

*The
Painted Cliff*

ALEX PHILIP



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**THE
PAINTED CLIFF**

BY

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ALEX PHILIP

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THE PAINTED CLIFF



CHAPTER I.

THE GIRL'S gasping cry of alarm was drowned by the piercing shriek of the big car's siren. With a muttered curse the liveried chauffeur set the brakes and spun the wheel. Pale-faced and shaking, a young man arose from the dust of the pavement and continued on his unsteady way, oblivious of the fact that he had been the near-victim of a tragedy.

"Just brushed him, miss. He's drunk," said the driver, as he released the brakes.

The girl's eyes were fixed on the tottering young man, who had reached the curb and stood clinging weakly to a lamp-post. Her look of disgust gave place to one of pity as she saw deep lines of suffering on his haggard face. She spoke quickly to the driver and before the car had ceased its motion, sprang to the sidewalk.

Food is nothing to you unless you are hungry. If you are hungry and can't get food it becomes of enormous importance.

The odour of frying steak, wafted to the youth's nostrils from the open door of a restaurant, nearly maddened him. Releasing his hold on the post, he moved to the window, which was piled high with pyramids of oysters, steaks and fish. The sight of food increased his craving, and a wave of intense sickness swept over him. A drumming set up in his ears.

The girl stepped before him. "You are ill," she said gently.

He saw her lips move, but heard no sound. To his befogged senses she appeared to be inside the plate glass window; a head detached and floating in mid-air. As though through a haze he saw a pale and beautiful face surrounded by an aureole of dark brown hair that showed a tinge of gold in the bright sunlight; eyes that were filled with a sweet compassion as they met his; eyes that were sea-blue wells; wells so deep and clear that he felt that he was being submerged. The buzzing in his head grew so intense that he was hard set to keep from groaning aloud. The bony hands at his sides shook violently. He felt his knees sag under him; struggled to right himself, felt a sharp jar; then the world went black.

As he returned to semi-consciousness he saw a big whiskered face above him. Powerful hands wrapped 'round him under his arms, heaved, and he was set upon unsteady feet.

“Can't walk, ol' sport?” As though from a great distance he heard a voice. “All right, boy. I'll hold you up.”

“A drunk,” said a second voice, “better call a cop.”

“Drunk! Hell! You damn fools, can't you see the boy's sick?” The voice was louder now. “Get out of my way! I'll take care of him!”

The young man felt a muscular arm about his shoulders and his legs moved woodenly under him. Presently he was in a warm dimness and something soft was placed under his head. Again he saw the big whiskered face suspended strangely in the air; heard the sound of running water, and winced under the shock of cold on his face. He gasped and opened his eyes only to close them tight again and shut out what was indisputably the delusion of a mind deranged. The angel's face floated above him again.

“Drink this, please.” The voice was sweet and low and muffled as though far away. Something touched his lips and the delectable odour of a rich broth was strong on the air. Long fingers clutched the bowl eagerly and he drank the steaming fluid in great gulps.

“Poor fellow. He's starved!” The soft voice trembled with deep pity. The youth's leaden lids flickered slowly open. He saw the angel's face close to his, the blue depths shiny and wet with tears. The warm flow of hot food seemed to fill his every vein. A soft cool hand rested on his brow. He sighed contentedly and fell into sweet oblivion.

Two hours later he awoke with a start and stared about him with puzzled eyes. He found himself, fully clothed, lying on a wide bed with a comforter thrown over him. The room was large, with two beds, and three big windows through which came the hum of city traffic and the faint smell of burning gasoline. He yawned drowsily as he stretched long emaciated arms above his head. The yawn was cut short by a sudden fit of coughing; a cough that turned his face a deep crimson and brought his breath in rasping gasps from tortured lungs. The spasm of coughing ceased. He fell back weakly to the pillow and gave himself over to a period of gloomy retrospection.

Before his enlistment for service in France he had held a secretarial position with a London importing house of which his father was president and chief stockholder; a firm that went into bankruptcy during the first

frenzied weeks of war—a shock from which his elderly father never recovered; dying a few months before his son's return from the trenches.

His lungs seared by German gas, followed by an attack of pneumonia, had kept him in a London hospital for six months after his return from France.

“Fresh air, sunshine and good food,” the doctor had told him. “Your condition will not permit you to return to office work again. Go to the mountains. I would suggest the bracing climate of Canada.”

His mother having died shortly after his birth, the young man found himself alone in the world save for a few distant relatives with whom he had never been intimate. Therefore the sick boy decided to accept his doctor's advice, and a month later he stepped to the platform of the Canadian Pacific Depot in Vancouver—the Western Gateway to the British Empire.

Owing to the mild climate on the coast of British Columbia, men from all parts of the Dominion flock to Vancouver during the winter months. Hordes of workers who have garnered the huge crops of wheat on the prairies; prospectors driven from the mountains by the deep snows; loggers from camps that have closed temporarily, and soft-handed hoboes, swell the ranks of jobless men.

To the young Englishman the past week had been a horrible nightmare. Too proud to ask for assistance at the many soldiers' organizations, he pinned his service button inside the lapel of his coat and trudged the streets in search of employment.

“T.B., poor devil,” people said commiseratingly; and he had turned away with a heart full of bitterness. Twice he had been given a job through pity. For two days he pushed a truck in a wholesale house on Water Street, but on the third morning collapsed. Again he was employed by a hardware firm, but his weakness overcame him and he fainted dead away the first day.

The pension allotted to him by a paternal government had sufficed to keep body and soul together. It had been days of frugal living; a cheap room, and meals in a ten-cent coffee-house.

For two days he had not eaten. Lacking in sophistication, he had been touched by the hard-luck story of a professional “panhandler”, bought him a meal and allowed him to sleep on the floor of his room. Sometime during the night the stranger departed, taking with him the last few dollars that stood between his benefactor and absolute want.

“Fresh air, sunshine and good food,” he muttered sarcastically as he lowered his long legs to the floor and came weakly to his feet. The room

whirled dizzily and he seized the dresser with both hands to keep from falling. Pain that threatened to rend his head asunder played before his eyes in blinding flashes. Faint and nauseated he clung to the support until the haze cleared away. He opened his eyes to gaze directly at his reflection in the mirror.

Critically he examined the tall figure with the broad but painfully thin shoulders; the tousled mop of reddish-brown hair standing high above a broad brow; the blue, blood-shot eyes surrounded by dark rings and the square jaw covered with a stubble of beard.

The emaciation of him had left a rawboned frame that testified to the fact that he had once been a splendid specimen of manhood. At college his prowess as swimmer, sculler and all-round athlete had won him national fame.

For a long interval the sick boy stared at the shadow of his former self; a wry smile twisting his lips. A duller red flowed to the hectic spots on his thin cheeks.

“Say, old man,” he apostrophized himself disgustedly, “buck up! You used to be a real he-man. Let’s see if there is one more good kick left in the frame that was once Peter Welton.”

Reluctantly he removed his hands from the dresser and essayed to leave the room, but again a sudden attack of vertigo assailed him. Reaching the bed he pulled the comforter over him and buried his aching head in the cool pillow.

CHAPTER II.

WHEN Peter's senses again renewed contact with their environment the pain and nausea had passed and he felt much stronger.

In a corner of the room a shaft of brilliant sunlight shone on a pleasing scene. A girl stood before the mirror fluffing out her glorious brown hair with swift, deft fingers. Her hands were unbelievably white and fragile. She was small and tender, pale as a tea rose, and her fly-away hair curled in soft tendrils about her white forehead. She sensed his eyes upon her and turned quickly, smiling. And when she smiled there was a lift and gentle curve about her lips that he had not noticed about any other lips before.

"How are you feeling?" she asked.

"Ripping," he answered happily. For he now realized that his brain was clear and that this was not a dream.

His eyes roved about the room; then came back questioningly to the girl. The hot colour swept to her cheeks.

"This room," she explained hastily, "belongs to the two prospectors who brought you here."

"Brought me?"

"Yes. Don't you remember? You fell on the sidewalk."

Peter smiled rather sheepishly. "Ah! I do remember. You're the girl in the restaurant."

For a moment the girl seemed puzzled, then a roguish look danced momentarily in her eyes, and she made no reply to Peter's statement.

"Pardon me," Peter went on, "I may as well introduce myself. I am what is left of Peter Welton, late of London, now with the 'down-and-outs'."

For the fraction of a second the girl hesitated; then said thoughtfully: "My name is Dorothy Sinclair."

To Peter it seemed incredible that this girl worked in a lunch-room on the water front. The thing was preposterous! Why, she was the embodiment of all that goes to make culture and refinement. Her manner, her speech—everything! What sort of a country was this where a lovely high-bred creature held such a menial position?

gray eyes were bright with health and he had the appearance of one who had communed long and profitably with the great outdoors.

As to his costume it was altogether grotesque, consisting of a frayed and torn buckskin shirt without a collar, a pair of "tin pants" so covered with patches that little was left of the original material. Well-worn moccasins, red socks pulled over trouser legs and a wide shapeless hat set at an angle on his big head, completed an ensemble that would have fitted in nicely with forest and mountain for a background, but appeared strangely incongruous in a hotel bedroom.

The big man's lips parted in a wide smile that flashed teeth of notable whiteness. He removed his hat with a wide sweep of his arm and bowed low to Dorothy.

"Klahowya, little girl." He turned to Peter. "Klahowya, tillikum. How's my mascot stackin' up? I'm Shorty McCrae," the booming voice went on, "an' here's my side-kick, Slim Chandler. Me an' him has been tillikums for a hyiu long time."

Slim was the direct antithesis of his partner. Of average height, slender and dark-eyed, and, in comparison to Shorty, a veritable Beau Brummel. He was clean-shaved save for a drooping moustache that partly hid a sensitive mouth. He wore a red and black mackinaw shirt hanging coat-like outside his trousers, high logger's boots, and wide Stetson hat topped coarse black hair only slightly tinged with gray at the temples. His mahogany-coloured face was deeply creased, and about his eyes there was a network of sun wrinkles. Although he appeared well past fifty, he moved with a certain lithe suppleness of a man half that age. He acknowledged the introduction with a slight inclination of his head.

Dorothy moved to the door. "I have to go now." She turned to nod to Peter and was gone.

"Some little skirt," commented Shorty as he threw his big hat to the floor, walked to the bed and stood looking down at Peter. "Me an' Slim," he grinned, "bin a' quenchin' a year's drought. Sufferin' cats, but this rum nowadays is sure firewater!" He made a wry face. "Every time I take a shot I hear somethin' explode inside me an' I have to use both hands to push my eyes back into place." He studied the sick man carefully.

"Gas?" he inquired gently.

The young man nodded. Shorty's kindly eyes continued their inventory. He reached forth a big hand and turned back the lapel of the sick boy's coat disclosing the service button.

He grunted. "I'll bet you're an Englishman."

"Yes."

"Knew it! Hyiu tum-tum. You don't savvy Chinook? Well, you guys got the guts!"

Another spasm of coughing shook Peter's wasted figure. Shorty patted the boy's shoulder awkwardly. "Never mind, son, we'll take you out in the mountains where there is hyiu mowitsh, grouse and fish. To hell with cities where there's plenty, but fellers are starvin'. Me an' Slim will look after you, boy. Won't we, Slim?"

Slim nodded vigorously.

The heart of the sick man warmed. The expressions of this man were crude but his tone was sympathetic. It had been a long time since he had heard such a kindly voice. Sick men avoid company.

"You are very good, Mr. McCrae, but—"

"Sufferin' cats!" exploded Shorty, "'mister', hell! My name's 'Shorty'. If you an' me are goin' to hit her off without murder bein' committed in the party, don't 'mister' me. Ain't that right, Slim?"

The figure sitting by the window nodded a silent affirmative. Except for thin smoke issuing from his nostrils from time to time, he might have been mummified.

Shorty chuckled. "I do all the talkin' for this outfit. Slim don't say much, but when he does open his trap he says a mouthful. Slim's a high-brow, an' I'm a rough-neck. Ain't that right, Slim?" Shorty looked at the silent one, admiration glowing in his eyes. "Slim can ride a cayuse like a Sioux Indian," he went on boastfully. "An' with a six-gun he can stand you sideways an' shoot a cigarette out o' your mouth—providin' you stand still. He can do more things with a rope than a man-o'-war's-man, an' handles an axe like a New Brunswick logger. Give him a pack o' cards an' a silver dollar an' he'll clean out any poker joint in this burg. Oh, yes! That pal o' mine is crazy—just like a fox. Ain't that right, Slim?"

Slim removed his pipe. "Shut up!" he said with a soft drawl.

"Oh, Slim!" protested the big man deprecatingly. "An' I'd just told the boy that you talk sense."

He settled himself in a wicker chair that bulged and creaked under his weight, then rolled a cigarette with a deft movement of one hand. He transferred about one-quarter of his cigarette to the depths of his husky lungs by the suction in one deep breath.

“You may think I’m a kind o’ nut,” he began sheepishly, “an’ I’ll admit that I’m a superstitious guy. When I walked up the dock after gettin’ off the boat this mornin’, a horse threw a shoe an’ it fell right in front o’ me. Then I picked you up right in front o’ this hotel an’ the name’s ‘The Horseshoe’. Do you want any better hunch that we are goin’ to hit her next time? I should say no!” He slapped his thigh a resounding thump, his face beaming. He rolled another cigarette and sat for a time smoking contemplatively.

“Bein’ a cheechako, I s’pose you never heard o’ Injun Valley,” he ran on. “In this valley there’s a band o’ Injuns that claim to have descended straight from the oldest tribe in the country, an’ they’re just as bloodthirsty as their forefathers. I ain’t never bin right into the valley, but there has bin quite a few white men go in that ain’t never come back. They say that their chief is a wrinkled ol’ patriarch ’bout a hundred years old, an’ that he came out a long time ago an’ got an eddication an’ a white wife, then went back to his tribe with the idea that the white race hadn’t treated the red-men right, an’ set his village to livin’ the way the Injuns used to live hundreds o’ years ago. They dress in skins an’ use bows an’ arrers an’ keep up all the ancient customs. I’ve heard that the ol’ tyee is as crazy as a loon an’ that he says he’ll kill any white man that comes into his valley.

“Now, me an’ Slim hit dust in a small creek bed that runs down from the mountains that are ’round the valley, but from the lay o’ the land we’re sure that a larger stream that empties into the valley will be lousy with nuggets.” He tugged a dirty buckskin sack from his hip pocket, untied a string, then held the sack toward Peter. “Look what we panned out o’ a stream that wasn’t any wider than my foot.” Peter saw that the pouch was full of gold dust and nuggets, some of the latter as large as peas. Shorty’s eyes were shining as he tucked the gold safely away.

“Me an’ Slim are goin’ into Injun Valley in spite of all the Siwashes in B.C.; an’ just as soon as we can see J. B. an’ get another grubstake.”

“Who is ‘J.B.’?” questioned Peter.

“Never heard of ‘J.B.’” cried Shorty in astonishment. “J. B. Smith is the high-muck-a-muck, the tyee of the mining business of British Columbia. He’s got more dough than a farmer’s got oats. He’s bin puttin’ up for me an’ Slim for twenty years an’ we ain’t made him a cent yet. But by the holy moses, we’ll hit her this time!” he exclaimed as he came to his feet and paced the room excitedly.

All prospectors have the hunch that the “next time” they will find the elusive gold. They keep going back to the wilderness until they are grey and

old, their hands gnarled with toil and their eyes become bleared and nearly blind.

Shorty sank into the chair again.

“Now here’s the proposition, son. We’ll take you along with us as our workin’ pardner. As good pals, as me an’ Slim is, it is always better to have a third party along to keep us from gettin’ grouchy; an’ besides, we will have more time to work. We’ll give you fifty bucks a month an’ everythin’ found, includin’ your outfit. An’ if my hunch that you’re goin’ to bring us good luck turns out right, we’ll give you a third. What d’you say?”

The young man’s face flushed with pleasure. He gave an eager affirmative. “But I am afraid I won’t be of much use to you, Mr. McCrae.”

“What?” roared the big man.

“Er—Shorty, I mean.”

“When you’ve bin in them hills a month you won’t know yourself,” Shorty assured him.

He moved to the mirror and surveyed himself. “Wow!” he yelped, “what a bunch o’ bulrushes! I’ll have to get a landscape gardener with a scythe to work on me.” He ran speculative fingers through his beard. “If I only had the nerve,” he mused, “I’d go to one o’ them lady barbers. Well, Slim, let’s go.” At the door Shorty turned. “We’ll be back in time for muck-a-muck, an’ if you feel equal to it we’ll go down stairs an’ eat together.”

Peter lay for some time revolving in his mind the many wonderful happenings of the day that had brought such a remarkable change in his fortune. The last few hours had given him a new lease on life; a chance to regain his health and to lead a life in the open, for which he had long craved.

He fell asleep to dream of wide open spaces, Indians in beaded buckskin, mountains, forests, singing birds—and always in the foreground a pair of sea-blue eyes in a pale and beautiful face; eyes that gazed into his with a tender softness.

On leaving the room Dorothy hastened to the restaurant below, and for five minutes talked earnestly with the Greek proprietor.

The look of bovine stupidity on the man’s face gave place to one of quick comprehension as a bill of large denomination changed hands. Bowing and scraping he escorted her to the door and with bewildered eyes watched her until she disappeared from view.

An hour later, with a tray in her hand, Dorothy rapped at Peter’s door. Receiving no answer, she pushed the door open and entered. Peter lay with

his head pillowed on his arm. Blessed sleep had given his tortured body surcease from pain, his face was tranquil and extremely boyish. The girl placed the tray on a table and stood looking down on the unconscious man.

A slow smile wreathed Peter's lips.

"Blue-eyed angel," he mumbled.

Dorothy drew in her breath sharply, tiptoed outside, and gently closed the door.

CHAPTER III.



THE long rest, the application of a wet towel in lieu of a bath, and a brisk rub-down, wrought a wonderful change in Peter. The strained, hungry look was gone from his eyes and his pale face held a healthier glow.

A curiously warm feeling of gratitude flamed through him as he ravenously devoured the lunch prepared by Dorothy. How could he ever repay her kindness? If this quest for gold should prove successful, if they “hit her” as Shorty had said, then he would find a way to compensate her four-fold. He finished the meal to the last crumb, rolled a cigarette from Shorty’s ample supply of makin’s, and with blue wreaths of smoke circling about his head, revelled in delectable imaginings.

As far back as Peter could remember, the spirit of romance had beckoned to him. In early childhood it had given colour to his life, and in later years made him more a dreamer than a doer. As a boy he would roam about the grounds of his father’s country estate, peopling each copse of woods with weird wild beasts, princesses, tilting knights, giants and fairies. Every overhanging ledge was a deep, dark cavern where brigands held princesses in durance vile, and in his dreams Peter was the knight in shining mail who with keen sword swept aside all obstacles and rescued the beautiful maidens.

As he grew older, he read eagerly every book he could find dealing with the Great West, Australia and Africa. In his mind’s eye he saw himself as a pioneer in a strange land, living in a log cabin and braving the dangers of the wild open places. The spirit of the gipsy in his veins, he welcomed the war which freed him from the drudgery of office work, for which he was temperamentally unfitted. Like thousands of disillusioned adventurers, he found that in modern warfare there is nothing of glamour or romance.

His present pitiable condition was not wholly physical. There was a deeper hurt. His aesthetic soul had revolted, his fine sensibilities shocked by the indescribable horrors of four years of trench warfare. A shock that had depressed his vital forces, left him a legacy of shattered nerves, twitching muscles, and a victim to sudden attacks of melancholia that plunged him into sloughs of despondency sapped his energy and weakened his power of decision.

Peter came to his feet and paced the floor excitedly. The virgin mountains and this glamorous Indian Valley called to him. In his fancy he breathed the ozone-laden air of the deep forests, heard the soft whisper of wind in the pines and the roaring of mighty rivers. He would be a woodsman, an explorer in a strange land, a seeker of gold in the Great West. The anticipation of adventure to come sent the blood coursing through his veins and he laughed aloud from joy of the thought that his dreams seemed coming true.

Peter's rapt musing was interrupted by the sound of heavy footsteps in the hall. The door swung open to admit Shorty and Slim—but what a changed Shorty. His cleanly-shaved face was mottled with patches of white where the dense growth of whiskers had excluded the sun. His neatly trimmed hair showed a line of lighter coloured skin around the edges at temple and neck. These pale patches contrasted oddly with the heavy tan of cheek and nose.

A suit of ultra-fashionable cut, checked and barred with colours that would excite the envy of a negro minstrel, fitted his huge bulk so tightly that there seemed imminent danger of bursting the seams, with every movement of his body. A wide-brimmed hat with a band of bright yellow leather and nicked rings, sat high on his grizzled head. A blue flannel shirt with collar upturned about his brawny neck, shiny patent leather shoes, and a necktie of brilliant red, completed a sartorial display equally as startling as the woodsman's garb he had worn that morning. A bottle protruded from each side pocket of his coat and under each arm he carried a bulky package.

"Klahowya, ol' sport," he roared in greeting. "Say, you look like a million dollars: an' this mornin' you resembled ten cents' worth o' dog meat. Brought you a few bottles o' stout," he went on as he deposited his bundles on the dresser. "Got to put some beef on our pardner before we hit the trail. Bought me a new music box, too. Lost the one I've had for ten years, when our canoe keliped on the river. Ain't she a peach?" he chortled as he held a shiny accordion for their inspection.

Shorty kept up a running fire of talk as he moved about the room preparing the drinks, all the while stealing glances at himself in the mirror.

"Ain't them some glad rags?" he asked as he stopped before the glass. "What I'd call class, speed and distinction," he answered his own query. His big frame rotated before the mirror as he inspected himself from every angle. Evidently pleased with his appearance, he smiled broadly. "Pretty slick lookin' ol' scout after all," he bragged.

Slim winked slyly at Peter, his eyes dancing with merriment. “Say,” chuckled Shorty, “you know a lot o’ city people think that a guy that goes prospectin’ has to run to shoulders an’ away from brains, but I showed one o’ them smart-Alec restaurant men that there’s one prospector that has a little grey matter in his nut.

“I went into this hash emporium, and I’ll be darned if they didn’t make me wait on myself. Had to pick up a tray an’ carry my vittles to a table. But I slipped it over on ’em when I went out. Can’t make a fool out of me. I just walked out without washin’ the dishes. I get enough o’ that when I’m in the hills, without doin’ it in city restaurants.”

“Where did you eat?” asked Peter.

“Don’t know what street it was on, but the name of the feller that runs it is Cafeteria.”

Slim leaned forward in his chair, his shoulders shaking violently. Shorty turned to him quickly. “What’s eatin’ you, Slim?”

With a struggle, Slim composed his features. “You’re sure too much for them,” he drawled.

“You bet I am, Slim,” Shorty agreed. He sat down, stretched out his legs and rubbed his new shoes gingerly. “Them new boots look classy, but they make my feet feel like a cooked bacon.” He sipped his whiskey and water meditatively for a few moments.

“You know that to-day in quenchin’ this year’s drought, I got pretty well licked up, an’ it gave me the gumption to go to one o’ them lady barber shops. I busts through the door an’ yells out: ‘Any you gentler-sex-female-tensorial-artists got a kind heart, a bush-scythe an’ an afternoon to spare?’ The boss dame at the first chair spots me for a bum rough-neck, an’ gives me the cold an’ fishy lamp.

“‘Say,’ she pipes, ‘what you’re lookin’ for is a mattress factory or a seat on the Bolsheviki Soviet Council. I seem to hear a human voice, but there ain’t nothin’ human ’bout that movin’ bunch o’ alfalfa I see. Come outa your ambush an’ tell me if you got the price; an’ in case you ain’t, just close the door as you go out.’

“I seen hyak that I ain’t got no chance o’ gettin’ the best in an exchange o’ gay reparty with a jane that slings the wau-wau like she does. So I says—very cold-like: ‘Madam, I’m Shorty McCrae, an’ I got more pil chicamin than a salmon’s got scales. I’m lousy with it, an’ I wouldn’t be surprised if my whiskers was properly assayed, they’d run about ten dollars to the pan.’ With that, I pulled out my poke an’ waved it under her nose. I seen right

away that she liked me better, 'cause her face changed so quickly. She looked as though she was suckin' a lemon when she first spoke to me, an' now the lemon had turned to honey. She give me a smile that fairly dripped. 'Set down, Mr. McCrae,' says she, 'I'll be through in a minnit.' An' then you should have seen the hair fly off the poor guy that was in her chair. 'Say, sister,' the victim squawks, 'I just want a haircut. Leave my ears.'

"When I come in the place I saw a little girl at the second chair who give me an admirin' glance—in spite of my whiskers—the minnit I come in. Talk about bright eyes an' rosy cheeks! Oh mamma! She was a darb! An' her eyelashes were the blackest an' heaviest I ever seen. Her neck made me think o' Annie Laurie's, it was so different; bein' not so long an' crooked as a swan's, but just the right length an' thickness. She give me a look that made me feel that she really liked me. She tipped the chair so quick that the feller she was shavin' fell on his face; looked right at me, an' yelled: 'Next!'

"I fell over a hat-rack an' a coupla spittoons, but got in just ahead of a skinny guy who said, 'I'm next'. I looked him right in the eye—none too peaceful-like, an' said: 'If you're 'next' to what's good for you, sonny, you better walk backwards.' He did. The look the boss dame with the codfish eye give me was sharper than the razor she held in her hand.

"Well, I said 'sure' to everythin' the little barber girl asked me. I got a face rub, hair tonic, shampoo, an' lots of other things I don't know the name of. An' look at that!" He spread his fingers to show highly polished nails. "It seems that she is supportin' her mother an' they are havin' a pretty hard time o' it. I threw her a ten-spot an' give her a nugget for a keepsake 'cause I felt sorry for her. I'm goin' to take her out for an automobile ride to-morrow—that is, if her mother'll let her."

For a long interval Shorty sat looking into nothingness, a gentle light in his eyes. He sighed deeply. "Peter," he said softly, "to-day was the first time since I was a kid that a woman brushed my hair. I remember when I was a boy goin' to school, my mother used to—" he broke off suddenly. "Oh, what's the use. Guess I'll solace myself with a little music." He picked up the accordion, tested the keys, then began to sing.

Shorty's songs were usually a mixture of Chinook and English and many were of his own improvisation. He slowly expanded and contracted the bellows, and his not unmusical bass voice boomed a chanting accompaniment to the plaintive, doleful sound of the instrument.

“Come, klootchman, fly with Shorty
An’ leave your bark canoe.
We’ll take a hyas Klattawa
Into the Cariboo.
Where there’s plenty grouse an’ mowitsh,
Where the silver rainbows play;
We will iskum tenas moosum
When daylight fades away.
No more am I to wander
A’lookin’ for a stake.
We’ll build a tenas cabin
On the shore of Canim Lake.”

“Now that I’ve got that off my chest, we’ll talk a little business.” He grinned at Peter. “Guess our mascot ain’t started to work yet ’cause we run up agin a snag to-day.”

Peter glanced at the speaker questioningly.

“We got to have a thousand bucks for a grubstake, so we went up to see J. B.; but the son-of-a-gun tells us he’s quit stakin’ prospectors. We run into a guy by the name o’ Ross Morlock, who is a kind of one-horse minin’ broker an’ bootlegger combined. As far as I can find out, he don’t amount to much; his only distinction bein’ that he’s a swell dresser an’ a hellion with the wimmen. He says he has the money an’ will listen to our story. We’re goin’ to meet him in the restaurant downstairs at seven o’clock.”

Slim twisted uneasily in his chair.

“Come on, Slim! Spit it out! What is it?” encouraged Shorty.

Instead of the usual soft drawl, Slim’s voice held a sharp tone: “Don’t like him!”

“I ain’t stuck on him, neither,” concurred Shorty. “But what we goin’ to do? Men with a thousand dollars to hand over to a coupla ol’ sourdoughs like us are scarcer’n hen’s teeth.” He glanced at his watch. “Let’s have another shot an’ then go an’ eat.”

CHAPTER IV.

THE rush hour being over, the restaurant was nearly deserted. Seated at the counter were two flashily-dressed youths, and at a table in the corner a big man wearing a red mackinaw shirt, whose shoulders sagged with the unmistakable slump of intoxication, was dozily awaiting his order. The proprietor, a heavily-set Greek, with a tooth-pick in his mouth, stood by the open cash register counting the day's receipts. From the rear came the high-pitched nasal tone of a Chinese song mixed with the clatter of dishes.

Shorty piloted them to seats at one of the tables. "Always afraid that one o' them stools will bust under me," he explained.

Peter turned eagerly toward the kitchen as he heard the sound of quick footsteps. Dorothy flushed as she met his glad smile of welcome.

"You're looking better," she said.

"Yes, thank you; I'm feeling much better."

"Say," bawled the man in the red mackinaw, "how much longer have I got to hang around this dump 'fore I git that order of boiled salt mackerel?"

With a few gentle words Dorothy soothed the impatient customer. She polished three plates until they shone, then placed them on the table. She removed a glass filled with paper napkins, and with a quick surreptitious motion flicked linen napkins from a drawer and placed them by their plates. All this extra service was wasted on Peter. His eyes were on her lovely face.

The waitress' costume was wonderfully becoming to her, he thought. But, with an inward twinge, he noted that she looked very pale. The bright light overhead gave an added luster to her shining brown hair, and her blue eyes gained a softer brilliance because of her pale cheeks.

As she passed the end of the counter, one of the young men reached out and seized her arm. "New hasher, eh? You look good to me, kid," he leered.

Dorothy broke away, smothering her embarrassment in a laugh; but her face flushed a deep crimson.

"Don't you think that tallow-faced guy's snoot is a bit too long, Peter," observed Shorty. "Hadn't I better spread it over his face a little?"

The two men turned.

"Oh, look who's here!" one of them derided.

“When’s the minstrel show coming?” scoffed the other.

Shorty’s heavy square jaw shot forward; his eyes gleamed with a fearless ferocity, and for a moment he looked almost tigerish. It was the quickest and ugliest change in a man’s face that Peter had ever seen. With a celerity surprising in one of his size, Shorty shot from his chair, seized the astonished youths by their collars and yanked them to the floor. One of them aimed a vicious kick at the big man’s shins. With a wide sweep of muscular arms he brought their heads together with a thud that made their knees sag, then forced them to the door and pushed them outside.

A moment after Shorty had resumed his seat, Morlock joined the party. He was a well-built man with wide shoulders and a conscious power in his every movement. He had a strong, heavy jaw, full sensuous lips and a hooked nose. His hair was coal black, and the whiteness of his even teeth was accentuated by a short, thick moustache. His black eyes and dark skin suggested a trace of Indian blood. He was well dressed and wore a big diamond pin in his necktie. His face was handsome in a coarse way and he wore an air of arrogant good health.

To Peter, Morlock’s face was sinister and repellent; especially his eyes which were cold and shifty and recessed below heavy brows. Peter’s dislike for him heightened as he saw him staring at Dorothy.

Shorty introduced him, and Peter felt Morlock’s insolent eyes taking in every detail of his threadbare clothing.

“Set down,” invited Shorty. “We’ll eat first an’ wau-wau after. Bring me a clam chowder, a T-bone steak smothered in onions, an’ mushrooms, french-fried potatoes, a coupla eggs sunny side up, an’ then I’ll give you the rest o’ my order. I been a-livin’ on hog-boosum an’ beans so long that I’m goin’ to make up for lost time.”

While they were eating, Dorothy busied herself about the counter, lining up mustard jars and ketchup bottles, filling up salt and pepper shakers and wiping the tops of sugar bowls.

Morlock’s eyes rested on her at every opportunity, with a certain glow in their dark depths that made Peter’s blood hot.

“Well, what d’you say ’bout grubstakin’ us?” asked Shorty after the dishes were cleared away.

Morlock extracted a cigarette from a gold case, lighted it and leaned back in his chair. “Hadn’t we better talk this matter over in private?” he suggested.

Shorty looked about the deserted restaurant. “Private enough to suit me.”

Morlock inclined his head toward Peter.

“Oh, him? He’s our pardner.”

“Your partner?” echoed Morlock. He shot a narrow-lidded glance at Peter. It was evident that he had conceived an aversion for the sick boy. “I’ll tell you right now that I’m not endowing a sanitarium,” he averred.

Peter flushed, but ignored the inimical remark.

“I can’t see where it’s any skin off your neck,” returned Shorty heatedly. “You get half. What Slim an’ me do with our’n is our business.”

“Well, what can I do for you?” asked Morlock placatingly, his voice smooth and oily.

“We’re goin’ to hit her this time an’ the party that stakes us is goin’ to make a big haul an’—”

Morlock interrupted with a wave of his hand.

“I’ve heard that same story a thousand times. I’m from Missouri—you’ve got to show me.”

“Well, how’s that?” Shorty dropped the small sack of gold on the table with a thud.

Morlock rolled the poke between thick, soft fingers, untied the string and poured the contents on a sheet of newspaper. His eyes fairly glittered at the sight of raw gold. He breathed heavily. For a moment he sat quietly, fingering the gold. His eyes flicked to Shorty’s face with a quick glint of shrewdness.

Peter was beginning to distrust Morlock in earnest now. Morlock had schooled himself to carry a look of conscious virtue in his eyes, but under stress of excitement or when unobserved, this look faded to one of sly cunning, which was his natural expression.

He leaned towards Shorty.

“Where did this come from?” he asked in a low voice.

Among gold-seekers this question is a gross breach of prospectors’ ethics, but to the trustful Shorty every man was honest until proved otherwise.

“We got it just outside Injun Valley. Next time we’re goin’ in—”

“Shorty!” interposed Slim’s gentle voice.

Morlock turned to Slim, lowering blackly. The slender man’s steady gaze seemed to disconcert him; he laughed uneasily. “Didn’t mean anything,” he apologized. “Didn’t think what I was saying.”

“Morlock,” drawled Slim, “I don’t like you. I don’t like your face and I don’t like the way you talk. As far as I’m concerned I don’t want your money.”

Morlock’s white teeth bared in a vicious smile. “I’m not doing business with you; I’m talking to Shorty.”

Shorty’s eyes blazed dangerously. “You go to hell! Me an’ Slim are pardners.”

Slim thrust his lean face, hardened with a look that was almost a blow, close to Morlock’s. “Get up and get out,” he rasped. His hand dropped below the level of the table.

Peter had never heard Slim speak in such a tone. It startled him to discover that the gentle old voice could harden and sting like that. Again the tone seemed to bite. Morlock came to his feet as though the words acted directly on his muscles. His face pale and viciously sullen, he picked up his hat and coat, walked to the door, then turned. “Indian Valley, eh?” he snarled. “I need an outing so I’ll grubstake myself and save a thousand dollars. You’ll see me again.”

Shorty sprang to his feet. “If you do, come a-shootin’!” he bawled after him. He turned to his friends. “Well, boys, I guess we’re outa luck again.” He slumped to his chair dejectedly. “Should have smacked him on the nose for the way he talked to Slim,” he mumbled regretfully.

There was a damper on the spirits of the party, and for a few minutes they sat quietly, each busy with his thoughts. Peter again felt the old sense of depression; a feeling that the hand of fate was still against him.

Shorty’s keen eyes took note of Peter’s despondent air. “Never mind, ol’ Mascot,” he cried cheerily, “little ol’ Lady Luck may be waitin’ just ’round the corner.” He came to his feet, stretched and yawned prodigiously, then took a few limping steps. “Holy smoke!” he groaned, “these new shoes an’ walkin’ on the pavement have made my poor dogs sore. I’m goin’ up an’ lie down. What d’you say, Peter?”

“I’ll sit here a-while. I’ve had lots of sleep.”

Shorty winked knowingly. “All right, son. Come on, Slim, let’s hit the hay.” He flourished his hat to Dorothy. “Good-night, little girl.”

Dorothy brought Peter another cup of coffee, then sank to a chair opposite him. “I’m glad you didn’t take money from that man,” she said earnestly.

“So am I—in a way.”

“I don’t like him.” She looked apprehensively toward the street, then shuddered. Her eyes held more of fear than hate.

Peter’s face hardened. “Does he bother you?”

“I never saw him before, but it’s the way he looks at me; his eyes are terrible.” She saw the quick glow of sympathy in Peter’s face and changed the subject abruptly. “Do you think the prospectors will be able to raise the money?”

“I don’t know,” he responded dully. “Shorty says that it is becoming harder every year to raise a grubstake, and that they may have to go to work in a logging camp for a few months; and I can’t do hard work,” he finished bitterly.

Dorothy rested her elbows on the table, her chin resting in cupped hands. “I’d love to help them,” she said, her eyes shining. “I’ve always wanted to grubstake a prospector. Do you think they’ll let me?”

Peter looked at her in astonishment. “But they need a thousand dollars!”

“I have enough,” she said quietly.

Peter’s mouth flew open, he stared at her incredulously. At this moment the proprietor emerged from the kitchen and snapped off a row of lights behind the counter. Dorothy arose and unfastened her apron. “We are closing now. If you will wait for me outside, I will be back in half an hour with the money.” She was rosy with excitement as she hurried from the restaurant.

In a daze from the sudden change in their fortune, Peter passed to the street. Feeling the need of exercise he walked along Cordova Street, then turned onto Hastings. The night was clear, with a full moon that bathed the city in its cool light. Crowds of pleasure seekers thronged the streets, and outside picture shows stood long queues of waiting patrons. Peter stopped in a doorway and viewed the animated scene about him.

Parked against the curb of a dimly-lighted side street, was a huge limousine. On the sidewalk in the shadow of the building, a man paced nervously back and forth, and at every second turn he would glance impatiently at his watch. He stepped forward eagerly, as a girl approached from the darkness of the side street, and assisted her into the car. Peter heard his voice raised in protesting tone as he tucked a robe about her. The powerful car set up a deep throbbing hum, and as it rolled under a bright arc light, Peter fairly gasped with astonishment—for it was Dorothy’s pale face, pale and smiling, that looked up at the driver. Peter’s eyes remained glued to the car until the tail light disappeared around the corner, a bemused look on his face.

“What next!” he muttered. He retraced his steps, to Cordova Street, his head bowed, a puzzled look in his eyes. For twenty minutes Peter paced the sidewalk in front of the restaurant, mulling over in his mind this singular occurrence, so engrossed with his thoughts that he was not aware of Dorothy’s presence until she touched his arm.

She smiled up at him. “I haven’t been long, have I?” She placed a package in his hand. “Here it is, Mascot,” she laughed. “And good luck to you. Good-night.”

“Can—can’t I see you safely home?” stammered Peter.

She gave him a startled glance. “No, no!” she replied hastily. “I’ll see you to-morrow.” A moment later her slender figure was lost in the crowd.

In his eagerness to get the glad tidings to his friends, Peter momentarily forgot his weakness. He bounded up the stairs two steps at a stride. Breathing heavily, he burst into the room. “Shorty! Slim! We’ve got the money! We—” Seized with an attack of coughing he thrust the package into Shorty’s hands, the string broke and bills fluttered to the floor.

Shorty’s eyes bulged out. “Holy jumpin’ jehosophat,” he yelled. “What you bin doin’, boy? Robbin’ a bank?”

His breath recovered, Peter told them of Dorothy’s partnership in their enterprise.

“Do you mean to tell me that the little girl put up a thousand bones for us rough-necks to gamble with?” enquired Shorty skeptically.

Peter nodded.

Shorty sank to the edge of the bed. “By the holy mackinaw, if we don’t hit her, I ain’t goin’ to see that kid lose a cent, if I have to work my fingers to the bone to get it! Ain’t that right, Slim?” To which Slim gave the usual affirmative.

“Say, maybe our mascot ain’t workin’, huh? Come on, boys, let’s have a shot.” He filled the glasses with beer. “Here’s to the little girl that trusts us. Here’s hopin’ that we bring home the bacon.” Shorty was filled with a great enthusiasm. “I’ll see my little barber girl to-morrer, an’ then back to the hills.” He seized the accordion, sprang to the center of the room, and his short legs attempted the intricate steps of a hornpipe. There was a quick tearing sound. The music ceased. Shorty clapped his hand to his nether garment.

“Hell!” he sighed dolefully, “there goes my new britches.”

CHAPTER V.



FLOCK of Japanese starlings testing their shrill voices under his window awoke Peter. He lay listening to the growing sounds of the slowly arousing streets. A trolley car swung around a corner with a nerve-racking scream of wheels, a bullying motor-horn blared its warning. The shuffling steps of early workers and the raucous cries of newsboys drifted through the window. Another day in the busy marts of trade was being ushered in with the usual clamour.

Peter sighed happily. He was leaving the rush of madly competitive centres behind him; where men lived in airless rooms; where tired city faces threw off a casual glance as a steel plate casts back a bullet; where all was din and confusion, and where men strove desperately for money and power.

He would soon be in the wilderness, in happy, beautiful quietude; his eye delighted by a leafy luxuriance, by brilliant colours of land and water; his ear soothed by the song of birds, by the flow of gurgling streams or the rush of boisterous mountain torrents. He sprang from bed filled with a joyous exaltation he had not felt for years.

Slim, shaving by the window, turned to smile a greeting. "Mornin', ol' hoss," cried Shorty gaily.

The big man sat on the edge of his bed mending the rent in his trousers with fingers that, though thick and heavy, were surprisingly deft and sure. As he wielded the needle he discoursed freely.

"Well, boys, we got to buy a few things an' then we're on our way. Peter, you'll have to get a whole rig-out. Can you handle a six-gun?"

"I was considered a fair shot in the army."

Shorty nodded vigorously. "Good! The days when you had to protect yourself with a gun are pretty well gone, but in this case we may run up agin a snag or two where bein' quick on the draw may save our hides." He chuckled happily as he tested the mended seam. "An elephant couldn't bust them britches now. An' the way things look right now, I'll have somebody to mend for me before long."

"Now, me an' Slim was a-thinkin'," he continued, "that we'll go easy on that little girl's dough. It would be different if it was ol' J.B.'s chicamin, 'cause he's gots barrels o' money; but that little girl slingin' hash in that place for a livin' can't afford to lose any. Now, there's two ways to get into

Injun Valley. We can go out on the C.P.R. an' then take an auto for 'bout two hundred miles, and then hosses for forty more to Foghorn's Camp, where we outfit with grub. This way it will cost a lot o' money. Me an' Slim got a trail blazed from Siwash Point—up the Coast—right in to Foghorn's place. We can take the boat this evenin' an' be on the trail to-morrer mornin', an' our fare will be almost nothin'. It will be a hyas klattawa but we can travel light an' take our time." He looked at Peter dubiously. "Do you think you can make her?"

"I'm sure I can."

"That's the way to talk," approved Shorty.

He moved to the mirror, adjusted his flamboyant tie and set his hat at a cocky angle. "I'm goin' to turn the rest o' our dust into cash the first thing, then we'll do our buyin' an' then I'm goin' to take my girl out for an auto ride."

Suddenly Slim raised his head, lifted his hand in a warning for silence, tiptoed to the door and flung it open with a quick jerk. Peter heard the sound of footsteps retreating down the hall. Shorty sprang to the corridor.

"That damned skunk of a Morlock's tryin' to find out somethin'; got a stool-pigeon on us," he blazed. "Did you see him, Slim? What'd he look like?"

"Half-breed. Black moustache."

For a full minute Shorty raved. He possessed the largest collection of vitriolic adjectives in captivity. His vocabulary, when aroused to anger, was a succession of expressive and passionate explosions. His imprecations were for the greater part of his own invention, and although extremely caustic, were never vile or sacrilegious.

"If I ever get my hands on that cultus skunk of a mealy-mouthed son-of-a-gun,, I'll break him in two an' feed him for crow bait! Come on, let's go and eat."

Later, when they had finished making their purchases, Shorty left them to keep his engagement with his new-found lady friend. A pink in the lapel of his coat, his homely face alight with enthusiasm, he waved them a careless adieu.

"Sorry I can't take you along," he grinned.

Slim stood gazing after his partner, a soft smile playing about his lips.

"Shorty has always been the same. His big heart has cost him all he ever made." He shook his head. "'No fool like an old fool'," he quoted tritely.

At noon Shorty joined them at the room. He burst through the door, radiantly boisterous.

“Say, boys, I’ve had some time! We rode ’round Stanley Park an’ we sure did wau-way. Her name’s Maude, but she told me I could call her Cutie, as that’s her pet name. When I got a good look at her in the sunlight I seen that she wasn’t as young an’ pretty as I thought last night. I ain’t robbin’ the cradle, but she’s a peach just the same. She told me all about herself an’ said that I’d been the nicest to her o’ any man she ever met. Her mother’s sick an’ they’re havin’ a hard time of it. She made me feel right sorry for her, too. Said she had to borrow some money from somewhere to pay the doctor. She had tears in her eyes when she told me, an’ she looked so little and sad that I shoved her fifty bucks, an’ she broke right down an’ cried. I’m goin’ to take her out to a show this afternoon,” he finished happily.

“Shorty, hand me your roll,” demanded Slim.

“Aw, Slim,” objected the big man. “I only loaned it to her. I ain’t spendin’ it foolishly.” But he produced the money forthwith.

Slim peeled off one bill which he passed to Shorty, and put the remainder in his pocket.

“I can have a hell o’ a time on a ten-spot!” lamented Shorty. “Let’s go an’ eat.”

Dorothy led them to a table and drew out their chairs. Shorty made an exaggerated bow in acknowledgment of this service. “Little girl,” he boasted grandiloquently, “when I come back I’m a-goin’ to throw a sack o’ pil chicamin on this table that’ll bust its legs; an’ then you can give up presidin’ in this hash emporium an’ have half a dozen slant-eyed Orientals to wait on you in a big house, an’ a French shoffer in leggins to drive you ’round Stanley Park in a big red limosine.”

Dorothy laughed heartily at this glowing picture of future opulence.

“When are you leaving?”

“This evenin’s boat. An’ as you are our pardner we’ll expect you to come down to see us off.”

“I’ll be glad to,” she smiled.

It was the rush hour; every seat was taken. Peter watched her as she flew about the tables, carrying loaded trays that appeared far too heavy for her slender arms. A wonderful girl, he marvelled.

Then he fell to wondering about last night’s occurrence. What relation was the man in the big car to her? He recalled with a peculiar twinge the

affectionate look she had bestowed upon her escort. Who was this man upon whom she had lavished tender smiles? But what had he, Peter Welton to do with all this? Why shouldn't she have a man friend—or even a sweetheart? He shook his head. What was this odd feeling that crept over him? Let him meet it frankly—was it love for Dorothy? No, not that, he decided. It was a peculiar sense of possession, of guardianship, an impulse of protection for this refined girl who was forced to work in such coarse surroundings.

“Damned if I don't feel like a highway robber for takin' that kid's money,” growled Shorty as he speared a potato. “She looks kind of pindlin' to me,” he went on in a troubled tone. “She ought to get out in the country.”

“You fellers go along,” said Shorty after they had finished. “I got a little business to talk over with our silent pardner.”

He sat quietly enjoying a smoke until Dorothy came to clear away the dishes.

“Why don't you get a job out in the country where you could get some roses in your cheeks an' not have to breathe rotten air?” he asked her.

“I would love to. I have never had an opportunity.”

“I think I can get you a job at Foghorn Jack's place. He keeps a girl in the summer to wait on these high-falutin' sports that goes fishin' an' huntin'. Do you think you'd like it?”

“Yes! yes!” responded Dorothy eagerly. “It would be wonderful! Is it near Indian Valley?”

“It's the last point we hit before we take to the woods. I'll write to you as soon as we get there. And don't say anythin' to Peter—I want to surprise him,” he finished with a chuckle.

At the mention of Peter's name, Dorothy's pale cheeks flushed.

“Oh, that's all right; you needn't get so flabbergasted. I know a thing or two,” Shorty smiled presciently.

It was a crestfallen Shorty who crept into the room an hour before the time set for their departure. He glanced sheepishly at his friends, sank despondently to a chair and rolled a cigarette. Slim looked meaningly at Peter.

“Gimme a drink, Slim.”

Slim produced a bottle of beer.

“Hell!” snorted Shorty disgustedly. “I need somethin' with a wallop—none o' that belly wash.”

He reached for a bottle of rum, took a long shuddering drink of the potent liquor, then for an interval sat in quiet meditation. "Somethin' wrong somewhere, Slim," he finally blurted.

Save for a slight lifting of his brows, Slim gave no sign that he had heard.

"Don't know what to make of it," Shorty continued querulously. "I waited at the corner where she told me for an hour, but she didn't show up. I went over to the barber shop an' I asks for her. 'Are you referrin' to my erstwhile employee, Cutie?' asks the dame with the cold lamps, as she gives me a kind o' mockin' smile that made me mad. 'That quick brain o' yours kinda misrepresents your appearance, madam; we are referrin' to one an' the same. That got her goat. 'Cutie got staked by some boob an' she got too proud to work,' she snaps. 'She's on her way to give Seattle a treat with her presence. Hats is cheaper down there'."

Shorty's face wore a puzzled frown. "Now what does all that mean, Slim?"

Slim evaded the question. "You'd better be getting ready to hit the trail, Shorty," he said gently.

Shorty removed his new clothing, folded them carefully and rolled them into a bundle. "Don't believe I'll ever wear them again. Guess I better stay in the woods where a rough-neck like me belongs." He donned his picturesque woodsman's garb, took another drink, slumped to a seat, his face shrouded in gloom. "Damned if I can believe that she ain't on the square," he burst out. "She's got too good an eye. Somethin's wrong."

To Peter the situation was no longer humourous, for he saw that his simple, trusting friend was deeply hurt. He reached out impulsively and patted Shorty's shoulder. At this display of affection Shorty's face brightened.

" 'The saddest words o' tongue or pen,
The saddest o' these, it might have bin.' "

He smiled rather gloomily as he finished this quotation, then reached for his accordion and began to sing a soft accompaniment. It was a wandering, formless fragment of a Chinook song, rising and falling aimlessly like the whispering of a gentle breeze along the seashore.

He placed the instrument carefully in its case, tied it securely to the top of his pack, squared his big shoulders, drew in a couple of lungfuls of his cigarette and let them out in a long smoky sigh.

“Oh, hell! Such is life. Come on! Let’s go!”

CHAPTER VI.

THE WHARF and boat were full of business as the time for sailing drew near. Clamorous with the shouts of deck-hands sliding with loaded trucks down the steep incline to the lower deck; the staccato exhaust of motor trucks crawling to and from the big shed, and the usual hubbub attending the departure of a steamer.

The four members of the strangely assorted partnership stood apart from the crowd, engaged in a desultory conversation. Peter's outdoor costume of cotton khaki fitted his spare frame flappingly. His wide hat and high boots accentuating his height, he towered head and shoulders above his companions. As the boat's hoarse and ragged whistle sent out its deafening call, Slim gave his hand to Dorothy in mute farewell. Shorty winked slyly as he enveloped her hand with his huge paw. "Hope to see you agin—soon," he beamed.

The strong wind had whipped a glow into her pale face; tendrils of her brown hair curled from under the small blue hat that fitted snugly on her head. Peter took her hand and they met each other's eyes in a long look.

No, Peter had assured himself again and again, he was not in love; but when he felt the pressure of her warm, soft fingers, and her blue eyes met his in a level gaze, a tingling shock of light vibrations coursed up and down his spine.

Prompted by some sudden inner urge that he could not explain, he seized both of Dorothy's hands in his and held them in a firm grasp.

"Good-bye."

He dropped her hands quickly, swung about and followed his friends down the gangway.

Lines were thrown off; a bell jangled; the engines sprang into a vigorous spinning rhythm that set the deck vibrating, and the boat backed slowly into the Inlet. Peter and Shorty made their way to the stern as the steamer swung about and headed for the Narrows.

Dorothy stood at the end of the pier, waving her handkerchief. Peter saw her start suddenly as a man appeared at her side and doffed his hat. There was no mistaking Morlock's fine figure and dark face, or the mocking smile as he turned toward the receding boat.

“That coyote spyin’ on us agin,” growled Shorty. “If he bothers that little girl I’ll go through him like a logger through his summer’s pay.”

The steamer fought her way out through the Narrows in the teeth of a boisterous west wind and against an incoming tide. Peter walked to the bow and drank in the purity of the salt-laden air made electrical and racy by the vigour of the gale. The big green waves broke crisply on the boat’s bow, flinging a white spume high in air. The wind shrieked, and above an escort of gulls, enjoying the gale, whirled like bits of paper, or poised seemingly motionless, screaming their joy as they rode the wind.

They passed a labouring tug towing a deeply-laden scow. The tug was making heavy weather of it, punching her short bow deep into the seas, and hidden by spray at every plunge. Every time she wallowed in the milk-white foam she seemed in imminent danger of foundering; but she rose lightly as a cork shook off the water that tried to submerge her, and staggered sturdily through the heaving combers. The wind tore the smoke from her funnel and sent it stringing far astern over the tossing wave-crests.

Emerging into the open bay, away from the dragging tide, the waves rolled in a series of long ridges more evenly spaced, and charging out of the ocean with a lusty power that set the deck heaving with gentle undulations. The breeze lessened as dusk fell. The sun flamed its last and dropped as if to crimson oblivion under the rim of the western sky-line. Lights gleamed suddenly all over the steamer and myriad pinpoints of lights sparkled out from the city behind them.

A big freighter, carrying the stains and blotches of a long voyage upon her, loomed through the dusk and passed so close to them that the tramping beat of her engines was plainly heard. A moment later her booming whistle announced her entrance to the Narrows.

Peter sat up until long after dark, while the boat ploughed north leaving a phosphorescent wake that writhed away in the darkness like a golden serpent. At times they turned into small harbours, the engines grumbling as if in complaint for having to stop at lonely places to discharge a mail sack or one insignificant passenger.

Day was breaking when the party came on deck to disembark. Gradually in the growing light, Peter made out a level spit of land sloping to a white beach from which a pier extended far out into the sea as though in welcome. The smoke from the chimneys of a tiny settlement mingled with the morning haze, and in the background a dark mysterious forest swept up the sides of massive mountains upon whose peaks gleamed limpet-like glaciers.

“There’s a hotel there. Let’s eat,” said Shorty, as they walked up the narrow wharf.

Peter noted an eager haste, a buoyancy of spirit on the part of his friends. They ate breakfast hurriedly, slung packs in place and turned toward the mountains. Nearing the rim of the forest, Shorty turned.

“Take a good look at the salt-chuck, ol’ Mascot. You won’t see it agin for some time.”

The last trace of wind had gone, the ground swell had died away and placid water rested in threads of silver among the countless rocks and islands. The air was steeped in the primal calm of early morn. So profound was the silence on land and sea, that the rising of a flap-skitter duck far offshore was plainly audible, and from a point fully two miles to the north, the half-human cries of a flock of gulls came faintly to their ears.

“Well, let’s go,” cried Shorty happily. He shook his heavy shoulders to put his load in place. “Golly, but it does seem good to feel a pack on your back an’ the trail under your feet again.”

Among the trees spring was in the air and announced by myriad catkins of ruddy brown on the alders, the unfolding leaves of the wild gooseberry and the flowering currants’ early bloom. From the tangled growth of small trees came bird notes, pure as silver, and thrillingly sweet in the hush of dawn. The caressing air, scented with the odours of the forest, drifted languorously through the dark aisles of huge firs and hemlocks.

An hour’s walking brought them to the end of the open, well-worn road, and they turned up the hill through a mass of windfalls and ledges with only an axe-mark of “blaze” to guide them.

Shorty carried a rifle and an enormous pack, but he leaped fallen trees and clambered over ledges with an agility that was surprising in one of his build and weight. Slim’s load was lighter. He walked with a loose-kneed shamble that carried him up the steep mountain at an astonishing speed.

For half an hour they climbed steadily. Peter, stumbling along in the rear, kept at first at Shorty’s heels, then lagged little by little. Presently his breath failed him and his choking lungs turned his pale face a deep purple. The muscles on the front of his legs began to ache, the straps of his pack cut his flesh cruelly and the throbbing of his heart choked him. Shorty noted Peter’s evident distress.

“Want to rest a-while, Peter?” he shouted without turning.

“No—I—I’m all right.”

Shorty emitted a satisfied chuckle, fumbled with his pack, then threw it to the ground.

“Darned fryin’ pan stickin’ in my ribs. Got to have somethin’ soft to put next my back or I’ll chafe all the meat off my bones.”

Glad of the moment’s respite, breathing heavily, Peter sank to the ground. Shorty opened Peter’s sack, extracted a heavy roll of blankets. “Just what I wanted. How’s your load, Slim?”

“Weight hangs too low,” Slim answered, as he reached for a bundle of the sick man’s clothing. “That will make it balance just right.”

All that day Peter stuck gamely to the task of keeping up with his companions. Panting at every step, utterly fatigued, lurching and stumbling, he plodded stubbornly on. It was nearly dark when they arrived at the crest of a ridge and Slim called a halt for the day. Peter threw himself flat on his back, arms thrown out, chest heaving. Slim stood looking down at the prostrate form, a kindly light in his soft dark eyes. To Peter, Slim seemed as unruffled as when they started.

“You—must be—in good shape,” he gasped.

“Good shape,” Shorty snorted. “Why, he ain’t nothin’ but muscle an’ bone. He don’t bother to go ’round trees an’ rocks; he goes through ’em.”

Peter came painfully to his feet as his partners set about preparing camp for the night. In spite of Shorty’s protest, he assisted in raising the small tent, preparing the meal and making their bed of soft boughs.

Peter ate ravenously. Every movement twisted his face with pain, but he stuck gamely with the job of washing dishes, then limped to the tent. There was not a bone in his body that was not the home of an ache. With a muffled groan, he eased himself to the pine boughs, tumbled into his blankets and immediately fell asleep.

The two men by the campfire exchanged smiles of satisfaction.

“The boy’s got the guts,” whispered Shorty.

“Pluck,” answered Slim.

The next day was a repetition of the first, except that the first three hours was down hill, bringing new muscles into play. Peter ached as though he had been beaten. Stiff and sore, he clung grimly to the heels of his companions.

By noon they left the rocky mountain-side and entered a valley where there was little underbrush and the going became easier. Emerald lakes reflected mountains and trees, and running through the valley was a wide sluggish river, its banks lush with a growth of willow, alder and cottonwood.

About them pressed the deep woods full of life. The air pulsed with the joyous song of birds. From the lakes came the whistle of wings and the harsh chorus of water-fowl. Grouse boomed from the ground and deer vanished from sight with a flash of white tail. The shrill cries of blue-jays and the chatter of squirrels told all the wood folk of their coming. Thus noisily heralded, they journeyed on into the heart of British Columbia, where towering peaks rear their cloud-swept crests until cloud and mountain are hard to tell apart; into the mightiest and wildest and most majestic confusion of beauty on the continent.

That night they camped by the shores of a small stream. Shorty cut a long slender willow, attached hook and line, and with a bit of bacon for bait, fished diligently for half an hour, but without success.

“Cook’ll have to give us sowbelly agin,” he said disgustedly.

While eating the salt bacon and bannock, Peter fell to wondering why the men deprived themselves of fresh meat in a country abounding with game. His musings were interrupted by a sound of snapping twigs. He turned to see a buck and doe standing in alert pose at the edge of the forest.

“There’s a chance to stock our larder,” whispered Peter.

Slim glanced at Shorty and the latter shook his head vigourously.

The beautiful animals were a study for an artist, delicate, graceful, exquisitely coloured, and their great eyes held a look of questioning innocence. For some time they stood to stare, whistle and stamp their dainty hoofs in an odd mixture of curiosity and defiance. A gentle breath of wind brought the human scent to their quivering nostrils, and with a startled bleat they vanished in the forest with a series of long graceful leaps.

The long walk on level ground had lessened the ache in Peter’s body, and that evening he joined the others by the camp fire. The dancing light etched their faces crimson against the outer darkness, and sent giant, fantastic shadows that leaped grotesquely about the tree trunks. The air was spicy with the scent of burning cedar, and in the quiet atmosphere the smoke stood erect like a lavender spirit released by the flames.

Stealthy mysterious sounds came from the gloom about them; the sighing of trees, eerie rustlings, whimpers and the soft padding of feet. The murmur of streams as they rippled over rocks; the call of night birds and the sudden flutter of startled wings. The wild, pulsing honking of a flock of geese grew nearer and sounded louder with the swiftness of a train. They heard the rustling of their wings, then in a swift diminuendo the sound died away in the north.

Listening to the wild life about him brought Peter's thoughts back to the fact that they were going on short rations in a land of plenty.

"Is it against the law to shoot deer now, Shorty?"

"For the general public, yes; but a prospector can shoot for somethin' to eat at any time."

"Why didn't you shoot one of those deer? A venison chop would taste pretty good."

"This is the matin' season, Peter. I'd have to be starvin' before I'd kill a deer now. Of course a feller has to kill to live, but a lot o' these hunters get my goat. They kill all the deer the law allows them, just for the fun of killin', an' then have their pictures taken with their chests thrown out as if they'd done somethin' brave.

"Makes me sick to see the head of a handsome deer lookin' down with glassy eyes from a wall, an' listen to the hunter braggin' how he shot it. I bin to blame myself, but I killed my last deer over twenty years ago, an' by the holy smoke I ain't goin' to kill another one!"

Shorty ignited a sliver of wood at the fire, lighted his pipe, and leaned back against the bole of a tree. Noting the questioning look in Peter's eyes, he continued:

"Me an' Slim was prospectin' up in the Chilcotin. We run short o' meat so I went out to look for a buck—we never shot does. It was near sundown when I saw a deer feedin' in the medder. I couldn't tell if it was a buck or a doe; but as it was gettin' pretty dark an' I was a long way from camp—I let drive. The deer threw up its head with a blatt o' pain when the bullet hit, an' I saw it was a doe—an' a beauty, too. She stood for a-while a-swayin' back an' forth on spraddled legs, then her hindquarters slumped down an' she dragged herself towards the woods, her hind legs trailin'. I knew from the way she acted that I'd hit her on the backbone.

"I couldn't find any blood but I follered her a ways into the bush, lost the trail an' stood for a minute, listenin'. It was the middle o' the summer an' the woods was heavy-leaved with the season's growth, an' quiet with that kinda creepy stillness that always comes just afore dark. All at once, right behind me, I heard the most awful moan; so human-like that I felt a crinkly feelin' up an' down my back. It sounded like a woman groanin' in hellish agony. I turned 'round to look right into the eyes o' the wounded doe."

Shorty paused for a moment.

"Peter, did you ever notice a doe's eyes?"

Peter shook his head.

“Well, there ain’t nothin’ in the wilderness goes right to your heart like a doe’s eyes,” Shorty went on softly. “Tender an’ shiny, they look out as if askin’ for love an’ kindness—like the eyes o’ a young mother cuddlin’ her first kid.”

“The deer was a-shakin’ all over, her ears pointin’ at me like two accusin’ fingers, tears o’ pain runnin’ outa her big eyes, an’ she seemed to be sayin’: ‘Why did you do it?’

“I should have ended her misery right then, Peter, but her eyes seemed to hypnotize me—I couldn’t move. I felt like a murderer. There was that innercent critter who, a few minutes before, was filled with the joy o’ livin’, now layin’ there with a bullet in her back, sufferin’ like hell!—an’ I had done it!

“The doe’s beautiful head begun to sink down just as though she was noddin’ to sleep. She stretched out her neck full length, let out a kind o’ sobbin’ blatt, an’ died.

“I don’t know how long I stood there before I dug up courage to start skinnin’ the body. My hands were shaky, an’ a slip o’ the knife cut a milk gland an’ the hot milk run over my fingers. I had killed a mother that was nursin’ her young! I turned sick. My nerves were jumpy, an’ when I heard a twig snap behind me I leaped a foot off the ground.

“I turned ’round to see a little fawn in its pretty baby coat o’ brown an’ white spots. I guess the dyin’ cry o’ its mother had called it from its hidin’ place. It wasn’t a bit afraid o’ me; come right up, and pressed right against my legs, sniffed at the dead body, an’ then licked my hand with its little rough tongue—the hand that had killed its mother!

“Peter, that was the only time in my life that anythin’ got my goat. I ran out o’ them woods as if all hell was after me, an’ for weeks after I could see that doe’s eyes.”

A shudder ran through the speaker’s big frame.

“I ain’t killed a deer since, an’ I ain’t a-goin’ to—never!”

With toughened fingers he extracted a coal from the fire, relighted his pipe, raised his eyes to Peter’s face, then stared suddenly into the darkness beyond.

“Look!” he whispered, pointing.

Peter turned, and his startled eyes beheld two glowing balls of fire flashing out of the dim forest.

“What is it?”

In answer, Shorty threw a handful of pine boughs on the fire. Immediately the gloom retreated, objects leaped into view, ghost-like in the sudden glare of light. The grey trunks of trees reared high to shadowy branches that stretched over them like heavy wings.

Within the arc of light stood a doe, head erect, ears twitching, her eyes ablaze with the wonder of the flames. Eyes, ears and nose tested the strange phenomena as she advanced timidly.

Peter watched the lovely creature, fascinated by her beauty, her dainty motions, her sleek hide and her wonderful eyes glowing like burning rainbows kindled by the fire. She stamped her tiny hoof nervously as the fire snapped, but she advanced slowly with her delicate nostrils searching the air to find out if this strange intruder was friend or foe.

Shorty leaned forward and pressed the rifle into Peter's hands. Peter shuddered, dropping the gun as though it burned his fingers.

"My God, no!" he gasped.

The deer held its pose until the danger scent poured into its nostrils, then with a sharp ka-a-ah that sounded like a pistol shot in the quiet forest, she bounded away, her white flag shining like a wave crest.

Shorty knocked the ashes from his pipe, a pleased smile playing about his lips.

"My boy," he said gently, "you and the wilderness are just becomin' acquainted. I want to start you right."

CHAPTER VII.



IF A BOOK were written on the climate of British Columbia, it would make a huge volume. No part of the continent has such a diversity of climatic conditions. The Coast atmosphere, mild from the tempering influence of the Japanese Current, has its wet and dry belts within a few miles of each other. Journeying into the vast hinterland one passes through three distinct climates. From the soft warm winds of the Pacific to the keen sharp air of lofty plateaux, then down into sheltered valleys where in summer the irrigated fields present an almost tropical appearance, and the air is burdened with the spicy odour of sagebrush.

In a valley near the edge of the dry-belt sprawled an oddly assorted group of log buildings known as Foghorn Jack's Camp. Built in the early sixties during the famous Cariboo gold rush, it ministered to the needs of those hardy bands of adventurers who made early history in British Columbia. The original building was dwarfed by the wing that Foghorn Jack had built, and clustering about it, a number of smaller buildings erected as growing business needs demanded.

None called the owner of the camp by his full name of "Jack Fraser", and few had ever heard it. His roaring voice supplied the reason for the cognomen and throughout the North Country he was known as "Foghorn Jack".

A brilliant flood of sunshine poured down from a cloudless sky, bathing hills and valley in its pure light as Peter and his friends debouched from the timber and walked up the dusty road toward the camp.

Three or four Indians in cowboy hats, woolly chaps and with red kerchiefs around their dusky necks, sat tilted back in rustic chairs on the wide verandah. Several wiry cayuses nibbled at the sparse grass near a gnarled old cottonwood whose rough bark held the tooth-gnawed marks of years.

Shading his eyes with his hand, the proprietor stood in the doorway peering at the approaching figures. He was sixty-five years of age, short in stature, huge in girth, wore an enormous beard, and was possessed of twinkling blue eyes that looked out on the world gently from under grizzled brows. He had a pleasant manner and a kindness radiated from him. Peter liked him at first sight.

Shorty greeted him cordially.

A cheerful smile parted the old man's mass of tangled whiskers as he recognized the newcomers.

"Well, well, well. If it ain't my old tillikums, Shorty an' Slim," he cried happily. He shook their hands vigourously, then ushered them into the dim and inviting coolness of the lodge. "Make yourselves to home, boys," boomed their host. "By the time ye git washed up, Wing will have a meal rustled for ye." He disappeared in the rear, and they heard him issuing orders to the Chinese cook.

Peter looked worn and weary, his face veiled in a pallor that a light coat of sunburn could not efface. Physically weak from months of illness, miserably undernourished for a long period, he had stretched his endurance to the utmost, covering the last twenty miles by sheer force of will power.

Foghorn showed them to their beds, and once inside, Peter threw his pack on the floor, then with a sigh of relief, stretched himself on the bed.

"Don't think I could have made another ten miles if my life had depended on it," he confessed.

"Never mind, son," comforted Shorty, "we're through with shanks' mare. No more sore feet. We'll straddle a cayuse from now on."

To his great joy, Peter discovered that the camp was equipped with modern plumbing; and for ten minutes he wallowed in the luxury of a hot bath.

A half hour later, greatly refreshed, he joined the others at a table in the big room that answered the double purpose of dining and living room. He attacked the plentiful and well-cooked meal that Wing set before them with a keen relish that he had never experienced before.

Shorty watched him approvingly. "Long's you can throw a lot o' grub under your belt there ain't anythin' very serious wrong with you," he observed.

Foghorn seated himself at the head of the table and kept up a running fire of talk. Well named, thought Peter, as he listened to the deep timbre of his voice.

"Got any visitors yet?" Shorty interjected the question during a pause in Foghorn's flow of speech.

"Got one dude Englishman, and a half-breed that come in yistiddy, who sez he hails from Vancouver an' that he's got a party comin' in to go prospectin'."

Slim looked up quickly.

“Describe him.”

“Ugly lookin’ cuss with a moustache an’ a welt on his face. He brought in five hosses an’ a load o’ grub. Wonder what he thinks I run a store for?”

“Sounds like our friend, don’t it, Slim?” questioned Shorty.

Slim nodded.

“Do you know him, Shorty?” asked Foghorn.

“Not yet. An’ we crave his company like a fish craves a shoe horn.”

The remainder of the afternoon was spent buying supplies in Foghorn’s store. Slim took charge of the packing, and his experienced hands stowed big sacks of flour, rice, beans, and slabs of bacon into astonishingly small spaces. Shorty dispatched an Indian to round up their horses that had been turned loose to forage for themselves during the prospector’s trip to the coast, and he bought two more of the wiry little cayuses from Foghorn.

“All ready to hit the trail in the mornin’, ol’ Mascot,” observed Shorty.

After dinner they gathered on the front verandah in the warmth of the lowering sun. Foghorn sat in a huge rocking chair, his slippered feet resting on a footstool. He chewed tobacco incessantly with toothless gums that had shrunken until it seemed that nose and chin met with every movement of his jaws, and he spat at objects with precision and deadly accuracy. His flow of talk went on uninterruptedly. A group of Indians in picturesque cowboy attire lounged about the steps, the smoke from their cigarettes forming a thin haze above their heads. Several cayuses, their tails twitching lazily, wandered aimlessly about.

The day was waning. The sun blazed low through an ice-filled notch in the valley ramparts, the sides of the mountains darkened into purple shadows, while above the sky was resplendent with vivid orange hues. Foghorn felt the spell, and ceased talking. Over the valley lay a misty peace, a suspended silence as though all Nature held its breath for a moment before shrouding the earth in darkness. This was a strange wild world to Peter. It seemed only yesterday that he gasped for breath in the stifling air of a cheap rooming house. Only yesterday that he walked city streets with the pangs of hunger gnawing at his vitals. He caught his breath sharply and tried hard to realize that all this about him was not a dream. The eternal beauty and peace of God’s great outdoors seeped into his soul. He bowed his head; his lips moved in a prayer of thanksgiving.

Foghorn was the first to break the silence.

“Where ye hittin’ for t’morrer, Shorty?”

“Goin’ into Injun Valley.”

Foghorn brought his feet to the floor with a thump.

“The hell you are!”

“The hell I am!” affirmed Shorty as he glanced about him. “But you needn’t advertise it.”

“You’re crazy,” averred Foghorn in a lower tone.

“Always was,” agreed Shorty.

“But listen, man alive,” protested their host, “you know ’tain’t safe. Bin three prospectors gone in there that ain’t ever bin heard of since. Them wild Injuns in there’ll shoot you so full o’ arrers that you’ll look like a porcupine. Hell, I wouldn’t go into that place for a barrel o’ gold dust.”

“We expect to git more’n a barrel,” laughed Shorty, unperturbed by Foghorn’s dire prediction. “I think all them yarns are ’bout three-quarters pure bunk. What’d you know to be real facts ’bout the place, Foghorn?”

Their host pulled a black wad of tobacco from his pocket, cut off a few thick flakes and thrust them into his mouth.

“There ain’t no such things as facts, ’cause nobody’s ever bin in that come out agin! All I know is what the Injuns tell me, an’ they is such damn liars an’ superstitious to boot, that I s’pose they magnify things.

“Seems like that the tyee o’ the valley is an old geezer by the name of ‘Tuckamonuck’, who’s crazy as a loon. He went away to the Old Country, when he was a boy, an’ got a college eddication, an’ when he comes back he brought a white woman an’ a bug that Injuns was better off ’fore the white men came. He picked out ’bout forty of his tribe that he claims are—like himself—descended from the Mongolians—or some such heathen—that first owned this country thousands of years ago. He took them ’way back into this valley that he sez was once the home of an ancient tribe. These local Siwashes sez that the valley has always bin hanted by screechin’ devils an’ that ev’ry night when the sun goes down they come out of a cave an’ let out ungodly yells.

“These Injuns of Tuckamonuck’s live as they did hundreds o’ years ago. Use bows an’ arrers an’ dress in clothes made from cedar an’ skins. From the stories these Injuns here tell about the climate in the valley, they don’t need to wear much clothin’ as it’s always warm on account of holes in the ground that sends out steam. The soil is so rich that everythin’ grows to twice its natural size. Trees fifty feet ’round, an’ all the wild things twice the

size what they are outside the valley. The Injuns here give it a wide berth. They're scared stiff if you even mention it. They say that if you shoot an Injun Valley deer that it will loose an evil speerit from its body that'll blow smoke in your face an' burn ye up."

"Do you believe all that bunk?" inquired Shorty incredulously.

Foghorn spat a stream of tobacco juice at a crawling caterpillar. Scoring a bull's-eye, a look of satisfaction crossed his face.

"Mebbe I do an' mebbe I don't," he replied evasively.

The conversation was interrupted by the sound of hoof-beats. A horseman galloped up the dusty road to the lodge, dismounted and led his horse to the rear of the building.

"That's the half-breed I was tellin' ye about," informed Foghorn as he rose from his chair. "He's late for eats. S'pose I got to rustle his grub."

The air being chill, they followed their host inside and gathered about the crackling fire of an open hearth. Shorty brought out his accordion and began playing. Attracted by the music the Indians trooped in, their faces set in a wide grin of appreciation.

Shorty sang a rollicking song in the Chinook jargon that set the Siwashes laughing heartily, and they applauded with a loud clapping of hands.

The half-breed entered and with a gruff word of apology to Foghorn, sat down at the table. The breed's face was dark and repellant, wearing sullenness like a garment. A drooping black moustache descended from each side of flared nostrils. A livid scar ran obliquely from high cheekbone to chin. He turned a casual glance on the group by the fire, started slightly, then resumed his meal.

Shorty sang a song in imitation of klootchmen singing a mission hymn, then swung his chair about quickly so that he faced the half-breed. With the accordion resting on his knees he stared steadily at the lone diner. Sensing Shorty's eyes upon him, the half-breed raised his head, but his eyes wavered before the unswerving gaze of the white man.

Shorty inflated the bellows of the instrument and with his eyes never straying from the breed's face, began to sing:

"I met a big rough-neck on the Cariboo trail,
His eyes were bunged an' his face was all pale;
One ear was a-hangin' an' his nose was bust in,
An' the way the cuss hobbled was a crime an' a sin!
'Oh, tillikum!' says he, 'you see me this way
'Cause I said 'You're a liar' to Shorty McCrae.'"

Shorty leaned far forward in his chair and his deep bass redoubled its intensity.

“So stop, look an’ listen to what I now say:
Don’t start any ructions with Shorty McCrae.”

The breed came to his feet, his face scowling, and walked slowly from the room.

“That ought to hold him for a-while,” grinned Shorty as he put his accordion away.

Just before retiring, Peter saw Shorty and their host with heads close together, engaged in low-voiced colloquy. It was evident that the result gave mutual satisfaction, as Foghorn kept his grizzled head bobbing and Shorty’s face was wreathed in smiles as he turned away. He sat down at the table, spread writing material before him, and with pen in thick fingers, with much frowning, crossing and uncrossing of legs, he laboriously covered two sheets with his heavy scrawl.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE MORNING was clear, sweet and fresh with a red sun that presaged a warm day. Shorty and Slim were up before daylight and the cayuses stood saddled, loaded and ready to start as the sun appeared over the peaks. Foghorn wagged his head gloomily as the travellers shook his hand in farewell.

“Better change your minds an’ save your scalps,” he advised them.

“Why, you darn ol’ beard waggler,” laughed Shorty as he leaped to the saddle, “you’d think, to hear your croakin’, that we was goin’ into the wilds o’ Africa.”

“They never come back,” said Foghorn dolefully as the little cavalcade started. “Say,” he shouted after them, “you may run across your ol’ friend, Bill McDermott. He’s in the hills a-prospectin’.”

Shorty waved his hand.

For a mile the trail wound through the valley, then swung in a zig-zag course up the steep mountain-side. Slim took the lead, Peter following, then the loaded horses, with Shorty bringing up the rear.

They climbed steadily through mountain woods hushed in an elemental stillness. Little sign of life was about them, and the only sound the panting and straining of the cayuses and the click of hoof on stones. At times they swung to bare cliffs which gave them a broad view of the valley below, like a great map of land and water, shining unutterably peaceful in the brilliant sunshine.

The trees became gradually smaller and more widely spaced as they ascended. Patches of snow lay in the hollows. At noon they came to timber line where streams gurgled through mats of thick heather that in a short time would be a mass of purple and white bloom. They crossed hissing mountain torrents that afforded a precarious footing for the cayuses, and wound their way about shattered boulders, grouped in wild disorder as though they had been cast forth from some underworld or thrown from the sky. Rock-rabbits shrilled, darting amongst the rubble; big glacial marmots whistled on all sides and thrust their grizzled heads from crevices to watch the trespassers. The atmosphere became more exhilarating as they climbed higher. Peter felt his sore chest expand as the rarefied air penetrated to every cell of his lungs.

They stopped for lunch at the foot of a vast glacier that threw off beautiful and light-coloured tints in strong contrast to the grey rocks. At some time in the remote past, billions of tons of pressure had thrown up ridges, peaks and pinnacles in cosmic travail. Great cliffs were all about them; jagged towers of rock that pierced the sky like the domes of cathedrals.

An hour's hot travelling under a noon-day sun, and they slipped over the last ridge and dipped down the north side of the mountain where snow made the going slow and difficult. Reaching timber, the air became cooler and filled with heavier odours than lay on the thinner atmosphere of the summit. Early in the afternoon they reached the valley and camped in an open meadow by the shores of a lake. Peter dismounted to find that his legs were helpless, being numbed from the long ride.

"Have you toughened to everythin' pretty soon," said Shorty, as Peter hobbled about.

Peter had come to look forward with pleasure to the nights by the fire. This was another evening of peaceful calm and content. The sun was sinking; its last shafts were splintering on the mountain-tops and glowing on the trees, and striking fire from the nickel parts of Shorty's accordion. The lake was a shimmer of coppery light; a little brook chuckled; a grouse at the edge of the woods eyed the tent, and then with a soft "prut-prut" glided to shelter. A goldfinch carolled its evening song from a swaying rose bush. Standing on long legs in the shallow water of the lake, a blue heron stood as motionless as if painted on a Japanese screen, watching and waiting to spear some unwary fish.

Shorty put his instrument away and they sat quietly as the dusk deepened. A faint wind fanned their cheeks, bringing dank odours of water-plants from the lake. Shorty and Slim were smoking; now and then sparks leaped from their pipes, flashed briefly in the breeze and were lost in the gloom beyond.

A new sound came suddenly to them, borne on a pressure of air from the north. A far-away, faint baying that held a weird note of sadness. Slim and Shorty listened intently, but the sound was not repeated.

"'Tain't no wolf," said Shorty. "Darned if I know what it is."

A few minutes later the mournful cadence was again lifted. Far remote, yet distinct; a long eerie howl . . . repeated . . . again repeated.

That night something woke Peter, he sat up with a start. He could hear the lazy munching of the cayuses at the grass outside the tent. It was not a

wild animal that roused him, as the horses were undisturbed. And then he heard the sound that had wakened him—it was the wailing howl from the north. Shorty stirred uneasily beneath his blankets.

“Have to find out what that is t’morrer,” he muttered sleepily.

At daylight the dismal baying was renewed. “Let’s go see what’s doin’ the howlin’,” said Shorty.

They skirted the shore of the lake, plunging through thickets of crab-apple and devil’s-club, sinking knee-deep in the slimy ooze of sloughs that were covered by the broad-leafed skunk cabbage. Coming to a ridge overlooking an open glade, Slim, who was in the lead, stopped suddenly, and with tense face stared below.

A huge cottonwood lay prone by a small brook that flowed through a sward of wild timothy. Under its broken and splintered top were the torn remnants of a small tent. Nearby, a gray-haired man sat with his back against a rock, his body twisted at a grotesque angle, his head bowed. Peter had seen death often enough to know it, and there was no mistaking that limp sprawl. The carcasses of four timber wolves lay by the edge of the creek, the ground about them bloody and torn. A huge brown and white dog reclined with his big head resting on white paws, his eyes fixed on the dead man’s face.

“My God!” faltered Shorty, “It’s Bill McDermott.”

The dog came weakly to his feet as they approached. His white scruff was a mass of clotted gore; his muzzle torn and lacerated; both ears split and caked with blood. A fearsome sight, he limped slowly toward them, nostrils quivering, a low rumble in his huge chest. There was a suggestion of hostility in the low growl, and Shorty whispered a word of warning to Peter. Slowly and painfully the dog came on, tail stiffened and nose thrust forward.

“Look out!” cried Shorty as Peter walked fearlessly to meet the animal. Peter spoke in a kindly tone, extending his hand.

The wounded animal sniffed tentatively at Peter’s fingers; the rigidity of muscles relaxed, he whined softly. Peter patted his bruised head. The dog ran to his dead master’s side and back again, whining pitifully.

The men stood silently for a moment, with bared heads, while the dog hobbled back and forth in mute appeal.

After a short consultation it was decided to inter the body on the spot—Slim to take the deceased’s belongings back to Foghorn’s Camp and inform the proper authorities of Bill McDermott’s passing.

As they were about to move the corpse, Shorty stooped and withdrew a small notebook from the dead man’s stiffened fingers, opened it, and after a

short scrutiny handed it to Peter.

“It’s a message he’s left, Peter,” he said softly. “Read it out loud; I ain’t very good at readin’.”

It was evident that the heavy scrawl was done by fingers unused to writing.

“to someone who finds me

“mon the 21 i think

“a tree fell on me last nite an brok both my laigs i aint got no more chance than a snowball in hell im purty old any how. my dawg tyee aint hurt thank god.

tues 22.

“wolves smelt my blud an cum round last nite. i couldnt see in ther dark so i fired in ther air to scare em off. tyee druve em away. im goin to keep one cartridge to kill myself with if nobody comes. tyees bin with me a long time. he is ther best dawg in ther world an the only thing that ever reely luvd me if he is daid when you cum put him in there same hole with me if he aint daid an you cant swear before god that you will be good ter him shoot him an put him beside me.

“wed 23

“tyee had a hell uv a fight last nite to keep the varmints offn me. i shot the cartridge i wux keepin to end my pain cause i wuz afrid that they wuz gettin ther best uv my dawg. i knew they didnt get him cause he cum along in ther dark an licked my face he is an awful good dawg. say good by to shorty an slim and foghorn an ask shorty to take my dawg he is an awful good dawg im purty sick an i want my dawg . . .”

Here the writing became illegible. Peter’s voice had become husky. Four years of blood and horror in the trenches had inured him to suffering and death, but when he felt the cold nose of the noble animal touch his hand, and looked down into the soft, brown, grief-stricken eyes, his throat tightened and his eyes grew suddenly dim. Slim stood with bowed head. Shorty blew his nose violently.

“God bless you, Bill, fer thinkin’ o’ us,” he said thickly.

An hour later the gruesome duty was finished. Shorty tied his dead friend's personal effects into a strip of the torn tent and threw the bundle to his shoulders. Tyee lay by the fresh mound of earth. He came to his feet as Peter called, took a few steps, hesitated, lifted his leonine head and sent out his last mournful dirge by his master's grave, then followed Peter up the hill.

"I'm a kind of superstitious guy," Shorty confided to Peter when they reached camp. "I ain't goin' to sleep here to-night. We'll go on to Bear Lake and Slim can catch up with us there."

Slim left them to take the back trail. Shorty stood watching Peter as he bathed the great dog's wounds. "I think that dog's a mixture of collie, mastiff, malemute, timber wolf an' hell-hound." The dog opened his big mouth in a cavernous yawn of content. "An'," Shorty added, "I'll bet he'd take as much as a couple pounds of red meat at a bite."

As they were leaving, Tyee sat down and pointed his big nose heavenward. For miles the forest echoed to his long-drawn wolf howl.

Reaching an eminence overlooking the lake, Shorty brought the heavily-breathing cayuses to a halt, swung in his saddle and looked below. Through the clear and stirless air the fresh grave stood out as a dark speck against the field of green.

Peter was deeply moved.

In common with the greater portion of city-dwellers, he had not known a prospector for his true worth; had thought him a cross between a hermit and a tramp, an unkempt, shiftless individual who sold wildcat claims to the unwary, and led a life of ease in the open. This was far from the truth. The true prospector was a man who took pride in his work, and who was faithful to any trust reposed in him. He was the pristine pioneer of the wilderness who risked his life to blaze paths for civilization to follow. His chief characteristics—tenacity, self-denial, perseverance and his innate love of adventure, placed him in a class with the great explorers of the past.

"Another ol' sourdough gone," sighed Shorty.

Just before they went to bed that night, Shorty heaped wood upon the fire. In the widened arc of light, Tyee stood facing the south, a look of abject misery in his brown eyes. His pose was like a piece of statuary, the brilliant light of the flames bringing out every detail of his magnificent body and head.

"Come here, boy," called Shorty. The dog turned his eyes to the speaker, then to Peter, but did not move. Peter spoke to him softly. With a low whine

Tyee ran to Peter's side, sat down on his haunches and gravely extended one huge paw.

"That settles it. He's yours, Peter," declared Shorty.

A moment after Peter had rolled himself in his blankets, Tyee crawled softly into the tent, touched Peter's face with his cool muzzle, then stretched his tawny body at full length on the boughs. Peter's arm crept slowly out and encircled the dog's neck. Thus did Tyee spend the first night with his new master.

CHAPTER IX.

INCE leaving Foghorn's Camp the prospectors had held steadily to the north through forests that loomed darkly; where huge mountains piled along the horizon, endless and white; where sparkling lakes sheltered tiny islands, and where the roar of tumbling cascades drummed continually in their ears.

At noon, two days after Slim rejoined them, they swung abruptly to the east, and the topography of the country changed with a suddenness unbelievable to one who has not travelled in the interior of British Columbia. From deep mysterious forests where water rushed and sparkled from every gorge, they emerged into a desert of rolling sandy benches, waterless and barren save for sagebrush and stunted jack-pine. All that afternoon they passed through dry canyons surrounded by a disorderly, unsymmetrical rock-jumble, rugged beyond description; and that evening they pitched their tent on a rock-strewn ridge that gave them a view of the surrounding country.

"Me an' Slim ain't ever come this way before," explained Shorty. He pointed to a row of mountains in the east, whose ice-crowned summits shone brilliantly in the rays of the westering sun. "Injun Valley is at the foot o' them hills. We'll hit the end o' our journey to-morrow night."

In the North Country there is a long twilight. The sun disappeared behind towering peaks, but for a long time clouds flamed in the sky with a wild and sombre glow. From where Peter stood on the highest eminence of the ridge, he watched the evening shadows steal forth and lick their way over the desolate land that lay beneath him, like a rumpled quilt of huge dusky folds. Faint vapours showed wraith-like in the gorges and the pungent odour of sage was wafted from below. Watching the darkness engulf the terraced amphitheatre, Peter felt a quick sense of awe mingled with a feeling of the presence of the Creator.

The prospectors displayed an eagerness that was shared by Peter, and they were urging their tired horses over the sand dunes before the sun arose. There was no trail, but Slim called Peter's attention to rocks that had been placed by human hands in conspicuous places and at regular intervals, all leading toward a cleft in the mountains.

Entering this ravine they found that it led gently upward between two solid walls of rock. For an hour they climbed steadily through the cool shade

of the narrow canyon. The walls abruptly widened, forming a small plateau. Tiny rivulets gurgled through purple and white heather in full bloom. All about them were forget-me-nots, anemone, lupine, and scores of other alpine plants in riotous confusion. The cayuses buried their hot noses in the crystal streams and drank greedily. Peter dismounted, slaked his thirst, then looked about him. He saw that the ravine ended in a table-land sloping gradually to the north and south, terminating in the east on a cliff upon which the two prospectors stood, looking below.

Since entering the wilderness Peter had passed through scenic wonders that he had never before seen, even in his most fantastic dreams; but all that beauty and charm paled into insignificance compared to the soul-filling, awe-inspiring panorama that unfolded before his rapt gaze as he joined his partners at the plateau's edge, and Indian Valley burst on his sight.

At their feet the cliff dropped sheerly away, so straight and breath-taking in its depths that their eyes could not grasp the reality. Peter felt that peculiar, fascinating desire to stand at the very edge; even to cast himself into space. Below lay Indian Valley, hemmed in by precipitous walls of rock over which the waters from the melting glaciers above congregated to plunge in foaming cascades to be swallowed at last in the tropical growth that carpeted the valley floor. Emerald streams flowed through rich, open meadows; hill-girt lakes reflected mountains and trees with mirror-like clearness.

For a long interval they stood dumb, motionless, on the edge of the mighty gorge. It was as if they looked down on a valley walled in by barbaric temples reared in the remote past to some ancient deity. The rocky walls of this oasis were like huge sculpturings, splashed with colours unbelievable. Peter felt that to speak lightly in this mighty silence would arouse one of the slumbering gods to lift a giant hand and crush them for their disrespect. Only the feathered denizens did not fear to break the silence. Flocks of strange birds swarmed about the bare face of the cliff, their brilliant bodies flashing in the sun, their tiny notes of song tossing like flecks of gold into the brooding quiet of the appalling grandeur.

God's country, truly, thought Peter. Where man becomes dwarfed, sheared of his trifling conceits, yet perhaps more clearly aware of the greatness of His handiwork. Standing there amid the splendor, Peter again felt that deep sense of reverence.

Shorty sat on a boulder, wide hat tilted back, staring down into the valley's space and colour. Slim stood with uncovered head, drinking in the wonders about him.

“Like bein’ in a church, Slim,” whispered Shorty.

“Yes, here is God.”

After half an hour’s searching on the northern slope, they found a cleft in the rocks that served as an entrance to this land of flame and colour. Slipping, sliding, loosing showers of pebbles, the horses carried them to more level land where they entered timber of such huge size that the party stopped to stare open-mouthed at the towering conifers.

They found that they were on an old trail, a scarcely discernible tracing, a winding stain on the carpet of needles. Slim pointed to blazes on the trees so old that the scars were nearly healed. Through the fragrant stillness of the deep woods they made their way down the mountain-side until they came to a trail that diverged to the right. After a short consultation it was decided to follow this path, as it showed signs of more recent use than the one leading downward.

Presently they entered an open glade where a stream cascaded over mossy rocks. On the banks of this brook stood a small log hut, its broken windows staring like sightless eyes. The chimney breathed no smoke, and about the place was an air of melancholy.

The spot was beautiful, yet weird and in some way menacing. Two ravens on dark pinions far above uttered dolorous croakings, pouring down vials of grief through the still air. Peter felt a premonition of impending evil, of something sinister about to be disclosed. He dismounted, and Tyee leaped about him joyfully, but as they approached the cabin the dog became suddenly subdued, kept close at his master’s heels, whining softly.

The door was wedged, but under pressure of Shorty’s shoulders it flew open, bringing a rush of musty odours. Dozens of bush rats, their beady eyes glittering, squeaking shrilly, scuttled from sight. The gnawed remains of a pack-sack, blankets and clothing littered the floor. Several lengths of corroded stove-pipe lay about a tin stove that had disintegrated to a mere heap of rust. On a pallet of withered boughs in a rude bunk against the wall, lay the skeleton of a man, the grinning skull facing them, one bony hand clutching the feathered shaft of an arrow that had pierced the breast bone.

Peter was attacked by a wave of nausea. He stepped back to the fresh air, revolted by the dampness, the mold and the dull, stale scent of death. Shorty followed, a tinge of grey showing beneath his bronzed skin. He took a blanket from the pack, glanced apprehensively about, then re-entered the cabin. A moment later the prospectors bore their gruesome bundle to a level bench by the stream, dug a trench in the soft loam and buried the remains.

“That accounts for one of the men that Foghorn told us about,” said Shorty grimly, as he brushed the sweat from his forehead with an unsteady hand.

Peter saw that the prospectors were uneasy. Slim swung his six-shooter around to this side, his keen eyes searching the dark forest about them. Shorty loaded his rifle, then turned to Peter.

“Keep your eye peeled, son.”

They retraced their steps to the main trail, and with senses keenly alert, continued the descent.

In half an hour they reached meadows where the vegetation was tropical in its density. Bracken, ferns and blue-joint grass stood above the horses' heads. Wild life abounded everywhere, the rich soil being littered with the spoor of animals. Deer of enormous size leaped from sight; moose grunted lazily as they stood knee-deep in the lakes feeding on water-plants; flocks of ducks covered the small ponds and streams; grouse hooted from the trees, and brilliantly-coloured birds flashed by and out of sight before the eye could identify them.

The flora was astonishing in its size, variety and magnificence. All around them stood trees of enormous girth and height. Spruce, cedar, hemlock, fir and cottonwood with heavy dark bark like the wizened parchment of age. Dandelions with stalks a half an inch thick made a golden blaze of colour in the open spaces. Honeysuckle vines crept along forty feet in length, and everywhere the luxurious growth was incredible.

Coming to a wide meadow on the shores of an emerald lake, they became enveloped in a warm mist that rose from innumerable bubbling hot-springs. Here the vegetation reached the height of its density and beauty. The big field was one mass of bloom and the air was burdened with the odours of flowers.

Peter had the sensation of passing into a new world and a new atmosphere. He drank in the pure air as if he were tasting a rare wine, and he was conscious that he had never breathed such an air before. There was a wonderful, a startling flavour in it, the flavour of miles of emptiness, of pine and cedar and newly-opened flowers. Never had he found an atmosphere so intensely pure, clear and lively with life-giving ozone. He drew the air into his sore lungs again and again, stirred by the sense of exhilaration it gave him.

The uneasiness caused by the discovery of the dead prospector being momentarily dispelled by the splendour about them, they dismounted and

turned their cayuses loose to graze. Hot and cold mineral waters welled up from springs in the deep soil and at every step they crushed flowers of strange exotic hues. Peter drank deeply from one of the cool, gurgling springs, and he was thrilled by its sparkling beauty and flavour. He plucked a giant white rein orchid and held it up for Slim's inspection. "Isn't it wonderful?" he marvelled.

Slim shook his head wonderingly.

"Never saw anything like it." He pointed to the bank of a stream where the water had cut through the fine rich loam to a depth of twenty feet. "This valley must have escaped the glaciers," Slim continued. "And this hot water must be a regular fertilizer, which, with the heat and this deep black soil, makes this place a natural hot-bed."

At a point near where they pitched their tent, a small stream poured from an overhanging cliff. The wind caught it, and there in mid-air it curled and writhed, its entire volume churned and twisted into a mist and blowing over the valley, where the sun struck it and formed all the brilliant rays of the spectrum. A rainbow curtain overhead; underfoot a carpet of flowers; truly this was a valley of the gods.

They built a fire, put water on to boil, and as it lacked some time until darkness, they climbed to a height of land to get a better view of their surroundings. Across the lake a painted cliff arose like a giant hand, monstrous, cruel, horribly life-like with its blood-splashed index finger pointing toward the setting sun, as if in ghastly, portentous warning to the intruders.

The gruesome beckoning hand made a deep impression on Shorty's superstitious nature. He stared at the menacing cliff as though bewitched; eyes filled with awe, his long silence proof of his keyed-up condition.

Back of a sandy beach near this red pinnacle, a thick growth of bushes climbed up to a rubble of broken rocks over which poured a mountain torrent, and where this talus slope joined the painted cliff, a ragged black cave yawned darkly in the mountain-side. The face of the gully from whence came the stream was deeply scarred as if by a cosmic blow.

Shorty shrugged his shoulders as if to free himself from the spell that enveloped him; and when he spoke his voice was unnaturally low. "I'll bet that's our stream. See that bend up above where she splits? Wonder where the rest of the water goes?" Below the glacier the water swept down in a rush of white foam, but where it broke through the rubble of rock it had greatly decreased in volume. "Must run underground," he decided.

A strange enchanted place it seemed, yet a weight of sadness hovered over the valley; in some way it was not cheerful. Some way there were too many shadows. The trees were heavily draped with moss that hung like hoary tresses. The air was preternaturally still and pall-like, charged with a spirit of mystery. Trout made widening circles on the calm water of the lake, and from the depths of the forest a wolf sent out a disconsolate wailing cry.

Returning down the hillside they raised a pair of jack rabbits clothed in full summer garb of brown. But it was the size of the animals that caused them to stop and stare, being twice that of any they had ever seen.

Approaching the tent, Shorty stopped abruptly, whipped his gun from its holster and leaned forward, his face tense. Before the fire, motionless like a votary, an Indian girl stood with bare arms stretched toward the flames. Peter was instantly struck by her extraordinary and lustrous beauty. She was lithe and full-bosomed, with the early-maturing, early-withering, grace of an Indian. A one-piece suit of buckskin, beaded and fringed, moulded to the soft contours of her supple young body; the skirt falling to her knees was supported by two beaded straps over her shoulders, exposing chest and arms. Her raven-black hair hung down her back in two thick braids, and around her forehead a head-band of brilliant red, on which was tied a swan's feather of purest white, its tip painted a vivid scarlet. A necklace of bear claws encircled her slender neck, pendants of polished gold nuggets hung from her ears, and her small feet were encased in moccasins of moose hide decorated with quills and beads. Her skin was dark, but not of the coffee colour of the Siwash; more like the skin of a brunette tanned by exposure to a silky, glossy bronze. Her eyes were black, with a sweet Oriental curve to the lids that gave their dark depths an added softness. From the delicate profile of her face, with its straight nose, tender red-lipped mouth, to the pointed curve of her breasts and the swiftly diminishing descent of her rounded limbs, every line bespoke beauty and grace. She gave to Peter the impression of allure, fresh and clean as the first ray of light that streaks the dawn.

“Klahowya, tillikum,” greeted Shorty.

She did not answer.

There was more of curiosity than fear in her dusky orbs as the men advanced. Her glance travelled from the two older men to Peter, and held there. Peter removed his hat, and with the sun flashing in his bronze hair, stood looking down into the dark face staring up at him.

“There's white blood in that klootch, or I'm a liar,” declared Shorty. The object of this remark turned cold eyes on the speaker. Then again her glance

was raised to Peter, a sort of veiled adoration in her eyes. The young man felt vaguely embarrassed.

“Like a goddess from the tropics,” he murmured softly. A scarlet flush glowed beneath the dusk of the girl’s cheeks, her eyes sparkled. Walking with the grace of a young animal to Peter’s side, she extended a long tapering arm, and, to their intense surprise, spoke in English.

“You say verry nice thing. I like you.” Her smile was captivating, her voice low and musical, with a strange accent. Peter flushed as he took her hand. A puzzled look came into her eyes as Shorty burst into laughter.

“The mascot’s made a hit,” he chuckled.

“What’s your name?” questioned Peter, to cover his confusion.

“Naida. What your name?”

“Peter.”

“Petaire. Petaire,” she repeated. “Verry nice name.”

While the men busied themselves about the fire, Naida squatted on her shapely ankles and missed no manœuvre in the preparation of the meal. She refused their invitation to dine, with a shake of her dark head, and sat lost in deep thought, her brow contracted in a slight frown. At times Peter would forget her, then suddenly become conscious of her dark magnificent eyes fixed upon him.

When they had finished eating and lighted their pipes, Naida walked to where Peter sat. The young man came to his feet. For a moment the girl stood silent, an anxious light in her eyes.

“Why you come here?” she asked.

“To prospect for gold.”

She shook her head gloomily.

“My grandfather, Chief Tuckamonuck, no like white man. You much better go ’way.”

“We have come a long way,” smiled Peter. “We are going to stay.”

The girl seemed much perturbed by this statement. She gazed anxiously across the lake, then at the white men’s camp.

“Move camp in woods. Indians no can see smoke. I tell my grandfather you good man. I come back to-morrow.” She smiled with a flash of white teeth, which by contrast, accentuated the brilliancy of her colouring. “Good-night, Petaire.”

She glided noiselessly to the lake, stepped into a tiny birch-bark canoe, and with strong vigorous strokes of the paddle, disappeared around a bend in the lake.

While they were shifting camp the shadows of the peaks fell across the valley. Although the scene was one of singular peace and charm, Peter could not free himself from the sense of impending evil. From the forest came the usual subdued murmur of night voices; an owl filled the air with his weird long-drawn hoot; a big dark heron rose croaking from the lake shore and flapped awkwardly away. The tumbling waters cascading from the cliffs above sounded like a rumbling dirge of mystery. A gentle breeze swept through the tree-tops with a plaintive eerie sigh, caught at the spiral of smoke rising from the smothered fire, and abruptly, as if borne upon it, came the faint reverberant roll of drums, infinitely remote. Then at once it ceased and silence fell again.

Peter was discussing this occurrence with Slim, when Shorty held up his hand. "For God's sake, what's that? Listen!"

A low, eerie moan, a mournful sound like the wailing of a lost soul, came through the dusk. The wail grew in intensity until it became a shrill scream that cut the air like a knife. Peter felt a chill down his spine. He turned a startled face to his companions. Shorty stood, peculiarly braced, a frying pan in his hands, blank amazement written on his features. Slim was in a tense listening attitude, his eyes narrowed to mere slits. With every muscle tautened, they stood fearfully alert. It was a penetrating sound, close yet far away; it came from nowhere, it came from everywhere; indescribably blood-curdling, it raised the hair on the necks of the listeners. Gradually the sound died in its intensity until it became a blood-chilling moan of sadness, then ceased entirely.

"Tuckamonuck," whispered Shorty, pointing across the lake.

On the crimson tip of the painted cliff, in the last rays of the setting sun, stood an Indian clothed in buckskin and feathered head-dress. Slowly the figure raised long arms above his head, and again the piercing, maniacal cry sent echoes rumbling through the valley depths. The loudness of the sound was amazing. It was hard to believe that the human voice could develop such penetration and volume. For a few minutes after the sun left the peak, the Indian stood silently with folded arms, then with head bowed, walked slowly to the mouth of the cave and disappeared within.

Dusk had fallen by the time the camp was moved to the shelter of the timber, and it was soon deep night. Sitting about the tiny fire, their voices

echoing hollowly from the cliffs, their faces grotesquely pitted by the flickering shadows, they discussed their perilous position.

“Might just as well have it out with these damn Injuns now,” snapped Shorty irritably. “We can’t hide away an’ prospect the—”

Twang. An arrow whizzed through the air and thudded into a pine a foot above the speaker’s head. Shorty ripped out an oath as he flung himself flat upon the ground beyond the firelight.

“Get to cover, Peter,” he whispered.

With his heart thumping tumultuously, Peter crawled away from the fire into the dark forest. For a long time he lay sprawled at the foot of a big tree, his gun held in readiness, awaiting the attack.

A rising wind filled the night with disturbing sounds; noises against which Peter found it hard to steady his nerves; sudden crashes as if heavy animals broke their way through the underbrush; stealthy furtive movements as if someone crept nearer; and, hardest of all to endure, vocal sounds, unbelievably like the whispering and muttering of humans. Peter’s sense of isolation and fear increased as the minutes dragged by with no word from his friends.

All at once the thickets stirred and rustled behind him. He whipped about, his gun raised, every muscle tensed. Then he heard Naida’s soft, low voice.

“Petaire.”

He whispered a reply. An instant later she was at his side. “He no come back. You are safe to sleep, Petaire.” Her small hand reached for Peter’s, pressed his fingers reassuringly, then with a low word of farewell she disappeared in the direction of the lake.

Peter called his comrades and they joined him at the tent. When he told of the Indian maiden’s assurance of their safety, Shorty stirred the fire into a blaze and pulled the arrow from the tree. Wrapped around its shaft was a piece of birch-bark made fast by a thin strand of buckskin. Shorty untied the string and held the bit of bark up to the light. On the white surface, written with red-ochre, they found a message:

“Leave this valley with the rising sun.”

Shorty’s mouth became a bloodless line in his sun-bitten face. He threw the bark into the fire.

“He can go to hell!”

CHAPTER X.

NOW that Tuckamonuck was aware of their presence in the valley and had issued a peremptory warning, the prospectors deemed it imperative that they place themselves in a more strategic position to repel an attack. Accordingly, as the first rays of the morning sun quickened the valley's depths, they moved to the ridge above the meadow. The spot was ideal for their purpose, having in the background the perpendicular walls of a cliff and a natural breastwork of boulders facing the lake. The position commanded a view of all approaches.

Shorty rolled heavy boulders into gaps in the wall of the parapet, then surveyed his work with a smile of satisfaction.

"They may get us in the end," he said grimly; "but if they do, they'll know they've bin in a scrap."

A canoe shot into view around the point and swung toward the beach below them. A strong wind blew from the north, churning the water into tossing whitecaps over which the frail craft ripped along like a bullet, seeming to skip the seas like a flying projectile.

Naida sat in the stern, plying the paddle noiselessly with long, even strokes. Her hair of night was loosed, streaming about her head like a Valkyrian. In the bow sat an Indian, stiffly erect, arms folded, the feathers of a flamboyant head-dress streaming in the breeze.

The visitors drew the canoe up on the beach and came slowly up the hill. While some distance away, they saw that the man was very old, his face being one mass of wrinkles; but although aged, a lithe suppleness of motion still lingered in his thin body. In a moment the picturesque figure of Chief Tuckamonuck stood before them.

He was tall, gaunt, with a lean leathery face and a hooked nose. There was a haughty power in every line of his furrowed face, in every movement of his old body; and he stood as erect as a naval officer. The hair hanging below the feathers was long and the colour of wood ashes. In his suit of multi-coloured buckskin and gaudy feathers, he presented a wild figure. But Peter was struck by the eyes of the man—he had never seen such eyes; they were inhuman, incredible; like two avid holes in his yellow face. They were a peculiar shade of green, and held an unearthly glow; little flickers of light

coming and going in them, and they seemed to be unwinking, like the eyes of an owl.

For a long interval he stood rigid, arms folded, his remarkable eyes roving from face to face. Tyee moved forward, head lowered, a deep growl in his shaggy throat. Peter seized the big dog by his thick scruff, and spoke placatingly. Shorty, his hand resting on the butt of his Colt, scowled under the Indian's menacing stare. Naida came quickly to the old Indian's side and spoke softly, which caused his taut muscles to relax, his face to lose its rigidity. It was plain that the girl exercised a great influence over the wild man.

"Why did you not heed my command?" His voice was startlingly deep and virile. His glowing eyes steadied as they met Slim's level gaze.

"We wish you no harm," answered Slim. "But as this valley is a part of British Columbia and we are citizens of this province, I don't see how you can stop us from prospecting here."

The effect of Slim's speech was startling. His face contorted with rage, his body trembling, Tuckamonuck's hand flew to a stone axe at his belt. Again the Indian maiden's voice soothed the frenzied man. With his greenish eyes blazing, the chief turned to Slim.

"The white man has been a curse to my race," he flared. "They have crowded us from our land; with rum and forked tongues they have disgraced and cheated us. Wherever the white man goes he brings disease and dishonour to a people who were once a noble race and the proud possessors of this continent. I do not recognize the white man's law. This is my valley. I have brought the remnant of an ancient tribe here to make a last stand. No paleface can share it with us."

"We're goin' to stay; even if we have to fight," interposed Shorty belligerently.

Tuckamonuck glanced at Shorty's sturdy figure, then at the white men's preparations to defend the ridge; and an amused smile flitted across his grim features. He lifted his lean arms slowly over his head and emitted a strange cry.

Peter gasped with amazement and fear; for, as if by magic, Indians arose in the grass below the ridge, and from the forest came a score of men mounted on horses; and, most menacing of all, figures appeared on the cliff above them with bows held in readiness to pour down a flight of arrows from which their defence offered no protection.

Tall and straight they were, with skins that resembled a golden-brown satin; they wore trousers and moccasins of buckskin, and above the waist were naked. Black, glossy hair was kept in place by feathered head-bands that rose and fell as the horsemen galloped into the open.

At a word from Tuckamonuck the riders checked their advance, forming into an orderly row. The horses, without saddles or bridles, were of the cayuse type, but larger and of wonderful grace and beauty, their well-groomed coats glistening in the sun.

The chief's strong voice barked a command, and the Indians flew into sudden action. The white men reached for their guns, but instantly realized that the demonstration was not hostile. For five minutes they were entertained by an exhibition of horsemanship nothing short of marvellous. Back and forth the Indians rode, standing on the animals' bare backs, clinging to their necks, leaning far over to pick up objects from the ground, and yelling like madmen.

Lining up again with military precision, one equestrian detached himself from the row and riding swiftly, he raised his bow and sent an arrow hurtling to the centre of a pine tree. One by one the riders followed, each archer placing a feathered missile with deadly accuracy a few inches above that of his predecessor.

While this display was going on, Tuckamonuck stood with folded arms, a proud smile on his face. The last rider launched his arrow, swung his horse up the hill and placed his bow in the chief's hands. The elderly Indian drew an arrow from a quiver at his side, adjusted it and raised the bow. Peter saw the muscles of the skinny arms swell as the yew wood doubled until the tips nearly touched. Almost simultaneously with the twang of the bow, the projectile thudded into the soft wood in perfect line with the other arrows.

With a majestic wave of his hand, Tuckamonuck sent the horsemen galloping into the forest; then turned to the white men. The crazed light was gone from his eyes, his face was more peaceful. Naida spoke to him in a low voice. Tuckamonuck nodded, and when he spoke his voice was gentle.

"A word to the wise is sufficient. You may stay here for two suns; you will not be molested. When you go to the outside world, tell the white men what you have just witnessed. No paleface may enter my domain. I have spoken." Bowing haughtily, he took Naida by the hand and strode down the hill. The girl waited until the chief was seated in the canoe, then turned to the hill, and waved her hand in adieu. Peter watched the pretty play of her shoulder muscles as she dipped the flashing paddle. At the headland she swung her paddle high in air, then the boat bobbed from view.

For some time after the Indians' departure, the men on the ridge remained silent. Shorty slowly rolled a cigarette, took a few deep inhalations, then sank despondently to a seat.

Without asking, Peter knew that these men, daring though they were, felt that their quest for gold had come to naught. Tuckamonuck's exhibition of strength showed that the odds were greatly against the white men, and that it would be sheer folly to offer further resistance to the chief's commands. All their high hopes and visions of wealth were dashed to the ground; all their arduous labour and Dorothy's hard-earned money wasted. Noting the gloomy faces of his partners, Peter forgot his own disappointment in a wave of sympathy for these men who had staked their all on this venture; who had treated him, a sick, broken stranger, as a brother. A mascot! Peter smiled bitterly.

Shorty broke the silence.

"When the cards are stacked agin you an' Lady Luck has flown, what's the answer, Slim?"

"Quit."

"Ain't no two ways 'bout it," agreed Shorty. "Of course, we could go out an' get the Mounted Police, an' get the Injuns arrested, but I'd hate to do that 'cause ol' Feathertop is right in a way; the whites have treated the redskins rotten. I kinda admire the ol' geezer for what he's doin', an' I always did hate to holler bull." He stood up and looked about him. "Say, ain't this a peach of a place? I hate like hell to leave here." He stretched his arms above his head, yawning. "Well, ol' Tuck says we can stay here two days. What'd you say, Slim, if we run over an' look at that creek?"

Slim eagerly assented.

A sound from below drew their attention. Three horsemen rode into view, reined in their cayuses, stared up the hill, then dismounted. "Our friend the skunk," observed Shorty as the men approached. Peter recognized Morlock and the half-breed. The third member of the party was a white man, a burly-bodied half-human creature with an inch-wide forehead and no chin.

Not certain as to the nature of the reception awaiting him, Morlock advanced warily, his dark eyes shifty, alert.

"Well, here we are!" he cried in an attempt at joviality. "How are we going to get along together?"

"Like a coupla bull-moose in the matin' season," growled Shorty.

"Come, come," said Morlock in a conciliatory tone, "we might as well be friends."

“’Tain’t necessary. We’re leavin’, an’ you can have the whole valley to yourself.”

Morlock’s heavy brows lifted.

“What’s the big idea?”

In a few gruff sentences Shorty told him of Tuckamonuck and his warriors.

Morlock listened, a crafty smile on his lips. He laughed contemptuously.

“I’m damned if I’d let a few Siwashes with bows and arrows get my goat!”

“If you stick, they’ll get more than your goat; they’ll get your hide.”

Morlock snapped his fingers.

“Pooh! That for them. We’re going to fix up a cabin we found on the hill, and if these Siwashes want a hot time, let them come up there and start something. I never saw a damned Indian that was any good in a fight.”

“Yeh, that log cabin’s a nice restful place to sleep,” grunted Shorty sarcastically. Then he told him of their ghastly find of the previous day.

Morlock’s sinister face assumed an excellent expression of tolerant amusement.

“You can’t scare me with your stories,” he blustered; but there was a hint of uneasiness in his voice.

“Meanin’ that I’m a liar,” bristled Shorty, who wanted to be rid of the visitors’ unwelcome presence. “You better beat it before I bust you on the nose.”

Morlock bared his white teeth in an evil smile.

“Thanks for your hospitality,” he returned sardonically. “And I may say that I’m wise to your little bluff. You can’t scare me out.”

“It’s your own funeral,” snapped Shorty. “Beat it!”

Morlock moved away a few steps, then turned to look at Peter. “Oh, here he is!” he said mincingly. “How’s the weak sister?”

Noticing the angry flush that rose in Peter’s cheeks, he continued. “I left the little girl quite happy. Strange, but she didn’t send her love to you.”

“That’s enough.” Slim’s voice cracked like a pistol shot.

Laughing derisively, Morlock mounted and galloped away.

A half hour later, the miners having departed with pans and shovels, Peter decided to walk to the other side of the point to see if he could obtain a

view of the Indian village.

The big dog, who had not fully regained his strength, lay sleeping by the fire. Since accepting Peter as his new master, Tyee had proven his allegiance by never allowing the young man out of his sight. Not wishing to disturb the dog's rest, Peter tiptoed softly away, skirted the beach to the rocky promontory, climbed the slope and pushed his way through the jungle-like growth to the opposite shore.

Across the lake, smoke drifted thinly above the water at the left of the coloured cliff, but the village was hidden, he decided, by huge trees that grew to the water's edge. He walked to the bank of a stream that flowed through a small open meadow, threw himself down among the rank growth of ferns and wild flowers, and rolled a cigarette.

His attention was immediately arrested by a movement on the opposite side of the creek. Pushing aside a growth of willows, he saw a bark canoe drawn up on the beach, and near the bole of a cottonwood the Indian maiden sat by a small pool, her hair fluffed out about her shoulders. She had apparently been in bathing, as her moccasins, necklace and feathered headband lay on the ground beside her.

Her hair, instead of being coarse and straight, which is characteristic of the race, was slightly wavy and so light that it suggested a breeze, although the air under the trees was still. She tilted her head sidewise in a bird-like motion, smiled at her reflection, then sprang to her feet, and with the golden sunshine streaming about her, she whirled joyously in a mad, ecstatic dance. Her swift figure, slight but by no means frail, was as vivid as a brilliant shaft of sunlight. She was so completely lovely that Peter watched her with breathless attention as she glided over the field of flowers, a swaying, swirling, graceful figure; a picture of symmetrical, happy youth, crowned with the eternal lure of spring, a vision of the subtle essence of loveliness. Breathless, she flung herself on her knees by the pool, stirred the calm water with her hand, and laughed merrily as the ripples contorted the reflection of her features.

Peter's eyes widened with interest as he saw her leap suddenly to her feet and face the forest, a startled look in her eyes. Morlock, carrying pan and shovel, stepped into the open, smiling broadly as he walked toward her.

"Fine," he applauded, "I've been watching you. You'd make your fortune on the stage." He moved closer. "Don't suppose you know a word of English, but you're the prettiest little piece of klookch I ever saw." He chucked her playfully under the chin. Naida drew back, tossed the hair from her eyes and gave him a scornful stare.

Morlock licked his thick lips hungrily.

“Why, you’re almost white, you little bit of pretty Indian. I’m going to give you a kiss.” He strode toward her, masterful, smiling; caught her up in his arms and attempted to press his lips to hers.

The girl was only a “klootch” to Morlock, and he was quite unprepared for the reception that his advances precipitated.

The colour surged beneath her dark skin, a red fury blazed in her eyes.

“Let me go!” she demanded steadily, her face averted.

“Oh ho! We can talk, eh? Come now, sweetheart, hold up your face—”

The sentence was cut short as Naida’s firm little fist caught him over the eye with enough force to make him stagger back a step, and like a flash the Indian girl was off toward the canoe. Cursing wildly, Morlock sprang after her, seizing her about the waist as she was about to launch her craft.

“You damned little cat, I’ll fix you,” he rasped, twisting her slender arms until she screamed with pain.

His face pale with rage, Peter broke through the willows, plunged headlong into the current, swam to the other side and scrambled up the bank.

“You damned brute,” he panted, “let the girl alone.”

Startled by the voice, Morlock loosed his hold on Naida and swung quickly about. The girl ran to Peter’s side and sobbing with pain and terror, clung to his dripping arm.

“What the hell are you butting in for?” snarled Morlock. “If you were half a man I’d give you a damned good licking. You get out!” He touched the spot over his eye where the girl’s blow had raised a lump. “The damned little Indian—” He advanced on the pair, his face livid. “You get the hell out of here, I told you. I’ll ’tend to my own affairs.”

Peter knew that in his present enfeebled condition he stood little chance of winning in a fight with Morlock. His only hope lay in landing a blow at the start that would end the battle.

“Morlock, I’m no match for you, but I’ll not see this girl abused.”

“Ah ha! Your klootch, eh?” said Morlock with an ugly grin. “Well, I must say you’re a fast worker for a cheechako. Going to fight for the lady! Going to be the noble hero! All right; you asked for it!”

Sensing a quick victory the big man tore in, loosing a right-cross which Peter easily avoided, shooting his left to Morlock’s jaw with force enough to snap his head back on his shoulders. With a curse the big man rushed his lighter opponent, both arms swinging like pistons; and Peter was hard set to

keep out of range of the sledge-like blows. Suddenly Peter saw an opening. He summoned all his waning strength into one blow, delivered with the skilled force of a trained boxer, which crashed on Morlock's prognathous jaw and sent him to the ground.

Morlock struggled weakly to his knees and looked at his opponent in dazed amazement. Peter stood waiting for him to rise, swaying unsteadily. The blow had robbed him of his last ounce of strength. The fallen man's head cleared, and with set teeth, his shoulders hunched, he drove after his weakening adversary. So far Peter had been able to smother all of Morlock's punches, but his own blows lacked strength. Presently Morlock began to penetrate his weak defence, and Peter felt his senses reeling as he vainly tried to ward off the punishing blows that cut his face and sapped his energy. Time and again he staggered pluckily to his feet to be beaten down, bruised, bleeding and gasping painfully for breath. He fell to one knee in a vain hope that Morlock would have enough sportsmanship to abide by the rules of the game; but Morlock struck him as he knelt.

Sobbing hysterically, desperate with rage, Naida sprang to Peter's assistance. Her strong fingers tore deep gashes in Morlock's face.

Swearing vilely, the big man turned and struck the girl a savage blow that sent her to the ground in a senseless heap. Enraged by his opponent's unexpected and stubborn fight, Morlock redoubled his efforts. Peter wound his arms about his head, occasionally opening up to land a weak left. He saw no sign of relenting in Morlock's face; there was murder in the man's eyes. Reeling, falling, blinded by blood, a roaring in his ears, he fought stubbornly on.

Back at the camp Tyee lifted his head, sniffed the air, and came quickly to his feet. Round and round he sped, nose to the ground, in eager trace of his master's trail. At last he found it. Running noiselessly as one of his wolf ancestors, he flashed along the white beach and disappeared in the forest. Silent, swift, he followed the trail to the banks of the stream, and sent out a sharp bark of enquiry.

Peter stood with long arms wound around Morlock's body, his knees buckling, his breath coming hoarsely from labouring lungs. Morlock wrenched himself loose and rushed in, raining a fusillade of short arm jolts that were only partly blocked by Peter's clever but weak, defence.

Faintly, through the buzzing in his head, Peter heard the big dog's questioning bark.

"Tyee!" he called weakly.

The sound of Peter's voice brought a half-human cry of rapture from the big animal. He sprang into the stream, and with powerful shoulders held high, ploughed through the current and ran up the bank. Shaking the water from his heavy coat, he took instant note of his master's plight. With hackles a-bristle, a growl in his throat like the roar of a wild beast, Tyee lowered his head and charged for Peter's enemy with the speed and deadly accuracy of a wolf. Without breaking his stride he sprang into the air, struck Morlock's back like a tawny thunderbolt, and buried his sabre-like teeth in the man's shoulder. Screaming in awful terror, Morlock crashed to the ground, Tyee on top.

Peter shouted a weak command as the dog's white teeth were about to clamp on the man's throat. Tyee turned questioning eyes on his master. His face white with fear, Morlock's shaking hand crept stealthily to the holster cramped under his body.

Naida tottered to her feet, her head whirling dizzily, and stared about her. Sensing the import of Morlock's move, she became instantly galvanized into action. With a quick feline movement, she leaped to the fallen man's side, jerked the gun from its holster, and with eyes aflame, raised it high and struck at his head with all her might. Morlock's quickly upflung arm saved him. The revolver flew from her fingers, and she was after it like a flash.

"Don't, Naida!" gasped Peter.

The girl looked at him in astonishment.

"For God's sake, call off your dog!" implored Morlock.

Peter spoke to Tyee, who left his victim with visible reluctance.

"Now, Morlock, get out!" ordered Peter weakly.

The terrified man came to his feet, and peering fearfully over his shoulder at the big dog, walked up the beach and vanished in the woods.

Peter was a terrible sight; lips split, eyes puffed, his face and chest covered with blood. He swayed uncertainly, head drooping. Naida seized both of his hands impulsively and pressed them to her bosom. Her eyes misty with tears, she looked up into his face.

"Poor Petaire! Poor Petaire. I—sorry," she said brokenly.

Peter attempted to smile. His knees gave away as darkness fell upon him; groping blindly, he sank to the ground.

When Peter's senses returned he looked up into Naida's eyes, and felt the warmth of her soft young arms about him. She was murmuring in a ghost of a voice, her lips fluttering little smiles and broken phrases of

gratitude while she gently bathed his face. He heard Tyee whining in a worried undertone, and felt his warm tongue on his sore hands. Peter attempted to rise, but the effort caused him to wince with pain.

“No, no!” protested Naida, as she drew his head back to her lap. “I call to chief to come take you home. He come now. Look.” She lifted his head and he saw an enormous war-canoe approaching. The high prow of the craft was grotesquely carved, and at least a score of paddles sent the boat sliding over the water at a great speed, a feather of foam at the bow.

A moment later the war-canoe grated on the beach, Tuckamonuck sprang to the shore and came swiftly toward them. The old Indian’s eyes darted about, taking in every detail of the trampled sand, then his eyes rested on Peter. The chief spoke sharply to Naida, who loosed a passionate rush of words in Chinook. She held up her arms to show the livid bruises made by Morlock’s cruel fingers. She pointed to the beach, to the forest, then to Peter and the dog. Her voice trembled with rage, but her eyes grew tender as she looked down at the man who had fought for her. Her lips quivered and suddenly she burst into tears.

Tuckamonuck issued a quick command. Two Indians raised Peter to his feet. For an interval the old Indian gazed steadily at Peter’s mutilated face, then began to speak in a deep sonorous tone. For two minutes the chief harangued, his voice at times rising to a weird chant, his discourse replete with gestures. At last he ceased talking. Removing a string of beads from his withered neck, he slipped them over Peter’s head. At this action Naida drew in her breath sharply, and Peter turned to find her smiling happily, a glad light in her eyes.

Tuckamonuck ordered one of the men to paddle the Indian maiden to the village, and the chief assisted Peter to the big dugout.

Peter’s partners, returned for the mid-day meal, stared in astonishment as a big war-canoe swung toward the camp and came on with the speed of a motor-boat. Their amazement increased as Tyee sprang ashore, followed by Peter, supported by two Indians.

Slim was the first to reach the beach. “Good God, Peter! What’s happened?” he ejaculated.

Peter’s face twisted in a wry smile. “Morlock and I—had—” His voice faltered, he slumped limply down between the two natives.

Tuckamonuck spoke briefly to the prospectors, shook hands gravely with both men, then departed with his warriors.

Breathing words of pity, the men carried their comrade to the tent. As Shorty stood looking down on the recumbent form, rage superseded his grief. For a minute the air was sulphurous with epithets that were principally concerned with consigning Morlock to underground regions. Peter's eyes fluttered open.

"How you feelin', son?" inquired Shorty solicitously.

"Fine."

Peter's hand stirred on his chest, his fingers encountered the heavy string of beads. He held them up and looked at them blankly. "Wonder what this means?"

Shorty leaned over, his eyes filled with repressed excitement. "It means this, boy. Your savin' the girl to-day has made ol' Tuck our friend. We can stay here as long as we like, an' he has invited us to smoke the pipe o' peace with him to-morrer." He drew a small tobacco sack from his pocket. "Look at this, Peter!" He poured the contents into the palm of his hand. Peter saw a tiny mound of gold dust and nuggets. "Found that right in the valley almost in the grass roots, so you can guess what we'll find higher up in the riffles." Shorty's voice was vibrant with excitement. "Ol' Mascot, you're sure workin'. Put 'er there." His big hand closed gently around Peter's fingers. Slim patted the young man's forehead bashfully, then they moved outside.

"The boy's got the guts, Slim," whispered Shorty, his eyes moist.

"Pluck," answered Slim.

At dusk Peter was awakened by Tuckamonuck's piercing scream, but now it lacked the hair-raising qualities of the previous nights. And the last echoes of the wailing cry died away, Shorty burst joyously into song in accompaniment to his accordion:

"Oh, Shorty, said ol' Snag-tooth-Sal,
I beless the very day
That I became your klootchman
In the merry month o' May.

"When you hit the dust that made you rich,
You didn't throw me down;
But we walked the streets together
In ol' Vancouver town."

CHAPTER XI.

RCHÆOLOGISTS claim that the American Indians are descendants of the Asiatic races; that vast hordes of Mongolians crossed to the North American continent on land bridges that were probably located in the Aleutian Islands.

It is undeniably true that at the present day there is a great similarity in the two races. Where Japanese and Indians mingle, as in the canneries of the British Columbia coast, it is often hard to distinguish the Oriental from the Siwash. Dress a Mongolian in the ancient dress of an Indian, or an Indian in the costume of a Mongolian, and you will find great difficulty in telling them apart.

The Indians are a dying race. The coming of the white man spelled disaster to a people who were once monarchs of this great land. Scientists have demonstrated by the examination of the excavated human bones, that there was no tuberculosis or venereal diseases among the Indians prior to the discovery of the continent by the white man. The evidence of the bones from sites at a later period, shows that the Indian had become infected with both plagues within the first two decades after the invader came. It is lamentable but true that the inroads of so-called civilization have contaminated and brought ruin to the red-men.

White men of to-day brand the Indian as a degenerate, and as being unworthy of trust. The Indian is simply reflecting the attitude of the white man toward him for centuries. Cheated and robbed by unscrupulous traders, it is little wonder that he has become wary and suspicious in his dealings with a race in whom he has lost faith. Let the white men once regain this lost confidence, and they will find them to be—as the early explorers wrote of the owners of this land—“A people gentle, inoffensive and honest.”

There is a great dearth of knowledge as to their history, as they have left no written records. The stories of their romantic past are handed down from one generation to another, and become much exaggerated by repetition, owing to their natural love for bombast and glamour. There are many students of Indian ethnology who believe that the scorned “Siwash” of to-day has a very ancient heritage, a heritage as noble and full of glory as that of the Egyptian, Peruvian and Mexican.

The red-men of British Columbia have not wholly given up their ancient beliefs and ceremonies which symbolize their belief in and dependence on

the Great Spirit in the minutest details of their every-day life. They have never lost sight of Nature and the elements, and never fail to find in them the chief manifestations of the strength and beneficence of the Great Father.

Old paintings and carvings of no mean artistic skill have been found on the northern coast, that prove that these people who have dwelt in the beautiful valleys and towering mountains of British Columbia for centuries have absorbed some of the beauty and grandeur of their surroundings. The similarity of these native sculpturings to those of the Chinese on soapstone is further proof of their Oriental origin.

Here, to this fat, rich valley in the wilderness, Tuckamonuck had brought two-score of the most stalwart of his tribe with their families, in a last stand before the onward march of civilization. Discarding many of the unhealthy habits of his own race, adopting some of the better customs of the white man and labouring with the quenchless zeal of a fanatic, he had brought to his people a condition of living that was well-nigh Utopian.

Tuckamonuck's men were striking examples of the recurrence in Indians, of the physical characteristics of their remote ancestors, they were of a distinctly Mongolian type, tall, short-headed, wide-faced, high cheek-bones and heavy black hair.

It was mid-afternoon when the big canoe with its high up-curved stems called for the white men. Peter, looking wan and weak, took a seat in the bow, facing the stern. He now saw that the huge canoe was made from one incredible cedar, the outside burned and heavily polished, and painted red within. Both high stems were ornamented lavishly with brightly-coloured carvings of birds and fish, a huge and life-like wolf-head at each peak.

Eyes straight ahead, faces stolid, the Indian paddled in silence. Snake-like muscles rippled and twisted under the dusky skin of their arms as the glinting paddles spurned the quiet water, powerful shoulders rose and fell rhythmically, and, save for the swish of water against the boat's prow, the valley drowsed in a warm, voluptuous silence. Trees cast long still shadows on the quiet water, and along the banks massed colours of flowers had an extraordinary magnificence of effect, their fragrance heavy on the air. Peter sat entranced. He felt that he was viewing one of the fairy scenes of his boyhood and that it would at any moment dissolve before his eyes.

A narrow winding path led from the beach through deep woods where the trail was broken by noisy waterfalls crossed by corduroyed bridges. Abruptly they came to the Indian village. One wide street ended at the foot of a vertical cliff over which pitched a hissing mountain stream that shattered itself on the worn rocks below in a cloud of feathery mist, forming

a rainbow that glowed softly against the background of grey rock. The well-built log buildings were of cypress, a yellow wood of the cedar family, whose smooth, silken surface and natural pure colour requires no stain or pigment to enhance its beauty. The roofs were of wide overlapping shakes of cedar stained with red-ochre, and held in place with brilliantly-coloured ropes. Tall totem poles carved with a phantasmagoria of eerie-painted sculptures of faces, fish and animals, lined each side of the street. The rainbow-tinted village with the massive mountains in the rear, formed a vividly beautiful picture. Again Peter was obsessed with the sensation that he was moving in a world of dreams.

As the white men entered the street a group of nude children fled in terror, uttering sharp cries of alarm. Klootchmen, wearing shawls of woven wood-fibre of many and variegated hues, sat sunning themselves in the doorways of the huts. Their flat, impassive faces remained immobile, but their dusky eyes held a look of mingled fear and astonishment. Barking vociferously, a pack of dogs came rushing toward them, but stopped abruptly as Tyee whirled, a menacing growl rumbling in his throat, teeth bared, and the bristles rising along his spine.

The Indians led the visitors to the largest of the houses and motioned them to enter. This building was evidently a sort of community hall. The walls were beautifully decorated with animal heads and skins. One end of the room was taken up with a display of war implements, long spears with deadly points of elk-horn, stone-pointed arrows, axes of stone, and huge bows of yew. The floor was of split cedar, remarkably smooth and brightly stained. The chairs were of peeled boughs laced with rawhide, and the rugs, into which their feet sank deeply, were of the skins of grizzly bear. The vigorous colour sense of the Indian was everywhere about them.

Several people were engaged at different tasks about the room. Old klootchmen with wrinkled faces sat cross-legged on the floor, weaving baskets from tules and the inside bark of cedar, young girls worked mortar and pestle, reducing wheat to a fine powder, and men were splitting blocks of cypress into smooth shingles with a stone wedge, using a sledge of the same material shaped like a dumb-bell.

Tuckamonuck sat on an enormous bearskin before a brazier of hollowed rock from which a spiral wreath of smoke ascended. Naida, standing near him, gave the visitors a bright smile of welcome. The chief beckoned them to be seated, then spoke to Naida, who brought a long-stemmed pipe of sandstone, curiously carved, highly ornamented and splotched with red. He filled it with Indian tobacco, known as kinnikinick or bearberry, lighted the

calumet of peace with a coal from the brazier, blew whiffs of smoke toward each point of the compass, and gravely passed the pipe to Peter.

The pipe passed from hand to hand until it had twice completed the circle. The chief knocked the ashes from the bowl, passed the calumet to Naida, sank his chin upon his breast, and for a long interval sat motionless. Without raising his head he spoke in a low chanting tone:

“Listen, pale-faces! My soul has gone from my body and climbed a ladder to the abode of spirits and ghosts. The great Sagalie Tyee has spoken to me, he has spoken right into my spirit and made me his mouthpiece. Hark to the Great Manitou!

“It is good that the young paleface saved our daughter from defilement at the hands of the white dog. Evil spirits are all about us in the ground and in the air. At times their wrath must be appeased. Our daughter must remain pure for the Great Sacrifice.”

At these words Naida drew in her breath, fell back shudderingly, a trembling hand fluttering to her throat, her eyes wide with stark terror.

The chief resumed in a low monotone.

“You may have the freedom of our sanctuary until you have gathered the gold from the sand, then you must depart never to return. You must not tell your white brothers of the yellow riches hidden here. I have spoken.” Rising slowly, he moved toward the door. “Come, I will show you the home of my forefathers.”

With his romantic head-dress stirring in the breeze, their guide led them to a terrace on the hillside near the cliff, and pointed to a long row of irregular hummocks.

“Here, a long time ago, dwelt a mighty race.”

For ten minutes the old Indian talked, his eyes shining as he told of the glory of his forebears, of their valour and strength in wars with the Coast Indian. The light died out of his eyes and a shadow crossed his face as he touched on the coming of the white men who brought a terrible sickness that in one season wiped out nearly half the tribe.

Peter stood for a minute lost in reverie, his thoughts drifting into the distant past when white men were unknown and the Indians were monarchs of the land. The dead men lived again. He seemed to hear the beating of war drums and the mournful wailing of the medicine-men.

The others having moved up the hill toward the cliff, Peter and Naida followed slowly after, while the girl told tales of the Indians of long ago. Listening to the strange Chinook names, her liquid pronunciation, and

noting the fear in her eyes as she spoke of Tuckamonuck's fanatical adherence to old traditions, Peter's thoughts reverted to the look of horror that had crossed her features during the chief's speech.

"What does the Great Sacrifice mean?"

The girl stopped short. Again terror shone in the flaky depths of her eyes. For a moment she did not answer, then looking about her fearfully, she spoke in a strained voice:

"My—my—grandfather—he—" She hesitated, then tapped her forehead significantly.

"Crazy?" prompted Peter.

"Yes—yes," she breathed. "My father, my brother go crazee—I—" She clutched Peter's arm convulsively with hands that shook, a look of dread in her sloe-black eyes.

"Petaire," she asked in a frightened whisper, "you think, maybe, sometime I go crazee?"

She loosed her hold on his sleeve, her trembling fingers crept into his hand. The colour had drained from the dark beautiful face lifted to him. There was a forlornness, a pathos, about the little figure that touched Peter's heart. He pressed her hand reassuringly. "Nonsense! Of course not," he laughed.

The girl's face softened, the look of fear gave place to one of wistful sadness. She stroked Peter's hand in an instinctive caress of adoration, then lifted her face to him, her eyes two deep pools of tenderness.

"I love you, Petaire," she said simply. "Do you love me?"

Completely nonplussed by this sudden turn in the conversation, Peter's face reddened.

"I—er—that is," he stammered, "I think you—are a—. You were going to tell me about the Great Sacrifice," he finished hastily.

Her face clouded. She spoke in an awed tone, her lips quivering pitifully.

"Some time Tuckamonuck and medicine-man say Evil Spirit mad. Then he make Great Sacrifice. One summer ago my—my sister die."

"Do you mean that—he—he killed her?" asked Peter incredulously.

Naida took his hand, then pointed up the hill.

"Come, I show you."

On arriving at the cliff, they found the rest of the party waiting for them at the cavern's mouth. The entrance to the cave was through a narrow tunnel

that gradually widened as they moved downward, somewhat like an inverted funnel. Clouds of bats clung to niches in the ceiling above them, and they heard the rustling of the wings of these repellent little mammals as they flew to the outer world for their night's foraging. Naida took Peter's hand and led him deep into the Stygian darkness. On they went until the opening to the shaft became a mere speck of light, and as they moved deeper, vanished altogether.

A dull light showed ahead, like a glowing eye, that proved to be a smouldering fire. The chief added fresh fuel, and in the glow the rugged sides of the cave took form. They were in a chamber of incredible size. The arched roof was so far above them that the fire only faintly illuminated it, and their voices echoed hollowly from the domed ceiling. Weird shadows seemed to approach out of the darkness, then recede. The Indian lighted a pitch flare, and as it slowly flickered from a dull glow to a bright blaze, Peter thrilled with amazement.

The walls were rough and irregular, having been worn into every conceivable shape by waters that had ploughed their way through, centuries ago. Snow-white stalagmites perched upon dark rocks like the proverbial ghost on tombstones. Others, huge as pillars, magnificently fluted and ornately decorated, stood as if supporting the roof of a vaulted cathedral of vast dimensions. In places the deposits of carbonate of lime were accumulated against the walls where water trickled from the rocks, forming masses of flowstone that resembled huge cataracts of frozen water upon which the light of the flare reflected as from a heap of diamonds. Stalactites, like chandeliers with thousands of pendants, hung sparkling from the roof.

Tuckamonuck walked to the edge of a yawning, dark pit in the cave floor, and held the torch high. "This is the Pit of Sacrifice," he intoned solemnly.

Peter felt Naida's fingers tighten on his as they approached the dark abyss. The air that fanned their faces was dank and clammy. Far below the water sobbed and gurgled, writhing inkily in the dim light like some mythical serpent.

"This explains where our creek goes to," said Shorty in a low aside to Peter. "An' some day this cave will bust up," he added, pointing below. The erosive action of the water had worn the soft sandstone walls until the stream spread far under the floor of the cavern, and where it vanished into the bowels of the earth, the rock was deeply honeycombed and pitted. Peter drew back from the pit with a shudder.

The chief led them to a smaller cave partitioned from the larger room by a curtain of gleaming onyx formed by the deposition of lime carbonate from water dropping from above. From this room came tomb-like odours, and, although very beautiful, it presented a ghost-like and gloomy appearance. On the floor and on shelves in the walls, were rotted cedar coffins containing the remains of ancient Indians. The boxes were less than two feet square and Peter wondered how the bodies had been crowded into such a small space. Through the moss and lichens on the coffins, that were more like cedar logs, could be distinguished weird picture writing done in red-ochre.

The Indian moved on through a narrow entrance in a curtain of sparkling stalactites, and they found themselves in a vault-like chamber with a low ceiling. On one wall the dripping flowstone had formed a natural altar. Tuckamonuck applied a light to several pitch torches set at regular intervals on shelves of the ice-like rock, and the room leaped into sudden brilliancy that was reflected from the walls in myriad rays of fantastic colours. At the center of the gleaming altar were trays containing an assortment of cooked foods, and on the lower step, a dozen or more brightly-coloured baskets.

Peter looked into one of these baskets, and his eyes widened with astonishment. All the receptacles were filled to the brim with gold dust and nuggets.

“Our offering to our dead, that they may not suffer want in the Spirit World,” informed their guide. He picked up a handful of the yellow metal and let it run slowly through his fingers.

Peter, who stood facing the gleaming curtains, started as he detected a movement near the entrance, a head cautiously lifted to view from behind one of the stalagmites. Peter saw Morlock’s sinister face, and beside it the swarthy visage of the half-breed. Morlock’s eyes glittered with a greedy light as he watched the shining wealth sifting through the Indian’s bony fingers, then his eyes meeting Peter’s, he sank quickly from sight.

In a whisper, Peter told Shorty of Morlock’s presence. Shorty placed his fingers on his lips in a signal for silence. A few minutes later they emerged to the bright sunshine of the outer world, and wound their way down the precipitous bluff to the lake shore.

Nearing the village, they heard a fluttering palpitation of sound coming from the big lodge. The trembling vibrations gradually increased in volume, then settled into a slow, regular pulsation of drums.

“Religious ceremony,” explained the chief in answer to Peter’s query.

Accompanied by the beating of the dog-skin drums with their weird droning bom—bom—bom bom bom, bom—bom—bom bom bom, the Indians sent out an uncanny chant that at times rose to staccato war cries.

Presently the medicine-man, or shaman, sprang through the doorway. His body, bare save for a breech-clout of cougar hide, was covered with oil that caused his copper-coloured skin to glisten in the sunlight. Following him came a score of Indians wearing red spirit robes and heavy wooden masks sculptured in fantastic imitations of the heads of birds and animals.

Uttering fearful cries, the medicine-man bounded to a fire burning in the middle of the street, dropped on all fours and circled the blaze, head held low and his lithe body twisting in a sinuous, creepy imitation of a mountain lion. The others followed the shaman around the fire, leaping and contorting their bodies in a wild frenzy of religious fervour. Drums boomed louder as the contagious hysteria increased. Men and women who had been standing about as if in a trance, joined the madly leaping crowd of worshippers to rush in a flood of spiritual ecstasy after the flying figure of the medicine-man as he dashed straight through the fire. In their frenzied mental state, they did not feel the heat of the blazing logs.

Gradually the tumult died down as one by one the religious fanatics sank exhausted to the ground. The medicine-man's endurance was incredible. Screaming in awful imitation of different wild beasts, chanting prayers to the Great Tyee, he continued his terrific dance for a full five minutes after the others had stopped from sheer exhaustion, then creeping on all fours with the shambling gait of a bear, he moved slowly to the doorway of the lodge and disappeared within.

The sun was twice the width of its disc above the valley's rim when Tuckamonuck escorted his guests to the big canoe.

While crossing the lake, Shorty, who had been studying the shore at the base of the cliff, called the other's attention to a small black hole at the water's edge where the placid surface was disturbed, sending tiny wavelets that lapped gently on the rocky shore.

"The water from the cave?" asked Peter.

Shorty nodded.

As they were to work the bed of the creek near the cliff, it was decided to move camp nearer to the base of operations. The shadows of the western peaks were creeping across the land before they finished packing the cayuses, and darkness overtook them before they reached the other side of the valley.

Floundering through the darkness of the forest, Peter turned over in his mind the day's occurrences. He thought of Naida living in hourly fear of an awful death, of her dread of inheriting insanity and of the look of horror in her soft eyes as they stood on the brink of the Pit of Sacrifice. Peter's meditations were interrupted as his cayuse stopped abruptly. A harsh, throaty cry of pain sounded from the darkness ahead, followed by a scream of mortal anguish. Three shots sounded in quick succession, then silence. The party stood listening. The moon rose above the mountains, its light filtering weakly through the dense foliage. A gentle breeze sighed through the leaves, but the sounds that had startled them were not repeated.

Advancing cautiously, they emerged from the timber to a boulder-strewn opening by the stream. The leading cayuse shied suddenly, snorting in terror. Shorty exclaimed sharply—an audible inhalation through set teeth rather than an oath—and Peter saw him bend over a huddled object on the ground. Slim struck a match and held it close. A dead man lay at their feet. The first thing that Peter noticed was an ominous red stain on the back of the man's buckskin shirt. Shorty rolled the body over to disclose the swarthy features of Morlock's half-breed. The feathered tuft of an arrow protruded from a ghastly hole in his chest.

They whirled about as a voice called out from behind a rim of rocks above them. Two shadowy forms rose from the ground and came down the hill. It was Morlock's voice that answered Slim's sharp challenge. He looked pale and shaken, and his eye roved fearfully about him. His hulking partner's face was pasty, his weak jaw quivered and blood dripped from a wound in his shoulder. Morlock's eyes rolled, showing the whites, as he stared down at the inanimate form.

"Is he dead?" he questioned hoarsely.

On being answered in the affirmative, Morlock's thick lips opened, and loosed a flow of the vilest objurgation.

"I'm going out," he choked, his face livid with rage, "but I'm coming back. I'll show these —— Siwashes where they get off at." He turned fiercely on Peter, his eyes blazing with hate. "And I won't have to turn squaw-man to do it," he snarled. Tyee bared his teeth in a threatening growl. Shorty muttered an oath under his breath, and with big hands opening and closing, he stepped forward. Slim seized his arm. "Let him go, Shorty."

CHAPTER XII.

HE PROSPECTORS were up long before daylight and prepared a quick breakfast which they gulped in silence, so eager were they to be at work, then with pans and shovels hurried to the creek and began their arduous toil. From the very first, their labour brought results. They found gold in the creek bed, sometimes dust, sometimes small nuggets. The precious metal accumulated slowly, the weight of each day's find mounting steadily as they travelled up the stream. They sat about the fire after the evening meal, estimating and appraising the value of each day's work. Although the skin poke in which they kept the dust gradually grew in size, Peter knew that the results were not living up to the prospector's expectations.

During these weeks, Peter felt a deep sense of contentment and well-being. It came to him as a surprise that he, like millions of others, had never up to this time, known the taste of real freedom. Morning after morning, he rolled out of his blankets with the sun, to breathe the warm sweet air of the dew-drenched valley. Day after day of outdoor toil brought a pleasant feeling of physical weariness, a healthy relish of food and the sound slumber that is denied the sedentary brain worker. His muscles grew hard, his thin frame filled out and once again he felt that incomparable thrill of possessing a healthy body. To Peter it seemed that he had cast off his old physical self and assumed the dimensions of an Olympian.

It was the life he was leading in this valley of wonders that had wrought this miraculous change. Hours of rugged toil that merged from cool of morning through heat of noon to warm sweet nights, when with Naida he bathed in the hot, invigourating springs; swam far out in the lake and lay floating for hours in the warm night of stars and dark, or paddled in a canoe to one of the tiny islands and lay amongst the luxuriant flowers while soft, ozone-laden winds whispered across the waters. The hot days, warm evenings, the eternal peace and silence of this rock-walled oasis, refreshed his soul, mind and body. Bright sunshine and heat develop the fertility of the earth, and also the possibilities in humans.

Peter thought of the desperate dirt of cities, of the sooty air brooding above the buildings and dusty pavements. Surely it was difficult to keep one's soul clean there. Here in the great outdoors it was easy. He felt he could stay in this valley forever. Here one could live with no great physical

effort or mental strain, far from the harrowing influences of the conventional struggle for existence. He thought of the abundance of food about him, and experienced that strange, fresh pleasure of knowing that here one could never starve. Like the wild things about him, one could get his food and drink straight from God. He felt as though he had been released from confinement and cast into the air on strong pinions that bore him floating and soaring away above sordid worldly strife.

On Sundays, Peter and Slim, with Tyee at their heels, and Naida walking soft-footed by their side, roamed through the valley discovering fresh marvels of plant and animal life. Slim was an ardent lover of Nature and a keen student of her ways, and he found that he could learn much from Naida, who knew all the plants of food value. "Slim knows more 'bout things in the woods than a duck knows 'bout divin'," said Shorty when they asked him to accompany them. "But me, I don't know a caterpillar's hind foot from a mosquito's suck-pump, so I'll just lay on my back an' smoke."

Peter found a keen exhilaration in these outings when they found lakes and streams unplaced on maps, peaks no one had marked, finding strange exotic flowers that stood up like candles upon long trailing ground vines, or peered with purple red, flushed faces, incredibly huge, out of green thickets impenetrable as a forest in the torrid zone.

Naida was in a constant state of beatitude when near Peter. To walk beside him with fingers entwined in his sufficed to make her blissfully radiant. She loved him with that quick, uncontrollable, burning passion that is understood only by those who have a streak of the savage in their nature.

The white woman depends on what she sees in the city markets for her inspiration and suggestion for the things she will eat and wear as her adornment. The Indian woman sees in the wild things of the forest and the fish in the streams an inexhaustible supply of food. She sees in the inside bark of cedar, roots and grasses, the material for making baskets of any size or shape. The colours for them are obtained from brilliant rocks in the mountains and in the juice of wild plants, which she understands how to mix into dyes that will never fade. Her aptitude in making beautiful designs and figures is her unimpaired inheritance through centuries.

On these Sunday trips, Naida pointed out the plants used as food by her people, and they collected enough each time to last the week through. The bitter-root grew in abundance throughout the valley, its pink flowers forming a gorgeous wave of colour. This vegetable is rich in starch and has a marked ability to survive when out of the ground. It is health-giving, tender and delicious, and when the Indian was in a wild state, this succulent root

formed an important part of his diet, and saved many a tribe from starvation. She taught them to distinguish the small, pinkish-white flower of the Indian potato, whose root, when eaten raw, is somewhat the flavour of a chestnut, and is highly prized by the natives for its food value. She instructed them in the use of the wild onion, parsnip, kamass-root, Indian raisin berry, Saskatoon berry, and how to extract sugar from the tips of the Douglas fir.

With surprising speed and matchless skill, the prospectors erected a compact little log cabin of peeled cedar. With a collapsible tin stove installed, bunks on the wall, a table in the center of the room with benches for seats, they moved into their new home and resumed their search for gold.

Tuckamonuck called on them occasionally. His moods varied, at times he was gravely friendly, and again, morose and silent, his greenish eyes resting on the white men with a peculiar glare. He was a man who was apparently ravaged by an inward flame.

A few times girls came with Naida from the Indian village, and with thick braids of hair down their backs they stood at a distance, glancing bashfully sideways at the white men. Although some of these young girls were very pretty, there was an intangible something about Naida's features and beautiful eyes that set her apart from all the others of her race.

For Peter she held a tremendous lure. At first he had explained his liking for her company as a natural desire for companionship, but when he found himself looking forward with eager anticipation to their evenings together, he questioned himself sharply. Was he becoming enamoured with this lovely Indian girl? Surely she was enticing enough, with her delicate features and graceful form. Certainly the environment was ideal for such a situation.

More and more Peter was absenting himself from the cabin to spend the evenings under the stars with the Indian girl. Shorty became much perturbed as he noticed Naida's steadily mounting influence over his young friend, and one night when Peter returned later than usual, he spoke to him.

"Go slow, Peter. Don't go too far with Naida." Peter looked at him in surprise. "I don't mean that you will do anythin' wrong," Shorty hastened to add, "'cause you're too much o' a man. But these here Indian girls, 'specially when they're young an' so damn handsome as Naida, weave a sort o' spell 'round a white man. An' when a man gets married he expects to have children." He looked at Peter significantly. "You know what I mean, son?"

"Yes."

"Watch your step then, my boy," advised the big man gently.

Something had certainly woven a spell about Peter. He fought against his longing to be with Naida, and for two nights he stayed in the cabin; but on the third evening, when she came to him, a hurt light in her eyes, and in broken sentences from trembling lips asked him why he shunned her, his will became impotent. A moment later they walked hand in hand toward the lake, the girl looking up at him adoringly, her face suffused with happiness. Shorty, watching their going, shook his head sadly.

“I’m goin’ to make some excuse to send the boy out to Foghorn’s for a few days,” he confided to Slim.

The sun had gone down, leaving the heavens a blaze of crimson and orange, and the lake had turned to molten gold when Naida and Peter stepped into the bark canoe and stole silently over the still waters to their rendezvous on a flower-scented island, a hundred yards from the shore. They beached the boat and moved up the bank to a bubbling hot spring. There under a friendly silence of warm twilight, shadow-checker grass and flowers, and gently rustling leaves, they sat down close together and watched the darkness engulf the valley.

The moon rose at last, at first a slight colouring of the sky-line, a steadily growing wave of light; then the sharply outlined sphere itself rose majestically above the eastern mountains, sending a sparkling path of gold across the lake. Dark shadows took form under the moon’s brilliance.

Naida adorned her hair with garlands of flowers that were already touched with dew, and laughingly placed a wreath of columbine about Peter’s neck, then looked up at him, her white teeth gleaming in a tender smile.

No human presence other than theirs disturbed the sovereignty of primal calm that brooded over the wilderness. It seemed to Peter that there was nothing in the universe but moonlight, water, trees, the pungent smell of flowers, and the beautiful girl by his side. An errant breeze fanned their faces, redolent and sweet with the land’s elixir, bringing with it the fluttering sound of Shorty’s accordion. The distant love song seemed the last touch of enchantment, making it indeed a wonderland. The subtle influence of the exotic night stole into his spirit; a powerful spell enveloped him. He looked down into Naida’s face. Her eyes shone up at him, filled with a dewy tenderness. Peter breathed deeply of the heady air. Naida’s hands crept to his shoulders, then her tapering arms stole about his neck. How warm and soft they were, how fragrant her hair! The warmth of the slender young body pressed to his set his heart pounding madly. A tremour ran through him. With face strained up to him, she whispered passionately:

“Petaire, I love you! I like you stay here with me. You like me, Petaire?”

There was a pregnant silence while she stared up at him beseechingly.

“Yes, I do like you, Naida, but I—” The remainder of the sentence was muffled as her arms tightened about him, and before he could object, her full red lips, ardent and tender, were pressed to his. The scarlet glowed beneath the dusk of her cheeks, her eyes sparkled with a sudden rush of tears.

“Oh, Petaire, Petaire! I so verry glad!” she cried ecstatically. “You make me verry happy. I no get sick—here!” she pressed both hands to her temples. She flung her arms impulsively about him, and laughing and crying by turns, crooned broken phrases of endearment, and lavished caresses upon him. Peter gently disengaged himself from her embrace.

“Naida, you mustn’t—” the words died weakly on his lips as he looked down into luminous eyes brimming with tears of joy.

Why not? he thought. The outside world had treated him badly, why not let it go? Let everything go. Drift through warm nights and bright days where life was easy. Sink to oblivion in this beautiful valley where time was as nothing; no more struggle for existence in the sordid marts of trade, only an idle drifting through life with this wonderful girl. He stretched out his long arms, drew her to him, and their lips met.

An hour later, at the parting of the trails, the Indian girl clung to his arm, talking joyously of their happy future, and Peter was content to keep silent and listen to her melodious voice.

He was scarcely away from the girl’s alluring presence, her farewell caress still warm on his lips, when the enormity of his offence struck him like a blow. He stopped in his tracks. What had he done? he asked himself aghast. He had given this trusting girl to understand that he would marry her. Bitterly he repented the weakness that had allowed him to be placed in this predicament. There was only one thing to do. He must tell her the truth. But, as he remembered the love in her eyes and her tear-wet face, his decision weakened. Nearing the house, his face reddened as he recalled Shorty’s warning and the trust the big man placed in him. Cursing himself softly under his breath, he tiptoed carefully into the cabin, and with his mind in a chaos of conflicting emotions, undressed and crept into his bunk.

CHAPTER XIII.



IT IS an incontrovertible fact that gold is where you find it. There is no infallible rule to guide one to Nature's storehouse of wealth. True, there is a knowledge to be obtained from books and from experience, that is of inestimable value to the prospector, but many of the richest mines on this continent have been discovered by men with little knowledge of mining.

Alluvial deposits of gold are caused by the action of running waters and glaciers grinding down masses and particles, and through the never-changing laws of gravity, deposit the debris on the lower ground. If fine gold dust is found in the bed of a river flowing through an open country, it will probably yield larger dust or grains nearer the mountain from which the stream runs; and grains of gold far along the stream may suggest nuggets near its source, for the reason that the stream which has washed the gold-bearing matter from the lodes in the mountain, has moved it down an inclined plane, leaving in its course the heavy particles and transporting the lighter to the valley below. The heaviest bodies of gold are found often where a current has changed its course, and where there is a sharp turn, so that one side of the stream is a steep ledge, and the other a sloping bank, the latter may be rich in gold. There is far more chance of finding gold in a stream that is erratic in its course, than one that flows straight.

Years of experience and study had given to Slim and Shorty a knowledge of the geology of British Columbia unsurpassed by any of their kind. Shorty's wisdom in mining lore was wholly by observation, while Slim, through reading, knew theory as well as practice.

Work went on steadily, but results showed little better than wages for the three men. They studied the characteristics of rocks and sands in all the creeks, channels and fissures over which the streams ran, explored dry water holes, climbed up to the foot of glaciers, shovelling and panning, but the value of gold found was not encouraging.

At the breakfast table the prospectors discussed the situation. Shorty expressed his disappointment at their failure to discover richer grounds. "It's here, somewhere," he grumbled. "I'll bet there's a cart-load o' pil chicamin right near us an' all in a bunch, but I'll be darned if I can find it. We've found gold dust right in the grass roots, which means that it's brought down when the floods are on in the spring an' fall. The way this country's cut up is

different than anythin' I've ever seen. An' I'll bet that when it rains here it comes down in buckets an' runs off them hills like Niagara Falls." He turned to Peter, a humourous twinkle in his eye. "It's up to you, ol' Mascot, you pulled us out o' the hole more'n once."

It was Sunday morning. Naida would appear at any moment to join them on their weekly jaunt. Peter felt that owing to her innate frankness and freedom from convention, she would greet him effusively in the presence of his partners. He flushed at the thought. He accepted Shorty's challenge with alacrity. A day alone would give him time to think, to find some way out of his dilemma. He prepared a lunch, and with Tyee cavorting joyously about him, left the cabin hurriedly.

"Hope Lady Luck sits on your shoulder," cried Shorty. Peter turned to wave his hand, shouted a laughing reply, then strode up the hillside.

The early warmth of morning presaged a hot day. The sky was cloudless save for a light mist that hung above the peaks in the clear emptiness of aquamarine. Peter walked with a long loose stride that carried him swiftly upward. A few months before, the rapid pace would have caused him to breathe heavily, but now he leaped from rock to rock with effortless ease, his breath coming normally.

As he climbed higher the sun's heat gained in intensity, reflecting from the rocks in a blinding glare. Perspiration poured from Peter's face. Tyee ceased gamboling and with lolling tongue clung close to his master's heels. Nearing the mass of snow and ice cupped in the crater-like summit, Peter stopped for a moment to lave his face in the cold water, then began his search.

Carefully and systematically he panned the gravel in all the creeks that hissed and foamed from the foot of the great wall of ice. Descending slowly, he worked back and forth, wading knee-deep in the icy water, rolling boulders aside, testing sands in eddies and dry water holes; but he found nothing worth while, or that would serve as a guide to the source of gold impregnating the valley below.

Near noon he ceased his labours, withdrew to the shade of a boulder and proceeded to eat his lunch. "No use, old boy," he said gloomily as he tossed a bit of food to Tyee, "the mascot has failed this time." Moving closer, the dog looked up into his master's face, his brown eyes shining with sympathy at Peter's tone of distress. Finishing his meal, he lay back in the cool shade and fell into a doze. Aroused by a low growl from Tyee, he sat up quickly. Again the dog growled, his big muzzle pointing down the mountain.

Far below, a tiny figure toiled up the steep grade; now in the open, now vanishing behind boulders; then a shoulder of the mountain shut the climber from view. Moving to the peak of a cliff, Peter at once recognized Naida's lithe form. Seeing him, she waved her hand and came on at increased speed, leaping up the boulder-strewn slope with the sure-footedness of a goat. Peter marvelled at her agility.

Drawing nearer, Peter saw that she had loosed the straps from her shoulders and tied them about her waist, leaving the upper part of her body naked. Her face wreathed in smiles, she came eagerly toward him.

"Naida, you shouldn't wear your dress like that," he chided her.

She looked at him with great starry, questioning eyes.

"Why?"

"Well—it's—it's not just the thing to do," he explained lamely.

"I sorry, Petaire," she said contritely, replacing the straps.

"Why you come here?" she added.

Peter told her of his unrewarded search.

"You not get plenty gold?"

"No; very little."

For a moment she meditated. "Tuckamonuck get plenty. I no sure where he find." She puckered her brows. "Come, I think over here." She pointed to where the glacier tapered to a point on a huge mass of broken rock. Coming to a creek that leaped from this rock-rubble, she followed it downward for a quarter of a mile, then stopped and looked about her.

To their left a small canyon was blocked with a huge up-ended boulder whose greatest length lay parallel with the creek. With an exclamation of satisfaction, Naida led Peter to the base of this massive rock and pointed to a water-worn opening at its base.

Worming their way through this narrow tunnel to an open space beyond, Peter saw that they were standing in an ancient creek bed whose course had been diverted by the fallen rock. The recently washed gravel testified to the fact that during high water a certain portion of the stream found its way through the original channel. The waters of this old river had struck the sheer wall of a cliff, then swung abruptly against a shelving bank on the opposite side, leaving a heavy deposit of sand and gravel mixed with boulders. Naida pointed at this heap of debris.

"I think you find plenty. Tuckamonuck no take for long time."

Eagerly Peter scooped up a pan of the sand, and hurrying to the creek, he carefully washed the contents, then looked blankly at Naida when no glitter of gold rewarded his efforts. Suddenly he remembered that Slim had told him that in formations of this kind, the gold would likely lie in layers near bedrock. Re-entering the gorge, he rolled aside rocks and dug to a depth of three feet. There was no need to use the pan. The shovel brought to light a glitter of dust and several nuggets; one being half the size of a walnut.

For an instant he stared at the precious metal lying in the palm of his hand, then whooping joyfully, rushed for the opening, his first thought being to acquaint his partners with the news of their good fortune. In his haste he bumped his shoulders cruelly on the walls of the passageway, but in his excitement, felt no pain.

Racing to the summit of a nearby cliff, he shouted at the top of his voice, eyes glued to the log cabin below. Again he shouted, but no sign of life appeared. Excited by his master's shouts Tyee loosed a deep bay that sent echoes booming through the valley. A figure appeared outside the cabin; then another. Peter shouted, waving his arms, and his partners stirred into quick action. A few minutes later Slim appeared, cool and unruffled, Shorty labouring after.

“What’s the row, Peter?” panted the big man, a note of suppressed eagerness in his tone.

Peter’s eyes sparkled. He dropped the nuggets into Shorty’s hand.

Shorty’s breath hissed from his lungs in one long exhalation, as if he had been holding it for a long time.

“Where’d you find it?” he questioned breathlessly.

Peter led them to the heap of debris, Shorty having difficulty in crowding his big bulk through the entrance.

The big man seized the shovel, and with powerful arms sank it to the depth of its blade into the dirt, then scattered the soil at his feet. With a muttered exclamation, he fell to his knees while the others gathered about him. The dirt was heavily impregnated with coarse grains of gold; and a nugget, whose dull outside surface had been scraped away by the sharp point of the spade, glittered under the bright sun.

Shorty came to his feet and threw his hat high in the air. “We’ve hit her! We’ve hit her!” he cried joyously. He grabbed Slim’s hands and pumped his arms up and down, then seized Peter by the shoulders and shook him gently. “An’ the mascot did it,” he boomed, his eyes glowing. “How’d you find it?” he asked abruptly.

Peter inclined his head toward Naida. The girl stepped to his side. "If you glad Naida find gold for you, you pay her," she said roguishly; and with a frankness that was dismaying to Peter, she lifted her face to be kissed. Peter felt Shorty's smiling eyes upon him, and his face grew hot.

"Sufferin' cats! A kiss for what she's given us? Kiss her, boy, kiss her! If you don't, I will!" yelled Shorty, forgetting his recent advice to his young friend.

With keen interest, Peter watched his partners construct the sluices for washing gold. They built a series of wooden troughs, the length of each about ten feet, the height six to eight inches, the width two and one-half feet. One end of each trough was made a few inches narrower than the other, so they telescoped into one another, making a sluice that could be lengthened or shortened as desired. Across the inside of the bottom boards they nailed small strips of wood two inches thick, some at right angle and some at an angle of forty-five degrees with the side of the trough. Running water washed downward the earth thrown into the sluice, and the gold accumulated in front of the wooden strips, while the lighter material was carried on to the end, where it formed in a heap called "tailings".

Operations were necessarily slow and arduous, as all the gold-bearing soil had to be carried through the narrow aperture to the creek. Shorty and Peter worked in a fever of excitement. Slim remained cool and undemonstrative; studying the formation of their strike, seemingly more interested in determining the cause of its origin, than in its value.

Peter thrilled as their first washing left the riffles filled with gold. For him life's highway had become very sweet. He had regained his health, and now, directly ahead, lambent and golden, the light of wealth was shining.

When darkness compelled them to stop work, they had filled a small sack whose weight caused Shorty to chuckle happily as he swung it to his shoulders.

"A few days like to-day, an' the little girl can quit slingin' hash, an' be ridin' 'round Stanley Park in her red limoosine."

In five days the heap was washed down to bedrock and there was still a small fortune in the tailings; but without this, the result far exceeded their wildest hopes—they were rich men.

Every evening Naida came to visit them. Pleading fatigue from his arduous toil, Peter stayed close to the cabin. She accepted his excuses meekly, and sat near him until a late hour every night, her dark eyes seldom off his face. Peter shrank from the ordeal of telling her that he did not love

her. Each day he firmly resolved to speak to her, but when night came and he saw her face light with happiness on meeting him, his courage ebbed away. She had made it possible for them to remain in the valley, had brought them riches—and now he had to hurt her cruelly. He told himself that he had been stupid in yielding momentarily to the wondrous charm of this beautiful girl. He felt low and mean; hated himself for his lack of strength.

One evening as Peter was returning from the lake, Naida sprang laughingly to the path before him, and flung her arms about his neck. At once she sensed a change in his manner.

“You verry cold, Petaire,” she whispered, her eyes searching his. “But my love make you warm.” She attempted to press her lips to his. Peter unclasped her hands from his neck and stepped back.

“You mustn’t do that any more, Naida.”

He averted his face at the wounded look in her eyes. She moved close to him. He felt her hand touch his sleeve, and her breath was warm on his cheek. There was a brief silence during which Peter steeled himself to meet the crisis.

“Look at me, Petaire!”

Slowly he turned his head and they met each other’s eyes in a long look.

“You—no want me to love you?” she breathed tremulously.

“No.”

“Why?” she whispered fearfully, eyes wide.

Then he told her.

The colour fled from her face. She shrank back cringingly as from a blow. With a trembling hand clasped to her brow, she regarded him with stricken eyes, a little choking catch struggling in her throat.

“Oh!” she murmured faintly, her eyes brimming with tears. Her head dropped forward, her breath coming in fluttering gasps.

Peter stood turning his wide hat in nervous fingers. He gazed out into the darkness and up at the stars, but his eyes were drawn back uncontrollably to the bowed head with its mass of shining black hair. When he could trust his voice, he spoke.

“I’m sorry, Naida. We’ll be good friends,” he faltered.

“I—know, Petaire,” she whispered almost inaudibly. “I—I only Siwash Indian.”

Suddenly she swayed toward him, head drooping, and but for his quickly outflung arms, would have sunk to the ground. She lay against him, limp, helpless; inexpressibly pathetic. He felt the soft contours of her body through her clothing, and in the panting bosom pressed to him, felt her heart leap and flutter wildly. She breathed a sigh in which words were borne faintly.

“I was so glad, Petaire. I afraid to stay here alone. I think you like me and stay here with me. I—love you—” Great racking sobs shivered through her slender body as though they would tear it apart.

In an absolute chaos of uncertainty, Peter stared down at the shuddering little figure. He stroked her hair, and her hand crept up to clasp his convulsively.

“I go now, Petaire,” she choked as she slipped from his arms. “I go. I no bother you again.” She twined her arms languishingly about his neck, pressed her tear-wet face to his, then ran blindly up the trail.

Peter felt his eyes smart as he watched the forlorn little figure move unsteadily up the path toward the Indian village.

CHAPTER XIV.

“**W**E’RE RUNNIN’ shy on grub,” Shorty informed Peter next morning. “Trout an’ these here Indian roots are all right, but they don’t stick to your ribs like beans an’ bacon. Me an’ Slim can work along on the tailin’s while you run out to Foghorn’s. What’d you say?” Upon receiving Peter’s eager assent, Shorty continued. “You can stay a few days an’ kinda rest up; an’ don’t forget to let our little partner know that we’ve hit it rich, an’ that she can buy the red limoosine any time she wants to.”

An hour later Peter was ready to start. The long idleness and the rich grass of the valley had filled out the wiry frames of their cayuses, and given to their coats that lustrous sheen that signifies a healthy, well-fed body. Peter sat his restive horse with difficulty while Shorty gave him minute directions for following the trail. Leading a cayuse on which to pack supplies, with Tyee barking excitedly in the lead, Peter shouted adieu to his friends, cantered down the hill and disappeared in the forest.

Reaching the rim of the valley, he stopped for a short rest on the plateau, then swung to the narrow defile that dropped to the sandy wastes below, and began the first day’s journey on the trail to Foghorn’s Camp.

Climbing tortuous paths to lofty summits; winding through the leafy coolness of shadowed valleys; and spending nights under the star-spattered dome of the heavens, Peter found a certain sense of exhilaration in being alone in the vast wilderness.

It was dusk of a warm night, when he topped the rocky ridge that gave him a view of the cluster of log buildings which was the first link between the rocky mountain fastnesses and civilization; and Foghorn’s Camp was in darkness when he reined in his horses at the stable door.

A light flashed on in a room at the rear of the lodge, and Wing, the Chinese cook, appeared in the doorway.

“’Lo,” he called sleepily, “how many come?”

“Only one.”

“You likee eat?”

“No thanks, Wing.”

“All light. You puttee horse in stable. You takee loom number tlee.”

Peter slept soundly, and it was after eight o'clock when he went down stairs. Foghorn boomed a hearty welcome, and with his usual garrulity plied him with questions about Indian Valley. Remembering Tuckamonuck's warning, Peter made evasive replies to the old man's bombardment of queries.

Foghorn told of Morlock's going in with two men, and of his return without the half-breed; and of Morlock's reticence to discuss the matter. What did Peter know about it? Did the Indians kill the half-breed? Did Shorty find gold? Finally Peter broke in on the old man's flow of language, to ask for a newspaper; and leaving his voluble host, he entered the dining-room.

A dozen men, dressed in the habiliments of sportsmen, were eating breakfast. Peter sat down at a table by the window, opened the paper and began to read. Deeply engrossed, he was dimly aware of quick footsteps crossing the room to stop at his table; and without looking up, he gave his order.

"Lots of ham and eggs, Wing, please."

Receiving no answer, he lifted his eyes. Peter's features stiffened with blank amazement. The newspaper dropped from his nerveless fingers to the floor. He was looking into Dorothy Sinclair's smiling blue eyes. For an instant he stared owlishly, then, forgetful of any other presence save hers, he leaped to his feet, seized both her hands and gazed down at her lovely flushed face.

"Dorothy!" he cried, "how—what." Then realizing that they were the cynosure of all eyes, he released her hands and stammered an incoherent apology.

Dorothy laughed embarrassedly.

"I'll bring your order," she said, then hurried to the kitchen.

Old Foghorn, peering in on this scene, withdrew his head, a wide grin on his whiskered face.

Eating mechanically, hardly tasting the food, Peter watched Dorothy as she moved swiftly about her work. She wore a short skirt of cotton khaki and a waist of the same material. The simplicity of dress made her more wonderful than she had seemed before; more lithe and child-like.

Peter dallied over his meal until the other diners had left the room. Dorothy cleared away the dishes, then settled like a bird alighting, to a chair opposite Peter.

Her eyes roved appraisingly from his broad thick shoulders to his bronzed face, then to his thick, muscular hands.

“My, but you have changed,” she said wonderingly. “Tell me all about—everything.”

“First, you must tell me how it is that you are here,” asked Peter.

“Shorty,” she smiled.

“‘Shorty?’ How?”

Then she told him of Shorty’s promise to apply for a position for her here, that she might be able to enjoy the fresh air of the country, and of his subsequent letter, written the day before he left Foghorn’s for Indian Valley. Peter’s heart warmed toward his big friend. “The old beggar never said a word to me about it,” he laughed.

“He’s a dear,” said Dorothy gently.

For ten minutes Peter talked rapidly, enjoying her proximity, the expressive play of her features, and her wide-eyed wonder at the marvels of Indian Valley. Her only interruptions were little gasps of astonishment and awe as he described Tuckamonuck, Naida and the Cave of the Dead; the many days of unremitting toil that brought discouragement, then led up graphically to Naida’s directing them to the hidden gold.

“Oh! She must be wonderful!” Dorothy murmured in an awed voice.

Peter was surprised that she showed so little enthusiasm in learning that she was rich and could now give up her menial labours.

“Shorty said to be sure to tell you that you can now buy your red ‘limoosine’.”

Dorothy laughed heartily.

“Please tell me something about yourself,” urged Peter. “How do you like it here?”

While Dorothy talked, Peter fastened his eyes upon her. The heavy log walls of the room seemed to act as a sounding board to her delightful voice.

Dorothy Sinclair had that rare and beautiful combination of brown hair and blue eyes. She sat in a bright shaft of sunlight, and Peter marvelled at the freshness of her complexion. Soft tendrils of hair curling about her forehead showed glints of gold in the sun’s rays. The outdoor life had given a tint of brown to her pale skin and an added lustre to her eyes.

The first sight of Dorothy had made a deep impression on Peter; this second meeting brought the full realization that his feeling for her was more than a mere sense of protection.

They were alone in the room. Foghorn's heavy voice came lazily from the office. Outside, hoofs thudded and saddles creaked as a party of tourists rode past the window. A warm breeze, heavy with the odour of sagebrush, stirred the window curtains. Dorothy ceased talking, and as she met Peter's gaze a flood of colour dyed her neck and face.

Peter covered both her hands with his.

"Dorothy, I am so glad that you are here," he said softly.

The rising tide of colour ebbed from her face. He felt her hands tremble, and when she slowly raised her head, Peter's pulse-beats quickened; for the expression in the blue depths of her eyes was warm, soft and ineffably tender.

"I hate to bother you," apologized Foghorn from the doorway, "but there's a feller here wants to muck-a-muck."

With flushed faces Dorothy and Peter came to their feet.

"When can I talk with you again?" he questioned eagerly.

"I'll be through at eight, to-night," she answered softly.

Filled with a great exhilaration, Peter walked out into the sunshine. Tyee met him, and seeming to sense his master's mood, he forgot his dignity and cavorted about like a puppy. His master was happy; therefore Tyee was happy—which is the way of dogs.

To Peter the air seemed more balmy, the birds sang more sweetly, and the sun was brighter than ever before. To-night he would walk out under the stars with Dorothy and hear from her lips what her eyes had already told him. He stretched out his arms and felt the bulge of muscles on chest and shoulders. Truly, this wonderful country had been good to him. Health, wealth and happiness were his. He laughed aloud from sheer joy.

It was dark when Dorothy, looking fresh and cool in white linen, came to the verandah. The day had been hot, and Foghorn's guests lay in hammocks or sat sprawled in big chairs, enjoying the cool of the evening. Several arose as Dorothy appeared, but she declined the proffered chairs and sat down on the steps, frankly unconscious of the many admiring glances thrown her way. Peter moved to her side, and they engaged in a rambling conversation that presently lapsed to a wordless silence. Peter stole surreptitious glances at her face, stirred by her beauty.

The idlers showed signs of interest at the sound of staccato hoof-beats from the darkness of the dusty road. There was the sound of creaking leather, then two dim figures, leading their cayuses, came up the hill toward the lodge.

Peter, watching Dorothy's face, saw her start slightly, then her attention became strongly fixed on the newcomers. As they drew nearer she caught her breath sharply, and without a word to her companion, rose and ran into the house. Puzzled by this action, Peter directed his interest to the approaching men.

A tall man, whose features were indistinguishable in the half-light, led the way, and behind him came an Indian carrying a suitcase. The stranger peered searchingly about the group on the steps, then entered the lodge.

Peter's brows knitted in a frown. There was something vaguely familiar about the late arrival; an illusive, shadowy something that made Peter feel that he had seen him before; but though he searched the innermost recesses of his mind, he could not recall the time, place or circumstances of their meeting. Baffled and confused by Dorothy's strange manner, and his obscure memory of the stranger, he paced slowly back and forth, his head bowed in deep thought.

He turned at the sound of Dorothy's quick steps.

"I'm sorry," she said jerkily, her face averted, "but I can't see you again to-night." And, before Peter could utter a protest, she was gone.

Piqued by Dorothy's changed demeanour, Peter strode out into the open. Tyee bounded to meet him, and again with uncanny intuition he sensed his master's mood and fell silently behind, close to Peter's heels.

Since entering the wilderness Peter had been free from the grim attacks of melancholy that had assailed him intermittently since leaving the trenches in France; but now one of the old fits of depression fell upon him like a cloud.

His steps led him to the crest of one of the many low wooded hills stretching across the valley. He sat down on a boulder, a deep weight of discouragement bowing his shoulders, his chin sunk listlessly in his open palm. Thus he sat, motionless, smoking innumerable cigarettes, while a murky darkness crept over the valley.

Delicate night gusts, laden with piny odours, sougled through the trees. He heard the stirring of wild creatures, and from a swamp below, an owl hooted his challenge to the night. But Peter was oblivious to the beauties of the summer evening.

Abruptly the sound of murmuring voices obtruded on the peace of the night. Peter raised his head and his hand dropped to Tyee's muzzle, stifling a growl. Dorothy and the stranger moved from the woods and stopped in the path directly below where Peter sat, their voices coming faintly to his ears.

The man stood looking down into the girl's upturned face, her hands resting on his shoulders.

A tiny crescent moon raveled like a silver thread out of a sable cloud, and cast its weak light over the earth, and as the faint rays dimly illuminated the stranger's face, Peter gasped. Like a flash he remembered. Again the scene came before his eyes. The man in the big motor-car bending over Dorothy, his face tenderly solicitous, under the bright arc light. But now the stranger's face showed anger. He removed Dorothy's hands from his shoulders. Peter heard her soft voice raised pleadingly, but could not catch the words. The man's deeper tone came in fragments.

"You must come back . . . won't stand for it . . . people will talk . . ."

Again Dorothy spoke, and as she finished, her companion took her in his arms and kissed her; then hand in hand they moved beyond Peter's vision, Dorothy's happy laugh floating back through the night air.

Ten minutes later, Peter, his face shrouded in gloom, stood in Foghorn's store. "Fill this order, please. I'm going out in the morning," he said tersely, throwing a written slip on the counter. Foghorn offered loud objections to Peter's leaving so soon, but as Peter answered him in curt monosyllables, the old man ceased his grumbling and attended to the grocery order.

"Here's a letter for Shorty, an' I'm puttin' in a bottle of rum for him, an' if he don't want it he can send it back," grinned Foghorn. Peter paid his bill, then went straight to his room.

Peter stole noiselessly to the stable three hours before daylight, saddled his cayuses, and was at the summit of the mountain when the rising sun gilded the glaciers. He swung his horse about and stared at the valley below. A light mist clung to the lower levels, but Foghorn's buildings stood out clearly through the thin morning air. Wing was building his fire and the smoke billowed from the chimney in a huge cloud, then slowly disintegrated to feathery plumes that drifted over the tree-tops.

She would be just now awakening, Peter thought. He wondered if she would care when she learned that he had gone. In his melancholy mood he had angrily resolved to put Dorothy out of his life forever. She was deceiving him. Who was this stranger? He had asked himself a thousand times. Her lover? Her husband? Was she an adventuress? He put this last thought aside as if it were a contagious disease sign. When he thought of her steady blue eyes and the sweet smile of her curved lips, he hated himself for harbouring such a suspicion. Try as he might he could not stop thinking of her. He remembered her presence, her wondrous beauty, her swift free step and the deep blue of her eyes; all these he thought of and recalled vividly.

She had been so sweet, and now—. With a sigh he swung his horse to the trail. And so, with a heart steeped in gloom, Peter rode on the homeward trail; rising before daylight and plodding on after darkness spread over earth and sky.

Late on a hot afternoon he neared his journey's end. Standing on the mighty rim of the oasis, he looked down on sun-splashed Indian Valley, sensing its cleanliness and emptiness of swarming, pullulating city life. Here was wide open spaces, and the sun spilling its radiance over fertile lands, hot entrancing days and warm nights.

He thought of Naida's haunting dusky loveliness, and the wounded light in her eyes when he last saw her. The grim lines around his mouth softened. Surely no man could wish a greater love than hers.

Slim and Shorty were in the cabin and Naida sat on the steps, when Peter arrived. The girl sprang to her feet and came forward hesitatingly. Peter saw that she had lost some of the healthy glow from her cheeks and there were dark circles around her eyes. He greeted her gently, and his tone brought a flush to her face and a glad smile to her lips.

Shorty came to the door and stared at him in astonishment. "Back already! What the hell—" he began, but seeing Peter's face, he instantly divined that something was wrong, and held silent.

Peter unpacked the cayuses, turned them loose, then entered the cabin. Shorty prepared a meal which Peter ate in silence, while he listened to Shorty's review of their work on the tailings during his absence.

Peter unpacked his saddle bags and placed Shorty's letter and bottle on the table. "From Foghorn," he said briefly.

"Bless his ol' heart," chortled Shorty. Then he spied the letter. "For me?" asked the big man wonderingly, a vivid expression of excitement shining in his eyes. He tore the envelope open and moved to the light of the door. As he read, a broad and radiant smile spread over his homely face.

"Hooray!" he shouted joyously, capering about the room. "Read it, Peter! Read it!" He thrust the letter into Peter's hands.

"The Acme Ladies' Barber Shop,
"Cordova Street,
"Vancouver, B.C.

"Dear Mr. Shorty McCrae.

"I dont know what you think of me and I dont blame you if you think bad things. Im going to be honest with you and tell you

that I aint as good as I might be but I got thinking it over and I felt ashamed of myself because I never had a man treat me like a gentleman as you treated me. I am herewith enclosing a sum of \$50 which you gave me and I thank you many times and I want you to come see me at above address when you come to town and I would like very much to have you write me to above ad. a nice long letter when you get time. I hope to see you when you come to town. Be sure to look me up.

“Yours truly,

“Maude Estella Fayette.

“p.s. Dont forget to look me up at above ad.”

“What d’you think o’ that, Slim, you darned ol’ croaker. You thought that I was hooked. Guess you’ll have to admit that I’m a pretty good judge of human natur’ after all. I knew she was a square-shooter.”

In spite of his despondency, Peter was forced to smile at the big man’s great joy.

Shorty seized his accordion. “Open up the bottle, Slim,” he ordered.

“Pass along the hootch an’ we’ll all have a shot,

Pass along the hootch an’ we’ll all have a shot,

Pass along the hootch an’ we’ll all have a shot

As we go marchin’ on.

Glory, glory halle-lu-yah, Glory, glory halle-lu-yah.

Glory, glory halle-lu-yah, Glory, glory halle-lu-yah,

As we go marchin’ on.”

“Better join us in a shot to-night, ol’ Mascot, ’cause this is a special occasion.” Peter needed no second invitation. Slim stared at his young friend in surprise as Peter took drink for drink with Shorty. For an hour they sat at the table, while Naida looked on wonderingly at this strange proceeding. Peter was moodily silent, the liquor having no visible effect on him; his eyes travelling often to Naida’s dark face.

Shorty picked up his accordion and played a soft love song. He played with deep feeling, the music throbbing in soft cadence, rising and falling bird-like and ineffably sweet and clear. While the air pulsed with sweet harmony, Peter stared at Naida as though her eyes held his in a hypnotic spell, and when the last passionate note died away, he rose and walked to her side. Breathlessly she came to her feet and stood looking up at him.

“Naida,” he said thickly, “I’ll marry you.”

“Oh, Petaire! Petaire!” she breathed with quivering gladness.

Peter turned about quickly, walked back to the table and sank heavily to his chair. Naida glided noiselessly across the room, touched her lips to his hair, then with a low “Good-night”, stole away into the darkness.

For a moment the room was silent.

“For God’s sake, Peter, do you know what you’ve done,” muttered Shorty.

Peter laughed discordantly, took another drink, walked across the room and flung himself into his bunk. Shorty followed, and stood looking down at the youth’s flushed face.

“Come, my boy,” he said gently, “get it off your chest. What’s wrong?”

Peter opened his heart. He omitted no detail of the happenings from the time he arrived at Foghorn’s until the morning he had stolen away in the darkness. Shorty listened intently, occasionally nodding his head. After Peter ceased speaking, there was a long silence.

“What do you think of it, Shorty?”

“What do I think of it, Peter? I think you’re a damn fool.”

CHAPTER XV.

DURING the week that followed Peter's return from Foghorn's Camp, event climbed breathlessly on the shoulder of event.

Morlock returned to the valley, bringing with him ten men, all heavily armed. Stealing in during the night, they spent three days in fortifying the cabin on the hillside before their presence became known to the Indians.

Tuckamonuck's usual warning went unheeded. The invaders made no hostile move, seemingly waiting for the Indians to assume the offensive. They never left their stronghold except in a body, and one day at noon they visited the prospectors as they were leaving the cabin for their afternoon's work on the sluice. Morlock rode in the lead, his eyes nervously alert. He smiled with insolent confidence as he dismounted and led his horse to where Peter and his companions stood by the door of the cabin.

"Make it snappy," barked Shorty. "What d'you want?"

Morlock's face darkened.

"I want to know, for your own good, whether you are with us or against us."

"Neither, as long as you leave us alone."

Morlock snapped his fingers.

"That settles it. We'll figure you as against us."

He mounted and rejoined his band.

One of the riders, a tall sinewy man, whose eyes held a fierce and frigid fire, slipped from his saddle and walked up to Shorty with his hand extended.

"Hello, Shorty."

"Bill Ryan, ain't it?" queried Shorty, studying the man's face.

"Right."

They shook hands. This show of friendship displeased Morlock.

"Come, get a move on, Ryan!" he snapped irritably.

The tall man shot a narrow-lidded glance at the speaker. "I'll come when I get damned good and ready," he drawled. He leisurely rolled a cigarette, lighted it, then mounted his horse.

“As fine a gang o’ outlaws as I ever seen,” commented Shorty, as the small cavalcade rode away. “Morlock must have picked up every yegg in Vancouver. Those guys ain’t goin’ to do any hard work prospectin’. I’ll bet they’ve come in to make a raid on ol’ Tuck’s cave, an’ we better cache our stuff where them fellers won’t see it.” He shook his head. “I’m surprised to see Ryan with that outfit, ’cause he ain’t a bad feller; just a sort o’ devil-me-care cuss.”

Since the night when Peter made his rash promise to Naida, he had suffered deep remorse. In a fit of pique, fanned to a reckless heat by the potent liquor, he had bound himself irrevocably to the Indian girl.

Although still mystified by the strange occurrence at Foghorn’s Camp, he believed that Dorothy cared for him. He could not forget the ineffaceable image of her eyes when she had looked at him that day in the dining-room. He had been too hasty in his judgment, and could not oust from his mind the bitter thought that even though Dorothy were free and the mystery solved, his impulsive action had placed her irretrievably beyond his reach. In the grip of a terrible heart-ache he worked listlessly through the hot days and wandered alone through the woods in the evening.

Peter was further distressed by Naida’s mental condition. During the past two weeks she had visibly failed. Her form had lost some of its former fullness, the girlish colour had faded from her cheeks, and in her face there was a great sadness; a sadness that somehow added to her tragic beauty. She was possessed of weird apprehensions as to her fate at the hands of the crazed chieftain who had become morose and sullen since the invasion of his valley by the armed force of white men. With this canker of terror gnawing at her heart, bewildered and depressed by the unlover-like attitude of the man who had promised to wed her, she became melancholy and sad.

Every day the roll of war-drums sounded from the village, and Tuckamonuck’s screaming requiem for the dead each sunset increased in its intensity. Naida brought news of her tribe’s preparation for war with the invaders of their sanctuary; and when she spoke of the wild orgies practised by the chief and his medicine-men, her eyes grew round with fear.

“I afraid,” she faltered as she crept close to Peter. She looked up at him beseechingly. “You take care of me, Petaire? I no feel good. I—I—maybe I go craze—I” She broke off, incoherent and sobbing. Her body trembled as she pressed her face to Peter’s arm.

“We’ll look after you, Naida,” Peter assured her gently.

On a hot afternoon when the valley was wrapped in a great gold wave of August sunshine, Peter saw Naida emerge from the woods and come

running up the rock-strewn slope. Flushed and dishevelled, she reached the sluice and sank breathlessly to a seat.

“Petaire—you come queek,” she panted. “Morlock he—he pull white girl from horse—he make her cry. You come—”

Peter’s face blanched under its coat of tan. He seized Naida by the shoulders. “A white girl? What is she like?” he asked tensely.

Naida clasped her hands.

“Oh, she beautiful!” she cried ecstatically, her eyes glowing. “Her face white like—snow. Her eyes—” she pointed to the blue heavens—“like that. She—”

But Peter was racing madly down the hill, his partners following.

The cayuses were not in sight when they reached the cabin, and as they were fully armed, they continued rapidly along the trail. Peter strode in the lead, his face grim and his eyes filled with feverish anxiety. Naida gave further details as they walked.

She had been spying on Morlock’s camp from a nearby bluff when the white girl came riding down from the rim above. Morlock had accosted her, and on the girl trying to pass him, had dragged her from the saddle. Peter knew it was Dorothy, and his heart leaped with a sudden joy at the thought that she had followed him into the valley. He thought of her being in Morlock’s power, and gritting his teeth, increased his pace.

Morlock had cleared away the timber from their camp, so as to give an unobstructed view of all approaches. Standing in tense postures, as though interested in something going on near the end of the building, Morlock’s men were gathered in a group with backs to the approaching party. Slim’s alert mind took in the situation at a glance. He exchanged a few whispered words with his companions, and with guns held in readiness they moved stealthily along the wall of the house, and sprang quickly around the corner.

“Hands up!” Slim’s voice snapped like a tautened wire.

Taken completely by surprise, and noting the tense faces above the menacing barrels of the six-shooters, Morlock’s men pushed their arms skyward as one man.

Apart from the others, Dorothy stood facing Morlock, her cheeks aflame, her eyes filled with fury. Morlock swung about with an oath, to look straight into the muzzle of Slim’s revolver not two feet from his face; and his arms stiffened above him.

With a glad cry, Dorothy ran to Peter.

“Get behind the building—quick!” commanded Peter tersely.

For a moment there was a silence that was broken by Bill Ryan’s slow drawl.

“You got us pretty, Shorty,” he grinned amiably. “If I dared to move, I’d take off my hat to you.”

“Thanks for the compliment, Bill,” returned Shorty. “Seein’ as we got the little girl away from that damned skunk—who I’ll settle with later—we’d like to back out as ‘pretty’ as we come in.”

“I’m glad you came,” Ryan said earnestly. “Saved me from taking a hand. We came here for gold—not girl-snatching. As far as I’m concerned we won’t interfere with you.” Several of the men growled assent to this.

Morlock scowled.

“Who the hell’s running this outfit?”

Ryan turned to the speaker.

“You’re not running me any more—I’m through with you. I’m going to get out,” he flared.

“Well, men,” interposed Shorty briskly, “there’s some o’ you I’d trust an’ some I wouldn’t; so you all step up one by one, an’ Peter will borrow your shootin’ irons for a while. You first, Morlock—you rat!”

His face twisting with impotent rage, Morlock obeyed Shorty’s command. One by one, the men were disarmed; most of them accepting the situation humourously.

This duty performed, Peter left Slim in charge of the surrendered firearms and hurried anxiously to Dorothy’s side. She looked pale and shaken, and when Peter spoke to her she began crying softly. Peter had disliked Morlock at first sight; a dislike that had grown to hatred. Now, standing looking down at the weeping girl, he felt the blood drain from his face; but when Naida, her eyes blazing, slipped back the sleeve of Dorothy’s coat to disclose great blue welts on the white arm, Peter’s face distorted with a savage, berserker fury.

Turning on his heel, he strode to Morlock, and facing him, he spoke in a voice that was low and deadly.

“Morlock, you dirty cur, you whipped me once! You’re going to have a’ chance to do it again!” Peter’s hand flashed out and his open palm smacked across Morlock’s thick lips. The big man fell back a step. His face turned deathly pale with anger, and he would have sprung at Peter, but at this

moment Tyee, who had stuck close to Peter's heels, bared his teeth in a wolfish snarl.

"Tie up that beast!" Morlock growled hoarsely, as he jerked off his coat and peeled his shirt from powerful shoulders.

Peter tied the dog to a corner of the building, removed his heavy boots, and threw his hat to the ground.

"Can you lick him, son?" inquired Shorty anxiously.

Peter nodded grimly.

Morlock's pride had suffered at his ignominious capture by the prospectors, and sure of his ability to whip Peter, he welcomed this chance to redeem himself in the eyes of his men.

"You didn't get enough last time, eh?" he blustered. "You'd better call your favourite undertaker before you start!"

The silence grew tense as the men moved toward each other. They were the direct opposite in physique. Morlock was "built from the ground up"; stocky, thick of waist and shoulders, and heavily muscled. Peter was tall, shoulders broad, hips narrow, and the muscles of his arms were long and pliable, rippling snake-like under his bronzed skin.

Coolly and confidently Morlock rushed at Peter, intending to profit by his first encounter and finish his man quickly; but a stiff straight left to the face stopped his onslaught. There was far more strength behind that blow than on their previous meeting. Again the big man tore in. Peter side-stepped and ducked the wild swings with effortless ease. Morlock tried a right-cross; it hit nothing, and Peter's counter to the body shook him and he began to fight wildly.

Morlock was much heavier, and his reach was equal; but Peter was now as hard as wire, his nerves and muscles perfectly attuned. Morlock tried the blow that had felled Peter so many times in their previous encounter. He loosed a right-uppercut with the full power of his big body behind it. Judging it to a nicety, Peter allowed it to miss his chin by the fraction of an inch. Morlock fell forward by his own momentum to meet two straight lefts that darted out and in like a snake's tongue, bringing a stream of crimson from mouth and nose. As yet, Morlock had not landed a clean blow, and he began to look worried. This was not the same man he had fought before.

Except for an occasional gasp, the crowd remained silent, their eyes glued on the whirling fighters. Shorty loved a fight. He stood leaning forward, hardly breathing, his thick fingers twitching nervously. For the first time, Dorothy saw man stripped of his thin veneer of civilization, battling

with the elemental hate and fury of his cave-dwelling forebears. Her body trembling, she watched the fight with a mingled feeling of fear and horrible fascination.

Peter, rolling his head like a canoe on the waves, avoided Morlock's blows, and each time countered with his left to the big man's face. Realizing that he was making a mistake by assuming the aggressive, Morlock began to fight more warily, but Peter's fist penetrated his guard, stinging the big man to madness, and he again resumed his bull-like rushes. Hatred for this man had been rising in Peter's throat for weeks, and he punched mercilessly. His fists cracked against the soft flesh of Morlock's mouth and cheeks.

Shorty's knowledge of the boxing game told him that Peter could end the fight at any moment; that he was deliberately prolonging it in order to inflict punishment on Morlock.

Morlock's face became one mass of bruises. One eye closed, his breath came jerkily through open mouth; he flung his heavy arms about Peter, and with an upward heave of his body, tried to butt his opponent with his head. A shout of disapproval from the onlookers was evidence that this mode of fighting was not popular, and he did not foul again.

Morlock rushed desperately. He tried to land his powerful fist to his adversary's body, the blow obviously intended to land on the solar-plexus was blocked by Peter's elbows, but the terrific impact sent him reeling. With a snarl, Morlock lunged forward and succeeded in landing a second mighty blow that struck Peter high on his well-muscled chest and again sent him staggering. Morlock's men shouted hoarse words of advice to their leader. Shorty grinned as Peter fell into a clinch and smiled reassuringly over Morlock's shoulder.

Peter pushed his adversary away, and crashed his left again to the face. Morlock spat out several broken teeth and loosed a flow of obscene oaths. Peter's eyes blazed. With teeth set tightly as a vise, he now began to fight in earnest. With a show of dazzling foot-work, he danced in and out, cool, grim and uncannily swift. He rocked Morlock's head with stinging lefts, and for the first time loosed his right, sending it to the body with sickening thuds that caused the recipient to wince with pain. Repeatedly, Peter battered Morlock to his knees, and twice scored a clean knock-down.

Be it said in all fairness—Morlock was game. Beaten and bleeding, he staggered about completely at Peter's mercy. Weakened and all but sightless, he summoned all his strength into one mad rush at his elusive adversary. Peter stepped back. Morlock had committed the unpardonable boxer's error; he had left himself open for a right swing. Peter saw the opening. His right

fist cut a half circle in the air and landed with a smack on Morlock's jaw. The big man whirled completely around and fell forward on his face, arms outstretched. With muscles twitching, he rolled to his side; then came slowly to his feet, his hand raised in a weak posture of defence. Peter, stepping in close, brought his right fist down in a chopping blow to the big man's jaw. This time he did not rise.

CHAPTER XVI.



ACCOMPANIED by an Indian guide, Dorothy had left Foghorn's Camp two days after Peter's sudden departure. Nothing would induce the guide to accompany her further than the gorge outside the much-feared valley. "Massache Ikta Illahie," he had muttered with an ominous shake of his head, and she had finished the last weary miles alone.

Unused to the rigours of the trail; shaken by the rough treatment at the hands of Morlock, she had collapsed on reaching the cabin, and for two days lay in bed while Naida, never leaving her side, skillfully and stubbornly fought off threatened fever.

To the Indian girl, the newcomer, so fragile and dainty, was as a being from another world. She sat for hours holding the sick girl's hand, brushing the curling tendrils of hair back from the fevered brow, her eyes filled with a fascinated awe.

When Naida appeared at the door of the cabin on the third morning of Dorothy's illness, Peter noticed the tired lines the long vigil had stamped on her features, but her dark eyes were luminous with victory.

"She be verry much better, Petaire. Look," she whispered, holding the door open.

Dorothy lay with closed eyes, a light coverlet drawn up to her bosom, one slender arm lying outside, palm upturned, the other hand's fingers curled into the blanket at her breast. Her bosom rose and fell regularly; her soft hair formed a halo around her face.

As he gazed at the sleeping girl he became aware that Naida was watching his face intently, and when they moved to the outdoors, she swung to look full at him.

"Petaire, you love white girl?"

"She's—she's—a good friend, Naida."

Naida placed her hands on his shoulders and lifted her dark face to his, her deep black eyes seeming to search his innermost soul. Peter moved uneasily under the piercing intentness of her gaze. What she read in his eyes caused her lips to quiver piteously. Her hands slipped listlessly from his shoulders, and with head drooping she walked to the cabin and disappeared within.

Late that afternoon Naida brought her patient outside and seated her in the warm sunshine by the cabin door.

“I go home now,” she informed Dorothy. “I come back by and by.”

The Indian girl’s loving attention had struck a responsive chord in Dorothy’s warm, impulsive heart. She threw her arms about her devoted nurse and kissed her tenderly, which caused Naida to flush to the roots of her dark hair. And presently she took her leave.

“She’s a dear,” Dorothy said gently to Peter.

At the edge of the woods Naida looked back, and the barrier between herself and the man she loved now stood fully revealed. Closing her eyes, she had a vision. She saw a home, a white man’s home. Then little children, white little children, like those she had once seen in a book. She felt then that she could never have him. He was not for her, but for this dainty white girl by his side—for his own people. A dull ache in her heart, and with lagging steps, she turned to the forest trail.

Back at the cabin the couple were silent for a long interval, Dorothy covertly studying Peter as he lay stretched on the grass at her feet. She marvelled at the fact that this man with the tanned face and powerfully muscled body was the same pallid-faced youth who had staggered helplessly in front of her car only a few months ago. She had at once sensed the change in his manner towards her, and convinced that she had seen more than a mere regard in his eyes that day at Foghorn’s Camp, she was anxious to re-establish their former relations.

“Aren’t you pleased that your partner came to join you?” she smiled.

“Yes,” he answered briefly.

Again there was a silence.

“I—I know what has altered your attitude towards me,” she began haltingly, “but I don’t want to explain to you at present. Will you please trust me? I—I care a great deal for you.” The colour flooded her face as she said this.

“I do trust you,” he replied steadily, without looking up.

The colour in the girl’s cheeks deepened. Now that he had confessed his faith in her, she was frankly hurt and puzzled by his manner. Peter stirred uneasily. He plucked a daisy and removed the petals one by one. With much inner perturbation he strove to summon courage to tell Dorothy of his promise to Naida.

An injured look in her eyes, Dorothy arose and refusing Peter's proffered assistance, entered the cabin and closed the door.

Feeling that he wanted to be alone in order to examine and compose his mind, Peter left the camp and wandered down to the lake.

The hush that precedes the mantling of night hung over the valley. Trout plopped on the calm water; the usual soft whimpers and furtive rustlings of furry night prowlers came from the thickets about him; a cow moose feeding on lily pads raised her dripping head, stared at him for an instant, then crashed her way through the trees. An early moon rising over the ragged rim of the valley shot a brilliant path of gold across the water, and sent Peter's shadow dancing grotesquely as he walked the shore, consuming cigarette after cigarette with feverish rapidity.

He heard a sound behind him, and turned to see Naida emerge from the darkness of the forest into the white light flooding the beach. She paused for a moment, her eyes searching the shore, her beaded head-band sparkling in the moon's rays, and the long white feather with crimson tip flashing against her raven hair. Peter was thrilled by her beauty. He marked the slowly widening curve of her lips as she saw him.

"Ah! I think I find you here," she cried, a note of forced gaiety in her voice. She seized his hand, but finding his fingers cold and unresponsive, released her hold and fell into step beside him.

"Petaire," she said presently, "you say you marry me, but long time you no kiss me."

"Naida," he began haltingly, avoiding her eyes, "I will keep my promise. You are a dear, good little girl and I've been weak and changeful. I'm ashamed of myself. I—I'm afraid that I don't care enough for you to—marry—" He ceased talking as she clung to his arm.

"Petaire, I love you!" she burst out passionately. "I want you stay here with me. I no care you no marry me!" She stretched her arms toward him appealingly, her beautiful eyes expressing an absolute and unreserved surrender to him. "Take me, Petaire, take me!"

"No, no, Naida, not that!" cried Peter.

At this Naida's demeanour underwent a startling change. Her Indian blood became a dusky warmth in her skin, a leaping fire in her veins. All that was wild and elemental in her nature now came to the surface. She flung up her head, her cheeks aflame, her eyes filled with fury.

"You—you no have me?" she choked. "You like white girl better? Maybe you think I only Siwash—klootchman, but my grandmother English

lady!” She beat her hands against her breast. “I have in me blood of men who for thousand years great—tyees. All right—you go back to white girl—I no care—I—” She struck her hands together passionately, then bursting into tears, sank to her knees at Peter’s feet, harsh sobs shaking her slight body.

Abruptly the sobbing ceased. Rising to her feet she looked up at him, her face wet with tears, her eyes dewy and tender; and when she spoke her voice was low and tremulous.

“Petaire, I sorry. I—I no mean to say that,” she said contritely. “Oh Petaire, I like you stay with me. I love you so much I—I—,” she broke off in ejaculations, half-sentences, broken-hearted and forlorn, clung to him convulsively for an instant, then she was gone.

For an hour Peter paced restlessly by the lake shore, trying to marshal his chaotic thoughts. Chiding himself for being weak and vacillating, he struggled to define his real feeling for Naida. The impulse to take the heart-broken girl in his arms and comfort her had been strong within him. He pitied her; there was no doubt of that—but as he thought of the tear-wet face upturned to his, he questioned himself as to whether his regard for her was pity alone.

Suddenly he noticed that an eerie shadow had fallen over the earth, and looked up to find that the moon was undergoing an eclipse. Slowly the earth’s shadow blotted out the bright disc of the moon whose dim radiance cast a grisly light over the valley. The sound of night-life ceased; a cold air rustled mournfully through the tree-tops, and then an unearthly silence fell.

From the Indian village came an uncanny, droning wail of many voices, the sound gradually increasing in volume until it reached screams of maniacal intensity. Then the sound of voices was drowned by the beating of dog-skin drums that set the still air vibrating to their dirge-like bom-bom bom bom bom, bom-bom-bom bom bom. Torches like huge fireflies danced about the mouth of Tuckamonuck’s cave, and the air was pierced by the horrible coranach of the crazed chieftain.

At the camp Peter found the others staring toward the cliff, where a huge bonfire had been lighted, around which shadowy forms leaped and bounded in accompaniment to the moaning of the medicine-men and the doleful beat of drums.

“Gettin’ ready to tackle Morlock,” said Shorty grimly. “An’ if he’s got an ounce of sense he’ll beat it hyak.”

Peter slept fitfully that night. The orgies on the cliff continued; at times dying down, only to break out again with renewed intensity as Tuckamonuck's wild cry urged them to continue their fanatical frenzy. But Peter's restlessness was not wholly from the discordant sounds that filled the night—Naida's dusky face intruded upon his dreams. He thought of her great fear of Tuckamonuck. She would be spending a night of terror, and he reproached himself for having allowed her to return to the village. He would go fetch her that very day. One thought piled upon another until he gave up all thought of sleep, and as dawn dimly lighted the tent he sprang from bed.

For a moment he stood by the tent door gazing up at the painted cliff, from which rose a thin spiral of smoke. Save for the sounds of an awakening forest, silence lay over the valley. Tyee lifted his head, ears erect, nostrils quivering. The sound of some one running came from the trail. An Indian girl burst from the woods and came swiftly toward the camp. Excited and disheveled, she pointed toward the cliff and loosed a breathless flow of Chinook in which Peter distinguished the words "Naida" and "Tuckamonuck".

Shorty ground out an oath as he sprang from his bed; and as he appeared in the doorway Peter turned to him, his face tense.

"What did she say, Shorty?"

"On account o' the moon's eclipse, that damned nut o' a Tuck says the Great Tyee is angry, an' he's goin' to throw Naida in the Pit o' Sacrifice."

Peter felt a gripping at his heart, a feeling of absolute terror, fear. He heard Dorothy catch her breath and turned to find her staring at him, her eyes wide with horror.

Silently and grimly, his heart thumping tumultuously, Peter led the party in feverish haste up the steep trail to the cliff. A rapid beating of drums sounded from below as they reached the cave entrance. From the village came a procession of Indians headed by a medicine-man arrayed fearsomely in the skin of a mountain lion with two horns protruding from the skull which was drawn over his head. His face was hideously painted, he wailed a mournful dirge, screamed horribly, leaped convulsively, rolled his eyes and protruded his tongue through the mask. Slowly the long column of marchers ascended the hill and filed into the cave. Unmolested, the party of whites followed.

Within, a bonfire and innumerable torches lit the room with the brilliance of sunshine. The floor was carpeted with marvelously beautiful skins, and the air was heavily scented with a strange perfume. A number of Indians stood against the wall of the cave while, stretching across the floor

right to the edge of the yawning pit, was an open passageway between crouching figures with heads bowed solemnly to earth. From the kneeling figures came a low moaning dirge that sounded faintly above the gurgle of inky water in the black pit. Silence, death-like as a tomb, fell suddenly. For a long interval, the silence was complete save for the sad sough of water in the Pit of Sacrifice.

All at once the demeanour of the Indians quickened. Except for the kneeling men, all eyes were turned toward the glittering entrance of the smaller cave. Tuckamonuck and Naida emerged from this inner vault and marched slowly between the rows of kneeling men. The chief looked gravely down on the bowed heads, his withered hand resting on the girl's shoulder. Naida's face lighted with joy as she saw Peter, and her lips curved in a heart-twistingly forlorn, brave little smile. Near the centre of the aisle Tuckamonuck stopped, and in a chanting voice he gave the reasons for the coming sacrifice.

As he listened, Peter clenched his hands until the knuckles showed white through the tanned skin. He visualized her sodden body in the bottom of the lake.

The chief stretched his hands above Naida's head and chanted a weird song. His voice alone echoed hollowly from the walls of the giant chamber until he lowered his arms. Then at once there came a terrific din as a score of Indians rushed from the inner vault and in a fanatical frenzy threw their bodies into a series of violent contortions in accompaniment to the screaming song of the Dance of Death.

Trembling in every limb, Peter drew close to the line of crouching Indians. Naida pressed toward him. He saw her face close to his, vivid and beautiful in the light of the flickering torches. She placed her hand on his arm and the touch thrilled him. Her low, sweet voice crept in on his senses.

"Remembaire, I love you, Petaire. I love you verry much. Good-bye!"

"No, no!" cried Peter as he darted toward her.

Tuckamonuck's wrinkled face contorted in lines of rage. He barked a few sharp words in Chinook, and several Indians sprang toward Peter. Tyee leaped to his master's side, his white teeth bared menacingly. The young man would have thrown himself upon the oncoming red-men had not Shorty seized him with powerful arms and dragged him back.

"My God! Stop, Peter!" panted Shorty. "You haven't a chance! They'll kill all of us!"

Choking with rage and horror, Peter fell back. Now he could only stare, with hanging jaw and voiceless agony numbing his faculties as they prepared Naida for the sacrifice. She sat cross-legged on a huge bearskin, while Tuckamonuck showered her with wild flowers. As the petals floated about her, he sang in a slow monotone. Placing a wreath of red and gold columbine about her shoulders and a crown of white heather upon her dusky hair, he beckoned for her to rise. Her slender figure seemed to float to uprightness, and she showed a face that was calmly peaceful; charged and overflowing with that more-than-human inner power that upholds martyrs and makes them wonderful. Like a queen to the pomp of her bridal, she moved toward the Pit of Sacrifice. With her head held high, she stopped at the edge and turned.

Peter watched her with fascinated eyes. Pain he knew and had endured; courage, tenacity, patience he had experienced. But the more-than-earthly strength shining on Naida's face was new to him; it thrilled him as he had never been thrilled before.

"For God's sake, Shorty, isn't there something we can do?" he choked.

Dorothy covered her face with her hands, her shoulders shaking with stifled sobs. Shorty stood mute and dazed. He did not answer. Slim's eyes roved about him, his hands clenching and unclenching convulsively.

Tuckamonuck fell to his knees by Naida's side, raised his arms above his head, and at once a concert of voices lifted in a mournful sighing cadence that rose in a crescendo of sound until it became horrible in its screaming lament. The shamen whirled in mad gyrations, their bodies twisting and contorting in a wild frenzy.

Above this terrific din Peter heard Slim's voice, cool and incisive. "Come with me, Peter. There's a chance to save her." Unnoticed by the others, Slim led Peter swiftly to the outer air and pointed to the foot of the cliff where foaming water marked the spot where the underground river joined the lake.

"There's one chance in a hundred—" began Slim, but Peter was gone from his side in a mad race down the hill, Tyee bounding at his heels.

With pallid face, eyes glassy with horror, Dorothy saw Tuckamonuck tie thongs about the doomed girl's ankles and lash her arms to her sides. Two powerful Indians stepped forward at a signal from the chief, seized their victim, and with a mighty heave of sinewy brown arms, sent the flower-bedecked body hurtling high in air. With flowers flashing about her in the bright light of the torches, Naida's lithe young body seemed to pause for an

instant in mid-air, then, twisting into a contorted heap, she shot from sight into the clammy blackness of the yawning pit.

A scream burst from Dorothy's lips. Clinging to Shorty's arm, her limbs trembling, she staggered weakly to the outer world.

Stumbling, falling, cruelly lacerating his flesh, Peter reached the foot of the cliff, tore off his coat, shirt and boots, tightened his belt; and shaking with excitement, glued his eyes to the black hole from which the dark waters roared. His muscles tensed as wild flowers littered the water's surface. Far below he glimpsed a dark object and then a flash of white. Peter's lithe body cut the water like a knife, and disappeared from sight. Without a moment's hesitation, Tyee plunged after, swam to the spot where his master had vanished, and with shoulders high, churned about in circles, whimpering anxiously. Buffeted by the current, blinded by the churning waters, Peter groped desperately about him until a thumping heart and bursting lungs drove him to the surface. Shaking the water from his eyes, he saw Naida's body come to the surface in an eddy on the opposite shore. With Tyee following in his wake, he battled the cross-current, only to see her body sink from sight when within ten feet of his goal. Again he dived, and to his great joy, his groping fingers fixed themselves in Naida's trailing hair.

With a sweep of his arms he raised himself and his burden to the surface. A powerful back eddy sucked them around a boulder and under an overhanging ledge upon which Peter's head crashed. Like a flash he experienced the sensation of exploding rockets, and was stabbingly aware of a hot pain that sickened him and robbed him of his strength. Hot blood blinding his eyes, clinging weakly to a niche in the rock, he strove to overcome the weakness that assailed him. He felt his fingers slipping. He looked about him desperately. It would be impossible to land on this shore, as a sheer rock wall rose twenty feet above him. He looked down at the inanimate form in his arms. Naida's eyes were closed, and her dusky skin held the pallor of death. Why didn't Shorty and Slim come to his aid? Then he saw that the boulder shut the opposite shore from view. He raised his voice in a weak cry for help, but it was drowned by the surging waters. A tawny form shot around the boulder, and whimpering with joy, Tyee swam to Peter's side. With a cry of relief, Peter loosed his hold on the rock and fastened his fingers in the thick hair on the big dog's back; then, half swimming and half supported by the noble animal, he rounded the boulder and set out for the opposite bank. Slim waded waist deep into the water and dragged the trio to safety.

"Get her out of sight, quick!" gasped Peter.

Lifting Naida in his arms, Slim bore her to the base of the cliff and placed her gently on the ground. With shaking hands they untied the ropes from the sodden girl. Her thin buckskin skirt clung to her body defining her naked beauty. Her hair hung in tangled masses over her shoulders; arms, face and chest showed long bleeding scratches, blood oozed from a ragged wound on her temple.

As Peter ministered to the girl, as he felt her bruised flesh beneath his hands, watched her death-like face and waxen lids, her utter helplessness, and thought that this might be the end of youth and life, a surge of emotion swept through him and left him weak and giddy. This girl would gladly have given her life for him. The greatest earthly joy to her would have been to have given herself into his keeping.

Feverishly he redoubled his efforts, and presently he felt her heart pulsing faintly against his hand like the fluttering of a nestling.

“She’s alive!” he breathed fervently.

At the sound of his voice she stirred, opened her eyes, and stared about her like a hunted thing until her gaze rested on Peter. Then a smile of ineffable tenderness illumined her dark face.

Raising her in his arms, Peter picked his way carefully through the rock-rubble in the shelter of the cliff until he came to the protecting forest, then swung toward the camp.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE DAY following Naida's rescue from the Pit of Sacrifice was one of the hottest of the year. At noon a sodden misty haze hung over the valley, and the sun, like a red hot stove lid, set the tree-tops shimmering in brassy waves under its burning rays.

Peter, his head bandaged, lay sprawled in the shade of the cabin, while Shorty and Slim were busily engaged in stowing the small sacks of golden wealth into a duffle-bag. The rich pocket having yielded its last nugget, every ounce of dust extracted from the heap of tailings, their work in Indian Valley was done.

Shorty straightened up, wiped the sweat from his forehead with his sleeve, and looked down speculatively at the sacks of gold. "They say that a feller can lift twenty thousand dollars' worth of gold dust—" He seized one of the bags, and with straining arms raised it a bare inch off the ground. "But I'd hate to part with her for that," he panted.

All forenoon the heated air had pulsated to a cacophony of sound from the Indian village. Not the weird droning sound of the previous morning, but a quick sustained beating of war-drums, interspersed by shrill, ear-splitting whoops.

Shorty swung his hand toward the cliff. "They're on the war-path all right, an' if Morlock's here yet he's a sure goner, an' we better get out while the gettin's good. If old Tuck knew that we had fooled him an' his gods too, an' was takin' the girl out with us, we'd have no more chance than Morlock's gang."

Peter was strangely thrilled by the thought that Naida was to accompany them to the outer world. It was the only course. To allow her to remain in the valley would be condemning her to an awful death.

A steady murmur of voices came from within the cabin, and Peter heard Naida quietly sobbing. Dorothy appeared in the doorway and beckoned to him.

"She wants to see you," she said, avoiding Peter's eyes. As Peter brushed past her, he saw that Dorothy's cheeks were wet with tears.

Naida's wounds had proved to be superficial, but the shock had been terrific. Peter was startled by her changed appearance. Dark rings surrounded her eyes, her skin was pale and the colour had gone from her

lips. A few recalcitrant tears still clung to her long lashes, but the smile she summoned for him was very brave.

“You are going out with us in the morning, Naida,” cried Peter cheerfully, as he took her hand.

She shook her dark head sadly, then glanced toward Dorothy who stood in the doorway, hands clasped, face averted.

“Petaire,” she said softly, “I know you no like to stay here with me, so I no make you keep promise. I—I like you and her be happy. I—I be all right—” Words failed her, and for a moment, she lay with eyes closed, tears welling from beneath her lids and rolling slowly down her cheeks. With an effort she spoke again. “I tell her everything, Petaire. She verry good and she love you. You will be verry happy.”

Peter swallowed into a dry and hurting throat. “I’m sorry, Naida,” he blurted. “I—you must go out with us—”

A sharp ejaculation from Dorothy drew his attention, and he turned to see her staring toward the trail. At the edge of the forest a horseman sat gazing up at the cabin. The rider dismounted stiffly, and leading his cayuse, came limping up the slope.

At once Peter recognized the approaching stranger. The newcomer ascending the hill was the man with whom Dorothy had walked in the moonlight at Foghorn’s Camp.

Shorty, who had advanced to meet the visitor, emitted a roar of surprise and delight.

“It’s J.B. or I’m a liar! You ol’ son-of-a-gun! What the hell you doin’ here?”

“Where is she?” demanded the one addressed as J.B.

“Here!” cried Dorothy, as she stepped into view.

“Dorothy! You crazy little fool!” shouted J.B. He ran to her, seized her in his arms and shook her gently. “Old Foghorn wired me that you had come in here! Scared me stiff! Beat it up here fast as I could! Good mind to give you a good spankin’, you little monkey.” His face was tender and his utterances became unintelligible as he caressed her. Dorothy moved from his embrace and turned to Peter.

“Uncle Jim, this is Peter Welton.”

J.B.’s countenance was curiously expressive of leashed energy. He regarded Peter with a stabbing eye which seemed to photograph and measure him at first glance. He crushed Peter’s hand.

“Huh! You’re the boy, eh? Glad to know you,” he beamed.

Peter’s mouth hung open. His eyes were unwinking and staring. J.B.! J.B.! Why, J.B. was the millionaire who had staked Shorty and Slim for years! And Dorothy—he turned to her. Speech itself seemed difficult.

“He’s—he’s your uncle?” he asked thickly.

Seemingly enjoying his astonishment, Dorothy nodded.

“But—I thought you worked in the restaurant,” he said slowly.

“Two days only,” she laughed.

Peter’s bewilderment deepened.

“Why did you fool me?”

“That’s nothin’ for her to do,” interposed J.B. “She’s always up to some crazy stunt. She thinks her dad left her more money than’s good for her; that havin’ things so easy has blunted her outlook on life. Wants to see the world in the raw, and all that sort of rot. It’s been bad enough tryin’ to keep track of her in the city; but this last one’s the worst she’s pulled off yet.” He chucked Dorothy playfully under the chin. “You’d ought to have enough experience by now to write a book that’d make O. Henry look like thirty cents.”

While J.B. talked, Shorty’s eyes roved from Dorothy to her uncle and back again.

“I’ll be damned!” he exploded, “an’ we thought she was a hashette!” He chuckled softly. “Thought you were pretty smart, J.B., when you shut off our grubstake; but we kinda slipped it over on you this time.”

“What’s the idea?” asked J.B.

“How’s that for a stack o’ pil chicamin?” said Shorty, kicking the duffle-bag.

J.B. prodded the bag with a tentative finger, then thrust a hand inside. Eyes wide with amazement, he let the golden grains trickle through his fingers.

“What d’you know about that,” he said almost in a whisper. “By golly, I never saw—” He ceased speaking abruptly and his body stiffened in an awkward pose as Tuckamonuck’s frightful, tearing, inhuman scream ripped the air. It rose and fell, rose and fell, horribly, and was silent.

J.B.’s eyes swept fearfully about him. He drew in his breath with a sharp hissing sound.

“What the hell was that?”

Shorty pointed to the peak of the painted cliff where Tuckamonuck sat astride a horse, his plummy head-dress trailing down his shoulders, and behind him a line of mounted warriors sitting motionless as though carved of stone.

The aged Indian lifted his arms slowly above his head, and again his harrowing screech set the warm air shivering with a nightmare of wild sound.

J.B. felt his hair sting at the roots. "My God! What a noise! What's it all about, Shorty?"

Briefly Shorty acquainted J.B. with the facts regarding Tuckamonuck. "Don't think they are after us, but they are sure on the war-path for Morlock," he finished grimly.

"If he's crazy as that, he may get after us," said J.B. nervously. "Hadn't we better get ready to fight?"

Shorty snorted. "Fat chance we'd have fightin' that bunch. If they want us, they'll get us."

"Can't we beat it out of here?" persisted J.B.

Shorty shook his head. "Too late. Here they come."

Led by their chieftain, the Indians passed in single file before the cave entrance and disappeared in the forest. A moment later they emerged from the woods, formed in a compact body, and emitting blood-curdling warwhoops, swept down the hillside in a cloud of dust.

With bated breath Peter stared at the oncoming red-men. Would they continue on the trail? Or would they charge up the slope and loose a shower of arrows on the helpless whites?

On came Tuckamonuck's braves, their oil-smearred bodies gleaming in the sun, feathers fluttering, and their faces hideously grotesque with war paint. Splashing through the creek they galloped up the bank, and at a guttural command from their leader, broke ranks and formed in a semi-circle within twenty yards of where the white men stood.

Stark fear clutched at Peter's heart when he saw Tuckamonuck's face. It seemed that the last thread of reason in the aged Indian's disordered brain had snapped. His deep-sunken eyes burned with an uncanny greenish-yellow flame, like glittering eyes in a wooden mask. His face distorted with white fury, he flung himself to the ground, and facing his warriors, began a vehement harangue filled with gestures. Pointing at the white men, his harsh voice rose to a scream, and then like a flash, arrows were jerked from quivers, and bows raised.

Suddenly the line of Indians shivered. Bows slipped from nerveless fingers, swarthy bodies stiffened. Wild-eyed they stared at a spot behind the white men. "Massache Ikta! Massache Ikta!" they shouted; then with choking cries of fear, fell to the ground and pressed their faces to the earth in abject terror. Tuckamonuck emitted a strangling cry, fell back a step, and for a moment it seemed that he was to seek safety in flight.

Peter whirled about.

Naida, her sloe-black hair loosed about her shoulders, her dusky face pale and ethereal, came walking slowly down the hill.

Peter gasped. The Indian girl was deliberately surrendering herself to the mercies of her insane grand-parent in an attempt to save the lives of her white friends.

She looked pitifully weak, her eyes wide; but when she spoke her voice was subdued and calm, and there was not the slightest trace of fear about her.

"Much better I go back to my people," she whispered. Her eyes held Peter's for a moment. "Good-bye, Petaire." Then, with arms extended, she moved toward the fear-stricken Indians.

Involuntarily Peter reached out to her. "Naida—"

"S-h-h!" warned Shorty, seizing Peter's shoulder in a vise-like grip.

Naida spoke to Tuckamonuck, and at the sound of her voice he slowly approached her, his limbs trembling, and there was a raising of heads and whispering among the warriors. Reaching out a shaking, claw-like hand, he touched her; then, with a great shout, he flung his arms about her and pressed her to his breast.

"Arise!" he cried to his prone warriors. "The Sky-people were not angry! They have returned our daughter in the flesh from the Land of Spirits, Ghosts and Shadows. The Great Sagalie knows best. We will return to our village, where we will feast for two days, and there will be joy in our hearts."

So he spoke, then swinging Naida to his horse, he mounted behind her and led his men on the back trail, his warlike spirit drowned in the great joy of his belief that the Great Manitou was not displeased with his tribe, and had returned their sacrifice from the Spirit World. Shouting happily, the cavalcade galloped up the hill and a moment later filed in silhouette over the painted cliff, their cries of rejoicing dying away as they dropped from sight over the shoulder of the mountain.

A profound sigh of relief escaped Shorty. “By golly, I thought we were goners that time,” he said, wiping the sweat from his face.

J.B.’s face was colourless. “Ye Gods and little fishes! They say there is no more Wild West these days,” he muttered. “I never was so scared in my life. Let’s get out of here!”

“We’ll beat it at daylight,” agreed Shorty heartily.

Arms folded, a melancholy look in his eyes, Peter stood apart from the others, staring up at the painted cliff.

Dorothy moved to his side and spoke in a voice filled with awe.

“She was wonderful, Peter!”

“She saved our lives,” he responded dully. Then, with a heavy heart he set about making preparations for leaving the valley.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THAT EVENING there was a strange sunset which attracted the attention of both whites and Indians. Sounds of revelry from the village ceased, and groups of Indians stood on the cliff gazing mutely at the fiery heavens. The day had been suffocatingly hot, but calm and beautiful; one of the loveliest days of the summer; but as it drew to a close, the setting sun shone through a murky haze that steeped the valley in a greenish-yellow light. There was a hush in the air as though the pulse of night had stopped. The wild things shared in this strangled intermission; all movement in the forest was stilled; the whip-poor-will's flute-like notes ceased with one accord, and over the valley lay an ominous silence. The sun, like a swollen orange disc, dropped behind the peaks, and the heavens changed from green to a vivid blood-red. The silence became intense, the heat stifling. Heavy black clouds massed up in the south, spread out fan-wise, blotting out the flaming sky, and a dismal gloom spread over the earth. With the coming of darkness came a sighing breeze that moaned through the tree-tops and set the leaves to shivering. The wind ceased, and again the valley was enclosed in a death-like silence. Trees stood stark and straight as if in fear. The whole world seemed to whisper fearfully, as if apprehensive of something awful to come. Again the wind swept through the valley, with a stronger force and longer duration, not yet powerful, not yet with its full strength; but as if in portentous warning of what was to follow.

Shorty stepped to the door of the tent, his face grave as he looked out into the stygian darkness and listened to the rush of warm wind and groaning trees.

"She's goin' to be a hellion," he vouchsafed.

Then the storm came with a flash of fire whose passage could be felt like the flick of a lash, and left Peter's eyes seared with a fantastic pattern of flaming trees and fire-etched mountain peaks that burned on the retina after the flash had passed.

Shorty's bronzed face blanched as the mammoth hand on the painted cliff leaped vividly against the fiery sky, the mute command of its grisly blood-tipped finger taking on a deeper significance because of the flaming anger of the heavens.

Then everything was overwhelmed by such a deafening roar of thunder as might have sent the world crashing out of its orbit into space. It seemed as

though a vast army were marching through the sky, and giant matches were being struck to light its way. The sky-roar was terrific. Thunder followed on the flaming lightning almost at once, crashing in the valley and dying away in mutterings among the mountains. Then the rain came as though the heavens were one vast bucket uptilted full on the valley. Gradually the storm's clamour would cease, only to burst forth with renewed vigour, but there was no lessening in the downpour of rain.

As Peter lay listening to the far-bounding growls of thunder and the drumming roar of rain on the canvas roof, his ears picked up a lesser sound—the faint sound of a voice outside the tent.

He leaped from his bunk as an Indian girl, sodden and bedraggled, lifted the flap of the tent, and with eyes glowing like balls of fire in the flickering candlelight, peered timidly within.

“Klahowya! Kahta mika?” questioned Shorty sharply.

Peter experienced a sinking sensation as he listened to Shorty's interpretation of the Indian girl's excited flow of Chinook.

Without Naida's knowledge she had stolen away from the village to bring the news that Tuckamonuck, having construed the sudden visitation of the fearful storm to mean that the wrath of the Manitou had not been appeased, was to cast Naida again into the Pit of Sacrifice.

Peter knew that the torrential downpour would have swelled the underground stream to a raging inferno of water in which Naida would be instantly ground to death.

Silently, with spirits depressed, the men donned waterproofs and stepped out into the tempestuous night. The war of the elements was on in earnest. A great wind buffeted them about, shrieking like a warlock; gusts of warm rain spattered their faces; the very earth seemed convulsed. Peter had never seen such a rain. Raindrops came down like missiles, making a purring sound on the pools, each drop making a separate splash on the rocks, as if the flood on the land were leaping up to join the flood in the sky. Deafening continuous crashes of heavy cloud-artillery rocked the hills; lightning of a supremely hideous coppery sheen, blazed and darted without intermission, and ran zig-zagging in fearsome, deadly fashion over the mountains. One terrible flash tore a huge fir from top to bottom, starting a fire that was smothered by the cascading rain. Amid this increasing giant wrath, the men stumbled up the painted cliff to the cave entrance.

Soon after Peter and his companions left the valley, six crouching figures emerged from the trail near the cabin, and hugging the protecting timber,

crept stealthily up the mountain trail. Morlock, under cover of the storm, was attempting a raid on Tuckamonuck's gold.

From within the cavern Tuckamonuck's weird cry sounded faintly above the storm's clamour, and up the trail from the village came a long procession of torch bearers, and the mumbling singsong of many voices.

Far below, in the lightning's glare, Peter saw Naida, supported by two masked shamen, her face ghastly in the greenish light.

Suddenly Slim grabbed Peter's arm. "Morlock!" he yelled above the din of the elements. "Get down!" Peter fell to his knees as the inky darkness was riven by spurting jets of flame and bullets spat about them. Peter felt as though his shoulder had been struck a sharp blow with a club, and his arm thrilled to a hot pain. A double tongue of flame leaping from Slim's six-shooters brought screams of pain from the darkness. Then the attackers charged.

Peter heard a rush of feet, collided with a form and weakly fell into a clinch. A stroke of lightning split the valley wide as Morlock's men disappeared within the cave. In the same blaze Peter saw the sullen, scowling face of Morlock close to his, a flash of huge fist holding a gun; then an overpowering heaviness crashed him to the ground and the world telescoped into oblivion.

Shorty aimed a vicious blow at Morlock's head, missed, and the six-shooter flew from his hand. Again the heavens glittered, to reveal Morlock racing for the cave. With a roar of rage Shorty took his leonine head and tore after the fleeing man.

Regaining his senses quickly, Peter struggled to his feet to see Shorty and Morlock locked in a deadly embrace near the cave's mouth. Shorty's thick fingers were twined around the wrist of Morlock's gun-hand. Desperately Morlock strove to deflect the barrel of his six-shooter, but Shorty's giant strength forced his arm up and back, until with a gasp of pain Morlock dropped his gun and threw his arms about his adversary. Now in a fluid-like darkness; now in coruscating lightning that flashed through the sky like dancing swords, the two men struggled on the narrow ledge; silent save for quick gasps for breath and muttered curses. With a quick wrench Shorty tore himself free from his opponent's enveloping arms, then, with his big shoulder lowered, loosed a shower of terrific blows that smeared Morlock's face to a pulp and sent him staggering. With a black hate in his heart for the man who had felled Peter, Shorty tore in mercilessly, taking Morlock's punches unflinchingly in order to land one of his own. Slowly Morlock retreated, lungs choking, a bloody froth flecking his lips. Right to

the edge of the cliff Shorty forced him, and, as Morlock felt his feet give way, his face filled with an unspeakable horror—that of one who in wickedness goes down to an awful death. His fingers clutched convulsively at the empty air. With a hoarse, animal-like cry labouring out of his throat, his body hurtled from the cliff, tumbled grotesquely through the air, struck on a ledge below, writhed for a moment, then lay still.

Mute and dazed by the sudden death of his adversary, Shorty, staring down at the huddled heap, failed to hear Slim's wild scream of warning. The ledge under their feet trembled. Tuckamonuck's shriek and the terrified cries of Morlock's men were silenced by a horrible, rending, grating crash. The ragged walls and roof of the cavern slowly disappeared, and from the mouth issued a vibrating rumble, a rasping, gasping, gurgling roar, as the cave vomited into the night a mass of rocks, earth and water that came with a great ratching, as if coughed from the very centre of the earth. The torrent of water from the underground river gored the face of the cliff, rooting under huge stones and tossing them aside like pebbles.

The spot where Shorty had stood a moment before, was a mass of heaving, dirty foam. Great drenching plumes of spray stung Peter's face. Plucked from his feet, as if by invisible giant hands, he was swept down the mountain-side. Buffeted, bruised and half-drowned, he lodged against the bole of a cedar to which he clung until the flood of water had passed.

CHAPTER XIX.

IT WAS late morning when Slim came walking toward the camp, his loose-kneed shambling stride lifting spurts of water from the sodden earth. He was moving very slowly, his lean shoulders drooping as if a weight lay on them. His eyes were red-rimmed, and the colourful blood had drained from his cheeks leaving a nervous pallor. He seemed to have aged in the night, seemed immeasurably older.

Peter and Dorothy advanced to meet him. "Did you find him?" breathed Dorothy with trepidation.

Slim shook his head, eyes averted, then sank down outside the cabin door and covered his face with his hands.

With bowed head Dorothy entered the cabin. Peter stood staring up at the painted cliff, a deep and brooding grief in his eyes.

The storm had passed. The hot sun bathed the earth in its effulgent rays, and again Indian Valley was caressed by a delicate loveliness, a cloying sweetness. From the forest came sounds and savours strange and intriguing, of wild flowers, sweet rain-washed grasses, and the warm babble of hot-springs. Gentle zephyrs sighed through the heavy-leaved trees, from which came the trills of myriad birds.

A long-drawn sigh escaped Peter. All the beauty and splendour of the radiant day could not efface the fearful havoc wrought by the tempest. Huge trees uprooted; tiny rivulets, changed to muddy roaring rapids, gouging deep holes in the mountain side, charging into the valley in a froth of dirty foam, bringing a tangled mass of debris that blocked the outlets and spread the water of the lake far into the forest. Tuckamonuck's cave lying flat; the underground river now pouring its water from the dizzy height of the painted cliff, striking the calm surface of the lake with a reverberating tumult of sound that made the earth tremble. Tuckamonuck's harrowing cry forever stilled; Morlock and his men buried under tons of rock—and Shorty —. Peter's throat contracted. His eyes were suddenly dimmed by a rush of hot tears.

With a joyous shrill, a blue-jay flew from a tree to the ground in front of Slim, and with its proud crest lifted interrogatively, emitted an almost human chuckle. Slim raised his head and stared at the bird. "Peter," he said in a hushed tone, "Shorty believed in the passing of the soul into another body.

He always said that when he died he wanted to be a blue-jay. Said they are the happiest things in the world. Do you think there's anything in it?"

Peter watched the bird as it flew to the top of a swaying alder. "Lots of people believe in it, Slim. I never gave it much thought."

Slim pointed to the painted cliff. "Did you know, Peter, that red hand got Shorty's goat the first time he saw it. Whispered to me last night as we were going up the trail that it was to be his finish. I tried to get him to go back, but he had too much pluck; didn't want to show the white feather. Shorty and I have been together for over twenty years. I—" Slim paused huskily and swallowed hard, while he looked away across the lake toward the scene of the disaster. He started abruptly; threw up his hand in a mute appeal for silence, then twisted his head in a strained listening attitude.

From far away, floating above the tree-tops, faintly and eerily came the sound of a voice raised in song.

"It's Shorty's voice," whispered Slim, his face filled with superstitious awe.

One ear was a-hangin' an' his nose was bust in,
An' the way the cuss hobbled was a crime an' a sin!
'Oh, tillikum!' says he, 'you see me this way
'Cause I said 'You're a liar' to Shorty McCrae.'

"So stop, look an' listen to what I now say:
Don't start any ructions with Shorty McCrae."

Leaping to his feet, Slim pointed a shaking finger toward the cliff. "Look!" he almost screamed. "He's alive! It's Shorty!"

Peter's pulse-beats accelerated as he descried Shorty's bulky figure moving cautiously over the jumbled rock about which wild waters swept and tumbled.

Slim's shout brought Dorothy and her uncle from the cabin, who, together with Peter, ran joyfully down the hill to meet the returning man whom they had given up as lost.

Emerging from the woods, Shorty swung his arm with a welcoming shout, and came rapidly toward them.

The big man's face was a fearsome sight. Nose broken, lips split, one eye completely closed, and a livid contusion on his forehead; but the white smile against sun-darkened skin was as cheerful as ever.

A glad light in his eyes, Peter seized Shorty's hand. The big man winced. "Go easy on that flipper, boy. She's pretty near broke, an' if it hadn't been

for Naida I wouldn't be here at all. Saw me when the cave fell. Hunted 'round an' found me layin' with my face under water. I'd'a drowned sure, but she rolled me over an' worked on me 'till she got life in my carcass, then made the Injuns carry me to the village." His battered face softened. "Some kid, Peter! Some kid! She's—" He stopped speaking abruptly, a frightened look in his eyes. "Where's Slim?"

Upon being told that he was at the camp, Shorty chuckled. "Might have known that the ol' sourdough wouldn't run out to make a fuss over me."

With his back turned to the approaching party, Slim knelt over a saddle, fumbling with the girth.

Shorty winked at Peter.

"Hello, Slim, ol' hoss! Ain't you glad to see me back?"

Slim leaned lower over the saddle, his throat working, face flushed, and eyes unnaturally bright.

"Huh," he grunted without looking up, "I knew you were all right. There's nothing can kill you."

"Gosh, Slim," Shorty said roughly, "you're an awful cold-blooded brute." But the harsh tone could not conceal the tremour in his voice. Reaching out his good arm, he gave Slim a quick, bear-like hug, then, singing a rollicking song in Chinook, passed into the tent.



It was mid-afternoon when the party moved to the trail, and the sun was abdicating its day-long tyranny when they reached the rim of the valley on the first lap of their long journey to the Coast.

Their sides heaving, the cayuses struggled up the last steep rise to the floor of the plateau, and plunged their foam-flecked muzzles into the cool water of a glacial stream.

Thrilled by the beauty of the day's withdrawal, the travellers stood looking into the valley. The evening was perfumed and humid, with no cool stirring of air that usually heralds the approaching night. The waters thundering from the shattered cave filled the air with a soft droning sound like low music. Feathery mists, hanging cloud-like about the base of the cliff, sparkled with myriad rainbow hues in the slanting rays of the sun.

J.B.'s voice broke the silence.

“Well, Slim, now that you’ve made a strike, what you goin’ to do?”

Dreamy-eyed, Slim was staring down into the vast amphitheatre. “If I had a million, I’d come back to the mountains just the same,” replied Slim in a low voice.

“How ’bout you, Shorty?” asked J.B.

Shorty grinned happily. “The first thing when I hit town, I’m goin’ to have a bottle o’ hootch, a clam chowder an’ a big T-bone steak. Then I’m goin’ to get a haircut an’ shave. An’ then—” He paused bashfully. “I’m goin’ to buy me a little bungalow with a bathtub an’ everythin’.”

J.B. laughed heartily, then swung toward Peter and Dorothy, who stood some distance apart from the others. Peter was talking to his companion in a low tone. Dorothy pushed back her hat and looked up at him, a soft light in her eyes; smiled with that gentle curve to her lips that was a delight to Peter, and placed her small hand on his sleeve. Forgetful of the others, Peter covered her hand with his, and held her fingers in a firm grasp.

J.B.’s eyes twinkled.

“Humph!” he grunted. “Guess that disposes of all of you.”

Shadows were now stealing over the land. Under the reddened heavens the valley stood out vividly in all its wild beauty and splendour; lakes and streams were transformed to molten gold, and as the lower levels darkened, the painted cliff stood out as if in a bright spotlight.

All at once the attention of the watchers became riveted on a figure that came bounding erratically up the trail from the Indian village, leaped from rock to rock, crossed the turbulent stream and came to a halt on the scarlet-tipped finger of the painted cliff.

“It’s Naida, isn’t it?” asked Peter excitedly of J.B., who was studying the cliff through a pair of binoculars.

J.B. passed the glasses to Peter.

Standing on the brink of the cliff, the effect was to lift Naida’s figure above the earth. A hot rush of wind swept up from below, molding her thin garments about her body, accentuating first one contour of her graceful figure, then another. For a moment she stood very straight and fine, with the last rays of the westering sun shining on her, flashing on the red-tipped feather and her dishevelled hair—as inexpressibly lovely as a naiad—a figure of beauty; but her face was clouded with dark despair.

Peter’s blood congealed when she turned and he saw the maniacal glare in her eyes. Suddenly she recoiled from the abyss, hands pressed to her

temples, eyes rolling wildly, looked behind her—and for a moment he thought she was to fly from the spot; but, as if forced by some invisible power, she moved shrinkingly back to the edge of the precipice. Then, with head thrown back, arms outstretched, the valley rang with an awful, appalling, ear-splitting scream that faded to a piteous moan as she flung herself bodily into space. Over the cliff her body sailed; into mists like the silver threads of a bridal veil she tumbled in a shapeless whirl, over and over, with nothing to stop the fall but the churning waters a thousand feet below.

A bitter oath escaped Shorty's lips. Dorothy covered her ashen face with shaking hands, and with a long-drawn sigh, crumpled to the ground. Sick with horror, his face ghastly, Peter sank dizzily to the prostrate girl's side and chafed her wrists.

Dorothy opened her eyes.

“Oh, Peter! It was awful!” she moaned.

His heart filled with an agony of grief that brought strangling sobs to his throat, Peter nodded. He could not trust himself to speak.

“For God's sake, let's hurry and get away from this place!” begged J.B. in a horrified tone.

Peter and Dorothy were the last to leave. Turning in the saddles, their eyes suffused with tears, they took one last long look into the ill-fated valley.

Gloomy shadows licked hungrily across the earth, as if to speed the dying day; an owl hooded its welcome to the coming night, and from the depths of the dark woods a wolf sent out a dismal, wailing cry. From the village came the whispering, sobbing rhythm of dog-skin drums and the mournful lament of many voices. Heavy vapours shrouding the lower levels were suddenly dispelled as a cool night breeze stirred the air; moaning through the tree-tops like a sighing requiem for the dead, it swept up the mountain and fanned the cheeks of the watchers with its clammy breath.

Dorothy shivered.

Then, with the blood-splashed finger of the painted cliff grimly pointing the way, they swung their horses toward the setting sun.

THE END



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Misspelled words and printer errors have been corrected. Where multiple spellings occur, majority use has been employed.

Punctuation has been maintained except where obvious printer errors occur.

[The end of *The Painted Cliff* by Alex. Philip]