here?" Fitzmaurice asked matter-of-factly, to Pat's surprise

accepting the situation without comment.

He grudgingly admitted that he had not. But Maude's multiplied virtues and unwavering loyalty he extolled without stint. The Englishman listened politely, with interest, even cheery agreement. Maude's eulogist paused again. Fitzmaurice pulled at his pipe.

"You sold her to me for 'thoroughly sound and fit,' remember?" he at length reminded.

"So she was," Dacey declared with heat.

"You *thought* so, I haven't a doubt, old chap," Fitzmaurice corrected. "Just th' same, I never saw a worse case of *cantankeris reluctans* than she had."

Pat stared, astounded.

"She must a' been eatin' somethin'," he decided. "She sure was a hearty feeder—et ennythin' come along, she did.... Ain't noways like th' heaves is it, that—what yeh said?"

The Sergeant touched a few high spots of practical diagnosis. One sure and certain symptom was that the mule wouldn't climb, even with half a pack. Pat's scowl faded into a grudging grin.

"*Cantankeris reluctans*," he repeated. "Say, that's a pretty good one!"

Irish love of a joke prevailed. When folks laugh together they cannot keep at daggers drawn. Formalities marked the burial of the hatchet, for Joe opportunely had produced a squat bottle and glasses clinked cordially over "Here's to Maude!"

* * * * *

Passage of a month found Pat again at the Cariboo. During his now almost completed convalescence it had grown to be habit with him to drop in during slack hours for a *cultus wawa* with "th' old man." This was one of the occasions. Since the fire his reception had somehow seemed different. The Sourdough, he had discovered, could "crack a joke with th' next one."

"Good ol' scout when yeh get t' know him," Pat had decided, justifying his new friendship.

"There's right stuff in the lad," old Joe, on his part, had mused, alone with his pipe and his thoughts. "I must give him a lift at the start, since Denny's not here."

So it was they had come together in many a talk when the tables were all but deserted. There was a twinkle in the old man's eyes on this particular afternoon, though his voice held no hint of mirth.

"Done anything with that Moosehide property of yours?" he asked casually, breaking a spell of silence. "Is it that you have sold it?"

The Irishman glanced up hastily, questioning the patriarch's face. He read nothing there. The veteran but beamed benevolently. He "didn't seem t' be joshing."

"No, I ain't done nawthin' with it," Pat grunted back, with obvious distaste for the subject. "Seen ennythin' a' th' Sergeant t'day?"

"It is too early for him yet," he was reminded. "But about the mine? What price are you putting on it? Or you'll work it yourself perhaps—later on, when you're your own man again?"

Pat stared in good earnest, suspicion now fully aroused. There was no disputing the sincerity of the old man's friendship. Dacey flushed to the roots of his ruddy hair.

"I guess like enough they're right 'bout Moosehide," he mumbled. "It don't look like there's emnythin' there."

"So!" The tone bespoke sympathetic regrets. "But you never can tell it—where gold will be. You know the old saying: 'Gold is where you find it?'"

"An' that's why it ain't at Moosehide," Pat commented resignedly. "Moosehide's one a' them places where ye don't find it—an' there's a' plenty more."

The old man nodded agreement, then mused in silence.

"Suppose I make you an offer?" he resumed. "Oh, I don't mind a little gamble sometimes, if perhaps I make something——"

Pat's mouth went agape. Had the old boy gone *loco*?

"Why, Joe," he interrupted, "I'm a' tellin' yeh it's a blank!"

The Sourdough stopped him with a gesture. He was smiling now.

"Supposing though, that I buy?" he insisted.... "I give you that last case of eggs for her—the whole case of 'strictly fresh'—not more than ten months from Outside——"

Dacey leaned eagerly forward, then caught himself up. Conscience was functioning. The Sourdough was his friend. He just wanted to give him a leg up. Well, he wouldn't impose on a friend!

"No, I guess we won't deal," he announced slowly. "There ain't no gold there at Moosehide—an' aigs sure is aigs!"

The twinkle in old Joe's eyes melted into warm regard.

"So you wouldn't take advantage of the old man, eh? Perhaps, son, I thought as much.... Let us talk then of better business.... Last night I get word from Ole. Siwash Charlie mused in with a note. Him I have cached away——"

Caution warned him to glance about. No one was within hearing. Pat was now all attention.

"What did Ole hev t' say?" he demanded eagerly. There was something of moment afoot. His pulse quickened.

"Not so loud! Not so loud!" warned the veteran. "Ole is at that French Gulch. He has found something good——"

Pausing, he searched a pocket, from which he produced a small packet. The string he removed with exasperating deliberation and unwrapped the paper, disclosing four sizable nuggets, rather blackish than golden-hued.

"It's not very pretty stuff, this wonderful Klondike gold," he observed reflectively—"not bright, like the Cariboo gold. But he says there is plenty there.... Just now we have this to ourselves. But soon it will get about—then another stampede! I have scolded myself all the day or even I should now be on this new trail.... But it is you who shall go instead. You will take my dogs. They are full-fed and ready harnessed. And the grubstake I have packed on the sled, working half the night. I also have *them* cached away—out at Beartrap's old shack at th' Forks. Know the place? ... You turn down my other offer, crazy Irisher you!—— What say you then to a partnership in this thing? You the hard-working one; me the lazy banker, just loafing here till you get back with my share? And we split fifty-fifty the pot?"

For answer Pat's hand reached across, gripping Joe's without words.

"You're all white, old scout," he declared with conviction, a bit later. "I'll be sneakin' off t' th' Forks in th' half-hour.... Yeh'll see me when I get back.... An' I'll sure make them malemites a' yours ramble!"

Chapter XVIII The Measure of a Man

The Montana Kid was angry—very angry—angry and ugly too. Lady Luck had been "doing him dirt." He could not dispute with Fate, the intangible. Therefore he hunted Trouble, and vexingly failed to find it. As he paced forth and back, in front of the café counter, he glared malevolently, each snarled word a challenge to contradiction. And no one was moved to oblige and mix it with him. Rage accordingly grew.

It was the third day after Dacey's silent flitting, French Gulch his secret objective, and the present company was curiously small and intensely subdued for Dawson—a trio of watchful Japs, some few aged men of business, a gossiping group of girls who alone betrayed amusement at the Kid's explosive wrath, immune in their sex security from his threatening violence.

As old Joe had sagely predicted, news of the strike had leaked and the town once again had emptied itself of its strong ones at the beck of Gold. The hush of a deserted village now lay upon it, a hush more palpable because of the roaring of winds without.

"An' me soused an' sleepin'," the Kid bitterly upbraided himself. To the world at large he proclaimed his grievance in vastly different terms. They had "done a sneak act on him—an' them callin' themselves friends!" Well, he'd get "damn good an' even." He was in the turning mood, although otherwise far from worm-like.

Outside the thick log walls, in sharp contrast with the cheery warmth radiated from the glowing barrel-stove, bitter winds shrilled defiance to puny man—savage, tearing, destroying winds, strangely sprung out of the ambushade of utter stillness—white-uniformed fiends, armed at all points with Arctic's lances of frozen death. The blizzard had raged for hours, without sign of abatement. Old-timers recalled no such storm, so suddenly born of tranquility and promise of early spring, so fiercely vindictive, in the short but entire history of the camp. Greyed heads now wagged pessimistically, punctuating speculations as to the probable fates of the stampeded citizenry. Safety of their men focused community concern. Where were they now? How wide the path the storm-scythe was sweeping? What might be done for luckless stragglers?

This was the imminent issue. No mention of the new treasure-field or its possibilities intruded when Humanity called. Nor did any think to criticise or condemn those whose rash impetuosity had wrought their present jeopardy. The rushers had taken long chances, as men ever must take them—as they themselves undoubtedly would have, had youth and its vigour been theirs.

But this be it said for the Home Guard: All had felt afresh the urge of the gold lust when the news of this latest strike had broken. Thin blood had tingled, hearts leaped at the call to conquest—the challenge to battle with Nature for treasure clutched close to her chill breast.

"Gettin' too old t' be stampedin'," they reluctantly and regretfully had conceded. None now, however, pleaded handicap of years, as anxiously they consulted wind-blown skies, studied records of barometer and thermometer, talked trails and coulies and cut-offs, compared vicarious and vague chance scraps of uncertain information as to the new field's location, apportioned and debated their several possible parts in relief work, when the storm should have spent itself.

To the self-centred railings of the disgruntled Montana they accorded comprehensively contemptuous indifference. Sensing this, rage outran his reason. He had not neglected bottled consolations as he blatantly berated his luck. The result was eclipse of judgment and sudden-born determination to defer to the tempest no longer. His snow-shoes were slung at his back. He had heard indefinitely of a miles-saving cut-off. His whisky-fortified brain assured him he would certainly find it. He would travel light and fast.... In warm security of the indoors, his exhilarated spirit soared, singing his invincibility! Yes, he'd show them what He could do! Lurching up to the counter-bar, he demanded a short-trip outfit.

No hint of surprise showed on old Joe's face. Placidly he listened as requirements were detailed and intentions reiterated, the Kid now grown belligerently insistent. Instead of trail equipment, the Patriarch produced, however, the consolatory squat black bottle.

"Myself, I do not often count it a friend," the Sourdough confidentially whispered. "But now, it is better for you.... Have one with the old man, anyway? Then we talk of this outfit business.... On the trail it is deadly cold and——"

Montana was not to be diverted. Uncannily quickened shrewdness divined a hidden intent. Anger found a concrete objective. Snarling, he flung down a shrivelled poke.

"Weigh out what yeh want fer th' stuff," he growled, ominously quiet. "Quick too, er I'll help m'self!"

The poke was pushed back to him.

"I want not your money, lad," the old man calmly told him. "Nor will I see you go—out into such a storm. It would be too great madness.... You must wait till it passes. Is there not an Order of the Police? ... Then, what is needful you shall have——"

"Wait! Wait!! WAIT!!!" the Kid interrupted fiercely. "Like as not you're in on th' game yerself? ... Oh you're th' wise ol' guy! Got someone out stakin' fer yeh? Want t' hog th' whole thing, eh? Don't want no one else t' get a look-in, yeh damn greasy ol' Jew.... T' hell with th' lot a' yeh——"

He wheeled from the counter. Swift strides took him to the door. He but touched the latch and screaming demons of the air flung wide the door, inrushing, screened by clouds of powder-dry snow. Talk halted, drowned in the blizzard's shrieks. Twice—thrice old Joe gave back ere he could swing-to the door. The Kid had plunged into the storm, which forthwith had swallowed him.

For seconds constrained silence fell on the stay-at-homes, a silence accentuating the elemental inferno. Then all talked at once, a bit incoherently, with a new and immediate theme of concern and speculation.

"He'll blow back," they assured one another. "She'll sober him in a minute or two an' he'll beat it back."

Assurances rang hollow, as tacit confession and defence of inaction when nothing at all could be done.

"I tried as I could to hold him," pleaded Joe in self-justification. "Poor lad, if he would but have listened——"

Scratching and wiping at the frosted panes, alternating groups peered vaguely into the whirling tempest, conjecturing, speculating, bartering scant comfort of empty words. So occupied thus were all that they neither saw nor heard the convalescent Fitzmaurice as he came shakily from the Sourdough's sleeping-room and joined them at the windows. Twice he spoke ere they caught his questioning:

"Who is it? Why did you let him go? And against the Order?"

As they told him he turned, stalking back. Eyes followed him, questioning.

"That's right, lad—get again to your rest," murmured Joe approvingly. "You must take care for a few weeks yet——"

The sleeping-room door slammed. They plunged anew into discussion, the interruption forgotten. Amazed, they found the Sergeant again with them, garbed and hooded now for the trail. Determinedly he strode toward the entrance. Ere he could lay hand to latch, the old man had clutched his arm. Others, chattering protestation, essayed to bar the way.

"Is it mad you also have gone?" Joe demanded. Anxiety shook his voice, but pride shone in the aged eyes. They mustn't let him go, of course—but he loved a Man! "You'd only kill yourself, Larry," he urged desperately.... "Here, men, grab him quick!" for the staying hand had been shaken off. The Sergeant was at the portal. With the old footballer's skill he eluded outstretching hands. Again the door gaped to the whirling winds, and he too was gone!

Speechless, they looked one to another. It all had been so sudden! They had just caught his parting words to the shaken patriarch:

"Police duty, old friend! ... Frightfully short-handed just now!"

* * * * *

All through that day of warring winds, Beatrice had been strangely ill at ease. Inexplicable restlessness possessed her. Vague foreboding weighed heavily. She started in nervous terror as invisible fingers shook at the stout shutters—paled as the blizzard's scream pierced the solid log walls—shivered with indefinite apprehension as whirling snow-cakes eddied on the shake roof with weird scratchings as of terrified mice.

"I don't know what's got into me," she shame-facedly confided to Trotters, squatted contentedly on the couch, her practised fingers busied with the rolling of a cigarette. "It isn't often I get the blues.... I suppose it's thinking of the boys, out in all this——"

The dancer regarded with nice approval the finished work of her hands. A pink tongue took the measure of the little rice-paper cylinder, neatly sealing it.

"It's sure one hell of a day," she calmly commented. "First time they've shut up th' old showshop.... It'd give a camel th' hump!"

Abstractedly she puffed her home-made smoke. The storm—the suspension of business—the tragic jeopardy of the departed stampedes, acquaintances many of them, failed to oppress her spirits. She felt sorry for the boys, of course—hoped they'd get through all right. Her feeling was, however, impersonal and detached.

"Pat's made it easy afore she started t' blow up," she assured herself, the cause of her complacency disclosed.

"Look a-here, Bee," she exclaimed a few minutes later: "You been stickin' here in th' cabin by yerself too much.... It ain't good fer yeh.... What say if we slip into th' café fer a spell? It ain't only a coupla steps an' we c'n make it easy? There won't be no one in there this time a' day an' we c'n set an' chin with th' old man—p'raps th' Sergeant 'll come outa his den an' we c'd make up a four fer euchre?"

The singer roused herself with a start. "Perhaps that would be a good idea," she agreed. "I've been mooning to myself too much.... Let's go."

They hurried into their wraps. Although the café was but a few steps away, the cold was pitiless. Wild winds howled deadly menace, clutching at them, shrieking. With difficulty they kept their feet.

"She sure is a screamer!" gasped Trotters. "Hold tight onto me, dearie, an' we'll run fer it."

The run proved a zigzag struggle, a gaining of inch by inch, but the goal was won. The door of course proved rebellious, but gave entrance. They stood within, panting. That short encounter with the warring elements had been strenuous. Together they turned to close the door and the thought struck each—their incoming had passed unnoticed? Not one among the men had rushed forward to help with the troublesome door? All were gathered about the frost-rimed windows, excitedly jabbering. Their voices made a composite murmur, words indistinguishable. Curiosity impelled the girls toward that knot at the window, subterfuge of slight acquaintance for the time forgotten.

"What is it?" demanded the show-girl, touching the nearest arm. The Sourdough turned. His face was drawn and strained. Then he saw Beatrice and caught himself up. Best keep it from her if he could!

"That Montana Kid," he vouchsafed hesitantly. "We tried to stop him—but he *would* go!"

Silence fell. Man looked to man and toward the little singer, furtively. Without words, one by one wriggled clumsily into parkas and, with muffled offers of convoy to the girls of the company, faced the diminishing storm. Old Joe retreated behind his counter, there to busy himself mysteriously. Whatever he was doing seemed to demand much fussing with lower shelves, his head screened from view, ostrich-wise.

With hurt surprise, missing his accustomed greeting, Beatrice turned to her companion, mutely questioning. Trotters

alertly waited for the veteran's head to bob up from behind his barricade.

"Why all th' mystery?" she curtly demanded, when the head did come into view. Joe looked embarrassment. Worry manifestly strove for concealment.

"What is it, Joe?" the dancer repeated. From the time they had entered, Beatrice had not spoken. Foreboding of something sinister seemed to paralyse every faculty. Her eyes were fixed interrogatively on her ancient guardian. Her hands were outstretched to him. He would not meet her gaze.

"He *would* go—after him," they caught the cry wrung from him. "There wasn't any holding him back!"

Then all seemed to go dark with her. Hands flew to pallid face, as though to shut out some horrid vision. With a choking cry, she fell into the dancer's arms.

"Now you've done it!" that young woman wrathfully upbraided him. To place all blame upon Man was, with her, instinctive. "Help me t' get her somewheres where we c'n lay her down.... There, don't pay no attention t' me. Guess it wasn't your fault altogether," she added grudgingly, with sex contrariety.

Without words, Joe led to the small back room, so lately vacated by his friend and guest. It still was littered with his belongings.

"Get us a shot a' hootch," commanded Trotters, chafing the wrists of her unconscious charge. "An fer gawd's sake get them duds a' his outa here! Yeh don't want her t' see 'em th' first thing."

Obediently the patriarch obeyed.

"Careful," he cautioned a moment later, handing over the glass. "The liquor—she never touches it——"

"That's all right," she checked him. "How long's he been gone?"

He sketched the situation briefly. She nodded comprehension.

"Looks like we'll have t' lie like hell t' her," she commented tersely. "You jest play up t' whatever lines I feed yeh, when she comes round."

There was no time for more. Beatrice shuddered. Her eyes opened.

"It's all right, dearie," Trotters comforted, bending smilingly over her. "Now whatever d'yeh go an do a flop like that fer—scarin' th' gizzards outa us?"

The dancer was quite her capable self.

"Why—why, I thought—didn't Joe say?—hasn't he?—Papa Joe, what *are* you trying to keep from me? Where's Larry gone?"

"Why, you poor innocent," Trotters broke in, laughing loudly. "Larry's just gone over t' th' Post. Coupla a' th' boys come fer him.... They'll be settin' up t' th' big fire nice an' cosy b' now, I bet.... There ain't nothin' wrong, dearie.... If that crazy Kid wants t' go get himself froze it ain't nothin' in our young lives——"

"What yeh want t' be lookin' at me that way fer?" she challenged in rising key. Truthful brown eyes seemed searching her soul. "What d'we care what happ'ns t' Montana?" she rattled on hurriedly. "Good riddance, I'll say——"

She stopped suddenly. Beatrice had risen. She felt her arms tightly gripped—sought desperately to escape mute questioning.

"He ain't nothin' t' us," she repeated, turning to the old stalwart for support. "Ain't it right what I'm tellin' her, Joe?"

But that rock of dependence had failed. Inept in deceits, the Sourdough was executing a strategic retreat.

"Papa Joe!" Beatrice called him back. She faced him now, insistent, swaying slightly but controlled and courageous. "Just the truth? It's best.... See," she smiled, pitifully brave—"see, I'm quite all right now?"

Faltering, he told her as best he could. It had to be.

"But he's *bound* to turn back," the old man concluded, ostensibly confident. "He can't have gone far—Why, he ought to be back any minute now!"

The old-timer was regaining his poise. Work—occupation—action is ever the panacea for minds distraught. "We must make ready for him," he urged. "Here, girls, you take hold of things.... One of you fix up the bed.... Fresh coffee, very strong! Let's make it quickly! Some of that Bovril, too! ... I wonder could I leave things to you two? It's clearing up fine now. I might slip up the trail a piece——"

The girls were swiftly attacking the suggested tasks. He reached for his trailclothes.

* * * * *

While Dawson watched and worried for its men that day the wind had suddenly shifted. One hour it had come roaring across the range, driving before it great banks of sleety snow. In these the pale sun had vanished—swallowed like a tallow taper, while the storm fought, screaming, about the Dome, whirling its battalions thence down the gulches in frenzied fury. From dark until past the dawn hour the shrieking of the tempest had been continuous, an omnipresent proclamation of destruction. With hesitant daylight came abatement. The blizzard's scream sank to a sullen growl. Then stillness.... Great drifts had submerged all trails. The valley and draws were sheeted in virgin white, unbroken by sign of man or beast or bird. The pallid Arctic sun crept up from the eastern horizon to kiss the Dome, across such a desert of universal whiteness as it had looked down upon through the ages. A faint, pink glow swept, wave-like, down the great riverway, overhanging it with countless millions of shimmering rose diamonds.

* * * * *

When Fitzmaurice plunged into the storm it already was in its death throes. Weakened as he was, it seemed, however, invincible in violence. Buffeted on every side, he staggered blindly, doggedly forward. All landmarks had disappeared before an hour's struggle brought him to the outskirts of the town. His snow-shoes sank deep in the powdery crystals. Stunted ice-laden shrubs struck viciously at his head. Breathing tortured.

Instinctively, obedient to some occult sense of orientation, he held on. Every resource of will, of body, of woodcraft and of pride he rallied to his support. Coherent thought died. Action grew automatic. Again came that curious detachment he had felt toward the end of that mad fight with the Count, back on the Lindeman trail, it seemed ages and ages ago. But now there was something else, persistently intruding—a sternly urgent force, compelling, insistent, inexorable. Vaguely he sought to define it. It eluded the groping mind. At long last he had it! He was again in that little old police tent at Bennett—Scarath's eyes were boring into his—the Inspector was reciting the unwritten creed of the force they served:

"An' when you're all in and famished and frozen, and th' bally game's quite all up—why, sail in and finish th' job.... Go through hell and back again, snowblind an' starving an' mad.... Get th' man you go after.... Make damn sure you get him!"

Weariedly, determinedly, Sergeant Fitzmaurice pulled himself together, stumbling on.

"Get th' man you go after.... Make sure you get him!"

Long minutes—hours—eternities seemingly, he forced himself, step by step, forward into the wilderness of white

death—on, on, until he could no longer lift leaden feet. Blood-froth oozed from the muffled mouth, to freeze there, choking. His lungs gasped protest.

Air! Air! Air he must have or die! He sought to lift a heavy hand to his ice-caked hood. The hand refused obedience. Rage-shaken, he compelled it. The hood at last was off! Blood gushed from his mouth. Air bit tormented lungs. He weakly brushed dimming eyes, breaking a film of quick-forming ice. He reeled dizzily—sank slowly to his knees....

What was that? On the bleak hill-side, not ten yards distant? A something stuck out of the snow— a signpost of tragedy? ... Only a broken snowshoe! Indomitable will compelling his last reserves of strength, he dragged himself to that half-buried object. Subconsciously he realised what it meant: *He had got his man!* ... Blinded by the white hate of the storm, exhausted, accepting defeat, the Kid had here lost the trail, staggering up the little draw to make his bed with Death!

Digging determinedly, each breath a growing torture, the mountie uncovered a leg that ended in the foot to which clung that shattered snow-shoe. Scooping out yet more dry-as-dust snow, came to view a body. The man had fallen face down. A pack was strapped to the back.... He just managed to turn him over—then lay for a space inert—done for.... Another flogging of the will and somehow he got to his knees....

"Get the man you go after!"

Again rose the unconquerable spirit, subjugating protesting flesh. A mitten was dragged off. How hard to do such a simple thing! A hand sought the seat of life in that inert form. Yes! The heart still beat—faintly—feebly—very feebly. But the spark was there—a dim, transient, almost vanished spark. Nevertheless, a spark!

"Why, then, sail in and finish the job!"

* * * * *

How he managed it he could never recall. In after days it remained but a nightmare memory—disconnected, shadowy, horrible. Somehow he must have got the chap on his back, as a hunter packs a deer. Automatically he must have back-trailed to where they found them—old Joe and his rescue squad.

"It weren't more'n a quarter-mile out a' town," they afterwards told him. "Here was you, a'sprawlin' out on yer back with yer arms an' laigs stickin' up 'n th' air—like a beetle that's been flopped over. An' th' Kid underneath yeh.... Like t' hev squashed th' last bit a' life outa him if we hadn't happ'ned along in th' nick a' time!"

Chapter XIX Deep Waters

It was many days after his tilt with Death in the blizzard's robes before these explanations filtered through Fitzmaurice's subconsciousness. Those days for him were largely blank—time curiously subtracted from life. He slept—a tormented, troubled sleep, for how long he had no conception. Voices sometimes came to him, indefinitely familiar, pleasantly remembered. People moved about. Were they real people or mere phantom folk of this quiet shadowland? Perhaps, if he opened his eyes, he might know? Was it worth the effort? Did it matter? What did anything matter? ... Sleep encompassed him.

And then, one morning, he fancied a hand rested on his brow—a small hand, soft and cool, infinitely tender. Fancies only! Pleasant dreams! But how soothing that imagined touch? Wonderingly, his eyes opened. Vaguely they rested upon a young woman seated beside the couch. It would be *her* hand on his head? The touch tranquillised. He closed his eyes.... Only another dream!

Then he missed that caressing hand. Missing it troubled him. Again he opened his eyes, looking straight into other eyes—anxious eyes of brown, love-brimming. He felt their questioning and managed the ghost of a grin. Brown eyes grew radiant.

"Larry! My own! My own! ... You *are* coming back to me!" The whispered words flooded him with a surpassing gladness. Again he achieved a wan smile—slipping back to slumber. He felt somehow that all was well.

Beatrice sank to her knees on the rough board floor, burying her face in the bearskin coverlet.

"He will live! He will *live* now! ... Merciful Lord, I thank Thee!" She poured out the broken thanks of a heart overflowing.

She still knelt when old Joe cautiously opened a crack in the door. Her eyes also were closed, but the aura of her happiness filled the humble chamber. The patriarch tip-toed away, smiling happily.

* * * * *

So worth while an asset is a sound constitution that, the crisis passed, Fitzmaurice recovered rapidly, thanks largely (as the doctor freely conceded) to excellent nursing. Came a day when he sat by the window, the spring sunshine now giving hint of warmth, and received his physician in state. Joe beamed from the doorway.

"How long before he can see visitors, doctor?" he inquired. "His O.C. and the boys are asking."

"Not yet—by no means yet," came decisive rejoinder. "Next week, at the earliest. He's had another close call. Mustn't take any chances."

The Sourdough nodded agreement. Not for him to suggest taking chances.

"And Montana?" he asked. "Think you there is any hope?"

The doctor shook his head—an emphatic negative.

"Not a ghost of a chance," said he. "May pass out any time. Marvellous how he's held on.... Tremendous vitality—strong will power. Damn pity—such good man-stuff spoiled."

* * * * *

But even doctor's orders are not as the laws of the Medes. Grappling once again with Life's small concerns, Fitzmaurice began to fill in, hazy memory aiding, the sketchy accounts of his last duty that Beatrice, the doctor and his ancient friend supplied. The Kid had not died after all, then! That grim struggle had not been unavailing. But living how? A pitiful, useless fragment of human flotsam! Mortification had set in, necessitating a double amputation.... Poor Montana! How he pitied the chap! Each morning he asked for him. Each day they told him simply:

"Still living—but the end *must* come soon!"

"I'd awfully hate to fancy he thought I had it in for him, or any such silly rot," he reflected, bits of the past coming back.

Then came one particular morning of the now glorious Arctic spring. He sat by the unshuttered window, looking out on the sun-flooded valley—listening to the hum of the town. Whisperings drifted to him from the café—admonitions to someone not to talk so loud—his own name more than once mentioned....

Curiosity intrigued and inaction irked him. He dragged himself from his chair, seized Joe's stout walking-stick and with its aid tottered out.

"Thought I heard someone asking for me?" he saluted a much-surprised group in talk with the Sourdough. The latter stood open-mouthed.

"This will never do!" he declared peremptorily. "We can't have you undoing the doctor's work! ... Come now, back to bed with you!"

An over-white hand waved protest. "I know, old friend—I know. But it's beastly hard, doing nothing—gets a bit on th' nerves. I need to be tripping about a bit now. Do me good, really.... Wasn't some chap here asking for me?"

Joe glanced round uneasily—tried to flash telepathic warning.

"Why surely," he equivocated. "They're asking how you get on. And I tell them the doctor, he said——"

He could get no further. The obtuse Swede he had signalled for silence had totally missed the message.

"It bane this way, Sergeant," he picked his words. "That man you bring in from trail—that Montana *cheechako*—He ask an' ask can he see you—Says he yoost got to before he cash' in.... Ay bane taal him——"

"Where is he? Th' Sisters' place, I s'pose?" The convalescent did not wait for more. Old Joe trembled with premonition of doctor's orders defied.

"But not yet—You can't go, not yet!" he protested. "In a few days, then we'll see, eh?"

He recognised it was useless. Grim out-thrust of jaw—a tightening of the thin lips told him Larry was bound to go. Quixotic, obstinate—Would he never consider himself?

"In a day or so—As soon as the doctor says," he pleaded, anxious but hopeless at heart.

"Always trying to keep me out of mischief!" The firm lips relaxed in a whimsical smile. "But I *have* been good lately? No running about nights, eh? ... You see, Joe," the voice struck an obstinate note—"You see he mightn't be there if I waited.

"Oh, no," hurriedly anticipating further protest. "No more crazy stunts—But, wrapped up a bit of course—The boys could lend a hand? Stretcher'd do th' trick? Never forgive m'self if I didn't go."

The Sourdough sighed ponderously. Upthrown hands expressed his unwilling surrender.

"You'll kill yourself yet," he predicted gloomily.... "Lie down again now, like a good lad.... I'll see what we can fix up."

* * * * *

An hour later Fitzmaurice was being borne in state to the little hospital self-sacrificing angels of mercy had planted there at the edge of the world, through sheer love of humankind, its doors ever open alike to derelict or to millionaire. Holding churchliness over-lightly and religion an emotional abstraction well enough for women but apart from the path of man-life, the chivalry of the frontier resolved itself nevertheless almost into worship of the brave nursing sisterhood. *Their* religion was a thing concrete—the spirit of mercy manifest, in deeds of unceasing devotion.

Meeting the convalescent's convoy at the door, the black-gowned Mother Superior put warning finger to lip.

"Quietly—very quietly," she whispered. "He's sleeping now, I think. Oh yes, still alive, but weaker.... He keeps asking for you. I did not think you could come."

This of course to Fitzmaurice. His boots the Swede was unlacing with clumsily willing fingers. His own moccasined feet could be trusted to make no sound.

"I have prayed Our Lady each day—that, should it be His will, he might live for this hour," she gently told him. "He so wanted to talk with you."

Into the diminutive ward she led, noiselessly placing a chair by the white-covered cot. "Sit here by him," she invited. "He may waken any minute.... I will get you a stimulant. The doctor would say I should."

Silently she moved away. The Swede bent his harvest-moon face.

"Ay bane vait outside," he whispered, soundlessly effacing himself.

Fitzmaurice turned to the cot. The swarth hair showed densely black on the snowy pillow. He thought of that couch of death in which it had lain last. The shrunken face gleamed waxen, Death's seal already upon it. A faintest respiration contradicted that ghastly pallor. Beneath the coverlet, little more than half the cot's length, showed the uprise of a body. Thence to the footboard the cool sheet lay smooth and flat. Grasping the significance, a groan escaped the watcher.

Montana opened wondering eyes, gazing into the face bent above him. Recognition dawned. He essayed to reach out an emaciate hand. Fitzmaurice clasped wasted fingers. The dying man looked his thanks. His lips moved almost imperceptibly. Larry leaned to catch the whisper:

"You're—all—right?"

A nod gave quick confirmation. "Top-hole," said his visitor. "Steady it is, old chap. Don't give up th' ship!"

Dulling eyes sparkled faintly. Again the lips moved:

"No—use," came whispered. "Better so—Never was—much good!"

Once more he rested. "Dropped off to sleep," thought the Sergeant, still clasping that icy hand. There was a slight return pressure of cold fingers. The Kid's eyes re-opened. He seemed flogging his will to effort of further speech. Once again Larry bent to hear:

"You're—*all—right!*" This time it was not a question.... "Remember—back there—at The Scales? ... I said I'd be waitin' fer yeh—over—th' Divide?" The whisper could just be caught. "Well I guess—I will. But I won't—*be packin'—no gun!*"

The whisper trailed off into pregnant silence. A tremor disturbed the waxen face. Eyelids fluttered and were still. The fingers stiffened.

Montana had cashed in.

Chapter XX A Misfit Parable

Those after-days of lingering convalescence, for his strength had been sorely tried, were black and bleak for Fitzmaurice. He did not "pick up quickly," as the doctor had predicted. Why not, much mystified that conscientious man. His patient had been "coming along fine—a most satisfactory 'case.'" Then apathy seemed to engulf him—long fits of abstraction, brooding silences, mechanical acknowledgments of kindly attentions. He lived within himself, walking paths of darkness alone.

"I can't diagnose these new symptoms," the vexed physician grumbled. "Here he ought to be fit as a fiddle now, and just look at him—Old Man Gloom himself! What's wrong with the chap, will you tell me?"

The Sourdough had no answer. He too was worried. His friend was drifting from him—turning into a taciturn stranger. The puzzling metamorphosis pained and perplexed. Casting about for clues, he yet failed to read the riddle. Fitzmaurice had raised round himself an impassable wall of reserve.... Why couldn't he "open up"?

But if doctor and counsellor were troubled, how much the more Beatrice? Why might not she share his worries, whatever they were? she sobbed to a tear-stained pillow. Not that she questioned his loyalty or his love. She knew they were hers—entire. Why then shut her out of his life? ... She had been so happy! Now sorrow companioned her.

"He just closes up in his shell—and I'm lonesome and miserable," she confessed to her foster-father, a suspicious catch in her voice.

"Clouds will come, but the sun it is sure to break through," he reminded gently.

The drooping of the Oregon rose began even to excite remark.

"What's eatin' this dame a' Joe's?" Gertrude whispered casually, as the minor drama unfolded. "Don't seem t' have no pep a' tall these days—Gettin' peaked an' painful, ain't she? ... Mebbe Johnnie-a'-th'-eyeglass's been handin' her a raw deal?"

She was "flabbergasted," as she later confided to Ivan, when her side-kick turned on her and "like t' bit her head off."

"Not on yer tintype," had been Trotters' verbatim rejoinder: "He's *some* man!"

The surprised comedienne had looked her bewilderment. A come-back suggested itself:

"Fer gawd's sake, yeh ain't fallin' fer him too?" she had quizzed.

Whereat Trotters had laughed loudly—a strident, mirthless laugh.

"Me? Fall fer a pink dressin' jacket?" she retorted hysterically. "That's th' biggest scream ever! ... At that," she hastily supplemented, "he oughta have quite a wad a' back-pay comin' now—'nough t' string along fer a night er two!"

* * * * *

Dawson in the weeks that followed forgot the taciturn sergeant, forgot the café singer and her conjectured troubles, forgot all the commonplaces of the treadmill of its normal life. The mosquitoes it could not forget, much though it longed to. In the swelter of swift-flying Arctic summer, it recalled that deadly blizzard as almost desirable. Flowers glowed on the emerald hills, fragrant and many-hued. Boating on the dun river—out-of-door dancing in the continuous sunshine—chilled drinks, ice-cream, straw hats and shirtsleeves—and always the one conversational theme: News from the creeks of the clean-up. Would it run fifty millions—sixty perhaps—or a hundred?

Attention focused there, as began the golden inflow from creeks and bench claims, where dumps diminished daily, sluice-boxes discharged their hurrying streams into riffle-box or primitive rocker and panting men toiled hip-high in the glutinous mud till they fell, exhausted, sleeping in the muck where they dropped until booted back to business. For these days the long winter's labour—the monotonous thawing and shovelling—creak of chain and windlass—the straining of easy credit, owners borrowing blindly, oft-times at usurious interest, on the uncertain collateral of what their dumps might hold, to keep pay-rolls going. It was when the unleashed waters came rushing down the miles of costly-crude flume and the long-awaited-for clean-up was "on" that glamorous romances of fortune were written in the sweat of over-driven men, to excite a continent's envy.

The Clean-up! Experience laughingly shamed! Sage predictions by facts contradicted! Hobo and grub-staked wanderer of departed Autumn welcomed back from the creeks—millionaires! Sixty cents to the shovelful from some derided dud; scarce the working costs from mounds of reputedly solid treasure! Laugh! Eat! Drink! Dice! Dance! Crowd the gaming tables! Throw Care to the winds and the yellow dust to Folly! "Plenty more where it came from!" Continuous carousal centred in Klondike's Capital. Mad magic was in the air.

Down at the busy wharves strung along the Front, steamers crawling in from St. Michael or gallantly racing to dock from up-river terminals disgorged their belated thousands, fretting and ultra-anxious, to swell the camp's population and forthwith be caught up in the whirl of the gold glamour and its fevered frenzy. Darting, pushing, hauling, desperately

driven, deck-hands and roustabouts cleared holds of their precious freights from the coastal ports, while captains and outbound passengers irascibly hurled anathema at any wastage of minutes until lines could be cast off and new adventure challenged. Rush! Drive! Hurry everywhere! Time a bit more than precious! Each voyage completed now meant a ship's worth in profit; and roistering victors in the season's bout with Fortune, whose millions in virgin metal overflowed safes and strongboxes, were lavish with perquisites for speed—more speed—on the way!

It was "Ho, for the homes Outside," or the great cities of garish delights that waited eagerly to clutch at plethoric pokes!

Strenuous twenty-four-hour days for the under-manned Post Police! Paternally indulgent, persistently patient, discreetly shutting the eye to trivial misdemeanours bred of ebullient spirits, charitably overlooking harmless exuberance, they moved about everywhere—guides, mentors and counsellors to the newly arriving host, the terror of crooked gamblers, swift and stern with the vicious elements inevitably present. The turbulence of the time, the need for unrelaxing alertness, was welcome to Sergeant Fitzmaurice. Work left little time for self-communion, distracting and troublous. He hurled himself into the game, much the better for it. Not work, but worry, it is that makes havoc of health.

Letters came in thousands by each restless riverboat—love-links, many of these, with Outside homes—months old as a rule, but welcome as though the ink had scarce dried on them. Newspapers too, once more! For all such mail matter the dog-team post of Winter had been taboo. Again the camp felt itself part of the Outer world—began anew to concern itself with affairs other than the mere winning of wealth. Two outstanding world events claimed more than passing interest: The Spanish-American war was hastening to its close. The American group developed insatiate appetite for every last detail. Also were dark clouds gathering in the distant South African sky. Boer and Briton, signs portended, soon might lock in conflict there.

It was toward the veldtland Fitzmaurice's thoughts turned incessantly. Again and again he had read a much-creased and travel-worn letter, every word of it now familiar, that had found him after three months' wandering while the sick-room held him prisoner. The sight of a brother's handwriting! The news that letter gave! How at first they had thrilled! The letter, at the outset, had seemed to offer the key to the Great Opportunity.

Long threatening war was near, so the brother wrote: "Father Paul will be taught his lesson." The time was ripe to put on the map of Africa another big splotch of red. Fighting-men for the flag were wanted—straight-shooting irregulars. A commission was waiting for him! ... A path to fame and fortune might be carved with a ready sword.... When the thing was won and over there would be the victor's spoils!

"All business is bound to boom when we've put the Boer in his place," the letter told him. "One can make himself rich very quickly then, taking obvious short-cuts."

They counted so confidently on his starting at once for Cape Town! Yet he found himself hesitating? ... With the Army, on active service? It had been the dream of his youth! ... The prospect was just as painted. He could feel it truth. And yet—?

A year ago it would have been so different. There would then have been no doubts, no waiting. He knew he would have "gone like a shot." But now? What *was* it holding him back? ... Parting with Beatrice? It would be a wrench, but it was not only that, he felt. This war would be short and decisive. Afterward might be golden years, with her always by his side. What then was it? Why didn't he seize this chance? His own vacillation vexed him. He kept probing for the root of his strange reluctance:

It could not last long, so they all predicted. What chance had Oom Paul's little country against Britain's might? A pigmy versus a giant, bantam matched with heavyweight, a handful against a horde? ... It wasn't a sporting chance.... And one boasted of British fair play! What real cause for war was there? He could feel no crusader's zeal! No great principle seemed at stake! ... From this farthest end of the world it seemed all poor, paltry politics—clever, unscrupulous scheming, with grand larceny the objective! He felt almost shamed for England, angrily indignant—

There must be something more! That was not Britain's way—far from it! He had missed—he must have—the essential cause of the quarrel. It would be for a principle surely, not mere conquest! ... Why didn't the papers give more

of the facts that really mattered. He searched inch by inch his *Seattle Times*, only three weeks old.

"What do they use such beastly small type for?" he grumbled irritably. "Wish I had my bally glass!"

The Sourdough's pipe halted, half-way to his lips. His match flickered out.

"It does seem, lad, that you don't see some things like you might," said he cryptically. Thought had flown to his protégée's perplexities. The girl was "eating her heart out." His random shot missed its mark. Fitzmaurice's thoughts just then were martial not marital. Mankind, the old man reflected, was ever a curious puzzle—civilisation yet more mysterious. One could only wait and watch while the scroll was turned. Gold madness! Love madness! Hates—Rivalries—useless Enmities! All maladies centuries old, for which no age had found a cure!

"Would you go—if this war should be?" he questioned perfunctorily.

"They want me to—I don't know yet ... I'm thinking it over a bit——"

He was not looking toward Beatrice's favourite corner or he must have caught her sudden paling—an instinctive shrinking as from a blow. The Sourdough saw and sighed. What was one to do?

* * * * *

So short summer sped and speculations crystallised into certainty as the war clouds thickened. The Sergeant went about his duties, his problem still in solution. Heralds of early autumn began to present themselves. River steamers shuttled forth and back, with capacity cargoes inward—outbound passenger lists stretched elastically. In warehouses, stores and cabins winter stocks were inventoried and very religiously checked. No dread of spectre Famine this time, if officialdom knew itself. Nights brought hint of frost, and police orders forthwith issued that, lacking shown cash or supplies to carry them over the winter, it was "Outside" for everyone. Enforcing that drastic mandate was far from delightful duty. Fitzmaurice found it so.

"We're as jolly popular as dog-catchers," he disgustedly told himself one Indian summer day, tramping toward the Trilby. "Shouldn't wonder if I'm in for a lovely slangfest right now," he resignedly added. "What a ghastly demnition grind!"

His immediate quest was for the debonair Count, not for surmised sins of commission—the reverse. De Maurin had not, as required, reported his maintenance resources, yet disclosed no intention of wintering Outside. Like the lilies of the field, he toiled not. Nor was he supposed to spin. The police did not view with favour that particular parable.

The Count was not of the bar-room throng. With a nod to the drink dispensers, the Sergeant passed on to the boxes. Not there either! Dressing-rooms as a last resort? Groping down a cavernous corridor he located the man by his voice. It came from beyond a closed door—domineering, insistent, angry. There were hesitant interruptions—a woman tremulously pleading.

"My usual beastly luck!" Fitzmaurice grumbled. "Butting into a family row.... Well, let's get the dirty work over!"

He rapped and silence ensued. No movement—no sound—within. Again he applied his knuckles.

"Who's there?" It was Gertrude's voice. No move, though, toward the door.

"It's the Count I'm looking for," he explained. "Sorry to bother—but I heard his voice here.... Won't detain you, de Maurin. Step outside here, please."

Came whisperings. Then the girl spoke, feigning much surprise.

"Th' Count? I ain't seen him t'day! Likely he's outa town!"

So that was the lay of the land! The Power of the Law grinned grimly.

"My mistake," he responded blandly. "Well, then, I'll just buy you a drink and trickle on!"

Open sesame this, according to every rule, but for once it failed.

"I'm changin' now," the girl snapped back. "S'mother time, thanks."

Once more he hammered the flimsy panel, this time insistent.

"Say, you get 'way fr'm my door," shrilled the girl, alarmed. "Told yeh I'm busy, didn't I?"

Simulated indignation masked questioning fear. The job threatened to be nasty, he decided.

"You—de Maurin!" he barked. "No use playin' 'possum. Out here, lively now!"

A stifled scream from the girl—more whispering. The Count flung out in a rage:

"Well, if it isn't Mr. Keyhole Gumshoe!" he sneered.

Larry flushed hot. He specially loathed this man. His list itched to deliver the answer. Duty held it back.

"I'm not calling socially," said he shortly. "This is strictly official——"

"I see you're in uniform," the Count interrupted. "Otherwise I'd have pitched you out!"

Again wrath rose. But policemen must be priests of patience.

"Sometimes I don't wear the harness," he could not forbear to answer. He half hoped the Count would press him a bit too far.

De Maurin preferred, however, to bait from the safety zone. He found the sport almost amusing.

"Don't take long t' shed a tunic?" he mockingly invited.

The sergeant gritted his teeth. He mustn't "fly off the handle." Private quarrels were not approved. He stepped briskly forward.

"Cut the comedy," he said tersely. "This is business. You haven't reported your provisions. Staying Inside or going Out?"

"Why, how damn interested you are in my affairs!" the Count drawled.

"I've told you I'm here on duty," came sharp reminder. "You report within the week—or get Outside while the river's open!"

"You'll butt into my affairs once too often," de Maurin hotly declared. But Fitzmaurice was stalking away.

"That job's done, thank heaven!" he reflected with relief.

The Count watched him turn to the bar. Gertrude crept to him, trembling.

"What'd he want with yeh, dear?" she ventured.

The Russian ignored her question, striding back into the room.

"Shut that door," he ordered. "What did he want? Why, t' run me out—sneaking English swine! Want's t' save his hide.... Remember th' fuss we had on th' trail? I'd a' fixed him if his gunmen hadn't butted in. He knows he's got it comin' t' him!"

The girl's hand sought his, loyally.

"He *is* a mean, sneakin' hound!" she agreed emphatically. "But what made him come 'round here?"

"Don't yeh see?" the Count turned on her. "That damned Order about supplies? Thinks it gives him a chance t' run me outa camp!"

"Th' dirty dog!" the girl fiercely commented. "He can't do it, though, ken he? They ain't got nothin' on you, dear?"

"Not a thing—except that I'm flat," he replied with cunning. "It's a crime up here t' be short a' money! ... How much d'yeh think yeh c'd raise before that last boat goes out?"

She considered seriously. Three weeks would be the limit.

"Couldn't make more'n eight er nine hundred," she announced dolefully. "Business ain't comin' my way much."

"An' yer rings?" de Maurin reminded. "Oughta get a coupla hundred on them?"

"That's so!" she conceded, brightening. "I forgot about them.... Mebbe I c'd hock some a' my costumes, too!"

The suggestion was promptly approved.

"Well, see what yeh can do," he directed. "You get your hooks on a thousand an' I'll see what I c'n dig up. Might make it on fifteen hundred.... May be it's a good idea going Out! Not much doin' here now, an' I might get a match on in Seattle."

"I'll sure rustle all I can," said she eagerly. He knew that she meant it, too.... Things might be worse, after all.

"Get busy, then," he admonished.... "You're not a bad little scout."

She flushed happily. It *would* be nice to go Out with Ivan! Her joy was complete when he kissed her—voluntarily.

"Got t' see where I c'n cop some coin, too," he remarked, departing. "Don't let anything slip past yeh!"

"Yeh bet I won't," she laughed, waving him adieu.

She was more radiant than for weeks when Trotters dashed in to don her "war paint."

"What yeh think, dearie?" she exulted. "Me an' Ivan's goin' Outside!"

The dancer sank weakly on a trunk.

"Spring it again!" she gasped. "You er me's goin' bugs!"

"Ivan's goin' Outside—fer th' winter," she repeated. "Course he's takin' me along," she added proudly.

Still Trotters stared, ever sceptical. There was a catch somewhere.

"Somebody left yeh a fortune?" she ventured. She had no doubt who would foot the bills.

"No such luck," chirruped Gertrude. "We'll dig up enough somehow."

"*You'll* dig, you mean," thought her friend. "What started th' big idea?" curiosity moved her to ask.

The sunshine fled Gertie's face.

"Say, Trotters," she spluttered wrathfully, "what yeh think that English guy tried t' pull? Wanted t' give Ivan th' run-

out! Ain't he th' dirty swine?"

Trotters' lips puckered in a small red "O." So that was it! Poor Gert!

"Sure!" she responded mechanically.

Meanwhile the Count had gone straight to Nigger Jim's dance-hall. His best smile signified he had found her he sought. "Little Egypt" (from Hoboken) was the ruling favourite of the house. Of late she had been piling up the coin. Therefore, in the Count's judgment, she invited wooing.

"Looking pretty as a picture t'day," he greeted her ardently. "Let's you an' I split a bottle!"

He was whistling blithely as he sought the street later, headed for the café and dinner. With the menu before him, his thoughts wandered from the changeless card. Cariboo and the singer were talking.

"He hasn't been in all day," the old man was saying.

"If it's th' Sergeant you're talking about," said the Count idly, "you'll likely find him hangin' round one a' th' dressing-rooms at th' Trilby. He was there an hour ago."

A peep over the top of the card, in the little balladist's direction, gave him satisfaction.

Chapter XXI The Jew in the Judgment Seat

"It's every last cent I c'd get!" Gertrude gasped, defensively. She stood, trembling, in the wreckage of the dingy dressing-room that had "come t' seem 'most like home."

The Count, glowering, rolled a cigarette, perched on her packed-and-ready trunk.

"So that's all yeh think a' me?" he sneered.

She caught her breath sharply. Had she not given all? She searched his face, vainly, for a glimmer of hope, waiting—tortured, hopeless.

Count Ivan flicked the ash from his cigarette. His hand reached for the bills on the table. Carefully he counted—eleven hundred and sixty-four dollars. The roll he jammed into his pocket. Standing up, he regarded the distraught contributor to his needs with reflective contempt. Terror seized her.

"Ivan," she faltered, "yeh ain't—yeh wouldn't go an' leave me up here?"

Without speaking, he strolled to the door. She slumped down in a heap. Glancing over his shoulder, callously unconcerned, he saw her huddled up on the floor.

"Not enough here for two," he mumbled. "Yeh know I've *got* t' get Out?"

She heard him, as in a dreadful dream, dumbly. Stricken sore, she surrendered to grief. Ivan! Her Ivan! He was going away without her! Never more would she see him, feel his arms about her, softly press her lips to his cheek as he slept. She was helpless to hold him; she knew it now. This would be the end! ... If only she might die! One shot, through the temple! ... If only she had the nerve!

The door was closed quietly, so quietly she did not hear. The Count slunk away.... Shuddering, moaning, sobbing brokenly, dry-eyed in misery, she lay prone on the littered floor. Life for her was finished.

A knock? Her heart missed a beat! ... Ivan had come back for her? He wanted her after all? ... Cruel, disappointing hope! *He* would not knock! ... It was only the town carter, come for her trunk. She'd "better be getting down t' th' boat," he reminded her, if she "didn't want t' be left behind!" ... If she didn't *want* to be left behind!

In a daze she told him she wasn't going—heard his whistle of sheer surprise.

What was to become of her now? What would she do with herself? Who was left for her even to talk to? Trotters was going Out, too!

Listlessly she dragged herself to the window, gazing vacantly into the street. How crowded it was to-day—people rushing everywhere—happily excited.... The steamer would sail at three—the last boat of the year! And she would not be on it! She would be left behind! ... Could she live through another winter? But that didn't matter now. She could sleep and forget, if she died——

Suddenly she grew tense, staring starkly, unbelieving. Pulses pounded.... It couldn't really be—yet it was—Ivan! ... There! Over in front of the Pine Tree Rooms! ... But there was a woman with him! He was holding her bag! They were talking and *laughing* together! The woman was glancing back! ... It was that "Little Egypt"!

Her knees gave way. She crumpled up in collapse. Unconsciousness extended merciful arms.

* * * * *

It was a day of days in Dawson, a day of extremest contrasts—delirious delights, deep dark despondency; joyous farewell carousing of jubilant outbound argonauts who had found the golden fleece, sodden, solitary drinking in countless cabins of those elected to stay. The going-out of the ice—the coming of the season's first adventuring steamer—intoxicant tidings of rich, new strikes—even the clean-up itself, failed to pack into crowded hours the hilarity and the gloom of "last steamer day." All morning the bars were besieged, perspiring servitors hastening to "set 'em up—set 'em up just once more!" At the tables the impassive bankers declared the blue sky the limit and raked in tribute of golden dust to the goddess Luck. Self-conscious sourdoughs promenaded, unrecognised by their friends, in unfamiliar raiment of the wider world. Thus until noon struck. One o'clock found the town lethargic. By two it was dead and deserted. The boat sailed, didn't she, at three? Dawson shifted *en masse* to the river-front. The erst animated business streets were abandoned to the somnolent huskies and their ever-faithful fleas.

* * * * *

In the empty café Cariboo Joe—glasses, worn only in strictest privacy, gripping his enormous nose—gave uninterrupted attention to the *Hebrew Journal*. A Peg-top was clenched in his still-sound teeth, its collar of ash lengthening. The *Journal* was two weeks old—still strictly fresh, being just arrived. As he scanned the market quotations indignation boiled.

"Four-bits? Four-bits for a salmon?" Incredible price! "Why that is a robbery!" he snorted impatiently. "Never have I paid more than twenty cents—in the old days, a dime! ... 'Eggs, new laid, forty cents!' ... A quarter at most they'd be worth!" [That his own charge for one lone egg (vintage of '98) had been two dollars scant weeks before, conveniently was forgotten.] "Clams, fifty cents a basket!" Cigar-butt was flung away. This last straw of irritation had cracked the back of credence. Out came the consoling pipe. Philosophy crept back under cover of the smoke-cloud.

"Times must change of course," he mused. "Wages, they rise also.... So *our* prices, too, must go up! ... The people they will grumble—but pay!"

He turned to another page, to read over and over again one ten-line paragraph:

"Solly Oppenheimer's Rachael married? Married?" he repeated, incredulous. "Some mistake there, it must be! She is only a little girl—not so old as my Naomi, when together they go to the school.... That would be five—no four years

ago! ... Four years? And Naomi, she was fifteen then? ... Yes, true it might be, of course." He'd forgotten how swiftly time speeds. They were growing up—boys and girls of but yesterday.

The newspaper slipped from his hand.... Only three years ago? He had lost his "baby" then! ... Three years? ... She, too, would have been a woman now! Making a marriage also, perhaps, just like Solly's Rachael! ... His pretty *pitzale kind!*

The smoke eddied lazily ceilingward. His pipe had gone out, neglected. On the misty glasses, memory painted pictures, Naomi in all of them.

Came surprising interruption. Day-dreams dissolved. Light, hurried footsteps—click of high-heeled shoes—sounded from the deserted street. Someone fingered the weather-worn latch. He got heavily to his feet. Who would be coming? he wondered. Was not all Dawson at the dock?

Gertrude flung through the door, going straight to the nearest table, his greeting unheeded. Amazed, he stared blankly at her. So strange she seemed, so unlike herself! What had changed her so? How haggard she was, and pale? Why yes, no paint-to-day on those death-white cheeks! ... Silent—abstracted—detached, she sat glaring into space.

Something sadly amiss, old Joe realised. She had had some bad news perhaps? ... Compassion welled up within him... Poor child! Poor, weak, reckless, unhappy child!

"Why I thought you had gone Outside?" it was on his tongue to say. He checked the unuttered words.

"Jus' some tea er somethin'," she said weakly as he came to serve her, mechanically setting forth knife, fork, spoons—the inevitable glass of water. She did not look up. He turned toward his kitchen perplexed. Impulse—instinct—Providence—a frontiersman's "hunch" compelled a backward glance. The girl, with shaking hand, was emptying a whitish powder into her water! With dread premonition, he whirled swiftly back to the table, snatching the glass from her hand.

"Whatcha do that for?" she demanded fiercely, half rising, hysterically overwrought.

"One minute," he answered quietly. "That water—it is not so fresh!"

"Nev' mind," she protested. "Don't bother."

She reached for the salvaged glass. He would not surrender it. There was something there looking much like strychnine.

"No, it is not quite fresh," he insisted firmly. "The tea, I will make it now." Yet he made no move kitchenward. Knowing something of her affairs—was not the town's grist of gossip almost nightly brought to his mill?—his sympathy went to her. Plainly she needed a friend.

"Tea? I don't want no tea!" she angrily contradicted. "Cup a' coffee I said."

Elbows on the table, she buried her face in her hands. Her shoulders heaved convulsively. Sobs racked her.

"Whatcha mean? ... Whatcha standin' there watchin' me fer? ... What right yeh got t' interfere?" she mumbled protestingly. "All I want's t' be let alone!"

"Sometimes it is best for us not to be quite alone," he answered simply, groping for ways to help. What was he to say or do? Such bitter brooding was bad.

"Myself, I was very lonely when you came in—lonely and unhappy," the deep voice confessed. "We all have our troubles, Gertrude. They are tests Life sets us. Through our trials it is that we find our souls——"

"Souls?" It was shot out vindictively. "I ain't got no soul! ... Ain't I jest a variety cat? They don't hev none——"

"There you are wrong—all wrong," he eagerly contradicted. "The soul, it may sleep perhaps, but always it is there.... May be it is that we do not give it a chance——"

"Chance?" Again she caught at a word, passionately. "What chance has girls like me got? With men foolin' 'em an' lyin' t' 'em an' shoo'in' 'em along t' hell?"

"I know. I know," sadly he admitted. "It is hard for the woman. The shadows get very black. But yet, *the shadows are always behind us when we look at the sun*.... You are young—Be a brave girl and brace up. Happy days they will come——"

"Oh *drop* it!" she broke in scornfully. "Happy days? Happy hell! ... Yeh goin' t' get me that tea?"

"Coffee, wasn't it?" he questioned mildly, her outburst ignored. "I will make it fresh, in a minute.... You are in no hurry, no? May I sit down here with you then? ... Do you know of what it was I was thinking, just as you came in? ... I am glad you *did* come."

He caught a swift, suspicious glance. Her hands fidgeted nervously under cover of the table oilcloth.

"I was thinking of my own little girl," the old man continued softly. "She would have been about your age.... She—she left me—just three years ago."

He had roused her interest. Suddenly sitting up, she fixed questioning eyes upon him.

"Whatcha mean, Joe, left yeh? Skipped off with some guy, did she?"

"Death took her," he answered gravely.

The girl's head sank.

"She was lucky," he heard her groan. "Wisht I was her!"

"It ain't no use, Joe!" She sprang to her feet. "Yeh mean all right I s'pose, but yeh can't understan'.... I ain't no good. None a' us box-rustlers ken be or we wouldn't be in th' business.... Yeh can't make no good woman outa a girl that's started wrong an' kep' goin'.... Pretty soon it sorta gets inta yer blood an' comes natch'ral. An' th' further yeh go, th' more th' kinda folks you been talkin' about seems queer chumps. They ain't human t' us. They ain't real like. Yeh get t' hate 'em an' guy at 'em an' laugh—only deep down, yeh don't mean it. Yer jest wishin' t' gawd t' be dif'rent.... But yeh can't—never—once't yeh get goin'.... Nev' mind that tea, Joe.... I forgot somethin'——"

She started for the door. The old man barred the way.

"What was it?" he asked, with studied casualness. "I could run out for it may be, while you have the coffee.... I don't want to be alone," he added as an appeal.

She hesitated—then burst out stormily:

"Guess yer tea or coffee wouldn't do me no good.... Ain't kick enough t' it.... I got t' get me somethin' t' make me sleep good an' hard or I'll go crazy!"

Her hand sought the latch.

"Wait! Wait!" he implored. Desperate cases called for drastic treatment. "I've old brandy here," he urged—"Old brandy that can't be beat in Dawson!"

Indifferently acquiescent, she halted and turned back. The Sourdough went for the bottle, taking with him that glass of water that was "not quite fresh." Carefully he pushed it far back on one of the shelves. The bottle he placed on the

table.

"Sometimes it is a friend," he philosophised. "In sickness—And is not Grief a sickness?"

Filling her glass to the brim, she shoved the bottle across.

"Where's yours?" she demanded. "Ain't yeh been tellin' me you got 'em too?"

"I haven't touched hard stuff in years," he protested unguardedly.

She set down her glass, untasted.

"I ain't goin' t' drink alone!" said she, sullenly stubborn.

"Well, this once then," he conceded hastily. He poured a small drink for himself, the girl watching narrowly.

"That's not fair," she insisted. "Yeh can stand as much as I ken, a big man like you.... Fifty-fifty er I won't touch it neither!"

Obediently he filled the glass. No telling what she might do? That other glass, back of the counter? He thought of it, shuddering. She might have more of those sugary powders? He must—He must watch her closely!

"Here's t' them we love!" she shouted recklessly, tossing off her drink in a gulp. At once she poured out another. "Here! No heel-taps there!—Drink it all up, old boy!" A flush began to tint the pallid cheeks. Frenzy gripped her. He must drain his glass too—every drop, she insisted fiercely.

"Here's t' them we——" Her stock toast again—unfinished. *Them we love?* ... Ivan was on the boat! ... He'd be going in less than an hour! ... With that woman that had stolen him from her——

Something clutched at her wounded heart. A great cry escaped her. Arms outflung, she was rushing out. Once more the old man moved quickly.

"Let us finish our drinks," he commanded. "Fifty-fifty! You said it yourself?"

Discarded! Abandoned! Scorned! Her idol fallen and her small world in ruins, Fear trod upon the heels of Disillusionment! Panic seized her. She must get away—somewhere—anywhere—quickly! ... But who could help? Where could she go?

Compellingly, the voice of the patriarchal Jew reached her through the chaos of affrighted confusion—dominant—insistent. His fingers grasped her wrist.

"One more drink!" he invited—commanded. "Surely *you* can stand *one* more?" Necessity called for guile. He must be cunning—tactful! He dared not let her go! ... "Let Wisdom guide me," was his unconscious prayer. Ends must justify means. Aloud, he repeated: "Just one?"

Was he sneering at her? Subconsciously, habit reacted to challenge. She lurched back to her seat.

"I'll see *you* under th' table," she shrilled recklessly... "Bring 'long th' drinks fast as yeh like!"

... Time gained. Thank Providence! ... Now wits must be matched with madness, for the sake of this woman's life!

Was ever conviviality so grotesquely mocked? Was ever duel more fearfully fantastic? Motive and method more startlingly incongruous?

Eye holding eye—glass for glass, the liquid fire all undiluted—the bottle was drained to the dregs. Ceaselessly she

watched him, forcing his equal drinking—laughing, sobbing, cursing, cajoling, deriding, babbling inane threats, mocking at all things decent, revelling in lewd jest, witless vulgarities.... Horrible! Horrible! Still he sat with her and drank—drank—drank, silent, shaken! It seemed the only way!

Frenzied excitement sustained her. Habituated to drink, the brandy seemed as water.

"I c'd drink this stuff all night," she boasted boisterously. "Fetch another bot'l', if yeh ain't got nothin' stronger!"

"Stronger?" He heard with dismay. Something stronger than his fifty-years-old brandy? ... Yet it did not seem to affect her as he had felt so sure it would! What kind of woman was she? ... Himself? Yes, of course he was still sober! His *will* had ordered it so. He could not—*dared* not let the brandy becloud *his* brain! Here was issue of life or death! Necessity steeled him.... He brought out a second bottle, fumbling with the cork. It was hard to draw—Or was it that his hands trembled? ... Ah, there it came——

A wild cry from the girl! Her head dropped on her breast. She sprawled over the table!

An instant he gazed stupidly, cold sweat beading his forehead. Shakily he approached her, knees threatening to give way. Terror-urged, he shook her roughly—felt for pulse and heart-beat—laughed, crazily exultant!

Unconscious she was, at last! For the present, safe!

Gathering her into his arms he staggered with her to his room. Before she could waken now, the doctor would know what to do.... Clumsily, he pulled off the ridiculous shoes—fumblingly loosened unfamiliar garments—drew a blanket over her—opened wide the window—wove his devious way from the room, slamming the door behind him.

Strain—the tension of emergency—relaxed, sudden dizziness seized him. He slumped into his chair, jaw sagging, arms hanging limply.

* * * * *

Minutes passed. The room whirled about him. Tables teetered giddily. In the wall mirror he glimpsed himself, a blurred wavering duality. Something wrong unquestionably? He wasn't—*He* couldn't be *drunk*?

The bare suggestion challenged. The Will reluctantly resumed control. He—Cariboo Joe? Was he drunk? ... "Pre-pos-t'rous!" ... He'd prove it—"prepost'rous!"

First, there would be the legs? Could he walk—walk straight? That crack in the floor? He would walk it! ... Came adventuring endeavour. That crack seemed to have a twin. They twisted and ran together—confusing, irrationally.... "No use—can't walk two cracks 't once—Cracks won' keep still—Imposs'ble!"

He dropped back in his chair, breathing hard. His hand fell on the discarded *Journal*.... "May's well fin'sh readin' it! ... Wher'sh glasshes gone?" He fumbled fruitlessly through pockets. Why here they were—on his nose. He'd been looking through them.... "Someth'n's wrong wi'h glasshes—Type all runs t'gether.... Glasshes aw'ri' while 'go? ... Mus' be bad printin'—awfl printin'... Have t' write editor 'bout it—good stiff let'r——

"Now where's pipe gone? Mus' have pipe! ... Queer 'bout ol' pipe!" From his pocket he produced it, wonderingly.... "T'bacco? T'bacco? T'bacco los' now! ... Nev' min' 'bout t'bacco—'Nough fr short smoke.... Awfl ma'ches! Rot'n wood! Won't light——" He choked on a mouthful of smoke. "Goin' aw'ri' aft'r all.... Guess smokin' too much—Don' jus' feel ri'!"

Pondering the situation with heavy gravity, although he wasn't drunk—"cer'nly not"—a bracer was obviously in order. The uncorked second bottle stood before him. He regarded it fixedly—questioningly—distinctly devoid of desire. Why was that bottle there though? What was there about it he must bring back to mind? It fascinated, as does the small shining disc a mesmerist passes before the eyes.... The brandy? The old brandy? ... What had he been doing with that old brandy?

Shakily he restored it to its place.... What would be good for him? he meditated, confusedly. A "prairie oyster"? ... He made and gulped down the concoction, shuddering.... That egg had seen better days! ... Worcestershire? ... He swallowed a tablespoonful—gasped—and reflected.... Coffee? Black coffee—strong? That was it! Action followed inspiration.

After a sixth cup he felt decidedly better. Consecutive thought became possible. When he had found water and soused his throbbing head, faculties began to answer muster. The meaning of it all came back. The shut door of his sleeping quarters confirmed memory's sketchy report.... The long-drawn whistle of a river-boat reminded him that "the last steamer" was pulling out.

* * * * *

The last boat had steamed up river, bucking the lazy current. Her shrilling siren no longer echoed from the hills, answering cheering crowds. These now poured back into the reawakening town—many familiar forms and faces missing. The volatile, roistering throng of morning had become a subdued and circumspect, even solemn, company. Hopeless homesickness inevitably intruded. Apathetically, Dawson once more took up its everyday life, resigning itself to the monotony and irking isolation of oncoming winter. Conversation languished. Mechanically they turned toward the café. They had "seen her off"—now they might as well eat.

In they filed, depressed, self-concerned, abstracted, indifferent to others' affairs. Thoughts wandered far afield, to families and friends in the homes "Outside." It was not until old Joe had let fall a third order and charged into a chair or two that he drew to himself mystified attention. Guests glanced up, puzzled, tentatively curious.

"What's up with th' old man?" they questioned mentally. He wasn't often awkward, or careless either! He "looked kinda funny, too—seedy an' sorrowful!" The Sergeant and Beartrap Smith exchanged anxious glances.

"Didn't see yeh down t' th' boat, Joe," the big miner called to him, as he came within speaking range.

"Me?" the Sourdough answered thickly, with ponderous dignity. "How could I leave it, the business? Such a foolishness!"

He halted as he replied. Beartrap caught a whiff of his breath.

"Well—I'll be—damned!" he muttered. "If Joe ain't been histin' in a few here all on his lonesome!" to himself he added, astounded. Fitzmaurice leaped to a like conclusion when, having called for wheatcakes, canned peaches were set before him. Anyone else but Joe! They stared, incredulous.

Many called for "a shot a' hootch," craving consolation. They were in the dumps; it was the approved prescription. John Barleycorn did his best. They began to "sit up and take notice." Astonishment ran the range.

"Why, Joe's got a little jag on!" the whisper went round. His heavy pose of stern sobriety gave cause for smothered laughter. Yet somehow it seemed uncanny—for old Joe to get that way! "Mustn't let on they'd noticed—might hurt th' old boy's feelings!"

Conversation began to buzz—its topic the day's event.

"D' yeh ever see Trotters so quiet?" remarked Beartrap to the Sergeant. "That girl somehow's seemed a lot diff'rent lately.... Got me guessin' 'bout her. Yeh'd a' thought t'day she was goin' t' her own fun'ral 'stead a' back home!"

"I didn't notice her much," Fitzmaurice forced response. "I was watching that girl chum of hers.... Funny thing, wasn't it? Deuced nearly missed th' boat. Women never on time——"

"Say, there was somethin' funny 'bout that girl—struck me too!" Beartrap interrupted. "I happ'ned t' be standin' right b' th' plank when she come rushin' down, all excited.... Didn't hev no pack er nothin'—jest that big poke.... Yeh c'd hev knocked me down with a feather.... Who'd a' thought she'd a stake like that! Not th' Count, I bet!"

"I didn't think she'd make it," came from the next table. "They was haulin' in th' plank when she hit th' dock.... Didn't hev no ticket. Said she'd fix up with th' purser aboard——"

"Well, she hed th' stuff t' do it," another commented sapiently. "From th' look a' that poke she was packin', an' th' way she lugged it, I bet it run three hundred ounce——"

"Three hundred hell!"—this from the box-waiter Spider. "Never hed that much in her life no time.... Queer 'bout her all right, though! Her trunks's at th' show-shop yet! ... Told th' man when he come fer 'em she wasn't a'goin' Out.... I'd a hunch she hadn't th' price. That there Count got 'bout all she made."

There talk centred. Old Joe gave it scant attention. Business rushed him. The debate continued, with infinite variations. He found himself dully listening, grown suddenly curious. Who could that girl going Out have been that they all had mistaken for Gertrude? Gertie hadn't gone! That he knew! Wasn't she there in his room, drunkenly dead to the world? Who was this other girl? ... What a joke it was on the boys!

Unsteadily balancing a tray, he looked from one to another, laughing. Eyes turned toward him.

"Gertrude *didn't* go Out, either!" He addressed himself to the theatre handy-man. "Someone else, it was, you mistake for her."

He laughed again, much amused. They stared, doubly mystified. Queer, what a few drinks would do!

"What makes yeh think she didn't go Out?" asked the Spider shortly. "Guess I ought t' know her, didn't I, workin' two seasons with her?"

"But I don't *think*—I *know*," the Sourdough assured him. "Was she not here—in this room—with me, when that boat it sailed?"

Silence and blank amazement! Fitzmaurice had risen. He laid a kindly hand on the veteran's shoulder.

"But Joe," he said, "we all saw her go on the boat!"

"You *thought* it was her," the patriarch chuckled. "Someone else, though, that looked like her——" He stopped, gravity returning. "Here a minute, Larry!" He led the way to the kitchen, the Sergeant following.

"You all *thought* it was her," he repeated. "Le' me tell you something! She is right here now—asleep!"

His friend could only stare. The man was imagining things! The drinks! That of course explained it.... He must humour him.

"Why, naturally, she's here!" he agreed.... "I say, Joe, why not lie down for a bit? You're not looking too spiff to-day.... Let Beartrap and I tend shop——"

The Sourdough drew himself up, dignity offended. Why should he lie down? Wasn't time yet to go to bed.... Besides, wasn't Gertie in his room? He must tell Larry about it.... Business forgotten, he poured out the tale in full: How the girl had come charging in, "acting crazy-like and wild"; how he'd caught her with the poison in her hand—he "could show him the glass"; how they'd sat down to punish the brandy—"only way he could think of to hold her"; how at last she had "keeled right over, full as a tick, if it did take a long time," and he had put her to bed in his room till the doctor could see her.

His recital ended, he felt rather pleased with himself. Had he not shown strategic genius?

Fitzmaurice knit his brow. Something wrong, very evidently.... These girls weren't easily "knocked out"! Wasn't drinking their business? Didn't they boast they were "human tanks"? And the old man wasn't used to liquor! ... Besides, he had *seen* her—*on the boat—himself!*

Resentment replaced elation in the Sourdough's breast. Was he not believed? Well, then, proof was near. He would show his doubting friend which of them had gone crazy!

"Come you with me," he commanded, confidently stalking toward the bedroom. Customers stared in silence. He opened the door a few inches, standing back with the invitation:

"Take a peek at the bed!"

Fitzmaurice looked, but saw no one—and said so. Together they forthwith entered. Plainly someone had lain there. Quite as plainly the bed now was empty. Joe stared at it, open-mouthed. The Sergeant's eye professionally marked the open window. A trunk stood open, too, its contents confusedly scrambled.

"What's been doing here?" he asked sharply. "Pull yourself together, Joe! What's all this about?"

Shock-sobered completely, the Sourdough dashed to his ransacked trunk. It had not been open, he knew—not since he had put away those last nuggets Ole had sent in! Shaking hands rummaged for his cached hoard—six thousand, mostly in nuggets! It was *gone!* ... In a daze, he mopped his forehead. Was he dreaming, or could it be?

"Why, *it's gone? She's gone?*" He vainly besought contradiction. "My poke, that I kept in the trunk here?"

Fitzmaurice nodded curtly. His brain was busy. He began to piece things together, visualising what had happened through the circumstantial evidence.... The girl had robbed Cariboo Joe, his friend! That much was plain. Her collapse had been all a fake! Or she had quickly recovered, saw her chance and seized it! That hound of a lover of hers—could he have put her up to it? He had seemed surprised though, when she went aboard! They were now on their way up river.... He consulted his watch, swiftly calculating——

"It's a chance! Yes, I can do it!" he thought. "Hike it hot-foot after them by the old cut-off! Ought to beat the boat to the head of the big bend!"

Consuming anger had seized him. The low, dirty thieves! To play on the man's good heart and rob him! He must certainly get them!

On his knees beside the trunk, old Joe tumbled his things about—searching still. His dust was gone. He realised it. Yet mechanically he kept looking.

"No use, Joe," his friend told him sharply. "The skunks have got to you.... She's lifted it and lit out!" He strode to the window. "Yes, there's the marks of her feet, plain as print.... Question is, just how far 's that boat got? Just th' one chance of getting 'em."

Hurriedly he sketched his plan, Joe intently following. "No time to lose," he concluded, turning to the door.

"Wait—wait, lad." The Sourdough held him. "Let me think—a minute."

The gold—his nuggets—gone! No question that it was stolen. The girl must have taken it? Yes, Larry was right so far.... Had she come to steal it? Had she made believe all the time, fooling him to rob him? He couldn't believe she had.... She had wakened there in his room, half crazed, irresponsible—her lover was leaving her! Opportunity tempted. She yielded! Yes, that would be more like it! ... No, it hadn't been planned! Yet robbed him she had! What, then? Larry might still overtake the boat. She had swift water to buck. He might bring back both girl and gold. It was his gold! They would give it back to him! ... The girl would go Outside—to prison! Did he want to send her there? ... What need had he, after all, for the gold that was gone? An old man, alone in the world? Would it count for much when he thought of her, looking out through those prison bars? ... The girl never would have done it—of that he was certain now—but for love of that worthless Russian! What a horrible life lay before her! ... That so beautiful thing Love—it had made her mad——

"Come on, Joe; I can't waste time!" Larry's voice reminded. "I've got to move fast——"

The patriarch rose to his feet, straightening to his full height, calm—commanding.

"You need not try it, my friend! I shall not permit it," he said quietly. "The gold? Say no more about it. It was mine! ... Well, I *give* it to her!"

Dumbfounded, Fitzmaurice stared.

"No, she meant not to rob her friend," the old-timer continued. "Conscience will punish her.... Would you send her—a young girl—to the pen?" Hand clutched the scarlet sleeve. "Let her, and the money, go! ... Love, foolish love, but devoted, it has turned her weak head.... Was it not a Jew, my son—yes, a great and a gentle teacher, two thousand years ago almost, said of such a woman:

"She hath loved much. Let much be forgiven her."

Impatient murmurings from the café. Beartrap's head appeared at the bedroom door.

"Wanted, Joe!" he called, questioningly.

The Sourdough gripped his companion's shoulder.

"Not a word of this, lad! Remember!" Louder he answered the call of business: "Coming, Beartrap—*coming!*"

He strode to the gaping crowd, Larry following, thinking hard. The law was the law, but yet——

"I forget," old Joe was saying, smiling down on the grinning Spider. "It was *yesterday*, I remember now, that I see that girl in here!"

Watchful patrons, listening curiously, in his face read what they took for abashed confusion.

"What's th' matter, Joe?" someone shouted amid the laughter. "Been havin' a birthday er something?"

"Why, yes! How did you guess it?" He had caught his cue. Beaming back on all benevolently, he passed to his little counter. "That is it," he said. "Drinks all round, they are on the house. On my birthday you will drink my health, friends of mine!"

In tumult of noisy mirth and congratulations, Dacey dashed in, scarcely noticed—trail-grimy, elate, exultant, to fling down a poke on the bar!

The Sourdough turned to him, with outstretched hand. Pat grasped it and squeezed it hard, then wheeled inquiringly. His eyes searched the crowded room.

"Where's Trotters?" he demanded anxiously. "*She* ain't gone *Outside*, has she?"

General silence answered. His delight was dead.

"That last boat—it pulled out at three!" The words seemed dragged out of the old man. Pat stood, disappointment-stunned. To his side stepped Maude's executioner.

"By the cut-off," he counselled swiftly. "You might beat out the boat to the Bend!"

Dacey bolted for the open door.

"Wait! Irish! Just two minutes!" He halted at his *partner's* call. "A letter I forget—important!" Pencil dashed over paper. An address was scrawled in a rush. He passed it to the impatient Pat. Dacey jammed it into a pocket, without so much as a glance at it. Had he noted the address he might perhaps have tarried to question. For it read: "Mr. Isaac

Wappenstein, Chief of Police, Seattle."

Again Dacey gained the door. Again the Sourdough shouted. In his hand was the bag of nuggets.

"Catch!" he cried, tossing it. "I wait for my bit till the clean-up. Hit the trail now, *hard*, lad—*Hyack!*"

Chapter XXII Soldiers: Of Mars or of Mankind?

Fitzmaurice was "up Dominion" when the news came of war declared. Winter had sealed the river, and but one newspaper reached the camp. Its possessor, alert for business, forthwith had hired a hall, and that paper—from first word to last, advertisements included—had been read to a crowded house, with one dollar admission charged. The reaper of the novel harvest declared he would keep it till he died—"as a souveneer." Its possession meanwhile enhanced his importance as he progressed from bar to bar, to finally come to anchor when hunger began to tease.

"Want t' take a squint at th' news?" he genially inquired as he found a table. "War's on down in Africa—all in th' P-I there! ... Got it on th' dock jest as we was castin' off."

Rather proud of himself, he was, nor dreamed that to the shy girl chatting with the grizzled proprietor his news was a stab of pain.... War had come at last, then! Would her Larry go? It was the world's way, she knew—for man high adventuring, for woman the anxious waiting and bitter tears! Why should there be cruel war—nations still turning back to savagery to settle their differences? Was this Christian civilisation, after two thousand years of growth?

The man had finished his supper and recovered his prized newspaper. He was moving to the door when she suddenly thought: Larry would be back in a day or two. She must get that paper for him.

"Oh, please, leave me it!" she coaxed the departing guest.

The man faced about, surprised. "What's this?" said he. "Another hold-up?"

"But you've read it all through?" she persisted, smiling through threatening tears. "Please—please won't you let me have it?"

Amused, he held it toward her—pulled it back as she reached for it.

"Nothin' doing, *cultus potlatch*," he grinned, ready for a mild flirtation. "Want it awf'l bad, sister?"

"Oh, yes; indeed yes," she replied.

"I been offered fifty dollars for it, an' it's made me five hundred if it did cost me jest a nickel," he bragged. "How many kisses'd that be? Mebbe we c'n make a deal?"

She knew herself blushing furiously, but she held her ground.

"Kisses are 'way up this time a' year," she returned his banter. "No more till th' first boat now. Sell it to me for a song, there's a good scout!"

In the end she got it, of course, at the offered price. She treasured it, triumphant if apprehensive, until Larry returned. And then, though he took it and thanked her, he did not so much as unfold it. She looked at him, mystified.

"Why, I thought you'd be so interested?"

"Well, rather—I am, of course. But they can get on with their war very nicely without us, it seems to me——"

He smiled, the dear old smile, looking down into the anxious upturned face. Fishing from his tunic pocket an official letter, he handed it to her.

"Read it, dear," said he, "and I think you'll understand."

Mechanically she took the typed paper, while her eyes sought his, questioning.

"And you're not——" She broke off abruptly.

He was patting her hand reassuringly.

"Oh, no; I've given up that idea," as he piloted her to their favourite corner. "Can't go back on the old Yukon."

Her heart jumped for joy. The letter was quite forgotten. He tapped it with directive finger.

"Read it, sweetheart, and let's talk things over.... Should have done it weeks ago."

Promotion—commissioned rank—larger responsibilities—more work with proportioned reward!

... *"The Commissioner notes with approval the capable manner in which you have carried out duty assignments in a manner invariably consistent with the traditions of the service,"* she read, her eyes shining like stars.

"Oh Larry, I'm proud of you!" she looked up to whisper. He reclaimed the letter in haste.

"Chief's a bit of a flatterer," he modestly deprecated. "Splendid chap though—like all our chaps. Wouldn't do to desert them, now I'm getting the hang of things.... Was tempted at first to chuck it, but that's done and over now——"

"Remember, dear, that night in the Lindeman camp?" his voice dropped confidentially. "That night we sat watching the stars? Got talking about Life and Religion? Agreed rather wonderfully, didn't we?"

Her hand found his and nestled in it. Starry eyes told him she remembered.

"And the 'still, small Voice'? ... Well, I think perhaps it was Conscience wouldn't let me get into this war.... Kept reminding me I've got work to do here—that Life isn't all for gold or glory. It's our place to look after those others that somehow can't take care of themselves——"

Long he talked of his temptation—what it might have meant for them both.

"And you wanted so much for *me*?" she said when the tale was told. "Why all I've wanted is *you*! The rest doesn't matter one bit. Society and a lot of money? I'd be scared to death in society. And does money bring happiness? ... My own man, all—all to myself—just a cosy little home for two—and, and a baby or two or three——"

She suddenly caught herself up.

"Why do people want to go to war?" she questioned, challenging. "Of course I am not a man—but to go away off to some strange country—make a business of killing people—good decent folks, lots of them? It all seems so uselessly dreadful, so different from what is right? Isn't it ever so much more worth while, just what you are doing here now: Helping to keep law and order; protecting, helping, befriending; holding up the hands of these brave pioneers in their peaceful conquest of this wild land?"

"Isn't it more of a real man's work than all their spectacular soldiering, when everything's said and done? You don't march with bands and banners, crowds cheering as you go by. The papers don't shout your praises. You don't get medals and decorations, but you *do* know your work's well done.... And no widowed women or children weep because your hand has struck.

"The Force—our own Royal Mounted: They're soldiers—of Peace, not ruthless Destruction. They help build while the others lay waste! Strong, brave, true, loyal fellows—What woman could know them and not love them——"

The Sergeant recaptured her hand.

"I say," he suggested, smiling, "that begins to sound a bit bigamous.... How about just one of us bally heroes? ... I want you, dear girl—just you?"

She did not reply in words. Reading a consent in silence he came round to her side of the table to gather her into his arms. That the Sourdough was a witness did not in the least concern him. Affecting a stern indignation, the old man bore down upon them.

"What's this? What's all this?" he demanded. "Do I not come in now with a blessing?"

In the *Nugget* one week later was printed a three-line notice, with the foot-note request: "*Pendleburg Planet* Please Copy." It attested the marriage of one Lawrence Hammond Fitzmaurice, late of Portman Square, London, W., and Beatrice Brooks, formerly of Oregon, U.S.A.

On another page of the issue appeared a news item also, that might almost have been lifted entire from the columns of the famous *Planet*. From this all concerned could learn that "the happy bride of the occasion looked lovely in white *crêpe de Chine*, with the traditional orange blossoms" (they had to be artificial) "and was given away by her foster father, the camp's popular Cariboo Joe."

* * * * *

And while bride and groom of the Arctic busied themselves with their home-making, the world forgetting and by the world forgot, a thousand odd miles away Police Chief Ike Wappenstein sat at his desk in Seattle, a frown clouding the official countenance—a pencilled note in his hand and a plain-clothesman, at attention, awaiting his further commands. Mechanically the Chief was reading, not by any means for the first time, a hastily scribbled message from his old friend Cariboo Joe.

"I don't want the girl arrested," the words ran, as he knew. *"She wasn't quite right in her mind. Been drinking hard I believe. But if you should run across the Russian and he has the nuggets, you might see what you can do for me. 'Stolen property in possession'? Isn't there a law about that?"*

The Chief laid the letter down, turning to his man.

"Just run over the facts again, Jackson. How was it the play came off?"

"I rounded him up as you said, Chief—wasn't no trick to that at all. All th' sports in Seattle knew him. Stayin' at th' Alaska, they told me.... Went up t' his room—Number 45, an' he opens th' door himself. Wants t' know, natch'lly, who I am and what I want. I flashes m' badge an' goes in, him puttin' on th' high an' lofty indignant.... There's a pile a' nuggets layin' there on th' table. Couldn't help noticin' 'em.

"Chief wants a word with you, down t' Headquarters,' I tells him. Then I looks at them chunks a' gold. 'Guess we better take these along too,' I says. 'He might want t' give 'em th' once-over.' I picks up th' little sack—it's layin' right there on th' table too—an' was jest goin' t' dump 'em in, when he jumps me, quicker 'n a cat, an' we hits th' floor together. Over goes th' table, nuggets an' all. Next thing he's got a' hold a' my neck an' like t' snap it off! Looks like flowers an' plumes fer me! Seems like he's gone plumb crazy—got th' killer look all right.

"Well, somehow I manages t' wiggle round on m' side an' get a' hold a' my gun.... It's him er me, no gettin' round it! I don't rightly know jest how I done it, but I must a' let him hev it. Th' gang came a' runnin' when they heard th' shot, an' a girl rushes in an' starts hollerin' and throws herself on to him.... I'm damn sorry I had t' do it, Chief—but 'twas him er me _____"

"Justifiable all right, I guess," grumbled the Chief. "That'll do now, Jackson. There'll be an inquiry of course, but I wouldn't lose no sleep over it.... Too bad it happened, but he seems t' been looking for it."

* * * * *

Eighteen months had slipped by. It was frosty February. Glowing stoves answered Winter's challenge. The Cariboo was *en fête*. Flags, bunting, tissue triumphs, green boughs and tinsel trinkets betokened high carnival doings. It was a birthday Party for Master Joseph Lawrence Fitzmaurice, aged that day just one year. There were only ten at the table: the proud father, Inspector Fitzmaurice, his and their wonderful boy; Patrick Dacey and (*née* Trotters); Mr. and Mrs. Ole Sorenson, with Ole, jun.; the good old reliable Beartrap, and the beaming host.

"D' yeh remember, Ole," Beartrap shouted across the board, "how tangled yeh used t' get when yeh started talkin' English? Yeh was forever askin' somebody er other t' pass th' 'yam' t' yeh?"

"Vell, I don'd no more!" The big Swede feigned offence. "Push th' yelly this way, Beartrap!

"Say 'please,' yeh barbarian!" Beartrap reached for a handy pick.

"Lay off there," Pat protested. "I jest paid a good dollar t' get that there pick fresh sharpened."

"Order in Court!" Larry commanded. The Sourdough was on his feet. He had risen with dignity, glass in hand, to perform a rite.

"I ask you, my friends, to drink with me a toast," rolled the sonorous voice: "To our little guest, my namesake, safe here in his mother's arms! ... For him and his first birthday party, I have kept the last of that good beer we bring with us when we come Inside."

Feasting ended, out came the pipes. The host had proffered cigars—they were genuine Peg-tops too—but the men would have none of them. Musing, well content, Larry whittled his plug.

"Steady there, lad, you're cutting too much! Do not waste," the Sourdough cautioned. "Never mind, I'll fill up with what's left!"

"Still stick to old T. and B.?" Larry passed over a fill.

"Well, sometimes I like that O.P.," Joe smilingly confessed.

"O.P.? That's a new brand to me. Anything like Cotton's Mixture?"

"Other People's," Joe elucidated, placidly puffing it.

"Guess it must be gettin' 'bout time we hit th' trail," Beartrap pointed out with regret. "Must be back on th' creek by mornin'."

Sorenson and Dacey rose with distinct reluctance. Here was Home—and Happiness.

"S'pose th' work's got t' be done," said Pat, meeting his Queenie's eye.

"What yeh think I married yeh fer," she retorted, smiling fondly, "if 'twasn't fer yer Moosehide millions?"

"Yes, our work we all have to do," pronounced the Oracle. "If the flowers they were all the time with us, the bees they would get very lazy—and that would be bad for the bees."

[End of *A Sourdough Samaritan*, by Charles Harrison Gibbons]