

What He Wanted

Marjorie L. C. Pickthall

Illustrated by

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Title: What He Wanted

Date of first publication: 1923

Author: Marjorie L. C. Pickthall (1883-1922)

Illustrator: Joseph Maxime Clement (1894-1956)

Date first posted: June 6, 2022

Date last updated: June 6, 2022

Faded Page eBook #20220608

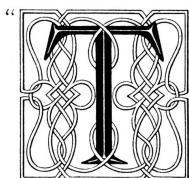
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W H A T H E W A N T E D

"The great thing is to know what you want—and then go for it"

By M. L. C. PICKTHALL



he great thing," said Grim Lawson, "is to know what you want—and then go for it."

He always knew what he wanted. He generally got it by the simple process of allowing nothing to hinder him in going for it. Nothing at all.

Consider what that may imply.

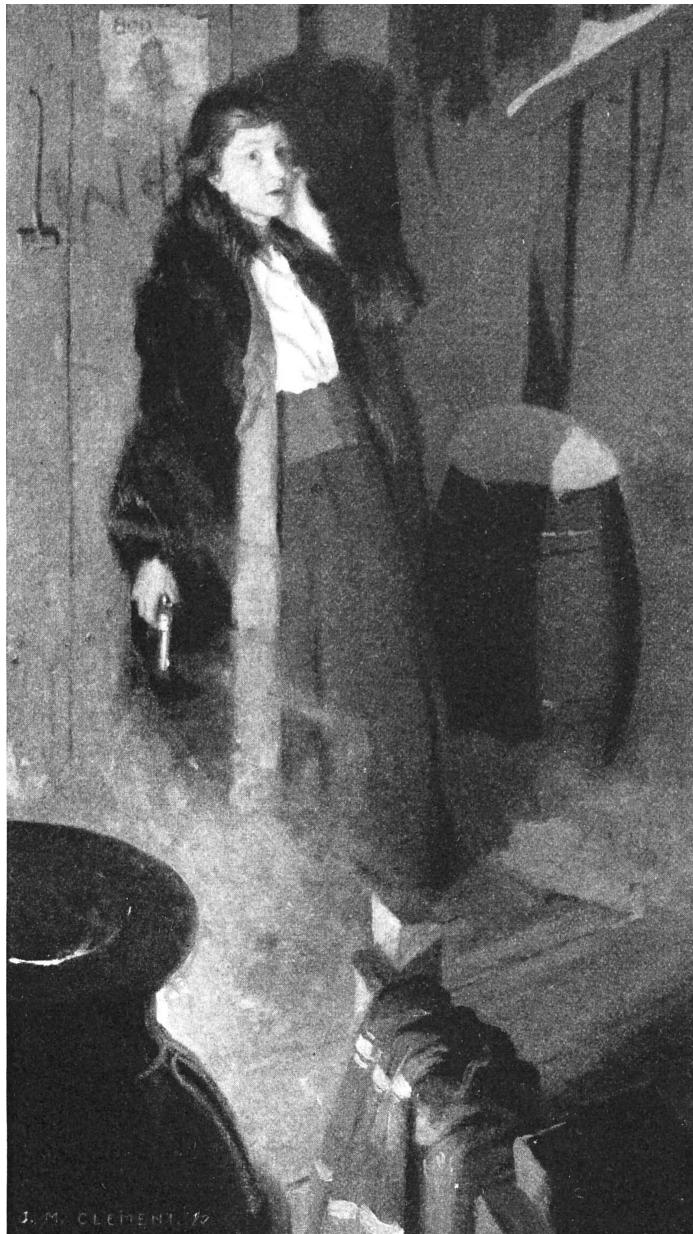
He wanted wealth. He got a very respectable share of it by being the first man in on the gold rush some years back at Elk Mountain. He had a partner then. He left the partner sick by the trail when the man broke down. He left him with some frozen pork and a handful of flour, while he himself pressed on and staked the first claims. He got the gold all right; the partner got pneumonia and a broken constitution. But no one ever reminded Lawson of this. It would not have been tactful. Grim was six-foot-three, and no man had yet found a limit to his strength.

Then he wanted a local investment for his money. He looked round Smithers and Kamosuk. He thought Cliff's General Store offered a safe twenty per cent. He went to Cliff and said: "See here, I want to buy this store right away. How much?" But Cliff refused to sell.

"But I want it," said Grim simply.

Cliff said if Grim started any rough-housing round there he'd send to Smithers for the Elk Lake Patrol.

Grim Lawson only grinned and went out. There was no rough-housing. Grim had the morals of a coyote and the same sense of humor. He just said to customers, "I guess you'd better not buy anything at the store to-day." And they didn't.



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*She stood frozen, blinded, choked by that little crack
of sound and weft of blue vapor.*

That was all. For a week Grim camped outside the store, advising people not to buy their goods there. You can't arrest a man for giving advice. There must have been something human in Grim, for he allowed the

children in to buy candy; or perhaps it was just his sense of humor. You can't keep a cash-and-no-delivery business going on candy-sticks. At the end of the week Cliff came out, hysterical, with a gun. Grim took the gun away, threw it into the creek and boxed Cliff's ears. Cliff, who was a little man and nervous, broke down and cried. The next day he sold the store to Grim and cleared out.

On this principle of always knowing what he wanted and going the shortest way to get it, Grim Lawson built up an interesting and profitable life.

It is difficult to say at what stage in his career he felt the need of a friend. More difficult yet to say why he should have chosen Lew Woods to fill that position.

Lew was entirely ordinary: a hard-working, not too intelligent, fairly good-tempered and fairly healthy specimen of the human race. He owned a two-roomed shanty on Mill Street, and all his spare time he spent on the shanty and in it. He was building a third room, sheathing the other two inside, painting, carpentering and making furniture. Grim's enormous presence flustered him. He was embarrassed that such a terrible celebrity as Grim Lawson should be sitting, evening after evening, on a soap-box in the corner of the kitchen, smoking and watching him as he worked. But he had no choice in the matter. Grim insisted on coming there and being friendly. And soon Lew Woods got used to him; finally developed a strange timid affection for the great man with the brilliant gray eyes under their tawny yellow brows.

Of course, every one in the town knew that Lew Woods was fixing to get married, and was interested. There were only about a dozen married white women in the whole community. They knew all about the lady. She lived back East, and she was nursing an old aunt who'd been good to her—she had no other relatives. When the old lady died, she was coming right straight up to join Lew, whatever time of year it was. And her name was Alice Dineen.

One day Grim said to Lew Woods: "She must be a pretty girl for you to work this way for her."

After a moment's hesitation, Woods showed him, in silence, a photograph.

Grim looked at it. His first thought was that she wasn't a pretty girl. He was just going to hand the picture back when something—the poise of the head on the rather massive throat, the fine eyes, the thick smooth hair—held him a moment longer. And in that moment the thing happened to him:

He wanted Lew Woods's girl.

He handed back the picture in silence. Lew was hurt by it at first; then he thought it was kind of nice that no one but himself should appreciate Alice.

Then Lew got a letter, and it went all round the town that the old lady was dead and Alice had started already to join Lew. A missionary was going to bring her as far as Carcajou, and there Lew was to meet her, and the missionary was to marry them, and Lew was to start home with his bride right away. There were three shacks and a waterfall at Carcajou—no place to spend a honeymoon.

It all fitted in very neatly, you see, like a puzzle.

Lew Woods made a calculation of the time it would take Alice to reach Carcajou after quitting the railway and the stage roads, and reckoned he had just three days in which to finish fixing the kitchen. He had been living in the kitchen after fixing the other rooms; now, to give himself more scope, he moved out into a tent.

It was a bad move with the Winter coming on. It came early that year in a fierce snow. The tent fell on Lew and he was soaked to the skin before he would give up and consent to track moisture on the kitchen floor. Twenty-four hours later, nearly crazy with anxiety and rheumatic fever, he lay on his back in bed, where the doctor from the Smithers Mines said he'd be for a month, and feverishly talked his heart out to Grim Lawson.

The neatly fitting puzzle, you see, was likely to go to ruin for lack of the king piece—Lew's prompt appearance at Carcajou to claim his bride. There was no time to get word to the missionary. And the missionary wouldn't know what to do. It would be impossible for him to wait long at Carcajou, and equally impossible for him to take a lady all the way up to Fort Delusion, whither he was bound. The more he thought of the situation the higher Lew's temperature went. Alice's condition of mind would be pitiable when he didn't arrive. She wouldn't know what to do any more than the missionary. He cursed himself, the whole plan, the weather, and Grim Lawson for saying nothing; he was almost ready, poor fellow, to curse Alice for being in such a predicament.

Grim listened with no comment, but a tightening of his long lips, an odd, hungry tensing of his whole face. Then he said quietly, "What's the matter with me goin' and fetchin' her up here for you?"

"You!"

"Ain't it about the only thing to be done?"

It *was* about the only thing to be done. Both knew it. And Grim was Lew's friend, and a friend up there means one whom you trust with honor and life—"Unless you think I wouldn't act square," Grim finished.

That ended Lew's hesitation. His hand went out. "God bless you, Grim," he said hoarsely, "as we will. We ain't seen each other for six years. I know you'll act square. But you'll have to act quick."

It was arranged with little more talk, and then Grim went out to examine the weather.

Within the last week, Winter had come. The snow was deep already. The temperature measured some fifty degrees of frost. There had been two or three thaws since the first fall which had given the snow a surface as though it were old. There was no time to spare. Grim went to round up his dogs.

He said nothing to any one. When, the next day, he pulled out of town behind a nine-dog team, with a sled heaped with furs, he himself magnificent in a sealskin parka fringed with ermine tails, not a man who saw him go knew where he was going, or why. The snow began to fall again. He vanished in it.

Out of lightly falling snow, turned into a fiery mist in the sunset, he appeared at Carcajou: huge, blooming, giantesque behind his racing dogs. All the missionary's dogs turned out of the drifts whither they had retired to welcome the newcomers with battle; and the tall woman who had been pacing up and down in front of the least populous of Carcajou's three residences stopped suddenly, her mitted hands pressing against her heart, staring into the vast wild glow. For a moment her gray eyes glowed also, and her fair skin. Then she went white, and her eyes darkened. The man who was coming to her out of the desolate glory was not Lew Woods.

She went into the shack and said quietly to the missionary, "I think you'd better come. There's a stranger here. Not—not Mr. Woods."

When she and the missionary went out, Grim was pulling up his team. His dogs dropped in the snow. He beat off the others and strode up to

the girl. As he approached her, he measured her. In three seconds he discovered three things:

She was older than he had thought. She was mistress of herself. And he wanted her more than he had ever wanted anything.

He said, with a directness that passed for frankness with those who didn't know him, "I'm Lew Woods's friend, Miss Dineen. I'm Grimshaw Lawson. And I'm a day late."

He *was* a day late. But there was no reason for it. He had, with his coyote cunning, kept his missionary chafing at Carcajou of set purpose.

She said quietly, "And Lewis?"

"He's sick. He took sick the day before he should have started for you. He got wet. He has rheumatic fever. He's not goin' to die, but he'll be in the house a month. When it happened, seemed like there was only one thing to do: for me to come down here and tell you."

There was a silence. Then the missionary said anxiously, "But what's Miss Dineen to do?"

Grim said reluctantly, "Well, I must say there seems only one thing for her to do."

The missionary was a tired man, shortsighted mentally and physically, aged with unsought responsibilities. He said rather sharply, "And what's that?"

Again Grim hesitated. It was the woman who said, in the same quiet way she had received news of Lew's illness, "You mean go back with you?"

"Yes," said Grim. "You could trust me to look after you."

"Impossible," said the missionary, the more irritable because of his own eagerness to be rid of the unsought responsibility of Alice Dineen.

Alice said, "Why? I—I could be married to Lew up there. I could nurse him then. This gentleman's his friend. I'd sooner do that than anythin' else, even if there was a choice. But there isn't, is there?"

"Come inside," said the older man. "I must talk this over."

They talked it over—at least, the missionary and Grim did. Alice's mind was already made up. It was Grim's size that really determined the conscientious but overweighted man; there are some minds which

persistently count honesty as the synonym of strength. The end of it was that the missionary formally handed Alice Dineen into the care of Grim Lawson. "And you are responsible for her before God," he said. Alice said, "I trust Lew's friend."

The next morning the missionary went off for Fort Delusion, his Innuit driver singing hymns and a fair day coming; and Grim Lawson turned northwest in the pale and bitter dawn, with Alice Dineen in the sled and every pulse and fiber of his violent being singing triumph.

It was at their first halt for food and rest that Grim, heaping her around with furs and very silent, asked her suddenly, "Why didn't you want to know if Lew had sent you a letter?"

"Wasn't he too sick to write one?"

"Yes, but I mean—somethin' to tell you you could trust me?"



T.M. CLEMENT 32

She stood with him beside the sled, and he, gaunt and bandaged in his seal fur and blood-stained ermine tails, lifted his arm and pointed.

Her face a pearly oval under her fur hood, she looked at Grim quietly. "I knew who you was," she told him. "Lew wrote of you once in a letter. He told me what you looked like. I knew you right away. I knew you was his friend. Wasn't that enough?"

"Well," said Grim slowly, "he sent you nothin' but—me."

He said nothing more. They went on to within three miles of Duck Lake. They camped then. Grim had brought a little tent for the girl, and a sleeping-bag of hair-seal. He packed snow around the tent; when she was inside, in the bag, he closed her in. He himself went off and lay down near the dogs. The vast march of the subarctic night went over him, and he lay and stared at the stars. He did not sleep at all. Something, vast as the night, unknown as the stars, was stirring in him. All the time, he wanted her. He wanted her more than he had ever conceived it possible to want anything. He did not suffer by imagining her as Lew's, because, since he himself wanted her, he simply couldn't imagine it. But something troubled him—When it was time, he woke her. He said nothing. He served her and cared for her very skilfully. They went on toward the Levels.

The Levels are practically tundra, almost treeless. Beyond them, in a river valley, comes a huddle of bull-pine and bush, and here is a cabin built long ago for the convenience of travelers by that lonely way.

All day they raced toward the cabin under a sky so low and gray it was like a lid pressed down to meet the edges of the featureless white disk that was the earth. In spite of its space there was something stealthy and oppressed in the scene. Alice, drowsing among the furs, felt an obscure dismay and suspense. Once or twice she walked a while beside Lew's friend; but he would not talk much. They reached the cabin early, and he installed her in it and served her carefully. Then he left her. She was alone.

There was a rusty stove in the cabin. This Grim had lighted. It cracked and roared; acrid smoke escaped from the damp pine boughs Grim had brought for fuel. The walls of the wretched cabin cracked in the warmth. They sounded as if they writhed, straining inward from some tremendous pressure outside—some weight of silence and frost.

The silence, the strange sounds—both expressive of some enormous strain—weighed on the woman's nerves. She had never been afraid before. Now she was too uneasy to sleep. She had been dead tired an hour earlier, drowsed with cold, numbed with cramp. Now she was wide awake—listening; listening to the walls as they yielded, bulged inward, broke like a bubble.

It was a fancy, a delusion born of weariness and the leaky stove's glimmer. She wrapped herself in the furs and tried to close her eyes. She couldn't.

She stared at the walls. Now and then a malemiut howled outside. Once she heard Grim's voice. Then again silence, silence but for the crackling walls—

At last she could endure it no longer. She went to the door and flung it open on a gray dazzle of starlight on snow and the black shape of a couple of restless dogs and the black distorted pines. Then her gaze narrowed on another darkness. She stood very still.

Grim Lawson was standing just outside the door, his arms folded, his head bent forward. He looked as if he had been there a long time. His dark furs bore a fragile efflorescence of frost. In the shadow of his hood his face was invisible, but his eyes held Alice's. She was rigid, answering that steady gaze; while her heart seemed to toll, to beat with terrible solemn reverberations like the tongue of a bell.

He said at last, "I wondered when you'd feel it."

She said faintly, "What?"

"I wondered when you'd feel me wanting you."

Her being seemed to sway a little. She felt as if, when she opened the door, she had admitted some tide, some tremendous current which swept her from her standing-ground. She visioned herself something small and futile, spinning round and drowning in that tide. She knew now what it was which had pressed on her, commanded her, strained against the cabin walls. It was this man's simple want of her. If his words were extravagant, judged by normal measures, she never dreamed of doubting them.



He was speaking again. And his very simplicity showed her how deep was her danger.

"I've thought of you for weeks. I wanted you the first minute Lew showed me your picture. I've gone on wantin' you ever since. I haven't wanted anythin' else. I never believed in this sort of stuff before. Now I know it's true. I love you."

He drew a deep breath, and the frost crystals glimmered on the black fur clothing his great chest. He did not move otherwise. And this motion, by its very simplicity, seemed to show her the deeps of his mind, like a tide-rip, and rocks of passion grinding together.

He went on: "I don't care for anythin' but you. You kind of filled up everythin' after I'd seen your picture. Now that I've seen you, it's worse. You're mine. I want you. I love you."

She said quietly, "And you're a villain to tell me so—now!" She put out her hand and supported herself by the side of the doorway for fear he should see how she reeled and trembled in the flood.

He put her words behind him, as it were, with the slightest toss of his head. "Alice. Alice Dineen." He repeated her name slowly, and she felt as if even her name had passed into his ownership. "You're mine, Alice. All my

life I've known what I wanted. All my life I've gone for it straight. All my life I've got it. Now I want you. And I've got you."

"No. Never. I'm Lew Woods's—I'm Lew Woods's *wife*."

"Mine, Alice. I want you."

"You shall never have me. I'll never be yours."

He looked at her as if for the moment he saw her afresh, astonished that such weakness could deny him anything he wanted. He said, with his terrible heavy reiteration like stones falling on her: "I love you. I want you. I'll never take you to Lew."

"He's your friend. He trusts you. *I* trusted you."

He put that behind him too. He said, standing great and splendid in the shimmer of the stars: "Trust—I'd make you love me in an hour——"

The night spun in slow rings of black and silver; steadied on that mighty black-and-silver figure; drifted again. She heard her own voice saying distantly, "In an hour and for an hour—maybe. Maybe you could make most women love you that much. But I love Lew in a life and for a life."

He went on as if she had not spoken. "Beyond here there's two trails: there's the trail to Kamosuk and Smithers; there's the trail to Rapidel. It's that last trail I'm takin' you. There's a priest at Rapidel. Maybe I'm a villain. But I'm no villain to you. I want you—proud like you are, and good. I'm goin' to take you to Rapidel and we're goin' to be married there. That's all."

Her heart gave a sickening leap of pure terror. The deadly simpleness of the man made her own strength—and she had much of it—feel like foam floating against granite. But—"You fool!" she said, very low. "You fool! Do you think a man can be a villain only one way?"

He said in a minute: "What's that matter? You're mine and I'm goin' to take you to Rapidel."

"Never."

"Girl," he said almost gently, "you're beat. Quit fightin'. You put up a good one. But it's no good. The great thing is to know what you want—and then go for it. I want you, and I went for you. Now I got you."

With the words everything steadied for her, became minutely and crystallinely clear. The picture framed in the doorway—the white level, the warped trees, the prowling malemiuts, and that figure which expressed in

some way every quality of the waste, its restless savagery, its unhuman patience—these things became a part of herself, an event which should never recede into the past, but be always burningly present, terribly of every moment. Grim stirred, his arms fell, he moved toward the door. His foot was on the crazy lintel when she pulled out a small revolver and shot him.

She stood frozen, blinded, choked, by that little crack of sound and west of blue vapor. She must have lost consciousness a moment, for she had no recollection of seeing Grim drop. But there he was, sprawled in the opening of the door. His head was in the cabin. The light from the broken stove, gaping flames, showed her his fallen head, his hands clawing on the floor as he tried to rise. Outside, his feet scuffled rather ludicrously in the snow. She stared and stared. Outdoors a malemiut suddenly pointed a sharp nose to the sky and howled hungrily. The savage sound woke her to life. Moving with a jerky stiffness, she forced herself to approach and bend over Grim.

As she did so, he managed to raise himself a little on his hands. He lifted his face and stared up at her in a strange way. His long lips worked together. His eyes were wide and had a curious dazed expression. He said rapidly and distinctly: "Take the dogs. They'll run all right if you don't whip the brindled trace-dog. He'll mix you all up if you use the lash. Clod him with ice if he don't work. Go on till you come to a low hill with pines on top. The only one. Camp there. Do like you seen me do. Go on again till you come to a river. Turn south by the river. Go on till you see a pine with all its boughs off it. That's a lob-stick. Go on to the next. Follow the lob-sticks to a Swede's house. He'll take you on to Kamosuk. Me——"

His voice stopped dead as if it had run from a reservoir now empty. He made another effort to speak. Then, still staring at her in that dazed, unresentful way, he sagged forward on the floor again. The last vague thought in his brutal brain was for the safety of the woman he wanted more than anything else in the world, and now would never have.

When Grim opened his eyes again, it was on darkness and great cold. Since he thought he was dead, the darkness hardly astonished him, though the cold certainly did. Then as life returned to him, with pain and trouble, he remembered where he was. He was lying in the cabin where Alice had shot him. She had saved herself as he had told her to, and left him to die, as was square. He did not complain. But he was sorry he had the

dying business still to do. He moved a little, and there was a stir beside him, and a hand was laid on him——

She had not gone. She had not left him. She was there beside him.

Grim lay still as death, staring upward into the dark. Presently he said hoarsely, “Why didn’t you go?”

There was a pause. Then Alice said gravely, “I was afraid of the dogs.”

“That’s a lie.”

Again her unmoved voice replied, “I don’t know how to drive a dog team.”

“You wouldn’t have had to drive ‘em. Once you got ‘em started your only trouble would have been to stop ‘em. They can ‘most smell home from here—And you ain’t afraid of anythin’.”

“Well——” he could fancy her gravely smiling—“I didn’t quit you, anyway.”

“Why? I wanted you to.”

“I guess that was why.”

This answer took some time penetrating through Grim’s skull. He was silent. She went on: “The last thing—after I shot you—when you tried to tell me what to do—you sounded as if you was—sorry——”

“Well, I wasn’t. Not for that. Was you sorry for shootin’ me?”

“No.”

“The great thing is to know what you want, and—Say, you help me up. Mercy you got me in the neck and not in the leg.”

She put her arms round him and helped him up. He had lost a good deal of blood, but with her help he could make shift to stand and walk swayingly. He asked, “How long since you laid me out?”

“It must be near morning. The stove’s out. I couldn’t find any more wood.”

“No. And I can’t cut any more. We got to go, or we’ll both die. I must take you on.”

“Yes.”

He turned stiffly—she had bound his great bull-neck and he could not turn his head—swung his shoulders and looked down at her. His savage

humor flared in his eyes. He said, "You ain't askin' me *where* I'll take you?"

She answered quietly, "No, I'm not asking."

They moved together out of the cabin. Beyond the Levels a late crimson dawn was spreading a finger-smear of sullen light; it showed low iron hills like a wall ahead, a wall in which were two breaks. Grim pointed.

"One of them cañons," he said, "takes us through to Kamosuk, the other's the gate to Rapidel. Do you know which is which?"

"No. I don't know this country at all. I don't know where one place is, nor another."

"And you ain't askin'?"

"No."

Under his direction she harnessed the dogs—they came and stood in the traces, scenting home across the miles—and made the sled ready. Now

he must ride and she must walk, or cling behind him on the down grade while he with hoarse voice and slicking thong controlled the team. Twice and again she must stop—for food and rest, and then because she found Grim had fainted. The day was one of unmitigated toil for her; but she was strong. At the end of it the hill barrier was behind them and they camped on another plain. Grim looked at her when they camped. He said, "You know where we're headin' for?"

"No," she answered in her quiet voice. It was true. She had no sure knowledge whether they were going to Kamosuk or Rapidel. She was still utterly in Grim's power, though the little revolver still held five shots. She had no choice but to trust the man—or die of cold and exposure in the vast waste.

"And you ain't askin'?"

"I ain't askin'," she echoed him, and crept into the fur bag, and slept instantly. She did not know he heaped his own coverings over her as she slept, and crawled about the snow on his knees to keep the blood moving. He had taken them back before morning. He looked like death, but seemed stronger. He headed the team away from the slow dawn. The second day was a longer shadow of the first. At the end of it he asked her again, in the phrases which had come to be a sort of liturgy between them, "You don't know where I'm takin' you?"

“No.”

“You ain’t askin’?”

“No.”

God knows what he would have done if she had asked, if she had shown terror, distrust, despair. Once he was light-headed and talked to himself between curses at the dogs; and she, walking beside, must learn what this great fighter was fighting, from what this conscienceless taker was refraining—If she knew fear and despair then, perhaps she also knew pardon.

And she never asked him. Not until on the morning of the fifth day he drew up the team on a ridge bristled with scrub, and showed her, not a mile away and below, the clustered shacks of Kamosuk.

She stood with him beside the sled. The dogs lay panting, wondering at this delay, their wild inscrutable eyes—so like Grim’s—turned to him. And he, gaunt and bandaged in his seal fur and blood-stained ermine tails, lifted his arm and pointed. He said quietly, “That’s Mill Street. And there—with the yeller front door—that’s Lew’s house. Keynes’s is right next to it. Mis’ Keynes is a nice lady. You can walk in in half an hour easy. You’ll be all right now.”

He took from the sled the few necessaries she had brought from Carcajou. Over them he laid the black-fox rug that had wrapped her many a day. “A gift to the bride,” he said. “One of the boys can come and fetch them in.”

She said in a strange voice, “Come here.”

He stood in front of her. He asked her, “Why didn’t you ask me where I was takin’ you?”

“Because I knew.”

They looked at each other steadily. Then Alice said, “Lew’s waitin’ for me down there—My dear Lew—And you was his friend. What will I tell him when you don’t come back with me?”

“You’ll have to tell him just the truth.”

“He’ll never forgive you.”

Grim laughed, his wild eyes flickering. “What do I want with his forgiveness?” he said.

She said, “*What do you want?*”

A light, which was not that of fight nor greed nor fiercer laughter, shone a moment in Grim Lawson’s splendid savage face. He took her hand clumsily. Clumsily he muttered, “I guess—I want—more than anythin’ on earth—that the woman I love should think well o’ me.”

“Come here,” said Alice again. Her face and her lips were white and cold as snow. And white and cold was Grim’s face as she put her hands gently on each side of his head and drew him down to her and kissed him quietly on the forehead. “Now go,” she said. “Good-by.”

“Good-by.”

Grim watched her a minute, walking wearily through the snow, down to where happy life and wholesome love waited her; then he swung his team and headed away for Rapidel. Alone.

But no one will ever know just how much of Alice Woods’s heart he took with him.

THE END

TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Mis-spelled 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.

Illustrations have been relocated due to using a non-page layout.

A cover was created for this ebook which is placed in the public domain.

[The end of *What He Wanted*, by Marjorie L. C. Pickthall]