CHILD *of the* WILD

By

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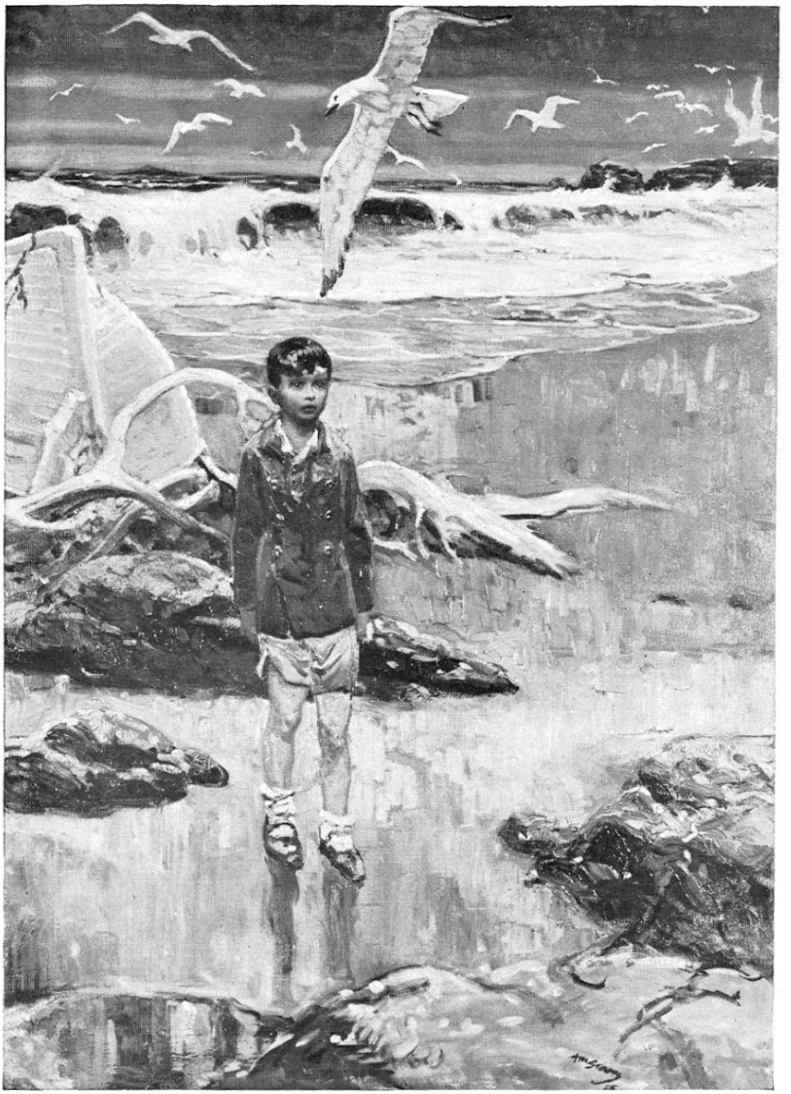

Sam had been cast on an uninhabited shore

CHILD *of the* WILD
A Story of Alaska

By EDISON MARSHALL
Author of
"*The Sleeper of the Moonlit Ranges*"

Illustrated by
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To
An Aged Woman
of Remington, Indiana—
the dear "*dear Minnie*"
of my childhood

ILLUSTRATIONS

CHILD *of the* WILD

Child *of the* Wild

CHAPTER I.

WIND and wave—night, disaster, oblivion! A ship lay dying on the reefs of Hopeless Land. She had missed Unimak Pass, through which she could have dropped safely down into the Northern Pacific, had struck far to the eastward near the end of that long land which men call the Alaskan Peninsula, and her soul was now departing from her quivering body. The only Pass that her crew found was one that led straight out and up to a sailors' heaven, where there are no gales and the wind blows fair.

There was nothing so very extraordinary about this. Those who sail Alaskan waters have always such a picture in the back of their minds—wind and wave, and a ship dying on an uncharted reef. Western Alaska, particularly, makes short shrift of ships; its glowering gods have set it apart as a land to which man must not come—a forsaken, lost and empty land, fog-laden, storm-swept and accursed—and so they have surrounded it with fortifications. Cleverly hidden under the icy water is a maze of reefs, cruel, sharp, and deadly. Here another journey had ended.

On the ship itself there was quiet heroism and no heroics. The sailors knew the truth, and quietly accepted it. Other ships and other crews had died, and the time had come for the old *Sock-Eye*, a good boat in the salmon trade in her day. Little was to be done, and nothing whatever to be said. The reefs had gone hungry a long time, and the dark billows had waited patiently; but now the hour of reckoning was at hand.

Bad enough for themselves, the sailors thought, but it was tough, sure enough, on the poor little mother and her babies, almost the only passengers on the ship. It wasn't fair for such as she to die like this. She did not live by the sea, and it did not feed her, thus holding the right to kill her when it liked. She was entitled to a quiet end, in a bed, with hands at her brow, and kneeling kinfolk at her side, and peace and a fair sail, not this hell of water and sound. She should have been allowed to lie quiet, floating graciously away, not pitched out, hustled, and destroyed in these God-forsaken reefs. It was bad enough for them, but it was cruel hard on her. Pretty yet, and young—fit for mating still, and bearing other babies; and this was no decent end for her. And her babies—they had hardly begun to live yet, and now life was done. Sam, the older, was only about seven—a sweet-faced, solemn little

fellow who would make friends with a man. The baby was not more than a year.

A slight figure in widow's clothes—a lovely, girlish being such as Mrs. Moreland was strange enough in this forsaken end of the earth; that such a fate could befall her was stranger still. Now, as the sailors prepared to lower the first of the lifeboats, she was deep in what might be her last communion with her babies.

It was profoundly moving to her how they trusted her. They thought she could keep them from the roaring monster beyond the decks. She wept silently and gently, but they were wide-eyed and hushed. She had never known them to press so close. They knew all three must cling together now. . . . She knelt on the deck, and little Sam stood beside her, his hands groping for hers, and his chubby body pushing close to her breast. Her youngest child lay in her left arm, holding fast to her dress.

"Don't forget me, little boy, if I go away and you stay here," she whispered to Sam. His dark eyes, so like his father's that they haunted her, gazed straight into her own. "Remember who you are—Sam Moreland, son of Sam Moreland. . . . Don't ever forget that, Sam. You won't, will you?"

The child nodded, but a lump in his throat would not let him speak.

"He wouldn't want you to forget. . . . Now come, into the boat."

The month was May and the snow was gone from the western Alaskan valleys, but the wind on this coast was raw and piercing, and Sam's awkwardly fumbling hands felt cold. Quickly she slipped off her long, heavy coat of seal-fur and put it about her son. Now as she lifted him into the life-boat she thought of another precaution she might take in his behalf. So he might not fall or be washed out, she caught the ends of the big fur sleeves, which the chubby arms did not begin to fill, and tied them to the thwart with cords cut from a spare life-preserver. Then, pressing close with her younger child, she gathered him also into her arms.

"Lower away," the order came—and the waves seemed to snatch at the craft.

But the gods who rule the north seas are strange-minded, perverse gods, and no amount of preparation can wholly prevail against them. Isobel Moreland had taken every precaution she could think of to keep her babies by her side. She had followed her mother's instinct, and of all voices that speak to human kind, this should be the most true. Yet the wicked spirits of the deep changed it to a jest.

No wonder the wave-monsters roared in triumph. This little trio in the loaded boat, these three who were bound with the closest tie of which man

can dream, were not to go on together.

When the life-boat was half-way down, something gave way. One end dropped, jerked and caught; then it went free with a splash. As it sped on into the night, it contained but one occupant, a child who had just passed babyhood, a little boy, tied fast to the oar-locks by the sleeves of a heavy coat of fur. His cry of fear was caught up, harried, and obliterated in the laughter of the wind.

Of those who had ridden with him, and of all the rest of the crew who had now left the breaking ship in a second life-boat, no tales are told. Only the storm and the wind were left, the huge dark waves, full-fed at last, went roaring over the sunken reefs, sardonically unmindful of the little voyager, alone in his unguided craft.

All this was too much for little Sam to understand. His years were all too few to fortify his baby spirit against this chaos which lay about him. What had occurred was far more than he could begin to grasp. Only his simplest childish instincts remained in his stunned consciousness—fear, the realization of darkness and solitude, the need of his mother's arms.

Human beings have strong needs, sometimes. Men need their loves, the starving need food, souls need faith. Yet perhaps none of those needs is so profound and so significant as this that the little castaway knew for the gentle, protecting arms that had been his haven and rest. Even though he were rescued at once, this would be an experience to influence his whole life, somehow setting him apart from other individuals, and leaving memories which would color his personality. If he lived, the loneliness of soul which he knew tonight could never wholly pass away.

This was a strange picture: the paling darkness, the white lips of the waves, the little boat leaping and falling with the billows, the child in the immensity of storm and sea. He sat near the bow of the craft, and by mercy of the long coat about him was spared the worst of the night's cold. Although confused and stunned, he was not asleep or unconscious. His dark eyes were wide and round, and quite dry. This thing was beyond tears. He had lost his cap, and the spray had dampened his dark-brown hair into curls —a fair sight if anyone had been there to see. He was always a rather grave-looking little boy, and even his ready smile was quaint and droll; and now his bewilderment gave him a wondering, solemn look far more moving than tears. Because his sleeves were securely fastened, he kept his seat through all the pitching and rolling of the boat.

Mostly he was silent—too stricken to cry—and only at intervals a wail of longing and terror broke from his lips and was whipped away in the blast. He uttered only one name—the name of the only deity he knew. Whether or not she heard him, whether she hovered close over that storm-tossed sea, neither he nor any earthly being might know.

There was little chance that the boat could pass through the reefs—the fortifications that the glowering gods of Hopeless Land had laid down—yet it did. Borne along before the wind, riding atop the waves instead of through them, it voyaged out of the night and into the dimness of a May dawn. A rising tide bore the craft into one of the shallow bays that are occasionally carved out of the rugged Peninsula coast-line. At the very height of the tide a last wave caught it, hustling it into shore. The wave broke at last in a cut; and, as if a giant had seized it, the boat seemed to spring clear of the water, all but turn over, and come to rest bottom up on the firm sloping sand beyond high-water line.

If those perverse sea-gods who had made merry with the boy so far had tired of their sport, they might have killed him under the boards of the boat. As it was, the bow caught on a pile of half-buried driftwood and hung in such a way that space remained for the boy's body to fall free. The strings at his sleeves tended to break the force of his fall, and since he struck only the sand under the hull, he was not in the least hurt.

It was dark and still under the upturned boat, and outraged nature took this opportunity to prevail upon him. Shocked a little by the fall, his childish nerves gave way, and the last of his stunned consciousness departed. For perhaps ten minutes he lay deeply asleep, deaf to the sound of the surge behind him, and out of the reach of the wind. The fur coat was soft and warm. It was all that remained of his mother, and it recalled her and seemed to bring her near. Here was some comfort for his lonely baby spirit. . . .

He woke with a scream of fear and called frantically for his mother. The first cry did not bring her, nor the second, so the tears flowed freely enough now. For a certain time he called steadily, loudly, and desperately, then wept in that inconsolable way that parents know. Finally came exhaustion and another period of sleep.

Quite a while after this the thought came that he must try to find his mother. The confusing noise of the sea was not so loud now, and broad day poured through upon him under the up-raised bow. He tried to crawl out, but at first the coat held him. Fortunately, one of the strings had broken when the boat turned over, and since he was small and active, he soon worked himself free, emerging on the open coast.

Of course he had not the slightest idea where he was. He could not know that he had been cast upon as uninhabited and desolate a coast as could be found almost anywhere in the world—the south shore of Behring Sea, near the far-western end of the long Alaskan Peninsula. Unimak Pass, which the captain of the *Sock-Eye* had sailed for in vain, lay some hundred miles to the westward. False Pass, a cannery site between the end of the Peninsula and Unimak Island, was half as far; but fifty miles can be an impossible distance in such lands and seas. Far to the east of him, in a vague location not marked on maps, lived a few families of natives, Aleuts with an infusion of Eskimos; and these, and the workers at a distant cannery or two, made up the human population of a great land. Of these the boy knew nothing and cared not at all; he cared only that in broad daylight his mother was nowhere to be seen.

And now the scene, though simply and easily accounted for, somehow passed beyond the every-day world of sea and water. It was somehow unearthly, yet not in a weird or uncanny sense; rather it was mythological, as when the earth itself was new and strange and mystical.

If there had been a single roof in the distance, the smoke of a single camp-fire, or a single footprint in the sand, the picture would not have been so moving or so terrible. Instead, there were only the sea and the land and the sky, and this child standing among them.

Something of infinity about this! Above him was the gray sky. No visible sun warmed him; the day was gloomy, shadowed, and desolate. Before him lay the empty sea. This was no legendary ocean, but an actual water-body for a man to look at on a map and for a wandering ship occasionally to enter; but here, the background for the picture, it became like the vista of a dream. It was so wide, so gray, so dimmed with mist. Because of the low-hanging fog, the sky never seemed to come down to it and give it limits; it stretched on forever. The wind now hustled and harried it, but could not really change it, and it had known a million million winds that had blustered over it and died. This great background alone would have been enough to have portrayed the child as the very symbol of solitude—a single life with all that great gray death behind.

Beside him was the yellow sand of the shore. Something profoundly lonely hangs over every unsettled beach. Solitude dwells here more than in an unpeopled forest, or vast moonlit mountain. Such wild creatures as frequent the coasts are themselves like symbols of loneliness—a gull, flying alone, an eagle on a craggy island, a crab crawling on the sand. That human beings had ever come, or ever would come to this beach seemed incredible. There was only the sand, and sometimes a gray crag, or a piece of driftwood

which the whim of the waves had deposited. Now, alive and erect upon the sand, stood the last gift of the sea.

Behind the beach was the open tundra, dun-colored, running up to the bare hills, and the hills climbed at last to glittering and lofty peaks. These were the Aleutian Mountains, that great range of snowswept crag and active volcanoes which run unbroken for a thousand miles and then make stepping-stones across to Asia. But Sam did not know their name; he was only chilled and awed by their measureless snow-fields.

He looked in vain for a tree. Nowhere were the long lines of the landscape broken by patches of forest. Trees would have comforted him, because they were living things like himself; and, coming from a wooded land, he would have found them familiar and companionable, but for a thousand miles none were to be seen.

In the center of all this vastness and solitude the child stood, looking out and up—his brown eyes wide and full of wondering fear, his tears gleaming on his cheeks. He seemed a tiny vessel of life in a dead world. A sea-gull, sweeping down the coast before the wind, peered down at him, and shrieked in surprise.

Since he was free of the big coat, perhaps now Sam could look for and find his mother. Nothing really mattered but that. He was chilly, worn and afraid; but all would be well if he could go to her. He began to advance up the beach, calling as he went. His voice rose quite clear in the pauses of the wind; and, poised before they struck, the gusts seemed almost to be listening and mocking him. This was good sport for the gods of Hopeless Land—his searchings and his cries. All the forces of the Wild, the secret spirits that the wilderness man grows to recognize after a time, seemed breathless with suspense as the little feet trudged farther and farther from the boat. They knew what he would find if he looked far enough! They knew what lay at the end of any search such as he could make!

In one way, little Sam had the right idea. He was taking the right way to find his mother. Somewhere down the empty beach she would be waiting with outstretched arms. There were certain shadows to go through before he could reach her, but in the end he was sure to find her, and she would bend over him, lift him, and soar away. . . .

Back! Turn back, little feet! Was this her voice? Did the warning so sharply whispered in his ear come from her or merely from the basic instincts which are full-fledged even in children? Perhaps the simplest explanation was that he had parted from the big seal coat. He had a distinct feeling against getting too far away from this, his single source of comfort.

It was all he had left of his mother, the only thing in this strange dream of desolation that suggested her to him. It represented her, now that she was hiding from him. He slowly turned, and crying bitterly, trudged back to the boat.

He stooped and crawled once more under the stern. Here lay the coat—glossy, warm and lovely—and he pressed as near to it as he could. In an effort to fondle and get close to it, he pulled some of it over him, finally working into the body of it. Here once more he found warmth and shelter. The shrill, biting wind did not come in here. The cold went out of his bones, and warmth came back—as if he were in her arms! Here was some measure of security from the danger that seemed to press so close. Here was even a degree of refuge from the bitter, awful solitude.

He wept a long time, occasionally calling his mother's name, then slept fitfully. He would call and weep and sleep at intervals for a long time before he realized that she had gone too far away to hear him.

He drank fresh water from the little creek that poured down by the boat. It was not bad-tasting like the waters of the sea. Matting the pools was a green plant which he thought was lettuce, and which was good to eat. It was not lettuce, but a species of watercress, and though not very solid fodder it helped to dispel some of the pinching emptiness of his belly. Later he ate sea-biscuits—hard-bread—from a great fifty-pound tank which he found, with cover rusted and broken, fastened to the thwart.

The coat was the main thing. It soon ceased to be merely a belonging of hers, a thing to associate with her, and became her actual representative. He did not weep for her constantly even the first day, but talked to himself in the way of small children, and played simple, lonely, sober games. In the sunset he even sat down for a moment or two to play with the sand.

It was here that Fear found him—Fear that invaded the land with dark banners of growing shadow. In the middle of a wistful little game he heard a new voice in the failing, wailing wind. Children's senses are keen—perhaps they can hear and see much to which grown men are deaf and blind—and the boy looked up with a startled air. He would have run to his mother had he known where to find her; as it was, he jumped up with the intention of crawling back into his shelter.

Through the gusts ran a whisper; a threat, almost a curse. It was only the voice of the spirit of the coming night—nothing that man, the dominant, need fear, could mature ears hear it at all. Old gods walk at night; ghosts of terror and death haunt such lonely shores as these; but white men have escaped them long ago, breaking their charms and casting off their yokes.

Sam, however, still had only his instincts to go by. As in the case of his little brothers, the snowshoe-hare and the ptarmigan, the first voices of the night warned of danger.

These were old tidings. The hairy people of a million years ago had heard the same and had gone to hide in their caverns. In their hearts and minds, even though not in their bodies, they had been children too. They shared with the wild things the horror of the dark which is the very title-page of conscious life. Yet this was a new experience for Sam. He had never had cause or opportunity to know the Fear. His mother had been as a priestess, warding it off with gentle magic. She was gone now; and the child's instincts were just under his skin. He was like a moth which has suddenly emerged from its chrysalis. For all his confusion, loneliness and woe, a whole new world was opening before him.

Fear ye the night! This was the old call. It whispered in the wind; it came up out of the vast snow-fields of the far, secret interior. How strangely, fearfully long the shadows grew—how dark and awful, were the deepening hues of the sea! And now a voice over his head made him look up.

It was only the call of a flock of birds slowly flying over him, but they looked down at him and seemed to have a message for him. Out into the dimness they sped, their weird, forlorn cries dropping down like great snowflakes upon him. To a grown man, the sounds would have had little significance. A naturalist might have identified a species of water-fowl. Sam, who knew nothing about them, understood them fully in his heart. He guessed that they were fleeing to secluded islands that were their night's shelter. In their cries he heard that ancient dirge to the setting sun which is the wilderness vesper, the wail of humble driven things prey to the cruel, raw forces of nature. This was the outcry of the Fear—the old Fear, the cold Fear, the Death-Fear of which night is the counterpart.

The last cry died in the air, and the child backed hastily into his shelter. It was still and dark in here, and the soft fur was a comfort against his cheek. Not only the terror born of solitude and bewilderment, but a physical dread which had been hiding a long time in some back part of his infant mind, took hold of him as he peered out through the aperture. His teeth chattered. His face paled. If a spirit had watched him, she must have shed shadow-tears. If she reached loving, longing arms to him, he could not feel them, and their blessing could not descend upon him. Oh, lost and forsaken little boy—this is a bitter hour!

Fear ye the night! This was the whisper. The sun was blessed, the daylight gracious and good, but the night was death! This was the first lesson that he learned. It is pleasant to live and breathe in the gleams of day,

but darkness is a specter and a demon. His skin crept—and he did not know of what he was afraid.

Danger crept about in the lengthening shadows. Dire peril, its shape unimagined, lurked just at the edge of his failing vision. A full-grown white man, even an older boy, in the same circumstances would have been uneasy, anxious, and apprehensive, but could never have known the full poignancy of this hour as did Sam, the child, who imaged the childhood of his race. Faint sounds began, dimly heard above the noise of the dying sea. He did not know what made them; he only knew that they were frightful and uncanny. How could he tell that the wailing shriek in the air was but a gull bent on some aerial journey; and that the curious bumping, rattling sound was a piece of driftwood settling against the pebbles of the beach?

The air grew chill. This was the very breath of peril. The west Alaskan night is coldly damp and raw even in the summer-time, and it ravaged the more exposed portions of his body. As he was weakened by exposure, sorrow, and fear, this was really an hour of peril for him. A minor malady, easily thrown off under normal conditions, could make short work of him. He lay shivering, miserable, desolated, and terrified, but just as a younger child would have done, he tried to draw closer into the body of the big fur coat. Presently he was buried in it. His nervous shivering ceased.

He tried to lie very still. This was his instinct: to hide in the darkness so that the dangerous things stalking about outside would not notice him. He dared not move. He was like a wild creature hovering in its covert. Gradually his sturdy muscles grew limp. Then an inevitable thing happened. The very act of hiding and lying still made habit too strong to resist. Even his fear could not keep him awake. The growing dark had finally forced his straining eyes to rest. And sleep, restful and natural, carried the child away.

CHAPTER II.

MORNING came and an amount of weeping. “Mamma, mamma!” a voice rang out into the desolate wilds, whisked by an inshore wind to the tundras beyond, where perhaps a caribou started and lifted her head from her feeding. But the solitude prevailed, and the stillness closed swiftly in again.

“Why doesn’t she come?” he asked himself. “Where is she—why has she gone away?” Sam spoke the words aloud, but they sounded queer in the silence, and no one answered.

With the idea of looking for her, in the faint hope that she might have come back to him during the night, he shook off the big coat and emerged into the daylight. The coast was still open, the wide places behind still empty, and the sea bare of any sail. He did not find his mother, but he found something rather cheerful. From behind distant clouds the sun was shining on the mountains.

The snow-fields were distinctly pink. The boy’s chilled and frightened heart gladdened to see them. This was not a love of beauty, but a much more primitive emotion. The peaks were red! They were warm and bright; they were like fire which in his heart he longed for. This was not death, but life! The sun, the sun was shining!

He looked pleased, and he smiled—a quaint, droll smile which was somehow characteristic of him. It was his first smile since he had come to Hopeless Land.

Little Sam was returning swiftly—getting back to basic conceptions—and sun-love was a logical step. When, in late afternoon, bright beams broke through the clouds and gilded the land, he stopped in his play, and a pleasant glow passed over him. He squinted, trying to look at the sun, kindling to the fact that this was the god who made the day. Why, this was the fire that drove away the scary, evil darkness!

Somehow or other, it was like his mother. When his mother’s arms were about him, he was warm, comfortable and secure. It was the same when the golden shine flung about him on the sand. For a moment all his loneliness and dismay passed off. He spread out his hands to it with the beginnings of adoration.

But it soon winked behind clouds. It rarely stays out long in Hopeless Land. The glowering gods, ruling through fear, cannot abide the sunlight.

When the sun shines, all their subjects escape from their dominance; the caribou lifts his head; the heart of the Wild is glad. These gods cannot suffer gladness. All here must be dark, fear-cursed, cold and desolate.

A mineral spring, common in the volcano country, lay in a rocky hollow fifty yards up the little creek. A wraith of steam danced over it. Like some of the springs of the far-off Yellowstone, and like many in the near-by Valley of Ten Thousand Smokes, it was a fantastic spot. The water—two or three gallons, still and scalding hot—was pale blue in color, due to some chemical; and about the edge was a blue lava where the contents imperceptibly overflowed. At first the child eyed the wonder from a safe distance. He saw the tell-tale steam, and he had learned about scalding water long before. Growing bolder, he ventured up and thrust his fingers into the blue paste.

It was only slightly warm, not unpleasant at all, and, though soft on top, was stone-hard underneath. Evidently it solidified on sufficient exposure to the air. He tried marking in it, as he might decorate a handsome pie of mud, and found that it recorded an impression nicely. He took the occasion to practice his outstanding accomplishment. With his dimpled forefinger he wrote his name in the deposit.

Was he not seven years old—almost a man? Had not his mother taught him, without any great difficulty, not only to print his name but always to spell it correctly? So in the blue chemical soon appeared the letters:

S A M M O R E L A N D

Anyone could see it who cared to. He would not mind at all. In fact, he was rather proud of it.

He soon forgot his feat and never thought of it again. He discovered that the spring had a utilitarian value. If he stayed on the rocks down wind, a little of its heat blew up around him, taking away some of the raw chill of the air. Any heat was a blessing in this cold and lonely land, so he sat still a long time, basking in it. He was like a small king—a lonely child-king—on a lonely throne.

Yet it was not to be that Sam should dwell in complete solitude. When the afternoon was half spent, a visitor from the interior came trotting with dainty feet. So light was its step and so inconspicuous its movements that it approached within twenty yards of the boat before the child saw it. Sam had been sitting motionless, digesting a stomach full of hard-bread and “lettuce,” and musing rather strangely about the sun, so he was not very noticeable against the dead sand and the quiet sea; otherwise his guest would not have

been half so bold. Though sharp as gimlets to see a moving object, its eyes were none too effective where still life is concerned—alike in this respect to most denizens of the wilderness. It halted suddenly, one foot lifted, and the two eyed each other.

In all probability, each mistook the other's identity. Certainly Sam believed that his caller was a dog. It looked like a dog—reddish-brown, four-legged, hairy and with a splendid, doggy tail. A little dog, he thought, such as he had played with many times. Just what he himself was taken for in the eyes of his guest will remain a matter of conjecture, but likely enough for a cub-bear. The visitor knew all about bears, and it did not know about small boys. Sam had been sitting, and now he stood on two legs, and as far as it knew, both postures were confined to bears. He was rather bear-like in his general get-up and motions, but since his smell was blown somewhat to one side, there was no way to be sure.

As Sam was not a bear, neither was his visitor a dog. This was a good-sized red fox, come down to look for dinner on the beach.

Sam immediately started toward the creature, and of course it ran away. He called, and it paused, then trotted on at an easier pace. Something in the voice had reassured it. It did not care to risk coming too close, but in its wild heart it seemed to know that the small, white-faced animal was not to be feared. . . . It stopped running, after a while, and began to look for sea-food. The child called in vain.

As if instinct told him to do so, he sat down quietly, making no sudden motions. This was reassuring to the fox. It lingered almost an hour, most of the time in his sight. At last the animal made up its mind about him. He was an eater of meat, of course—perhaps a hereditary enemy—but did not seem to be dangerous. After a while it forgot about watching him, and in its investigations worked within a hundred yards of the boat. At last it trotted away.

Another twilight came, ushering in the Fear, and then darkness; and at last the dawn, ruddy on the peaks. For Sam, this day passed much like the preceding one—eating freely of his hard-bread and of the water-plant when he was hungry, drinking when he thirsted, hiding in his mother's coat when he was sleepy or cold. The fox came again in the evening; and at a distance Sam saw a small herd of animals which he took to be cattle. They swung up over the tundra with unimagined grace, paused, pawed the ground, and skimmed off. They were not cattle, however. They were caribou, free children of the barren lands.

The day died, and another was born, and after the manner of days, it passed also. This was followed by another.

He lived! Not weakly, not lingeringly, but definitely. How could he survive, a child cast alone upon an inhospitable, uninhabited coast? Simply because there had been nothing yet to kill him. Even a child cannot die of loneliness. The chemical processes that cause life are vigorous and self-perpetuating, and nature does not halt them without full cause. He slept warm, the time of year was favorable, and his ration of bread and vegetable roughage kept him fit.

Sam passed the time one way or another—playing little-boy games, peopling his shore with imaginary companions, floating boats in the creek and on the sea, watching his wilderness companions. Of course he never washed, but dirt does not kill children. He still longed for his mother with a longing, aching and tragic, and sometimes wept for her, but he called her only rarely now and was rapidly adjusting himself to her absence. She still lived in his dreams, but in his daylight hours he thought of her more as a symbol than as a human being; she represented all that was tender, happy, and desired. He sometimes sat still, imagining her arms about him, but she did not come, and in his heart he began to know that she would not come.

In many ways he was much the same sober-acting little boy he had been at home, but his white face began to turn brown, and a queer bright look came into his eyes. While he did not actually suffer, at first he was almost never really happy. Except when he lay in the fur garment he was usually somewhat chilly and uncomfortable. He was terrified at night, disquieted by day, and subject to periods of bitter loneliness; and he was hopelessly in need of mothering.

However, he was no longer confused and bewildered. He remembered the shipwreck, his lonely sail and his landing, as he might an unpleasant dream, not as part of the reality of his life. Indeed, all that had come before was blurred in his memory, as if the terrific shock he had undergone had resulted in partial amnesia; and a new existence, strange, sad and gray, seemed to begin thereafter. Perhaps this was because he did little thinking about the past; his mind was busy with the strangeness about him. As there was no one to pronounce his last name, he began to forget it. It was a hard word without great significance for him. Of course he would always remember Sam.

On cold, raw days he liked to stay near the hot spring, because a little warmth was there; and when it rained he crawled under the boat and huddled in his beloved coat. When storms swept the shore he was darkened and appalled, but he never feared the sea. Even in bad weather the waves did not

roll so high. Indeed, the little cut where he had grounded seemed to be slowly filling with sand, banking the edge of the boat and fencing off the water.

He forgot many things—home, relatives, and the world outside—yet certain things he learned. The latter were the basic things, the first truths. Above all, he learned to love the sun.

The sun, the sun! It is a word to conjure with. No wonder the name rings like a bell through the literature of all far-northern peoples. In the North men feel its sacredness. Sam did not know that the sun was the source of all life, but unconsciously he knew that without it he would die.

He knew that when the sun shone, he was warm, light-hearted, fearless. It was hidden most of the time; then he was chilly, darkened and dismayed. The land was lovely when the yellow beams played over it. The bleak whiteness of the peaks was rosy and pleasant to see. And these impressions had the most significant effect upon him. In his heart was implanted the beginnings of an actual religion, one whose power was all the greater because it was basic and primitive. A strange thing for this little castaway to become a sunworshiper, yet such was very near the truth from the first. His heart glowed when he saw the fiery orb, and once, when it suddenly appeared in the middle of a chill, windy rainstorm, he stretched his arms to it. Once, when it shone warmly upon him, he asked it gravely to bring his mother to him.

He personified it, just as a hundred heathen tribes have done, imagining it as a champion-god who drove away the cruel and wicked spirits that held sway at night. Everything was happy and bright when the sun rode in the sky. When it sank, the world was dismal, cold, and ghost-ridden. The sun was not only his personal god, but the good god of all this land, of the open places, of the Wild, of the sea and the rosy peaks, and of the living things that visited his shore. Worship of it went hand in hand with other primitive ideas that throve in him.

He forgot the ways of men, but he learned a great deal of the ways of beasts. The wild creatures came with ever greater frequency to his shore. They did not take long to learn that the lonely little figure on the sand was not to be feared, and that he was not afraid of them. Such an attitude promoted an easy relationship. He did not try to hunt or kill them, but sat quietly, making no fierce, terrifying motions; and although they did not like his smell, in time they became somewhat indifferent even to this. Yet even the boldest of them would not let him approach them from up wind.

His ripening acquaintance with them was not a miracle, but a perfectly natural development of his life among them. No naturalist can sit still in the woods even for an hour without being virtually run over by wild creatures; and this child lingered here not for an hour, but for days and weeks. He was not a grown man with the smell of blood upon him, but a child—whether or not they sensed this fact is beyond man's wit to know, yet stranger things are told and believed in the far woods.

No pungent smoke of burning brushwood hung over his lair; no terrifying fire leaped in front. He was quite like one of their own people. They would not hunt him—*they* dared not hunt *him*—such was forbidden, banned and accursed by the Law which goes to the roots of wilderness life, and which they could not begin to understand. They only knew that he was of the masters, and that the Law reads plain, "Thou shalt not kill man." But the man-child would not hunt them, either, nor leap upon them from ambush nor take their liberty. Day after day they watched him, night after night they saw him withdraw into his strange cavern, and so they soon got used to him. They went on about their business indifferent to his presence.

Sam would have been glad to make close friends with his animal neighbors, but this they would never permit. If he tried to come too close, they trotted away. They would not let him touch them, as he wanted to, and they did not take him into their queer running games that they played in the dawns. Still, it was a pleasure to him just to watch them. It was somehow like a picture-show—he did not know that it was far more wonderful than any motion-picture that the greatest director could produce. At first he was interested in them in a detached way, as a spectator, but the time came—after a few weeks on the coast—that they became an integral part of his life. They were not only his amusement, but his study, his almost sole interest, and his only companionship. Indeed, he was almost one of them.

They did not like to have him look straight at them, so he learned to pretend not to notice them. When a strange animal came to the beach—one that he had not seen before—he found it an advantage to sit perfectly still; otherwise the stranger would not come near. After a long time he went so far as to discover that the direction of the wind influenced the behavior of his visitors. Of course he knew nothing about human scent, but his powers of observation were keen—as in most children—and the fact finally dawned on him that when his face was cold, instead of his back—that is, when the wind blew toward him instead of from him—the timid folk seemed to like him better.

The fox came almost every day, and usually brought his mate. These were playful creatures; sometimes they would race side by side on the sand,

sometimes romp and wrestle only a few feet from him; they would leap and bark in the rapture of the sunlight; they would play marvelous, graceful games, light as air. In one strange red dawn he saw them do their unforgetable shadow-dance, a sight worth a year of a nature-lover's life.

Sea-birds came to rest upon his shore, and he learned to identify them one from another. Of these the gulls were the most common; they were always perching about on the tide flats, shrieking and fighting, and after a while they paid not the slightest attention to him. It thrilled him to watch their aerial minuet—wheeling, dipping, cutting the most graceful, complicated figures—and a sense of the beautiful in his childish heart was stirred and quickened. Later the beach-geese came, the most cautious of all the birds, and they learned to be his most intimate friends. They looked foolish, with their long necks stretching, but really they were amazingly wise; and when they knew him well, they let him walk among them, and gobbled the crumbs of cracker that he dropped. He listened for hours to their gossip and laughed at them as they strutted about him in ludicrous dignity. He was not so fond of a golden eagle nesting near-by; the big bird shrieked at him and sometimes hovered above him in a queer, suggestive way.

He knew the sea-pigeons and the ducks, the cormorants and the terns. Among the land birds, he was particularly fond of the ptarmigan. These grouse went two by two, a gayly colored cock and a drabber hen— and a pair of them was in sight most of the time. "Go t'hell, go t'hell, go t'hell," they squawked at him; and it always lifted up his heart to see them volplane through the air, finally dropping down like gossamer. Often he heard a weird, forlorn whistle—three descending notes in a minor key—which was the very voice of Hopeless Land, but he was a long time tracing it to a brown sparrow with a golden crown. This song said, "Shame on you, shame on you!"

The big gray hares that lived on the higher ground came frequently to the beach, but while they liked Sam fairly well in their vapid rabbit way, they were not partial to the foxes. Indeed, when Red Brother danced on the sand, Long-Ears stayed strictly away.

A porcupine visited him one day, but it was too dull and stolid to make any progress with. Of course Sam did not know its name. He called it "Needles"—for good reasons. Another animal, about the size of Needles, was of an even less companionable sort. This was a long-furred, ugly-shaped creature that moved with an awkward gallop, somehow most unpleasant to see. It had small fierce eyes, glowing with hate of all living things, and it did not know the Law. For once, when the child met it on the beach, it snarled and showed wicked, white, sharp teeth.

For a few seconds the two faced each other. The creature had a most singular, excited manner. For Sam, the day seemed to grow bitter cold. A coldness swept into his veins, and the hairs of his scalp began to move like marsh-grass in the wind. There was something hideous and terrible in the way the animal eyed him. It was not like his other wild friends, and maybe was not a friend at all, but a savage and hateful foe. The boy started to cry out, and turned with the idea of running and hiding in his big coat.

Then a most curious thing happened. Sam not only choked back his wail of terror, but turned and faced the animal once more. For the first time in his life, he was facing a living enemy, one who hated him and wanted to destroy him. The sullen glow of its eyes, brightening now to searing fire, was terrible to see. He loved the fire of the sun, of warmth and life, but this was the fire of death.

It was not because of any failure to realize his danger that he stayed his ground; but at the same time it was not due to any unnatural daring. His only wish was to run and hide. Something—he never knew what—locked his feet.

This was not the paralysis of terror. It was something far deeper, far more wonderful. It was simply an inherent prompting. Even in these first weeks, he had largely reverted to a creature of instinct, which is naturally close to the surface in children. Its voice was clearer and surer every day. He had no superior, mature intelligence to guide him; he relied on a racial knowledge ingenerate in him. His instincts told him that his only hope was to face the creature down. He was a man-child—on the lances that leap from man's eyes, and on man's basic superiority over the beasts of the field and the fowls of the air, he must rely.

Observation of animal life had whetted these instincts, and taught him to obey them. He might have noticed that the sea-gull which stands its ground is not molested by its fellows, and consumes its food in peace, while that bird which flies away is pursued by all the rest. Of course he did no conscious thinking about it, but simply did what he was prompted to do.

This was a strange picture—the crouched animal, with its fiery gaze; the pale child, trying to stand so straight, trying not to run away. The boy's scalp twitched. Terror of a primitive, devastating kind almost broke his spirit. It was a moment of uttermost trial—but the man-child won.

The beast snarled and backed off. Sam need never fear him in the open. But his escape had been by none too wide a margin.

If he had fled, all too likely this beast would have pursued him. Had he hidden under the boat, it would likely have crawled in after him; and what

would have come to pass in that narrow, darkened space would not bear scrutiny. This beast was used to invading the lairs of its prey. Any animal or bird that fled from it was its fair game—only those creatures which intimidated it, did it permit to live. The Law of the Wild is that might makes right, but Devil-Claws went even further—it would break a greater law: it would risk the extermination of all its breed to satisfy its hate and fury—and it slew even the porcupine, only to die from the quills that worked into its vitals. Because Sam seemed unafraid of it, it feared him—otherwise the episode might have had a different ending.

No respecter of persons was this sharp-eared, wicked-eyed hunter. No wolf would have dared stand up to the child, no mighty-horned bull caribou, no lynx. This was none of the three, but the wilderness outlaw—the crudest, most savage killer—for all his medium size one of the most ferocious and formidable beasts of prey in the whole North country. This was the demon of the barren-lands. Among certain primitive people he is known as Devil-Claws. White men call him wolverine.

CHAPTER III.

MOST of Sam's relations with the wild folk were entirely friendly. The wolverine, once intimidated, never approached close to him again. An otter, one of the shyest of animals, learned to accept him, and no longer dived in frantic terror at sight of him. A mink, a cruel little killer hardly less savage than his mighty cousin, the wolverine, frequented the beach, and after his first few visits sniffed and scurried almost at his feet.

The seals crawled up on the sand, and he saw their games and watched their strange communion. They learned to sleep here without fear. Once a mighty thing, a walrus, came to land a quarter of a mile down the beach—a rare visitor even to this uninhabited shore, so Sam went to call on him, and arrived only to see his long, black body vanishing under the waves.

Of all his visitors he liked best to see the caribou. A small herd of these deer ranged immediately back of his shelter, vivid, vital figures, so free, swift and splendid. The foolish rompings of the calves, the anxious concern of their mothers, and the proud prancings of the bucks all delighted him, made him laugh, and somehow appealed to his sense of fitness.

Staying here day after day, week after week, with nothing to do but watch and listen, with no interest except the fulfilment of his simple needs, this child achieved an acquaintance—the beginnings of an understanding—of animal life possessed by few upon the earth. His opportunities for observation were all the better because he did not have a grown man's tall and fearful form. While he could not identify a single species, he could separate them one from another; he was at a highly impressionable age, and he had no fixed opinions to overcome. After a time, he did not regard them, as man regards the lesser folk that share the world with him, as creatures lower and apart, but thought of them as his brothers and his companions.

And his thought seemed to reach out to them. In that unaccountable way of beasts, they seemed to know and understand how he felt about them. Trusting them, he won their trust.

Within a month after his coming—a whole lifetime, it seemed to him—he was almost a little animal himself. Living a wholly primitive life, he reverted quickly to primitive habits of thought and action. Imitating the wild things, he began to acquire a stealthy tread and a furtive manner. Through exercising a great deal to keep warm, a most extraordinary ease of motion passed into his body, a singular grace and lightness. Yet there were more

important changes still. He was at a most plastic age. Slowly he gained a new conception of life.

He began to notice, almost at first, that the stronger and more aggressive individuals in any flock or herd seemed to be the masters. The best fighter among the gulls took the best food, and the strongest bull led the caribou herd. Evidently the good god of the land—riding so gloriously through the sky—was a god of might and of battle, rewarding the strong and persecuting the weak. Sam had become a little pagan, and pagan ideas began to prevail upon him.

The law here seemed to be of claw and fang, tempered only by that of self-preservation. The boy's first vague conception of this state of things strengthened with the passing weeks; and one twilight, about a month and a half after his arrival, he beheld a wilderness drama which tended to crystallize his ideas into what might be called a philosophy.

A fine cock ptarmigan had sailed in and lighted on a mossy hummock about twenty yards behind the narrow strip of sandy beach. Sam heard its familiar cry and, as was his habit, crept up to observe it better. Lying flat on the moss, he saw now what had at first escaped his gaze.

Creeping in the grass came Red Brother, the fox. He was like a snake, like a shadow: no grass-blade twitched under his feet. Sam was fascinated. A brown and inconspicuous figure himself, he watched with growing admiration the animal's almost invisible approach. A rather curious but thrilling excitement took hold of him. He began to shiver all over.

The fox drew up within a few feet, then pounced in a flash of red. The cock saw him just too late. Its leap into the air was like the wind, but the fox was like a thrown lance. He caught the bird fairly and bore it to the ground.

This was a common sight in Hopeless Land, but entirely new to Sam. For the first time in his life he saw a living creature die. For the first time he saw a killing—a hunter felling its prey. He had no thought of feeling sorry for the bird. Pity is a civilized emotion, something to associate with the tenderness and the beauty belonging to his memories of his mother, not with this game of life and death, chase and kill, played in the open places. The excitement which overtook him now rose to a fierce climax which was nothing less than some dark sort of ecstasy. He jumped up and down, laughed, and clapped his hands. The fox ran away, and he chased it a short distance. At this moment the wistful little boy who had talked so gravely with the crew of the *Sock-Eye* seemed far off, and in his place a wilderness creature, a bright-eyed, skinny little savage, danced at death.

He wanted to hunt too! He wanted to creep upon his prey and kill it! This was the Law, that the nimble and sly and white-fanged should conquer and kill the sluggish and the dull. He did no conscious thinking about it, but only unconscious wishing. The fox had slain his prey, and now he was eating. The boy wanted to kill food for himself to eat.

About the end of June this wish was recalled with added force. Warmer weather brought new visitors to his shore. Water-folk, this time—queer shadows darting in the little stream beside his shelter. At first there were only three or four, then bands of a dozen, then schools of a hundred, and finally hordes of thousands, blackening the water and forcing it out of its banks. They were fish; he knew that. He did not know that he was witnessing the summer run of the salmon, the silver bands that choke the little rivers of western Alaska. They were coming up out of the sea in their death-swim, and they would not pass this way again.

Their numbers excited Sam intensely. The very swiftness of their flight wakened in him the passion of the chase. He went up the creek to a shallow riffle and deliberately waded in, but although the salmons' backs sliced the half-foot of water, they were far too swift for him. Even if he could have caught them, he could not have held their slippery bodies. He chased them for an hour, laughing and shouting, before giving up the game.

As he waded to the bank, and stood watching the endless parade of shining bodies over the riffles, he saw that another fisher had come.

No wonder the boy was startled. Up until now he had seen only small land creatures—the barren-ground caribou, weighing at most two hundred pounds, being by far the largest. He had not dreamed that anything lived in the country of such dimensions as this beast which he now saw moving toward him. It stood as high as a caribou and would have made three of the deer in thickness. By its side were two smaller specimens of the same kind, evidently its young.

The animal was about two hundred yards off when Sam first saw it, and it slowly approached until it was not a hundred yards away. Meanwhile he stood quite motionless, a habit that had grown upon him lately. This simple trick, it seemed, kept his visitors from noticing him. He was cold in the face —which meant that the wind was right for encouraging close acquaintance.

Sam decided it must be a dog, although it was ten times larger than any dog he had ever seen. It had a dog-like head, and was the color of some of the big yellow huskies he had seen in Alaska. He wanted to try to make friends, but he had learned by experience that the dogs of this country were

peculiar and were shy and flighty when one pushed an acquaintance too soon. He simply waited—for something to happen.

Something usually did happen, in Hopeless Land. In this case, it was a rather surprising occurrence. Leaving her young on the bank, Sam's big she-dog slowly waded into a wide shallow in the creek and, like himself, became perfectly motionless. She resembled a big yellow rock in the stream.

Sam watched with bright eyes narrowing; this also was a habit he had lately acquired. A great many of his wild neighbors took the water freely—the seals, for instance, and the otter and the mink—but they did not pretend to be yellow rocks. And as the boy peered, the huge, motionless figure suddenly came to life.

More things happened at once than he could follow. The beast's huge hairy paw suddenly smote the water. It was a motion too fast for Sam's eyes—and rather bright, quick eyes these were. At the same time—or at least not a tenth of a second afterward—there passed a silver flash, like small lightning, a gleaming streak in the air. The big creature bounded to one side, a motion so swift that it was bewildering, and struck the water again. A second gleam burst into the air before the first died out upon the ground.

The child's instinct was to remain unnoticed, and to see what magnificent thing would happen next, yet it took all his will-power to keep from crying out. A shiver of excitement passed over him, and with it, a most ardent admiration for the big she-dog. Although a little savage, he was still a boyish little boy so far as hero-worship was concerned. He thought this bit of fishing the neatest thing he had seen in his long life.

This was the noblest of animals, he thought, and he was not far wrong. The big beast was nothing less than a Kadiak bear, the monarch of the grizzly clan and of the biggest breed of bears—incidentally the biggest carnivorous animals—in the whole world.

With a grunt and a splash of water, the old bear lunged up on the bank. Her cubs were tussling over the first of the salmon, but a mild blow of her paw—with only about four hundred pounds of driving power behind it—caused them to turn surprised somersaults for about a dozen feet, and to sit up to await orders. She tossed the prize to the smaller cub, then searched about in the moss for the second fish. She seemed to have misplaced it.

Sam could have told her exactly where it was. His keen eye had marked it down. The thought glowed faintly in his mind that if he were a little nearer, he could have crawled up and stolen it away. Finally she found it and presented it to her larger cub, then went back to her fishing.

She soon knocked out a third fish, then three more in rapid succession. One of these fell just at the edge of the water, yet it lay where it fell and did not flop back to safety. When any living thing receives the entire force of the full-stroke of a grizzly bear, it moves for the last time.

The bear family ate their fill, then wandered back up the creek. From this time on, almost any hour found one or more of the great bears on the flat back of Sam's shelter. They came from their lairs in the mountain wastes beyond, and they would linger, gorging and growing fat, until the salmon hordes spawned and died.

The boy watched the creatures from a distance, and when, the next day, he saw a bear family slowly working its way down the creek, an engaging thrill crept over his sensitive skin. He supposed they were the same three; certainly the old mother fished with the same skill and violence; certainly her cubs ran and jumped and scuffled and fell over themselves and each other with the same energy, and gobbled the prey with the same avidity, as his previous visitors. Shivering all over and quite hollow in the pit of his stomach from the very wonder of his half-formed purpose, he crept slowly up the creek to meet them.

They paid not the slightest attention to him. Cold was in his face (which meant he was down wind) so this was a favorable time. They were much easier to get close to than a fox or a caribou. They did not even hear his shoe grate on a stone, and they did not seem to see his sly form slinking in the grass.

The truth is that, while his nose is a veritable receiving set, taking in everything for miles and miles up wind, the Kadiak bear does not hear or see particularly well. Thus the boy was able to crawl near without having his presence known. It was also true that even those creatures with senses sharp as porcupine quills would need look intently, and listen rather keenly, if they were to discover Sam. He had learned quite a little about stalking. He had picked it up naturally from his wild brothers. When the bears were absorbed in their fishing or were looking in some other direction, the furtive, lean little figure pushed slowly forward. When they looked toward him he lay like a stone. If they glanced his way before he had time to sink down into the grass he did not attempt to hide, but remained motionless where he was, even though in plain sight. He had seen the foxes, hunting or playing their games, do the same. Once the entire bear family cocked their ears at him and stared intently for a full half-minute. When they concluded that he was of no importance whatever, a pile of earth thrown up by a fox, or a peculiar-shaped rock, they went enthusiastically back to their fishing.

So the child crept up and up until he was within forty feet of the bears. He had no idea of doing anything brave. Bravery had nothing whatever to do with it. Sam had never been taught to be afraid of large, benevolent dogs. The reason that he stalked them so carefully and tried so hard to keep out of their sight, was to prevent them from being afraid of him. Though this might seem a ridiculous idea—that a thousand pounds of bear could possibly be afraid of sixty or seventy pounds of boy—nevertheless it was justified, not only by Sam's experience with animals, but by facts. He did not want to alarm them. The wild things were usually savage and formidable enough in regard to each other, but instead of intending wrong to him, they always seemed a bit distrustful of his intentions toward them. He was only deliciously excited in playing the finest game he had ever played.

One after another the female slugged the shining fish out upon the bank. The boy watched with eyes that glittered in the grass. One after another he marked the fish down. When she had batted out five or six, she lunged up to show her cubs how to eat them; and for the moment she seemed to have forgotten a fine fat salmon, a wonder-fish with scales of living sunlight which lay a little to one side and only fifteen feet from the boy's hand.

His heart was a frantic little drum against his ribs as he began crawling toward the shining, silvery thing. This was a game that was a game! The fox's stalk on the ptarmigan was dull compared to this. Even the little mink, tracking a rabbit on the creek bank, knew no thrill that was not his.

The bear family were stuffing fish, so they did not notice him. Presently he reached a thin brown arm, slipped his fingers over the slippery skin of the salmon and into its gills. Snatching it up, he jumped to his feet and started to run.

This course of action proved to be a mistake. The old mother saw his sprinting figure out of the corner of her eye. Likely she had not the slightest idea of his identity, but she did identify easily enough the shining thing in his hand. This small cub who ran so speedily on two legs was making free with her belongings. She uttered a resounding "woof!" of surprise and indignation, then bounded forward in pursuit.

She suggested a caterpillar-tractor, gone wild. Sam looked most insignificant in contrast. Of course this race was bound to be short. Few animals on the earth are swifter in a short run than a grizzly bear, and though Sam's small legs fairly flew, she gained on him with horrifying rapidity. Whatever her intentions toward him—whether she meant any harm beyond the recovery of her property—the fact remained that he was now in certain and most terrible danger. This was no longer a mere matter of sport, but a race of life and death.

Even though she were not enraged, a creature of such size cannot bear down upon, seize, and knock to the earth a fragile child's body without more or less breakage. All too easily this could prove a pitiful end to a child's strange adventure—a huddled, broken body in the grass, and the great golden bear, unknowing and undreaming of what she had done, going gravely back to her fishing.

Yet there was some hope. Just like any bad little boy, Sam dropped the fish. His idea was partly to make better time, partly to placate the owner. As he now spurted forward lightly, his eagerness for speed betrayed him; he tripped over a grassy hummock and was flung heavily to the ground.

The she-bear checked her pace, grunted, and picked up the stolen fish in her teeth. She looked around for the thief, but he was now lying still, stunned by the fall, and she did not immediately locate him. Presently he wriggled; and with her fish in her mouth, she went to investigate him.

For some curious reason the boy did not attempt to flee. He was like a mouse in the paws of a cat; perhaps instinct told him that he would be struck down. He was frightened enough now. Yet the bear showed no signs of anger, but only an overwhelming curiosity.

She ventured close, pausing within three feet of his body. She sniffed uneasily. She moved her huge head back and forth, trying to focus her eyes on the child. Finally, she caught his scent plain. Then, in that unaccountable way of beasts, she turned and strode away.

She collected her cubs on the creek bank, boxing one of them for inattention. Slowly, but steadily and purposefully, she herded them up the creek and away.

A sadder and wiser little boy went back to his shelter. He was not at all exalted at his wonderful escape—he scarcely knew he had been in danger—he was only disappointed at the loss of his prize. As to their general conduct, the bears had turned out like the rest of his animal neighbors—reluctant to push an acquaintance, in their hearts a little afraid of him.

The fact tended to make him less afraid. Indeed, in these warmer, brighter summer days, fear forsook him almost altogether, revisiting him only at night.

Nothing had occurred to dampen seriously his ardor for the sport, so the next day his mind turned again to salmon-poaching. The darting shadows in the creek intrigued his fancy, and the sun-god rode the sky. He was always bolder when the golden beams were on him. They turned him free. Fear lifted its curse. Half-heard whisperings reached him.

His breath almost failed him, and quivers came over his skin when he saw an old male bear working alone down the creek. He simply could not resist going forth to meet him. Again he crawled on his belly, and again he waited until the huge fisherman had knocked out half a dozen glittering salmon. Presently one lighted within a few feet of him and, being the farthest from the bear, was not searched for at once.

The boy crept toward it, finally slipping his fingers into its gills. He saw that the bear had again entered the water, evidently forgetting the prize. Sam did not care to attempt another foot-race so he crept quietly away, dragging the fish behind him.

All in all the adventure was not only thrilling but delightful. His golden god had been good to him. Soon he was safe from pursuit—and the wonderful, speckled, silvery trophy lay in his hand.

The ideas he had picked up lately now found a most striking confirmation. To the victor belonged the spoil! Not only to the strong and fleet, but to the cunning and sly came precious rewards. Did his conscience hurt him about the theft? Indeed it did not. Instead of being penitent and remorseful, as childish innocence should have made him, he was delighted and triumphant. Never was such a fish! It was longer than his arm. It was bigger around than his leg at the thickest part. Oh, it was heavy to carry! And surely a more beautiful thing was never made.

Silvery, speckled, handsomely formed! It was game of the finest. It was a plaything such as he had never had before. It was *food*!

But when he tried to eat it, he encountered unexpected difficulties. It had a lovely smell that stimulated his appetite, but was cold and slippery against his teeth, and hard to bite into. Evidently the cub-bears had special dental equipment. However, he still admired it, carrying it wherever he went and keeping it beside him when he climbed into his robe for his daily nap. On wakening, he tried nibbling at it again, but it was even harder now, and stiffer. Moreover, it had shrunk a little and lost some of its beauty—the fate that befalls so many trophies of men!

The day was chill now—raw and sunless—so he went to sit in the rocks by the hot spring, laying the carcass beside him on the sloping basin. The fish was slippery, and there was an immediate splash of steaming water.

The boy was considerably distressed. He was not tired of his plaything yet and did not want to lose it. Only the tail of the fish was out of water, and the steam would not permit him to catch and hold it long enough to rescue it. He was a resourceful lad, however, and after scalding one of his fingers, he went to look for some implement for prying the fish out.

He went quite a distance down the beach before finding a stiff but slender alder branch washed down from the hills. With this he returned to the pool and began grappling for his prize.

Even now the recovery was not easy. The fish kept slipping back into the water. It was only after a half-hour's patient effort that he managed to get the end of the stick into the salmon's gills, and hoist it out on the rocks.

He started to pick it up, only to burn his fingers again. Childishly angry now, he was about to leave it for good, when he noticed that his efforts with the stick had prodded several holes in the fish's side. The red meat showed through.

The next step was practically inevitable. As soon as it was cool enough, he thrust in his fingers and pulled out a piece of the warm red flesh, which found its way naturally into his mouth.

His droll smile, not forgotten yet, grew and beamed until it lighted his dusky face.

CHAPTER IV.

FROM now on, the child had salmon almost any time he liked. He attained considerable skill at stealing it from the big furred fishermen, sometimes sneak-thieving in front of their very noses, and sometimes actually intimidating and driving them away from their prey. It was more exciting and ticklish to stalk and pilfer, but it was somehow absurdly gratifying to shout at the great creatures and make them run.

He was never pursued again. The monarch of the barrens would not stand his ground against him. Such is the dominance of the man-child. He was running some risk—occasionally a Kadiak bear goes back on tradition and charges like a cyclone—but he did not know it. His luck stayed good. The sun-god, in whose blessing the alder leaves waxed green and the grass grew long and rich, took excellent care of him.

When he caught a fish he immediately took it to the hot spring and dropped it in. In his first experience he had beheld a cause and effect, perfectly obvious even to his child mind; and, besides, he had a vague memory of seeing things cooked in his mother's kitchen, a process he had been deeply interested in, which the scalding of the fish suggested. He found that the longer he took to get it out again the easier it was to eat, but because of his eager appetite he never made the mistake of letting it stay too long. The red nutritious flesh was a welcome addition to his diet, particularly in that it supplied abundant fats. He felt better, had more energy, and began to put back some of the flesh he had lost. Other things being favorable—not often the case in western Alaska—he could have lived long on his diet of bread, fish, and greens.

This business of fishing made a wanderer out of him. Plenty of fish still swam the lower riffles, but the bears, never more energetic than necessary, found them easier to scoop out of the spawning-beds, the narrow, shallow sloughs that winked all over the flats, so Sam had to follow them here. At first he went cautiously, staying close to his creek, but he gradually grew bolder. Almost instinctively he learned his land-marks; a homing pigeon seemed to live under his skin. Wilderness men speak of a natural gift which they call a sense of direction. If ever given ingenerate, it was to this little vagabond of the tundras, this human little animal cast away in Hopeless Land.

By mid-August, when the sun was waning again, the whole flat under the hills was his fishing-ground. Fish-hungry, he would climb upon a near-by dune and spy a plodding figure often two miles distant across the plain. Swiftly and easily he would make his way toward it—the huge, cumbersome mass that was his prey! He learned to map out rather complicated campaigns, almost uncanny in one of his years. True, that he had developed rapidly since his exile. He was going to a rough school.

When the sun shone, or even when the day was bright, he feared the wilderness no more than he feared the bears. He went where he liked. He played the most exciting, enterprising games. But when the shadows lowered, when the hills dimmed and the land darkened, and the little, hushed night-noises began to creep and rustle just beyond his sight, he was glad of his warm, dark shelter under the upturned boat. The day did not stay out so long now. This was a puzzling thing. And though the fish went up his creek by thousands, none of them ever came back.

He was only half human. The rest of him, that part of him which his habits and his ideas had created, was merely a wild thing of the marsh-grass. He still remembered his first name—his mother was still an Adoration moving through his dreams—but the rest was hard to think of, hard to recall and puzzle out. Physically he achieved remarkable development. His muscles grew stringy and hard; his lungs were exercised by his running, walking, and his long, breathless, lifeless waiting in ambush. He weighed no more than many boys of his age, but none of him was tare.

He was not cruel, but he obeyed the Law, and the Law was of claw and fang. He worshiped in his heart a god of light and warmth. These were the teachings of the Wild.

Only those who had known him best could have recognized him now. His face was almost as dark as an Indian’s. His clothes hung in rags, and some of them had sloughed off. His hair had grown long, but even now, when the fog wet it, it lay in curls; and his general figure had changed from that of a rather stocky little boy to a wonderfully shaped small animal. His motions were ever more light and free. There were significant changes in his expression, too: his eyes gleamed brightly as if from constant peering, and his smile broke less often.

August glided to September. And now there were new signs. The days were shorter. They used to last almost from one dawn to another, with merely a curtain of darkness dropped between, but now they were no longer than the nights. The sun hid in heavy, sullen clouds; the rains and the mist were more frequent; and the winds were more restless and uneasy. It seemed

to Sam, of nights, that the sea talked with a new voice. A strange, hollow, moaning voice—as if in inutterable dread.

The fox no longer had bare patches on his sides. The grouse gathered in flocks. Certain friendly voices were stilled. The plaintive whistle of the golden-crowned sparrow, which the child had learned to love and listen for, no more floated in the dawns. Other voices, somehow moving and terrible, spoke instead.

As yet he had no dream of the meaning of these signs. He tried to play and laugh in spite of them, yet he was uneasy and distressed. And the wild creatures seemed to share his mood. The foxes romped no longer in the dawns and never danced with their shadows, and the sea-birds had unhappy cries he had never heard before. One night the beach-geese clamored, and when he wakened in the dawn they were all gone.

Fear ye the night! This was the threat, but it was heard no longer merely in the twilight, but all through the gray hours, and was stilled only when the sun shone bright and warm. Later he was chilly in his bed. He had to burrow deep into the coat and tuck it around him, in order to find warmth to sleep. In the morning the damp grass sparkled, and in the cold hollows it was beaten down and snarled. A thin sheath, hard and brittle, covered the still pools.

Sam examined this strange thing, and his fingers felt cold; and in a moment he stood straight and glanced about as if he expected to see an enemy. He did not understand why he looked toward the north; the instinct was deeply hidden. From this time on the alder patches on the far-off hills began to turn yellow and gold, but these were the hues of death, not of the kindly fires that he saw in the sun; and then the yellow and gold fell away, leaving only gray. Even the gulls were less numerous. The wild things came less often to the beach.

Most of all, he wondered what was happening among the salmon. They no longer invaded his creek in hordes of thousands, but only in schools of hundreds. With the passing weeks, these schools dropped to bands of dozens, and finally to three or four—big silver fish, simply racing up the riffles. No fish had come back, and all had either vanished utterly or, no longer bright but russet as fallen leaves, lay dying in the shallow water.

What death was this? The child beheld it with creeping dread. He could understand violent death—the ptarmigan in the fangs of the fox, or the fish under the shattering paw of the bear—but this was conjuration, mystery and horror. Yet it was all around him. The flowers that had shone like stars in the grass were withering. He crept home and crawled into his fur.

His sun-god was failing him, and now the bears failed him too. They seemed to be going where the salmon went—away and away. Time was that he had stolen more fish than he could eat, but now they were few and far between, and soon he searched the sloughs in vain, returning empty-handed to his darkening shelter.

One morning the white covering of the bleak mountains sifted down and lay on his beach, slowly melting away.

The green leaves of the water-plant on which he had fed had grown tough, yellow and inedible; but a crueler blow was in store for him. One morning, when he reached into the big tin tank for a biscuit, his hand came out empty.

A childlike wail broke from his lips. He had always eaten when he wanted to, never dreaming that there was a bottom to the can.

"They're all gone," he told himself, quite as if an older boy—a hard, disciplined, strangely valiant boy, possessing the fatalism of the Wild—were speaking to a younger brother, a gentler, tenderer little boy who had sailed with his mother on the ill-fated *Sock-Eye*.

"Every one is gone," he repeated gravely. Talking frequently to himself, he had never lost the use of the language. "And now I shall die, too."

This was the truth. Wide the dark knowledge that his baby soul had gained!

Fear ye the night! That which impended was a longer night, the long sleep to which all must go. Its shadows were of oblivion.

Could there be any other answer? Was this the end of that adventure which had begun with the shipwreck so many months before? Had the glowering gods—now sweeping into dominance—spared him so long only to slay him like an annual flower?

Once more his voice lifted in a never-forgotten cry. "Mamma, mamma!" But she did not come. He lay weeping a long time.

The day passed. Another was born. He tried to eat the withered dead leaves of the watercress, but he could swallow only a few of them, and no comfort was in them. Except for this he had gone without food for more than twenty-four hours.

He searched about for scraps which he had dropped before—of old fish and bread—but the gulls had gleaned carefully, and he found only a crumb or two. He walked far out on the tundra, in the hope of a stray salmon, but he found none; and the wind mocked and buffeted him, and his limbs no longer moved light and free. He was bitterly and painfully tired when he crawled again into his dark cave.

In here he would die, he thought. Surely the time was at hand.

The fur coat was never more soft, sweet and consoling. The sand that had worked into it did not scratch his face; its embrace gently enfolded him. His mother seemed quite near. Perhaps she was returning to him, or he was going to her. Even before sleep overcame him, he seemed to soar up from his huddled body and float in solitude on the wind.

He would never crawl out again, he thought. Only death lived on the howling barren-lands, only the gathering frost, the sleet, the hollowness. Here, under the upturned boat, there was comfort, some haven, and sleep. He too was like the salmon, lying so still in the pools.

The slim savage of the tundras, furtive and fleet, seemed wholly to have gone away, and Sam Moreland, the wistful, sweet little boy of the *Sock-Eye* had come again. This was not brought about merely by his starving and his despair. When the big coat was about him, he had always returned in some degree to the child he had been. Such was its alchemy—to drive the wild from his heart and bring back the human—recalling his mother, her tenderness, her warmth and her love. He had crawled into it at the fall of every bleak, menacing night, as if he had come back into her arms. Now as this longer, darker, more fearful night dropped down, his return was more absolute than ever before.

Yet he wakened for another dawn, and lay a long time watching with hollow eyes through the entrance of his cavern. The day was bleak, cold and gray. The sun would not shine.

"Soon I shall die," he told himself, "and then maybe I can find her." So he smiled gravely and once more drifted to sleep.

He was visited by a most real and vivid dream. . . . His mother had come back at last, just a little way across the sand of the beach, and was waiting with outstretched arms. He went running toward her, and the sun came out, and the shadows fell away behind. He could not run fast enough. . . . He wakened with a start.

Bewildered, but with shining eyes, he got on his knees and looked out. The day was still gray and sunless, but no longer forsaken. In the middle distance down the beach two figures plodded toward him.

Neither was his mother. He knew this in one searching glance. He thought at first that they might be some of his wild companions revisiting him once more. But now his heart almost stopped beating, and his face turned stark white under his tan.

There was a familiarity about these figures that moved him to the depths. He remembered a dream-world which he had lost. These were not bear, to

forsake him on the shore; not caribou, to run fleetly away from him. Nor were they dream-people, to melt and dim and disappear in the breaking day. They were of the life he had known, far away and long ago.

They were two natives, a middle-aged squaw and her daughter, returning home after the summer fishing. For bears are not the only creatures whose migrations depend on the salmon runs.

They paused, staring, about a hundred yards from the boat. They had intended to make a detour just ahead, to avoid a place taboo to the Aleuts—the region of a wizard's caldron full of melted sky and haunted by a misty ghost—and plainly they had waited too long. Another ghost, taking the form of a child, came crawling from under a stranded boat.

It was coming toward them! It was running in their direction across the sand. The girl hid her face, then turned as if to run away. By none too great a margin the squaw held fast a moment more, fighting back the creepy terror which seemed about to conquer her.

Something about the little ghost's appearance—perhaps its torn clothes, perhaps its fumbling footsteps, eager yet queerly faltering—made her look with open and clear eyes. Presently her woman's heart told her the truth.

"It is only a child," she said in her own tongue. She grasped her daughter's hand. "A child—lost on the shore."

It was not a ghost, not a *tornac* of which the Eskimos told, but just a little castaway, stumbling from weakness. It was lost and forsaken—and it was running to her across the sands.

Never would this picture pass from her mind—the desolation beyond, the wraith of steam rising from the wizard's caldron, the child stumbling so eagerly toward her. Tanned though he was, this was a white child. His hair lay in damp curls. His eyes were fixed hungrily upon her face. He could hardly run fast enough.

She knelt on the sands and spread wide her arms. Oh, so wide they spread—and the tears lay upon her swarthy cheeks. Sobbing, the child went to her, and she folded him to her breast.

CHAPTER V.

THE two Indians lived far and far in the Black Hills, in a country of brushwood fuel and white water. Here they took Sam, carrying him patiently on their backs and in their hard but tender arms. They did not, however, carry his beloved fur coat with him. Because it lay in a forbidden place—the haunted region of the Medicine Pot—they did not approach the boat.

At last there was a *barabara* (turf house) where the winter could not come in. Here the boy met Breed Pete, the squaw's husband and therefore his foster-father. A darkened, squalid, cave-like place the hut was, yet within its close warm walls lived kindness; and a love, primitive and plain yet not unmixed with a singular adoration, was poured upon him without stint.

The squaw had no young children, and her love was instantly fierce, whole-souled and jealous; but Breed Pete's love was grave and wise, and he knew to what ends it must be directed. He realized that a great responsibility had been put upon him, and it can be said for this humble son of crossed breeds—this benighted Siwash and salmon-eater of the barrens—that he upheld it with stanchness splendid to see.

Even before Sam learned the Indian tongue, Pete used his broken English to impart the first vital teaching.

"You no Indian," he would say. "You white—white all over. You never forget that, no, never. You never forget white man's talk."

There was wisdom here far beyond Pete's normal gifts. Here in this outcast land the boy could all too easily forget his birthright of blood and language, and by growing up a native in habits and ideas never come into it again. This he must not do. He must keep to the tradition.

After Sam learned the harsh, guttural Aleut tongue and the Russian idioms that went with it, Pete had long talks with him on the subject.

"I also am part white," he was fond of saying. "My father was a white man, with skin like snow under his shirt, and he came in a great boat from far away. He was much too proud and fine to marry a squaw. He merely stayed with her—not for so long a time—but long enough for me. At last the boat took him away, as it will take you. Half white is my blood, my child, but—little one who looks at me so wisely—half white is not enough! You, my child, come of the conquerors—you will not forget? In time you must go back to your own people."

"Oh, not yet, not yet!" Olga, the squaw, would interpose.

Presently she would gather the boy in her arms, and rock him back and forth, gazing at his lips with most hungry eyes.

"What would you do, Petro—drive off the child before his milk-teeth are shed? He might fall into worse hands than ours. There is time enough for talk of him going back to his people. He is mine now, and I love him beyond my own, and his place is now against my breast."

But Pete's wisdom prevailed, and Sam never forgot. There were books to help him remember—procured by roundabout trading, and, with the man's meager help, read with the greatest difficulty. Pete also tried to help him recall his last name, but without result.

Part of the native life he liked, particularly the hunting and fishing, but other parts were not so good. When the ice-pack rimmed the coast, and when the winter gales harried the land, he liked the close warm darkness of the *barabara*, but it oppressed him like a barred cage in the tempered days of spring.

Were not the violets purple in the grass? Were not the leaves budding on the alders? Was not the running-time at hand—the salmon in the rivers and the foxes on the shore?

He liked to fill his belly with fried salmon, wocus-bread and seal-oil. The four thick walls were good at night. Still he had not forgotten the caribou racing over the barrens. The wind blew, and certain smells were fresh, and sometimes the sun shone. The last was almost more than he could stand.

One day, his first June in the hut, something snapped inside him, and he ran away. This was a short expedition, but after a while he took a longer one. From then on his goings and comings could not be kept track of even by the gulls, who see and talk of everything. Pete despaired—he considered that these periodical reversions to the wild were a shame to Sam's white blood. No doubt the Medicine Pot had bewitched him.

But it came about that Pete did not interfere with him beyond the first two years. Riding with his daughter in his *bidarka*, he struck a reef and no doubt went to the white man's heaven he had always dreamed of. What became of his daughter, only the seals and the sea-folk knew.

Olga, the squaw, was stricken and bewildered by the disaster, but it was no great wonder to Sam. He knew about death. He did not even question the justice of it. Might was right—and the sea had been mightier than Pete and his companion. The whole thing was absurdly simple.

He continued his expeditions. He had already learned all the hills and barrens immediately around the *barabara*, and now he went farther and stayed away longer. In the meantime he continued to read such white man's books as fell into his hands, and to learn the Indian tricks of trade. He had inherited his foster-father's rifle and was learning to shoot it; he could hurl the Eskimo dart which still found some favor with the more uncivilized Aleuts; he could build fire; he knew the nesting islands of the gulls; and of course he could help net, gaff and spear salmon.

Adventure followed him. When he was ten years old, a clear night of moon and stars found him some ten miles from his mother's fish-camp at the threshold of high mountains. Ravished by the mystery of beams and shadows, he had strayed into the farthest depths of the night. He had met a fox, which he had chased; a bear that had grunted at him and had seemed loath to leave the trail; and a caribou that had whisked and fled like a white ghost. No sleep could abide in him tonight—only a clear, fine-edged delight, an ecstasy of living. His blood seemed to tingle. His skin crept deliciously—not with horror as in certain nights of the long ago. Again he was the half-wild little pagan of the barrens.

Suddenly he saw an unfamiliar light—a faint spark in the soft, blue gloom. It was difficult to account for—so far back from the salmon-camps—and demanded the most careful investigation. He was not only intensely curious, but uneasy too; he felt that his playground had been invaded by an alien.

No grass-stems rustled, and no dead leaf crumpled under his moccasins. The light proved to be a dying fire, and beyond it was a strange thing. The *barabaras* of the invader were *white*. They came to a point, and were fastened with ropes. Two of them stood side by side, and men slept noisily within.

The boy hesitated, somewhat appalled by so much strangeness. He breathed silently, his eyes darting everywhere in the gloom. Yet this was just the kind of game he loved. He crept up to the door of the larger of the two white houses, only to find it a curtain of cloth.

Sam knew that he must see what kind of men were sleeping in these queer houses. This was no longer mere curiosity, but a deep feeling. Pronounced pricklings came and went all over his skin. Stealthily he drew aside the tent-flap, peered into the interior, and then, to see better, crept inside. He was careful to hold the curtain open behind him, feeling the fear of a trap which all of his wild brothers could understand perfectly. The firelight showed faintly through.

And now the breathless feeling went deeper and deeper until it reached and almost stopped his heart. A smarting began in his eyelids, and a hollowness in his belly. These were a different kind of people from any that he knew. They were not like Breed Pete, who had died—they were not Aleuts at all, and they were not Eskimos, a few of whom had married with the true Indians. In the ruddy light their faces looked so pale!

White men! The truth flashed over him. And then his heart *did* stop, a second later beginning to boom like a tom-tom.

No one had to tell him that he had guessed right. These were no more like the brown people than the great Chinook is like the dog salmon. They were so tall, they lay in such strange postures, their hair grew so short, their skins were so white! He could not turn his gaze from those white faces. They were aliens—strangers in Hopeless Land—but were they strangers to *him*?

It was not exactly conscious memory which now quickened in Sam's mind, yet it was a dim voice from the past. Long ago and far away he had seen men like this. It was like recalling a previous existence. Breed Pete's teaching had borne fruit. He was white, and so were they; all three were of one blood. These were his own people.

Before this wonder had time to sink home, the adventure itself once more commanded all his attention. The older of the two men stirred uneasily, muttered, and started to waken. Sam immediately froze. Make no motion—such is the hiding-rule of the wilderness. His shivering ceased, and never a muscle twitched.

But his magic did not seem to work tonight. He saw the sleeper start wide-awake, and his lids snap apart to full width as he stared. The boy knew that he could deceive no such gaze as this. Instantly, fleet as a shadow, he sprang back into the darkness.

The man flung up in his sleeping-bag, leaned forward, and peered into the now empty space before him. Quickly he snatched the flap aside, but only the shadows lay about the dying fire, and only a faint gleam came back through the opening.

"My God, Wilson, did you see that?" he cried. He turned in intense excitement to his companion, who was now waking. "Wilson, did you see what I saw?"

"What is it?" The younger man's voice was blurred with that half-terror that lurks at the edge of sleep, and which men know when wakened too suddenly.

"I've had a visitation. I saw him as plain as I see you. A boy—a boy about eleven years old was standing here by my bed——"

"Oh, you dreamed it!" The younger man crawled out of his bag and got on his feet. "I've often done that—dreamed so vividly that I'd swear it was true. How could a boy come way out in this wilderness?"

"I saw him, I tell you. I wasn't dreaming. A little brown boy—an Indian, I suppose—though he didn't look it. He ran out the door of the tent——"

Both men got up and slipped on their boots. There was that in the older man's tone which compelled belief. Wilson could no longer dismiss the experience as a vivid dream. "Well, there's nothing here," he pro-tested. "Maybe you saw a ghost. It's a queer form for one to take—but this is the devil-country. I believe in the things, Hillguard. A little brown boy, eh?"

They were now joined by their guides, Scandinavian fishermen from a cannery on one of the distant island-groups, who heard the story in profane disbelief.

"We're a day's march from the nearest native fish-camp," said one. "You dreamed it, Mr. Hillguard—or else you ban hittin' dat bottle——" He halted, staring, at an imprint of a child's moccasin in the warm gray ashes near the fire.

"Dreaming, was I!" Hillguard exclaimed. "What made this then? And there—look there!"

He pointed, and fifty yards beyond the fire they saw a small, still figure hovering in the moonlight.

Sam had not run far. He was shy as one of his wild brothers, breathless and tremulous, but no real fear was in him. These men meant him no harm. Not only his instincts but his intelligence told him that they were his own people. Now they were calling and beckoning to him, and their faces in the brightening fire were friendly and smiling. Slowly but steadily, on guard yet loath to show his timidity, he walked up to them.

"Don't startle him!" Hillguard warned the others. "He's like a wild little animal——"

He crouched down, and Sam came straight up to him. "How do you do," he said, in painstaking English. His voice trembled ever so slightly, and he put out a brown hand.

Hillguard took the hand and knew that here was a tale to tell at dinner parties for the remainder of his life. At present, however, he was not thinking of parties. His keen eyes were searching the boy's face and form, taking in every detail of his appearance with characteristic thoroughness.

“A little native boy, wandered from his home——” Wilson was saying. And a gleam of amusement flashed over his face. To his sophisticated mind there was something warmly humorous in this visitation in the dead of night.

“What’s your name?” Hillguard asked in a confiding voice.

“Sam,” was the answer.

“He certainly has a name of some significance in this end of the world,” Wilson commented with rising humor. “To make this really good, his last name ought to be Moreland——”

The child turned to him with a look that Wilson never forgot. It was a grave look, ineffably appealing, and reality departed from the scene.

“I *am* Sam Moreland,” the boy said simply. Of course he was—he had recognized the name in an instant. And now he repeated some words which were echoing faintly in his ear. “Sam Moreland—son of Sam Moreland.”

No one could tell what happened after that. The child was confused by the voices and more confused by the silence that dropped between. Even the guides had imagination enough to know that this scene was making history. Out of the bewilderment and the dream rang Wilson’s voice at last, bringing them all to their senses.

“Oh, Lord, this is too much! It can’t be—so that’s all there is to it.”

It was only a few minutes later that the two Americans stood side by side, talking in low tones, “But Sam Moreland *did* have a son. He was lost on the old *Sock-Eye*. If he is an Indian brat, how could he know it?”

“Moreland’s son *was* lost—don’t be absurd, Hillguard. You know how boys are—they’ll say what you put in their mouths. Sam Moreland is a name all through this end of the world—it isn’t surprising that the boy should hear of him and his lost son, and maybe even go so far as to imagine he *was* him. There’s nothing so strange about that—it was just his coming here in the dead of night—and the shine in his eyes, and the snaky way he moves—that’s knocked us off our mental pins. Maybe his father took Moreland’s name, just as the colored people took prominent names in the South. You can see the little devil is Indian all over——”

“That’s just what I don’t see. He doesn’t look Indian to me. He’s brown as a berry, but his hair’s wavy, and his nose is like a white boy’s——”

“Don’t you remember those girls at Squaw Harbor? One of them was a perfect blonde. Of course he’s a breed—that’s not uncommon at all. Say—your friend Moreland didn’t happen to be something of a philanderer, did he?”

“You know he wasn’t.”

"Of course. I was thinking through my hat. The whole thing is lunacy. I think a moment's questioning will likely clear the whole thing up."

So they questioned the boy, but his answers complicated, rather than simplified, the problem. Yes, his name was Sam Moreland, and such was his father's name. He had forgotten it until now. No, neither his mother nor his father were natives, although he lived with a native family. He himself had come up from the sea in a boat a long, long time before. Who was his real mother? He did not know—she was lost. His father was lost too.

"In a boat!" Hillguard commented. "Would you listen to that? Take off your parka, son. I want to look at your skin."

Inspection of Sam's skin under his shirt was without important consequences. It was darker than that of most white boys—a pleasant tan—but whether this was from alien blood or from the sunlight beating through his scanty summer garb, they could not tell. He talked to them shyly, though gravely and confiding; but they could not shake his story, and they decided that when the light came, they would go and talk to Olga.

In the morning Sam directed them to the fish-camp, and the squaw looked at them as might a cornered animal. They tried to be kind to her and win her confidence, but a great fear seemed to hang over her. Kris, one of the guides, had a native wife, and he was able to act as interpreter.

"Explain to her who we are, so she won't look so scared," Hillguard directed. "Tell her we were friends of Sam Moreland, and know members of his family, and that it was through the courtesy of his aunt, Miss Helen Moreland, the present owner of the great Moreland salmon interests, that we were able to make a big-game hunting expedition into this country. Tell her we don't intend to hurt her, and repeat to her what the boy told us."

After considerable parley to which the hunters listened with growing impatience, Kris translated the squaw's excited speech.

"She says dares no trut' in the boy's story, just as I t'ought," he told them triumphantly. "She says he's Breed Pete's boy."

"And where's Breed Pete?" Hillguard demanded.

"He's dead. He was kind of crazy, she tells me, and the boy is crazy too. She says he's her own boy, and says he likes to play games—likes to play he's a white boy—and pretend he came here in an old broken boat dat lies down on the beach a ways. She asks how *could* he come in a boat, yust a baby, when all the rest was dead."

"An intelligent observation," Wilson remarked. "I am afraid, my friend Hillguard, that our romance is being knocked into a cocked hat."

“She says his firs’ name is Sam. Where he picked up Moreland she ain’t any idea. And she seems pretty oxcited about somet’in’.”

Olga could speak a few words of English, and now she confronted Hillguard. “He my boy,” she said. “He no white boy—he my son. He tell big lie.”

“He got the name out of my mouth,” Wilson mused. “Well, old boy, are you satisfied?”

“Perfectly. Just the same, I’m not through.”

“Do you mean you don’t believe her?”

“Of course, I believe her. But, Wilson, the little half-breed has me going. I like him—by Jove, I do. I like the way he moves, and his voice when he speaks, and the sparkle in his eyes. I’d like to give this boy a decent chance in life—just to see what he could do for himself, and his squalid and degenerate people. Those childish lies are nothing against him—you ought to hear some that my daughter June tells me! All children make up stories, and the yarn he told us—I’ve heard the like before—only assures me that he has an uncommon imagination. And if he should turn out—but of course that’s nonsense. Sincerely, I think it would be a worthy charity to give this boy an education.”

Encouraged by his friend, Hillguard explained his plan through Kris. At the latter’s suggestion, she was to receive ten dollars a month for herself. As the guttural talk began they watched the squaw’s face, swarthy, dull, deeply wrinkled for all that she was not yet forty years of age. Her black eyes were small and sunken, and her dark lips drooped at the corners.

“I wish she’d show a trace of human expression,” Hillguard muttered to his friend. “I don’t believe she’s getting a word Kris is saying.”

But now an extraordinary thing happened. Perhaps it was really commonplace, yet both gentlemen were startled, as if by an unnatural manifestation. Ugly tears rolled from the sunken little eyes down the dark cheeks.

Wilson and Hillguard were not only uncomfortable, as always when women weep, but confused and perhaps a little awed. There was no apparent change in the woman’s expression—only the water-drops clinging on her cheeks. It was as if they had seen an animal break into tears.

Kris finished, and she brushed the tears away with a rough hand and faced the two gentlemen. Sam stood beside her, watching her with glittering eyes. A dark, impassive figure she was, somehow eternally significant, as her blunt, ugly hand clutched that of the boy.

“You want—send Sam to school?” she asked, hesitantly.

“Yes,” Hillguard told her with dignity and patience. “I want to give him a chance.”

“He learn be like white mans? Be rich, not poor like Indian?”

“He will have a chance, not only to help himself, but all his people.”

“You send him home—when salmon run?”

“She means in the summer,” Kris explained.

“Yes,” Hillguard assured her. “I will let him come back every summer, until he finishes school.”

“Then I let him go. Breed Pete—he dam’ fool—but maybe me dam’ fool too.” She pulled Sam forward, and thrust him into Hillguard’s hand. “You take him—and no forget send Olga ten dollar.”

CHAPTER VI.

SAM went to school in Unalaska, learning all that was demanded in the curriculum, and many things besides. In the summer he returned to the wild, free life of the Peninsula. While he was learning so much that was new and strange, he did not forget that which was old and tried—the sun on the barrens and the wind on the hills.

Among other things he gained a few very vague ideas about the White Man's God. This was an invisible God, it seemed—a God of love, far different from most of the hate-gods who rule in Hopeless Land, and He made the sun to shine! In His eyes and in the eyes of those who believed in Him, the rich were no better than the humble and the white man was no better than the Indian. This, Sam thought, was a very beautiful idea. In the great Christian world which lay to the south, no discrimination would be made against him because he was poor and because some question had been raised as to his race. Why, this was the very teaching of the Son of the White Man's God! The Bible said so in plain English. He need never be afraid of civilization, and the generous, tolerant simple-hearted people who composed it. The point reassured him immensely. It seemed that he had been mistaken in his impression that might was right and that to the victor belonged the spoils. He would certainly give up his old religion and become a Christian.

But ideas gained when one is seven years old are not disposed of so easily. They have a way of lurking in the back of the mind and popping up when least expected. When Sam sat in chapel he could sing "Rescue the Perishing" as well as any of the boys, and he could pray, simply and childishly, to a God of love and mercy. Yet in summer, when he stood alone on the windy barrens, when the high peaks flashed their signals one to another and when the sun broke from behind clouds, his old gods lived again.

As he grew older, he made it a point to gain all the information he could of the Moreland family. Thus he learned about his father's death in 1909, the sailing of the *Sock-Eye* immediately after with the bereaved family aboard, and of the present existence of a certain Leonard St. John, a distant cousin of his mother, just out of college. This young man was the apparent heir to the Moreland salmon canneries, and was already helping to manage them. The Hillguards were not related to the Morelands, but were old friends of the family, moving in the same circle in Seattle.

Sam grew to be a tall, spare youth, rather homely, but pleasant to look upon if only for his abundant health and vitality. His hair was still wavy, but quite dark now; his skin was darker than many half-breeds, and his eye had a shine that never belonged to cities. He was grave, as he used to be, but he had a flashing smile—and there was a watchfulness, a hovering alertness about him that his teachers could never understand.

At the end of the summer following his graduation from school, when he was about twenty years old, Hillguard invited him to Seattle for the first time. He sent money for the trip, but the youth sent it back, explaining that he had received help enough, and that he would come the following spring on his own money. He had had a most remarkable bit of luck: for the past three months he had worked on shares an all-but-abandoned mine on the Shumagin Islands, and out of a "pocket" he had taken, as his share, almost three thousand dollars in gold.

The following April he took one of the cannery boats from False Pass, a heroic journey in that he was heading toward a new world. There are no cities in Alaska, only towns, and he had seen but the smallest of these, so the lights of Seattle burst upon him with terrifying splendor. At first sight he was fearfully lonely—for his barrens and his peaks—and bitterly afraid.

Yet he must conquer fear. This was civilization! This was Christendom, where one man was brother to another, regardless of race or station. Some of the passengers looked at him, wondering why he was so pale. For all his alert look there was an innocence in his face which the children of cities grow out of quickly. There was a dark knowledge of things distant and strange, yet a puzzling simplicity.

When he got down on the dock a man in a stiff-brimmed cap stepped up to him. "Mr. Sam?"

The youth turned with a welcoming smile. "Yes, sir."

"I am Mr. Hillguard's chauffeur. He couldn't come down to meet you, because his daughter, Miss June, is having a few friends in for the evening. He told me to take you right up to the house."

Sam had seen a small automobile once in Unalaska, and had considered it a miracle, but he was quite unprepared for the huge limousine waiting at the dock. The chauffeur held the door open.

"I'll ride with you, on the front seat, if you don't mind," Sam told him cordially. "Then we can talk as we ride."

He did not know why the man smiled in such a knowing and superior way; he only knew that things were not as they seemed, and that he had already encountered one of the million complexities of civilization. He took

his seat beside the driver, but was painfully embarrassed, confused, and fearful of what was to come. The car sped up Queen Anne Hill, turned into a driveway, and halted under an arch beside the wide veranda of a stately home.

There were people on the porch, and they all paused in their talk to watch him. Sam had never imagined such splendid figures. The men were all in black and white, and now, for the first time, he was acutely conscious of his own appearance. He had been so proud of his clothes. The best merchant in Unga had supplied them. He wore a blue serge suit, a striped shirt and gay necktie. Now he felt that the people were looking at them—amused looks—and smiling at each other. The ladies were gorgeous, but there was no friendship in their smiles and no welcome in their bright eyes.

"Thank you for the ride," he told the chauffeur. Then, amid those half-smiles—more dreadful to his spirit than any savage enemy he had ever faced—he stepped out onto the porch.

A little gray man in a queer-cut coat walked out to meet him. Sam held out his hand. "Are you Mr. Hillguard?" he asked.

The little man did not smile, but one of the group on the porch laughed aloud. "No, I am the butler. Are you looking for Mr. Hillguard?"

"Yes, sir. It's been a long time since I saw him, and I've forgotten just what he looked like——"

The scene was not to end without a minor crisis. A young man—the one who had laughed aloud—stepped up and took command. Of all the figures his was the most splendid—tall, faultlessly garbed, his features distinctly handsome. He appeared rather older than most of the others—probably eight years older than Sam. Now his lips made a line under his trim mustache.

"Don't disturb Mr. Hillguard, William," this man directed the butler. "He's expecting a friend in the library. I'll tend to this man." Then to Sam, "What do you want?"

Sam looked at the man and saw the scorn in his face, and a wave of fierce heat moved slowly through him. It made him forget his confusion, and it recalled, in some queer way, his stand against a wolverine, long and long before. This was even a more terrible enemy. His fangs were not of porcelain and bone, but of contempt. Devil-Claws might destroy his body; this foe would torment his soul.

The man saw a look come over Sam which he had never seen before on a human countenance.

"Are you one of the family here?" Sam asked carefully.

"No. But I'm a friend here, and——"

“Then what do you mean by asking me what I want?” Sam leaned forward, and something that was born in the wilds showed itself in him. “Didn’t I hear you laugh at me a moment ago?”

It was to be that many and many a night to come this man would waken from his sleep to curse himself for the answer he made to the youth’s question. It was one of those answers that slip out before they can be stopped. It was wormwood to his pride that now, while Sam watched him, he disavowed his own act. He lied—in the presence of those whose admiration he craved—and they knew he lied.

“It wasn’t I who laughed at you,” he said. The others had all stopped smiling. “What—what’s your name?”

“I am Sam Moreland.”

Except for this answer, the other might have taken himself in hand again, and still had the better of the encounter. As it was, he could only stare. This was a name of all too great significance for him. He had pondered over it in lonely hours. He had heard the story of Hillguard’s foundling, but had not been prepared to meet him in the flesh.

“I am Leonard St. John,” he said. “You will find Mr. Hillguard in the library.”

For Sam, it was only a temporary victory. The world he had dreamed of was tumbling down about his head. As he hurried into the hall he slipped on a rug, all but fell, and as he straightened he saw that a little group of dancers had paused and were watching him with the same silent laughter he had met with on the porch. But he could not combat them now. The rage-fire in his heart had burned to ashes, leaving him cold, stricken, and defenseless. In the middle of the hall, a forlorn and bewildered figure, Sam was as lonely as on that lonely beach where he had been cast in childhood.

But in this moment of bitter wakening, the sunlight pierced the gloom. A girl came hurrying toward him through the little group of watching figures. He could not see her. He only looked at her, blinded by her. Her smile was no smile of scorn. It was the sun, blinding him by its sudden burst through clouds.

She was speaking to him, but he could not really hear her. She touched him, his arm and his hand, but he could not feel her, only be guided by her. She took him through the long room, amid faces that blankly stared, and into a study, lighted warmly as if by summer. Then she halted him and looked into his face.

“Don’t mind them, boy,” she told him. Then, as she saw how tall he was, “Don’t pay any attention to them, sir. What—what do you want?”

And now he saw her, his eyes looking far and clear. She was young, even younger than he, but in the same breath she was old as the race—she was eternal, she was immortal, she was strong with a strength he could not dream of. Oh, this was just the beginning! Just the beginning!

Her eyes were blue. Did he not know that blueness? Had he not glimpsed it, ineffably beautiful to his sight, between ragged patches of cloud overhead? Her hair was gold. Not yellow—gold, yet not hard like gold. Did he know that hue? Could he forget? His face flamed, as if it were lighted from without.

His lips moved, and he said a strange thing the full meaning of which she was not to know for a long, long time. Yet even now it was not without sense. Her woman's intuition—full grown already in this child of nineteen—told her what her intelligence could not guess.

"You are the Daughter of the Sun," he said, simply and solemnly.

Neither of them were ever fully to understand this hour. It was one of those miracles that drop from the sky. The words which came so brokenly upon their lips could not have been spoken at all in a cooler, saner time—in the bright morning that would follow this mystic night. The emotions and the dreams that the words falteringly expressed could not, in the ordinary course of events, have been experienced short of weeks of companionship. Yet tonight it all seemed as if it had been ordained. It was not strange at all, but simple, true and inevitable.

Sam had been overwrought by his first conflict with civilization—his emotional pitch was high, his imagination violently active. He had been oppressed, bewildered, broken, and the blonde girl had rescued him. She, on the other hand, had been profoundly touched with pity—the expression of her maternal instinct for a boy in need and in pain. Yet he was in a sense the aggressor, and what she said and felt was mostly the reflected warmth of his own fire. The boy of whom her father had told her may have seemed a romantic figure in her eyes, and perhaps she had builded on this meeting. . . . They were young, and tender of heart, and given to dreams. She wore a blue gown, pure as the sky. Her hair was golden like the sun. Her smile was welcoming and sweet. He had been standing alone, a childish figure, on a chill, forsaken shore. . . .

He stood confronting her now, and he could not breathe, and his heart had stopped dead still in his breast. Presently he rubbed his eyes with his hand, like a child waking from sleep.

"Are you real?" he asked blankly.

"Oh, yes!" The words broke from her lips almost like a sob. Then, humbly, "I'm just June——"

"June!" Presently the fulness of his smile, slow and grave and sweet, lighted his dusky face. "Of course, you would be—June." Then like a hushed wind whispering suddenly out of the sky, "I love you, June. I love you."

"Oh!" She uttered a long gasp, not of amazement, only of wonder. There can be no amazement at destiny. Then, from some habit-fixed part of her mind, rather than from her heart, "You mustn't say that! Oh, it isn't right for you to say that—to me——"

"It's so." He spoke very quietly, and his eyes never left hers. "Why shouldn't I tell you, when it's true? Have I done wrong?"

"No wrong! But it couldn't be true. We've just met——"

"Maybe you've just met me, but I've known you *always*." His words gathered fire. Some poetic part of him was sweeping into dominance, yet the unadorned truth still spoke in his somber, level gaze. "I've known you since the world began. Why, you were with me all those months on the shore. You kissed me while I was lying asleep, on the sand. . . . It all comes back to me now. Let me tell you, before it goes away—before I forget again. . . . I used to stretch my arms to you. . . . Then every summer you'd come back, out of the south, and I'd meet you on the hills. You'd come out of the cold clouds. . . . June, June!"

"I don't understand." Yet she did, in her heart, because tears dimmed her eyes.

"You are crying. Don't cry, June. You must always smile—like you did in Hopeless Land."

She shook her head. "It didn't ever happen. We—you just dreamed it ——"

"We?" His eyes glittered.

"Maybe I dreamed it too. Oh, I don't know—we're both dreaming now. This can't be true. I've just met you—you're a stranger. Just the same, it seems I *did* play with you—that we were together a long time, in some place a long, long way off. . . . But it isn't so, Sam. We're just a boy and a girl, and this is our first meeting."

"How did you know my name was Sam?"

"I know who you are. You are the boy who came to see father, from Alaska. We mustn't talk this way any more." She seemed frightened.

“The memories may never come again, and then I’ll be afraid to tell you. You aren’t angry with me for telling you now?”

“I can’t be angry. But—father will come in a minute. Oh, I don’t understand——”

“I don’t understand, either—only that a miracle has happened. I know that I’ve found you, without ever looking for you. I know that it matters more than anything; and though in the morning I’ll wonder that I ever told you, the truth will remain just the same. It won’t ever change. It isn’t something to come, and go away—— I told you this tonight because I couldn’t hold it back, and because I’ve waited all my life—and maybe more lives than one—for this chance to tell you. Maybe it was just your spirit that I played with on the beach . . . that used to come and comfort me, just as you comforted me a few minutes ago. . . . In any case, I know you better than any of your friends know you.

“But I promise not to tell you of this again until I feel sure you want me to. We are not in my world now, but in yours.”

She nodded, and smiled wanly, and he knew she was immeasurably relieved. “That is a bargain,” she told him. “And I want you to know this ——”

“Yes?”

“That I believe in you. I believe you are Sam Moreland, just as you say you are.”

“If you believe this, I don’t care what the world thinks.”

“I want you to care. I want you to win. And Sam—I don’t want you to be sorry for anything you told me—on my account.”

Her smile was gentle and childish, and it cleared up everything. “I can’t thank you,” he told her.

“It will be just a secret between us two.” She gave him her hand in a gesture of understanding, and very simply and gravely, he pressed it to his lips. For an instant she let it linger in his. Into her cheeks stole a lovely color, comparable only to some of those hues of dawn that Sam had seen in a far-off land, beside a forsaken sea.

CHAPTER VII.

WHEN HILLGUARD came into the room, Sam and June were talking shyly and impersonally, like any boy and girl who had just met. However, the lips of the tall, brown youth were trembling, and his eyes glowed as if bright fires within them had just burned down.

June looked up with a bright smile. “Sam has just been telling me some very interesting things about himself—and Alaska. I’m sure we are going to enjoy his visit.”

Hillguard’s face lit up with one of his rare smiles. “Evidently—considering you are at the first-name stage already.” Kindly and hospitably he turned to Sam, taking his hand. “Take a chair, Sam. June dear, we’re going to have a little chat. Won’t your friends miss you?”

“I’d rather stay and hear you talk—unless—unless it is going to be business,” the girl replied, rather eagerly. “My friends can get along very nicely.”

“It is going to be business, but you can stay if you want to. I have this young man’s future to look into. Now, Sam—tell me about your journey down here—what you have done—and everything.”

But the youth had experienced too greatly tonight to be free with words. He was rarely talkative; his eyes and his face now spoke more than his lips. It was quite a little while before he and Hillguard actually got down to business.

“Now in regard to the use of the name, Sam Moreland,” Hillguard ventured at last. Meanwhile he watched the boy’s reactions with quiet, speculative eyes. A fine type was Stanley Hillguard—a man about fifty, now—finely bred, strong, well-groomed, and instantly recognized for what he was by clean-cut features and friendly, imaginative eyes.

“It isn’t using a name,” Sam told him uneasily. “It *is* my name.”

“I know you think so. I feel sure—I know—you are honest about it in your heart. Just the same, it is possible for people to be mistaken about their names. I don’t have to tell you, Sam, that the use of this name, so well known in Seattle and in the North, will create a great deal of prejudice against you. People will say you are an impostor. Until you can prove that you *are* Sam Moreland—and I must admit that the evidence is all against you—I’d rather you didn’t use it.”

Sam looked and spoke as if he were uncomfortable, but his eyes lit up in a most peculiar way. “I would be much more of an impostor to take someone else’s name,” he argued. “It’s awfully hard to refuse anything you ask—considering how much I owe you—but maybe you don’t realize what this means to me. I am a white man. I have built everything on this. I just *can’t* change my name.”

“But how can I introduce you, in my house, as Sam Moreland?”

“You can’t, I suppose, as long as you believe I am somebody else. I can see that this is a barrier between us. But I can’t give it up. It is going to be my one purpose to establish my name, and live up to it, and I can’t renounce it in the very beginning. You have spent a great deal of money on me. More than that, you took an interest in me. I can pay back the money, part of it, anyway. I want to pay it back, in case you think this stand is disloyal to you. And I don’t want you to be sponsor for me any more until I can prove my claim.”

Hillguard studied his deft hands. “You must understand, Sam, I would be only too glad to have you prove your claim. The Morelands were very dear to me. If my old friend’s son could have survived that wreck of almost fifteen years ago, I can’t tell you what a joy it would be. You must understand that this is not always so—people are not always glad to have the dead come back. Things go on—things change—old places are filled—and sometimes they come ‘like ghosts to trouble joy.’ In this case, it would only be a delight. There is only one man who would hate to see you win—to him your reestablishment would be a definite misfortune.”

“Leonard St. John?” Sam interrupted.

“Yes. We had better be frank. He would fight your claim to the last ditch—and for good reasons, too. If you go in, he goes out. Tell me, Sam. What is the reward you are after—the money?”

“I suppose you would like me better if I told you the money had nothing to do with it.” The youth spoke slowly and thoughtfully. “However, it wouldn’t be so. My father built up a great business—he was an empire-builder, I guess. I feel that business belongs to me—because I am his son. But this isn’t near as important as the name. I haven’t any name, except that. I want to come into my own.”

“Well, let’s review briefly the evidence. Don’t you see, Sam, that there isn’t any—except your word? You haven’t anything to make a case. You couldn’t get a lawyer to take your claim, except in the hope of blackmailing the Moreland interests out of some money. If you came to court, what would

you have? Olga, the squaw, said you were her own son. That would appear conclusive to start with."

"Perhaps—with the right kind of influence—Olga could be persuaded to tell the truth."

"What if she did? Then you would have only her story to go on—no circumstantial evidence to support it. No judge would accept her testimony absolutely, simply because it might have material motives. However, you don't have to convince a court—all you have to do is prove your claim to the satisfaction of Miss Helen Moreland, your great-aunt, provided you are who you claim to be. She owns the property—if she accepts you, that is all there is to it. But I'll tell you frankly that this aristocratic old woman must have more than a squaw's word. Let's look further. You say you landed in a boat. As a reasonable man, can you readily believe that a child, seven years old, could survive a wreck in which everyone else was lost? Why didn't others land on the beach, too?"

"I don't know. . . . I came alone."

"Not very convincing, I am afraid, Sam, my boy. There must have been others in the boat. What became of them? You think you lived a long time on the beach, eating the stores in the life-boat. Why didn't you die of exposure?"

"There was a blanket—or something—in the boat. I know I went there for warmth. If I dig up the boat and find it, would that be proof?"

"Not of any real value. The squaw said that there was an old boat on the beach—very possibly it was one of the lifeboats from the *Sock-Eye*. She said you went there often to play, and your imagination did the rest. Even if there are articles in the boat belonging to people aboard the *Sock-Eye*—even to your own mother—it wouldn't be proof that you had anything to do with them, other than to play among them. Have you ever been back to the scene?"

"No. It is out of the way. And the place is taboo to the natives."

"I can't reconstruct any set of incidents that would account for your survival, and the others' death. There is only one thing in your favor really, Sam. That is—you look white."

"I am white."

"Well, you look it. I must admit that. You are dark—but the wind and the sun might have done that. Your features are distinctly Caucasian. Yet by the law of reversion to type the child of Breed Pete who was a quarter- or half-breed—his child by an Indian squaw—might be white as June here."

"I know that's so. But sometime—some way—I shall win."

"Well, I like your spirit. In the meantime, let's figure a little on your future. You spoke of having some money. Now it happens that I don't want any of the money back that I spent on you. I am hoping that you yourself will turn out a good investment. However, a little money might be particularly useful to you right now. I was going to lend you some, but it is far better that you use your own. How much have you, and what are you going to do with it?"

"I have almost three thousand dollars, a fortune for me. I was going to buy a trolling boat and troll for salmon in southeastern Alaska. I could make good money at it for a year or two."

Hillguard's eyes sparkled. "Salmon in the blood, eh?" was his amused comment. "By Jove, you would have, if you are Sam Moreland. Well, it will work out even better.

"I want you to buy your boat, but not for trolling for salmon. Three thousand dollars will buy a good thirty- or forty-foot motor-launch, won't it?"

"I could get a good one, second-hand, for that."

"Good. I have a little influence in Washington, and recently I have been talking with a friend of mine in the Biological Survey. He says there is an opening at present for a game and fish warden, in the Bristol Bay country. It pays a reasonable salary, but there is no appropriation at present for a boat, so the warden has to provide his own, and is permitted an expense account to run it. It is a young man's job, and since you know the North, I have persuaded my friend to give you a trial."

"There is nothing I would like better," Sam told him earnestly. "But you've done too much for me already."

"This will be a pleasure. We will put it through as soon as we can. There is a special advantage for you in this job, Sam."

He sat beaming upon the younger man, but presently he saw June leaning forward in deepest attention, whereupon his smile quickly faded. "The added inducement is that Miss Helen Moreland is going to spend the summer at Gull Point, one of her salmon canneries in Bristol Bay," Hillguard went on. "Your main location will be at Gull Point also, so you will have a chance to know her and talk your case over with her. We are getting up a party for a big summer in Alaska."

"You?" Sam asked innocently. He hoped that the mounting color in his cheeks would not show through.

"Yes. I am in need of a good rest—and a little more bear-hunting and fishing on the side. I have accepted Miss Moreland's invitation, seconded, I

am glad to say, by her manager, Leonard St. John. Leonard has persuaded me to bring June with me." He smiled at his daughter. "The young man seemed to be quite particular about that."

What did it matter? What if he *was* particular—and what if Hillguard *did* encourage Leonard's suit? June was coming North!

So one day it came about that June, Sam, Stanley Hillguard, Leonard St. John and Miss Helen Moreland sailed on the same ship for Bristol Bay. The ship was the *Virginia*, one of the Moreland properties, and behind her, at the end of a long tow, rode what looked like a disreputable grandson, a forty-foot power-launch which bore the modest name of *Queen*. But while she was not much to look at, Sam regarded her with more than a little pleasure. She was his own property, to use in connection with his new office as game and fish warden of the Bristol Bay district of Alaska.

"How did that half-breed get the appointment?" Leonard had demanded of Hillguard when he first heard the unwelcome news. "I do think it a bit thick that this Siwash—not even a white man—should be so situated that he could pry into the operations of my canneries." It was somehow significant that in moments of excitement, Leonard anticipated matters to some degree and referred to the Moreland interests as his own. "As it is, I am bound to be thrown with him, and he'll surely make all the trouble for me he can. Considering that he is the very impostor who is trying to supplant me, it will be doubly hard for me to deal with him."

"I don't know, Leonard, but I rather question your taste in calling my protégé a 'Siwash,' " Hillguard had answered gravely. "I understand this is a term of disrepute in the North. I helped him get the appointment, with an eye for his future, and so I could watch over him while I am Miss Moreland's guest at Gull Point this summer."

Leonard had apologized in that handsome way for which he was famed, and as far as Hillguard was concerned, no hard feelings were left. It would not do to antagonize the father of June. Besides, there was a certain amount of compensation. Under Hillguard's control, Sam would probably not make himself unduly officious in regard to the operation of the Moreland canneries. He was young, new to the game, and could be easily controlled.

It was on shipboard that Sam met Miss Moreland for the first time. He found her a thin little woman, with silvery hair and sharp black eyes, and terse, rapid speech that at first was rather disconcerting. She talked as she knitted, and knitted as she talked.

"So you are the young man who is going to prove himself my grandnephew," she remarked when Sam was presented. "My boy, I must say

that you have undertaken a difficult feat. I have mourned Sammy Moreland as dead for fifteen years, and I shall not consider that I have wasted all those tears until you give me something more than a pleasant smile and a word or two from that honest-sounding voice of yours. Some of my relations have been thrust on me, and I have had to take 'em, but I am hard to please when I am allowed to pick 'em." She eyed him frankly over her needles. "I will say that you have the Moreland forehead, if that counts for anything. A great deal of nonsense the Morelands always had in their foreheads—but a great deal else besides. Young man, I am glad to make your acquaintance, but you are not to call me 'Aunt Helen,' for a while at least."

"It is a pleasure to know you in any capacity," Sam replied, rather neatly. He had not read the "Letters of Lord Chesterfield" for nothing.

Sam looked much better now in modest clothes turned out by a Seattle tailor, and his knowledge of Alaska and particularly of its wild-life made him always an interesting figure at the dinner table. Hillguard found that his charge was surprisingly well educated. He had not only made the most of his schooling at Unalaska, but had read widely with something of that insatiable appetite for knowledge that had marked the generation gone. He had a natural courtesy which might—Miss Moreland conceded the point with caution and many reservations—have come from distinguished ancestry. . . . Yet palpably, this was nonsense. How could a child live when grown men had died?

It happened naturally that he saw a great deal of June. He never violated his agreement with her, so their companionship had every chance to progress. Although he possessed depths which were beyond her, she understood him better than anyone aboard. Two persons watched their growing friendship with misgivings—one of them, Hillguard. There is always an element of danger when a boy and a girl are thrown much together, and in this case, considering Sam's doubtful blood, there was a remote chance for actual tragedy. The only reason Hillguard was not seriously distressed was his conviction that June would soon marry Leonard. The two were "as good as engaged," a point which June herself had conceded. She was not likely to turn from that good-looking, distinguished figure for this dark stranger from the Wild.

Yet the other person who deplored their friendship was Leonard himself. He deplored everything, in fact, that fell to Sam's fortune. He had not forgotten the meeting on the veranda of the Hillguard home, and of course, from the nature of Sam's claim, they had been at odds from the first. Leonard usually showed tact, but once he was provoked into speaking of this matter to June.

"I believe in giving the devil his due," he began in his nice voice and generous way, "but I do feel we are all going a little bit strong on the new game warden. In the first place, I am not sure but that we made a mistake in tacitly inviting him to eat at our table. The races are kept apart rather strictly, even in Alaska."

"Sam says he is white," June answered mildly. "Isn't that rather an unusual claim to make, if it isn't so?"

"I suppose you understand what you are saying. You are as much as admitting that he is a rightful heir of the Morelands. You don't seem to care about what it would mean to me to have his claim recognized——"

"Why should it mean anything to you, Leonard? Surely you don't want something that *you* have no claim to—and that's how it would be if he proves to be Sam Moreland."

"It seems to me you are championing him pretty strongly. Until his claim is proven—and I know it will never be, because it is false—I believe in treating him like an Indian, not permitting him to eat at the same table with you and Miss Moreland."

"Does Miss Moreland object?"

"I haven't heard her say so. He is probably pulling the wool over her eyes too."

"Well, I don't object—so that doesn't leave much of a case, does it?"

Leonard's eyes began to look angry. "You're mighty cool about it, June. I'm going to be frank and tell you what I really think. I think you are making a big mistake to encourage this boy the way you have—walking with him on the deck, and talking with him. He is not your equal in any way. Counting out the fact that he comes from an inferior race, he hasn't had the opportunities to make him an equal of a girl like you. Anyone who puts up such an absurd claim as he does, is likely to descend to other things too. You don't know what risks you are taking to go around with him. I feel like ordering him to stay away from you."

June got up, then, and clasped her hands so he could not see that they were trembling. "I am going to be frank with you, too," she told him, her cheeks very pale and her eyes very bright. "You don't own me yet, Leonard. I am not married to you, and I'm not even engaged to you yet, and until I am, I shall choose my own friends."

Instantly he was apologizing to her. He knew he had stepped too far. It was quite a little while before they were back on their old footing.

The ship had sailed from Seattle on a day in early May, in order to reach Bristol Bay in time to get ready for the salmon runs. It had steamed out of

the sound and into the Inside Passage behind Vancouver Island. Almost at once, June thought, it dipped into the wilderness.

She had not dreamed that civilization could pass so quickly. Here were only its outposts—an occasional scanty town on the island shore. While these were busy waters compared with some Alaskan seas, other ships passed so rarely as to constitute an occasion. She began to see the spruce trees climbing down to the beach, and she saw the mountains gleam beyond the forest.

She was going North. The air told her so, the green of the islands, the silence of the night. She was a sensitive girl, keenly alert to all this beauty poured in abundance around her; and with Sam to help her, she began to behold the spirit that moved through it. Through his eyes she saw the Inside Passage as few have seen it—and among its crags and isles she saw him as she never had before.

At first she was simply amazed at his powers of vision. He caught and pointed out a thousand things that she missed: a distant waterfall which to the naked eyes showed as a fine thread against a far-away mountain range, but which through her binoculars became a thing of glory; a hidden lake in a hollow; a moonlit tide-rip, like burnished pools of silver; a deer that hovered in the greenwood while the boat steamed by. But soon, instead of watching the marvelous panorama, she began to watch him. In him she saw the North; he was its exponent.

As the towns became fewer, as the snow-fields dropped down ever nearer to the sea, a most peculiar manner came upon him. He seemed to be exalted. She thought that even his eyes looked different, brighter and more alert—and he always seemed to be watching, and listening. He got away from her a little now. He was far removed from the crushed and bewildered figure that she had met for the first time in her Seattle home. He seemed to be entering into his own.

She did not pity him so much now, and in her heart she was a little appalled by him. Could it be that Leonard was right about him, and he was of an inferior race which she must not trust too far? Yet while he was savage, he hardly seemed *Indian*. He was more like a wild creature than one of those stolid, dull-eyed people she had once seen on a reservation in her own state. But one night she had her first gleam of the truth—and something that was akin to pity went out to him more fully than before.

The sun was going down in flame and splendor. She watched the marvelous pageant and change quite oblivious to the man at her side. “Sublime, isn’t it?” she murmured at last. “It may be just phenomena of

clouds and light, but sometimes I think it is a sign of God. It is put there for those who love Him, to lift up their eyes and to exalt their hearts."

The tall figure at her side did not answer, and she glanced quickly at him. She knew now that he had not heard her. He was blind to all the world except that flaming glory in the western sky.

Out of his flushed face his eyes glittered noticeably. Whatever it was he saw, it had ravished him, and stilled his breath. She watched him in fascinated interest.

He seemed to remember her after a time, and turned slowly toward her. "The sun is shining in Hopeless Land," he said in a sober way.

"I—I don't understand."

"It is clear to the westward—not foggy and dismal as usual. There are just a few tattered clouds—just enough to give color to the sunset. The caribou are prancing tonight. . . . The old bears are wakening from their winter sleep. . . . I wish you could see the mountains, turned all pink——"

He spoke so slowly, in so strange a tone, that her deep interest became wonder. "Sam, tell me what this means to you?" she murmured at last. "I saw just a beautiful sunset. What did you see?"

He looked startled. "I saw—God!"

"Oh!" Then, as she searched his countenance; "Of course you mean just a manifestation of God's gifts. A gift of beauty to the world. I saw that too."

"I saw God," he repeated in a rapt tone. "I saw God himself."

For a moment she gazed almost dully at him, as she tried to understand. At last his words sunk home. She was a religious type, with a great deal of spirituality, and it was not because she was intolerant or bigoted that she was shocked. Not only the words shocked her, but the passion with which he spoke them, the glory in his eyes and the white flame on his cheeks.

"Don't you know that's heresy?" she demanded.

"I don't know—anything. I can only feel."

"Oh, has it been put on me to save your soul?"

This was an unusual speech for a girl of her generation, but it sounded no more strange to her than to him. They were both in earnest. There was much in June of which her friends and even her father had never guessed, and which only her mother, who had been a woman of profound religious instincts, could have understood.

"Is my soul lost, do you think?" Sam asked her gravely. "If it is, you are the only one who can save it."

"You are a pagan. Maybe that's a greater tragedy—not a sin, but a sorrow—than most people believe nowadays. Do you remember what you said to me—the first time we met? I understand it a great deal better than I ever did before."

" 'You are the Daughter of the Sun.' "

"Yes. Sam, what did you learn to believe when you were out there on the beach by yourself? Don't you know there is a God behind the sun? A God who makes the sun shine?"

"I know, there are other gods," he told her darkly. "There are gods of hate. There are gods of death—of terror—of destruction. The dark, the lightning, the volcano, the storm!" Then, with gathering fire, "The sun is my good god. He warmed me when I was cold. He lit up the mountains. He brought the salmon into the rivers."

"Oh, it is only a ball of flaming gas! You know that. You must have read it a hundred times."

"I've read it—but I forget it, in times like this."

"Have you ever heard about Jesus?"

Strange talk for children! Yet she was almost whispering, white-faced in her fervor. "They taught us about Him in school," he replied. "I guess I was too old when I went there—I already had my gods. I remember about the manger and the King who rose out of the common people, and the Cross and the Resurrection. He died to save us from our sins. What has that to do with the god of death in the lightning! With the god of fear in the darkness!"

"But these gods you speak of don't exist! They are just manifestations of nature, back of which there is only one God. Listen to me, Sam. They didn't teach you enough in school. Didn't they teach you what Jesus taught? It is His teachings that can appeal to your reasoning mind, not the story of His life, that can save you and bless you. He taught *love*. He taught the equality of man. He taught humility and mercy—and love thy neighbor as thyself. Oh, it was a beautiful, beautiful thing! He taught to give to the poor—to give everything to the poor—and not to sit in the seat of the scornful. He taught us to follow our hearts and not let anything stand in the way, and it is only those who are false to Him who teach vengeance and bigotry and hatred. These are the teachings you must believe and follow. They'll save you, Sam. If you believe these and follow these, nothing else can matter, and nothing can hurt you any more."

"I would like to believe them," he told her gently. "My gods are the gods of the Wild, and except when the sun shines, there is little solace in them—only fear and death. My gods teach that might makes right. And since I

haven't any might—since I am poor, with a cloud on my name, since I couldn't sit in the seat of the scornful even if I wanted to—these teachings of Jesus are just what I need. They must have been spoken just for men like me."

"By believing them and following them you can find happiness," the girl went on. "Your gods are false gods, Sam. They can never win for you. Might doesn't make right—it usually makes wrong. Only love can make right. There are no gods of fear and death."

"I'll try to believe, harder than you can imagine. . . . But tell me this, first. You believe it, don't you?"

"Of course——"

"And your father, he believes it? And Miss Moreland?"

"Yes. Of course they are both Christians."

"And practice it?" He spoke eagerly.

"As much as—is practical." Her tone fell. "Yes, they practice it very well."

He smiled gravely. "That is good news for me, June. Why? Because I am one of the unsecure. There are strong forces out against me—I feel there is trouble for me, up here. I am likely to have need of their mercy—and their generosity—and their Christianity."

CHAPTER VIII.

IN BRISTOL BAY SAM met a government inspector named Brunn, and gained for the first time some definite idea of the problems that faced him. There was trouble for him here, he had said—and Brunn's words seemed to bear out his prediction.

"I am sorry to tell you, Moreland, that the people you'll have to watch the closest are the people you'll be thrown with every day at Gull Point," Brunn informed him gravely. "Fortunately, you'll have no trouble with the Pacific American people, Bradford and his crowd. They obey the law in spirit as well as in fact, and they have vision enough to see that their interests are in the end the same as the government's—the preservation of the fish-runs. But it is their competitors that will be your main source of worry."

"You mean—the Moreland interests?"

"I'm sorry to say, I do. They have fallen into bad ways. Fifteen years ago, before Sam Moreland died, no one could find fault with the way his canneries were conducted. The salmon laws were not so strict then, but he made rules for himself which were even more efficient. He was a conservationist, and his principle was to let enough of the fish escape to their spawning-beds to keep up the supply. He didn't try to hog everything, and he was fair to the native population. Instead of losing out by these tactics, he profited by them. If he was your father, as you claim, you certainly have a right to be proud of him."

"I am proud of him," Sam replied—and his eyes told more than his words.

"The policy of the company has changed since his death, and particularly since Leonard St. John became the manager. It is my duty to be frank with you, regardless of your personal relations with St. John. He seems to have but one end in view—to clean up in a few years and the salmon industry be damned. You'll have to watch him about seasons, the location of his traps and seines, the percentage of his escapement, and, what is worse, about destroying fish."

Sam nodded. He had heard of such before. "Has he any new tricks?" he asked.

"The same old ones, only worked on a bigger scale. Out of his limit of five hundred thousand cases which the government allows as his combined

pack, about seventy per cent should be reds, the high-priced variety. That's the way the runs average throughout his waters. Last year his pack was eighty per cent reds—which meant an extra dividend to the stock owners. This is a discrepancy of fifty thousand cases—a half-million fish. In other words, fifteen scowloads of fish of the cheap varieties—which he didn't want to pack because he knew he could fill his limit with reds—were thrown away, ditched, allowed to rot, and wasted by his trusted employees and assistant managers. Think of wasting that much food that belongs to the people. Of course when the runs are destroyed, the Indians can starve.

"Moreland, it's your duty to protect the game, as well as the fish, in this part of Alaska. And that means you've got a tougher problem. Have you ever heard about sea-otter?"

"I've heard about them all my life," Sam told him. "I've seen 'em—playing in the kelp."

"You know, then, that the rookeries of sea-otter were almost wiped out fifty years ago. Alaskan history is written around the sea-otter—the Russians came here first to hunt them and to sell their precious skins in China. When they sold the territory to us, the creatures were almost extinct, and almost too late, as usual, our government passed stringent laws to protect them. No sea-otters were to be killed—to have a skin in your possession meant an enormous fine and jail sentence. As a result of these laws, the sea-otter have begun slowly to come back. It was a slow business, but they were making it—up until last year."

He paused, and Sam could see that this was no light matter to Brunn. The latter was one of those nature-lovers in whom lies the hope of the nation's wild-life.

"Somebody's been killing them?" asked Sam.

"Somebody has—and he's growing rich at it. Moreland, did you know that sea-otter skins sell for fifteen hundred dollars apiece in London?"

"Everyone knows that. The most expensive fur in the world."

"The animals were doing especially well through the little bays and inlets of this coast," Brunn went on. "I suppose there were over a hundred altogether. In the last year at least fifty of that hundred have been killed.

"I'm not even going to hint at a name," Brunn told him. "In the first place, it is too serious a charge to make against a man unless you have at least some grounds for suspicion—and I have none. In the second place, I think you will have a better chance to solve the problem if you face it with an open mind. I might put you on the wrong track altogether. I only know this: that if you enforce the laws here—particularly if you protect that

scattered and dwindling band of sea-otter—Alaska will owe you a debt she can never pay."

This was the obligation. Brunn looked at the new warden, his eyes and his jaw, and was content. Sam went quietly to work at his investigations.

He had certain points in his favor. He was something of a hunter himself; he had abundant energy; he was fixed in no habits of living, but could work early and late and snatch sleep in between. Moreover, he was not just working for the government. He had a personal interest in every living thing that shared these wild coasts with him. They were his people.

Alaska was his country. He could not suffer to see it stripped and gutted. Its riches were for all time, not for a few grasping men who came and robbed and went away. He fought for the preservation of its wealth of flashing silver—its shining hordes that rushed to the rivers in June—as he would fight for his own.

It was not long before the natives found that they had a champion, a white man yet one of their own people. About the same time the poacher and the law-dodger began to hear unpleasant accounts of a new warden at Gull Point, a mere youth but Alaska-schooled, a gaunt, dark fellow who stayed with most aggravating energy upon their trail.

It was inevitable that he should clash with Leonard. He soon found that Brunn's charges were only too true; and by means of a surprise dash to the seining-grounds, he caught one of Leonard's men in the act of wasting fish. He did not arrest the man, who had simply acted under orders. He cruised back to Gull Point and accosted Leonard in his office.

"There will have to be a new policy in the Moreland canneries," Sam told him simply. "It seems to be up to you."

"So?" Leonard smiled pleasantly. "You speak like you owned the canneries. I suppose you think you will some day."

"That isn't the point, I'm afraid." It was a curious thing, but this wilderness brat could achieve a certain dignity at times. "I am not speaking as Sam Moreland. I am representing the Government of the United States. Its laws apply to the Moreland interests, as well as to everyone else.

"This violation I speak of is not a special case, I'm sorry to say," Sam went on. "It is the regular order of events throughout the Moreland canneries. I am obliged to tell you that there must be a change. The throwing away of fish, so that you can make your pack entirely of reds, the abuse of the escapement law and the violation of the preserves must stop today. I must ask you to send out the word tonight to your gang foremen that all fish laws are to be strictly kept hereafter."

Sam had a simple way of saying things, in a quiet voice and without the slightest fervor or melodrama, that made them particularly effective. He did not seem to realize that he was bearding a lion in his den—that he, a nobody, was "talking turkey" to no less a person than Leonard St. John. Leonard would not have taken cheerfully to such instruction no matter who delivered it, and coming from Sam, it was almost more than he could swallow. He did not want to show anger to this underling, but he had a hard time holding his smile. He did not answer at once, and then he leaned back in his chair.

"What would you do if I refused?"

"Arrest you."

"Arrest me, eh? Do you suppose any court would convict *me*?"

"I don't know. I would send you to Washington for trial, and I assure you that considerable evidence would be sent with you."

Leonard got up now—a tall and powerful figure of a man—and confronted Sam. "Look here! I've got a bit of advice for you. You're not so strongly situated that you can afford to antagonize me. You've given me some orders, and now I'm going to give you some—to let the Moreland properties strictly alone. You'll find that we've done about what we want to out here, and we're going to continue to do the same. We don't want any ten-dollar-a-week warden talking to us. If you have any eye for your future, you'll mind what I say. Now, good day."

He stared into Sam's eyes as he talked, but he did not succeed in looking him down. The younger man was fully aroused now, with that queer passion of battle which was one of his dominant characteristics, and was able to make a bold answer. "Good day. I've given you fair warning. Now I'll give you twenty-four hours to send out those orders."

He turned, leaving Leonard white with anger, but he himself was darkened with misgivings. He knew he had done right. Yet he knew that much he had heard was only too true: his position was none too secure; the Moreland interests were powerful; the officials might believe them before they believed him. It seemed he was always fighting against tremendous odds. His wars had begun in babyhood.

Should he press his charges? Should he maintain his stand? If he did so, he would antagonize the very people whose friendship he needed. Why should he not busy himself in other quarters, as some of his predecessors had done? What was this law, deep within him, that would not let him yield?

He had not heard the last of the affair. That night Stanley Hillguard sent word for him to come to the Lodge, a comfortable house overlooking the sea

where June and her father were Miss Moreland's guests. When both men were seated, in the firelit study, Hillguard came straight to business.

"I had a talk with Leonard this afternoon. He tells me you are trying to make trouble for him."

A need of justification overswept the youth. "I was simply trying to enforce the law that he's been breaking."

Hillguard looked grave. "You are making a rather serious charge, Sam. It may be that my young friend has inadvertently broken the law one time or another, but that is almost inevitable in the operations that he conducts. You weren't sent out here for petty violations of the letter of the law, and particularly you weren't appointed—I don't mean this to be harsh—to be a nuisance to big business. Sam, there is nothing more objectionable to business people than an officious petty official.

"Leonard tells me that you were impertinent to him this afternoon. He says that you came into his office and threatened him. I am sorry to hear it. I have known Leonard a long time and know him to be the soul of business honesty. He would not countenance any illegal fishing on the part of his men, and he would no more attempt to cheat the government than he would to cheat Miss Moreland."

Sam was pale, but now there appeared under his brows a peculiar light, fascinating to Hillguard and almost diverting his attention from the subject in hand. "What would you have me do?" he asked gravely.

"I'd have you devote your attentions where they are needed more. Catch some of those Indians that fish out of hours. Get those men who kill salmon for fox-food. Let legitimate business alone.

"Sam, I got you this position. Humble as it is, you'd never have had a chance at it but for me. You don't wonder, then, that I was acutely embarrassed when Leonard came to me today. It certainly is a queer way for you to show gratitude for the chance I have given you, to make trouble for my friends and hosts."

"No matter what your hosts do?"

"Of course, if there was actual and intentional violation of the spirit of the law, I'd expect you to do your duty, but such a thing is impossible on Leonard's part. Sam, you're a puzzle to me. Here you are, trying to win Miss Moreland's favor—claiming to be Sam Moreland's son—and then you deliberately antagonize her and her trusted manager."

"Has she heard about it?"

"Of course. Leonard must have told her."

Sam smiled bitterly. “Oh, I suppose there is no use going on! You got me the job—I suppose now you can take it away. Because I can’t do any differently than I did.”

“Do you mean that you’re going to maintain your stand? Even in spite of my wishes? Sam, don’t be foolish. You are a very young man—likely to get off on the wrong track. If you let the matter drop now——”

“I can’t let it drop. I know I’m a fool. I take everything too seriously—even a solemn oath that I took to the Government of the United States. I suppose oaths are not important any more, where big business is concerned. I guess my whole idea of life is wrong—all that I’ve gone on and dreamed of.

“It’s true that I want Miss Moreland’s favor. Do you think I’d antagonize her by taking this stand unless there was something more to it than an accident or a minor violation of the law? I tell you that those violations of Mr. St. John’s aren’t minor at all, but are striking right at the heart of the Alaska country.” He got up and began roaming about the room like a jungle creature. “You speak about Indians fishing out of hours. Of catching salmon for fox-food. These people don’t *waste* salmon. They don’t throw away the food of the people. And the fish they catch illegally in a month don’t equal those that St. John throws away in a day!”

Hillguard got up too. “Good Lord! Are you sure?”

“Of course I’m sure of it. Brunn was sure of it. It isn’t just this cannery, but the whole Moreland chain. All the way down the Peninsula—scowloads of salmon thrown away and wasted by St. John’s orders. The stripping of the streams! The gutting of the country!”

“Can you prove it?”

“I can make a good stab at it. I’ve already lined up a number of witnesses.” He paused and his hands shook. “And I’m going through with it, unless you get me fired first. I owe a great deal to you, and I’m sorry to cause you embarrassment. But I owe something to the people of Alaska—the Indians who picked me up on the beach, and loved me, and fed me, and whose very lives depend on the salmon runs.”

“Oh, the devil!” Hillguard was much disturbed, and now he too began to pace up and down the room. “Sometimes, Sam, I can almost believe that you’re Sam Moreland’s son. It would be just like Sam Moreland to take a stand like this in spite of hell and high water! I suppose you’ll make nothing but trouble for yourself, and for me——”

“That’s all. That’s the luck of it——”

“Well, by Jove, I can stand it, if I have to. Maybe trouble of that kind is more satisfaction than any possible material reward. . . . Well, my boy, it’s not for me to tell you what to do. You’ve grown up, and you’re holding down your job.”

“Do you mean that I’m free to go ahead!”

“Wait just a minute. I’m going to put this up to Miss Moreland.”

The old lady was called in, and the talk that followed was of some import to the west Alaska country. Of this talk, Miss Moreland contributed but a few words. Mostly she sat and knitted, and her fingers flew ever faster as Sam told his story. At last she looked up with old eyes that flashed and glittered.

“Well, young man, what do you want me to do?”

“I want you simply to write a note to Mr. St. John, telling him that it is your wish that all government regulations be strictly kept.”

The old lady turned to Hillguard. “Stanley, bring me my fountain pen, and some paper. And don’t stand there gaping like a ninny.”

“You mean——” Hillguard stuttered, and swallowed. “You mean you are going to do it? You believe him?”

“Of course I believe him. Don’t I know men well enough to tell when one is lying? Leonard lies to me all the time, and thinks he is getting away with it. I’ve had my suspicions of what was going on. I knew that my catch last year was eighty per cent reds, when seventy was all I had a right to expect. I hope I’m not a fool!”

The very thing she was not—a fool. She knew that the welfare of Alaska and of the Moreland interests were one and the same. She wrote the note, and after Sam had gone, she made a significant remark to Hillguard.

“You know, I wouldn’t blame June if she’d fall in love with that young whipper-snapper. Did you see his eyes shine? My goodness! I was reminded of my nephew—the one he’s pretending to be the son of. He went tearing around the room that same way, the night his father asked him to give up Isobel.”

CHAPTER IX.

AMONG SAM'S natural gifts that fitted him for his position of warden of Bristol Bay, not the least was his remarkable eye. Not an eye to threaten and command, nor to quell evil-doers, but simply an eye for seeing, clear and far. It was a brown eye, ordinarily not as quick as a gray, but it was sound to start with—a heritage from clean-living ancestors—and it was most superbly trained. Not for nothing had he lived his life among the deceptive lights and shadows of the Wild.

He missed very little of what was going on about him. Particularly he was quick at discerning movement—and in this he was like the wild creatures which had been his companions. Even the mice that lived in the moss could not stay hidden from him; he would catch the flick of their brown fur and trace them down and laugh at them in their nests among the grass-roots. He rarely missed the flitting shadow of the gull, and he translated into a living object what to an untrained observer would have seemed a mere speck of gray on a distant tundra. He soon located the playgrounds of the sea-otter and so he knew where to look for the hide-hunters who came to kill them.

His was a far-seeing eye, unaided, and he possessed spectacles that added ten times to his range—a powerful pair of binoculars. From time to time he took them with him to a certain ridge down the coast from the cannery, and studied very closely the waters of a small bay back of a craggy island.

One warm afternoon he got track of game. Three small objects moved on the blue water. To his naked eye they looked like ducks, swimming among the beds of kelp, and off to one side, at the mouth of the bay, floated a large object. He focused his glasses and the bay and its traffic leaped to his eyes.

The ducks became three small pulling-dories, each manned by a single oarsman. The larger object was a power-launch about the size of his own. And now he knew he was on a hot trail.

He knew every power-boat in the region—just as he knew most of its wild creatures—and he had no difficulty in recognizing it as the property of one Cap'n Vigten, a squaw-man of uncertain livelihood. This in itself was a startling thing. He opened his eyes, wondering if he were on the track of bigger game than he had ever dreamed of. It happened that he had seen

Vigten once or twice under what now seemed rather significant circumstances.

The three men in the dories were acting rather queerly. They seemed to be slowly closing toward one another. At ever decreasing intervals one of the men would throw a gun into the air and fire.

They did not seem to be aiming at anything in particular, but, like drunken cowboys, firing to make a noise. Yet this strange behavior was not without meaning to Sam. They were not merely celebrating. They were simply making certain what otherwise might be a sporty chance.

A sea-otter is a powerful diver, and when he is first startled by an enemy, he can stay under water for a considerable length of time. If he is frightened again the instant that he comes to the surface, he of course redives, but on this occasion he cannot stay under quite so long. The time shortens with each successive dive. In the meantime the hunters can close in on him. Soon his dives are of only a few seconds' duration, giving him no opportunity for under-water swimming, and he can be approached within a few feet. At this distance even an ordinary rifle-shot can be fairly certain of hitting him.

Sam waited until the three boats were close together, and one of the oarsmen had lifted something from the water. Then he descended the hill and returned to the dock at Gull Point.

He went into the cabin where he lived and sat down at the window. Peculiar conduct for a hunter! Except for a noticeable alertness of his gaze, one would have thought he had given up the chase. The truth was, he was doing what few hunters have wisdom and patience enough to do—lingering quietly while his game approached in range. He had learned this lesson long ago. If he had pursued his prey, it would either have escaped him utterly, or have been valueless when he caught it. He had staked everything on one theory—that the prize which the three gunners had taken would tonight be brought to some "fence"—perhaps to their very employer—at Gull Point.

It was a long wait. The lingering Alaskan day was all but gone when Cap'n Vigten's boat chugged innocently into the dock. Sam could make out the figures of three men, one of them carrying a fair-sized bundle under his arm. One of the three turned into the company store; the other two, including the bundle-carrier, walked down the dock, climbed a short distance up the hill, and made their way toward the more comfortable company bungalows.

Sam was not lingering now. Like a wolf he was stealthy, noiseless, taking advantage of every patch of shadow. He could have overtaken the

men and caught them, but this was not the game. He was never a fawn-killer. He wanted the big head, the leader of the band.

It is not surprising that the quietude with which he had sat by the window had now passed from his body. Sam always lived vividly—and his skin was thrilling all over. Fortunately, this did not mean that he was greatly afraid. Some fear was in him—as in all men faced with a crisis—but other feelings nullified it. Nor did it mean he would soon go to pieces, a useless bundle of twitching nerves. He had the passion and vitality of a wild thing, but the balance of a man. Something stayed cold inside of him, in spite of his fire.

It *was* big game. The two men entered the house of the company manager, Leonard St. John.

A great many things were made plain. Sam knew now by what means the fifty or more otter skins which had been taken the preceding year had been shipped out of the country and to England without confiscation. No warden would dare search the trunks of the heir of the Morelands. A distinguished man was he, of great place and power, and the humble official of some obscure British Columbia port passed his things with a bow and a nod. It was also plain how St. John, in the beginning a poor man, could hold his place in the richest circle of Seattle, drive expensive cars and entertain at pleasant parties. A man can do a good deal with the lion's share of fifty otter skins, bringing between a thousand and fifteen hundred dollars apiece in London.

Should Sam back down and go away? Just for one moment he contemplated this, to spare himself all the personal disaster that might rise from a second war with Leonard. . . . But Sam was a fool. An oath he had taken actually had some lingering meaning for him. The queer ways of the Morelands prevailed upon him; his must be a family of fools!

Why should he care about the sea-otter? They were just animals—shy beasts with marvelous coats of fur—and they would never put a penny in his pockets. What real difference did it make to him whether this breed was to the last puppy wiped from the face of the earth?

Yet he cared. It was somehow unimaginable that one of God's species should be utterly annihilated by its fellow creatures. It struck him like a monstrous blasphemy. He was not the typical sentimental nature-lover; he himself was a remorseless killer for food and profit. But he conceded certain rights to the living things that shared the coasts with him, and one of them was to perpetuate their kind. He was willing that they should take their chance with him, just as they took their chances with all their natural foes,

but he could not bear to think of any of them passing utterly from the face of the earth. They completed the round of nature: if one species was annihilated, a break was made in the circle. Might was right—so he had once believed—but might does not give the right to upset the plans of God!

He was a fool, but even a fool's creed must be followed to the death.

Lamplight winked as a door opened and closed. He was alone in the twilight.

He crept up to the threshold. No twig cracked under his feet. This was what he did best—a stalk in the dark—and human senses were not keen enough to discover him. He knew that intense excitement of the still-hunts of the beasts of prey, but this did not mean that his hand shook, or that he made noisy tremblings in his ambush. The only life apparent in him were the surface lights in his eyes.

He heard men walking beyond the threshold. "Did you bring it?" one of them said.

"Yeh——"

"Then lock the door."

Until this instant Sam had not been sure of his plan of attack. It had depended on the conduct of his quarry, never a certain thing. He had hoped for a chance to spy, and then, when the coast was clear, to go in and settle matters with the leader of the gang. Gentlemen do not look with favor upon spying, but it came naturally to Sam. The proposal to lock the door was an unlooked-for development. It could very easily defeat him entirely. The evidence so necessary to his case might be concealed where he could never find it.

Part of Sam's equipment was a revolver of fairly large caliber. He did not draw out the weapon, but he felt it and made sure that it was free to draw. He was not looking for serious trouble and did not expect it, but he knew that he was dealing with three purposeful men. Not just two—the two he had followed through the dark—but three. It was true that Cap'n Vigten and his companion would require watching more than their leader—they were of a type that descends quickly to violence through lack of other resource—but he would not care to stake his life on what the third would do.

One of the men was already walking toward the door, to lock it, so Sam turned the knob and went in.

The fact that struck him first was that there were not three men in the room, but only two. One of them was Cap'n Vigten, the other, Leonard St. John. Ordinarily this reduction in numbers would have pleased him—two are easier to handle than three—but now it was a serious setback.

Introducing an unknown quantity in what was otherwise a rather simple proposition, it upset all his calculations.

But no time remained to think about the matter. Leonard glanced up, started slightly, and then stood still, waiting. Vigten froze in the middle of the floor.

There ensued a second or two of rather heavy silence, during which Sam's eyes photographed the scene. A bright fire burned in the hearth at one side. The room was furnished by a comfort-loving man of good taste, but in Leonard's hand was that which for luxury and beauty eclipsed any article in the room: a lovely, dusky thing over which the firelight rippled in unimagined luster. It was the pelt of a sea-otter.

"Well?" Leonard queried at last. "What do you want?"

"I am afraid I want you," Sam told him.

Leonard's eyes glanced idly about the room. This was hardly in character—ordinarily he would have looked straight into Sam's eyes and contemptuously smiled. Again the latter sensed some unseen factor in the situation. He felt growing discomfort.

"Making a nuisance of yourself again, are you?" Leonard remarked at last. "I suppose now you are going to try to make me a lot of trouble, because of an otter that Captain Vigten picked up dead on the beach."

It seemed to Sam that Leonard was talking only out of some superficial and automatic corner of his brain. Such a defense as he had just offered did not do him justice; he was not one to rely on such a feeble story. He was undoubtedly thinking fast, and his mind was not on his words.

The sooner the affair was over, the better. "I'll take that skin," Sam told him.

"Let's see you take it!"

He looked up, almost smiling, and Sam's eye roved to Vigten. So far, the latter had not stirred out of his tracks.

"I demand it in the name of the United States," the warden told him with some formality. "If you refuse to give it to me, I am empowered to arrest you at once, and quell any resistance you make."

Leonard looked him over carefully. He marked the blanched cheeks and the watchful eyes, and his respect for Sam increased. Squaw-brat though he was, at least he was a worthy adversary, one with whom he could contend without injury to his pride. He no longer considered offering him a bribe.

"Don't you think you are sort of a fool, Moreland?" he asked coolly. This was the first time he had ever used this name to Sam. "You ought to

know by this time that a man like me doesn't need to fear the law. The law plays favorites—it shouldn't, but it does. Ask any old veteran in the service if this isn't true. You can't really do any good by pressing this charge against me. It won't help Alaska, and surely it won't help you."

"It *will* help Alaska," Sam told him stubbornly.

"How's that? The next time a gentleman wants an otter skin as a present for a young lady, he'll get it just the same. That's all I wanted this one for—a present—and no judge is going to give me more than a nominal fine, at the same time detesting you for making him the trouble of imposing it. I'll give up this skin, and you can do what you like with it, but if you have any savvy you'll drop this case."

"You didn't want it for a present for a young lady," Sam told him gravely.

"I lied, eh?"

"Yes. You wanted it to sell—just as you've sold about fifty others. You told me truth about one thing—that the law plays favorites. Just the same, the only hope is for minor officers like me to do what we've sworn to do—and maybe in time the law will have to pay attention. You're a rich man, and maybe you'll get off through the courts, but you won't get off from me if I see any way to stop you."

He paused, startled by the signs of growing excitement in the other's face. And now Leonard's still form sprang to life in a cat-like dart toward the fireplace.

His purpose was apparent—to burn the skin—and without looking behind, Sam sprang to intercept him. He took his first step before he realized that he was thereby moving directly between Vigten and Leonard, who had out-maneuvered him. As a strategist Leonard was of no mean order. The victim saw the plot just too late.

Vigten lunged and leaped upon his back. Leonard tossed the skin toward the fire and dived for his hips.

Up to this time Sam had never given his enemy credit for any particular facility of motion. He had known him to be an individual of character and purpose, but he had not known him as an athlete. Now he knew that a rugged and virile fighter lived under that well-kept exterior. Even if he had been inclined to draw his weapon, he could not have done so. Leonard's arms were about his thighs in an instant, and Vigten was hurling him backward.

There were two against one, which ordinarily means a short and uninteresting conflict. In this case there was an unusual factor: Sam was a

most terrible fighter himself.

Leonard had gone to many prize-fights. The flow of blood excited him, the matching of human muscle and skill. Now his brain paused in its work of directing his fists long enough to hold the thought that he had never seen a man in the ring who fought like Sam. He had never seen a better fighter, and he had never seen quite the tactics which he pursued.

This would not be an easy business. Vigten arrived at that conclusion the same time as his master. The sailor-man had seen some battles himself, a mutiny or two, and many a rough-and-tumble barroom brawl, and when liquor was in him, and there was a plump German wench to fight for, he could take care of a fair number of adversaries. He thought this would be a simple matter of the two of them confining Sam while the evidence of their law-breaking was destroyed. It had seemed part of the day's work. Suddenly it had turned into one of the most interesting combats that this big Norse had ever engaged in. It was just the kind of thing he loved. He would have liked to study Sam's methods, but the man kept him altogether too busy.

Sam had no science, in the usual sense, but he had a claw-and-fang ferocity, a whirling-dervish violence that made up for it. In his general attack he resembled the larger felines. His enemies were more like bears—savage, powerful, and systematic. They knew what to expect of most fighters. Sam was always doing the unexpected. He followed no known tactics, but had an ability to be here and there and everywhere at once.

The explanation lay simply in his wilderness heritage. He fought as the animals fought. In this instant he was an animal himself—far removed from most that was human.

Vigten and Leonard together were not much more than a match for him. It was not that he could equal their combined strength, but he was swifter, more desperately courageous, and more savage.

Wrenching muscles, writhing bodies, grappling arms. Raw and brutal the combat was, but even highly civilized Leonard was at heart primitive enough to enjoy it. Smacking flesh, blood, flailing arms, violent embraces. Leonard forgot his fine clothes, and recalled good days in France. Vigten recollected a rumpus in a geisha tea-house in Japan, only slightly better than this. Sam remembered nothing, consciously—but the wolf in his heart recalled all that it had learned of battle since the hills rose into mountains. Ferocious faces in and out of shadow; gasping throats; a table smashed to kindling; a gathering ecstasy of battle that made them almost friends. . . .

Suddenly it ended. A figure plunged through the door from an interior room, and a chair hummed in the air. Fortunately for Sam, he received the

main force of the blow on his shoulders and the upper part of his back, where he was best able to withstand it; but the fag-end of the blow got him in the head, and he wilted on the floor.

There had been three of them after all. . . . So silly of him to forget. . . . Always look for the unknown quantity, the missing *x* . . . Now they'd probably kill him, and throw his body into the sea. . . . Into the sea, that had first claim on him, that almost got him fifteen years ago. . . . Far under the waves he would never see the sun. . . . The sun, the sun!

Vigten stood straight, breathing hard, and looked at the newcomer with contempt. "You damn fool!" he said.

"Whatta you mean?" This was certainly the most surprising remark that "Tony" Giovini had ever heard. "I save-a you. You getta da kill." Tony gesticulated emphatically. "Why you calla me da damn fool!"

"You stopped one of the best fights I was ever in," Vigten told him. "You low dagos never will learn how to act around gentlemen."

The big sailor strode over to investigate Sam's condition and was genuinely relieved to find him not seriously hurt. A friendly scuffle is one thing; a killing, with a possible charge of murder put upon all three, is quite another. Besides, he had no personal rancor against Sam. The latter was a first-class man, and might have put them both down if that fool Giovini had stayed out of the room a few minutes more. . . . He was glad the warden was alive, because thus he might have an opportunity to take him on again.

Leonard had meanwhile put the otter skin in the fire, and it was now a charred strip of leather. To all appearances, the adventure was over. The evidence on which Sam could have based his case was destroyed.

So far, the course of things had been wholly cause and effect. Events had worked out much as expected. Even the intervention of Giovini was not a surprise. Now the forces of chance took a hand, the playful gods of the unforeseen.

In the general tumult and breakage of the fight, none of the three had heard a repeated knocking at the door. When one knocks and no one answers, it is a natural impulse to try the door, particularly if there have been violent sounds, followed by a silence, within. Without further warning, the door opened. Vigten had never got around to lock it.

June Hillguard stood on the threshold. In her hand was a plate of dessert which Miss Helen Moreland had sent down to her cousin with her compliments.

CHAPTER X.

LEONARD and Vigten had covered their amazement fairly well when Sam had entered. They had been cool and collected. It is not so easy to be cool immediately after a violent conflict, particularly when an unconscious man lies among the ruins of a table on the floor. Giovini, the third ally, was never cool under any circumstances. "*Dio mio!*" he cried—and at first this was the only sound in the room.

The three stood staring with blank and stupid faces. Only for a second or two did June return their stare. Her eye dropped to Sam, and the plate dropped from her hand. With a little cry of terror and woe, darkly significant to Leonard, she ran in and knelt at the victim's side.

Leonard came to life then. "Get out!" he ordered his two allies. "I'll explain to her."

Vigten and Giovini were glad enough to go. They pushed past her and out the open door. And now the only sound was the weeping of June.

Low and bitter were her sobs, yet Sam heard them in his half-trance. He forced himself to wakefulness. "I'm not hurt, June," he told her. "Just knocked out for a minute. . . . Don't cry."

But his head was warm and wet to her touch, and she dared not believe him yet. To prove his point he shook the sleep out of his eyes and sat up. Very slowly and gravely he smiled.

This was a moment of glory for him. He had lost the fight, and the otter-hunters had escaped him, but he was a man before he was a warden, and a boy before he was a man. The girl had wept for him! The tears lay on her cheeks, bright as dew; the cheeks themselves were white as the snows of Hopeless Land. And Leonard, who had won, knew for the time being at least that he had lost.

Instantly the girl returned the signal, because this was the code, and because, even at a time like this, she could not resist his smile. It always moved her to the most blissful mirth. But her smile died quickly as she saw his blood on the floor and the ruins of the table; and she was sober enough when she turned to Leonard.

"I rather wish you'd tell me what happened," were her words.

Her tone was bitter to his pride, but he dared not resent it openly. "I don't think you should accuse me till you know the facts." He paused just an

instant to test his story. His mind was quick, so he already knew his defense. Better still, he knew human nature—although he was taking a chance as far as Sam's testimony was concerned, he believed that he was betting on the right side.

"Those two men who just left are otter-hunters, and they brought a skin to sell me. I'll be frank about it—I had every intention of breaking the law by taking a sea-otter skin into my possession. What I was going to do with it, perhaps you can guess."

"I'm sorry. I'm not very good at guessing tonight."

"It was to be a present for you. It seems that Sam, in his official capacity, followed them here. He attempted to arrest them, and they tackled him. I was in a peculiar position. Out of loyalty to them I could not assist him to the extent of helping him arrest them, and of course I couldn't let them kill him, as they might have done. I helped him all I could under the circumstances, and finally stopped the fight."

"You helped me a lot, all right," Sam observed.

"I did. And I hope you are *sportsman* enough to admit it!"

They looked at each other. Leonard smiled, faintly—one had to admit that he possessed the schooling of a gentleman! After a moment Sam smiled too.

After all, this was a sporty proposition. One does not carry tales to women. Their smiles did not mean that they were friends—indeed they were enemies as never before, and could expect no mercy from each other—but they did recognize each other's manhood. There is a code which must be observed. And June, the woman, could not begin to understand.

"You can believe as much of that story as you like," Sam told her. "I am not going to dispute his word. June, can I walk home with you now?"

"Are you able to walk?"

"Perfectly—and it isn't very pleasant here, considering the state of the furniture. You give rough parties, Mr. St. John. Now I'll bid you good night."

"You'll come again, I hope." Sam got up, and as he was picking up his hat, his enemy stepped close to his side. "Promise you won't tell her."

"Under one condition," was the whispered answer. They confronted each other, but not in wrath now, and June regarded them with feminine speculation. "I won't tell her how you lied, if you promise to lay off the sea-otter."

"I give you my word. It happens to be good. I won't let any more be killed."

"It's a bargain." Then, aloud to June: "I'm sorry to tell you that the fur Mr. St. John was going to buy for you from the poachers was burned in the fire. I'm afraid you can't have another."

"You are a very strict warden," was the girl's reply. "But I think you must be a very good one."

"By Jove, I'm beginning to think so myself," Leonard told them, blandly smiling.

Half-way to the Lodge Sam and June said nothing at all. Their hearts were too full. This was a solemn hour.

But when they came to a little gully which they helped each other over, and when their hands touched, so vital and so warm, they began their first troubled efforts to understand.

"I'm glad it all happened," June murmured.

Sam's heart gave a great bound. "Why?"

"Because—because it has set me thinking. Is it a mistake to think, Sam? Would I be happier just to go on, and never worry—because in the end I suppose I'll do just what I was going to do. . . . It's too late to change, and there are such strong forces against me."

"Do you mean about Leonard?"

"Do you know what was going to happen tonight?" she went on somberly. "I was going definitely to engage myself to Leonard. Miss Moreland thought it would seem all godsent to me—a wonderful mystery—and didn't think I saw through her match-making. I did see through it. I was just pretending I didn't. She told me to take over that dish of dessert. I even saw her wink at father. Alone with Leonard, in front of his big fire, all my doubts would go away. . . . Then, this happened!"

"But you said—you were glad it did happen."

"I am tonight. I suppose I'll be sorry in the end. When there's a road to take, I suppose it's best not to worry about it—and never wonder whether there might be a happier road. . . . I had almost made up my mind that I loved him, Sam, and I was willing to walk into Miss Moreland's trap. And then I saw you, lying there with your blood on the floor."

They halted, and he seized her forearms gently in his hands, turning her so that she faced him. "Why do you tell me this, June, if there is no hope for me?"

"I—don't—know!" She looked startled. "I've always told you just what I felt. I can't help taking my worries to you; you are always so understanding—and so gentle. Tonight I almost hated Leonard, because I thought he had hurt you. . . . He stood there with his clothes all torn and spoiled, and he seemed to be spoiled too—and no longer splendid to me—just as if his clothes were all there was to him. As if the splendor I loved was just on the outside. . . . And you lay there, and I thought maybe you were dead!"

June gasped as she relived the horror. "You mattered more than he did, then," she continued, almost as if she were fighting it out in soliloquy. "In spite of all the long time he and I have known each other and have been thrown together, you seemed closer to me than he did, and he was like a stranger. . . . I think I must love him in my heart. I have been in his arms and had his kisses, and he seemed almost superhuman to me. It was different with you. For all your great strength, and your eyes, and all the rest that is so strange and wild in you, you always seemed like a child to me. . . . I needed him, and you needed me."

"Maybe that's it. Maybe you are just sorry for me . . . like you were that first night."

"Maybe. Tonight I wanted to pick you up in my arms, and hold you, and cry over you."

June was speaking from her heart, and all embarrassment between the two had passed away, and barriers of pride and fear and self-consciousness were destroyed. Under that cold northern moon she was almost an unearthly figure. Her old-gold hair was luminous, like a halo—as if she were a spirit that had come suddenly to earth on some celestial mission. Her eyes were brimming and starry. He could just glimpse her sweet, grave smile. She was so young, so virginal. He knew the immaculacy of her soul.

They walked on, blindly, and now they were almost at her door. "Don't hope for me, Sam," she told him sadly. "I wouldn't want you to do that—and then see your hopes fall. I mustn't hope for you, either. The forces are too strong against us. . . . But I can't pretend indifference to you any more. When I marry Leonard, it won't be because I have forgotten you. It will be in spite of you."

Now they stood at her door, and she gave him her hands. He kissed them, lingeringly and devotionally, and presently his eyes told her of his deeper need.

She shook her head. "You mustn't kiss my lips, Boy. I'd love to have you do it, but it might mean too much. It might be too hard to forget."

He started to turn away, but she drew him back. “I’d like to hear you say it,” she whispered, “just this one time more.”

“You want me to tell you again?”

“Yes—” She spoke softly, but with a childish eagerness. “I do want to hear it.”

He smiled sadly. “I love you, June,” he whispered. “I love you, my Daughter of the Sun.”

CHAPTER XI.

IN the middle of July, toward the end of the packing season, Leonard returned from a short trip which he said was one of inspection of his canneries, and shortly thereafter he called Hillguard to his office for an important conference. The two men met behind closed doors, and at first Leonard seemed in doubt how to begin the conversation.

It was a curious thing, but this worldly, self-confident, masterful man actually appeared embarrassed. Hillguard could hardly remember such a thing. His young friend—his son-in-law-to-be—was usually master of any situation in which he might find himself. The surprising result of his present uncertainty was that Hillguard warmed to him. He really liked him better for this sign of human frailty. He now realized that Leonard's self-confidence had been a bit trying at times. He had always admired him, boasted about him, and encouraged his visits, but now he was astonished to look back and discover that he had never entertained a positive liking for him. Now, when the young man seemed so ill-at-ease, Hillguard became his champion.

"It's about June," Leonard blurted at last. "I want your advice."

"You know it's yours for the asking," was Hillguard's encouraging reply. "Perhaps I can help you out. Things haven't been going so well lately?"

"That's just it. I feel I need a little encouragement. I didn't know where to go for it at first, but at last I got up the courage to come to you."

Now this was human—and therefore pleasant. The older man was off his guard at once. He smiled into Leonard's troubled face. "I'm glad you did come to me. I'll be frank with you, Leonard. I have always regarded you highly. I must tell you that since I shall have to lose her to someone, I was pleased to have you, and not some other young man, stand at the top of June's friends. I have always encouraged your suit."

"I appreciate that, sir, more than I can tell you. No one is worthy of June, but at the same time I am immeasurably proud that you favored me. That is why I was so bold as to invite you here today. I am in a rather peculiar position. I love June and want her to be my wife. Sometimes I think that she loves me. But lately—things haven't been going so well. I don't understand her, and to be frank, I don't want to continue annoying her with my attentions if they are not welcome to her. I don't mean just tolerable—I mean actually desirable. If she is never going to marry me, I want to leave the field, and try my best to get over it. But she won't be frank with me, and

tell me definitely. Sometimes I'm afraid that she's simply reluctant to hurt my feelings.

"It may be that you know her state of mind toward me better than I do. Sooner than continue to be a problem to her, I thought, perhaps, I could dare ask you to help me out . . . to advise me how to go on."

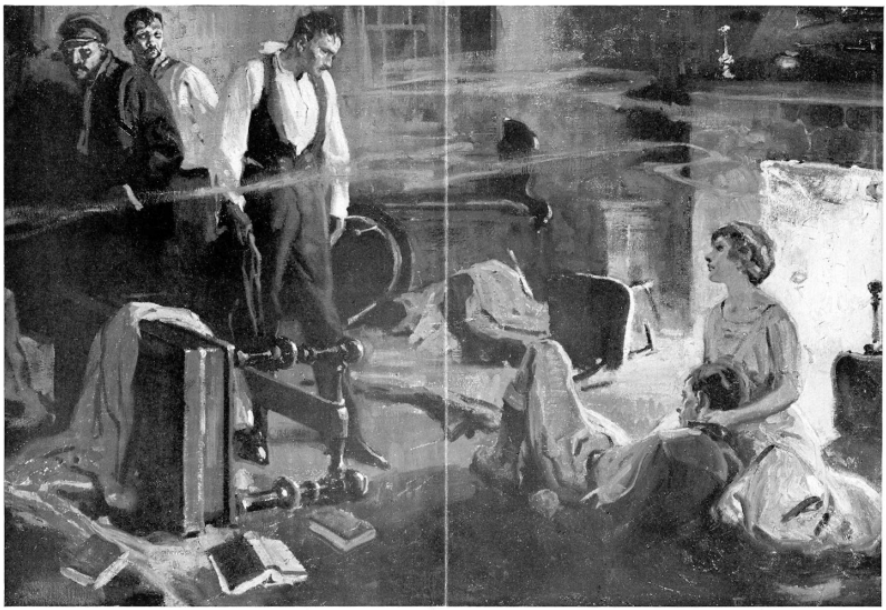
Hillguard's heart warmed. "My boy, I for one would be mighty disappointed to have you and June break up," he said frankly. "And I can't help but think you've taken a young girl's humors too seriously. I feel sure that she loves you. Girls are apt to waver at times, and mean nothing by it. Of course there has been nothing specific——?"

"I don't know. I know that she refused to set any date for our marriage. I must say this—sometimes I'm afraid she is interested in—another man."

Instantly they were both very grave. "I know whom you mean," Hillguard muttered.

"Have you noticed it yourself?"

"More than I care to. Just the same, Leonard, I wouldn't let it discourage you. You are thirty years old—I can talk to you as man to man. June is still a child—not quite twenty. Young girls are sometimes given to romantic notions that never amount to anything. It happens that Sam, with his mystery, and his strange story, might be a romantic figure to any girl. I know she is keenly interested in him, but I can't believe it is in the way you mean. It would be a painful thought to me that anything should ever come of it ____"



Leonard, who had won the fight, knew that he had also lost it
(*see page 138*)

"But how do you know it won't? As you say, June is in some ways just a child, but how do you know she won't let a romantic idea carry her away? I'm not a bit certain of it. To tell the truth, I'm mightily afraid of it—and I'll be frank and say that my fear isn't altogether selfish, either. My love for June is big enough to care about her welfare, even if she doesn't marry me. If she does discard me, it would be very bitter to have her take Sam. I could bear it, if she'd marry someone of her own class, but, Hillguard,—that boy is an Indian!"

"Whether he is an Indian or not, it would be a most unfortunate marriage."

"But surely you know he is one!"

"Oh, I have to believe he is—remembering what Olga told me—but just the same, I keep thinking of him as a white man. If all the evidence were not against it, I would think him a white man. I'll go further, Leonard—I haven't the horror of his Indian blood that I might have had once. If he has it, it hasn't damaged him—in many ways he's a splendid young fellow. You know that some of our country's greatest have Indian blood, and boast of it, too. It isn't like some of the other races. They are the first families!

"But this isn't the point. He is of a different world. I see no chance of his ever proving this claim of his—that he is Sam Moreland. Ignore the fact as

much as you like, our social lines in America are pretty strongly fixed, and unless he *is* Sam Moreland, this boy is an outsider. Moreover, marriage with him would create an enormous amount of talk. June would be apologizing for him—and trying to stand up for him—the remainder of her life. She would lose social prestige by marrying him, and she would never get away from the charge that she had married outside her own race. To me, it would be nothing less than disastrous—and what you tell me is mighty disconcerting news."

"I don't like to say this, but I wish they could be separated. That sounds cowardly, but at the same time I have more than a lover's interest in June. Girls' hearts do queer things, sometimes, and lead them into terrible mistakes—and this impostor could very easily be a plausible figure to a young girl. Whether she ever marries me or not, I wish that she could see the last of him."

"I wish I had never brought her here. I was so sure that nothing could come between you and June. And what can I do now? If I order her home, she'll see why in a minute, and that might bring about just what we are trying to prevent. The surest way to bring a young couple together is to separate them forcibly. He'd seem all the more romantic——"

"Exactly. It would be the worst mistake. The only safe way is for her to become disillusioned—or disgusted with him." Leonard's eyes gleamed; the conversation had gone just as he had directed it, and now he was ready to unfold his plan. He pretended to be struck with an idea. "Mr. Hillguard, I believe I know how it can be done."

The older man's glance quickened, but his guard was still lax. "Of course I want to give Sam a sporty chance——"

"I wouldn't think of taking advantage of him," Leonard remarked, rather coldly. "The idea that hit me is to show Sam up in his true colors, to test him out, and let her see what he really is—then she can decide whether or not she wants to marry him. In other words, to strip the false romance off of him."

"There could certainly be no wrong in presenting him in a true light. Just what do you mean?"

"It has struck me that I know a way. One of my men, Vigten, is driving his launch over to Walrus Rock tomorrow on some business regarding a trap-site. What if I should ask him to pick up Olga at her fish-camp and bring her back here?"

"I don't see yet——"

"She would be glad to come to see her son. It happens that I want to give her a job, anyway, on one of my sliming crews. We'd simply have her make her appearance when Sam and June are together."

"I begin to understand . . . But wouldn't that be just a little like conspiracy?"

"I don't see it, and my sense of honor is not usually blunt. Let's be sensible, Mr. Hillguard. If Sam saw her alone, he'd simply send her away before June could lay eyes on her. It's the contrast—or rather the similarity—between this half-breed and his mother that will win our point for us. It isn't taking advantage of a man to show him with his mother, is it?"

"We could ask Olga if this was her son," Hillguard mused. "What would she say?"

"She would say, 'Yes,' telling the truth as she has always done. June would hear her, and any question she might have, would be answered. She has heard only second-hand evidence so far, but this would be conclusive. She will not only know that Sam is an Indian, but she will know what it means to be an Indian! Have you seen Olga lately?"

"Not for about twelve years."

"You have seen other old Indian women. You know how they look. This squaw—this Olga—will be Sam's *mother*. Imagine it! Would June ever be able to look at him again without remembering her, or touch his hand without thinking about her? She will know that, if she marries Sam and has girl-children by him, in their old age they may look like Olga."

Hillguard got up, and stamped about the room. "Why, it's a satanic plan," he muttered. "But I won't say it isn't justified."

"Of course it is justified. It's fair, too. It's just as fair as throwing a young girl with some ineligible suitor so much and so often that she sees through him and gets tired of him. Let me tell you something else that I think would happen. I think he would not only show himself up as an Indian, but as a cad."

"You are prejudiced against him, Leonard."

"Why shouldn't I be? Just the same, I have an unmistakable feeling that you've wasted your kindness on him. I think that in some ways he would prove a pretty poor sport. And if there is one thing that June can't stand—and I guess she inherited that from you—it is a poor sport!

"Can't you picture how Sam will act when his mother appears suddenly before himself and June? He'll try to deny her first. He'll be much too good for her. He'll make her feel bad, and act contemptuous of her for the sake of appearances, and altogether show himself just as he is."

He waited only a second for Hillguard's answer. At last the older man came and confronted him. "By the Lord, I think it's a fair test!"

"Of course it is——"

"If it's tricky, the end justifies the means. I don't want her to marry Sam, Leonard, and I'll go a long way to prevent it. Tell the old squaw to come."

The afternoon of the last Sunday of the fishing season Sam spent at the Lodge. There was nothing out of the ordinary about this—he spent most of his Sunday afternoons at June's side, reading and playing records on the phonograph—but on this occasion Hillguard's attitude toward him was most extraordinary. For the first time since they had met, the older man seemed to avoid his eyes. He was anxious and uneasy, and from time to time he looked at his watch. He took pains, however, to make Sam more than usually welcome.

During the early part of the afternoon, June and he listened to a sacred concert. The girl was fond of church music, and under her influence, Sam responded to it quickly too. He heard "Rescue the Perishing," a favorite of his because it recalled his school days in Unalaska; he was lifted up by the promise of "There's a Land that is Fairer than Day," but better than any, he liked "The Ninety and Nine." The idea of the Shepherd going out in the night and the storm to search for his lost sheep touched him deeply. He himself knew the mountains, thunder-riven—the deep waters to be crossed —the rocky steep. And then:

> There rose a cry to the Gates of Heaven,
> "Rejoice, I have found my sheep!"

This song seemed to have personal meaning for him. He could picture the dangers of the trail that the Lord took, and besides—he had been lost on the mountains himself. And the invisible musicians sang as if with overflowing hearts a hallelujah of devotion and triumph.

"There is nothing more wonderful than this," Sam told her, in that exalted way of youth. They were very confiding together on the big divan. "Almost a whole world bowing before one God, and one alone—a God of tolerance, and love and mercy. A whole people accepting those teachings you told me about! June, I was doubtful at first. It seemed to me that even in your world might made right—that people didn't give to the poor, and didn't follow their hearts, and didn't love their neighbors as themselves, but followed vengeance and hatred, and sat in the 'seat of the scornful.' But I've pretty nearly conquered my doubts, June. When I hear music like this—in your house and at your side—I can forget all those gods of my childhood,

and believe as you believe—as your father believes—in a God of love and a creed of giving and mercy. . . . It's sublime, isn't it?"

"Yes. Most of us don't stop to think how sublime it is."

They started to put on "Give up All and Follow Him," but they did not begin to play it. There came an interruption.

Hillguard came into the room first. He was not proud of the business in which he was engaged, but once committed to it, he could do his part. "There's someone to see you, Sam," he began simply. "She came back with Vigten, and Leonard brought her up with him."

Miss Moreland came in next, and then Leonard. The former looked troubled, but the eyes of the latter had a shine that startled June. As soon as he got through the doorway he turned as if to present the person who walked behind him. And now all except this last comer stood stark and inert. It was like the entrance of players on a stage, but most of them knew now that the drama which impended was far beyond that which was written in the lines.

The last to come through the door was Olga. Humbled by these white faces, she paused just beyond the threshold.

June gasped. It was the first utterance anyone had made; had Leonard not been lifted above the plot by the drama itself, he might have rejoiced to hear it. It seemed to indicate that all he had anticipated would come true. As yet, Sam stood blankly gazing, while Olga returned his look with dull, lack-luster eyes.

The years had not been kind to the squaw. There is rarely great kindness in the North, never a gentleness such as women need, and her brands were many and plain. One does not follow the salmon in summer and keep lovely hands; one cannot mind the traps in the lash of winter's wind and still cherish youth. Many a white woman is still young at fifty, but Olga looked as old as the features of her landscape. An old, old crone she was—one who had fulfilled her simple destiny of child-bearing and was ripe for the dark, inglorious end to which all children of the wilderness must come at last.

Age may sometimes be beautiful. There was no palpable beauty in her. What there was, was an idea which must be seen only through the eyes of God. She was a representative of a degenerate people. Her skin was swarthy, not only because of its natural pigment, but from dirt. She was deeply, incredibly wrinkled. She was not good to see, nor to hear described. She was a woman of the Aleuts, a living soul with whom the North had worked its cruel will, and would soon throw away.

Was she beautiful in Sam's eyes? Could any memory or hope in him conceal the truth? His standards had changed, and he saw her as the rest did

—in terrible and blasphemous contrast with June. He knew the same wonder which now stilled and humbled Hillguard—that these were both women, both the seat of living, immortal souls, both the daughters of Eve. . . . But men are bound not only to beauty. Men will sometimes fight, and give up all, for one whom the gods despise. Would Sam disavow her? Would he deny her thrice, and send her to the cross of ingratitude?

At last her sunken eyes slowly brightened. "Sam——"

Now was the time for him to play the cad. Now was the moment of trial. She was calling him—she eyed him as a whipped dog eyes its master. Time was when she had towered above him, and had knelt to commune with him, but he was taller than she was now. Once she had been his refuge, but now all strength was in him. Would he remember his debt? Would he show shame of her, in order to uphold his own place?

June looked at him, but he did not feel her eyes. In her heart she was praying, but it was not only her will, her belief and trust in him, that throbbed like a wireless message in the air. There came also a voice from the past.

He said an Aleut word. It meant "mother." He smiled, wistfully and gravely.

Then with a dignity that humbled even Leonard, he walked to the old woman's side. He put his arms about her ill-clothed form. He kissed her swarthy cheek.

In his joy at seeing her he did not know that June was crying, her tears flowing unchecked and unconcealed. He did not hear the fragmentary conversation between her and Miss Moreland, when the two met five minutes afterward in Hillguard's study. "To think that she was almost the only mother he ever knew," the girl wept. She smiled through her bright tears. "It was the most beautiful thing I ever saw."

Miss Moreland regarded her in annoyance. A woman of the world was she, not to be taken in by sentimental scenes. "You ever saw! It was the most beautiful thing *I* ever saw!" the stern old lady told her.

When they reentered the room, they found that the strain was over, and that Olga was not now a symbol of motherhood, but had resumed her place as the Aleut squaw. At present she was admiring the phonograph. "I got 'em," she was telling Sam.

"You have—what?"

"Olga got sing-box too."

Although out of the ordinary, this was not great news; yet Leonard responded to it in a most curious way. He appeared to stiffen, and for an

instant his pleasant smile was fixed and flattened on his lips. Olga glanced up, saw him, and a flicker of expression passed over her dull face and into her idol eyes. Then, out of a clear sky, "Sam, him my boy."

Hillguard stepped forward. The time had come to know with certainty the answer to a question that had troubled him long. "What's that, Olga?" he asked gravely.

"Him my boy," she repeated. "He kiss me."

Hillguard turned to Sam, who was standing at one side and regarding Olga in a rather confused way. "I hope you'll forgive me, Sam. This is a matter that concerns us all—all of us here. We might as well find out the truth of this thing now as well as later. I assure you, I feel that I have a right to know. Olga, what do you mean? You say he is your boy. Do you mean—your own son? Do you mean he was *born* to you?"

"Him *born* to me," the squaw repeated, nodding vigorously. "He my son. He no white boy. Him Pete's son—come out of Olga."

"Then what about this boat he tells us about? The boat—on the shore?"

"Boat? Boat, she come in from wreck. Sam, he go play there—often. Make up lie about white boy. Sam, him big liar."

Sam pushed forward. "Why do you say that, Olga?" he asked, sternly. "You know it isn't true. You know I am *not* your son. You know the day you found me on the beach. Why do you lie?"

"Olga no lie. Olga tell truth."

Sam towered above her, and tried to look into her eyes, and she returned his stare dully. "Who told you to tell that lie, Olga?"

"No one tell, Olga tell truth. You just want marry white girl. . . . Put tune on sing-box. Olga want to hear music."

Dully, as if in a dream, June obeyed. Perhaps she did so to conceal emotion that soon would prove too much for her. Then, as the music quieted her, she looked from one to the other—from the squaw to Sam. With clear eyes she compared them.

Perhaps it was by the keenness of her vision, perhaps by intuition, that she found the answer to the question that had evaded them all so long. It was the direct confutation of the squaw's testimony. It was not Sam who had lied, but Olga. His all but incredible tale was true. There was no tie of blood between this woman and this man.

June would never doubt him again. The barriers between herself and him might still be unsurmountable, but they were not barriers of race.

Not so with Hillguard. He looked at Olga, and nodded slowly, rather regretfully. The question was answered for him, too, and because his eyes were dulled from too long looking upon life, he could not see what June saw. He could only accept the lie.

"Well, that settles it," he told them all. "That ends the affair."

"It ends everything for me too, I guess," Sam answered. There were shadows startlingly black under his brows, in the blank pallor of his face.

"Not everything. I'll still help you—up here. It only means the end between you and June. White as you are inside, you must not dream of trying to marry a white woman."

As his voice died away, they all were startled to hear ringing, triumphant words from the mouth of the phonograph. "Give up all," an inspired chorus was singing. "Give up all, and follow Him!"

CHAPTER XII.

BY themselves in his study, Hillguard talked with Sam, and gently tried to make his position clear.

"It isn't that we have any horror of you, Sam," he explained. "We don't think of you as an inferior, but interracial marriages are always a mistake, and looked upon with disdain. If I were the only one concerned, I could imagine you as a member of my own family without any great difficulty, but I must regard what the world thinks. Most of all, I have to think of June.

"It might be that if you continue to be thrown with her, she would fall in love with you, and want to marry you. If she didn't go through with it, she would suffer keenly—June is a type to take her love-affairs seriously. If she did marry you, she would spend the rest of her life explaining it—or else suffering silently from the contempt of her friends."

Sam leaned forward, and his gaze was so still, his look so free, that the older man was startled.

"Mr. Hillguard—I understand what the world might think. What do you think yourself?"

"What do you mean?"

"Isn't that the only thing that matters, what you and June think? Do you believe I am a half-breed?"

This straight-out question seemed to embarrass Hillguard. "The evidence is all too plain," he replied regretfully.

"I wish you'd tell me what you really think, yourself, not what the evidence shows. But you don't have to tell me, because I know."

"You seem rather sure of yourself this afternoon, Sam." Yet his cool tone belied the spark of excitement in his eyes. "What is it that you think you know?"

"You know I am a white man. All the evidence in the world can't knock out your instincts. Do you suppose I could have worked with white men out here, and succeeded with them, if they hadn't recognized in their hearts the truth of my claim? Miss Moreland knows I am white too; she feels it whether she admits it or not. I am sensitive enough to tell that. And that isn't all."

"What else do you know about us that we don't know ourselves?" Hillguard asked rather grimly.

"You both know—in your hearts—that I am Sam Moreland's son."

Hillguard would have liked to laugh, a harsh, forced laugh, but some respect beyond his good manners kept him from doing so. He studied Sam carefully.

"If we know that, why don't we admit it? Do you mean that we are trying to keep you from your inheritance?"

"I suppose you won't admit it because of what people will say."

"People have to pay attention to what other people say these days." He sat a long time in silence. "You've set me thinking, Sam," he admitted gently at last. "Perhaps, in my heart, I *do* feel that you are white—white all over. Even if your mother was a squaw, you are white. But I won't admit that you are Sam Moreland's son. Whatever feelings I might have in that direction are smothered by the evidence against you. I do admit that you are somehow a convincing figure. . . . But Sam, all this doesn't make any difference."

"You mean that you are going to believe the evidence, instead of your own heart?" Sam asked bitterly.

"Hearts can't enter in much. If they did, we might do all kinds of foolish things. I am going to accept the evidence, as any reasoning man must, regardless of any personal feelings toward it. Regardless of any personal feelings toward you, I am going to act on my best judgment. Olga's testimony closed the case."

"Guilty!" Sam muttered.

Hillguard went on as if he had not heard. "I'm still going to help you all I can, but our relationship must be somewhat different in the future. It is apparent to all of us that you have been trying to win my daughter June. This cannot go on. Hereafter your attitude toward her must be as—as——"

"An inferior," the other interposed.

"As one of a different race. I mean, you must knock out all personal relationships, otherwise I shall have to prevent her seeing you at all. I don't wish to be harsh. Sam—I simply have to safeguard June's happiness. Your own happiness would suffer too, if I let this thing go on.

"She will be leaving for Seattle in a week or two more. And—and—I should advise that you make up your mind to live your life in Alaska."

"Out here? Or anywhere in Alaska? You know, there are places farther east where life is good, and the country pleasant——" Sam was pale, and his bony hands hung listless.

"This is the country where you will feel most at home. However, suit yourself about the part of Alaska you want to live in. If I were you, I'd give up any thought of social contacts with the whites. You can deal with them in business, and have their friendship and respect, but in other ways I would advise you to accept the race in which life has placed you."

Sam looked up with failing hope. "This is final—about June?"

"Yes, Sam. It is all final. . . . I am sorry."

"Well, it isn't final for me."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that I do not accept your verdict." Sam's eyes flashed. "I'll appeal to a higher court. I'm not going to accept the lot of a half-breed. I'm going to go on fighting to prove my claim. I'm going to try to win June."

Hillguard looked grave. "Regardless of her happiness, I suppose," he remarked bitterly.

"If I win her love, I'm not afraid for her happiness. If she loved me, she wouldn't care what the world thinks."

"Then this is a declaration of war between us."

"I hope not. I'm against the wall—fighting for my rights."

"Perhaps this is my retribution for lending a helping hand—for lifting you out of the dirt and giving you a chance in life."

"You've lifted me out, and now you can't put me back. I'm sorry if this looks like ingratitude. At least I can pay you, with interest, all the money you spent on me—in a very short time. That will be my first obligation."

"I don't want the money back."

"I'm going to pay it, just the same. You said that this is a declaration of war, and in a sense it is, because I'm going to conflict with your wishes. Therefore I want to be free of my debts to you. Of course, some of them—your interest in me, and your kindness—never can be paid, but I want to pay what I can, so I can be free to go ahead."

"Well, that's honorable, anyway. . . . Perhaps I don't blame you, in a way, for your stand—but I'm going to fight you just the same. I release you from all obligations to me."

They nodded gravely to each other. Each felt growing respect for his adversary.

"But my advice is still to give up, and accept your fate," Hillguard went on. "You can't win, Sam. The world will always be against you. You can't win June, either. All you'll do is add to your own misery."

"You mean—that she'll obey you?"

"Of course. She's only a child yet, but she knows the way the world thinks."

"I won't believe you." Hillguard was surprised to see him shiver in his chair. "She's different from the rest. I'm going to see her now, and ask her whether I am to give her up, once and for all. If she wants me to stay, she will tell me so—regardless of what the world thinks."

"Why do you think she is different from me?"

"Because—she is a Christian."

In the little study that overlooked the sea he found the girl, gazing disconsolately out the window. He sat beside her and told her all that her father had said.

"Am I free to talk to you, June?" he asked at last. "There mustn't be any misunderstandings between us today. May I tell you everything?"

"You can tell me anything you like. . . . I'm afraid that it won't make any difference."

She spoke softly, not looking straight at him, and the shine of the sun was gone from her blue eyes.

"If you should learn to love me, nothing could make any difference to you," he said. "I told him you would let nothing come between us, in that case. That you would follow your heart. I told him that I wasn't afraid on your account."

He paused, as if waiting for her confirmation. She dared not look into his eyes. The pause lengthened until it hurt. Presently he reached and seized her hands.

"Tell me, June," he begged. "I've had so much go back on me today, and I can't have the faith I ought to have. I want to hear you bear me out. I was right, wasn't I, June? If you loved me—nothing could make any difference. You'd go ahead with me, just the same."

At last she looked up in dull misery. "I can't tell you," she breathed. "I—don't know."

"But you told me——" She felt his hands grow cold in hers. "You are not yourself, June. I know you better than you know yourself. I remember what you told me, the day we saw the sun go down. I know what your creed is."

"Oh, don't make it any harder for me." She seemed to rally a little, and presently she straightened. "Sam, I didn't tell you the truth. I guess I didn't tell the truth even that day on shipboard—and I didn't just now. I *do* know. I can't get away from it. . . . It's too much for me."

"I don't understand."

"Father told you the truth. Oh, we might as well face it now and get it over with. There's no use trying to fool ourselves." She spoke in grim tones. "Everything is over between you and me. I knew it would be when the squaw came today, and now it is."

"Then it's because you realize you couldn't ever learn to love me? If that's it, I don't blame you, June. I couldn't hold it against you for not loving me," he went on, in utter humility. "I don't see any reason why you should —it was just a prayer with me, just a dream."

"Maybe I could learn to love you." She caressed his hands. "Maybe I do already. . . . But I know the world, Sam. I'm afraid of it. It's too strong for me—convention, and society, and what people will say, and how everyone would feel. . . . I've worked it out with myself since Olga came. I—I couldn't bear the charge of marrying outside my race."

"You believe what Olga said?"

"No." She shook her head. "I believed you at first, and I believe you now."

"And in spite of your belief in me, you are going to send me away?"

"In spite of a whole lot more, Sam." She dropped his hands as if they were hurting her, and got up and looked out over the sea. "It's not just belief in you—it's knowledge. I *know*—and no evidence can make me think otherwise—that there is no barrier of race between us.

"Yet I am going to give you up in spite of what I know. I'm going to marry Leonard and be safe from the world, and all the cruel things it can say. But this isn't the worst, Sam. You ought to lose faith in me as I have lost it in myself—when I tell you the rest."

"Lose faith in you! I'd die, if I lost faith in you." He fumbled for words, but he was a boy still, and glibness had not come to him yet. "You are my whole life—beginning long ago, when we played together on the shore," he told her wistfully. "Do you remember——"

"Just as I would remember a dream. That's all it was, you know—a dream that never really happened. Sam, I'm giving you up in spite of my belief in you—and in spite——"

"Of your love for me?" He stood up, beside her, facing her. "Is that what you're trying to tell me?"

"I don't know. . . . I think so. I know that I want you more than I ever wanted anything—there must only be the truth between us now. When I saw you with Olga—the old Aleut squaw—I couldn't deny it any more.

“Let me go on, Sam, and tell you everything. I want to do that, anyway —for the sake of the creed you spoke of. I found out today what you meant to me. You’ve come into my life, and I couldn’t shut you out. As long as you are near, with your eyes—and your longing—and your groping for me, I can’t resist you. I can’t help loving you, no matter how hard I try.”

“But why should you try?”

“Because of the world! Because people say you are a half-breed. The judgment of the world is mightier than you dream.”

“It’s the judgment of Satan!” Sam told her in solemn tones. “It’s the judgment of Hell!”

She stared blankly, burned by the fire of this zealot from the wilds, profoundly shaken by his oath, but at last she caught up again the thread of her story. “I’ve found out the truth, but it isn’t too late to save myself,” she went on. “I’ll be happy with Leonard—as happy as the world lets most people be. I’ll think of our love as a dream that couldn’t be true. You’ll be better off too—you’ll be up here where my friends can’t snub you and ostracize you. But if we let ourselves go on, and plan for each other, it will ruin both our lives.

“In a week or two more, I’ll go home. You must stay here. In the meantime we must hold each other away. If you should take me in your arms, I’m afraid it would destroy us both. That’s why I’m not going to let you do it, Sam, in spite of what my heart tells me. So this is the end. I’ve told you the truth, and it’s fair. We mustn’t hope for each other any more.”

Beyond the window lay the cold, gray waters of Bering Sea, and from his dull look, June might have thought that his spirit was once more lost in its depths.

“Then it wasn’t true, what you told me on shipboard.”

“I guess not,” she answered miserably. “Only partly true, anyway.”

“To give everything to the poor. This was Christ’s teaching, you said. Humility, and mercy, and ‘love thy neighbor as thyself.’ But you didn’t mean it, did you? It was just talk—empty talk—about people following their own hearts, and letting nothing stand in the way.”

“Just talk!” She nodded sadly. “When the test comes, we can’t go through with it.”

“You said if I would just believe those things, and live them, I would find happiness. I must become a Christian, like you and your father. It is sham, June. It is the talk of hypocrites!”

She caught some of his bitterness. “We sit—in the seat of the scornful.”

“And it isn’t true, either, about the great God of love.” Sam’s tone was grim and contemptuous. “He who blesses the humble, and the poor, He’s just a fake, too.”

“No! You mustn’t say that.” Her eyes opened wide. “He is our one hope still. We can’t see Him, and have forgotten His teachings, but He hasn’t forgotten us. You must believe that, Sam, and never doubt it. Without Him we would die.”

“We shall die, then. He is not here.” Sam shook his head slowly, a dark sign somehow suggesting the Aleut. “And you and I have come to the end.”

“Yes.” She was stark pale, a white and gold image, with eyes of turquoise. “The bubble’s broken. We mustn’t talk any more about it, or think about it—any more than we can help—the rest of the time I’m here. We’ll enjoy each other’s comradeship, and then forget.”

“I can’t forget. We’re allowed but one dream in Hopeless Land, and we follow it to the finish. One of my promises will always hold. Nothing that you can do can change it.”

“Then tell me, for the last time.” She whispered the words, with a childlike eagerness. “I want to hear you say it.” She put her hand in his.

“I love you. I shall be faithful to the death.”

These were grand and mighty words, but from the beardless lips of this boy—this dusky child of the North, speaking so solemnly—they were only pathetic and sweet. Without a good-by caress he left her, walked out of the room and house and on to the shore. With clasped hands, she listened to his dimming footsteps.

“And I love you, Boy,” she whispered. “No use to doubt it. But I haven’t faith enough.”

Through the window she saw him walking down the shore, and at last climb out on a crag toward which the high spring tide was slowly advancing. But she could not follow him farther. His body lingered here, listless and forgotten, and she could see it from the window, but she could not see or trace the wheeling flight of his spirit. Where his thoughts went she could not go.

He had left her house about nine, in time to behold the sun drop out of the cloud-banks. He watched it calmly enough at first. It was just the sunset. The red orb, glaring in and out of clouds, was only a distant sphere of flaming gas. . . . But he could not look straight at it. It blinded his eyes. It lit all the seas with its gleam.

This was just the sun. . . . But as he whispered the name, it echoed in his ears, and the echo grew until it was like the boom of a drum. The sun! The

sun!

Presently his body grew tense. His look of a moment before, bitter and black, became a stare of bewilderment. There was a queer confusion in his thoughts which he vainly tried to straighten out. . . . He must try to remember what had been told him: the sun was merely a great sphere about which the world turned, one of God's mechanisms. It was at the most a manifestation of God's power. . . . But it lighted up the mountains. It brought the salmon to the rivers. It drove away the terror-gods of night.

Terror-gods! Why should he think of them? He must forget about them. They did not exist—June had said so. The tempest and the lightning and the avalanche, all the powers of ruin and death and terror, were but natural forces. There was only one God, a God of love. The teachers in school had told him so, and June—June had told him other things, as well.

And at this point in his thoughts, his brain seemed to clear, and confusion passed away. He had been right all the time, and the girl had been wrong. He knew about this doctrine of brotherly love! He had seen how it worked out in life. Sham, cant, hypocrisy, lies! Giving to the poor? He knew what gifts the poor received at the hands of God! He had found out how right triumphed, when it clashed with might. Why, he had been duped and cheated! If there was a god beyond the sun, it was a god of hate.

Yet, one good god remained. Under its blessing, Pavlof Peak was glowing red. This was a god that men could know with their own eyes, and not merely hear tales of from priests. Here was a direct and material god, glorious and golden and gorgeous beyond human words. Such was its power that man could not look straight at it, unblinded. It permitted life! It fought with death. The other was said to be a God of love, but this was the true love-god—not an abstract love, but warmth and passion and kisses made possible by the heart-quickening caress of its beams. It made grass to grow on the tundras. It drove away the deadly winter cold and melted the desolate wastes of snow. It undid the death-charms of the night, and dispelled the haunted shadows.

When it was abroad in the sky, a man was warm and alive and bold. As bold as his strength permitted. This was a god that blessed the bold and strong, and harried the cowardly and weak.

Sam was no longer calm. Calmness was a thing for the men of cities—far from the empty spaces of the sun.

Such men could be calm enough, aloof, and quiet-hearted, considering the cold gods that they pretended to worship. Such men did not really live. Sam had been cold as a stone himself, outside, seemingly without breath,

but already the most terrific fires were blazing in his heart. He was still pale, but no longer with despair. His alien eyes were glittering as June had never seen them, but as might have been remembered well enough by certain wild things of the distant interior. His hair crept; his spine was alive and tingling. He no longer sat limp and dead; his muscles were tense, and he was a true believer, rapt by the fervor of his prayers.

A passer-by would have seen only a pale youth, crouched on a crag, enraptured by the beauty of the sun. But it was not just beauty that Sam knew now; it was godhead. By now the great orb was dropping behind the horizon. The clouds lit up in the glory of him; strange hues, gorgeous and unimaginable. The sea itself, old and infinite, tried to image his grandeur. The gray waters turned to blood.

Blood! This was a god of blood—hot, wild, and thrilling in the veins. This was a god of chase-and-kill, the right of the strong to spill the blood of the weak.

It was, particularly, the god of Hopeless Land. Even now, it was dropping down into Sam's old haunts, two hundred miles to the west. It seemed to hover there, a point which struck the youth with startling force. It set up a tingling train of thoughts. . . .

An idea began to glimmer faintly in his pagan mind. This was a god of might, not a puny deity who failed to enforce his own creed of humility and brotherly love. People did not talk fine words about him, and disobey him the next hour, as they did the white man's god. Frank in his loves and hates, the sun-god cherished the bold and hardy, but he made slaves of the timid and feeble.

Sam glanced at his own hands. A violent sensation coursed through him, part wonder, part ecstasy. What hands these were—finely molded, yet like vises of iron, swift as the dart of an otter. From them his thought went to his lean arms, of which few men had yet tasted the full power, and to his broad, loose shoulders. Was he one of the weak? Should he lie down and be prey to the strong—those forces which today had all but broken him? Had he forgotten his heritage? Had the good god given him great gifts only to throw away?

Then he beheld another sign. In the twilight a ptarmigan volplaned down on a hummock. This was a splendid cock, gay-feathered, vain, vibrant-winged; yet a weasel half its size, dun-colored, furtive, and ignoble, stalked it, sprang upon it with demon fierceness, and killed it.

Sam watched, and everything was made clear. He wondered how he had ever been deceived. He had known the truth always, and he would not forget

again . . .

His stunned look passed off. With his lithe hunting stride he swung back to the cannery. So light was his step that he almost trod on a nesting curlew. He went early to bed, dreaming strangely and vividly.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE day following Sam spent in working with his boat, and in buying certain articles at the cannery store. He slept early, and arose at three to greet a fair new day. The sun rolled up into a clear sky. No fogs dimmed it, no clouds obscured its glory. It was warming almost at its first glance. This was one of the fairest days that Sam had ever seen on Bering Sea. He was swept with exultation.

About twelve o'clock he sought out June. He was smiling when he met her. She noticed that he walked lightly and noiselessly, but this was not unusual in him. Frequently he relapsed into the motion-habits of his childhood. If there was a new glint in his eyes, June could not see it.

"It's a beautiful day," he told her. "The sea's like glass. I'm going to take a short run out in the launch to look over the sea-otter situation a few miles down the coast. Wouldn't you like to come?"

The girl's look brightened. This was just the sort of thing she loved. Her companionship with Sam was always at its best when they were away on some such expedition. He could turn the most commonplace errand into an adventure of keenest interest, because of his knowledge of the country and its people. When she was with him, she saw Alaska as few are privileged to see it.

"What time will we get back?"

"By sundown."

He made the answer in a rather peculiar tone as if it had more meaning for him than for her. When would the sun go down in Hopeless Land? When would his sway cease, and the white man's god occupy his throne?

June looked out over the bright waters. The sun looked back at her. She felt warm, free, adventurous. Her young blood was eager in her veins. Her father would not approve of her going because she would thus prolong an episode which he had declared closed, but surely there could be no great harm in taking back to civilization one memory more.

"I'd be delighted to go," she said. "When do we start?"

"Any time you're ready. What have you to do?"

"I haven't had lunch."

"I thought maybe, if you liked, we could cook lunch on the boat. It would be pretty plain, I guess. If you'd rather wait——"

“I think it would be fun to cook lunch on the boat. I’ll run in and tell Miss Moreland.” She smiled mischievously. “Fortunately, father is not around. Otherwise, it might be necessary to pull the wool over his dear old eyes.”

Miss Moreland was busy, and merely heard some mention of a picnic. A moment later June rejoined her companion.

“Hadn’t you better get your coat?” the latter asked. “It’s always pretty snappy on Bering Sea, even on a day like this.”

“This riding-suit is wool, and I’m getting husky out here in Alaska, Sam. Now for an enormous lunch.”

Like two children they ran down to the dock, chattered and laughed as they climbed down a barnacled ladder, and boarded Sam’s forty-foot boat, the *Queen*. He started the rugged engine, and a few seconds later they were gliding out into the bay.

They found a gentle swell outside the harbor, but good sailors both, they paid not the slightest attention to it. June went at once to inspect the culinary arrangements, and yelped in delight. This was really a most amusing adventure. It recalled “playing house” in her childhood, and since she still secretly hankered to play with dolls, the compact little stove in the snug little compartment, which was kitchen, pantry, and dining-room combined, gratified her immensely. She was pleased with the shining copper utensils. She was surprised at the remarkable cleanliness with which Sam kept his belongings. Seeing this, no old-timer in the North would accuse him of Aleut blood. The Aleut, though a superior person in some ways, does not care about things being clean.

Sam gave her a free hand, while he steered the boat. She made chocolate out of rich, canned milk. She baked biscuits and opened a jar of marmalade to eat with them. She fried a young chicken which she found dressed in the pantry. She carved a mince pie from the bakery. After the fun of cooking, there was all the pleasure of eating under difficulties. They had to take turns guiding the boat. They yielded easily to nonsense, and if a menace and a peril ran through it all, June failed to find it.

After luncheon she took a chair out upon the deck and sat beside Sam at the wheel. Talking gayly, she paid not the slightest attention to their direction. Sam was following the shore to the southwest—out toward the far, bleak end of the Alaska Peninsula—but she was not interested and simply gave herself to the mystery of the coast.

This was her first close view of western Alaska. She had passed this way before on the *Virginia*, but the freighter had needed deeper waters for her

huge hull and had stayed out to sea. Now she began to see mountains. Such mountains—mystical, snowswept, aloof!

First was the beryl marsh, then the deep green hills, and then the white range—Devil Peaks, Sam told her, flashing against the sky. These were not mountains, he confided, but gods, and she could almost believe him.

It was natural that they should be so white, so still, so forsaken. The snow and silence and emptiness were simply the attributes of the North. But whence came the profound spell of solitude, the mysticism, the echo of a dream? Why were the peaks so sharp, as in painted scenery? Why were the valleys so deep and black, the cliffs so precipitous, the mountain streams so wild, the contrasts so striking? Why was the mood of the range so violent?

A geologist could have told her easily enough that this was a new range, thrown up but yesterday according to geologic time, and had not yet begun to round off and wear down. Yet the thing went further. This was the world before man came. This was the unclaimed, the Wild in its pristine form.

For a long time June did not look at Sam. She was lost in the mood of the land. When her gaze finally went to him, she found that he had undergone a singular change of expression. He was no longer her boyish comrade; for the instant he seemed a stranger. He was not now wistful and forsaken, but remote, dominant, almost cruel. There was a cold glint under his dark brows. He was deep in some barbaric communion with the wilderness beyond.

A most unexpected fear shot through her, violent and unintelligible. But he saw her wide eyes and instantly came back to her. He smiled down at her.

"What is it?" she demanded breathlessly. "Why did you look that way?"

"I don't know how I was looking, June, so I can't tell you. . . . You must understand that this country has the most vivid memories for me. We are beginning to get into the real peninsula now, the land's end. It's like the end of the world, too—the world-end of man's dominions. And it's beginning to feel like home.

"The only home I ever knew, really!" he went on. "Look at the muskeg, June—the green flat this side of the hill. It looks inviting, doesn't it—as if you'd like to lie in it and sleep—but it's different when you get up to it. It's a marsh, filled with man-traps. Then the hills beyond, with the wind always blowing over them." His voice thrilled. "And then the still valleys of the mountains."

To the casual eye this was simply an uninhabited coast, but he showed her that it teemed with living things. First came a fox, the most common of the wild hunters, trotting down the beach. Sam shouted some Aleutian

greeting which June could not translate. After a while he counted a herd of caribou which, to her, were the most minute gray specks on a distant tundra.

She quite forgot about time. This afternoon ride had a quality of excitement, and she lost herself in it. They had passed innumerable points of land, exclaimed over scores of striking pictures, and counted hundreds of living things, birds and beasts, but had not yet given a thought to the return trip. And suddenly she noticed her shadow, long on the deck.

It surprised her. She glanced at the sun, to find it heading toward the west. The dial on her wrist-watch indicated six o'clock.

"Can this be right?" she demanded.

"I don't know. It doesn't seem like it, does it? Hasn't the afternoon fairly slid along?" He minded his wheel, and did not look at her.

"This is certainly a fine little jaunt you've taken me on." Then, with changing and serious tone, "Sam, do you realize we've been traveling over five hours?"

"It doesn't seem possible, does it?"

"I don't like to be curious, but at the same time I'd like to ask when you expect to get to this sea-otter place you are going to. It must be farther than you thought. . . . We're not—not lost, are we?"

"No. I know exactly where we are. I know pretty near every foot of this peninsula. We just haven't arrived yet. This boat is not very fast."

"It appears to me that we're going faster, with the wind behind us, than we shall going back. And if it takes us as long to go back as it did to come, we'll arrive about eleven o'clock—and that's provided we start right now."

"It's hardly dark by eleven o'clock," he assured her.

"Just the same—eleven o'clock is just one hour before midnight. Father still counts time by the clock, not by the sun, and for his little girl to come limping in at that time of day is going to cause some comment. You don't know father when he's going really good. When you said sundown, I supposed you meant dinner-time."

"You think he'll be angry, do you?"

This would seem a commonplace response, yet in some ways it was extraordinary. It startled the girl. Without knowing why, she suddenly turned a searching gaze on the pilot's face. A sense of strangeness deepened—strangeness in him, and—distant and uncanny—in the situation. He wore no expression that she could read. He spoke disinterestedly. His eyes were like cold stones.

Her instinct was to be gay. “Angry!” she echoed. “He’ll think things have come to a pretty pass.”

Sam smiled, but made no reply. He headed on westward.

The girl watched him with growing curiosity. As yet she permitted no deeper feeling. She assured herself that the experience would turn out like all the rest that composed her days, rather commonplace in the end. This was the twentieth century, she remembered, and she was within the territorial waters of the United States. The fact that the Wild lay just beside her, genuine, primordial, and mysterious, could not lift her life from its usual grooves. She repelled contemptuously her tendency toward dismay.

But why was she not frank with Sam? Why did she refrain from questioning him more closely? Why did she pretend a frivolity that she did not feel?

“Sam,” she demanded, “how much longer is it going to take us to get where we are going?”

He glanced at her, and then looked back to his course. “Oh, not long.”

“How long? And how long do you expect to stay after you get there? I want to know.”

“We’re going to stay always.” He spoke lightly and smiled down at her. “I’m going to take you to China.”

“I’ve always wanted to see China,” she replied in the same light way. “This is ever so much better than going on a liner. . . . Seriously, Sam. It is going to be embarrassing for me to come in so late.”

But he did not reply, and he did not turn the craft about. She regarded him with sudden, fascinated interest. Who was this man? What did she really know about him? She had always realized that, because of some extraordinary environment of childhood, he differed from all the youths of her acquaintance; but how much of him remained hidden? Yet he had never purposely concealed himself from her. Rather, she herself had refused to seek him out; innured to the ordinary and commonplace, she had shut her eyes to that which was romantic and strange.

He had spoken lightly, but humor did not arch his brows as usual, and no fun sparkled in his eye. Only his smile was sweet.

She waited ten minutes more, expecting every instant that he would explain the joke. Then she got up from her chair and confronted him.

“Sam, I want to go back,” she told him.

He eyed her gravely. “I’m sorry . . . We’re not to our destination yet.”

“Just the same, I want to go back. I want you to turn the boat around. It’s too far to go there tonight. It will be midnight before we can get home, now, and my family will be worrying about me. I’m sorry I can’t be a sport and see it through, but you didn’t tell me the truth about how long the trip would take. You’ll have to go tomorrow, and start earlier.”

He did not seem to hear her, except her last sentence.

“I can’t go tomorrow. This is my last and only chance.”

“Is something—something very vital depending on this trip?”

“Yes. The most vital thing in my life.”

So tense was his tone, so moving, that she was instantly stricken, and her heart began to drum, great leaping beats, in her breast. Still she refused to believe.

“Is this trip in connection with your work?”

“No.”

“Then it has to do with your name—your effort to prove who you are. That’s it, isn’t it, Sam? But you had no right——”

“It’s not about my name, either. It’s—about you.”

She rallied, clenching her hands. “That’s very interesting, but I’ll have to ask you to give it up till another day,” she told him as calmly as she could. “This has gone far enough, Sam. I’m not playing any more. Turn the boat around and take me home.”

“I’m not playing either.” His strange, bright gaze met hers. “We’re going on.”

“Where?”

“To Hopeless Land.” He smiled gravely. “I’m not—going—to take you back—at all.”

CHAPTER XIV.

THERE were qualities in this scene that prevented June from mistaking it for a dream. There was the sunlit water, the rhythmic explosion of the engine, Sam's hand on the wheel. Yet the whole thing was unreal. It was like a spell that had been woven around solid facts. . . . She could see the coast-line slowly passing and the untrod mountains beyond.

For some few seconds—an interminable time through which the *put, put, put* of the engine never ceased—they regarded each other in silence. June could not speak. She had lost even the relief of words. Without breath and without motion she stared into Sam's pale, impassive face. If he had kept the dull look with which he responded to her stare, she might have thought him a madman, to be turned aside through artifice; but at last he smiled faintly.

She had fought off dismay, but now terror itself made its violent assault upon her. It showed in her eyes and lips and posture, but its full depth he could not guess, because it was in her heart and her veins and the cobweb wires of her nerves. But she was of good steel, and after a while she mastered herself enough to speak.

"What—what do you mean to do?"

"To keep you, June. To hold you, and never let you go."

He spoke so strangely, with such profound feeling, that some of her great terror became more like awe. She struggled with herself, fighting for self-control.

"You wouldn't dare!" she told him breathlessly. "You couldn't get away. It's just ruin for you, and disgrace for me. What do you expect to win?"

"You. I'm going to win you." His voice began to boom. "I'm throwing away everything for that. I wanted you, and you wanted me, and this was the only way to get you. If I hadn't done this, we'd never have had each other. What choice did I have?"

"And you thought you could win my love by such an act as this?"

"I'd almost won it already, but it didn't do me any good. It was either do this or lose you altogether. You belong to me, so I took you."

"I *don't* belong to you. You are throwing away any chance you ever had. You are killing any love I have for you in the quickest way you can. Take me back. Turn the boat around right now."

"And then let Leonard carry you away?" His eyes glittered. "That isn't the law, June. The law is to fight for our own."

"You'll find out what the law is, quick enough." Her terror was now swiftly giving way to rage. "Listen, Sam. I'll give you one chance. If you turn the boat around right now, and take me back, I'll make up some excuse why we're late. I won't tell them of this thing you attempted. If you don't ——"

"If I don't, what?"

"I'll jump in and swim to shore. In time they'll find me, and they'll hunt you to the ends of the earth."

He shook his head, smiling gravely again. "It wouldn't do you any good, June. You'd just give me the trouble of jumping in after you. We'd both get wet and uncomfortable, and be just where we are now."

"Do you mean that you're really going through with it?"

"Yes. I've tried people and failed with them. I've tried white men's gods, and they went back on me. Now I'm going back to my own people and my own gods. You belong to me—you as much as admitted it, yourself—so I'm taking you with me. That's all there is to it."

"Oh, you are insane!" For the first time she was near to hysteria and weeping.

"I think I'm pretty sensible. I'm doing the natural thing—going back to my own country, and taking my girl with me. . . . Please don't cry, June. That would be harder on me than jumping into the sea——"

She rallied gamely, finally taking a new tack. "Sam, there's nothing heroic about this," she told him at last. "It's only foolish. Give up this crazy scheme, Sam. They'll find me anywhere you go."

"That shows that you don't know the country and that you don't know me. They'll hunt a while. They'll spend thousands of dollars. But it will be weeks before they'd think of looking in the place where we'll be—no boat could get within miles of the coast at that place, they'll say. In the meantime, one of the revenue cutters will find our boat drifting before the wind with not a soul in it.

"What'll they say then? Why, we're dead. 'Look some more,' your father will say, but the search won't be so careful then, and the men he hires will loaf on the job, thinking it's no use. Even if they come within two hundred yards of us, they won't find us. They won't find any sign, or see any tracks. Your father is just human—he'll give up after a time. And by that time you'll see my way is best. You'll be willing to live my life."

It was a far better explanation than he thought he could make, and a fuller recital of his plans. The truth was, that until now his reasoning faculties had functioned but little. He had been acting on instinct—he wanted June, had felt entitled to her, and had simply taken her. He had had no particular intentions toward her, except to keep her at his side, and not let Leonard take her from him. Defeated in every other way, he had relied on his first philosophy of life, his basic laws and creed, and these had dictated his course. Now his need of justification made him talk the girl's talk, instead of relying still on what his heart told him.

"I'm afraid you are just making yourself a lot of trouble," she told him calmly. "Abduction—isn't being done in the twentieth century."

"I am not of the twentieth century. I come from a forgotten age and time."

He told her this simply, yet she was shocked into silence. The words fell upon her still-hopeful spirit like a blow. He had told her the truth: she was not dealing with a man of her own generation. If so, she might sway him; guessing his mental processes, she might out-maneuver him; knowing his weaknesses, she might prevail upon him. For the first time she began really to despair. He was a pagan and a savage, the man of the old Stone Age.

Was he an Indian? Was this the explanation? No—were he an inferior, she could likely control him easily enough. It was not his weakness that she feared, but his strength: a strength that had come upon him since their last parting, and which was developing with every hour that they journeyed westward. She tried to keep her mind clear, so that she might understand. Her only remaining hope was to analyze him and thus find out how to combat him. She must not let him confuse her with his unanswerable simplicities.

In what way did he differ from other men? He had not seemed so different before—only appealing, wistful, and attractive to the imagination. Had an insanity come upon him overnight? The explanation lay far deeper than that. It was far simpler, if she could just seize upon it. Simplicity—in this was the key.

Out here in his barrens he had learned a simplicity of thought and conduct which life in civilization would not permit. He was merely coming back to his own. He was regaining his heritage of the Wild.

He was doing nothing which natural human impulse did not prompt. June could look in vain for any twist or abnormality in his mind and make-up. He was like any other intelligent and sensitive man, except that he was

free from the repressions of civilization. It was not he who was strange—he was simple and natural. He was *homo sapiens*, with civilization left out.

Because of a remarkable experience in his childhood, the crushing, molding forces of civilization had passed him by. It was not he who had changed through the long roll of the centuries; he was the outgrowth of the basic plasm; and it was the men of cities who, physically and perhaps in some other ways, had been maimed. Into the twentieth century had walked the man of the old Stone Age.

She represented civilization at its best—its beauty, its spirituality, its tenderness. Could she win over him?

Some of her horror passed as she began to understand him, but her terror, a far different emotion, was no less. How did she know in what way his untrammeled instincts might express themselves? What fate would be hers in the black hours? When she thought of this, her heart sank, and the stream of her blood ran cold.

So far she had struggled remarkably well against panic. Now she rallied her mental and emotional faculties to make a last appeal to her captor.

She put her hand on Sam's arm. He shivered, and avoided her eyes.

"I think I know why you did it," she told him. "It was so childish, Sam—and so useless. Now I have a new reason for asking you to take me back."

"What is the reason?"

"Just that I want you to. I ask it in the name of your love for me. Even though you lose me by it, I ask you to turn around and go home. I want you to sacrifice yourself and all you hope to gain, for my happiness."

He looked forlornly down at her. "You make it hard for me. That's the hardest to refuse of any way you've asked me."

"Don't refuse. If your love is real, you can't."

"But I'm going to refuse, just the same." He straightened and sighed. "I've staked everything, and I'm going to see it through. I'm doing it for your happiness, as well as my own."

"But you can't know where my happiness lies, Sam. What right have you to attempt to shape my life?"

"No right—except maybe *might*. Yes—I have another right too. You belong to me, because I've won your love, and so I can keep you any way I can. I don't know how it works. I can't think—I can only feel. Let's don't go over it any more."

"Sam, I beg you to take me back." Tears broke from her eyes at last. "Won't you do it, just because I beg you to?"

"No . . . We mustn't unbend. If we give in, we die."

"I don't know what you mean——"

"I don't either. . . . It's something I learned long ago——"

"Even if I go down on my knees——"

"No. Don't kneel to me, June. I couldn't stand that. I'd go on just the same, but it would haunt me forever. You are the Daughter of the Sun——"

Her tears flowed unchecked. Through them she looked with growing wonder into Sam's worshiping eyes. There was a fatalism about all this, an inevitability which filled her with deepest awe.

"Go in and rest," he advised at last. "There are some bunks forward. You are tired out. Maybe you'll feel better after you rest."

"Can't—can't even pity touch you?"

"It can't make me turn this wheel around."

The helm on which his hands lay was like the wheel of fate. Somehow it was beyond his strength to turn.

She sobbed once, then walked unsteadily up the deck and through the hatch to his sleeping-quarters. In a listless, dazed way she sat down at the edge of one of the bunks. For a long time she looked blindly at the wall.

At last her expression changed. The blind look passed from her eyes. Her gaze quickened, sharpened and focused. Her face that had been blankly pale, now drew; certain lines darkened. Her limp muscles gathered power. Slowly she leaned forward, unbelieving.

Something was hanging on the opposite wall. It was taking form and substance before her wakening gaze. It was not a figment, but a material thing of wood and steel. Why, it was victory! It made her the master of the situation. With its aid, her strength was greater even than Sam's. Her tears had not moved him, but this would make him move quickly enough, force his dark hands to turn the wheel.

It was his revolver, hanging in its holster on the wall. She seized it, regarding it with burning eyes. How did it work? She must not risk defeat by half-measures. This was her great chance, and she must make it sure. Her strength was rallying; she was beginning to gain an amazing self-control. She was cold, alert and hard.

She had fired a revolver before. To go off at a touch, it must be cocked. Slowly and firmly she drew back the hammer until it clicked. With the barrel gleaming darkly she moved stealthily up through the hatch. She kept her arm down until she all but gained the deck. Then she raised the weapon and pointed it at Sam's breast.

It was a vivid picture, here at sunset. The girl's hand was steady. She looked along the level gunbarrel with glassy, indrawn eyes. She was markedly pale, but there was no terror in her face, only a cold zeal. Well could he believe that she was the daughter of a god of strength! Her back was to the west, and the beams from the low sun burst around her like magic armor and shone through the spun gold of her hair. Sam started slightly at the first sight of her, then regarded her gravely in silence.

"Now turn the boat around," she commanded.

His answer was to shake his head.

"I'm not joking, Sam," she assured him. "Turn the boat around!"

He deliberately looked away, and sought his landmark which for a few seconds he had forgotten, then continued to steer a straight course. "June, when your tears didn't make me turn, how could you think *that* would?"

"You don't seem to understand." Deliberately she drew a fine aim. "Don't you know I'll kill you if you don't obey?"

"Kill me if you want to," he told her dully. "If you don't need my life, I don't need it either. It's yours to do what you want to with. Pull the trigger, if you feel like it. If the gun's loaded, it goes off at a touch."

She gasped sharply. "It is loaded. You are trying to fool me——"

"I don't think it is. But you don't have to rely on it. There's a loaded rifle in the cabin, if you want one. Try the revolver first, and if it's empty, get the rifle—if you're willing for my life to end."

"Oh!" The gun wavered, and all but dropped from her hand. "Maybe I wouldn't have to kill you," she muttered. "I could just maim you—so you couldn't keep me from turning back. I could do that, even if I couldn't shoot you dead. I'd have every right to do that."

"You have every right, but you won't do it, just the same. Likely you wouldn't shoot straight, you know, and kill me after all. You've set yourself to a hard task, June."

"Oh, you're taking advantage of me—you're not playing fair. . . . What shall I do——"

She wavered and swayed. The pistol fell from her hand, clattering on the deck. He left his wheel now, letting the boat take its own course, and caught the girl as she swooned.

He carried her easily and lightly down into the cabin and laid her on his bunk. Then he picked up the pistol and hung it in its holster. This done, he went back to his wheel.

June's fainting spell merged into sleep, and the moon shone on the sea when she wakened. At first she did not know where she was. She had had the most fearful dream, which would presently dim and pass off. . . . She stared into the gloom and the bitter truth came home.

She sprang up, gasping, but immediately sank down again. There was nothing to do. No plea of hers could sway that still figure at the wheel. No use to cry—yet she wept a long time, bitterly and inconsolably.

Still she could hear the *put, put, put* of the engine. On through the night, down the wild coast, Sam was steering the craft. It was like being carried away in some delirium of fever—the cool wind, the gentle swing of the sea, the rhythmic explosions like a bounding pulse.

At last her weeping ceased, and for the first time she began seriously to contemplate her situation. She tried to think of some way out of his power. Her roving eye showed her that the gun had been returned to its holster, and at first she looked at it without interest. It could not be used to force Sam. As a threat against him, it was just a bugbear which he saw through. He had taken advantage of her weakness, and could do so again. Yet it might sometime be her refuge against disaster.

She could not use the weapon in cold blood against Sam, but she could imagine circumstances under which her finger might press back strongly against the trigger. She got up, took the gun, and examined it as closely as the deep dusk permitted. She "broke" it easily enough, and although the first shell that she drew out was empty, the second was loaded. She replaced the cartridge, closed the gun, made sure that it was not cocked, slipped it into its holster, and fastened the belt around her waist.

Her thought went next to the engine. Could she disable it, so that Sam could not go on? A moment's thought showed that the idea was without value. Sam's wheel was at one end of the engine-room, and to enter without his seeing her was impossible.

June had always been a girl of considerable resource; she had a natural aptitude for adjusting herself to difficult situations, and what was equally important, a great deal of native courage. She knew the time had come when she must plan some sort of program for herself, not simply give way to despair and tears.

At present she could not sway Sam. Whatever was done for her release, she must do herself. She must fight her own way back. Therefore she must not lie crushed and spiritless, but must be watchful of her chances. In time there would come a relaxation of his vigilance, and she must be prepared for it.

No use of expending her strength in useless struggle! The proper course was to go on with her abductor, appear to make the best of a bad situation, and put him off his guard. As long as she fought him openly he would keep her a close prisoner. She must pretend a readjustment she did not feel.

As she lay here, quietly considering the situation, the engine coughed and ceased. Had Sam shut it off, or was it out of order? A warm hope spread through her. She hovered an instant, fearful that it would start again. She heard faint sounds which until now had been obscured—the wind and the moan of surf.

She got up cautiously and thrust her head up through the hatch. Instantly she understood.

Passing from the west was a lighted ship. Sam had shut off his engine so that the crew on watch would not hear it. June peered at it with alert eyes.

She was glad she had pulled herself together. Perhaps her chance for checkmating Sam had already come. The ship was still far off, but if it kept its course it would pass within a half-mile. Could she give it a signal?

She need not attempt to cry for help. Her voice could never carry so far. Yet at her side was a loud-mouthed ally, and its sharp utterance in the stillness of night would not only reach the distant deck, but would probably result in an investigation. The firing of a gun was an old signal at sea.

But she must wait until the ship was at its closest point. . . . As she hung at the hatch, Sam swung down beside her.

She gasped at sight of him, bitterly afraid that he had guessed her plan. Yet he did not seem to be looking at her, and was watching the swiftly approaching ship. Rallying bravely, she began to try to allay any suspicions that he might have of her intentions, and to hold his interest from the revolver at her side.

"You see they've already come," she told him.

"Who?"

"Father. I told you you couldn't put it through. He's already overtaking you."

"The ship's coming from the wrong direction."

"Then it's a revenue cutter that he sent for by wireless. They're looking for us. Did you dream for a moment you could get away?"

"It's the *Starr*," he told her.

"The *Starr*?"

"Yes. The mail boat that comes to Bristol Bay once a month from Seward. They are not looking for us. It will be hours before boats come

looking for us."

Swiftly she sorted over her chances. She must not attempt to leave his side, for such action would immediately put him on his guard. Perhaps in the darkness she could do her work unseen. The ship was now almost at its nearest point, so her hand began to glide toward the revolver. But she had not reckoned with Sam's peculiar gift. She had forgotten his sea-gull eye. His arm glided too, slowly, so as not to startle her. She saw it, shrieked and snatched wildly at the revolver grip. She was swift, but she had never dreamed of such fleetness as this with which his hand leaped out.

It did not hurt when it struck. This was almost an incredible fact. It simply pinned her arm to her side. She swung back, her left arm rose to strike at him, and he checkmated this second movement as easily as the first. She could not tell what he did; she only knew that both her arms were pinned to her side, that her mouth was pressed close against his coat.

This was the first violence he had put upon her, and, some way, it was gentle. She could feel no tenseness in his muscles, no breathless struggle. It was as if she were fastened to a wall.

It was not merely the folly of struggling that kept her quiet in his arms. It was the sheer inability to struggle. Slight though the pressure was upon her, she could not move. He held her easily while the ship passed, and its light dimmed. Then he let her go.

She leaped back, confronting him in the shadows. For the first time since the abduction, his life was really in danger. Her hand was on the revolver-butt now, and in her heart was a tempest that twisted her desires.

A second passed. He was saved. The moonlight through the hatch showed his face wanly smiling.

She knelt by her cot and wept. Whether in relief or in despair she did not know.

When she woke again, another day was bright on the sea. The engine was still, but Sam had spread his auxiliary sail and was skimming before the wind.

She rose, went to the hatch and peered up at Sam. She had every right to find him drawn and hollow-eyed from his long watch, but, of course, he was not—he never would be. She was not really surprised to find him looking as fresh as when she had left him the previous day—and his smile was just as bright. She had been learning about Sam Moreland. What good to fight against a creature tireless as a wolf, patient as a stalking lynx?

"Good morning," he bade her cheerfully.

It happened that June possessed a distinct sporting sense. “Good morning, Sam,” she replied in the same tone. “The voyage still goes on, I see.”

“Yes. June, there’s a kit-bag over in the corner. You’ll find quite a collection of toilet-articles in it that I bought at the company store—still in their original packages. I foresaw that you might forget to bring any. There’s a faucet in the little compartment where you can draw warm water from the engine, a basin and some soap.”

“Thanks. I’ll join you presently.”

She went to make her toilet, and it not only refreshed her, but in some way cheered her. She had learned long ago that of all tonics, water applied externally is the most effective. As she washed and combed her hair she came to a curious conclusion in regard to her future attitude. For her own sake, not for Sam’s, she would play the game. She would hide her despair, her resentment toward her captor, and pretend a companionship with him such as had existed in the past. She had sense enough to know that the only shadow of happiness lay in this direction; otherwise her health, nerves and morale would suffer keenly. Besides, these tactics would put him off his guard and favor her chances for escape.

“How about breakfast?” she called up to him at last.

His smile was broad and beaming. “June, you’re a dead game sport. I might have known you would be.”

Instantly she was still and cold. She forgot any wile that she might have intended. “Don’t presume on it,” she warned grimly. “I’m simply not going to make myself miserable while I’m waiting for this criminal escapade to end. I shall play the game—but it is only play.”

“I’ve lost you then?”

“Utterly.”

“If so, I never really had you. I might have been mistaken about you, but the law I go on is still—the law. . . . But smile again, June. I won’t misunderstand again.”

“Good.” She was cheerful at once. “About breakfast; one must eat, even during an abduction. Shall I—officiate again?”

“If you’ll be so kind. . . . There’s some rat poison down in the hold.”

“That would be an aggravating death to watch. I don’t think I’ll descend to that. How about pancakes, bacon and coffee?”

“Grand!”

“Ready in a minute, your Pirate-Highness.”

They had breakfast. Afterward she stood out on the deck, finally taking the chair she had occupied the preceding afternoon. She scanned the northeast for a glimpse of a pursuing ship, but the seas were empty. She guessed that the first search was being prosecuted nearer the cannery.

After taking a big circle about Port Heiden, the boat was now nearing Sam's childhood playground. He knew every stream between here and False Pass, every valley, every yellow flat and range of mossy hills. It was a territory as large as the state of Vermont, but he considered it his own immediate neighborhood. And this day he showed her a bear, a far speck in the muskeg beside a salmon stream.

The day passed, and the sun went down again, and just before deep dark he reefed his sail and started his engine. On the height of the tide he drove in toward shore.

She knew that this was a crisis. He was not smiling now, but his eyes were coldly watchful, and his hands moved lightly on the wheel. The boat crept at its slowest speed. He did not watch her now—perhaps now was the time to strike, if she only knew how. Instead of following a distant landmark, he seemed to be guided by the shadows on the water.

She guessed that he was working his way through submerged reefs. His trained eye could detect deep water, perhaps by its color, possibly by peculiarities of its little waves. The boat turned this way and that, and once it grated, and once he reversed the engine. She had never seen him so still and grave.

She was motionless too. She did not attempt to distract his attention, and she simply lacked the heart actually to interfere with him. For the first time since they had left, his position was insecure. It would be easy to confound him now: to struggle with him but a moment, even to wrench at the wheel, would surely deflect him from his course and wreck the boat on the reefs. Her moment of greatest opportunity might be at hand. Yet she passed it by. Her instinct was to hover, and hardly breathe. It was as if she shared his cause.

Was she crushed? Was she already subservient to his will?

Now she strained into the twilight to trace the shoreline. It was unbroken as far as she could tell, without the slightest indication of a harbor. There were dunes beyond, and a sandy beach, and directly in front of them a great rock with which they seemed about to collide. They sailed up almost into its shadow, then Sam turned his wheel again.

An instant later he reversed his engines, and as the boat paused, let go his anchor. Then he shut off his power, sighed, and stretched out his arms.

"We're here," he told her, laconically.

She looked about in vain for the open sea. Presently she understood—that he had driven the boat into a miniature harbor of deep water behind the rock. No ship passing beyond could possibly locate their hiding-place.

"You've planned your little picnic very well," she observed.

"That's the game. Now I'm going to sleep. I advise you to do the same."

"Where—where are you going to sleep?"

"On the deck. And by the way, June—there's no use attempting escape tonight. I'd hear you if you tried to launch the skiff, and you couldn't get away in it, anyhow. You can cut the anchor rope if you like, but we couldn't float out except in the highest tide, and in any wind at all, we'd go to our death."

She seemed to miss what he was saying. Her thoughts were ranging far. He would not be at the wheel tonight. He would not be occupied, and his steel body could know no fatigue to force him to sleep soundly. She started to turn to the cabin, but hesitated, pale-faced, at the hatch. Her trembling lips begged for reassurance for which she dared not frankly ask.

"What's the matter, June?" Sam inquired in low tones.

"I'm afraid! You can't blame me, can you, Sam? How do I know——what you are going to do——"

"Don't you know me well enough to tell?"

"I thought so—but you have shown me a new side. . . . You've adopted a new philosophy. If you follow your new law in one way, why not in another?"

"I *will* follow the Law, June. That is your safety, not your danger. The Law of the Wild is that the male must protect the female, not despoil her." Then, bitterly, "You are not in civilization now, and you can feel safe."

"That is a strong indictment."

"I don't know. I only know that the wilderness mating is of love only—and it seems that it is different in your country. . . . Anyway, don't worry any more. What you fear is forbidden even among the beasts."

She heard him out, and her fear fell away, never to plague her again. She sensed his self-mastery as never before. She knew his steel that his long wars in the open places had forged and toughened. He was her fort, not her foe.

"I believe you," she told him simply. "I'll see you—in the morning."

She turned to go. His voice still followed her, vibrant and low. "Good night, June, and sweet dreams," he was wishing her. "And God bless you."

She had entered the cabin before she decided to answer that benediction. She came part-way up, and her face was a white blur in the heavy shadows. “God bless you too, Sam,” she told him—soberly and sweetly in spite of all the resentment she bore him, and of all the wrong he had done her. This was June. She could not be otherwise. Her heart was a sweet but forceful master.

The boy almost sobbed. He had fought the hardest fight of his life—a fact that escaped even June’s intuitions—and now was perilously overwrought. “You need His blessing more than I do,” she went on. “Sam, do you remember—the ‘Ninety and Nine’?”

Her deeply spiritual side spoke in her throbbing tones.

“Yes. How one was lost—and how the Shepherd went to find him——”

“You are the one who is lost. You are the one who is in need. You have wandered away from the Truth.” Her voice quavered, and he knew the heart of woman which no blasphemous generation can change. He knew that faith still lived.

“You mean—like Aaron I have set up an idol in the wilderness?”

“Yes. You have gone to a false god. More than for a blessing, you should ask for mercy.”

CHAPTER XV.

SAM spent the next day in transporting his few supplies to the beach, and in watching the sea and the air. The afternoon of this day saw the first of the searching fleet go by. The morning thereafter brought the wind he was waiting for.

It had come much sooner than he had expected. He had anticipated being forced to remain in the cove for several days. The winds of Hopeless Land are not often so obliging. Vigorous gusts ripped over the water from the southwest, so that now he could go on with his plans.

He explained that he was going to drive out through the reefs, spread the sail, and set the boat adrift. With the present wind and tide it was bound to float toward the northeast, and from his knowledge of currents and sailing, he felt sure that it would make an unguided voyage clear to Bristol Bay. In any case, it was sure to be picked up a long way from his present hiding-place.

Its departure would serve two purposes. In the first place, he thus removed from the vicinity a conspicuous object that might be seen through a field-glass from some distant mountain. In the second place, the empty launch would persuade Hillguard that the two were lost, and dishearten the search-party. For the same two reasons he would let the skiff remain in tow, himself swimming back to shore. This small boat would be awkward to hide, and its presence with the launch, indicating that they had not made a landing, would be added proof of death at sea.

"It is a cruel plan," the girl told him emphatically. "What has father ever done to you to deserve it?"

"I have declared war with your father. He expects no mercy from me."

"If you have any mercy—any decency—you'll try to spare him as much as you can. You will try to keep him from thinking that I'm dead, instead of doing everything you can to make him think so. Sam, I haven't made much trouble for you so far. I've been a tractable captive. I haven't asked much, but I do ask something now, and if you ever dream of wanting my forgiveness, you will comply with it. I want you to let me leave a note on the boat."

"What will you say in the note?"

"Anything you want me to, so long as you let me assure him that I'm alive, and will come to no harm."

After a while he granted the point. It was her first winning, his first departure from his creed. He tried to excuse it on the grounds of fairness to a foe, forgetting that ruthlessness was the first teaching of the Wild.

His law told nothing of sparing the feelings of a victim. It simply ordered victory—at any cost of blood and tears. Bending to his enemy, he would hurt his own chances.

So she wrote:

> *We are prisoners in a ship, and in not the slightest danger. So please don't worry about me. No harm of any kind will come to me.* (This at his dictation. The following on her own account.) *Please don't send any gunboats or armed posses to look for us. It would be embarrassing for me to explain later. Confine the excitement and search to members of the family and the cannery force; I don't wish to appear in the Seattle newspapers. Above all, don't worry about me. I am having a rather interesting time, and will escape at the first opportunity.*

She showed him the note, and at his suggestion, she made two copies, fastening one high up on the mast and the other at the end of a cord, protected by a bottle, the whole being tied conspicuously on the deck.

He dressed himself lightly in some old clothes, leaving his serviceable garments on the beach, then reboarded the boat alone.

June seemed somewhat disturbed by these preparations. "What are you going to do?" she demanded. "What's the idea of swimming back to the beach, when you could row back in the skiff? There's no point in it, since you've decided to send the note."

"On the contrary, it is more important than before. If the skiff is found with the launch, your father will think we couldn't have landed, and really believe we are prisoners on some ship—a smuggler, or something like that. I don't mind the swim back. The water's like ice, but the day's warm, and the wind's off shore. I've done it many times before."

"Oh, it's so useless. Not just the swim, but all the rest. The whole thing is so purposeless, Sam. Where will it all come to, in the end?"

"Where the end will be, I don't know." His voice rang so like a deep-toned bell that she whirled to stare at him. "I'm not thinking about the end. I only know that when I was about to lose you, the strength came to me to carry you away—into my own country. We have come here, to the Wild. We

are going to stay here and live my life until you are taken from me; and until that time I will show you what life is." He turned to her in infinite entreaty. "Isn't it worth any price to me? If you don't *know* it is, there's nothing I can say to make you understand——"

"But you didn't consider me."

"I obeyed the Law. Yet I did think that I was considering your happiness as well as my own, in that I was saving you from a loveless marriage. Maybe that was useless, as you say—a trivial dream. But *that* isn't useless." He pointed to the snowswept range behind, and his eyes lit up like lanterns. "That isn't purposeless—trivial."

She looked at him before she followed his gesture. In his scanty garb she perceived him as never before—his dusky skin, his long, wolf-like muscles, his body like a barbarian god.

"What do you see?" she asked.

"The snow-peaks. Look at them! The great valleys and the gorges of the rivers. The hills, rolling and rolling. The salmon flats. The barrens." His voice thrilled her, in spite of herself. "It's all real, June. Your childhood vision of you and me on the shore together has come true. It's real, and alive, and *tingling*!

"The world is left behind. We've come back to the Wild. We're face to face with it—its hard tests—its great adventure."

A few minutes later Sam boarded his boat, started his engine, and began threading through the shoals. June was left on the shore. Now was the time to make plans for herself, perhaps even to effect some bold stroke for freedom—so why did she linger here, so watchful and so still? She seemed to forget her own interests. Her feet were frozen to the sand. What kind of chains had her captor put on her, invisible but yet so strong?

The boat sailed and sailed, dwindling to the size of a row-boat. Surely he would not attempt to swim so far. He was not a fool, deliberately to drown himself and leave her forsaken on the shore. Would he never stop, and turn back? Already he was just a thin reed on his tiny deck.

Her nerves began to jump. She clenched her hands, and her skin crawled. Was he forsaking her? Was this the final lunacy of an insane man? She snatched up his binoculars, and with trembling hands fastened the bright disk upon him.

It was thus that she saw his final preparations. He tied the skiff securely, and did something to the wheel. He vanished into the cabin, and the last faint sound of the engine trickled in and ceased. Then he reappeared, and, shaking off an old coat, dived handsomely into the water.

A wail broke from the girl's lips. Why, he was a half-mile out, and even a fool would know that such a swim through waters of melted ice was beyond human endurance. Instantly he went out of sight. She could not pick up his swimming figure through the glasses. He might be dead already, for all she knew . . .

But she need not mourn for him yet. Presently he appeared, as suddenly as he had vanished, the upper part of his body darkly visible against the gray water. He was wading, and he seemed to grow tall as the water lowered about him. Soon it was no higher than his knees, showing that he was following a spit. Her great fear slowly passed off.

He trudged steadily toward her for more than a quarter of a mile, swam what appeared to be a channel, and came out on another spit. This brought him within a hundred yards. Still she watched him through the glasses. She was not frightened now, only deeply curious, and at this distance she could actually read his face.

He dived again in deep water, a movement not only graceful, but somehow joyous and playful. It was almost beyond her to imagine vitality like this, against which even severe exposure was impotent; and sportswoman though she was, she wondered at a philosophy that could change this swim of death into a game. She thought of the seal which he had often showed her at sea. He took the water with the same desire, as if it were his natural element; he made as free with it as an otter that she had once seen fishing in a stream back of the cannery. Freedom: this was the answer. An escape from the thousand chains that bind mankind. This was an outgrowth of what he had learned in that first year on the shore. Vivid life—vigor—freedom!

He splashed up to her, whooping with the cold, climbed out and ran to a sand dune. She heard him yelling as he changed to dry clothes. He was once more sedate—a man, not a wild sea-thing—except for the tell-tale spark in his eyes, a plain youth of her own species, when he came to her side again.

Now he began to do a number of curious things. He fastened sacks on his feet, and in this awkward gear tramped up and down the immediate bit of shore—everywhere, in fact, that footprints lay in the sand. The tracking-up of a trail is an old trick in the Wild, and Sam had learned it so long ago that he seemed to have been born with it, but now he was obliterating any sign that he and his companion had passed this way. The effacement completed, he carried his supplies to the grassy flats beyond the sand, then returned and swept up after them. At last he smiled down at June.

"Would you mind taking a free ride?" he asked.

"I'm getting used to almost anything. What now?"

"I want to carry you as far as the grass. No tracks will show there, but they'd show plain enough in the sand, and the first search-party that comes along would know where to look for us. I can get you a pair of gunny-sacks if you like, but I'd rather give you a lift."

She answered his smile, though rather grimly. "It's your affair," she told him. "You've done about what you wanted to, so far."

"Then up you go!"

He swung her up in his arms. For all that she did not like to admit it, the experience was rather pleasant. There was a delight in the sharing of his vigor, and an interest in the feel of his muscles moving against her body. His strength somehow became her own, a comforting refuge.

He set her down on the grass and made a pack out of a portion of his supplies. The rest—some spare toilet-articles, blankets, camp-gear and food, as well as his binoculars—he concealed in a bear-digging—one of the big holes that dotted the flat. These things could be brought over as needed. And now they trudged away together toward the green hills.

Soon they encountered a creek in which living things, like dark shadows, flicked and raced. Sam led the way up the creek bank clear into the hills.

The waterway changed from an easy-flowing canal to a murmuring brook, given to lovely dark pools under thickets of alder; and the brook became a noisy cataract. Here were falls, whirlpools, white cascades. Just at the foot of the high mountains they turned off and climbed over a ridge to a smaller creek, which they followed down. It led them through a steep-walled valley.

As they stopped to look at a herd of caribou, Sam was heard to utter a wondering oath. June turned to him with wide eyes. She was beginning to be interested in her companion's reactions.

"It's all here," he told her soberly. "It's all unchanged. They've made no mark on it yet—the builders and the spoilers."

His amazement seemed to grow as he gazed about him. "June, it's more familiar than ever before . . . It's just as it was when I came here first, out of the boat, and better than when I saw it last, during summer vacations. It needed something then—something that it had lost—and now it's got it again."

"What? What is it that the country lost and regained?"

"You. You were here, you know, that first summer. . . . Your ghost, maybe—maybe your spirit—maybe just a vision of you in my lonely child-

heart. Then you went away, and I couldn't find you when I'd come here with Olga, and even when I'd come by myself, running away from the *barabara*, I could never find you. Now you've come back. Not just a vision, but June —herself—"

"Does it make such a difference to you?"

"Don't you know it does?" He turned hungrily toward her. "Why? I don't know why. Is any human dream explicable? It's just one of the strange outgrowths of a strange destiny."

He paused, as if trying to shape his thoughts into words. "June, that destiny is on my heels still. . . . I am having some peculiar premonitions."

She could not answer quite calmly. A little shiver of superstitious awe passed through her frame. "What are they?"

"They are hard to describe. They are not bad—only exciting. They are sort of in the air, and in the look of the hills and the snow-fields, and in the feel of the ground. June—don't you feel *suspense*? The wilderness air is always exciting, when you can open your lungs to it at all, but isn't there a kind of static electricity——?"

"I don't know. I'm sort of expectant, if that's what you mean——"

"Alert? As if something's going to happen, and you don't know what? June—it may be imagination—but it *may* be the Red Gods! I have a feeling that they're planning a celebration for us. It's as though they want to show us a good time, now we've come—and hold a big jubilee in honor of your return. Lots of things can happen, you know.

"June, I'm telling you what I really feel. You've heard of the luck of tenderfeet—how things will happen to 'em in a month that don't fall to the lot of an old woodsman in ten years? I feel that the barren-land gods will give us a tenderfoot's welcome. They'll put the books away, and present us with something a little extra-special. Maybe they're going to test me, as I've never been tested before." He looked up shyly. "Maybe they're just going to reward me—for coming back to worship at the shrine."

After a while they came to what looked like an old road—two deeply worn ruts through the moss. Yet no wagon had passed here—the ruts were too close together to be made with wheels—and Sam explained that this was an old bear-trail, common in Hopeless Land. It led them through a dense thicket of alder brush at the base of a mountain, bringing them at last to the dark mouth of a cave.

He stopped and threw off his pack. He leaned his rifle against the rock wall.

"Is this camp?" June asked quietly.

"It's home," he replied.

Later he pointed out its advantages. "It's a place I found years ago—dry inside, except for one spot, and a dirt floor packed hard. There are small caves all along the cliff, but this is the largest. There's plenty of alder brush all around, and a fire in front makes it the coziest camp I ever stayed in. There are other things in its favor, June, for people in our situation."

"You mean it is a perfect hiding-place for a fugitive?"

"Perfect. I've thought about it often, and that's why I brought you here. In the first place, this is a lost valley. The creek circles through a gap below here, and unless you walk right up to it, you'd think it was solid mountain. It's hard to find, and hard to get in unless you know the way. If a pursuer did get into the valley, there would be only one chance in a hundred that he'd find the bear-trail leading through the brush. Otherwise he'd never imagine that any of these caverns are here. We're hidden from spy-glasses by the hills, and a pale green smoke from an alder fire is nearly invisible against this mountain."

He glanced up at the heights. "There's more snow than usual at this time of year. That saddle up there is usually bare by the end of June. It's rather puzzling—otherwise the old place looks much the same. I'll see how things are inside."

He stopped and disappeared in the shadows of the cavern. Extending back from the main chamber was a narrow passage, virtually a crevice in the rock, into which water used to drip from the walls. It seemed entirely dry now, indicating that the spring had dried up. Thinking it would be a good place for stores, he got down on his knees and crawled into it.

How quickly the light died! He had hardly passed the threshold, yet his keen vision failed him. He paused, listening. And presently radiance came again. It appeared in the form of two disks, an inch apart, directly in front of him. These were greenish-yellow in color and had a hard, jewel-like shine.

The gleam seemed to hurt Sam's eyes. He covered them with his forearm. This motion had apparently been instantaneous, yet he had taken time for another act hardly less significant. As his arm swept up, it had paused for a fraction of a second at his belt, and now his hand grasped an object that shone wanly even in the darkness of the vault. It was his knife, snatched from its sheaf and now held point outward in his hand. Quietly he began to back out.

Those two circles of greenish-yellow fire did not give him time. Their hue flashed to orange, as colors change in a kaleidoscope, and some demon of the darkness sprang upon him.

CHAPTER XVI.

AN old wolverine had found a suitable place for his afternoon sleep. It was a little crevice in the back of a cave—always cool, dry, and secluded. It was dark, but this made it all the more desirable; he loved the dark hours, and was not one of the grass eaters to worship the day. Lately he had made it a point to come here every afternoon.

For the first time in his recollection his nap had been disturbed. Some other animal had come crawling in. This was an unfamiliar beast, but it was enough for Devil-Claws that it walked on four legs.

There were two things for which Devil-Claws was famous throughout his range from the Arctic to the wheat-belt. One of these was hatred. He hated every living thing, darkly and fiercely, ravenously and horribly. It was not a cold hate like the serpent for mankind, and it was not a hereditary hate, such as the dog for the wolf, but simply insane—murderous, insatiable, and frantic. He could suffer no life but his own. Even when solitary, he seemed to experience bloody hallucinations, as might a homicidal maniac, because from time to time his eyes would flame up, his hair bristle, and his fangs flash at an invisible enemy.

The other thing for which he was famous was his fighting. In a sense this was a family trait: he was kin to the weasels—really a monstrous, shaggy weasel himself. Like a weasel, he could kill animals many times his size—and even the bull caribou stayed out of his way. He was incredibly strong. He was swift as a serpent. If his general fiendishness had been tempered with good sense he would have conquered the wilderness long ago. As it was he constituted a fine example of nature defeating her own ends—of a virtue carried so far that it became a vice. He was over-evolved, and in his general passion for blood he would attack even porcupines, never learning that Needles would exact a most terrible vengeance afterward. He habitually attacked creatures who mastered and killed him. His species could not flourish, but could only hold its own—hateful, ferocious and devilish to the last.

True, he hardly ever attacked man. Not even the outlaws do this. Man's stature is terrifying to practically all animals; and there is a sorcery about him which no wild beast can endure, in his smell, in the darts from his eyes, and in the cold steel which he sometimes carries in his hand. Devil-Claws would never have attacked Sam had he met him in the open. But this was a

closed lair, not open country—and the man had entered on his hands and knees.

The intruder seemed to be low in stature. He was a shadowy, clumsy figure such as always wakened a most devouring fury in the beast's heart. Devil-Claws could see his outline against the dimly lit opening, but not his eyes, and his rage would not give him time to notice the cold steel. The danger-smell was, of course, all but overpowering, but today it seemed only to waken in him the blind ferocity characteristic of a death struggle.

He sprang for Sam with that mad-dog fury which famed him. He would slash his victim, rip him open, kill him—then he would worry him, mutilate him, and defile him. As he leaped, he snarled—a sound that ripped the air like canvas and which simply dripped with venom, malice and hatred. Its echo was June's scream of fear. As was his way, he struck the man with fang, claw and body, biting and tearing with that strength and speed which had won him his name.

Sam fought in the darkness, striking with his knife. Meanwhile he tried to protect his face with his arm. It did not seem possible to crawl out. To do so he would be obliged to take down his guard—and in one half-second thereafter this snapping, slashing, scratching death might reach his throat.

Sam was known as an agile man. He had need of such agility now. One Cap'n Vigten had considered him the fastest fighter he had ever been honored to engage, but now he seemed painfully slow. He had strength comparable to the beasts', so explosive and terrible it was, but his adversary was strong even compared to other beasts. The closed chamber where they fought was all to Devil-Claws' advantage, and it rang and reverberated with his snarls.

This fight must necessarily be short. It was a matter of one telling blow. Devil-Claws had ripped Sam's sleeves to shreds, and torn great pieces out of his coat, but his fangs were still white. Sam's knife had cut only fur and skin. But if once the brute broke past his guard, tearing down the defending arm and ravening at close quarters, it would mean the end.

Sam made no mistake about this. He was fighting for his life, and he knew it. Those claws of steel could rake through flesh and muscle, smashing the bones that lay in the way, and reach his foe's vitals. The fangs could pierce cartilage and membrane to the pipes of life beneath. Thus he might die ignobly in the dark, slain by a foe no larger than a dog.

So far the fight had lasted about ten seconds, a time cruelly long. June had run into the cavern, and was gazing into the black hole from which the uproar came. She had drawn her revolver, but it pointed useless in her hand.

And before ever a plan of rescue could occur to her, the thing ended at her feet.

With a backward wrench, Sam flung himself out of the passage. Now he could swing his arms. Raging, ravenous, the beast sprang out upon him. The man's quick eye saw an opening, and his knife stabbed the shadows. Devil-Claws leaped to meet it, and the force of his onslaught, added to the strength of a snaky arm, made this a blow to reckon with. It slithered through till the hilt stopped it. The animal was simply skewered, quivering and dying where he fell.

Sam immediately sprang to his feet, whirling about to face any other danger. He saw only June holding the gun in a shaking hand. She searched his face as if in great dread, but divining that he was not injured, instantly clamped down upon her own surging emotions. She must not show him all she had felt. She must keep aloof from him yet and not let the blood on his hands wound her heart so deeply, or a moment's crisis cost her all hope of victory. With a brave effort she fell into an adventurer's manner.

"It was rather pretty work," she commented. Then, concealing the last of her terror the best she could, "That fiend didn't get his claws into you anywhere, did he?"

Sam did not seem to understand. He looked at her dazedly. Stricken again, she ran toward him.

But he shook his head. "I'm all right. Not even scratched, except through the clothes. The scrap was over before it got well started."

"Then what's the matter? I—I believe you're hurt?"

Indeed he was more affected than she had ever seen him. His more serious injuries received in the fight at Leonard's house had left him with no such look of bewilderment and horror. Seeing how distressed she was, he smiled and led her out of the cave.

"I believe he remembered—even after I had forgotten," he muttered in an awed voice.

"I don't understand——"

"I don't either." Then, contemptuous of himself, "I'm talking nonsense, anyway. The brute piled on me simply because I invaded his lair, as even a badger might do. You see, June, it's so unusual for an animal to attack a man. It has never happened before in my life. Of course if you fool around a carnivorous animal long enough, sometime you might have an accident—and that's all there was to it, today. I was down on all fours, and it was dark, and his escape was cut off. Just the same, it got under my skin a little, and appealed to my superstitions.

"Might is right out here in the Wild. Of course the wolverine is a renegade, yet even he knows that man is his master—far mightier than he. When he flew in the face of the Law I was dumfounded, and in seeking the reason I fell back on mumbo-jumbo."

"Of course it couldn't be that the Law isn't a true one, and doesn't hold—that might *isn't* right?" the girl commented thoughtfully. "That he would defend his lair even against someone mightier than he——"

"The Law's true enough. I'll never doubt it again. Let me confess, June. At first I fancied that this fight was the end of a long war." And he told her of his meeting with a wolverine fourteen years before.

"I had forgotten it entirely," he concluded at last. "The creature was just one of many that I encountered on the shore, and nothing had ever happened to recall the experience. As I was fighting that beast in the cavern it all came back—like a picture thrown on a screen. I remembered that long ago I met him and drove him from the trail, and it seemed that he had been waiting all this time for his revenge.

"When I saw how old an animal he was, I thought so all the more. I couldn't realize that there wouldn't be a chance in a thousand that he was the same animal, and if he was, he'd have forgotten me more completely than I had forgotten him. I could only feel that he had never accepted my mastery over him, and had lain in wait for me all this time.

"Of course there's absolutely nothing to it. I find that I'm given, at times, to regarding animals in a mystical way—and in this I'm like all primitive folk. The souls of animals are so strange, June—so hidden from our eyes—it's natural for superstitious people to attribute all sorts of things to them. I am mortified that I ever let my fancies carry me away. Just the same, it was significant. The wolverine is one animal that always seemed to defy me. Somehow, I found myself questioning my dominance over him. Now it is proven."

"Does that make so much difference to you?"

"It makes more difference than it ought to, I guess. This is my own country, and it is important to me to know I am master of all its people. And they know it, June, they know it. They concede my right to do with them what I like, and they don't dare resist. Back there he lay in his lair—the renegade—defiant of the Law. Where is he now?"

Sam had been trying to control his voice, yet now June found herself listening, not calmly but with fascinated interest.

"Where is he now?" Sam repeated, as his eyes began to glitter and flash. Was Sam trying to hide a barbaric rapture? She thought of a Hebrew bard,

chanting to his tribe of some bloody victory, or perhaps an earlier figure, vaguely seen in the shadows of another cave-mouth. “Why doesn’t he get up and come out?” her companion went on darkly. “What makes him lie so still?”

“He is dead!” the girl gasped. “You know he is.”

“Dead? Devil-Claws—the terror of the barrens? The great fighter who would not yield the trail even to man? Arise and come out, Devil-Claws—your mate is waiting for you, and there is plenty of game. . . . You do not come? Can it be that the girl tells the truth?

“Who killed you, Devil-Claws? Was it the porcupine with his quills? Was it a rifle-bullet such as any child may shoot? Still he doesn’t answer. . . .

“He was fierce enough when I met him on the shore, so long ago. He is not so fierce now. His leap upon me in the dark was like lightning, but now he does not move at all. *He defied the Law, but now—now*——”

June walked up to him and took his trembling hand in her own. “Sam, you are talking like a maniac,” she told him in a matter-of-fact tone. “What is the matter with you?”

He started violently as if suddenly wakened from sleep. His hand grew still in hers. His lurid gaze changed to a quiet scrutiny of her face. Easily she called him back to her. “I don’t know,” he told her dazedly. “I was carried away, because I killed that beast with my hands. To kill anything has always driven me almost crazy——”

“Something you learned on the shore, when you were a child——”

“I didn’t have to learn it—only to let it come out. We all have it in us—the blood-drunkenness—the lust to kill. Have you ever been on hunting parties?” Ashamed of his outburst, he was trying to explain it away.

“I’ve been on too many of them,” the girl answered. “I’ve been on quail-shoots, and once I saw some men kill a deer. They showed, plain enough, how thin the skin is over our instincts.”

“The skin is particularly thin over mine. Childhood environment! I felt the same way when I used to steal salmon from the bears, and when I lay and watched a fox sneak up and kill a ptarmigan. It got away from me for a minute, June—the terror, and the memories, and the violence, and maybe even the strain I’ve been under, combining to knock out the last of my civilization. I’ll control myself better in the future, June. I’ll remember I’m a man, not a beast.”

A ptarmigan floated down, squawking raucously, in the thicket, and Sam shot its head off with his rifle. Fried over a low fire in front of the cave, it was the meat dish of their evening meal.

After supper they sat still and communed with the wilderness night. They heard faint rustlings in the thicket—a broken twig, a hushed step, the crinkle of alder leaves. June knew what at first she had not dreamed—that this waste-land under the crags teemed with life.

A great white hare halted near the fire, its eyes luminous in the gleam. Presently it started, pointed its ears to the darkness, and sped away in an opposite direction. Once they heard the beat of caribou hoofs on the tundra.

The dark lowered, and she prepared to go to the bed that he had made for her in the cavern.

"Don't be afraid," he counseled gently. "I'll be on watch outside. I'll sleep too, but it will be wilderness sleep, waking at the faintest sound, not the drugged sleep of cities. Nothing can harm you."

She knew this was true. Even the wild thing in his heart would not harm her; it was chained so far as she was concerned. It amazed her how fearless she was.

"You have been a gentle jailor," she told him gratefully.

He regarded her somberly.

"I hope you'll remember it in my favor when the reckoning comes."

She opened her eyes at this. It was the first admission of weakness in his position. So he knew, too, that somewhere, sometime, a reckoning would surely come!

"I shall remember it. I thank you for it, with all my heart. Even though you brought me here against my will, I shall never forget your chivalry."

After she had gone, he took the pelt from his trophy and stretched it, just as in former days. He listened a while to familiar voices, then slept. Within the cavern June dreamed lightly and pleasantly, and did not lie tossing as she had expected to do. When she wakened, the cavern was warm from the fire at its mouth.

He had a plan in mind, Sam said. He thought she might like something special for breakfast. So he took a hook from his hat and a string from his pack and a wand from an alder bush. With such an outfit they repaired to a little stream beyond the thicket. Two minutes later they were snaking a superior kind of breakfast-food out of the white, cold water.

It was quite an experience, June thought, for one who habitually took her first meal in bed. It seemed delightful improvidence to catch one's breakfast after getting up in the morning. Yet such a procedure did not impair her appetite. June had eaten pompano, drumfish roe, and diamond-back terrapin,

but she had never tasted fish or fowl or flesh to compare with the brook-trout which came cold out of the stream and hot from the skillet.

"These won't be on the regular bill of fare," Sam told her. "On some days we won't be able to catch them at all. Salmon is the only fish we can count on regularly."

After breakfast they searched for the water-plant of pleasant memory, and gathered Indian bread-root. In the afternoon they hunted caribou, but June was tired from tramping, so they returned without killing. They would dine on ptarmigan tonight, or snow-rabbit roasted over coals. There were plenty of caribou, and plenty of time to hunt them.

That evening they saw really big game. When the coals were red, and just as June was leaving her fire-side seat to enter the cave, Sam touched her hand and pointed up the mountain-side. At the edge of the snow trudged a heroic and imposing figure. No one had to tell her that this was the brute king of the barren lands, the great Kadiak bear of many legends. Sam tingled with the glory of him.

Partly to amuse her, partly because he could not refrain, this man king shouted up a greeting. He had a strong voice, and now it boomed among the gulches of old snow and roared back in sounding echoes. The old bear paused. He lowered his vast head and peered down. Then in ponderous dignity he trudged on, without the slightest change of pace. Soon he vanished about an upjutting crag.

"Do you want to kill him?" June asked soberly.

"No. He's too grand to kill—and he's worked for me in the past. . . . Besides, he obeys the Law. He knows I'm his master, and he wouldn't stand against me under any conditions. He knows that might is right—that my might denies him any right to oppose me—and that there is no higher, kindlier law to interfere."

She left him soon after, expecting that her fatigue would put her to sleep at once. She found, upon retiring to her sleeping-bag, that she was unexpectedly nervous. She kept listening; when she dozed at all, she would violently waken with an image of terror.

Why was she unable to rest? She felt no fear of Sam, and he had persuaded her that no creature of the barrens would attempt to do her harm. At last she got up and walked to the mouth of the cave.

Sam was already rolled in his blanket, but his quick eye saw her shadow in the firelight, and he immediately sat up.

"Sam?" she called.

"Yes."

"I'm uneasy. I don't know why. Do you suppose it's a premonition?"

"I guess not. I don't suppose there is such a thing as a premonition really."

"There's such a thing as a sixth sense. I got up to tell you—that I'm afraid."

"I'll protect you, June," he told her good-naturedly. "Go back to bed."

"Oh, I suppose it's nonsense. Just the same, I feel danger in the air. Do you remember what you said, the day we came—that you thought quite a program had been laid out for us? You had some premonitions then, yourself. They were not bad, you said—only exciting. These I'm having tonight are *bad*."

"The tenderfoot welcome?"

"Yes, only worse. As you said—there's static electricity in the air."

"Well, there's nothing we can do about it. You are just tired and nervous, June. I'm kind of tingly myself, but I'm going to forget it in sleep. Good night, again."

She went back to her sleeping-bag and, repelling all uneasy thoughts, began to put herself to sleep. She was just about to succeed when her lids sprang wide open.

A most extraordinary thing was happening. There were other living creatures in the cave. In themselves they were nothing to fear. In a little hole in the rock lived a family of gopher-like squirrels. Now, in the dead of night, they were deserting their home. Not only the parents, with whom she was already acquainted, but five half-grown squirrels crept one by one to the floor of the cave and trotted in a noiseless procession to the open night. She saw their shadows, grossly magnified, against the firelit threshold.

It was not just superstition which blew a cold wind over her brow and along the edge of her hair. She was shaken to the depths of her soul. Wide-eyed and trembling, she jumped up and quickly dressed, not forgetting to buckle on her revolver belt. Once more she appeared at the cave mouth.

"Sam!"

The man was asleep, but immediately he sat up, vividly alert. "What is it?"

"Get up and dress. We've got to get out of here. Something's going to happen—I don't know what. Don't lose a minute."

His only reply was to jerk on his boots and such of his outer garments as he had removed. He did not stop to question her as to what warning she had

received. His companion's white face and frightened eyes were argument enough.

As he buckled his belt and flung into his coat, he turned to pick up his rifle. He never reached it.

From far above them on the heights there came a low mutter. As its first note struck Sam's ear, he whirled about as if he had been struck a violent blow. He did not attempt to seize his rifle. To do so he must cover a distance of ten feet, which would require almost a second of inestimably precious time. One treasure alone was worth saving, at no matter what cost, and at the conclusion of his first swift movement he had clutched it in his hands. This treasure was June's life.

Snatching her to his side, he began to run. He gave no thought as to whether she could run as fast—he simply held on to her, as he raced along the base of the cliff. She was jerked almost off her feet by his first violence, but she caught her balance, and from that time on, her feet flew. Although she was pulled faster than she could possibly have gone by her own efforts, not once did she lose her footing.

Their race did not comprise the only movement at this mountain base. The air moved, snapping like a whip and swishing in eddies. Sound leaped and grew. The first mutter increased to a murmur; the murmur became a low rumble; the rumble grew to a roar, and the roar to a bellow beyond the limit of man-heard sound. This was not by easy gradations, but in a rising river, as if the gods had blown a mounting blast of doom. There was a crescendo somewhere, but the fugitives' tortured ears were too stunned to catch it. The final blast lasted a full five seconds, filling the valley and unable to escape, and by now all discord had passed, leaving a clear, deep note like a tidal wave of vibration, of terrific volume. It was as if a thousand Minotaurs were bellowing at once.

The saddle which Sam had spoken of was no longer snow-bound. The lingering drifts from the winter before had fallen at last. With them there smote down a thousand tons of rock and earth, burying Sam's cave so deeply that no man could ever know of it again.

A few days before Sam had tried to efface certain tracks on the sea's brim. He had been to considerable effort to conceal his presence here. Now the country's gods, by unusual favor, had taken over the work. They had wiped out his cave, his camp and his duffle, and if he had not run away they would have completed this matter of effacement in one easy gesture. He and his companion too would have been hidden beyond any fear of finding.

But he had fled. He had run with a speed not often reached by ambling and awkward man, and the girl had raced at his side. Just as the avalanche dumped its load, he snatched his companion around the turn in the cliff. As they flattened against the wall, the outside boulder brushed them with its wind.

CHAPTER XVII.

LONG moments dragged away before either of them could move. It was good to feel the firm rock, to hover against its face of flint. They could not dream what terror might lie in the dark beyond. Yet silence was coming back to Hopeless Land. The last echoes had died, and now they heard only an occasional sigh and murmur as the fallen giant of earth and snow settled in his bed. Between the little sounds crept a hush beyond their wit to fathom.

At last Sam did a bold thing. With one hand he let go the wall he clutched and glanced back over his shoulder. Nothing happened. No new terror smote him. The silence lingered still, and now it began to seem almost familiar—an old enchantment of the night. His ears were getting used to it, just as a man's eyes will get used to a shadowed room after a blinding light. The earth had begun to breathe quietly again.

Other familiar things reassured him. The wind was blowing as usual, no longer in wild and insane gyrations. He heard it whispering through the remains of the alders. A small animal rustled close to him, showing that there was life here other than his own, and that he was not the sole survivor of a cosmic disaster. Indeed, as far as he could tell in the dark, the general aspect of the wilderness was much the same. There was merely a new hill where his camp had been.

No exultation was in him yet. Far back in his mind there was something he must tend to—something infinitely dear. What of the treasure he had tried to save?

Suddenly he remembered June. His daze passed off like a wind-blown smoke, and he whirled about. He did not move timidly now. And now he made a sound for the first time since the cataclysm. It was a cry of joy, but it sounded more like a sob. The girl was beside him, unhurt.

They both made sounds. They did not seize hands, nor did they kiss, because their emotion was too primitive for such expression. They stood apart, staring at each other's wide eyes, and they gasped and shivered. They were both bitter cold.

So far they had acted much alike, except that Sam had shown a somewhat greater boldness in making the first movements. Now their individualities began to assert themselves. The man had sensed another emergency—cold—and deep-buried habit impelled him to fight it. The cold was simply of terror—in reality the night was warm—yet he began to make

motions toward fire. At first he worked rather aimlessly, yet he managed to scrape together some dead twigs of alder. Presently he began to think about what he was doing, and his actions became more efficient. His hand went to his belt, and—still controlled by habit—he was not surprised to find his camp ax.

He carried the tool to the first bush, with the idea of cutting fuel, before the wonder of its possession sank home to him. His camp had been buried under a hill of stone and snow, yet he had his ax. . . . Of course. There was nothing inexplicable about it—it was always fastened to his belt. At the same time, it was a blessed discovery. He had saved his knife too.

The work of chopping wood steadied him, and he continued his fire-making almost as skilfully as ever. A little ghost of flame crept up through the kindling. The shadows broke apart, scattering in panic as this miraculous vine burst into bloom. Sam crowded close, opening his hands to its warmth. The killing cold was driven from his veins.

He was saved! No wound was on him. The cannons of the giants had volleyed at him in vain. June unharmed was at his side. The spirit to live and fight for life welled strongly through him once more. He glanced at the girl expecting her to share his joy.

She had not come to the fire yet, and her eyes were dark and brimming. She stood with bent head, her lips moving slowly. She was exalted, but not with his sense of personal victory. For some reason, baffling to him, she was praying!

She looked up at last, her eyes misted with tears. “Why were we spared, Sam?” she asked wonderingly. “What have we done to deserve such mercy?”

This was a new point of view to him. He took some seconds to absorb it. “We were spared because I ran like a deer,” he told her bluntly. “I don’t see where any mercy comes in.”

“You don’t?” She emerged quickly from her awed mood and was vividly awake. “Aren’t you thankful?”

“I’m thankful for my swift legs. If a man shoots at me, and I dodge quick enough to avoid the bullet, do you think I owe him any thanks? That devil up there on the mountain shot at us, and by our own powers we escaped.”

“Oh, is that what it means to you!”

“What else can it mean? It’s an old story to me.” His voice dropped, and though deep, it had a queer, confiding, childish tone. “Upon that mountain, June, live the gods that hate us. They live on all the mountains, and they are

always in wait for us. They are the gods of night, and terror, and death, and they hate every living thing. They want this land for their own, with no track in the snow, no camp-fire in the dark—only the wind and the storm and the desolation reigning here forever. They set a trap for us. They fixed a cave for us to stay in. Then they tumbled the mountain down on top of us! But we fooled 'em, June. We got away. We ran like rabbits, and beat 'em. Why should I thank those gods for trying to kill me? I'll try to please them, so they'll leave me alone, and I'll fight 'em, when I have to; but there is only one good god that I thank."

"There is only one God, and He is good," she answered. "Sam, you've gone back. That's the talk of a barbarian—or of a childhood complex. Don't you know that the avalanche was simply a force of nature? It wasn't aimed at us. It wasn't sent to kill."

"Then what was it for? What was the good of it, except to destroy? Why did it wait until we were underneath it?"

"You speak as if it were alive. It was just old snow, and I suppose the vibrations of your voice, when you yelled at the bear, made it begin to slip. You owe a prayer, but not to placate any mountain devil. You owe a prayer of thankfulness that your life was spared, instead of being buried under those tons of rock.

"I don't know why avalanches have to be. They are like other natural disasters, killing people who happen to be in the way. You say we ran and saved ourselves, foiling a fiendish plot against our lives. That's just what a savage would think. Most sophisticated people of today would say our preservation 'just happened' or that it was all a matter of cause and effect. But I go further than that."

Her voice had begun to ring. Her tears had dried, and something close to religious ecstasy flamed in her face.

"You think we were saved by the will of God?" Sam asked.

"Yes, I do. I was brought up on an old creed. How did it happen, Sam, that you were wide-awake, and ready to run, when we heard the first sound above us? You would have been killed if you hadn't had that second warning. Who gave it to you?"

"You did!"

"And where did it come from? It was a sign!" And she told him how the family of squirrels had come out of their nest in the rocks and left the cave.

He was impressed, the story touching his superstitious sense, yet she could not change his pagan conceptions. "Maybe you have a good angel, June, who warned you of the plot against you," he suggested. "Maybe those

squirrels felt vibrations which they knew meant danger, too delicate for you to catch. Until I can see some other reason for them, I'll believe that avalanches are forces of destruction, hurled down by a hateful god. And the same with lightning—and the same with the blizzard.

"Hate is the motive power of life, not love," he went on somberly. "It's one big battle—and to the victor belongs the spoil! There's no good law, no force that makes for growth—only the Law that might is right."

"You'll learn sometime," she predicted.

"I wish I could. There's no joy in what I know, except the joy of fighting against great odds. And now they're greater than ever before."

"You mean, the fight to live?"

"The fight just to live—to be. That avalanche didn't kill us, June, but it whacked us all it could. We got a laugh on it, but it thinks it got a bigger laugh on us. Where is my gun?"

"Under the avalanche."

"Yes. The tool I counted on to get our meat and shoot salmon."

Her hand flew to her waist. "I've got this revolver——"

"Two shots in it, to be saved for an absolute emergency. They won't help our meat problem, June. A revolver isn't a hunting gun, anyway, but just a gun for defense. Fortunately, we have our ax, and there are some blankets, a kettle or two and a few supplies back at our cache, but all the food we brought here is wiped out."

She moved toward him and touched him. "What does it mean, Sam?" she asked earnestly. "We can't survive without a gun——"

"Can't, eh? So you think they've done for us, do you?" His expression was warlike and zealous, but back of it he could not hide his smile of pure joy. "Well, we'll show 'em. We'll fight 'em with our bare hands. And we'll win, June. We'll meet them on their own ground, and win."

As soon as light came, they brought the supplies from the cache and made a new camp at a smaller cave farther down the valley. They were not so luxuriously situated as before, but they were comfortable—a dry cell for June to sleep in, hard beds but warm, and enough cooking-pots for simple fare. Matches they had in plenty, so that Sam did not have to go back to stick-rubbing, a few toilet things, salt, and sugar for Indian tea.

It remained to be demonstrated whether they could survive in this hostile land. Certainly it did not look promising. But, hard though it was, it proved a joy rather than a pain.

Sam did not have much to go on, yet he was ingenious at contriving ways and means for procuring meat. At once he fashioned a crude bird-like dart, similar to that used by the Eskimos. This hunting was not so dull—the careful, cautious creeping stalk on a fat bird, the pausings, the suspense, the bright scrutiny by a suspicious eye, at last the careful aim and throw of an erratic weapon. Then June's laughter at his miss, or her gloating at his kill.

The darts were equally effective with rabbits, and a rabbit, after all, is a meal of parts! They were silly things, and since they could not smell, he could approach them from any direction, but they were flighty to a fault. June had never heard that porcupines were good to eat, but she was a person of cosmopolitan tastes, and she would surely give them a try. She learned that porcupine roast, prepared under Sam's directions, was not to be despised. Of all their small animal neighbors, one family alone was safe—some squirrels that were making a new nest in the rock. Sam was a remorseless hunter, but he was not without sentiment.

He caught trout almost any time he liked, but not every day did he bring in salmon. The silver bands were not so numerous as they once were; the Moreland managers had done their work well. Sometimes, however, he was able to club them in the riffles.

They had plenty of water-greens and Indian tea; they enjoyed an occasional dessert of wild strawberries; and if they had cared to go to the great labor of preparing it, they could have had an abundance of the Indian root-bread. As yet, Sam had contrived no means for killing caribou, and until he did so the food supply would remain uncertain. Nor had he rigged up apparatus for taking seal.

These were full days. The mere problem of finding fuel and food kept them from being bored. For the first few days Sam did not make the five-mile journey to the Medicine Pot—the spot where he had landed after the wreck of the *Sock-Eye*, and which was one of the objectives of his present expedition. He had chosen this part of the peninsula for their hiding-place so he could make certain investigations in regard to the proving of his identity, but so far his time had been occupied. Yet his work was not drudgery. For the girl the days were zestful, interesting and exciting, if not at times actually happy.

One day the past returned to Sam with startling force. During the evening meal, about a week after the avalanche, three newcomers visited their valley. Sam saw them first—a Kadiak bear and cubs, calmly resting on the creek bank four hundred yards below their camp.

June rejoiced to see them, but was nevertheless annoyed. She had resolved that sometime, during their stay in Hopeless Land, she would spy a living creature before Sam did; yet he had bested her again. He chaffed her on the subject, pointing out that although she was facing in their direction, the bears had walked up virtually to her front door without her noticing them. But presently he stopped teasing her. He began to watch the family with fascinated interest.

The old she-bear had something of an eye herself and had discovered that which even Sam had missed—a half-dozen salmon spawning in a pool in the creek. Only king salmon would have come so far; the other varieties regularly spawned in the flat water closer to the sea. Quite as if she were already full-fed, and therefore had little enthusiasm for the enterprise, she descended the bank and began to fish. The two cubs quietly watched her.

Now Sam knew about king salmon: first, that they were superior to any other variety, and second, that he had not yet procured one for the table. And he also knew of a talent of his, an old trick, that would amuse and amaze June even more than his quickness of eye. He was rather in a show-off mood. The chaff they had just had made him more so. He was very boyish, in some ways; now his eyes began to shoot sparks, and a pleasant excitement took hold of him.

"June, I'm going to try something," he told her suddenly.

"What?"

"I'm going to sneak one of the salmon that the bear knocks out. I used to do it, and I still can. I lived by it once. You can't imagine how thrilling it is!"

"If you want salmon, why don't you drive the bears away and catch them?"

"We'd never be able to catch 'em in that big pool. Besides, we must give 'em a sporting chance. Let's see—the wind's exactly right. Now, June, I'm going to demonstrate a fact not generally known about Kadiak bears—that they are among the easiest animals to stalk in the whole world. They don't see well, except at very close range, and they hear only indifferently. But oh, how they can smell! Keep the ice-cream and cake till I get back."

But June did not seem to enter into the spirit of the thing. She did not appreciate his joke about dessert, and indeed looked rather drawn and intense. "Oh, you're not going to stalk those brutes without a gun."

He laughed happily. "Just watch me!" Then, sensing her real anxiety, "June, I know just what I'm doing. The bears are one group of animals that can be counted on to keep the Law. Once in a long time, a wounded bear goes crazy, and charges a man without knowing what he is doing, but those

bears out there wouldn't make an unprovoked attack under any conditions. They're safe as so many kittens. They realize that man is their master, and will suffer any abuse he wants to give them. There—she's moving out into the water. She'll be whacking 'em out in a few minutes more, as soon as the fish get used to her, and begin swimming around again." He started to go. "Don't worry, June."

"You have to take the revolver anyway."

"That pop-gun? It's useless, and besides, the only danger is that she'll run away before I get there."

"Oh, come back! Don't be a fool."

He flashed her a smile and hurried on. She saw him walk within two hundred yards, pausing only when one of the cubs looked in his direction. A curve around a small knoll took him another hundred and fifty yards. Her eye could not follow him farther; he went down in the grass and completely disappeared.

Now she was visited with an extraordinary impulse. There was no thinking behind it; it seemed an outside force controlling her muscles. With no great care whether or not she frightened Sam's game, she began to stalk too. She knew but one desire, one which had its roots deep in her heart. She wanted to be with her companion in such adventure as might come to pass.

Simply enough she crossed the distance to the little knoll. Encircling it cautiously, she came out within fifty yards of the bears. It was a compliment to her skill that up to this point Sam had not seen her. Where his quick eyes failed, the beasts could not hope to see.

In the meantime he had approached twenty yards nearer. He moved slowly toward the animals, occasionally freezing, and once lying still for a full minute while all three bears cocked their ears at him. This critical time was merely thrilling excitement for him, but for June it was cruel suspense that she would not soon forget. At last they went back to their fishing, and he pushed on.

He was now within sixty feet. Would he let them walk on him? And now the old she-bear knocked her first salmon out upon the bank.

The cubs rushed for it, but except for the single thunder-clap blow which had socked out the fish, their mother did not move. June did not move, either. Sam was still advancing, almost under their feet, and she felt as though all power of motion had been frozen out of her forever. Great fear was smiting her now. If Sam had known how bitter this fear was, he would have given up the sport and returned to comfort her. But he could not know.

He thought she was back at the cave. He knew only the wild excitement of the stalk, recalled in full from the distant days of his childhood.

She was afraid to call him back—lest the sound startle the bears—and afraid to let him go on. One thing, however, she might do. She took her revolver in her hand. Small comfort though it was, it was all she had.

Now the she-bear knocked out two more fish in rapid succession, one of which lay unnoticed in a patch of high grass. It was so easy to reach—only fifteen feet farther on through cover dense enough to hide Sam's body. The mother was still fishing; each of the two cubs had a salmon to keep it busy. The thing was as good as done.

He crept slowly forward, moving only when the bears were headed in the opposite direction. At last he reached his hand toward the prize.

Then the accident happened. There entered the unforeseen.

A third bear, likewise a cub, sprang up in the thick grass just beyond his hand. It had been lying asleep, and Sam simply had been dosed with his own medicine. He had worked on the principle that a motionless figure is virtually invisible against a protective background, and the same principle had been worked on him. Thus he had not seen the cub, and since he had failed to remember that a she-bear is often followed by three young—occasionally by four—he had not conceived of its existence until now.

This was a puny cub. Its fur was poor; it was scrawny, pot-bellied, and sickly. When Sam's startled eye absorbed these facts—the identical instant the little creature leaped from cover—he knew what it would do. It would not scamper off, after the manner of healthy young bears. It would shriek.

It squealed. It crouched down and made the hurt noise.

This was a remarkably penetrating sound in the silence, and violently startling. And what then followed was startlingly violent—like a cannon fired in a storm.

The old she-bear had been seen to move swiftly when she had batted out the salmon. That movement was now recalled as tedious. Before the cub squealed she was facing in the opposite direction in the middle of the stream, and in one hair-raising bound she turned completely around and made the bank. It is dumfounding when a massive figure, cumbersome and vast, leaps to raging life. It was somehow awful—shattering to the spirit—to see that huge figure, jaws wide, paws outstretched, yellow fur erect, spring clear of the water like a great winged thing in her transport of ferocity.

One of the larger cubs was between the mother and her little one. He was standing up, trying to see what was happening. The mother struck him a glancing blow with her shoulder as she lunged up the bank, with the result

that he was knocked twenty feet to one side and stunned. The Kadiak bear, unlike its cousin, the grizzly, does not often roar. This Kadiak not only roared, but bellowed—a sound which must be heard and can never be imagined, the quintessence of hell-fury against those who had hurt her cub.

No male bear could have made this sound. It was a frightful, thunderous rumble, yet not impersonal like thunder; it was animal, and in a vague and ghastly way it sounded somehow human. It burst the air without warning, the same instant that she made her first bound.

The human brain can move faster than any muscle. There was no time for Sam to get to his feet and attempt to run, yet there was plenty of time, not only to realize this fact of his situation, but many others as well—ideas, arguments and conclusions marshaled for review in a single bright light slicing across his mind.

He knew that if the bear chose to kill him, she could do it. It all lay with her. She could run faster than any man, even if he were able to start at all. He knew, further, that if he did start, she would surely follow, because the instinct of any beast of prey is to chase a running figure. Last, he knew the one chance that remained. It was only a chance, yet it was all he had.

He remembered how, long ago, he had lain motionless in the grass, and the foe had gone away. It might be that this enemy would do the same. She might stop to sniff at her cub, to ascertain his injuries, and then, remembering man's mastery, troubled by man's smell, be frightened off. So far the bear was merely advancing to defend her cub. She had not yet found out who her adversary was, but she would find out soon. A second or two—in which his mind had traveled miles—had already elapsed, since the cub had squealed; an equal time could easily see the finish.

The female was at his side at her third bound, and her little red eyes picked him out instantly. As she paused to sniff at her cub, she watched him out of the corner of her eye, and now she caught his smell. If she attacked now, it would not be because she did not know who he was.

Sam had been given one chance. It did not win. The bear bellowed again and whirled to attack. He was not spared as on that memorable occasion of his childhood. There was a difference in the issue involved. That she-bear of long ago had been willing to yield to his man-might, since it concerned a mere matter of stolen fish. The issue now was the protection of her young. There had been no anger before; now there was fury, ravenous and wild.

Sam's eyes were wide-open, watching. This was no time to cover and protect his face. He saw the huge sledge-hammer paw lift to strike.

If that blow had gone straight home, Sam would have never breathed again. It would have caved in the skull or the trunk, torn off the arm or the leg. And her paw was not only blasting in its power, but hideously swift. Yet it happened that its target was also swift. This was not dull clay at her feet, but one in whom movement was rife.

Sam made an almost incredible effort to dodge the blow. He was more like a cat than a man, more like a snake than a cat. His wrench to one side had not only signal swiftness, but uncanny accuracy. Of course, he could not escape entirely—the sweeping paw was too swift for that—but he avoided the full force of it. For a second or two more, his life was spared.

Yet even the edge of such a blow can be deadly enough. The ends of the claws raked Sam's head. He was not only knocked to one side, but smitten instantly unconscious. No fleetness was left in him now. He would not again slip like a dancer away from his doom. The momentum of the blow swung the she-bear half around, but her growl sounded, and she sprang to attack again. Her teeth crunched once into his side.

At that instant she came aware of the presence of another enemy. There was a loud noise just beside her. At the same time she felt a sharp blow at her shoulder, as if she were being struck by another bear. A blow which she had meant for Sam, she dealt herself—striking at the source of pain. Then she turned to fight the foe advancing toward her.

It was June. She was coming in. She was taking her place. The absolute crisis for which she had saved her revolver cartridges had come at last. One shot had already been fired, inflicting a flesh wound in the animal's side. Although its range was less than fifty feet, except to divert the attack from Sam, it had virtually been wasted. One cartridge remained, and it must not be wasted.

It was only a thirty-eight shell. The gun was made for killing men, not giants. So she ran up until the beast was just beside her. High, higher, it reared, as it prepared to strike with its maul of death.

In its shadow she stood. She aimed at its head. Its neck would have been a better risk, considering the narrowness of the skull, yet she did not know this, and she followed instinct. Once more the gun barked.

Her eye and her hand held true. She was not a skilled shot, but in this great trial, she rallied to do two things—to hold the gun still and to look along its barrel as she fired. She hit the bear's head because she had aimed at it, but it was chance that sped the bullet into the brain instead of through the great muscle-masses flanking the skull. And even a thirty-eight bullet is heavy foreign matter in a brain.

The last growl abruptly ended. Silently, and with awful dignity, Shatter-Paw sank to the ground.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE revolver fell from June's hand, and she crept to the side of her companion who lay so still. Her eyes were dry, painfully dry, and her face was a blank sheet from which all writing had been erased. She sat down quietly in the grass and nursed the man's breast against her own.

This was his place. She had known so all the time. Her arms and breast had always longed for him, and now they had him, if only for one hour.

His head was warm and wet. She put her lips against his, but she could hardly feel his breath. Had the raking blow of the claws torn away his life? Was this the last hour? If it was, she would spend it as she liked. The rest of her life might be sold or become prey to the gods of earth, but this hour was her own, and no one could steal it from her. Plainly, it was the end, because the sun was just setting, as in splendid allegory. The peaks were red. The wind swept the tundra.

She must make the most of the time that remained. Night would fall soon. The warmth would pass away, and the cold would set in. His hand was in hers now, no longer groping, and she pressed it as she had always wanted to do. His eyes were not pleading with her now, because they were closed, but it was not too late to answer their plea with her kisses. She could kiss his lips, too——

This was a mystical summons. He stirred; his eyes opened. They were luminous eyes, but their light was no longer startled and strange, only childlike and grateful. It was a clear luster, as if an ineffable dream had come true.

His arm came slowly up and pressed her close, holding her lips to his. The meaning of it, the sweetness and the significance, was not only far beyond the ken of these children of the sunset; it was beyond worlds; it was the first mystery, and the last; it remained beyond the far journeyings of thought.

But an instant later the world returned to them both. There was an earthly problem here, perhaps a life to be saved. She was not free yet. The hour had been cut short. She shook off the spell of dreams.

"Sam, can you speak?"

He nodded, and smiled dimly. "I'm all right, June."

She dared not let herself believe him yet, but he felt a sob wrench at her breasts, and she knew the relief of tears. Instantly she wiped the drops away.

"Tell me what to do, Sam," she begged. She looked helplessly about, seeing only the raw and merciless Wild. "Oh, I don't know what to do——"

"We'll go to camp." He faltered, but his struggle was not physical, but mental, showing that the stunning effects of the blow had not yet passed off. "That's the first thing, June—camp—fire. . . . If you'll just help me——"

His humility made her cry, but she rallied as soon as she could. "Oh, you can't walk——"

"Yes, I can. . . . I can't think, but I can walk. . . . I'm not really hurt——"

She could hardly believe her eyes when he sat up. The episode had seemed so final and deadly, and now life quickened in him again. In him it seemed to be an inexhaustible fountain. She got up and lent him her strength, and in a moment he was rocking on his feet.

"It's not my body," he told her. "It's my brain—it's jarred for a minute. . . . Stay beside me, June. . . . Show me the way. . . . I can't go without you."

With her arm about him and her shoulder against his back they made their way to the cave. He walked like a drunken man, stiff-legged and reeling. She laid him on her bed, then, fully herself, went to throw wood on the fire. On her return she found him insensible, but this was not coma now, only the deep sleep of nervous exhaustion, and terror did not break her down again.

First, she examined the wounds on his head. With sensitive, gentle fingers she probed them, but nowhere could she find the skull fractured, and she had every reason to hope that they were flesh-wounds, and that the mental effects he was suffering were due to shock rather than to any actual injury to his brain. In his side she found his only other wound, a severe laceration of the flesh. His ribs, however, were not broken, and if she could prevent infection, the injury would heal in a few days.

Among his few remaining stores was a bottle of whisky, the only antiseptic in camp. She washed his wounds with scrupulous care, then poured in alcohol. It was not surprising that he wakened. This was heroic treatment.

She had some skill in bandaging. First aid had been taught her in school. She cut into strips a towel which she had boiled and sterilized, and with these protected the wounds from dirt. This was the most she could do, but she was keen enough to know that it was the best that could be done by anyone, and that her extra care more than made up for the crudeness of her

materials. If she could prevent infection, nature would take care of the rest. In this clean, new land, she had every chance to win.

It was after midnight when her first aid was done. Sam had dozed most of the time, but occasionally he had spoken to her, deploring in faltering words the trouble he was making her. Now she sat holding his limp hand, watching his quiet breathing. . . .

When Sam wakened again, his hand was still confined, and bright morning gleamed outside. He recognized the walls of the cave, which until now had been hung with curtains of mist. A vivid self-consciousness had returned to him.

For a moment he lay thinking. He had undergone some remarkable adventure. . . . He remembered now—the squealing cub, the charging bear. That must have been just at sunset, because twilight had fallen immediately afterward.

Through that twilight, there had been some motion, some event. He had slept and wakened and slept again, and his first wakening—before June had brought him in from the barrens to the cave—had called him from the most exquisite, blessed dream that dreamland could know. He could recall only the faintest figment of it, but this was like a haunting strain of melody, blissfully sweet, and his heart glowed to think of it. The sun had beamed in that dream as bright as in the tropics. There had been some sort of miracle . . .

Of course, all this was just imaginary. It could not have happened. But it *did* happen that he had reeled to the cave, with the girl's arm around him. It *did* happen that she had cared for him all through the night. Curiously enough, light spaces spotted the night, not bright like the present morning, yet misty and differing from the deeper dark. During some of these periods he had got up, and moved about, and exchanged a few words with his nurse. He was glad that he had not been a helpless patient. Most of the time, however, he had dozed.

He had been aware of warmth and comfort and care. Thank Heaven, he did not need it now and could begin to wait on June. She had been holding his hand early in the evening, and now she was holding it again.

He turned and faced her. The night had gone hard with her; she was drawn and haggard, although her beauty had a delicacy he had never observed before.

"I've wakened, June," he told her.

Some vividness in his voice startled her profoundly. “What do you mean?”

“I mean I’ve come back. I’m well. The mist has all cleared from my brain.”

It was hard to doubt his ringing tones, yet she must not be deceived again. “How do you know?”

“How does anybody know when they’re awake instead of asleep? I’m telling the truth, June—I’m as well as you are. A little weak, I think—why I should be, I don’t know. I don’t remember much loss of blood.”

“There wasn’t much loss,” she informed him.

“I didn’t think so, although the events of the night are not very plain.”

“The night?” she demanded.

“Why, yes. The thing happened just about sunset, I remember. There’s bright morning light outside——”

“Oh, Sam!” She began to cry, but somehow her tears hardly seemed of sorrow, but rather of nervous exhaustion. She sobbed bitterly and inconsolably.

He sat up at once, patting her and talking gently to her. “You’ve had a hard night, June,” he murmured. “You’re worn out. Now it’s your turn to get in bed, and let me wait on you. Don’t cry, little girl.” Then, humorously, as she tried to check her tears. “We’ll take turns being nurse—that’s better than playing prisoner and jailor. I’ll take off these bandages in a few days——”

She dried her eyes, and confronted him. “You can take them off now, if you like.”

“What!” His eyes got round.

“The scars are all formed. The wounds are healed. Yes, it was certainly a night I had. Have you any idea what time it is?”

He glanced once at the daylight. “About ten.”

“Just about. And what day?”

“Good Lord! *What day——?*”

“I’ll tell you. It’s the fifth day since you went to steal that salmon. You’ve slept here five nights, not one.”

As this news went home, his power of speech departed. He did not even attempt a suitable remark. He simply eyed her in growing wonder and in blessed humility. He touched his wounds, but felt no pain. No wonder there had been lighter spaces between the periods of darkness.

At last, feeble speech returned. “And you—you stayed with me all this time?”

“All the time I could.”

“What—what about fires? I hear a crackle outside. Have the men come?” His voice quavered. “How did you keep the fire burning, June? Tell me.”

“I chopped wood. Two hours a day, I guess. It’s so tough—so hard.” Then, with the faintest trace of humor, “I got rather skilful at it.”

She held up her hands for him to see, and a shiver as of fever passed over him. She had not known that the sight of her flayed palms would hurt him as it did, yet she was not sorry she had shown them. It is the way of woman not to be too tender, when the welfare of their men is at stake. This was part of his cure, which he was now well enough to stand.

He uttered one syllable in exclamation, but it was of shame rather than of amazement. For quite a few minutes afterward nothing further was said.

At last he braced up and regarded her straight. “I might as well face the music,” he muttered. “June, what’s the rest of the story. How did you feed me? There wasn’t hardly anything here to eat. I don’t feel as though I’ve been starving——”

“You haven’t starved. The food wasn’t good—it was horrible—but there was plenty of strength in it. I had to eat it too, to keep up. It was bear meat.”

“And you went out there and cut it yourself?”

“Of course. Brought in great pieces of it, piece at a time, and hung it up. I didn’t know how long you’d be sick. I even tried to dry some of it, by cutting it into strips. It was so strong I could hardly swallow it at first, but it made nutritious broth.”

“Where did you sleep?”

“By the fire. I wanted to keep it going. It went out once and was so hard to start.”

“You’ve had five days to do what you wanted to. Why didn’t you run away, or try to get word to the search-party to come and get you? Why did you stay? I guess I can answer that—because you didn’t know the way. You didn’t know how to send word.”

“I did know how to send word.”

All the color slowly faded from his face, leaving it waxen white in the shadowy cavern. “What do you mean?”

“Just what I said. I could have brought them here within two days, and maybe less. I know how to build a fire, don’t I? All I had to do was to make

a big fire up on that ridge, and put green alder branches on it to make it smoke. They could have seen, easy enough. They've been scouring the seas along this coast. I've seen boats almost every day, from the alder patch."

"Great Lord!" He spoke reverently and in awe. Again there was a period of silence. He was trying to understand.

"June, was it because you were afraid to leave me?" he asked at last, falteringly. "Did you think I was seriously injured, and you didn't dare go away even long enough to go up and build a signal-fire?"

"That was not it, Sam." Her voice was clear. "I knew—felt, anyway—that you were not seriously hurt. If you had been, I would have sent for them, so they could have taken you to a doctor. I—I just didn't want them to come until you were well. I didn't want them to capture you. I wanted to give you a chance to get away."

"I am beginning to understand." He swallowed painfully. "It seems as if you were right, and I was wrong." He was suffering keenly, but she did not attempt to comfort him. Bitter though it was, this was good medicine for his soul. "It appears that I was mistaken."

"You were mistaken about many, many things. I've had lots of time to think, while I was cutting up the meat, and chopping fuel. I have balanced your beliefs with mine and gone over in my mind all that you told me. I didn't blame you altogether, Sam. That last day back at the cannery was one of sad disillusionment to you, but you took the wrong view of it. Just because we don't follow certain teachings, it doesn't mean that those teachings are not true. The fault is with us, not with the creed. We just haven't learned to obey it yet—the world is too strong against us.

"Maybe we will learn sometime, but flying off to worship idols won't help us any. Although might may still conquer right, it doesn't mean that might *is* right.

"I've been reviewing some of the things that have happened, and the effect that they had on you. Don't think I fail to understand about the sun, Sam. Way back there on the shore—fourteen years ago—it was the only comfort of your cheerless little soul, and naturally you flew back to it when other comfort went away. I don't hold that against you, and I don't hold anything against you—even bringing me here. If I had, I would have lighted the signal-fire, and let them come and get you, and give you your punishment."

"I'll take my punishment." He raised his head.

Her eyes glinted. "There's something besides punishment waiting for you," she went on. "There is reawakening. All you have to do is open your

eyes. Sam, have you tried to recall the actions of that she-bear? They are worth looking into. She rather upset your ideas, didn't she?"

"She knocked 'em all to pieces," he confessed with some emphasis. "She didn't leave me a leg to stand on."

"She knew that you were man—dominant man, against whom no beast can stand—yet she attacked you. She was not insane from a bullet wound. She was simply fighting for her cub. Then there must be some law behind yours, mustn't there? Somewhere within her was a voice even beyond that of self-protection. Where did it come from, Sam? Who was it that ordered her to fight for her cubs even at the cost of her own life? Even in this beast, might didn't make right—only *love* made right."

"I concede it," he admitted, humbly. "I might have known."

"Something else happened that you thought was proof of your barbarian philosophy. You thought the avalanche was a weapon of hate, hurled down by some mountain-devil to destroy mankind. I told you that it was just a natural force, striking anyone who happened to be in its way, but at that time I couldn't think of any reason for it to be, or any good in it. Sam—far, far back, that was an act of love too. Not love of us, especially, but of all life. An avalanche may kill someone occasionally, and this one might have killed us, but for every life it takes it gives a hundred more.

"You know where that rocky waste was, along the base of the mountain? That's all filled up with the dirt and gravel of the avalanche. Creeping up through that dirt is new grass. A million little lives, where before there was only a desert. Don't you see now? It is avalanches, and snowslides, and glaciers that wear down the mountains, and make ground for living things. It's been going on for millions of years. If it wasn't for such forces, there would be no life—you and I would never have been born."

Her voice had grown solemn as she talked. She was telling him what was very near her heart for a cause most dear. He was not so amazed now. He had seen this side of her before. Her face was flushed—no longer pale—and her eyes were alight.

"You plead your case very well," he told her. "But you aren't changing me."

Her lips trembled. "Then I am bitterly disappointed."

"Those arguments couldn't change me—because I was already changed." He was flushed now, too, swept with all the dear fervor and hope of youth. Somehow they got each other's hands. "I acknowledge defeat."

"Then—then what was it that changed you?"

"What you told me first. How you stayed with me to save me, when you had every reason to want me punished. How you took care of me, when I was down and out. I don't need any further proof that there is something mightier than might in this world. I take back what I told you that day at the cannery. Your faith is greater than mine, and yours is true, and mine was false."

"Then what are you going to do?"

"I'm going to let you go back. I'm going to send for them and put you in their hands when they land on the beach, and I'm not going to run away like a whipped dog. I will face them. I'll give up all—because you were right, and I was wrong."

He began to pull on his boots.

"What are you going to do now?"

"I'm going up to light that signal-fire. I'm pretty weak from five days' lying around, but I can make it, if I take it slow. There's a low ridge three miles down, an easy climb. It shows up well from the sea, and it's just back of the Medicine Pot, where I landed as a child. They can land there too, and we can meet them—where the trouble first began."

But she was not willing that they go at once. She feared that his strength had suffered more than he thought. She insisted that he wait another day.

This day they rested, idling about the camp, and Sam tried to win back their old, gay mood. He did not succeed very well. He was growing up—perhaps both of them were—and this meant that he had begun to dwell darkly on the future. What it held he did not know, but he could guess and fear.

For all he could see, today was his final reprieve. He planned to make the most of it. He wanted to shut away all thoughts of tomorrow, and live today—the day of his dreams, with the Daughter of the Sun at his side. Yet a shadow fell across the blue. There was no cheer in the camp-fire, no fun in the crude meals, no tingle of adventure in anything. He hardly dared let himself think . . .

Fortunately, his mood did not reach June. He was able to conceal it from her, he thought, and plainly she had no fears of her own to darken the day for her. Indeed, she seemed in splendid humor—her smile flashing, her laugh ready, her rest peaceful. There was a queer darkening about her eyes that he had seen only once or twice before—particularly on the occasion of their last good-by talk at the cannery—but evidently it was without significance. Her gaiety was surely genuine enough. And he did not blame her—evidently she was no longer fearful of what the future held for her. In

these days in the Wild she had plainly arrived at some important decisions on her own account. Perhaps she had concluded that happiness was to be found yet—and in Leonard's arms.

They spent most of the next day in the fire-making expedition to the top of the signal ridge. Barren and gray was the crest; fuel had to be chopped and carried up laboriously from a brushwood patch five hundred feet below. Three back-loads of alder sticks, and armfuls of green vegetation.

The kindling was arranged. The match was struck. The fire licked up. When it was blazing well, handfuls of green stuff were laid on, and a cloud of savory white smoke streamed into the sky.

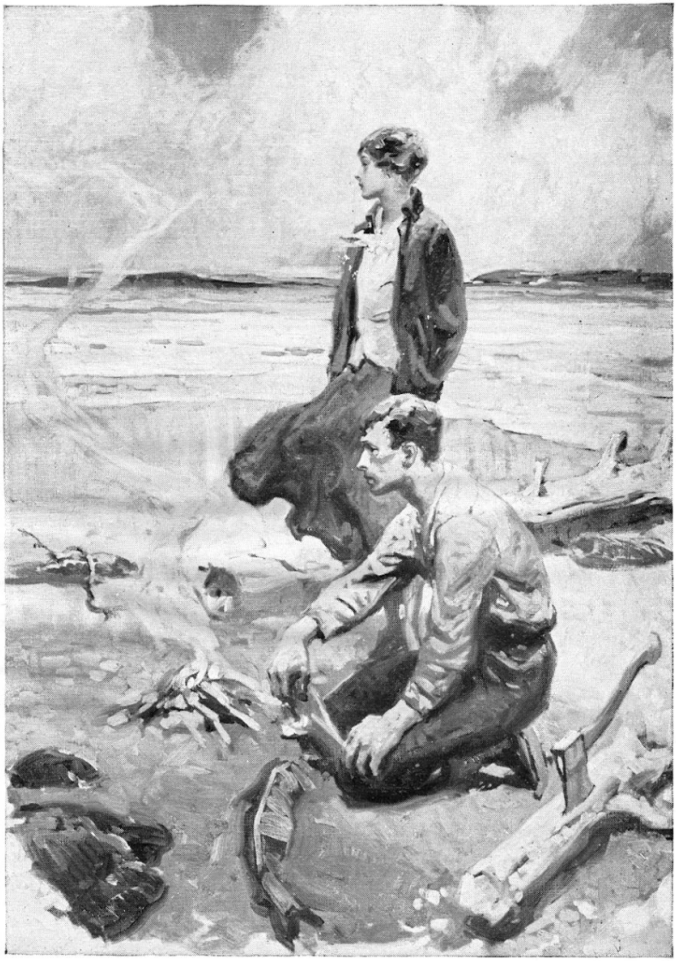
June's lashes were wet as she touched her companion on the sleeve. "It's our altar, isn't it?" she asked gently. "To the truth."

His eyes were sunken and strange. "It's my sacrificial fire," he told her.

CHAPTER XIX.

WHEN morning came again they made their way to the beach. At any other time this would have been a thrilling expedition to Sam—to this region of mystic memory. Even as things were, this scene of his infancy—this drear coast where he had landed, lived, played and striven—was one of profound interest to June, and perhaps it moved her too. She was not without imagination. She could see a ghost, a wistful, lonely little ghost, standing upon the brown sand, looking toward the sea.

It turned out that they would have no great amount of time for Sam's investigations. They had no more than pitched their camp and lighted a fire of driftwood to guide the searchers to the place, when a dark spot appeared at the edge of vision, far up the coast. It seemed to herald the end. Sam guessed at once that this was one of the cannery tenders from Gull Point—probably the *Silver Hake*—and its quick appearance showed that no time had been lost after the signal was seen. He had supposed that some one of the scattered searchers would see the smoke first, and a trip to the cannery would be made necessary to organize a rescue party, but plainly one of the larger boats, perhaps with Hillguard himself aboard, had been in binocular range when the ridge-fire was lighted.



Far up the coast their signal had been seen

"It'll take them about two hours to get down here and anchor, and at least another hour to put out a dory and make a landing, so we'll have time to dig out the boat," Sam told her. "Perhaps it's best. You won't have to spend another night in Hopeless Land."

Hopeless Land! It was proving its name.

Where the life-boat had once hung upside down for Sam's shelter, there was only a heap of sand. The cut where the boat had been thrown up had been completely filled. With a shovel made of his pack-board he began to dig.

June stood beside him, her bright eyes following every movement of the shovel. Soon she caught sight of white board. It slowly grew like an

amphibian monster—the keel of a boat was revealed, then its curved bottom, and at last a black letter, upside down and still plainly visible on the faded paint. Other letters came to view, and presently she could make out a name.

"The *Sock-Eye*!" she whispered. "It's like a message from the dead. That's proof, isn't it, Sam?"

Watching him digging, she had not noticed how pale he was. Now the fact startled her.

"Only circumstantial evidence of a slim kind," he told her dully. "The *Sock-Eye* was wrecked in these waters—it isn't surprising that one of her boats came to shore. You remember Olga's story—how her boy, her own son who had an active imagination, used to make a playhouse out of a forsaken life-boat? There is nothing to connect me with it—nothing to prove that the boy who played here was Sam Moreland."

He dug farther. Shortly after, a black hole appeared between the bow of the life-boat and the sand beneath. The forward end was shown to be suspended on a half-buried pile of driftwood. The hole widened until he could work with his shovel under the boat itself.

The entire cavity under the arched bottom was filled with dry sand, so another hour went by before he approached the beach level. After a while he crawled through the hole, and she peered in to see him digging with his hands.

Presently a sound reached her, hollow and strange in the cavity of the boat. It was a gasp, she thought; yet there was a throat sound in it too, and it had not been uttered lightly. Now his face appeared at the opening, drawn as she had never seen it. He crawled out to her, bringing a dark, bulky object in his arms.

Speechless, he spread it out. It was filled with sand, yellow and dry as dust, and he shook it gently and rubbed it with his hand. Now she saw that only the back of it was black. The inside of it was faded red—a silk cloth, like a lining, that fell into strings as he touched it.

She could tell that it had once been a fur coat. The fur, in fact, was still intact, and the shape of the garment was unmistakable. But presently she looked away from it to stare at the man who held it in his hands. She saw what she had never expected to see in him. His eyes were not now black and glassy, but wet with childish tears.

"Don't cry, Boy," she whispered, not loud enough for him to hear. She had forgotten he was grown, even as he had forgotten. In her heart she was speaking to a forsaken child, a cheerless little figure lost on an empty shore.

“A great many things are coming back to me,” he told her after a while. “This was my mother’s coat. She put it around me on shipboard. . . . ‘Don’t forget who you are—Sam Moreland, son of Sam Moreland,’ she told me. She was crying, and I didn’t know why. . . .

“I can almost remember how she looked, June. It’s like a faded picture. She was so beautiful. . . . The coat was lovely once too—warm and soft. It’s filled with sand now, but you can see how soft it was. I’ll keep it always. It is worth more than the Moreland heritage or the Moreland name. . . . I’ll have *this*, anyway.

“I know now why I didn’t die of exposure in the boat. It was like her arms about me. Then at night, on this shore, it saved me from cold. I’d run to it when the night came—when I was chilly or afraid—and it always comforted me. *This* was why I was able to keep alive on the shore, even when everyone else had died.”

June shook off the spell of his voice, and made herself think of the practical aspects of this discovery. “But how did you come to be alone in the boat, Sam? Why wasn’t she with you?”

“I don’t know. There are no memories about that.” He looked at the coat, as if it would tell him everything, and now he noticed what had at first escaped his gaze-a rotted cord tied about the sleeve and dangling. He remembered that as he had dug the coat out of the sand just now, he had felt a slight resistance, as if a thread had broken. A connection between these two facts was instantly established in his mind, so he searched under the boat again. Soon he found the other end of the cord dangling from the thwart.

It was like a thread of memory. He could follow it distinctly now. He emerged, pale but composed. “She put the coat on me and tied me in,” he explained. “The string proves this point. Then something happened—in the dark. I suppose the others fell out as the boat was lowered—that’s a common thing.”

“Then that proves your story, doesn’t it, Sam? It explains everything.”

He smiled at her shining eyes, but shook his head. “Explanation isn’t proof. There is nothing here to show that little Sam Moreland landed here—except my own story. All there is, is a boat from the wrecked *Sock-Eye*, stranded on the beach—a fur coat in it, that could have easily belonged to Mrs. Moreland—and a string tied to the coat. He *might* have landed here—it is possible—but the burden of proof lies on me; and where can I get it? Don’t you see that Olga’s story is still more plausible than mine—that I just

came here to play and imagined the rest? Now if I could just find evidence that little Sam Moreland was ever alive on this shore——"

"Look again. Maybe you'll find something——"

"If I could find a little worn-out shoe, that an Indian boy could never have had, or any of the clothing of a white child, showing signs of wear on the shore—then I would have proof of some value. You see the biscuits are all gone out of the can, but that doesn't mean anything. Olga's son, coming here to play, might have eaten the biscuits. I'll see what I can find in the sand under the boat."

But this search was without result. There was nothing to indicate that a white boy had ever visited the shore. From the pockets of the coat he took a handkerchief that could have been Isobel Moreland's, yet even if this point were established, it did not affect Sam.

By now the *Silver Hake* had anchored outside the shoals, and a boat was launched, full of people. A wheel which had started turning fifteen years before was just now completing its circle. For the second time in the history of this immediate region of reef and sea, a life-boat came rolling in toward shore.

It was a curious fact that June looked out but once. She did not watch the boat's approach—she knew it was safe, and would arrive soon enough—but continued to help Sam's search. But the time came shortly that neither of them could further ignore their visitors. They must give up now. The boat was only a hundred yards away and approaching swiftly. The reckoning was at hand.

The two stood side by side at the water's edge. Now they could identify the people in the boat—and not one of those most concerned had been left behind. Besides members of the ship's crew, there were at the oars June's father and lover—Hillguard and Leonard. In the bow sat a woman whose erect head and alert manner identified Miss Helen Moreland. No doubt she was in command of the expedition. In the stern was a squat, still, stolid figure whom Sam gasped to see.

Yet he might have known that they would bring Olga. She knew the coast, and particularly she knew Sam's boyhood haunts. She had probably been recruited early in the search and was now acting as guide.

June looked at Sam, and by his eyes she knew that his heavens were falling down about his head. Yet he did not ask for mercy, now that he was in her power. Only his glance, hovering for an instant on her face, was an unconscious appeal. He was stricken—his gods had gone back on him, and the pride of his strength was humbled—but still his look was not that of

physical fear. Indeed, he was quietly waiting for the finish, and when she saw the gun that leaned at her father's side in the boat, her countenance was paler than his.

The boat found the cut, grating at last on the sand. Everyone landed. And now June saw that Leonard was armed too. The faces of both men were set and stern.

For the first moment only Olga noticed Sam. All the rest seemed centered on June. Hillguard's eyes searched her face, and perhaps some of his intensity passed off. As yet he did not take her in his arms. The others stood in fixed postures on the sand, waiting for him to speak.

"What happened, June?" he asked gravely, at last.

Tears rolled strangely from the girl's wide eyes. "Nothing. I'm not hurt. I'll tell you all later."

"We are all your friends, June," he went on. Then, tensely, "Is there killing to be done? Now is the time to square the thing up——"

"You are not to do anything to Sam. I'll explain everything when we get back to the ship. I tell you everything is all right—I'm unharmed. He has taken the best of care of me, never taking advantage of me in any way, and you're not going to make any trouble for him. Oh, I don't want to talk about it now! I want to get it over with."

Hillguard petted her and comforted her, then turned to the others. "Our fears were evidently without foundation. We'll hear the story later, when June gets ready to tell us. She's plainly tired out and overwrought. We'll go back to the launch now."

Only the squaw's dull voice broke the hush that fell. "Olga, she stay here," she said. "Me walk down coast to old *barabara*. Sam, he stay too. We no see white people any more."

"Very well," Hillguard answered gravely. "Here is the pay for helping with the search. As for Sam—I am perfectly willing to allow him to go with you. I think that what you say is best—that he had better not try to see white people any more."

"Sam, him my boy," was the answer. "Him my son." Her old eyes faintly gleamed. "We stay here together."

"Oh, that isn't fair!" The voice was June's as she flung about and confronted Hillguard. A faint flush had appeared high in her cheeks, and so strange was her gaze that he was profoundly startled. "You're not giving Sam a chance," she told them all. "Here's his boat on the sand—with the name of the *Sock-Eye* on it—and none of you has even asked him about it.

He ought to be allowed to show the evidence he has found. At least, you ought to grant him that——"

"He *shall* show it." Miss Moreland pushed her way into the center of the group. "Don't you cry, June—we'll give him a fair trial." Then to Sam, "What have you to tell us, young man? If you've discovered anything about your childhood, I want to hear it."

"Sam, him my son," Olga broke in mechanically.

"Will you shut up a minute, you old thing?" Miss Moreland complained to the squaw. "Go ahead, Sam. She seems to be so proud of you she can't keep still."

Sam regarded her in humble gratitude. "I'm much obliged to you, Miss Moreland, for giving me a chance," he told her with dignity. "Just the same—I haven't much to offer. I found my mother's coat under the boat. I think you could prove it belonged to her by a handkerchief in the pocket. The coat shows how I was able to keep warm at night. There was a string tied to the sleeve, attached to the oar-lock, showing that she had put the coat around me and tied me in. That accounts for my being in the boat alone—the others were likely lost out when the boat was launched. But there's nothing to prove that little Sam Moreland was ever on the beach."

The old lady turned to Hillguard. "What do you think of that, Stanley?"

"Of what?"

"Of this he just told me. Don't stand there looking like final judgment, and pay attention. Your daughter is all right. I can tell by her looks that she's had a grand time. What do you think of this evidence?"

"There isn't any evidence. A string and a fur coat! He has told you nothing to indicate, much less to prove, that Isobel Moreland and her whole family did not die at sea. A boat came to land, but we've known all the time there was a boat here—Olga told us so. The situation is in no way changed."

"You wouldn't have been so certain of that, if you could have seen his face when he found the coat," June informed him with spirit.

Hillguard regarded her bitterly, and Leonard was seen to shift uneasily in his place.

"We're not judging faces, but facts," her father told her.

The old lady sighed rather heavily. "I guess that seems to settle it," she told them all. Then, to Sam, "I'm sorry, young man. Mr. Hillguard seems to think you haven't a leg to stand on, and although I'd like to believe that Sammy Moreland has come back, I can't do it without proof."

"I don't blame you," the youth answered quietly.

“I don’t think hard of you or believe you are a deliberate impostor. I suppose you dreamed it, just as they say—but it’s a mighty queer thing to dream. Now I guess we’d better go. This is getting to be too much for all of us. I’ll be swearing at that Indian woman again in a minute. Get in the boat, all of you, and don’t stand there like geese. June, you’ll have to marry Leonard and make the best of it. Good-by, young man—and good luck.”

“How about taking that coat,” Leonard suggested. “It was probably Mrs. Moreland’s.”

“You can’t take that.” Sam’s voice was almost inaudible, but no one misunderstood. He picked up the garment and held it in his arms.

“Of course we’re not going to take it, Sam,” Miss Moreland assured him gently. Then, vigorously, “Leonard, why are you such a fool? But come on. We’ve done all the damage we can.”

The sailors were already getting ready to launch the boat. The old lady took her seat in the bow, and Leonard, hesitating just an instant with the hope of helping June, followed her to his place. Olga, the squaw, trudged off fifty yards down the coast, then paused to wait for Sam. She did not like this region of the beach, and she was eager to go away. She had been uneasy all the time the white people were talking. She had not forgotten the sorcery in the hollow, fifty yards away and haunted by a wraith of steam. This was the Medicine Pot of the wizards—a caldron full of melted sky.

June still hesitated. Hillguard looked at her anxiously, then came and put his arm around her. She shivered at his touch, but it was too much for her, and at last she let it guide her.

She knew no other way to go. People said that the world was small, and that they were masters of their own souls, but they lied. Too strong, too many, were the hands to pull her away, and only one reached out and tried to hold her. She felt the call behind her, but it was only the call of love, and what was this compared to the commanding voice of hate? She walked down to the water’s edge and boarded the boat.

The sailors shoved off. The sand grated, and the first waters slid beneath. June still stood, looking back.

“Good-by, Sam,” she said quietly.

“Good-by, June. God bless you.”

There were no tears. The boy and girl were young, proud, fearful of the world, and they dared not give way to the scalding, bitter tears. Sam turned away and down the beach to the last comfort that he knew.

He walked blindly, and so he stumbled a little. He tried to hurry, but he went slowly. And the years whipped back.

The long-past unwound its scroll. . . . A child, not a man, ran so eagerly across the sand, a stumbling, eager little boy, lost upon the shore. He had been forsaken by his people, and he had known hunger, and fear, and the doom of winter. But help had come. Just beyond the sand was one who loved him and who had strong arms to shelter him. She was waiting—a dusky figure—just beyond the sand.

For Olga, the dead past lived again. Again she saw the child who ran to her—and who trusted her. He was tall now, and in some eyes he was strong enough to face the winter alone, but she knew differently—she knew she must open wide her arms. He was no less hungry, no less in need. And now she must give him more than she did then.

Her arms were not enough. Her heart was not enough. She must give him her tears, even from tear-glands dry as dust. The drops would not flow easily, and they were bitter and burning—yet she must give them.

She was not a Christian. She was the dark woman of the Aleuts. Yet she must give all.

She did not wait for Sam to approach her. She came running toward him as fast as she could across the sand, a grotesque and somehow awe-inspiring figure. She did not pause beside Sam, but ran on, splashing into the water until it reached her knees. Then she raised her arms, calling:

"Mist' John! Mist' John!"

The sailors braced against their oars, and the boat hovered. It floated only fifty yards from shore, and its occupants could hear the squaw distinctly.

"She's calling you, sir," one of the oarsmen said.

"Let the old fool go," Leonard replied coldly. "She wants to beg me for a job. Go on, you fellows."

The sailors started to sweep their oars, but Miss Moreland made a quiet gesture.

"I think we'd better see what she wants," she announced grimly. "Row back, men." Then, when they were almost to the shore, "What do you want, Olga?"

All of them gazed at this strange figure knee-deep in water. But only one, of all these in the boat, could dream what her word would be.

She looked with a look of doom on Leonard. "You take back sing-box," she said.

This was like mania. Except to the man she spoke to, it made no sense. They had all sensed the drama of the moment, and at first this seemed

anticlimax.

"She's crazy," Leonard muttered. "Why should we waste our time on her?"

But his pale face startled them all, and Miss Moreland knew now that their time would not be wasted.

"What is it, Olga?" she asked gently. "We don't understand."

"He take back sing-box," the squaw went on sullenly. "Olga no want it. Sing-box—talk-machine, you call 'em. He take back records too."

"Did Leonard give you a phonograph, Olga?"

"Yes. Me no want 'em. Olga no lie no more."

"She's lying right now," Leonard cried desperately. "I didn't give her anything——"

"Hush up, Leonard," was the quiet direction from Miss Moreland. "Why did he give it to you, Olga?"

"He give me sing-box if I go Gull Point tell white people Sam my son. I no tell lie any more. He not my son. He white boy, same as you. He land here in boat, and Olga find him pretty near dead, take him home."

"You swear this is true?"

"Olga no lie. Olga let Sam go. No keep him no more." She shook her head slowly, darkly. "No see him no more."

The boat had grounded now, and Miss Moreland led the way on shore. Not only she, but all her party, were intensely excited, Leonard with the excitement of terror. It was quite a little while before they could get themselves in hand and establish order sufficiently to go on with the investigation. Leonard was protesting loudly, and Olga soon became bewildered by the many questioning voices. June stood as if dazed in the center of the group.

"When did this happen, Olga?" Miss Moreland asked at last, when the men grew quiet. "When did he buy it for you?"

"He bring it early summer. He say no tell——"

"Helen, I think you are adopting the wrong tack," Hillguard broke in. "You should question Leonard, not that old woman. He suggests that she has made up the story with the idea of getting some money out of you, or that Sam put her up to it. You have no right to charge Leonard with any such offense, and I refuse to believe he did it."

"I believe the important thing is what *I* believe—June and I." The determined gleam went out of her eyes as she turned and smiled graciously and in understanding at June. "I don't know that it's any worse to charge

Leonard with doing it to protect his interests, than to charge Sam with putting the old woman up to it."

"I should say it is a great deal worse. You are dealing with two distinct classes of men. You have the right to charge anything to—an abductor."

"Fiddlesticks! What girl doesn't want to be abducted? That's off the point, Stanley. I'm going to sift this thing to the bottom."

"I only wish to remind you that you haven't anything definite yet. No court would accept the old woman's unsupported testimony. Before she ever saw Leonard, she told me with her own lips that Sam was her own son."

"You mean—ten years ago? Well, I would have told you the same. I'm an old woman, and I've never had a husband or a child, but if someone came around and asked about a boy I'd picked up on the shore, and whom I'd held and loved, I'd say he was mine too. I don't blame her for that. I don't blame Leonard for trying to bribe her, in case it proves that he did so. I simply want to know the truth—whether or not he is Sam Moreland's son. . . . If we could only prove the boy landed here! June, what do you think about it?"

"I know what she'll think," Leonard said bitterly.

The girl moved and stood at Sam's side. Her stricken look passed away, and now her hues were bright and warm, and her blue eyes full of the sun. "I believe Sam," she told them all. "I'm never going to doubt him again."

"You are going to turn against me, are you?" Hillguard asked gravely. "You are going to believe him, regardless of my opinion?"

"Regardless of your opinion," she echoed clearly. The girl looked proudly from one to another. "I'm going to stand by him from now on. If he stays here, I'll stay too. No one can make me leave him again."

She turned to Sam for his answer, but he could not speak yet, and except for the lanterns that had been lighted under his brows, she might have thought he had not heard. Leonard regarded her darkly, but Miss Moreland smiled.

"Sam, don't you know anything to tell them to prove the truth?" June demanded of her companion. She was keenly aroused now, and an ally not to be despised. "Can't you remember anything more? Where did you use to play? Maybe you dropped something that would show you were here—a knife, maybe, or a little shoe. Where can we look for further evidence?"

"I played all around here," the youth told her. "I spent a great many hours over by the hot spring near the creek up there in the rocks."

Turning to answer a question from Miss Moreland, he did not see June slip away. No, he could not recall the name of his baby brother. They just

called it “Baby.” Nor could he describe his mother, except that she was golden-haired, like June, and young, and clinging, and beautiful to see.

“Well, I can only say that I’m going to sift the matter to the bottom,” the old woman told him. “Mr. Hillguard doesn’t think that your proof is sufficient, and perhaps it isn’t, but I’m going to help you dig out all the proof there is. I suppose we’ll have to let it go at that for the present.”

“And in the end you’ll see I’m right,” Hillguard told her. “That little boy couldn’t have lived——”

But he did not get to finish his words of wisdom. He was surprised to see that his hearers were forgetting him and one by one looking away. Presently he looked too. And then they were all running to a little hollow in the rocks, from which rose a small white cloud of steam.

June was standing here, and she was crying happily, and drying her eyes to laugh with the most exquisite tenderness, and drowning her laughter in her tears.

“Come and look,” she told them, “and see if a little boy could have lived here.”

They tried to be calm and not to push each other, as they gathered around the hot spring. As is common through the volcano country, this was a mineral spring, and the water was blue from chemicals, and around it was a chemical deposit. It appeared that any impression made in the soft margin became fixed as the lava hardened, and the slowly thickening incrustation did not conceal it, but actually emphasized it, deepening the mark by building up around it, so that it became indelibly recorded. Not one, but many such impressions surrounded the spring.

There were many footprints at the edges of the lava, all made by the same little boots. And just back of the spring, in the main field of deposit, was a series of marks made by a finger. They seemed to be letters, proudly printed for all to see.

Wabbling, but plain to read, was the signature:

SAM MORELAND

Nobody knew what happened after this. Everyone talked at once—everyone except Leonard, who stood back, and Sam, who tried to speak and could not—and some said it couldn’t be true, but looking again, saw that it *was* true; and June laughed and cried to her heart’s content; and the sailors said, “Good Lord!” and, “Who’d have thought it!” and nautical

exclamations in Scandinavian. Everything was a confusion in which only two sensible remarks were made, and perhaps these were only half sensible.

"It's certainly proof, if it's genuine," Hillguard said decidedly. "Of course you'll want to get the opinion of geologists, to see if by any chance it could have been written here for effect, in the last few years."

"You go ahead and ask all the geologists you want to, and all the anthropologists, and criminologists," Miss Moreland answered with undue excitement. "I only know it's enough for me. I know those prints were made by little-boy feet, and the letters by a little-boy finger. Now I'm going to kiss Sam. He's my nephew, and I have a right to. And I've wanted to for a long time."

There were many details for Sam to attend to. There was the matter of Leonard, and of his own business future, and of his dreaded parley with Hillguard; and all the time he wanted to be with June, who was waiting for him before an open fire, in the study that overlooked the sea.

Of course this was a long two days after the discovery by the Medicine Pot. The rescue party had returned to Gull Point with a hero in place of a villain, and—almost—a villain in place of a hero. And at last nearly everything was settled.

The problem of Leonard St. John was simplified by his resignation. He said with some dignity that it would be embarrassing to continue in his present position, and that he had other desirable offers, which was true. Miss Moreland accepted his resignation, but in some ways regretted seeing him go. He had been an efficient manager, and by the judgment of the world, a first-class man.

Leonard's resignation meant that, as soon as he was trained, Sam must manage the canneries himself. In the meantime there remained a staff of able assistants.

"If I have one ambition, it is to try to carry out the Moreland tradition," Sam told his aunt in a wonderful talk they had together. "That would be to try to build up Alaska, instead of tearing it down. Then there will always be salmon in my rivers. There will always be bears to bat 'em out, a streak of silver in the air."

His dread of meeting Hillguard proved groundless. June's father greeted him pleasantly, and shook him by the hand, and did his best to remove the strain they were both under.

“I know you’ve come to tell me that you want to marry June,” he said at last. “I realize too that you two have made up your minds to marry each other whether I give my consent or not. Just the same I appreciate your coming.

“I am a worldly man, Sam, and judge things by worldly standards; but at the same time, I have June’s happiness at heart. I have always had it at heart. You, as a man, are not changed by what has happened lately, but conditions have been changed, and her chance for happiness as your wife is far better than it was before. I can say now that she has every chance of happiness with you, while before it would have been doubtful at best. The world can’t attack her now, or make her suffer.

“I fought you, but I hope you’ll forgive it, and remember that before then I was your friend. I won’t oppose your marriage to my daughter. Indeed, I am convinced it is for the best.”

There were hands to shake, and thanks to give, but they only took a minute. At last he could go where the sun was shining.

The study was lighted by a bright fire. June was waiting, her hair full of the gleam, her skin like satin, her eyes luminous, her lips wistful and sober. She went straight into his arms. There was not another second’s delay. Her arms were around him too, and her lips against his, with a kiss so sweet to their young hearts that it was almost pain.

Youth. Love. Hope. They had all three. The fulfilment of dreams, and also dreams growing, rosy, warm and exquisite, yet to be fulfilled. Her breast pressed so close against his! Her arms locked so tight. Her lips so eager. All had gone hungry such a long time.

They must take time for a few words. There were a few things that really needed saying, and they must give each other a chance. “I want to tell you that Hopeless Land won’t be hopeless any more,” Sam said breathlessly. “I love it all—its fogs, and its wind, its desolation, and its peaks! Could you ever forget that wilderness of snow above the hills?

“We’ll go back often, June. Every summer we’ll forget the world, and go back to the cave under the mountain, and chase the caribou over the barrens. It’s my home, June. There’s something there we can find no place else. I’ve got a new name for it—the Land of Old Desire.”

And now the words were said. They had only taken a minute or two, after all, and they could well afford the time. . . . But life was so sweet. Love was so new and miraculous. There was a window-seat before the fire, and straightway her bright head was in his arms.

“I can’t get enough kisses,” he told her soberly and wistfully. “Not even in a whole lifetime can you give me enough. You’ve got to make up for all those long, empty childhood years.”

She would try! Her eyes promised, and her mouth, so yielding and warm and soft, gave witness. She would surely try to make up for those empty years. It was a mighty debt, but she would pay it.

In an adjoining room Miss Moreland sat knitting. She smiled over the web. Far away, in a hut of turf, another old woman was making garments out of caribou skin. They had found out, these two. They knew the facts. But many suns would rise and set, wax and wane, before Sam and June would know. Clasped in each other’s arms, lost in this first great wonder, the boy and girl could weave the gorgeous tapestry of dreams.

THE END

TRANSCRIBER NOTES

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.

Some illustrations were moved to facilitate page layout.

[The end of *Child of the Wild, A Story of Alaska* by Edison Marshall]