

PRAIRIE GOLD



HAROLD BINDLOSS

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THE GREATER POWER
THRICE ARMED
DELILAH OF THE SNOWS
FOR JACINTA
THE DUST OF CONFLICT
ALTON OF SOMASCO
THE CATTLE BARON'S DAUGHTER

PRAIRIE GOLD

By HAROLD BINDLOSS

Author of "CROSS TRAILS," "CARSON OF RED RIVER,"
"GREEN TIMBER," "THE WILDERNESS PATROL," "THE
BUSH-RANCHER," "NORTHWEST," "KIT MUSGRAVE'S
LUCK," "LISTER'S GREAT ADVENTURE," "THE WILDERNESS
MINE," ETC.

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Prairie Gold

CHAPTER I

A LOSING FIGHT

Blue wood-smoke curled about Stannard's camp by the lonely poplar bluff. The wind had begun to drop, but the evening was fresh, and so far the mosquitoes did not bother Stannard much. When they got numerous he must throw green branches on the fire, and sit in the pungent smoke. Lying on the grass, he waited for his battered kettle to boil, and languidly looked about.

He faced the sunset, and the sky was clear and green but for a luminous yellow belt on the horizon, along which the wide plain's edge ran like a smear of dusky blue. Then the strong color melted to gray, and in the foreground dim red lilies checkered the shadowed grass. Stannard had watched Egyptian sunsets melt behind the desert, but he thought he had not known the crystalline transparency and sense of distance one remarked in Western Canada.

Stannard, however, was not an artist. In Egypt he was a lieutenant of British infantry, and now he cultivated a Canadian farm. There was the trouble, because he wanted rain, and the thunderstorm he had hoped would break had rolled away. As a rule, in summer, thunder showers refresh the Manitoba plain, but for some time the wind from the Saskatchewan steppes blew fresh and carried the clouds east to break across the Laurentian woods.

The kettle boiled and Stannard brewed tea, and put two gold-eyes in the frying-pan. The small fish were not remarkably fresh, but he had bought some from an Indian, and his salt pork could be used another time. When one farmed in Manitoba, one studied things like that, and Stannard admitted that his fastidiousness was gone. So long as he had youth and strength, he must not grumble. He could eat doughy bannocks and rancid pork, drive the plow until his tired horses stalled, and get up fresh at dawn. His muscles were hard, his skin was brown, and, except when he studied his accounts, his mood was calm.

He got his frugal supper, and throwing green wood on the fire, lighted his pipe. The mosquitoes had begun to hum, and his horses sought the protecting smoke. Not far off a little creek splashed in the grass, and

sometimes the poplar leaves gently shook. Stannard was tired, and the hay in his wagon was a pretty good bed, but he did not want to sleep just yet.

For a week he and another had camped in the broken country on the edge of the timber belt. Small lakes and creeks were numerous, and they had loafed about and fished. The time, so to speak, was between the farmer's seasons; when the wheat was up but the wild hay was not ripe, and if one wanted a cheap holiday, one went north. Now the excursion was over and Hunt had taken the home-trail two or three hours since. The plain got dark, and pale stars shone, but Stannard brooded by the fire.

He was not going to think about Egypt and Gallipoli, and there was not much use in dwelling on the rather hectic winter in London. Although Stannard had not yet satisfied the doctors, he admitted that "hectic" was the proper word. After three or four months, however, a reaction began. So long as he was willing to jazz, his friends were numerous and kind; when he declared he must get to work they smiled. To welcome a rather battered hero was one thing; to help him find a useful job was another.

Stannard's talents were not remarkable; but he knew when he had had enough and he faced the reckoning. It looked as if the Old Country no longer needed men like him; to some extent his last job was a woman's job, and he agreed that his employers must not discharge the girl who had filled his post. He claimed his war gratuity, sold his small inheritance, and bought a Manitoba farm.

In some respects, he was satisfied; he liked the space and freedom, and to know the quarter-section of gumbo soil was his. His three-roomed shiplap house was large enough; at night the smell of peppermint hay in his bunk was soothing, and when he got up at daybreak the keen wind braced mind and body. Nobody was his master, and the reward for all he did was his.

Perhaps Stannard's luck was good, for the man he hired was honest and knew his job. They used two teams; the big, slow oxen broke virgin soil, but Stannard, with high hopes sowing his first crop, speculated about a tractor. The crop sprung, and when the wheat rolled like green waves in the wind, he cut wild hay in the mosquito-haunted sloos. He ate when he or the hired man had time to cook, and his clothes went to rags. All was strain and effort, but effort fired by hope does not cost one much.

Summer waned, and when the wheat was in the ear hail reaped the crop. Stannard got a nasty knock, but something was saved and his pluck was good. Sitting by the stove in the arctic winter, he studied economy and

weighed fresh plans. Now he thought about it by the poplar bluff he smiled—a rather dreary smile. Perhaps it was strange, but he was once an optimist.

He sowed again, and rust touched the wheat. All was not spoiled, but the wheat was third-grade, and the price was low. Stannard hauled the stuff twenty miles to the elevators over the prairie grass, and when he labored across a sand belt he doubted if all he got for the load would pay for transport. Moreover, a loosely-rooted thistle the boisterous winds tore up had begun to roll about the plains, and the seed sprang best where the soil was plowed.

Stannard, smoking by his camp fire, thought in Canada things went like that. Man's part was protagonist; Nature was a stubborn foe. Where a pioneer broke virgin soil, harvest frost blighted the grain; man cross-fertilized varieties, and got wheat that ripened before the frost arrived. In the dry West, he dug irrigation ditches and used snow-fed rivers to water the parched soil; but Nature was not beaten, and sent fresh plagues. One must fight for all one got, and Stannard thought he had not shrunk.

When the wheat was sold he let his hired man go and braced up for a sterner effort. Coal was dear, and his teams, exhausted by hauling grain to the railroad, could not carry back a useful load. One must cut fuel in the bluffs, and Stannard got to work. For a beginner, to pull a big cross-cut saw is hard, and an ax is an awkward tool, but if the wood-pile gets low while a blizzard rages one must freeze. Although Stannard cut his boots and sometimes his foot, his stack of cordwood grew, and when the arctic frost arrived he could rest and ponder by the red-hot stove.

For the most part, he weighed plans to cut down his housekeeping bills. He was getting parsimonious, but his capital had begun to melt like the snow in spring. Sometimes he studied pamphlets about agriculture an optimistic government bureau supplied.

Stannard smiled; the State paid for the bureau's experiments, but he paid for his and the bill ran up. Sometimes in the long evenings, when all was quiet but for the roof shingles cracking in the frost, he vaguely recalled his last winter in the Old Country.

He pictured the revues and night-clubs, the riotous dances and the negro bands. When he thought about the girls he met the pictures got indistinct, for "met" was perhaps the proper word. One did not know the girls with whom one danced. They were pals for the evening. A number were attractive, but their charm was physical, and they were rather reckless Hedonists than

romantic. Some were kind, and one or two perhaps had moved Stannard, but they vanished and nobody knew where they went.

Thistles invaded Stannard's third crop, and when he had paid the threshers he set his mouth. The fight got very stern and the time to use all his reserves had come. If he were beaten now, his fourth year's farming would be his last. The crop sprang, and the thistles were not remarkably numerous, but boisterous winds stopped the rain, and the green of the shooting wheat was sickly pale. Moreover, a sand belt to windward of his farm began to advance. When the northwest gale was fresh it looked as if the sandhills smoked, and the sharp grit cut the prairie grass. So far, it had not reached the wheat, and soon rain would bind the blowing stuff, but Stannard was anxious. His reserves were gone, and to lose would break him. Well, there was no use in brooding, and when he had mended the smudge fire he climbed to his bed in the wagon and was soon asleep.

Daybreak was cold, and the bracing freshness banished moody thought. Red lilies glimmered in the dewy grass, and where the sun rose the sky was pale gold. Stannard fried the last stale fish, brewed coffee, and harnessed his team. After all, he was his own man, and if he went broke nobody would bother much. It looked as if his relations had forgotten him, but when one's road was rough, to face the hills alone had some advantages.

He started and the bluff melted in the grass. In front scattered woods slowly got distinct and floated like islands on the dazzling horizon. Shining ponds dotted the folded plain, and sometimes the wagon plunged down ravines. Swift shadows touched the grass, and white-edged clouds, blowing from the Rockies, checkered the sky. The clouds, however, rolled on, the sun was scorching, and Stannard saw the wild hay ripened in the sloos.

Prairie-chickens sprang from clumps of bush; gophers, like squirrels, plunged into holes, and blackbirds with gold-barred wings flew about the bluffs. Stannard knew it all, but somehow the charm of the sunny plains was fresh. Yet he would sooner the clouds broke, and the wind was ominously strong. Dust blew about the wheels, on high ground the grass was parched, and when he reached a curving trail the cracked soil rang under his horses' feet.

The sun got low and the shadows grew dark and long. Although Stannard's team was tired, he drove fast. He began to bother about the sand belt, and a long rise in front commanded the flat his farm occupied. At the top he frowned. The wind was dropping, but along the sandhills' crest a

yellow haze shone in the slanted beams, and for some distance to leeward the grass was dingy gray. The oblong of wheat was pale, lifeless green.

Stannard used the whip, and the horses plunged down the slope. At the bottom, broken white grass and gritty dust were like a cushion under the wheels. Stannard jumped down. The sand had reached the wheat, and along its western edge the drooping stalks were cut. So far, the damage was not much, and if the wind dropped, rain might put all straight, but Stannard clenched his fist.

The clouds had rolled away, and the sky was clear. So long as he could hold on, he meant to fight, but at last he knew he faced defeat. By and by he shrugged, and started for the homestead. The team was tired, and he was hungry. In order to hold on one must eat and sleep.

CHAPTER II

THE BADGER HOLE

Not long after his excursion, Stannard one evening smoked his pipe by the homestead door. The evening was calm, and the parched soil, touched by the dew, began to smell. Stannard noted another smell, like peat-smoke in the Old Country and the Arabs' cooking fires. Although he thought the prairie burned, he was not disturbed. He had plowed the guards the law required, and if the fire jumped the furrows, it could not much hurt the wheat.

Sharp sand had cut the tender stalks like a reaper's knife, and the tough thistles had not escaped. To see their broken stems was something, and Stannard smiled—a dreary smile. He wondered why he carried on, and admitted he did not know. For all his stern frugality his bills ran up, and to labor for his creditors was ridiculous, but mechanical habit accounted for much.

He looked up. The sun sank behind a ridge, and the small birches by the ravine got dark. On the other side the trail went down obliquely between the trees and forked. A badger had recently tunneled the fork Stannard did not use. The light was going. The sky was green and gold, and the dusky plain was crossed by sinuous crimson lines. In the parched grass the fires spread fast, and Stannard hoped some thistles burned.

Then he thought he heard horses' feet, and by and by a dark object sped down a rise. The staccato rhythm grew louder, as if somebody hustled the team along; Stannard knew Houghton's habit was to drive fast. Jim farmed a half-section, three hundred and twenty acres, at Willow Creek, and used a tractor and an automobile, but he liked good horses, and as a rule, a flivver cannot climb a prairie ravine.

Stannard hoped Houghton would not want supper. All he had was rancid salt pork and cold potatoes. Jim was rather fastidious, and his housekeeper was a pretty good cook. The team advanced furiously, and Stannard saw the wagon rock. It looked as if the fire had frightened the horses, and Houghton let them go. For a few moments he stood upright in order to see the trail. Steadied by the reins, he balanced gracefully, and his dark, athletic figure cut the sunset. All the same, he ought to pull up, and Stannard shouted a

warning about the badger hole. Houghton waved his hand and dropped to the driver's seat.

The team vanished in the trees, and Stannard jumped up. He thought Jim had not understood him, and he started for the ravine. On the other side, behind the brush and thin trunks, Houghton's rig plunged headlong down the slope. A Western farmer's wagon is narrow and light, but it looked as if the team could not hold back their load. The steep bank was in the gloom, and Houghton and his hired man were indistinct. Stannard imagined Jim was not disturbed. He was young, and he liked speed. If he got round the awkward corner, he ought to make the bridge.

Green brush crashed, and a horse leaped from the branches and fell. Another was entangled by the broken pole. The wagon had vanished, but a wheel rolled down the bank and struck a tree. Stannard braced up and, smashing through the undergrowth, jumped the creek. A few yards off, the horse that had fallen rolled about by the broken wagon, and Houghton's hired man leaned against a trunk. His head was cut, and his look was dull. Houghton lay across the trail and his eyes were shut. The color had melted from his skin, and his overalls were torn. A large dark hole was broken where the trail turned the corner. Stannard got down in the dust and said sharply:

“Jim!”

For a moment or two Houghton was quiet, and then he looked up languidly.

“Hello, Hugh! Something like a smash!”

He turned his head and groaned, but Stannard asked: “Where are you hurt?”

“I'm all hurt,” Houghton gasped. “Went under the wheel—my leg's broke. Felt the snap. Don't touch me!”

Stannard nodded. The job was a doctor's job, and, getting up, he said to Houghton's hired man:

“I'll be back in three or four minutes. Leave the boss alone.”

When he returned from the homestead he carried two blue blankets, a lantern, a sheath-knife, and a gun. The hired man sat by his master. Houghton's eyes were open, and he gave Stannard a crooked smile.

“You feel you ought to put me out?”

“The gun’s for the horse,” said Stannard. “The doctor will ’tend to you, and I expect he’ll soon put all straight.”

Throwing down his load, he felt the ground. He did not want to move Houghton, and the dusty trail was warm and dry. Pulling the blankets over the other, he beckoned to the hired man and went a few yards down the trail. To cut loose the entangled horse was awkward, and Stannard took a kick, but the animal staggered to its feet and vanished in the brush. Stannard studied the other, and gave the hired man his gun.

“There is not another way, Tom.”

Tom hesitated. “I’ve fed him and groomed him. He knows me, and I’d feel poison mean——”

“Very well,” said Stannard. “I don’t like my job. The stove at the house is burning; run across and make some coffee. See he gets it good and hot.”

He took the gun and spoke louder.

“Buck up, Jim. I’m going for the doctor. Tom will stop about.”

Then he advanced for a few yards and pulled the trigger. A crashing report rolled across the wood, and Stannard ran down the bank. Ten minutes after he reached the stable his team was harnessed, and he started in the dark. The doctor had a car, but the settlement was fifteen miles off.

The trail was uneven and indistinct, and Stannard concentrated on his driving. He was sorry for Jim, but the important thing was to get help.

Hugh put essentials first; his bent was practical. When he drove into the little settlement all was dark, but soon after he beat on a door a man came down.

“Hello!” he said drowsily. “More trouble! What do you want?”

Stannard told him, and the doctor nodded.

“All right. We’ll start in about ten minutes. The livery’s behind the implement store.”

“I’ll be ready,” said Stannard, and led his steaming horses up the street.

He thought the interview typical. Where there was no use in talking the plainsmen did not talk; their habit and Stannard’s was to get to work. Using his boot on the door, he wakened the stable man, and at the time fixed, the lights of the doctor’s car flashed across the wheel-torn street. Stannard jumped up, and the car rolled ahead.

As a rule, a prairie trail is not continuous. Sometimes it curves like a brown ribbon across the plain, but where the ground is soft, teamsters take an independent line. The wheelmarks diverge, and one is bothered to find where they rejoin. To keep the trail, however, was not Stannard's business. For a time he could relax, and he looked about.

Clumps of brush leaped up in the headlamps' speeding beam. A poplar bluff shone like silver and vanished, and the long waves of grass sparkled as if touched by frost. The car lurched like a ship at sea; gravel and broken clods rattled against the guards, and one smelled wild peppermint and the dew in the tossing dust. Thin brush smashed under the wheels, and now and then the jolts indicated that the soil was tunneled by gopher holes. Stannard wondered why the gophers burrowed in the trails.

The doctor let his engine go, and the car sped noisily across broken levels and past small dark woods. Sometimes she labored over a sand belt, and sometimes leaped down a coulée. Stannard mused about Houghton. Jim was a good pal, and now Hugh thought about it, he admitted he owed the other much; his hired man's help, the loan of implements and horses, and so forth. Houghton was not embarrassed for money, and Willow Creek was a first-class farm.

Then he was a handsome young fellow, and marked by a sort of humorous confidence. Stannard pictured his balancing on the rocking wagon floor. In front the horses plunged, and Jim's athletic figure cut the sunset. His braced pose was somehow classical, like a Roman chariot-driver's; a sculptor might have used him for a model of joyous, conquering youth. Then the wagon crashed, and his broken body was flung across the trail.

In a sense, the swift blow was merciful; a long fight that broke one slowly was another thing. Stannard, however, did not want to philosophize, and he hoped Jim was not knocked out for good. Rocking and jolting, the car sped on, and at length a light twinkled in a belt of trees. The trail dipped steeply and Stannard, signing the doctor to stop, got down.

"The road's not graded, and we'll leave the car. Come on!"

They crossed the ravine, and on the other side the doctor took the lantern from the hired man. The light touched Houghton's colorless face, and it looked as if he saw the others, for he said awkwardly:

"You made it, Hugh! Have you brought the gun?"

"He brought me, and I expect he hustled some, but we'll talk about it another time," the doctor replied, and ordered the hired man to hold the

light.

For some time he was occupied, and then he nodded.

“Well, I guess we can move him. Can you get two poles?”

“I got them now,” said Tom, and using his knife, pushed two trimmed birch branches through the blanket. “If you put him aboard, we’ll pack him to the house.”

They lifted Houghton onto the blanket and went cautiously down the hill, but their load was heavy and the trail was steep, and when they reached the homestead Houghton was unconscious. They put him in Stannard’s bunk, and the doctor opened his bag.

“I don’t know but his fainting helps. Your stove is burning?”

“She’s burning good, and the kettle’s full. I ran across,” said Tom.

“Then we’ll get to work,” the doctor remarked, and seizing Houghton’s overalls at the ankle, stretched the thin cloth. “If your knife is sharp, cut along the seam.”

Half an hour afterward they put hot bottles in Houghton’s bunk, and the doctor forced him to swallow some warm liquor. The blood began to come back to his skin, and when he shut his eyes the doctor nodded, as if he were satisfied. Fastening back the door, they went to the kitchen and sat down by the stove.

“I must pull out at sun-up, but I’ll be back as soon as possible,” said the doctor. “Have you got some food?”

Stannard brought cold bacon and cut a bannock. Tom brewed a jug of coffee.

“After an awkward job, I don’t like mine black, but the canned milk is off,” he said. “The night’s pretty cold. Maybe you could prescribe.”

“In the circumstances, I might,” the doctor agreed. “I’ve used worse helpers at a hospital. Get my bag, but go quietly.”

The liquor helped the meal, and when they had drained the jug, Stannard inquired: “What are we going to do about Houghton? I suppose he can’t be moved?”

“I certainly don’t want to move him; a box wagon is not much of an ambulance. One fracture’s bad, and the other’s awkward. You might let him stay here. The trouble is, he wants proper food and a nurse.”

“That’s soon fixed,” said Tom. “My wife’s a bully cook, and she can nurse some.” He turned to Stannard. “I caught the horse, and I’ll go for her right now. Maybe you got a grubhoe and can give me some shotgun shells?”

Stannard agreed, but inquired why the other wanted the cartridges.

“When I’m back, my first job’s to get that blasted badger,” Tom replied, and went for his horses.

CHAPTER III

HOUGHTON SEES A PLAN

Mrs. Wheeler was a good nurse; Houghton was young and strong, and his broken bones soon began to mend. The doctor, however, refused to talk about his removal, and one morning he languidly smoked a cigarette in his bunk.

“It looks as if I must bother you for some time,” he remarked.

“I won’t grumble,” Stannard rejoined. “Before you blew in the house was lonesome, and Mrs. Wheeler is a first-class cook. Then when Tom’s about he’s a useful help. In fact, your stopping has numerous advantages.”

“All the same, it’s awkward,” Houghton remarked. “For one thing, when I was pitched down the ravine I had all fixed to start for the Old Country, and was coming to look you up before I went. I reckoned to get back in six weeks. Now, of course, it’s off——”

He stopped and frowned, but after a few moments resumed in a careless voice: “Tom will be across soon; he’ll help you mow some hay.”

“I got two or three loads, but I don’t know why I cut the stuff. In fact, I’m now writing to Davies, who pulled out for British Columbia twelve months ago. It looks as if he made good, and I’m inquiring about my chances——”

Houghton knitted his brows. “You mean to quit?”

“I may be forced.”

“Well,” said Houghton, “your luck has not been good; but good and bad seasons go in cycles. We have had four of the mean sort, and for some years sand and drought might not bother you again. To feel you had let go just before our luck turned would be galling, and I’d hate to see you beaten. If you wanted seed for another crop, teams and implements, and so forth, I’d be glad to see you out. In fact, if it would help, I’d guarantee your storekeeper’s bill. A bumper crop would put all straight.”

Stannard was moved. Jim was generous, but Hugh was proud.

“A bad crop would let you down, and I’m not keen about working for the storekeeper. You see, I was broke some time ago, and although I tried to

carry on, I have had enough. Anyhow, to bore you by my troubles won't help you get well. I must finish the letter to Davies, and clean the stable."

Houghton said nothing. Hugh was independent, but when he went off Houghton pondered. He rather thought he saw a plan.

In the evening Tom and Mrs. Wheeler started for Willow Creek. Hugh cooked the supper she had prepared, and when he had carried off the plates, lighted his pipe. Houghton, in his bunk, smoked a cigarette. His leg was encased in plaster, and a stiff bandage was round his body. His face was pinched, and when he took the cigarette from his mouth his thin hand shook. Hugh hated to see Jim look like that.

For a time both were quiet, and Stannard rather moodily looked about. He faced the open door and saw the green sky and the yellow grass that melted into blue. A slanted sunbeam touched the wall and resin sparkled on the boards. The floor was cracked, and a dark stain from the bent stovepipe discolored the roof. Boots and leggings and broken harness occupied a corner; one or two implement manufacturers' advertisements decorated the wall opposite the bunk.

Stannard admitted the house was not luxurious, but he had fastened the frames and boards, and it was his. At the rude homestead he had known hope and freedom. Now it looked as if he must let it go and labor for another. By and by Houghton threw away his cigarette.

"Tobacco does not yet taste good. You are a four-years' pal, Hugh. Perhaps you won't be bored by an autobiography?"

"I expect to be interested," Stannard replied.

"Very well. My father and mother are long since dead; my sister married and went to India. I was in France, and when I got back my brother was at school and I couldn't stand my occupation. Somehow all was different and my friends were gone; I think the best stopped, for good, in France. Well, I was restless and moody; but perhaps you know——?"

Stannard nodded. "I do know."

"There was another thing," Houghton resumed with a touch of embarrassment. "Before I joined up my raw ambition was to marry the daughter of my father's old friend. Her relations and mine approved. In fact, their approval was rather obvious, and Alice is keen. She's a sport, my part was attractive, and perhaps we both played up——"

“In France her kind letters helped me carry on, but now I think about it, they were not letters to a lover. For all her sporting frankness, Alice is somehow elusive, and when I got home I began to see she was not the girl I had thought I knew. She was a finer girl, and by and by I doubted if I were the man for her. The game we had played was but a game, and I must not claim that the loser pays—— Well, it’s done with, and I have an object for my frankness.

“I started for Canada, and since the bad years have not broken me, I expect the turning tide to carry me ahead. For some time I was satisfied, but I have begun to be disturbed about my brother. When I pulled out, Ted was a kid and my grandfather urged that the boy must go to an English public school. Afterward he might go to Oxford, and then, if he resolved to join me in Canada, the old man would see he got a proper start. The trouble was, Ted did not want to stay behind; I have no other brother, and I hated to leave him. All the same, for the kid’s sake, I saw I must be firm. The boy must get his chance.”

“Your grandfather is rich?”

“I believe he is rich, but I was not his favorite, and I don’t know much—— Anyhow, his house in the North is large and gloomy, and if he meant Ted to be his heir, I must not meddle. Well, after a time Ted was sent home from school. He’d been ill, and Seymour thought he ought not to go back. You see, the kid is delicate. I understand he studies with a first-class private tutor—the sort that coaches you for the Army; and Frank Seymour superintends.”

“Who is Seymour?”

“A sort of cousin. My aunt married a widower, and Frank was her stepson. When she and her husband died, my grandfather took the young fellow. Anyhow, he’s a doctor, and was at a famous hospital. Now he has a laboratory at Gatesgarth, my grandfather’s house, and occupies himself with biological research. Writes papers about which medical associations dispute, and so forth.”

“Since he seems the proper man to look after a delicate boy, why are you disturbed about your brother?”

“If you will get me my wallet, I’ll try to put you wise.”

Stannard took the wallet from the other’s coat, and Houghton, pulling out some letters, gave him a small photograph.

“Alice Cunningham,” he said. “What do you think of her?”

The portrait was attractive. The girl smiled, and her small firm mouth was curved. Stannard imagined her eyes sparkled, but her glance was level, and somehow challenging; he sensed humor, cultivation, and pride. Something, however, eluded him. He felt the girl had qualities one did not at first remark.

“For one thing, I imagine she is not at all a fool, and she’s—perhaps steadfast is the word. The sort to be a useful friend!”

“Exactly,” said Houghton, smiling. “You are rather keen. The next is my brother, Ted.”

Stannard studied the portrait. Ted Houghton was a handsome lad, and Stannard thought him frank and trustful, but his face was thin, and his look was rather highly strung. One sensed a lack of boyish vigor. Stannard said something like that, and Houghton gave him a small bundle of letters.

“Light your pipe and weigh all the kid writes,” he said.

Two or three letters were typically boyish. Ted had got a small-bore gun, and the fishing was good. Although he would rather be in Canada, he liked Gatesgarth, and Seymour was a sport. Then Stannard thought he noted a difference. The letters were shorter, and it looked as if Ted’s enthusiasm for his sports and his relations had begun to melt. He did not grumble; in fact, he declared he was content, but one missed the note of careless satisfaction. The boy obviously used some reserve.

“Well?” said Houghton. “Let’s be frank!”

“Then, I think Ted writes for the censor. He’s playing up, as we played up in France.”

Houghton nodded. “Looks ridiculous, but I agree. There’s another thing _____”

He gave Stannard a picture postcard. A broken tower commanded a river pool, and rocks and trees were reflected in the quiet water. Across the front was written: “When are you coming over, Jim? You promised—— Don’t be very long.”

“That’s not all,” said Houghton, and pulled out another letter.

The letter was from Miss Cunningham, and when she had given Houghton some news about his friends she wrote: “If your farming is not very important, perhaps you ought to take a holiday and look up your relations. I rather think Ted needs you.”

“Now you see why I gave you Alice’s portrait. Her habit is not to exaggerate,” Houghton remarked.

“I imagine she does not,” Stannard agreed. “One feels she’s persuaded you ought to go.”

“There’s the trouble; I must keep my bunk for some time, and I’m disturbed about the kid,” said Houghton in a moody voice. “But for a sister in India, he’s all I’ve got——”

Stannard sympathized and Houghton resumed:

“I can, however, send a deputy. Your crop is badly cut by sand, but I have two hired men and I’ll engage to harvest all that is not spoiled and keep your farm going. Then, if you paid off the storekeepers, you could hold on for better times—— Well, if you will go for Ted, I’ll put up the wad.”

Stannard’s eyes sparkled. For four years he had used stern economy and done all he thought flesh and blood could do, but it had looked as if he must give up the farm he had stubbornly broken. Now, however, the help for which he would not ask was, so to speak, thrust upon him. Jim’s word went; he would see him out.

“Well?” said Houghton.

“I’ll start when you like, Jim; but the job is awkward. To begin with, I’m not Ted’s relation.”

“You’re my deputy. If you are forced, you can engage a lawyer, but I’d sooner you did not. Alice will help. Besides, we don’t know where the trouble is; your business is to find out. For example, if Ted is unhappy for nothing, you mustn’t indulge him; I’d like the boy to go to Oxford. All the same, if you’re satisfied he ought not to stay, bring him back. The job is awkward, but you’re a thoughtful, shrewd fellow, and I feel you won’t let me down.”

“I’ll try to make good,” said Stannard, and Houghton lighted a cigarette.

“It’s all I want, Hugh, and now you have taken my load I’m another man. But it bothered me, and I’m tired—— In the morning I’ll give you fresh particulars.”

CHAPTER IV

STANNARD GETS TO WORK

A stony road followed the river to the bleak watershed where England and Scotland meet, and Stannard's hired car jolted in the holes. The rain had stopped, and for a minute or two a wet hillside shone; the fern like emerald, the mossy belts like gold. Then the bright beam faded and, a mile in front, the brawling, glimmering river melted in the gloom.

Dark folded hills enclosed the narrow dale, and behind their tops a higher range loomed black and indistinct. Rushes and storm-torn peat rolled down to the water, and the angry current was stained claret-red. In the eddies behind the boulders livid foam revolved.

The car labored noisily uphill and Stannard pulled out his watch. Forty minutes from the station, ten miles off, and for some distance the road was pretty good! Big oaks and ash-trees had bordered the fields, but where the Scotch firs began the road grew worse. Now the trees and stone walls were gone; the stony track followed the water across a peaty waste. Sometimes the driver slowed for awkward curves and sheep, and Stannard doubted if they would reach Gatesgarth by dark. The rain, however, had stopped, and lighting his pipe he reviewed the plans about which he and Houghton had rather vaguely agreed.

To begin with, Hugh had the other's authority to take the line he thought best, but he must not be rash. Jim himself was not his grandfather's favorite, and it looked as if he meant Ted to inherit his estate. At all events, the old fellow was willing to send his grandson to Oxford and start him on a useful career. Ted must not refuse in order to indulge a boyish caprice.

Then, farming in Manitoba was a strenuous job, and unless the boy could bear the strain he ought to remain in England. For all that, Jim wanted his brother, and if Ted were really unhappy he empowered Hugh to carry him off. In fact, Hugh must use his judgment. There was the trouble. He was not the boy's relation, and before he knew him properly some time might pass.

Houghton, however, no doubt knew his grandson, and Seymour was a doctor. If they declared Ted was not the lad to make good on a Canadian farm, Hugh could hardly dispute their claim. His job was awkward and since he felt his youth he resolved to wait.

He looked up. The hill in front got steep, and he thought the noisy engine was not pulling as it ought. The road curved, and twenty yards below the bend the river leaped across a rocky shelf. There was not a wall and Stannard looked down, between rugged mountain-ashes, on the foaming pool. A flock of draggled sheep blocked the road, and when they scattered he saw a wire fence and a gate.

“I’ll get down. If I’m quick, perhaps you need not stop,” he said.

He ran for the gate, but the rails had bent and jammed the posts. While he struggled with the latch the car rolled up and stopped.

“Bodderation!” said the driver. “She was knocking, and sometimes she won’t get ho’d when t’ pitch is steep.”

He pushed in the clutch, and for a few moments the wheels churned in loose stones and mud. Then the clanging and splashing stopped, and the driver swore.

“Carrying last lot o’ cattle meal for Tyson up Greensyke bank had tireded her,” he said. “Aw’t same, if you shove a bit she’ll may happen start.”

The engine did not start, and for some time Stannard smoked his pipe. He was not keen about getting to Gatesgarth, particularly since Houghton had not announced his arrival. Jim’s relations knew he meant to look them up, and he had sent a cablegram, putting off his visit, but that was all. His notion was that for Hugh to arrive when he was not expected might have some advantages. Hugh did not like the plan. By and by he saw the light had begun to go.

“I doubt if your car will start, and I must get on,” he said. “How far is it to Gatesgarth?”

“Maybe three miles. You keep t’ road up water.”

Stannard pulled out his watch and frowned. His luggage was a battered portmanteau and a small bag, and seizing the bag he set off. The clouds had got thicker and big drops splashed in the pools. Mist floated about the dim black hills, and the wet road curved about dark peat hags and belts of white wild cotton. Lambs bleated on the storm-torn slopes, and the angry river brawled in the rocks. Sometimes grouse sprang from the heather and a curlew called on a high trembling note, but that was all.

Summer in the North! Stannard thought—and smiled. To smile perhaps was logical, for to some extent the adventure on which he had embarked was

humorous, but by and by he set his mouth. He opened three or four gates, and at one spot where a flooded burn crossed the road he was forced to climb along a fence. His bag dropped in the spongy moss and when he got down he tore a button from his mackintosh.

At length the dale got narrow, and two or three small meadows occupied a flat between the folded hills. On the other side a firwood rolled down a ghyll, and a row of trees followed a noisy stream across the fields. The road went over a bridge and Stannard saw a lodge. Mist floated about the trees, but he thought lights twinkled behind the trunks. Inquiring at the lodge, he took a road by the stream. In two or three minutes he would meet Houghton's relations, and he mechanically braced up.

A dreary wind shook the branches and big drops splashed. The rain had begun again and the burn throbbed in the ghyll. All one saw of the house was a shadowy mass, pierced by three or four glimmering windows. Stannard did not know about his welcome, but he felt Gatesgarth was a dreary spot.

In the square hall he gave a servant a letter, and after a few minutes the man took his coat and shabby bag and went with him to a door.

Stannard saw a noble room. The walls were paneled, and the old pictures made patches of deep color on the pale wood. Garlands of flowers and amorini, painted a hundred years before, decorated the high ceiling. The floor was polished and a few rugs dotted, like islands, the shining surface. Stannard did not know much about old furniture, but he thought the style was French—the first Empire perhaps. Only the acetylene light and the plate-glass shield across the carved white marble fireplace struck a modern note.

An old gentleman got up from a big chair. His hair was touched by white, and his evening clothes were old-fashioned. A lady not far off put down a book. Her hair was all white, but her clothes were modern and the thin black material shone. Stannard knew his clothes were wet, and his boots were muddy. Across the floor a boy stood by a small table, as if he had got up quickly and wanted to advance, but dared not do so yet. The boy was like Houghton; his eyes were Jim's eyes, and his glance was fixed and eager. Stannard thought politeness cost him something, but at Gatesgarth one was polite. A man the boy had left studied a chess-board.

Mr. Houghton gave Stannard his hand and Hugh noted that his skin was cold. Although the old fellow carried himself well, his hand shook and his

glance wandered. He presented Stannard to the lady in the straight-backed ornamental chair.

“My sister, Mrs. Maitland!” he resumed, and added in an apologetic voice: “She does not hear.”

“I heard ‘Champlain, Manitoba,’” Mrs. Maitland rejoined, and tranquilly studied Hugh. “You are Jim’s friend!”

“Jim is my friend, ma’am,” said Hugh.

He knew she had heard, for her eyes twinkled as if she approved, and he was flattered. Mrs. Maitland was thin and fragile, but her glance was commanding. Somehow, for all her modern clothes, she was rather Georgian than Victorian; a lady of the Regency. Stannard had thought ladies like that were gone.

“Jim is independent, but sometimes he is not rash. You will stay with us,” she said, and her level voice carried an order.

Stannard felt that for him to declare himself her servant would not be extravagant, but he said he would be glad to stay, and Houghton put up Jim’s letter.

“So long as you are in England my house is your home, and perhaps we can amuse you. The fishing is rather good, and by and by you can get some shooting—— But you don’t know Frank, and I expect Ted is keen to ask about his brother.”

Stannard was presented to Seymour, and then Houghton nodded to Ted. The boy advanced eagerly, but his glance was rather embarrassed and Stannard saw he was anxious. It looked as if his arrival had excited the boy, who tried to use polite control.

“If you like fishing, I can help you get good sport,” he said, and resumed with an effort for carelessness: “I suppose Jim cannot get across?”

“I am sorry he cannot,” Stannard agreed. “In fact, I doubt if they can move him from my house for three or four weeks. Since he couldn’t come, he sent me. You see, I’m his particular pal.”

Ted smiled. Stannard thought the boy had got a knock, but his pluck was good. Well, Hugh’s business was to win his trust, and he hoped Ted saw all that Jim’s sending him implied. They, however, must talk about it again, for Hugh thought Seymour interested.

Seymour was strongly built, but his skin was white as if his habit were to keep to the house. His hair and eyes were black, and the look he gave Hugh was friendly. That was all Hugh remarked, and he owned himself embarrassed. His hosts were kind, but he had undertaken to find out if Jim could trust the boy to them. On the surface, the thing was ridiculous, and Hugh frankly did not like his job. All the same, he had undertaken to find out and he must wait.

He was shown to a room where a wood fire burned, and when he had put on dry clothes Houghton joined him at supper. When Hugh saw the fine glass and silver and the manservant, he smiled. In Canada one was not served like that.

They rejoined the others, and since they wanted to know about Jim's farming Hugh tried to satisfy their curiosity. He admitted the drawbacks: the exhausting labor, sometimes rewarded by blighted crops, the arctic cold, and the risk of freezing when the wood fire got low. Then he turned to the boy, and pictured the thrill of the race for the homestead before a blizzard; the straining, plunging team, and the bob-sledge rocking in the snow. Ted's eyes got bright, and a touch of color came to his skin.

Then Hugh pictured the ducks and geese and cranes breaking their northward flight by the prairie lakes when the snow was gone; the plow-teams in the long furrows, and the flowers in the grass. He talked about the mowers in the yellow sloos; the rush and strain of harvest, and the calm that broods over the wide plains in the fall.

Hugh had an object for talking, and he saw the boy was moved. Ted's look got eager, as if the prairies called, but Hugh thought him disturbed. He had waited for his brother, and Jim had not arrived. By and by Seymour pulled out his watch, and gave Mrs. Maitland a deprecating glance.

"Your day has been pretty strenuous, Ted, and Mr. Stannard will talk to you again. I rather think you ought to go to bed."

It looked as if the boy were unwilling, but he went and Seymour gave Stannard a smile.

"He's keen but highly strung, and his studies are hard. Sometimes a doctor must be firm."

Not long afterward Stannard went to bed. The big house was very quiet, but for a time he heard the wind in the trees and the beck in the ghyll. Then he thought the noise was the beat of the liner's screws. Long seas rolled about the ship, and he was asleep.

CHAPTER V

THE FLOOD

A swallow dipped in the shining pool, and by the tail rapid a silver sea-trout splashed. Flies swarmed about the trees along the bank, the sun was hot, and Stannard was embarrassed by his fishing-coat, wading-stockings, and thick, nailed boots. For two hours he had floundered about the stones, and had caught four small brown trout, but the island pool was the sort of spot for a good fish, and he must try another cast.

When he started from Gatesgarth the savage rain had stopped and the clouds were breaking. Hugh had thought to see the river swollen, and he carried a bag of worms, but the water had not risen much and shone like amber in the sun. Across the peat bog a thread of foam sparkled in a dark-blue ghyll; the ravine's mossy bank was luminous yellow, and red grass-tops dotted the long green slopes. Dark clouds rolled about the mountain's broken crest.

At the head of the pool, eddies streaked by foam revolved behind a stone. Stannard thought one ought to find a trout at the tail of the eddy, and he stole into the stream and experimented with a cast. The water was clear, and when he reached the proper spot the long line must go where he wanted. If he did not hook his fish when the flies touched the eddy, he might not get another chance.

His luck was good. The line got tight, the rod bent, and a silver object splashed and dived. Stannard took his thumb from the reel. The fish was going strong; a pound-trout, anyhow, and the silvery glimmer implied it was fresh from the sea. For a few moments the reel hummed, and then he held down the rod butt, and began to wind. The trout had turned by the rapid and was coming back. A broken alder branch touched the water, and he knew he must be quick.

Then the line got slack and the rod straight, and Stannard swore. The big trout was gone. He had had enough. Crossing to the little island, he sat down in the shade of a mountain-ash, lighted his pipe and pondered.

For three or four days he had been at Gatesgarth, and since his business was to decide whether Ted ought to join his brother, he imagined he might stay for some time. To begin with, he did not know if the boy was really keen; they had not yet properly talked about it. For the most part, Ted was

occupied by his studies, and when he was not, and they played tennis and went fishing, Seymour joined them. He was something like a physical instructor, and it looked as if he thought games and sport useful accomplishments rather than amusements.

Stannard did not know if he liked Seymour. The fellow was polite, and Hugh even now used his fishing-rod and waders. Hugh imagined him a first-class chemist and biologist, and he talked interestingly about his experiments. Yet something jarred, and his cleverness rather bothered Hugh, since it looked as if Seymour ruled at Gatesgarth.

Mrs. Maitland did not go about much. She was old and fragile; moreover she was deaf. Houghton was not infirm, but he was slack and languid, although Hugh thought him obstinate. At all events, he was willing for Seymour to use control.

Ted frankly puzzled Hugh. He had all a boy ought to want. He was a pretty good shot and a good fisherman. Although he was lightly built and nervous, he was not bothered by any marked physical weakness. He admitted his studies interested him, and Seymour superintended and encouraged his sports. In fact, Ted ought to be happy and vigorous, but he was not.

Hugh pictured the boy's controlled excitement when he arrived, and his moody resignation afterward. It looked as if Ted had thought to find a champion in his brother's friend. All the same, he did not grumble, and some time, when Seymour was not about, Hugh must try to break his queer reserve. The lad was marked by a rather strange hesitation; nothing he did, so to speak, was boyishly spontaneous. Although his relations were kind, Hugh thought him cowed; "dominated" was perhaps the proper word.

The flies became numerous and Hugh, resting his back against the mountain-ash, pulled his handkerchief over his head.

He did not think he went to sleep, but when he looked up the sun was gone and angry clouds rolled across the hills. The rapid had grown noisier, the water was thick, and Hugh imagined the rain on the high moors at length had reached the becks. Anyhow, the river was coming down and he must get across.

Seizing his rod and basket, he plunged into the rapid, and although the current foamed about his knees, soon reached the bank. Then he pulled out his watch. It was six o'clock, and Gatesgarth was two or three miles off. The water drove him back from the gravel, and he was forced to push through

tangled heather. A road followed the other bank, but now the water rose he must look for a proper ford. Not far off, a row of stepping-stones crossed a shallow pool.

Big drops began to fall, a cold wind swept the valley, and the hills melted in rain and mist. Stannard went faster. The brown current raged across boulders and ledges. The bridge was at Gatesgarth, and he was not keen to plow through rushes and spongy moss. Near the stepping-stones, a path crossed the bog, and Hugh saw a girl jump a pool. Her mackintosh blew about her, and she wore a man's oilskin cap and long rubber boots. She reached the stepping-stones a few yards in front, and when Stannard arrived she was in the stream. Jumping down the bank, he pulled her back.

“You can't get across.”

The girl turned. For the most part her face was covered by the oilskin cap, but her pose was haughty.

“Do you know the river?” she inquired.

“I do not. All the same, the stones are covered, and I know a savage flood. When you had gone a few yards your boots would fill and your clothes might pull you down.”

“It is awkward,” the girl admitted. “However, I must get home, and on this side the bog is soft, and one must cross a flooded ditch. I think I'll risk it.”

Stannard frowned. The stones had vanished, and only a faint turmoil marked where they were. The current was ominously swift and smooth, for when the obstacles are covered a river does not foam. The girl must not try to cross.

“No,” he said firmly. “You must go for the bridge.”

“I don't know you. Is it your habit to meddle where your help is not required?”

“As a rule, I think it is not,” Stannard replied with a smile. “Perhaps I'm selfish, because if you did try to cross, I might be forced to pull you out. Since I don't want to do so, I'd sooner you didn't try. That's all.”

She turned her head as if to study the current, and Hugh remarked that the water was near the top of her long boots. Then she looked up, and he thought her like somebody he knew, although he could not picture who it was.

“If you had crossed Greensyke bog after heavy rain you would not be so determined to go for the bridge. At all events, I am going by the ford. Since you are not accountable for me, you need not stop and watch the experiment.”

Hugh pulled off his basket and threw down his fishing-rod.

“If I went off, I would be accountable. You’re very obstinate; but perhaps you’ll let me go in front and steady you?”

“Very well,” the girl agreed. “But why do you leave your fishing-rod?”

“The rod’s my friend’s; he can send for it in the morning. I imagine my hands will soon be occupied,” said Stannard dryly.

His wading-stockings reached his waist. He gave the girl his hand and pushed ahead. Her pluck was good, for she did not hesitate, and, jumping for the first stone, she balanced on its submerged top. Then Hugh stopped. An alder, uprooted by the flood, floated downstream, and struck the stones. The current leaped and foamed about the obstacle, and then the trunk rolled and broken branches splashed. The tree ground across the stones and savagely plunged ahead.

“I don’t expect you’d like to follow it,” Hugh remarked. “Anyhow, we are going back.”

They turned and, climbing the bank, took the heather. The tangled stuff was long; their feet sank in a spongy moss and treacherous, quaking mire. The girl did not talk, and Stannard, with his fishing-rod, felt for the firmest ground. Their progress was slow, the rain got heavy, and after a time a broad ditch crossed their path. On Stannard’s side the broken bank was a foot above the flood; on the other the muddy water had spread about the peat. One could not see where the bank was, but he imagined he could not jump across.

“Do you think we can find a narrower spot?” he inquired.

“We might—at the bottom of the hills,” the girl replied, and indicated the dreary bog. “For a mile or two, the ground is like this. Now perhaps you see why I wanted to try the ford?”

“Oh, well,” said Stannard, “we mustn’t dispute about it, and I admit I’m responsible. In the circumstances, my business is to help you across.”

He got into the ditch. The water was near the top of his tanned stockings and the bottom was soft. Moreover, the stream went fast. Bracing himself firmly, he held out his hands.

“If you jump, I reckon I can swing you over.”

“I doubt,” the girl replied, and he thought her eyes twinkled. “All the same, I really don’t see any other plan.”

She jumped and Stannard seized her, but the shock was harder than he had thought and he staggered. Somehow he kept his feet, and, floundering awkwardly, dropped his load on the bank. Then he straightened his back and got his breath. His face was dark-red, and his skin was wet with sweat. The girl crossed the boggy patch to a clump of heather. So far as Hugh could see, her short dress was not remarkably wet, and she was not embarrassed. In fact, he thought her amused.

“I’m afraid I put you down rather hard,” he gasped.

“You were not very gentle,” she agreed. “The important thing is, you put me down on the peat. But do you mean to stay in the ditch?”

“On the whole, I think I’ve had enough,” said Hugh, and climbed the bank. “You see, when it looked as if I couldn’t keep my feet, I was rattled.”

“I imagined something like that. All the same, you did not let me go.”

“Oh, well,” said Stannard modestly, “one likes to finish a job. Besides, I felt you were not afraid. If you had struggled, we’d both have gone down. However, we ought to push on.”

After a time they reached the bridge by Gatesgarth and Stannard stopped.

“You don’t know me, and when I pulled you back at the ford, I think you were annoyed, but you ought to get home as soon as possible. Perhaps I might be allowed——”

“My home is not very far off,” the girl replied. “I must thank you for your help and I suppose your object was good. All the same, you forced me to go two miles farther than I need have gone, and I really think I could have crossed by the stepping-stones.”

She went off. Stannard took the road for Gatesgarth. The rain beat his mackintosh, and his waders and heavy boots galled his feet, but when he speculated about his recent companion he laughed. He rather liked her obstinacy, and he had got a hint of humor. Somehow he felt he ought to know her, but her oilskin cap for the most part hid her face. In the meantime he was getting wet, and he pushed on for the house.

CHAPTER VI

THE LADY OF THE PORTRAIT

Two or three days after Stannard went fishing, some friends of Houghton's dined at Gatesgarth and Hugh joined the party in the paneled room. The evening was bleak, and Houghton's guests occupied the space in front of the big fireplace. Stannard thought he knew their type; they were something of his father's type and not at all the sort he met in London when he came back from France.

For one thing, they were not young, and nobody talked noisily. Their voices were cultivated and the men's skins were brown. For the most part, their figures were athletic and their look was thoughtful. Their evening clothes were old-fashioned and perhaps rather shabby. Hugh imagined them sportsmen and small country landlords who had not got rich by the war. Anyhow, they were not profiteers.

Hugh did not know much about women's clothes, but he remarked that black was the predominant color, and the three or four old ladies were not fashionable. Yet he sensed a touch of dignity and charm he had not known for a long time. Their school was the old school, and Hugh instinctively approved. They received him graciously, but he imagined he owed Mrs. Maitland something. Her word went, and if she was satisfied with him he was flattered.

By and by a girl he had not noticed joined the group, and he turned with some surprise. Her clothes were fashionable, and the thin, dull-blue material harmonized with the soft yellow tone of the old paneling. Her figure was slender; Hugh noted her balance, and thought she carried herself like a young plainsman. Her face was finely molded and her skin was white and pink. Then Mrs. Maitland signed and Hugh was presented to Alice Cunningham, the lady of Jim's portrait, whom he had stopped at the ford.

Hugh admitted some embarrassment, but Miss Cunningham's look was calm, although he thought he had remarked a vanishing twinkle. The important thing was, she somehow indicated that she was friendly. Yet her friendliness was not the sort of friendliness young women had offered him in town. He saw she was not going to talk about their recent meeting, and he played up.

At dinner Alice was at the other side of the table and some distance off. Seymour was next to her, and it looked as if they joked, for sometimes Alice laughed. Yet Hugh imagined her laugh was rather an acknowledgment of the other's cleverness than spontaneous amusement. The fellow was clever; Hugh admitted—and vaguely resented—his charm. Anyhow, he must not study Miss Cunningham, and he talked to his neighbors, for the most part about farming in Manitoba. Perhaps it was strange, but he thought them interested, and one or two knew something about the Northwest.

After dinner they went back to the paneled room, and by and by Hugh joined Miss Cunningham. For a few moments she was alone and Hugh imagined she was willing for him to join her. The couch she occupied was old French and Miss Cunningham's clothes were modern, but Hugh thought her slenderness and flowing lines harmonized with the classical model. Then the blue material was the proper color to cut the curved gold band. In fact, the picture satisfied him, and he rather thought Alice knew. When he sat down she smiled.

“At Gatesgarth one does what one likes to do,” she said. “One goes to houses where in order to be happy one must make a noise. But, after strenuous Canada, perhaps you think us dull!”

“Canada is strenuous, but the plains are lonely. Sometimes I have sat for two or three weeks by the red-hot stove, mending broken harness and calculating. When the calculations imply fresh economies, the job's dispiriting.”

“Yet you have an object for labor and frugality. All is for an end. You know where you want to go.”

“To get there is hard, but I mustn't grumble,” Hugh rejoined.

“When Jim was in England he was rather extravagant, and I don't think he calculated,” Alice remarked, as if she pondered.

“You knew I was Jim's friend,” said Hugh, and Alice gave him a smile.

“It really is not remarkable. In our quiet dale young men are not numerous, and a stranger's arrival is something of an event.”

“Well, when we crossed the bog I felt I ought to know you.”

“Ah!” said Alice thoughtfully. “I suppose you saw my portrait at Jim's?”

Hugh agreed, and for a few moments Alice was quiet. Hugh imagined she speculated about Jim's object for showing him the picture. Then she resumed with a twinkle:

“Although you saw my portrait, when you met me by the river you did not know me!”

“Sometimes I’m rather dull,” said Hugh in an apologetic voice. “Then the afternoon was stormy and you had an oilskin cap.”

“Exactly! I expect you felt the main thing was to see me across the river and get on to Gatesgarth? All the same, I knew you would see me across. Are you flattered?”

“Oh, well; we made it,” said Hugh modestly. “When I helped at the ditch perhaps you ran some risk.”

Alice said nothing, and he looked about. The corner was quiet, and he wondered if she felt they were, in a sense, conspicuous. If this were so, to send him off was her business. All the same, it looked as if nobody but Seymour was interested. Hugh thought Seymour wanted to join them, but he talked in rather a loud voice to Mrs. Maitland, who apparently did not mean to let him go.

In the meantime, Alice quietly studied Hugh. She liked his brown skin, his blues eyes, and his humorous smile. Then she liked his thoughtful look when the lines crossed his forehead and his mouth went firm. In a sense, she thought him obvious, but sincere, and although he was lightly built, she got a hint of nervous force.

“I hope you will like your holiday in England,” she remarked.

“So long as I am at Gatesgarth, I expect to do so,” Hugh replied. “The contrast helps. In Canada all is clear-cut: scorching sun, boisterous winds, and arctic frost; your hills are blurred and dark. Then after our keen hustle, Gatesgarth is marked by a queer, soothing calm. In fact, one begins to feel a sort of gentle melancholy. Houghton’s friends have not our plainmen’s hard, pushing optimism. Their look is very sober, and one senses something like tired resignation. Well, I suppose Houghton’s friends are yours?”

“You are keen,” said Alice in a quiet voice. “You see, our lot is going; the merchants and the manufacturers push us out, and soon we’ll have vanished like the people whose earthworks and pit-dwellings dot the hills. The bleak dales are our last strongholds. The war broke our damaged fortunes; our patriotism was not the sort that pays. Our men were not at all indispensable, and they went—— I suppose you were in France?”

“I was in Egypt and Gallipoli. When I joined up I was a raw, enthusiastic lad, but the others’ hair is going white.”

“One was hurt at Loos, and will not again walk properly; another was broken by sickness at a Turkish jail. Seymour, too, was at a typhus camp by the Euphrates, and I believe he was accountable for numerous cures.”

Hugh imagined Alice did not like Seymour, but wanted to be just. After a moment or two she resumed:

“Our young men who came back from France are in India, Canada, and Australia, and sometimes we at home envy you. You are not tied by old traditions; so long as your nerve is good, you can go where you want to go. In fact, your business is to push ahead. When you get rich, perhaps you’ll sometimes come back—for a holiday.”

Hugh smiled. Miss Cunningham was obviously moved, and he liked her pride, but if she thought all got rich in Canada, she was much deceived. Somehow he felt she ought to know he had not.

“My holiday is not at my own cost, and I have not yet got very far ahead. I owe the excursion to my friend’s generosity.”

“Ah!” said Alice. “Jim sent you across?”

“Yes; he himself could not start. I expect Houghton told you about the accident,” Hugh replied.

Alice gave him a queer look, and then got up.

“We must talk about it again,” she said, and went off.

Hugh joined Houghton, and the old fellow said: “Since you were with Alice, I knew you were not bored. I hope you liked your excursion across the hills today. Ted was keen to go, and I wanted to indulge the boy, but Frank thought we must refuse.”

When Hugh suggested another excursion Seymour had stopped Ted. Hugh imagined he and the boy had not for more than a few minutes been left alone.

“Oh, well, I must not interrupt Ted’s studies, sir,” he said politely.

“When one is young, a touch of discipline is useful. One must be kind but firm. Frank has carefully drawn his program—fixed hours for exercise and study, and so forth. When one trusts one’s doctor, one doesn’t meddle.”

“On the whole, the plan is good, but it has a sort of Prussian touch.”

“The boy is keen and his temperament’s romantic, but he’s physically weak, and we must not allow his nervous force to wear out his muscular

power. Frank is afraid of something like that. You must talk to him about it.”

Hugh pondered. He did not doubt Houghton’s kindness, but he doubted his judgment. All the same, he ought to know his grandson, and Seymour was a doctor.

“I expect you know Jim would like Ted to join him,” he said.

“The plan is not fresh, and if Jim insists, I must agree. Jim, however, does not look far ahead, and Ted is very young. For the boy’s sake, and perhaps because I am selfish, I would sooner he remained here until he is able to choose. In fact, I hope he may remain for good. I would engage to start him properly on a useful career. Then I am old, and after a time—— Well, I soon get tired and cannot concentrate for long. Besides, I think my sister wants you.”

Hugh joined Mrs. Maitland, and when the others went, Seymour took him to the smoking-room. For a few moments he said nothing, but his searching, thoughtful glance embarrassed Hugh. Then he smiled.

“You are bothered, Mr. Stannard. Your business is to advise Jim Houghton about his brother. He waits your report?”

“Something like that,” Hugh agreed, since he did not mean to state that he had further powers.

“Well, I expect you feel your responsibility! Jim Houghton will take the line you indicate?”

“He’ll weigh my report. To some extent, there’s the trouble.”

Seymour nodded, but Hugh did not like his thoughtful glance. Somehow he sensed cleverly controlled, dominating force. Yet he must not exaggerate. The fellow was polite and friendly, and but for his queer, disturbing look, not at all remarkable.

“Jim wants his brother, and your problem is to decide if the boy ought to go. Well, perhaps I can help. I imagine farming in Manitoba is a strenuous occupation, and the reward is not large. On the other hand, Ted has some talent, and, if he stays in England, can reckon on a rich relation’s support. In the circumstances, Jim must weigh the financial argument and satisfy himself that his sending for the boy is justified.”

Hugh frowned. Seymour had correctly stated the problem Jim expected him to solve. It looked as if the fellow knew he hesitated.

“Where I can help I’d like to be useful,” Seymour resumed. “My occupation is medical research, and nervous diseases interest me. Ted is neurasthenic; since you are not a physiologist, we’ll use the word. For some time he must go soberly, and not risk excitement and strain, particularly muscular strain. Not long since we were anxious for him, and although he has recently made progress, I doubt if he could on a Canadian farm follow the rules we believe account for his recovery.”

Hugh knitted his brows. Canada was not the country for the weak and highly strung. On the plains, at all events, one must sweat and hustle and take hard knocks.

“To see the proper line is awkward,” he remarked.

“Then I’d wait,” said Seymour, and Hugh went to bed.

CHAPTER VII

TED'S CONFIDENCE

Hugh stopped where the road dipped to a sparkling burn, for Ted came down the hill on the other side. At length they could talk, and perhaps talk frankly, when nobody was about. Ted looked across the moor, but he went fast, and where a plank bridge carried foot passengers across the burn he jumped the channel. Then he saw Hugh and ran up the hill. When he stopped he breathed hard and his face was red. Ted was rather a handsome lad, but Hugh did not approve his slenderness and girlish refinement.

"Hello!" he said. "Oughtn't you to be at your tutor's?"

"Old Charlton got a telegram and let us go. But where are you starting for?"

"For the hills. Come on. I've got some sandwiches."

Ted hesitated, but Hugh saw he wanted to go, and the boy's indecision bothered him.

"I'd like it, but I ought to ask——"

"Do you think Mr. Houghton would be annoyed?"

"He wouldn't mind," said Ted, knitting his brows. "Seymour's really boss, and I must keep a sort of time-table; so long for study, so long for exercise, and so forth—— However, he didn't reckon on Charlton's telegram, and I'll risk it. Let's go up Black Fell. You ought to see the linn."

The sun was bright and the wet hillside shone. The yellow moss was luminous, brown peat checkered the green fern, and sparkling threads of foam streaked the rocks. The sky was blue, and a fresh west wind shook the mountain-ashes by the burn. When they labored across a soft belt, however, Ted's look got thoughtful.

"Is something disturbing you," Hugh inquired.

"My brown boots," Ted replied. "If Seymour spots the peat-stain, he'll know where I went."

Hugh frowned. For a boy to think about his boots was ridiculous, and Ted's doing so implied that he was afraid of Seymour. Perhaps the fellow was entitled to use some caution, but he was not entitled to dominate the lad.

Hugh, however, said nothing, and after a time they stopped at the bottom of a sandstone crag. A deep gully pierced the rock, and small birches and clumps of heather dotted the precipitous banks. At the top a stream leaped across a shelf and plunged for a hundred feet to an amber pool. Hugh followed a curving sheep-path to the pool. At the tail, the water was three or four feet deep, and smooth gravel lined the bottom; under the fall the rocky basin looked profound, and angry eddies revolved in the gloom. The sun was hot, and Hugh began to pull off his clothes.

“What about a plunge? I suppose you swim?”

“Oh, yes,” said Ted. “We have a bathing-pool, and Seymour goes with me in the mornings. I mustn’t swim at other times.”

Hugh admitted he ought not to persuade the boy, but he wanted to experiment.

“Oh, shucks! A plunge won’t hurt you, and Seymour will not know. Anyhow, you can keep the shallows at this end, and I’ll engage to pull you out.”

Taking the water, he swam for the fall, and allowed the broken eddies to toss him about. In the gloom of the rocks the pool was sinister; one saw vague dark stones through the revolving foam, and all one heard was the current’s turmoil. Hugh, swimming strongly, studied Ted.

Ted had pulled off his clothes and stood irresolutely by the water’s edge. The spot perhaps was daunting, but after a few moments he crossed a ledge to a rock commanding the dark hole by the fall. Although he was very thin, his figure was well proportioned, and in the gloom of the rocks his finely posed white body shone like sculptured marble. Hugh, however, wondered whether a sculptor could properly indicate Ted’s emotions.

One knew he shrank; the boy had hesitated to take the water where the pool was shallow, but it looked as if pride fought his fear. He stretched his arms, advanced to the daunting edge, and stopped. Hugh thought him beaten, but he braced up, balanced himself for a moment, and jumped. Hugh shouted triumphantly. Pride had conquered; the boy was good stuff.

Ted’s white limbs glimmered, a fathom down, in the gloomy basin; then his head broke the surface and Hugh pulled him from the eddies. The current seized them, and in a few moments they were on the shelf at the tail of the pool.

“Your nerve’s first-class,” said Hugh. “Get into your clothes. When you’re warm we’ll picnic up the hill.”

They found a sunny nook behind a rock and ate Hugh's sandwiches. The heather was a springy cushion, and the wind carried the throb of falling water across the long green slopes. Sometimes a curlew called, and sometimes a cock-grouse crowed. The sky was serene, and across the lonely dale in front folding hills rolled back. Hugh was satisfied to loaf, but he wanted Ted to talk. In the mountain solitude, the boy might give him his confidence.

"Your plunge was a good plunge," he remarked. "All the same, at the beginning you didn't want to go."

"Oh, well," said Ted, with a touch of embarrassment, "perhaps I rather did funk; sometimes one does—— But, of course, one mustn't allow oneself to be afraid."

"Anyhow, you did not. Your philosophy's pretty sound. Where did you get it?"

"I expect it's Seymour's," Ted said, smiling. "At the bathing-pool, when the river's flooded, and the morning's cold, he talks like that. Then, you see, we practice at the nets—— You must stand up to fast bowling, and in the field you mustn't hesitate to stop a hard ball. Sometimes I'd sooner not."

Hugh pondered. Seymour's methods were Spartan. His discipline was the discipline of the English public school; good for the mass, but Hugh had known it to break a nervous boy. Ted, however, did not talk like an English schoolboy, and certainly not like a Canadian. He ought not to be introspective, and a healthy lad did not philosophize. Hugh wondered where Seymour meant to lead his pupil.

"How did you get the bruise on your arm?" he asked.

Ted colored, but he saw Hugh wanted to know, and he replied:

"We were going riding, and my horse's temper isn't very good; then he was fresh, we had not been out—— Anyhow, I couldn't get up. I don't think I was afraid; the stones in the yard are slippery, and the groom mustn't help. Well, Seymour grabbed my arm and pulled me back. He didn't hurt; the worst was, he sent me off, and ordered the groom to take the horse. Had I been alone, I expect I would have got up."

"You would have got up," Hugh said firmly.

He pictured the boy's humiliation, the grinning stablemen, and Seymour's scornful impatience. Then he began to wonder whether the fellow's impatience was calculated.

“Seymour has looked after you for some time?”

“Since they sent me down from school. You see, he’s a doctor and I was ill. For a long while I did not get much better; and then Alice Cunningham began to come across and talk to me, and help me crawl about the garden. You have met Alice; she’s a sportsman.”

Hugh nodded, and speculated about Miss Cunningham’s meddling. Ted was Jim’s brother; that perhaps accounted for it.

“I’d got very slack, but to go about with Alice braced me up. Alice is bracing,” Ted resumed. “She made me feel I could get better. Then I think Seymour began to be interested—perhaps at first he imagined I could not be cured. Anyhow, he tried fresh plans; mind-cultivation, suggestion, something like that. Seymour knows all about one’s brain——”

He stopped and looked down drearily at the gray walls of Gatesgarth in the dark trees. Then he turned to Hugh and his glance was eager.

“Jim’s your pal, and I hoped he’d sent you for me. Can’t you persuade my grandfather to let me go?”

Hugh hesitated. The boy’s look disturbed him and he wanted to agree, but in the meantime he felt he must not.

“I doubt if I could persuade Mr. Houghton, and I don’t think I ought. There’s the real drawback, Ted. You see, farming in Manitoba is not the romantic job you imagine, and in order to make good you must be hard and fit. Then there’s another thing. You are young, and if you join Jim now, you’ll grow up a prairie farmer.”

“But Jim is a prairie farmer.”

“Jim was a public school boy and an army officer,” Hugh rejoined. “He’s a pretty good plainsman, but he has the other type’s cultivation and knowledge of the world. In London, New York, and Paris, Jim would be at home; his French is not bad. If you joined him now, you’d presently know something about horses and plows; but it’s all you would know, and I expect your ambition does not stop at handling a team and loading up four-bushel bags of wheat. In fact, I expect you’d not be satisfied to be what Americans call a ‘hick’——

“Besides, since you have not much weight and muscle, any loafer at the settlement would beat you at your job. You would not be even a first-class hick. Well—don’t you think you ought to wait and cultivate your talents? When you have got the advantages a university can give, and are an all-

round useful man, you could go out to Jim. All you know would help you make good, and if you did not like farming, you'd be fit to undertake another job."

Ted's look got drearily resigned, and although Hugh felt his argument was logical, the boy's resignation hurt. Ted had thought him his deliverer, and to find out he was not was a nasty knock.

"Oh, well," said Ted in a dull voice, "I suppose there's no use in talking, and after all I have nothing to go upon; but they won't take me at Oxford for some time, and I don't want to stay at Gatesgarth. The house is quiet and gloomy, everybody's old, and I don't get fit. Somehow I feel I shall not get really fit. At Gatesgarth one is always tired and slack."

Hugh thought slack was not the proper word; Ted was daunted. Well, the old house was gloomy and tradition declared it haunted, but to be afraid was extravagant, and he must not humor the sensitive lad.

"I expect you think me ridiculous," Ted resumed. "My relations are kind, but Mrs. Maitland's very deaf, and my grandfather's tired. I feel I mustn't bother them, and Seymour has control. All I do is superintended, as if I were in prison. In a way, the house is like a prison; I mustn't write a letter unless Seymour knows. Then, you see, I want to be with Jim. My sister's in India; he's really all I've got."

"Very well," said Hugh. "If you feel like that about it, I'll write to your brother, but you mustn't reckon on his ordering me to take you across. In the meantime you must buck up. Let's start. I want to see the top of the hill."

CHAPTER VIII

JARRING FORCES

Hugh's candle flickered in the dark passage. The night was stormy; windows jarred, and the wind in the trees was like breaking surf. Sometimes one heard the flooded river. When a gale raged across the hills the old house was dreary. For some time Hugh had mused by the sinking fire in the smoking-room. He was bothered about Ted, but he admitted his thoughts for the most part had centered on Miss Cunningham.

Alice's charm was marked, and Hugh had met her once or twice since the dinner party. She was friendly but she used some reserve, and he felt she weighed him. To see her object was another thing. Jim had indicated that he was not Alice's lover and she was willing to let him go, but Hugh wondered — When one studied Miss Cunningham one sensed her steadfastness. Anyhow, it had nothing to do with him. Miss Cunningham was an important lady, and he was a broken farmer.

His foot struck something, and the candle went out. He had forgotten the steps in the passage, and his matches were in his room. Hugh wanted to get there. On a stormy night, Gatesgarth was somehow forbidding, and he did not yet know the house. Feeling for the wall, he cautiously went ahead.

When he turned a corner a bright beam touched the wall. Seymour's room was in the passage, and Hugh wanted to get a light. He might stop for a few minutes; Seymour interested him.

"Hello!" said Seymour. "I heard somebody in the passage, but when you hit the steps I knew it was not a burglar. Come in and smoke a cigarette."

He indicated an easy-chair and Hugh looked about. Seymour's laboratory was on another floor, and the room was furnished like an office. All the same, jars with ground-glass stoppers and delicate brass scales occupied a locked glazed case, and Seymour had obviously been using a big microscope, for he had pushed up a green eye-shade. His face was rather white and his look was tired. Although he was muscular, he stooped.

"I hope I don't disturb you," Hugh remarked.

"Not at all. I had meant to stop, and after steady concentration, to relax before one tries to sleep is a useful plan. Besides when the wind roars in the

trees the old house is gloomy, ghostly perhaps. According to tradition, there is a ghost. You are skeptical?"

Stannard laughed. "In Western Canada, we are a materialistic, doubting lot, and we require to be shown. But what is the tradition?"

"Houghton claims some part of the tale is historically accurate, and it's supported by the heroine's picture and an old-fashioned ball dress. The argument perhaps is not convincing. Well, so far as I know the particulars, the story goes like this: When George III was crowned, some Scottish Jacobites thought to work on popular discontent. Houghton's ancestors did not then own Gatesgarth; it was built by the Maitlands, and one, on his daughter's birthday, gave a feast. The few important families in the dale, as a rule, intermarried, and Mrs. Maitland states Alice Cunningham is the lady's relation——

"In the Border hills the Stuart's friends were numerous, but their loyalty was sentimental and since Charles Edward refused to meet their demands they would not risk a rebellion. Their rule, as in 1745, was 'safety first.' On the night of Maitland's feast, an exiled Cumberland Jacobite arrived from Rome. Perhaps he thought the feast a proper time to persuade the waverers, and since he carried dispatches from the Prince to Scotland, his way was through the dale.

"Maitland's friends, however, were obstinate, and a dispute began. Charles Edward's messenger was rash, and stated that his dispatches implicated Maitland, and one or two neighbors. Since he could compromise them with the Hanoverians, they ought, for their own sakes, to support Prince Charlie. Well, when George III was king sobriety was not the rule, and gentlemen wore swords——

"The messenger did not reach Scotland. All that's known is, he stopped at Gatesgarth for the night, but tradition states his body and broken sword were found long afterward in a deep peat bog. A rash, stanch fellow. Sometimes he comes back and searches the dark rooms for his stolen dispatches. All the same, when I hear the old boards crack, I suspect burglars."

"Then Houghton's silver is valuable?"

"Mrs. Maitland's jewels are good and ought to be at the bank; besides, Houghton's habit is to keep a rather large sum in the house. The dalesfolk are not up-to-date, and would sooner use a roll of greasy notes than a check.

Since I imagine a blacksmith's boy could open our safe, I don't like Houghton's plan. On the Manitoba plains you don't bother about burglars?"

Hugh laughed. "Our plate is tin-plate, and I have no safe. A tobacco-box is strong enough to hold the bills I cannot meet."

"Then your farming is not prosperous? Yet you came across for a holiday!"

"When I started I was nearly broke," said Hugh. "However, a good season would help put all straight."

He thought Seymour interested, and wondered whether the fellow had wanted to find out if his excursion were at Jim Houghton's cost.

"You are a sort of secretary for Houghton?" he resumed.

"I am his medical adviser, accountant and farm bailiff," Seymour replied. "In fact, I'm his general factotum, and the old fellow needs some help. The drawback is, when I'm occupied by his business my experiments must wait. It accounts for your finding me engaged when the others have gone to bed. To some extent I stop at Gatesgarth because I'm not rich."

"Biological research is expensive?"

"My experiments are expensive and sometimes risky," Seymour replied. "If I had five thousand pounds, I might get the help I want; if I had ten thousand pounds, and a private hospital, I might be famous. I'm not yet old, and ambition calls; but the subject's fascinating, and one does not labor altogether for the reward. Well, when you're poor you cannot use proper tools. The clues you awkwardly follow break, and advance is not fast——"

He stopped, and Hugh sympathized. Seymour was not his sort, and at the beginning Hugh thought he led the talk where he wanted, although to see his object for talking about the ghost and Hugh's farm was hard. Now, at all events, he was sincere.

"To be stopped for a sum an extravagant fool might squander at the Derby is galling," he resumed. "At the hospital I got an elusive clue to a disease that has baffled doctors for long. The thing is tremendously important, and for eight years I have patiently experimented without proper tools. Well, I did not make much progress, but now my youth is going, I begin to see a light. One ought not to boast, and much must yet be proved—all the same, I believe I might find a means to conquer pain, and save numerous sufferers from premature death. The obstacle is, I need money I have not got. If I could persuade Houghton, I'd risk his fortune, but the old

fellow doubts—— Well, I expect you're bored. Take a cigarette, and let's talk about something else."

Hugh lighted a cigarette. The tobacco tasted queer.

"Doped?" he said.

"In a sense, yes. Dope implies a narcotic, but this stuff is gently stimulating. When you have concentrated for three or four hours you need a stimulant. Well, you are a good listener and sometimes one must let oneself go."

"I'm not at all bored," said Hugh. "To some extent, your trouble's mine. In Canada I was stopped for money."

For a minute or two Seymour brooded. His mouth was very firm, and his look was moodily resolute. Then he said in a queer voice:

"Sometimes perhaps to steal is justified. A school of philosophers argue that our moral code is founded on public utility. If that were so, to take and use another's goods for the benefit of all would be logical. For example, my experiments indicate that a cure for a terrible disease may be found. If I can follow the clue I might banish suffering and give the hopeless courage and health. Moreover, I might win some fame for myself. Yet one hesitates to break ancient rules. Perhaps the hesitation is rather instinctive than ethical; one does not know—— We are moved by queer blind passions, and vague jarring forces."

"On the plains we don't speculate about things like that," Hugh remarked. "I suppose an up-to-date doctor is something of a psychologist."

Seymour smiled, a gloomy smile. "All the same, he's a man, and the urge of flesh and blood is strong. At times an ascetic student's life has not much charm. I feel I want to let my researches go and be a careless human animal. Yet I carry on. One must use one's talents, and ambition calls. Anyhow, I'm not a philosopher and you have had enough. Let's go to bed."

Hugh got a light and went off. In his room the candle flickered, and fantastic shadows leaped about the walls. He heard the wind and the door jarred. Boards creaked and sometimes a noise in the passage was like cautious steps. In the dark the old house was sinister, but Hugh put out the candle and languidly recaptured Seymour's talk.

Although he did not like the fellow, he admitted his ambition was a noble ambition. His claiming he was justified to remove the obstacles that stopped his progress was another thing. Hugh believed the rules Seymour

would like to break were not conventions founded on public utility; he felt the foundation was firmer. In fact, one better build one's code on Moses' stone tables than on philosophical argument.

Hugh thought Seymour would not be scrupulous and had not told him all. He was, perhaps, as he had stated, moved by jarring forces, but the struggle was a struggle in which all must engage. Hugh himself faced some awkward obstacles, and he was not going to bother about Seymour's. He pulled a heavy curtain across the big, old-fashioned bed; the noise of the wind grew fainter, and he was asleep.

CHAPTER IX

A GAINSBOROUGH PICTURE

A trout splashed and Hugh's line got tight; then he turned his head and frowned. The trout was gone and the strain had implied that it was large. As a rule, the large fish did go, but when one cast upstream one ought to watch the flies and Hugh had cast and looked about. A girl went along the river-bank some distance in front and her walk was like Miss Cunningham's. Now she had vanished in the trees and he had lost his fish.

He tried another throw and hooked a trailing water-plant. When he jerked the rod the gut broke and Hugh was frankly annoyed. Now he must tie on a fresh trace, and Miss Cunningham, like the trout, was gone. For ten minutes he floundered about the stones and was sorry he had not started before; sometimes in the afternoon Alice took the river path. The sky was cloudy and the reflections were puzzling. One could not see where the line went; the water was like dull claret, the alders along the bank were dark and the colors were subdued. Moreover, flies swarmed about Hugh and his hands were occupied.

A horse-fly bit his wrist and, striking at the insect, he swung the rod and hooked an alder branch. When he went to free the line he plunged into a hole, and the water reached a tear in his wading-socking. Hugh swore and then looked up, for somebody laughed a frank, spontaneous laugh.

Miss Cunningham occupied a mossy shelf under the trees. Her clothes were gray and the thin material's gently flowing lines melted into the background of moss and yellow stone and dim red foxgloves. In the shadow her face was ivory white, but all the colors were soft and vague. Hugh admitted the picture's charm and for a moment or two rather naively indulged his satisfaction.

The current broke against his tanned stockings, the landing-net was pushed through his belt, and crossed straps carried his basket and fishing-coat. His skin was brown, his glance was level, and somehow the long inclined rod gave his braced figure dignity. Then his glance became inquiring.

"Yes," said Alice, "I waited for you."

"Then I'm allowed to join you?"

“Unless you would rather stay in the pool,” said Alice. “I thought I was frank.”

Hugh splashed across, his nailed boots rattling on the stones. He put down the rod, threw off his load and indicated the rent in his tan stockings.

“I got up against some barbed-wire and I expect Seymour will be annoyed. When I cleared the line from the branch the hole went under water.”

“I think I see, but apologies are rather out of date,” Alice remarked with a twinkle. “The flies are numerous. Would you not like to smoke?”

Hugh sat down and gave her his cigarette-case.

“Thank you for permission. I wouldn’t take the thick sort; they are Seymour’s and the tobacco’s doped. The other lot is honest American.”

“Then you don’t approve Frank’s habits?”

“That does not account for it,” Hugh replied with a touch of embarrassment. “His giving me the cigarettes was friendly. I’m going to smoke them.”

“A man may indulge where a girl may not?” said Alice, and gave him back the case. “You are not up-to-date, Mr. Stannard, and I mustn’t shatter your old-fashioned illusions. Perhaps plainmen, lumbermen and pioneers have romantic illusions!”

“I don’t know about lumbermen; the gang whose camp I once hit were not romantic,” Hugh remarked dryly. “Anyhow, I think my illusions are really not illusions and in consequence cannot be shattered. Shams alone are destructible.”

“Oh, well,” said Alice, smiling, “your compliment is rather labored, but I expect you mean to be nice.”

Hugh waited. Alice’s humor was baffling, but he imagined she wanted something. She carried a thin walnut branch and for a few moments she used it like a fan. Then she looked up.

“I called you in order to talk about Ted Houghton. What do you think about your ward?”

“Ted is not my ward. Mr. Houghton is the boy’s guardian.”

“Then you begin to be afraid? You feel Jim gave you an awkward job?”

“No,” said Hugh quietly. “I really don’t think I’m afraid, but I feel I ought to wait. When I see my line, I’m willing to go ahead. To begin with, if Ted stays with Houghton he may inherit his estate; if he goes to Jim he must farm, and I doubt if he’s strong enough.”

“Do you think he gets strong at Gatesgarth? Do you think him happy?”

“I do not; I’m anxious about it,” Hugh admitted, and gave Alice a keen glance. “Well, you know Jim sent me across, and he had some grounds to reckon on your help.”

Alice’s look was inscrutable, but she said, “Jim did not give me the power I imagine he gave you. For all that, I feel my meddling is justified. Very well. Gatesgarth is gloomy, and all winter rain and snow clouds roll about the hills. Houghton and his friends are old and, for the most part, sad. The war broke their fortunes; their sons died in France. A sensitive boy does not thrive in an atmosphere like that——”

She stopped and Hugh wondered whether she herself did not feel the gloom. Sometimes when one studied Alice one got a sense of gentle melancholy, as if she knew she sprang from a dying stock. Her charm was the haunting, elusive charm that marks the dark North. When the sun shone and the mist rolled back, the storm-torn hills were strangely beautiful. He, however, must not be romantic and Alice resumed:

“Then Seymour’s educational model is frankly German; mechanical obedience, mental subjection, and stern physical training. For some boys the plan might work, but Ted is highly strung and his muscle is not good. In fact, he’s rather a girlish type. Yet in biting mornings he must take his plunge at the bathing-pool, he must conquer a vicious horse, and so forth. The boy is proud and pride helps, but one sees the strain gets hard.”

“After all, strain is bracing.”

“When one is strong. Sometimes strain breaks one. But I was not altogether thinking about Ted’s physical strength; Seymour breaks his spirit. Where a boy ought to rebel he’s dully resigned. He knows nobody would support him, but he weighs things and I believe he is afraid——”

“You obviously do not like Seymour,” Hugh remarked.

“What has that to do with it? Your business is to use the powers Jim gave you.”

Hugh mechanically lighted a cigarette.

“Suppose Houghton does not agree? I’m young and not at all important. Houghton is an English landlord and Seymour’s a doctor. You see all I’m up against.”

“Then you are afraid?”

“I’m *responsible*,” Hugh rejoined. “One must think for the future. If Houghton were offended, he might leave the boy alone, and I’d hate to think my rashness condemned Ted to be poor. Jim is not rich and might marry _____”

He stopped, for the ground was awkward. Alice gave him a baffling smile.

“Have you some grounds to think Jim will marry?”

“Oh, well, at a back-block farm one is lonesome and Jim is young. I think that’s all.”

“Perhaps loneliness does account for some weddings,” Alice agreed. “The old-fashioned convention was: one married for one’s lover’s personal charm. Well, my cousin at Brandon, Manitoba, married a Canadian girl he had known for but two or three weeks, and his letters do not indicate he’s sorry for his haste.”

“Then you have a cousin at Brandon!” said Hugh with surprise.

“That is so,” Alice agreed. “Not long since his wife urged me to visit them, and perhaps I might. However, we were talking about Ted. I think you ought to take the boy to Canada, but you refuse. Perhaps your refusal is logical so far as you know. All the same, Ted ought not to stay——”

She got up, but for a moment or two she waited and Hugh saw Seymour in the road behind the trees. He went by as if he did not remark they were about, but Hugh doubted. Then Alice went off and Hugh took the river. He could not concentrate on his fishing and when he put up his rod he had broken a fresh trace and caught a very small trout.

Two or three days afterward, Alice and some others were at Gatesgarth for tennis. A rainstorm stopped the game and Alice inquired if they might go to a lumber-room at the top of the house, where some old furniture and pictures were stored. Mrs. Maitland agreed and sent for candles.

“The articles are battered and broken, but I believe two or three are good examples of Jacobean and Georgian workmanship,” she said. “At all events, to look about might interest you until tea is served. Will you ask Frank for the keys, Ted?”

Hugh thought Seymour's keeping the keys significant, but he joined the party. The lumber-room in the roof was draughty and dark. The candles wavered, shadows leaped about the walls, and the trembling illumination touched old rosewood and mahogany.

"The writing table is Louis XVI; the tallboys are older," Mrs. Maitland remarked. "I really think they ought to be mended, but when one gets old one does not bother. Perhaps when they are Ted's he will have the best restored."

"I doubt if they will be mine, and I'd sooner mend a Canadian tractor," Ted rejoined in a moody voice.

Hugh knew Mrs. Maitland did not hear the boy, but he thought Alice gave him a meaning look. After a time he took a slender walking sword from the wall, and when he looked up only Mrs. Maitland, Alice, and a young girl were about. The others perhaps were bored and had stolen away. Alice stopped in front of two battered leather trunks.

"I have not seen these before. Do you think they will open?"

"We'll try," said Mrs. Maitland. "The *mails* are very old and I believe they carry my ancestors' clothes!—perhaps your ancestors'. I don't know whose they were."

Hugh took the bunch of keys and by and by opened the front trunk. He pulled out a man's three-cornered hat, a blue coat with silver buttons, and a sword-belt.

"I expect the Jacobite who haunts Gatesgarth wore clothes like that," he said.

Mrs. Maitland turned and gave him a smile. Sometimes when she did not hear others she heard Hugh.

"Although your home is in Canada, your English is better than the English my young friends use and you control your voice. When I was a girl, a gentleman talked like a gentleman—— Well, I think the hat is in the Jacobite's period, but the coat is later; Regency dress, perhaps. Can you open the other trunk?"

Hugh did so and Alice pulled out silk and lace and old brocade. The colors were faded, but the fine material was not much decayed and Hugh smelled spices and faint perfumes. By and by Alice held a trailing robe against the other girl's light form, and when she looked at Mrs. Maitland her eyes sparkled. Mrs. Maitland nodded and signed Hugh.

“Will you collect the others in the hall and keep them occupied for about twenty minutes?”

Hugh went off and waited with the party. The rain had stopped and a bright beam touched the wide staircase by the wall. At the top a gallery with carved rails went across. But for the ray of sunshine, the hall was gloomy. Hugh, by a window, saw dark thunderclouds roll across the hills and thought he smelled the spices in the vanished women’s clothes.

Somebody exclaimed and he looked up. A woman appeared in the shadow behind the gallery. Her figure, so to speak, was unsubstantial, like the faint perfume, but the outlines grew distinct and he saw it was a lady in old-fashioned dress. She advanced to the stairs, her high heels tapping on the polished boards, and he noticed her trailing robe, wide hat, and powdered hair. Then she reached the spot where the sunshine struck, and Hugh’s heart beat. The lady was Alice Cunningham and she was like a picture by Gainsborough. Excitement, perhaps, had touched her cheek with rose, and where her skin was white she wore a small dark patch. Her hair shone in large, loose-twisted coils. Clothes and powder and patch were accurate, but Hugh felt that all was not a masquerade. Alice knew her part, yet, in a sense, she did not act; she was the Gainsborough lady. Her look was proud, her calm was the old school’s calm; she carried herself nobly and one knew her thoroughbred. Hugh thrilled and set his mouth. An impoverished plainsman must not be ridiculous, but he knew himself the Georgian lady’s lover.

Glancing mechanically at Seymour, he knew something else. The fellow’s skin was slightly flushed and his eyes sparkled. Seymour had talked about jarring forces and passions that bothered flesh and blood; he loved Alice Cunningham, but she was not for him. Hugh had indulged his very mixed emotions but for a moment or two, and Alice was not yet at the bottom of the steps when he saw Mrs. Maitland at the top. Her hair was white and she had not the long stick she sometimes used, but she carried herself with old-fashioned dignity. If Alice were a Georgian belle, Hugh felt Mrs. Maitland, for all her modern clothes, was a Louis XVI marquise. They were rather like than different; something that marked one marked the other.

Hugh hated to be theatrical, but he thought Mrs. Maitland hesitated and he saw his part. He went quickly up the staircase, and Alice did not turn her head. The steps were wide and she, no doubt, knew where he went. At the top he stopped and tried to copy an old-fashioned bow.

“Your servant, ma’am,” he said.

Mrs. Maitland gave him a queer smile.

“Youth calls to youth, and the days when I had charm like Alice’s are gone. Yet you did not stop. It looks as if you knew your duty.”

“True charm does not fade, ma’am, and to wait for you is not a duty,” Hugh rejoined.

He doubted if Mrs. Maitland heard, but she put her hand on his arm and they went down the steps. The others, laughing and shouting their approval, advanced to meet Alice, who curtseyed and was surrounded by the noisy group. She, however, waved back one or two, crossed the floor, and vanished. Alice knew where to stop, and Hugh admitted that her stage-management was good.

When she came back she wore modern clothes and humorously faced the banter about her exploit; but Hugh was not cheated. Alice had not copied the Gainsborough lady’s old-fashioned grace and haughty calm. They were hers by inheritance, and Hugh’s look became thoughtful.

CHAPTER X

HOUGHTON'S REFUSAL

Dinner was over and Mrs. Maitland, Houghton, and Stannard occupied the drawing-room. Ted was engaged by his studies and in the evening Seymour went to his laboratory. Hugh thought Houghton half asleep; the old fellow's habit was to drowse after dinner. Mrs. Maitland's pose was upright and she used a straight-backed chair, but her hands were languidly folded and her glance was fixed, as if she brooded. The spacious room was drearily quiet.

Hugh was sorry for his hosts. Mrs. Maitland's deafness denied her the social activities and command he thought she loved; she, so to speak, was condemned to loneliness. Houghton was old and tired; he stood for vanishing traditions and it looked as if he saw the new school had no use for him. Hugh imagined all his hope and ambition were for Ted. This was embarrassing; since he had sensed a sort of antagonism for Jim, and he must talk about the boy.

To persuade Houghton would be hard and Hugh admitted that his resolve to try was not altogether logical. Alice declared Ted ought to join his brother, but Hugh, for proper grounds, did not yet agree. His arguments carried the weight they had carried before, and to let them go because Alice was very beautiful and like a Gainsborough picture was ridiculous. Yet sometimes one was ridiculous and Hugh resolved to indulge her as far as he dared. By and by Mrs. Maitland looked up and her glance was humorously sympathetic.

"I am afraid our house is dull, Hugh. Our young friends are not numerous, but we must try to fix for another tennis match."

"The grouse-shooting will soon begin," Houghton remarked. "Hugh would like the sport, and although I no longer carry a gun, I have arranged for a small party to stay with us."

Hugh saw the opening for which he had waited and he said he doubted if he would be at Gatesgarth for the grouse-shooting. His visit had been happy and his hosts were kind, but he would like a week in London and he was wanted at his farm.

“Since I must go soon, I wonder whether you would allow me to take Ted across,” he resumed. “Jim is keen to see his brother.”

Houghton’s tired look vanished, and Hugh thought him disturbed and alert.

“I think not. To go would interrupt Ted’s studies and might make him dissatisfied. He might want to remain.”

“It’s possible,” Hugh admitted. “Suppose he did want to stay? Jim is his brother.”

“Ted is my grandson, and when Jim went to Canada he acknowledged me the boy’s guardian. So long as Ted is a boy, I am justified to plan for him. In a few years he must choose for himself, and if he is resolved to emigrate, I must agree. Although I would sooner he stayed in England, I would try to help him to the career he liked. But let’s be frank. You are Jim’s friend. Did he empower you to carry off Ted?”

“Not altogether, sir,” Hugh replied with some embarrassment. “My part was to judge; for example, if Ted was well and happy and satisfied to stay in the Old Country. If he was not, and wanted to join his brother, I might indulge him.”

Houghton nodded, but his look grew politely ironical.

“I think I understand. Well, you are a young man, Mr. Stannard. It looks as if Jim gave you some responsibility.”

“That is so, sir. I do not like my job, and since I’d sooner Jim carried his own load, I suggest an experiment. For a boy, Ted is delicate and nervously sensitive. He does not thrive—— Suppose we tried a three-months’ holiday?”

“Then, you imagine he would thrive in Manitoba!”

Hugh hesitated. He saw Houghton was hurt, and admitted the old fellow perhaps had some grounds. Mrs. Maitland studied them and her look was interested, but Hugh did not know if she heard the argument.

“I think it possible and the experiment would not cost very much.”

“You stand for Jim. Would you agree to send Ted back when the holiday was over?”

“I cannot promise, sir. For Ted to remain at Gatesgarth has obvious advantages; but if, after three months, he would sooner be in Canada, I do not believe Jim would force him to go back.”

Houghton smiled, as if he had expected the reply.

“You are honest, Mr. Stannard. In the circumstances, I will not run the risk. Well, we agreed to be frank. Jim has a good farm and can support himself. He is independent and he indicated politely that he was willing for me to leave him alone. I doubt if he can properly support his brother, and I want to help Ted——”

He stopped for a moment, and resumed in a firm voice: “Although I am not a lawyer, I imagine I might claim control, but I doubt if I would do so. If Ted stays with me until he is old enough to choose his line, I will undertake to give him a useful and honorable occupation. Moreover, should his qualities and education fit him to carry on the house, he might inherit my estate. If he joins his brother now, my undertaking does not stand. That is all, Mr. Stannard.”

Hugh said nothing. Houghton’s argument carried some weight. After a few moments the old fellow gave him a friendly look.

“In the meantime, suppose we let it go? You must remain for the grouse-shooting and I hope you will then see mine is the proper plan.”

Hugh agreed and went to the smoking-room. When he came back Mrs. Maitland was waiting for him in the hall.

“Not to hear is a sad embarrassment, but one uses one’s imagination,” she remarked. “My brother is obstinate and sometimes not very wise.”

“Then, you think Ted ought to go?” Hugh asked in a carefully pitched voice.

Mrs. Maitland smiled a meaning smile. “I love the boy, and when he is gone the house will be drearier, but one must not be selfish. Well, you are scrupulous, but I think you are not a fool.”

She went off and Hugh pondered. Mrs. Maitland’s statement that he was not a fool was rash. It began to look as if he loved Alice Cunningham and in the circumstances he ought to start for Canada as soon as possible, but he had undertaken to satisfy Jim about Ted and he could not yet do so. Alice and Mrs. Maitland thought Ted ought to be with Jim, and the boy was keen to go. Women, however, were moved, and sometimes cheated, by vague emotional impulses, but he must be logical. At all events, he would stay for the shooting and he might then see his line.

When he started for the river one morning, Ted waited at a stile where the path to his tutor’s crossed a field.

“Seymour told me you go back soon,” he said. “It looks as if Jim hadn’t answered your letter.”

“That is so,” Hugh agreed. “I have stayed longer than I thought.”

The boy hesitated and turned his head. When he looked up his mouth was tight and he awkwardly fastened the strap round the books he carried.

“Oh, well, I suppose you must go,” he said in a dreary voice. “By and by they’ll send me to Oxford and perhaps I can hold on. All the same, when you arrived I thought Jim meant you to take me across. But it’s done with. There’s no use in grumbling.”

Hugh remarked his pluck, but he saw his fight for control was hard. He imagined the boy felt the champion he had trusted was deserting him.

“Buck up!” he said. “You’ll be all right at the university and the time will not be long.”

“I wonder,” said Ted. “Anyhow, if I don’t start, I’ll be late at Charlton’s. I hope your fishing’s good.” He got over the stile and took the field path, but his step was slow. Hugh pulled out his pipe, and knocking it savagely on the gate-post, broke the bowl.

“Blast Jim for giving me his load!” he swore.

When he got to the river his fishing was not good. He whipped off three or four flies and entangled a cast. He dared not think about Alice, and he was disturbed about Ted. Seymour was the man to advise him, but Hugh would not ask his help. Although Seymour was polite and sometimes friendly, Hugh sensed antagonism. Then Alice doubted the fellow and Ted was afraid of him.

Not long afterward three or four sporting gentlemen and their wives arrived and Alice and another girl joined the party. The first day on the moors was bright, but a boisterous wind swept the heather and the grouse were wild. The distance between the butts was long and the gamekeeper kept the party moving across bogs and stones. When Hugh got back he was tired and moody. In two or three days he must start for Canada and he frankly hated to go. Some time after dinner he went to the smoking-room. Two or three others were in the room, and by and by Houghton looked in. He declared he must not stop, but Seymour fetched him a chair and they began to talk about farming.

One inquired about Canadian methods and Hugh replied. He saw the others were interested, and one could talk to men who knew something

about the job. When he thought about it, he wondered whether Seymour did not once or twice give him his cue; but he did not know. In the meantime, he could not banish his moodiness and his remarks about Canadian farming were not optimistic. Unless one had a reserve fund one ran a daunting risk. Much depended on the weather and something on one's luck. Some poor men did make good, but most of them went broke.

He was asked to give a typical example, and he narrated his own fight. Somehow he imagined Seymour inspired the request, but the others were country landlords and their interest was obvious. When he stopped one said:

“Your tale's illuminating. Are you going to try again?”

“I don't yet know,” Hugh replied. “Not long since the usual plan was to pull out for British Columbia and leave your creditors to guess where you had gone. To some extent, however, the homestead laws protect a farm and one hates to be beaten.”

“Would you require a large sum?” another asked. “Your giving us some useful particulars perhaps justifies the inquiry.”

“Oh, well,” said Hugh, with a touch of hesitation, “fifteen hundred dollars—three hundred pounds—would see me out. At present, I don't know where to get the money, but my friend, Jim Houghton, will help me plow, and if you trust your luck, sometimes you win.”

They began to talk about the shooting, and when the others went Hugh asked Seymour if he would cash a check. Seymour was Houghton's business man.

“Certainly,” he agreed. “I expect Mrs. Maitland wants me and for an hour or two I'll be occupied. Perhaps you will wait until our guests have gone to bed.”

CHAPTER XI

HOUGHTON'S SAFE

At length, Houghton's guests began to go to bed and Hugh waited moodily for Seymour in the hall. He thought Alice was gone, and he had not yet been able to talk to her. Hugh had wanted her to know he was leaving Gatesgarth in a day or two. For a time Mrs. Maitland, and then Seymour, had kept him occupied. Seymour was a sort of majordomo and master of ceremonies, and although his touch was light, his rule was firm. For all that, Hugh imagined Alice was willing to leave him alone; had she wanted to talk to him, she might have found an opportunity where he could not.

In the morning the shooters were going to a moor some distance off, and breakfast would be early. Seymour reckoned they would not be back until six or seven o'clock, and on the next day Hugh ought to start for Liverpool. It looked as if he might not, except when the others were about, see Alice before he went, and although he admitted it was perhaps better for him not to do so, he was hurt. Moreover, he was haunted by the queer, hopeless look Ted gave him when the boy knew he was going back. Hugh hated to picture Ted's painful effort for resignation, but the picture would not be banished. By and by Seymour came in.

"Sorry you were forced to wait, but at length I'm not engaged," he said. "Let's go to the office and I'll get you the money."

The office was a small room in a passage on the first floor. Seymour got a light and, opening a safe in the wall, took Hugh's check and gave him a cigarette.

"We had a pretty strenuous day on the moors and since dinner I have been running about," he said. "To be Houghton's factotum has some drawbacks and I hope he, at last, has gone to bed. He's a queer, obstinate old fellow and sticks to his old-fashioned rules. For example——"

He went to the safe and pulled out a flat Russian-leather box. The lid swung back and Hugh saw shimmering pearls in a bed of colored silk.

"The necklace is Mrs. Maitland's and ought to be at the bank," Seymour resumed. "I imagine pearls are a burglar's favorite booty. He is not forced to break the setting, as he must do with stones. All he need do is to cut the string, and I believe to identify separate pearls is hard. Then, of course, they

can be sold by twos and threes. In fact, if I were a thief, I think I'd go for pearls."

He laughed and putting back the box lighted a cigarette and picked up a thick bundle tied by green tape.

"Another example! Three hundred and fifty pounds in small notes—rents and so forth paid us recently. However, I must go to Hexham soon, and I made up an even sum for the bank. We ought to have some loose cash to meet your check——"

Somebody knocked, and when Seymour replied a servant pushed back the door.

"Mr. Houghton hopes he does not disturb you, but if you can join him in the morning-room——"

Seymour shrugged resignedly. He was not annoyed and somehow Hugh imagined he had expected the call.

"A fresh plan for tomorrow! Sorry, Stannard. I don't want to break the tied-up packet. Perhaps you'll wait."

He went off and for a few moments Hugh brooded. Then he thrilled and got up, for Alice came in. Her color was rather high, but she went to Seymour's chair and Hugh leaned against the open safe.

"You are going back?" she said.

"I start on Thursday," Hugh agreed. "It accounts for my getting some money. When Frank looked for the notes Houghton called him."

Alice's smile was baffling, and Hugh imagined she knew the carelessness he pretended was hard.

"It looks as if you did not think me much interested!" she remarked.

"Whenever Mrs. Maitland and Seymour left me a few minutes you were not alone."

"Then, you did mean to tell me. That is something! I suppose to signal you wanted to talk was impossible?"

"I didn't know the proper code. Besides, I imagined you knew, but since you did not play up I must be resigned. To indulge me or refuse, was, of course, your privilege."

"You are very modest, Hugh," Alice rejoined. "Then for some time you have lived in the wilds and it's possible you haven't found out your rules are

not up-to-date. At all events, I knew you and Seymour were at the office, and when Houghton sent for him I stole along the passage. Perhaps I was sorry I did not play up. But I expect you are jarred!”

Hugh thrilled. Alice had not called him Hugh before, and she had risked exciting her friend’s curiosity. For all that, he must not allow her to pay for her generous rashness.

“Although you are very kind, I doubt if you ought to stay,” he said. “Seymour will soon be back.”

“Houghton will keep him for five or ten minutes. In the morning you start early and when you get home I may not be at Gatesgarth,” said Alice, and resumed with a queer smile: “In the circumstances, I felt I’d like to know what you are going to do about Ted.”

Hugh gave her a searching glance and his heart beat, but he dared not admit he thought her statement did not account for all, and he narrated his interview with Ted and his efforts to persuade Houghton.

“So far as I can weigh the advantages, Ted ought to stay here,” he continued. “But you and Mrs. Maitland do not think so, and the strange thing is, I want to take the boy. All the same, one mustn’t trust one’s impulses, and Ted must stay with his grandfather——”

He turned his head and the blood came to Alice’s skin. Somebody advanced along the passage, and Hugh thought the step was Seymour’s. The noise, however, died away and Alice got up.

“I must go, and I suppose my venturing to the office supports your argument. You feel you ought not to trust vague suppositions like Mrs. Maitland’s and mine! Women do not reason; we are governed by romantic impulses, and so forth. You, however, mean to be logical. Well, for Ted’s sake, I hope you will not be sorry!”

“The important thing is, Jim Houghton trusts me and I’m to get a useful sum for carrying out his job,” Hugh rejoined. “Where it’s possible, I like to earn my pay.”

Alice’s eyes sparkled. “You stated something like that before, and I understand you not long since pictured your fight in Canada for Houghton’s friends. Have you some grounds to boast about your poverty?”

“One hates to cheat, and since I am poor I thought frankness useful,” Hugh replied in a queer voice.

“You are remarkably scrupulous; I expect your object’s good,” said Alice, with a baffling smile. “When you get home tomorrow I may be gone, but it’s possible I’ll visit my cousin in Manitoba, although nothing is yet fixed——”

A door along the passage shut, boards cracked, and Alice stole away. After a minute or two Seymour came in and took a small bundle of notes from under some documents in the safe. Hugh noticed that he did not seem to look for the bundle. He gave Hugh some of the notes and carelessly fastened the safe door.

“Houghton kept me longer than I thought. I’m sorry you were forced to wait. Good-night,” he said.

Hugh went off, but he was disturbed and moody and for some time he brooded by the sinking fire in the smoking-room. When the shooting party got back Alice might be gone, and if she did go to Manitoba, to look her up would be rash. He had nothing to do with a girl like that and all for which she stood. It looked as if she saw why he declared his poverty; her glance implied that she thought his frankness naïve. Yet, now he thought about it, he was justified.

A clock struck, a single note, and Hugh got up. All was quiet, the coals were black, and a flood of silver light trembled on the polished floor. Hugh thought he had left his candle, but the moon was nearly full and he would not need a light. The staircase was dark and at the top he pulled off his shoes. Houghton’s sporting friends had had a strenuous day and must not be disturbed.

Although two windows opened on the long passage, he could not see far in front and the floor was broken by two or three steps. It looked as if the moon had gone behind a cloud. His shoes were in his pockets and he could follow the wall, but he did not want to stumble at the steps.

Hugh had thought all was quiet, but when he felt for the steps in the gloom he heard puzzling noises. Perhaps the faint elusive rustle was a curtain shaking, although it was like silk trailed across a floor; Hugh pictured a Georgian lady’s flowing, hooped dress. Then a board cracked, as if somebody stole along the passage, but the step was not a lady’s step. Somehow the noise indicated a thick riding-boot. Hugh smiled; if he indulged his imagination he would hear spurs clink and a small-sword rattle. Besides, he rather thought ghosts went noiselessly.

All the same, the old house was somehow forbidding. Hugh was not remarkably romantic, but at Gatesgarth he admitted a sort of atavistic shrinking from the dark. Anyhow, he expected to find a candle in his room, and since he must not disturb the others he felt for the wall and cautiously went ahead.

CHAPTER XII

HUGH SEES HIS LINE

At the bottom of the short steps Hugh stopped. Although he admitted he was ridiculous, the queer noises had disturbed him and now he sensed somebody in front. Sensed was the proper word, because all he saw was the glimmer of a window not far off. The window began to get distinct, as if the clouds rolled back from the moon, and faint reflections touched the opposite wall. Then a board cracked and Hugh frowned. Somebody was in the passage and in a moment or two would cross the window. Hugh waited. The passage turned and the only occupied rooms round the corner were Ted's and his. Houghton's friends had some time since gone to bed; in fact, nobody ought to be about, and if a burglar had broken in, he would steer for the office and the butler's room. Ted, however, had a powerful electric torch Hugh had bought for the boy at Hexham when he found out that Ted sometimes did not sleep and was not allowed to use a light. Perhaps his wanting a light was ridiculous, but Gatesgarth was rather a ghostly old house, and Hugh had said nothing to Seymour about the torch.

A man's dark figure cut the window. The figure was bulky, as if the fellow wore a large thick coat; in fact, his indistinct outline was strange and somehow foreign. He melted in the dark, and although Hugh would frankly sooner have gone the other way, he clenched his fist and stole along the passage.

At the corner where the passage turned he saw Ted's door was not shut. The moon had grown bright and a silver beam, shining through the boy's room, touched the wall; moreover, a large window occupied the end of the passage. Hugh stopped, and although the light was puzzling, his skin got wet with sweat.

The stranger's hat was three-cornered and his coat was an old-fashioned riding-coat, crossed by two or three overlapping capes. At one side, the thrown-back skirt seemed to cover a sword. It looked as if tradition were accurate and the Jacobite messenger searched for his dispatches.

Hugh braced up. If the apparition went into Ted's room, he must jump for the door, but it did not. It went on along the passage and although the carpet was soft Hugh heard the long horseman's boots. The Jacobite was obviously willing to make a noise. Hugh made for his room and leaned

against the door. The wall was thick and the recess deep enough to hide him. Moreover, the spot commanded the passage. He rather thought he heard another step, as if somebody crept through the gloom by the corner he had passed, but he concentrated on the ghost. He began to see somebody masqueraded. For one thing, although the three-cornered hat was in the period, he thought the coat was not. The three-decker cape went with a high, beaver hat. Anyhow, the fellow was treading noisily, as if he meant to waken Ted, and he would soon be sorry for his joke. The nervous boy might get a nasty knock. But Houghton's friends were sober gentlemen and perhaps it was not a joke. Suppose the masquerader meant Ted to get a knock?

He turned at the end of the passage and began to come back. He was going to Ted's room and Hugh braced himself for a jump. The fellow thought nobody was about, but when he was a few yards nearer Hugh's fist would crash against his jaw. It did not go as Hugh calculated. Ted's door was pushed back and the pale illumination on the wall and carpet got wide. The masquerader stopped and Ted, in the doorway, balanced a shining gun. His legs shook, but he put the gun to his shoulder and Hugh knew he meant to shoot. Although the gun was a light sixteen-bore, at six or seven yards the concentrated shot would strike like a solid ball.

Hugh thought somebody called in a faint, broken voice, but he leaped for the boy. Knocking up the gun, he seized Ted, and for a few moments was occupied. When he looked round, the passage was empty, but he thought a door at the end shut and he ran for the spot. The door was fast and Hugh tried for calm. To break the door and disturb the household would not help, for he imagined the masquerader would soon hide his clothes. In the morning he might spot the fellow; anyhow he would let Houghton know Ted was going to Canada. Hugh had tried to weigh things and now the beam went down.

Turning back, he stopped with keen surprise. Alice's arm was round Ted and she talked in a low soothing voice. Hugh could not account for her being there, but he saw Ted was embarrassed. Perhaps he felt for a woman to comfort him was humiliating; perhaps he was bothered about his pajamas. At all events, his nerve was better than Hugh had thought. The shock had steadied the boy.

Alice's clothes were fashionable evening clothes, and she had obviously not gone to bed. She stepped back and Ted looked up.

“At first I didn't know you; I was going to shoot.”

“Then, my stopping you was lucky,” Hugh rejoined with some dryness. “But where did you get the gun?”

“It’s mine; I stole it from the gun-room. The breech-lock’s rather stiff and I wanted to experiment,” Ted replied in an embarrassed voice. “Then I thought I’d like to keep the gun, and Lizzie, the housemaid, promised she wouldn’t tell. Before you arrived nobody used the other rooms and sometimes I didn’t sleep—— Well, I suppose I was afraid; but I said nothing. If you knew, I thought you’d banter me. After all, it does not look as if I was very ridiculous.”

“I found out something about the gun, but I did not think Ted ridiculous,” Alice remarked. “Perhaps I indulged my imagination; women, of course, are not logical, and so forth. Since I knew the arguments you would use, I did not bother you. For all that, I was anxious and tonight I did not go to bed. When all ought to have gone, I heard steps, and then I heard yours. You went very quietly and once or twice you stopped—— Well, I trust my instincts and I crept from my room.”

Hugh nodded. Alice had tried to guard the boy. The strange thing was, she and Ted were cooler than he was.

“Your pluck is fine. It’s obvious I was an obstinate fool,” he said, and put his hand on Ted’s arm. “Buck up, my lad. Nothing is going to bother you again. It’s Wednesday morning and tomorrow we start for Canada.”

Ted’s eyes sparkled in the moonlight and he stood straight and upright, as if he had thrown off a load. Then he plunged into his room and began to look about for a coat.

“What are you going to do about Seymour?” Alice inquired. “I expect he went off by the small back staircase. After all, his plan did not work.”

“Ah!” said Hugh. “I begin to see a light! You are satisfied you knew the brute?”

“It was Seymour,” Ted declared. “At first, I own I thought him the Jacobite—— You see, he had a small black mask, like the old highwayman, but when he got near——”

Hugh shut the door and turned to Alice.

“Now I think about it, you ought not to wait.”

The light had become indistinct and in the gloom Alice’s face was shadowy white, but Hugh knew she smiled.

“You feel you do not need my help?”

“It looks as if my independence did not carry me far, and I have not much grounds to boast. Well?”

“Houghton is obstinate; I doubt if you could persuade him about Seymour, and we have not much to go upon. I expect you’re not entitled to take the boy from his grandfather.”

“I don’t know; it might be awkward,” Hugh agreed. “You imply we ought to steal off before Houghton knows we mean to go?”

“You mustn’t risk his stopping Ted,” said Alice firmly. “I’m afraid for the boy. Perhaps Seymour’s object was to terrify him and force you to carry him off; but it’s possible he meant to break his nerve for good. You see, Jim will not inherit much; he was stubbornly independent, and I think Seymour worked on the old man. But for Ted, he’s Houghton’s heir——”

Hugh thought he saw and his part was not to talk.

“Ted and I owe you much, but you mustn’t be implicated, and we’ll push off,” he said and opened the door. “I’m going for some clothes, Ted. Put on yours. When I’m back we’ll start.”

“Wait for me in the library,” said Alice and vanished.

Ted joined Hugh in the library, but Alice did not arrive and Hugh got anxious. It looked as if nobody had heard the noise in the passage; the house was large, the rooms were spacious and the walls were thick. All the same, he ought to be off. After a few minutes a car throbbed at the back of the house, and, running to the window, he saw a silver beam speed across the trees in the avenue. Hugh was puzzled and disturbed, but Alice had ordered him to wait. By and by she stole into the room and pushed a game-bag and an envelope into his hands. “Some food and a note for my relations in Westmorland,” she said in a breathless voice, as if she had gone fast. “You see, you mustn’t go to Liverpool for your steamer.”

“I don’t see,” said Hugh. “A car started. Has Seymour run off?”

“He has sent for the police. Don’t talk! Come with me.”

Hugh pushed his coat and Ted’s through the game-bag straps. Then he picked up a small bundle of clothes and followed Alice along a passage to the servants’ staircase. At the bottom he stopped Ted and they pulled on their boots.

“We are ready, but I don’t understand Seymour’s sending for the police,” he said. “You are satisfied he did send somebody?”

“When I was getting some food for you he stole across the kitchen and I crept after him. Watkins, the chauffeur, lives above the garage and I heard Frank’s orders.”

“Your nerve is fine,” said Hugh. “In a way, I suppose I am abducting Ted!”

“That’s not all, Hugh. You had talked about your poverty and Frank left you alone in the office. The safe was open, and he told Watkins a bundle of notes was gone.”

“By George!” said Hugh, and began to pull off the game-bag. “Well, I’m going to stay and face the brute. He doesn’t know you were about, and we’ll force him to pay for his masquerade.”

“You mustn’t risk it. Houghton’s very obstinate and he trusts Frank. Then, although I’m satisfied Frank was the masquerader, I did not see him distinctly, and you were alone in the office. If you were disgraced, Ted would lose his champion.”

“He would have another—the stanchest, pluckiest champion a boy could get,” Hugh declared. “All the same, if I went to jail, I could not help, and Ted mustn’t stay here. Well, I’d like to wait and fight, but it might be rash _____”

Alice firmly steered him across the kitchen and opened a door. “Go to my relations; you have a note for them, but I’ll write a long letter, and they will see you out. Seymour knows you mean to sail from Liverpool and I expect the roads and railway stations will be watched. If I were you, I’d keep to the moors. Houghton will not look for you in Westmorland.”

She kissed Ted and when he was a few yards off gave Hugh her hand.

“Good-by, Hugh. I wish you luck!”

Hugh said nothing. A queer break in her voice fired his blood and he drew her toward him. The strange thing was, he thought at first she did not resist, but after a moment she gently pushed him back. Then the door shut and she was gone. Hugh thrilled triumphantly, and overtaking Ted, stole across the lawn.

On the other side he climbed a fence and stopped for a few moments to look about. The house was dark and all was quiet. Seymour evidently had not wakened Houghton and meant to wait for the police. When they arrived

Hugh hoped to be some distance off. He touched Ted, and keeping to the gloom under the trees, they started for the moors.

CHAPTER XIII

IN THE MORNING

The morning was cold, the library at Gatesgarth fronted north, and Houghton had not waited for the tea he was accustomed to take before he got up. When he entered the gloomy room he shivered and turned to Seymour with a frown.

“You ought to have let me know you were going to send for the police, Frank.”

“I did not want to disturb you, sir, and speed was important. There was no use in getting a village constable and the distance to the Dalefoot office is long. Three hundred and fifty pounds is a useful sum, but my object was mainly to prevent Stannard’s carrying off Ted.”

“All the same, I ought to have known,” Houghton grumbled. “Stannard was my guest and one hates notoriety. Unless we get a warrant, I imagine we cannot stop him.”

“Notoriety has some drawbacks,” Seymour agreed. “Still I expect you are not willing to let Ted go, and if Stannard gets on board ship, you will lose the boy. We must use a warrant and I have sent for Mr. Elliot.”

Houghton frowned. Elliot was a magistrate, but to ask his neighbor for the warrant jarred. Yet it looked as if he must, since he was not willing to let Ted go. He was old and lonely and his ambitions centered on the boy. Jim did not want his help, and although Frank had not all he wanted, he was not poor and his talents would, no doubt, carry him far. Houghton trusted Seymour, but Frank had not Ted’s queer attractiveness. Houghton had thought to mold the boy and fit him for the inheritance that might be his. Then Mrs. Maitland came in. She carried herself haughtily and gave Seymour a keen glance.

“I understand a police inspector is waiting.”

“That is so, ma’am,” said Seymour. “I expect you know your pearls are gone!”

“The pearls are mine. Before you meddled I ought to have been informed.”

“On the whole, I think my sending for the inspector was the proper line,” said Seymour, in a slow, distinct voice. “When we find the pearls, I imagine we will find Ted.”

“I wonder—— At all events, I am not sorry Ted is gone. He ought to have gone before.”

“But you do not approve of his being carried off by a thief?”

“We do not yet know if Mr. Stannard is a thief.”

“I’m sorry we have not much grounds for doubt,” said Houghton, and went to the window. “However, Elliot has arrived. Ask him and the inspector to come up, Frank.”

The magistrate and the officer were shown in. Elliot was a sober country gentleman; his hair was white and his look thoughtful. The inspector was young and politely inscrutable. He had already talked to Seymour and some of the servants and gone about the house. Houghton was embarrassed and annoyed. He felt Seymour, so to speak, had tricked him and forced on him a part he did not like.

“Frank and Stannard were at the office,” he said to Elliot. “Stannard wanted some money and wrote a check. When I sent for Frank the safe was open, but, thinking he would not be long away, he asked Stannard to wait for the notes. Stannard was alone for about a quarter of an hour. You perhaps remember his stating a blighted crop had ruined him, but three hundred pounds might help him out?”

“As a rule, a man who plans to steal does not talk about his poverty,” Elliot remarked. “When Frank went to you, why did he not shut the safe?”

“Stannard was our guest and Jim Houghton’s friend. I hated to imply that I doubted him,” Seymour rejoined.

“You did not immediately miss the notes and pearls,” said the inspector.

“The hour was late and I was tired. I expect I shut the safe mechanically, but when I got to my room I began to reflect—— Perhaps I had not used proper caution, particularly since I had shown Stannard the pearls and he knew the tied-up notes were for three hundred and fifty pounds. You see, I’d told him I did not want to break the bundle. Thinking the temptation might carry away an impoverished man, I went back.”

The inspector pondered. Although he was young, he knew his business and had cultivated his observation. Mr. Seymour’s tale was plausible, but it was rather like a prosecuting lawyer’s argument than a plain statement of

facts. On the surface, it looked as if one of two people was the thief, and Seymour apparently had not much object for stealing. Stannard had an object, and motive was important, but the inspector thought the case more intricate than it looked.

“So far as you know, only Mr. Stannard and the servant who carried Mr. Houghton’s message were at the office! Will you send for her?” he said.

Seymour rang the bell and a frightened housemaid arrived. When she went for Mr. Seymour, Mr. Stannard was in the office, she said. The safe was open and Mr. Stannard’s chair was about a yard off. She gave Mr. Seymour her message and he followed her along the passage. Mr. Stannard stayed. Nobody else was about.

They let her go, and then Seymour looked up sharply, for Alice came in.

“Since you called the housemaid, I imagined you might want me,” she said. “I was at the office, a moment or two after Frank went. In fact I knew Mr. Houghton wanted him and I waited for him to go.”

Seymour’s habit was to control his emotions, but his face got red. Houghton frowned and Elliot’s look grew thoughtful. The inspector waited.

“Why did you go to the office?” Houghton inquired.

“I had not been able to see Mr. Stannard alone. I wanted to find out what he was going to do about Ted.”

“Then you thought you were entitled to meddle?”

Alice faced the old man, and although she blushed, her look was proud.

“In a way, perhaps, I was entitled. Ted’s my friend and at one time Jim was my lover.”

For a few moments the others said nothing. Houghton was annoyed and embarrassed; Elliot pondered, and Mrs. Maitland smiled. The inspector studied the group. He thought Miss Cunningham’s statement was not as frank as it looked; Mr. Seymour had obviously got a knock. Then Mrs. Maitland’s smile was significant: the old lady was not a fool.

“When you arrived was Mr. Stannard embarrassed?” he inquired.

“His look was not at all guilty,” Alice replied. “Perhaps he was disturbed: I think he felt I ought not to be there. For some time we talked about Ted Houghton, and then we heard Seymour’s steps and I stole away. He went rather fast, although the passage was dark, and I doubt if Mr. Stannard could seize and hide the notes and pearls before Frank arrived. The

bundle was thick—I noted it on the shelf ledge—and the jewel box is not very small. Mr. Stannard’s clothes were evening clothes.”

“But you don’t claim it was impossible?”

Alice did not, and although she was rather obviously resolved to wait, Mrs. Maitland signed the inspector, who opened the door. When Alice went off Seymour braced up. It looked as if she knew nothing about his playing the Jacobite, and he had no grounds to think Stannard had penetrated his disguise. Then Ted was gone, and if he did not come back Seymour would be resigned.

“So far, we have concentrated on the notes,” Houghton remarked. “The important thing is, Stannard has carried off my grandson and he must be stopped.”

“You implied another time that Jim sent his friend across to inquire about Ted,” Elliot rejoined. “If he is empowered to take the boy to his brother, I doubt if you could properly refuse to let him go. At all events, the dispute is not a magistrate’s business, and I would hesitate to write a warrant.”

“A thief is not a proper person to take charge of the boy, and when the police find Stannard I am justified to resume control. Then Jim’s trusting a fellow like that is a useful argument for my keeping Ted. To begin with, however, we must get Stannard——”

“Very well,” said the inspector, “the packet missing from the safe contained three hundred and fifty pounds in notes. Perhaps Mrs. Maitland can fix the value of the pearls.”

Houghton repeated the question, and Mrs. Maitland knitted her brows.

“I cannot be very accurate, but I think the necklace is worth five pounds.”

“Five pounds?” exclaimed Houghton. “You’re ridiculous!”

The others said nothing, but Elliot’s eyes twinkled and the inspector’s look grew thoughtful. Seymour gave Mrs. Maitland a keen glance.

“Oh, well, it might be fifteen pounds,” she said and turned to the inspector, as if she took him into her confidence. “I expect you know one does not always keep one’s expensive jewels in one’s house. Sometimes one uses replicas; I believe a good workman’s copy would deceive all but an expert. The advantage is, one can then use the money the jewels are worth.”

“Do you imply you pawned the necklace?” Houghton demanded.

Mrs. Maitland smiled, a baffling smile.

“The pearls are mine, Edward. Perhaps I am extravagant, but I am really a better business woman than you imagine. When Frank urged me to send the necklace to the bank I was amused. Pearls, locked up by a bank, do not earn dividends. Well, if the inspector is satisfied, I think I will go.”

She got up and Seymour opened the door, but when she was gone Seymour set his mouth. So far as it was possible, he knew Mrs. Maitland meant to baffle him. The inspector shut his notebook and quietly looked about. The case was intricate and he saw the magistrate hesitated. The old fellow was keen and it looked as if he suspected Mr. Seymour had worked on his relation. Anyhow, the inspector must not be entangled by a family dispute.

“When I was informed about the robbery, I gave some orders,” he said. “It is possible our men are now on Mr. Stannard’s track, but before we arrest him I must ask for a warrant.”

“But if you find him carrying the stolen notes, are you not entitled to stop him?” Houghton inquired.

“I doubt if Stannard does carry the notes,” Elliot remarked. “However, since you are resolved, I suppose I must write the warrant. I hope you will not be sorry.”

He crossed the floor to the table and after a few moments the inspector took the document and went off. Houghton felt he ought to be satisfied, but somehow he was not. For one thing, he began to think Frank had rather hustled him. Houghton’s habit was to go slowly.

CHAPTER XIV

FREEDOM

A curlew called on a high note and Stannard languidly turned his head. A level sunbeam touched his face, and he stretched his cramped legs and got up. His hip-joint ached and he was cold, but he had slept soundly for two or three hours.

The old limekiln fronted east and the broken hearth was dry. Mist floated about the hills and a faint blue smear marked the valley Gatesgarth occupied. When Hugh looked the other way, high folding moors rolled south and melted in the distance. A few yards off, a little beck splashed in the heather. Sitting down in the sun, he unpacked the heavy game-bag. He found bread, pickled tongue, and cheese; a small tin stove and a bottle of spirit, and a map.

Hugh was strongly moved. Alice had packed the food; she was gone but for a few minutes and the house was dark, but she had got him proper supplies. Well, he knew Alice was cool and, so to speak, efficient. When things were awkward one could trust her. Filling the little tin kettle at the beck he lighted the spirit and glanced at Ted.

The boy lay in the stones. His face was pinched, his thin mouth was set, and he clenched his fist, as if some terror haunted his dreams. Hugh pulled out his watch and began to study the map. The shining streak he had remarked was a river and went to the North Sea. A road of a sort followed the water, but in front was a lonely table-land, pierced by shallow valleys. Fifteen miles off, across the waste, a trunk road went east to Newcastle, and two or three villages dotted a narrow, cultivated belt. On the other side, the Pennine range stretched south.

Hugh, looking up, saw the blue summits. There was his road to Westmorland. The police would search the trunk roads and the railway stations. They might inquire for him at Glasgow, Newcastle, and Liverpool; but they would not think to find him on the bleak Pennine fells.

Then a cock-grouse called and Ted moved uneasily, frowned, and jumped up. When he saw Hugh his strained look vanished.

“I thought I was back at Gatesgarth. How far are we off?”

“About seven miles; the main thing is we are three miles from the road. But let’s get breakfast. I’d like to make Blacklaw Hill by dark.”

“Then we will make it,” Ted declared, and standing very straight, squared his thin shoulders. “Now I’ve got my freedom, I can do all you want.”

Hugh gave him a sympathetic smile. Behind Ted’s braced figure the red moor melted into the shining sky. His pose was alert and buoyant; his look was joyous. In fact, he was not the lad Hugh had known at Houghton’s gloomy house. Ted, however, sat down and began to eat.

“We have got a first-class breakfast. Alice is fine!” he said. “She thought about food for us and my coat and thick boots. In the circumstances, you’d expect a girl to be knocked out by nerves. Alice was as steady as a rock.”

“Perhaps her steadiness cost her something,” Hugh remarked. “Were you very cool?”

Ted frowned. “I hate to think about it—— At the beginning I was desperately afraid; my hands shook, I thought I could not hold the gun. You see, when I jumped up I was half asleep, and to watch the big dark figure steer for my room was horrible. Then I felt if I did not get control the fright would break me, and somehow I bucked up—— Since I’m not going to talk about it another time, I’ll go on, if you like——”

Hugh nodded. Perhaps Seymour had reckoned on breaking Ted’s nerve for good, but the boy had conquered.

“Then I began to see I was cheated, and I got savage,” Ted resumed. “Somebody meant to scare me stiff, and since he’d nearly done so, the brute must pay. I rather think I wanted him to pay for all.”

“You knew it was Seymour?”

“In a way, I did not; I’d nothing to go upon. Yet I *felt* it was Seymour, and now we were equal. He hadn’t reckoned on my hiding the gun.”

“But you didn’t mean to shoot?”

“I don’t know—I felt I might be forced. Still, I think my plan was to hold him, with his hands up, and shout. Then he’d be caught; I think I mean *convicted*. At length Grandfather would understand——”

“You mustn’t exaggerate,” said Hugh.

Ted laughed, a queer laugh for a boy. “You thought I exaggerated before, and Grandfather would not be persuaded. Only Alice knew and she could

not meddle. Well, you had all some grounds to doubt. Seymour wasn't cruel; in a way, he was not unkind, but I felt he was slowly breaking me. I couldn't fight, he ruled the lot, and perhaps my pluck was gone. I pictured him creeping behind me in the dark, and waiting—— Looks as if I'm a neurotic rotter, doesn't it?"

"It looks as if I were a fool. Go on," said Hugh.

"I knew Seymour got at my letters and he stopped some. There was no use in talking to Grandfather and I had no money. If I ran away, they would fetch me back and Seymour would have an argument for firmer control. All I could do was to hold on until I went to the university, but I doubted if I could——"

Hugh pushed across a sandwich.

"It's done with, Ted. Get your breakfast. We must start."

They set off, Hugh carrying Ted's coat in the game-bag strap. The dew was on the heather and a bracing wind rolled soft white clouds across the sky. Ted's step was light and he carried himself joyously, as if freedom had given him confidence, but Hugh imagined he would not go as fast when the sun began to sink.

For four or five hours they plowed across the red heath and shaking belts of yellow moss, and Hugh kept below the moor top. A broken background has advantages and the skyline was not the spot for him. Sometimes in the distance they saw a clump of trees and a white farmstead, but cultivation followed the valleys and only the sheep and grouse fed on the high moors.

At noon a crooked sheep-path carried them down to a sparkling burn. The pools shone like amber, but tradition stated that sometimes in the old days when the Scottish mosstroopers crossed the Waste the stream was red. For some distance Hugh imagined the mosstroopers' road was his. He stooped to get a drink, and then sharply turned his head. Little feet clicked on stones, and a flock of sheep plunged down the bank, and Hugh, seizing Ted, threw himself into the long heather. A few moments afterward a man followed the path to the water. He carried a game-bag and pushed on up the glen.

"A gamekeeper! Do you think he spotted us on the hill?" said Ted.

"Since we heard guns, I expect a shooting party is not far off, and he's somebody's loader," Hugh replied. "Perhaps he stopped to pick up crippled birds and cartridge shells, and lost the others. If you wait, I'll go ahead and look about."

He saw Ted was unwilling to be left and he resumed: "It's safer for you to stay. News about the robbery will travel fast, and I'd sooner nobody talked about seeing a man and a boy on the hills."

"Oh, well, don't be long," said Ted and Hugh set off.

Some distance up the glen a ravine pierced the moor. Hugh imagined it would carry him to higher ground. A little burn splashed in the stones and Hugh pushed on up the hollow. He must find out where the shooters were, but until he got away from the burn he could not hear the guns. Plunging round a corner by and by, he stopped and clenched his fist. Fifty yards off, a shooting party climbed the ravine, and one at the end of the row looked round.

To run would excite the other's curiosity and Hugh resolved to trust his luck. The man was fat and his face was red, as if the climb and the hot sun bothered him. The party straggled up the hill in groups of two or three and Hugh thought some were country house servants. The red-faced sportsman was behind the others and carried two guns. He looked at Hugh with surprise and waited.

"You are not my loader. Do you know where he is?"

"A man went up the other burn," Hugh replied.

"We are two short, and I think my fellow doesn't know the moor. No doubt he lost us when we started from the butts. I suppose you can load?"

"I'll try to keep you going, sir," said Hugh, and took the other's guns.

The party was now some distance in front, and Hugh thought his carrying the game-bag was fortunate, although his clothes perhaps were rather good. The sportsman was probably a guest at a country house and did not know his host's outdoor servants; besides, when a big grouse-shoot was planned a gamekeeper engaged help where he could. Hugh imagined Ted would be disturbed, but he must wait for a chance to steal away.

In the narrow glen the sun was hot and his companion labored across the tangled heather, but Hugh was not keen to overtake the others. At length they left the hollow, and in front a row of turf mounds crossed the moor. Somebody waved them to the last butt on the brow of the hill and the fat gentleman sat down and got his breath. The heather was red like claret and broken by gullies of chocolate-brown; the mossy belts were shining green and gold. The sky was calm, and soft white clouds floated back to the vague horizon. One saw the blue watersheds of Tweed and Tyne and Tees.

“A noble playground for all who can pay for their expensive sport,” Hugh’s companion remarked. “One is sorry for the old lot who are forced to let it go. After all, they had qualities the new gang have not.”

“The war broke them, sir,” said Hugh. “As a rule, they gave and did not, like the manufacturers, get much back.”

“You are stanch; since you support your masters, I don’t know if you are up-to-date,” the old fellow rejoined with a twinkle. “Well, I suppose you were in France. Are you satisfied to carry a game-bag?”

“I’d sooner carry a game-bag than a rifle, sir.”

“Then your business is to see you are not sent to the trenches another time. The new politicians state the future’s yours, but sometimes one doubts. However, I don’t yet see the beaters and we breakfasted at seven o’clock. Have you got your lunch?”

Hugh said he had not and the other, pulling out some sandwiches, took one or two and pushed the case across. Hugh thanked him and began to eat. He liked the old fellow’s humorous twinkle, and, in a way, the circumstances were humorous, although his companion did not see the joke.

After a time, clusters of small dark objects crossed a ridge and melted in the red background. It looked as if they dropped, but in a few moments the scattered coveys again cut the sky. The grouse, pushed on by the beaters, flew fast, and Hugh saw the guns were loaded and put some loose cartridges in his bag. The guns were beautiful London guns.

On the hill-top a pale flash leaped from a butt and a grouse tossed in the air and fell. Sharp reports rolled along the row of mounds; faint streaks of smoke, and feathers, floated about. The red-faced gentleman’s gun flashed and Hugh gave him another. The noise was like the crash of riveters’ hammers and Hugh’s eyes were stung by nitrous smoke. Then the hammering stopped, the broken coveys vanished; cartridge shells were scattered about and one mangled grouse was in front of the butt. The old fellow gave Hugh an apologetic smile.

“So long as there are no cripples, I mustn’t grumble. One ought to begin one’s shooting when one is young, but I was occupied by another job.”

“Your on-end shot was good, sir,” said Hugh. “The swinging shot is awkward. To use both eyes helps and you swing a little faster than the crossing bird. If you’ll allow me——”

He demonstrated with an empty gun; and then snapped in fresh cartridges, for a row of advancing men dotted the heath. Grouse, flying in threes and fours, cut the sky. Guns flashed and the old gentleman shot and missed.

“Try your luck,” he said and refused to take the other gun.

Hugh mechanically put the butt to his shoulder and the barrels jerked. When he snapped out the cartridges two grouse were on the ground.

“You have helped my score,” the old fellow remarked. “Your shooting’s first-class. Can you drive a car?”

Hugh said he had driven American cars, and the other resumed: “Well, I suppose one mustn’t poach, and Mr. Nairn is a good employer, but when you feel you’d like to change your job you might look me up in Westmorland.”

He pulled out a card and Hugh wondered whether his face got red, for he thought the old fellow studied him as if he were amused.

He, however, must get away, for when the party stopped for lunch the host and the gamekeepers would know he was not their man. Besides, Ted might start to look for him. Opening a gun, he looked along the barrels.

“The fouling is rather thick, sir. The gun ought to be wiped out; nitro powder bites the metal, but I haven’t a cleaning rod.”

“Perhaps you can borrow a rod,” said the other.

Hugh started for the next butt, but turned as if to avoid some boggy ground. A gamekeeper signaled and the shooters began to leave the butts; the party was going downhill for lunch and the gentleman for whom he had loaded would expect him to follow. Hugh stole behind a butt and after a few minutes went the other way.

By and by he ran down a steep slope and saw Ted’s small figure by the burn.

“Two o’clock!” he gasped when he got to the bottom. “We must spare ten minutes for a quick lunch and then we’ll start.”

CHAPTER XV

THE GREEN ROAD

Dusk was falling and a little river splashed in the wooded ghyll. For some time Hugh had followed the stream across the barren waste, but now alders and birches spread their boughs across the pools, and behind the trunks the dull red sunset glimmered on the Cumberland plain.

Hugh carried his fishing-jacket and Ted's coat, and the game-bag straps hurt his shoulders; his wet boots began to gall his feet. Although the stony path went downhill, Ted's walk was labored and sometimes he stumbled. Hugh imagined the boy could not go much farther, but he dared not stop. They were getting near a large village and he meant to camp on the first slopes of the Pennine range across the valley.

Lights began to twinkle behind the trees, and some distance off, speeding reflections marked a trunk road. The path went down to the water and Hugh, crossing a row of stepping-stones, reached a lane. A white house occupied a wooded dell and its long front was broken by shining windows. Hugh heard music and careless voices on the terrace. The house was obviously a tourists' hotel, and the guests waited for dinner. Well, he and Ted must wait some time for theirs and he sat down on a stone bench by the gate.

Down the lane, a silver beam touched the trees, and boisterous singing drowned the river's throb. A motor coach carried home a noisy band of excursionists, and Hugh wondered whether Ted felt forlorn. He would sooner avoid the houses, but he hesitated to entangle himself in the dark fields and he must buy some food.

"We have got to separate," he said. "You know the map and you'll join me where the dotted road goes up the hill. Unless you're forced, don't ask the way."

"I'd sooner stay with you, but I suppose we oughtn't to risk it."

"If the police are on our track, they'll look out for a man and a boy and perhaps expect to see the man and boy together. Anyhow, boys are not uncommon and it looks as if a crowd of tourists was about. So long as we separate, I imagine nobody will bother us."

“You are a logical fellow,” Ted remarked with a dreary laugh. “However, we must get some food. What do we want?”

Hugh told him and resumed: “You mustn’t buy the lot at one shop, and I’ll get the heavy stuff. If we meet in the village you don’t know me.”

Ted got up and put on his coat. Bits of heather and grass seeds stuck to his stockings and his boots were soaked. His legs and shoulders ached and he looked at the house in the trees.

“They do you pretty well at Riverside; Seymour has stopped there for the night. But I expect it would be risky!”

“Visitors’ books are awkward, and our luggage is a game-bag,” Hugh remarked.

“Oh, well,” said Ted in a resigned voice, “I’ll look out for you at the green road.”

He went off and Hugh noted his limp. The boy was tired and the evening was cold. The tourists at the hotel were going to dinner and would presently go to bed. Ted’s bed was in the wet fern at the end of the dotted road where the black hills cut the sky.

After a few minutes Hugh followed the lane to the village. Holiday-makers sauntered about the street, the hotel at the top was lighted like a theater front and cars throbbed by the steps. Hugh, pushing along the pavement, heard pianos and gramophones. As a rule, he was not attracted by a noisy crowd, but when he looked up, the hills behind the roofs were dark and somehow forbidding.

He stopped at a general store. Three or four others waited by the counter and Hugh leaned against a barrel. His fishing-coat covered the game-bag, and where tourists congregated he imagined he was not conspicuous, but when a policeman came in his heart beat. Then a man at the end of the counter turned. His leather coat and peaked cap shone under the lamp, and Hugh knew him for Watkins, Houghton’s chauffeur. The important thing was, Watkins knew Hugh, and the policeman waited not far off.

The chauffeur faced him and the light was good, but his glance was mechanical and Hugh hoped his was careless, for calm was hard. Then Watkins signed the grocer.

“Haven’t you got my cigarettes?” he said in a loud voice. “The boss is waiting and we must be in Newcastle by eleven o’clock.” He seized the

packet the grocer gave him and went to the door. Hugh advanced to take his place and saw the policeman a yard or two behind.

“Wait a moment,” said the grocer, and turned to Hugh. “Now, sir!”

Hugh bought two or three articles, and the other, tying the parcel, remarked that the evening was fine.

“That is so,” Hugh agreed. “If the next few days are like this, I ought to get a splendid holiday.”

He gave the policeman room, and although he was keen to be in the street, went carelessly to the door. Ted was at a gate near the last house, and when he heard Hugh’s step he crossed the road.

“Come on,” he said eagerly. “I met Watkins, and Seymour’s in the village.”

“Watkins didn’t know me,” Hugh remarked in a meaning voice, and, opening the gate, resumed: “Our road, I think. Well? Go ahead.”

“I was by the post-office, and when Watkins nearly ran into me I got an awkward knock. I was under the street lamp and there was no use in running off. He gave a sort of sign and I saw he meant me to wait. Well, I did wait; the fellow is a good sort and I knew I must trust him. When he came from the office he put some letters in the box and a postcard fell on the stones. I picked up the card and he thanked me and went along the street. You see, a number of people were about.”

“The card carried a message?”

“‘Starting for Newcastle. Liverpool and Glasgow roads not good.’ That was all,” said Ted.

“A useful tip! However, I don’t see why Watkins played up.”

“Oh, well,” said Ted with a touch of embarrassment, “I think he likes you; you were rather a favorite with Grandfather’s servants. Then, of course, he knew you did not take the notes. Servants weigh up people pretty accurately. Besides, I imagine he’s not Seymour’s friend. Seymour, you know, is firm.”

“I expect that accounts for something,” Hugh remarked dryly and looked about.

Thin mist streaked the boggy pasture, but the night was not dark. One saw clumps of rushes, blurred trees, and pale stars. The cart-track went uphill and cut the big trunk road; the road from the village joined the other

about a mile off. Hugh must cross the trunk road and, steering for the hills, find a spot where he could camp. To do so would not bother him—in France he had slept in freezing mud; but Ted was exhausted and the night was cold.

“Seymour’s going to Newcastle is strange. The Canadian liners don’t start from the Tyne,” Ted resumed.

“It’s possible he found out we took the moors and reckoned on our pushing across for Hexham and the coast; at Newcastle one could get a boat to London. Then he’s stopped the roads to Glasgow and Liverpool, and the police will watch the railway. However, I expect nobody will look for us on the Pennine Hills.”

Ted said nothing; the track was stony and the hill was steep. At the top a gate opened on the main Newcastle road. For a yard or two rough grass bordered the highway and Ted waited by its edge. Hugh tried to fasten the gate, for the hook did not meet the staple in the post. A light flickered along the hedgerow, but Hugh had no grounds to bother about a car going west and he lifted the gate. Pushing in the hook he turned. The grass shone like silver, and the advancing light picked out Ted by the glittering road. A horn hooted, as if the driver thought the boy might cross.

Then another beam leaped round a curve and Hugh saw Watkins and Seymour in the front of a big car. Ted faced the car, and although the other’s lights went low Watkins’ did not. Hugh turned his head; his eyes were dazzled, but the blaze Seymour faced had sunk. If he were left alone, he must see Ted.

Hugh lurched awkwardly across the grass, as if he were drunk; but he steered obliquely away from Seymour’s car. The road was wide and something must be risked. Two horns hooted, the light behind him swerved, and dust rolled about his head. Somebody swore and Watkins’ car took the grass. Wheels plowed through soft turf and a lump struck Hugh’s back.

A few yards off a red lamp lurched about and then got steady.

Watkins’ car was back in the road and the other was gone.

The red lamp got indistinct, the white reflections melted in the dust and all was dark. Hugh went back to the gate. Ted leaned against the bars, as if he needed support.

“I didn’t dare look. I thought you were under the wheels!” he gasped.

“I was two or three feet off,” said Hugh, and seized his arm. “But come on. It looks as if the green road is the road for us.”

He opened a gate on the other side. A faint track, smoother than the grass and rushes, went uphill, and Hugh pushed the boy ahead.

After a time, Ted threw off Hugh's arm.

"I'm not altogether beaten and you have got the load. You were near the wheels. Why did you chance it?"

"For one thing, I reckoned on Watkins swerving, and I expect I calculated mechanically where the other car would go. Anyhow, I rather think I did not risk much."

"When I stopped in the grass I let you down. People's trusting you is not strange," said Ted in a hoarse voice.

"I know some exceptions. Mr. Houghton's trust was not remarkably obvious."

"He is rather dull and Seymour works on him. The brute did not know us, but I think Watkins did. You see, I faced the car."

"I imagined Seymour would not know my back," said Hugh. "But why did you not jump for the hedge?"

"When you're very tired you get slack," Ted replied in an apologetic voice. "Then, although I heard the other car I did not hear ours, and when the light swept round the curve I got rattled. Seymour looked my way, and if he had ruled you, perhaps you'd understand—— Have you watched a weasel follow a rabbit? The rabbit goes faster, but it does not get away! Seymour's like a weasel."

"Sometimes a gamekeeper arrives with a gun," said Hugh. "Anyhow, the fellow's steering for Newcastle and we are for the hills. Buck up, my lad; we'll baffle him, and as soon as I find the spot I want we'll get supper——"

He got his breath, pulled up his load and began to sing:

"Ye'll tak' the high road and I'll tak' the low——"

CHAPTER XVI

THE SNARE

Hugh's camp was a hole in the stony moor, dug long since by men whose tools were flints. Other holes honeycombed the turf and gravel, and when Hugh had come near to falling down two or three he crawled to the bottom of the next. The pit was conical and seven or eight feet deep. At one time, perhaps, it was deeper and was covered by a thatched roof. Hugh did not know, but antiquarians thought the holes in the moor the homes of a vanished race.

The bottom was dry and the springy heather would make a bed. When he had gathered a bundle he lighted the spirit stove. The small blue flame was invisible a few yards off, but its faint reflections and the hissing kettle gave the camp a homelike touch. To see Ted's appetite was keen was some comfort, the heather was soft and the boy was soon asleep. When Hugh heard his measured breathing he lighted a cigarette. So far, his luck was pretty good, but he was not yet in Westmorland and he began to ponder——

Something hard hurt his back and he dully felt about. The heather puzzled him. Heather did not grow on the Manitoba plains; but now he looked about, he saw he was not in Manitoba. The dark pit was a shell-hole and at length the guns had stopped. Then a faint rhythmic throb pierced the strange quietness. It was not a train; Fritz had cut the line. A.S.C. lorries bumping along the road, perhaps——

The noise got faint and Hugh heard little high-heeled shoes tap on polished boards. Alice was advancing along the gallery; her old-fashioned clothes trailed in flowing lines and she carried herself like the ladies Gainsborough painted. Alice was thoroughbred; in a way her grace disturbed him, since Hugh was a broken farmer. The picture melted and until day broke he knew nothing more.

They started at sunrise, but their progress was slow. Awkward gullies cut the peat and the long heather entangled their legs. Moreover, they were forced to cross boggy valleys and climb back to the high tablelands. Hugh saw Ted must rest and at noon they lay for some time in the heather on the slope of a broken hill. Half a mile off a cairn indicated the top, but Hugh did not like the skyline and had no use for stopping by a conspicuous mark.

The sun was hot and the sky serene. Sometimes a fleecy cloud trailed a blue shadow across the moor. On the west side a river sparkled in a deep valley, and in the distance silver reflections marked a lake. When Hugh looked the other way, red heath and chocolate-colored peat rolled back to the Yorkshire plain. Only the grouse and calling plover broke the brooding calm. He thought his high viewpoint commanded all the lonely North.

When their frugal lunch was over Ted inquired: "When do you think we'll arrive?"

"In two days; three days, perhaps. We cannot go fast," Hugh replied, and indicated a long, smooth-backed mountain. "There's Crossfell, and if you study the map, you'll see the becks on its southwest slope are pretty numerous. Becks imply deep gullies and boggy patches——"

He pondered for a few moments and resumed: "You are resolved not to go back to Gatesgarth?"

"I will not go back. If Seymour finds us, I'll fight as long as I have strength——"

"Very well. If I am stopped, I want you to promise that you will not bother about me. You'll steal off and push on for Alice's relations' house."

Ted looked up, and the blood came to his skin.

"You must think me a shabby hound!"

"Not at all. Your getting caught certainly wouldn't help. By myself, I might bluff or make my get-away; for you to be with me would fix who we were. Besides, to think you might reach Alice's friends would be some comfort. To know Seymour had got you would not. Well, do you promise?"

"If I'm satisfied I cannot help, I'll try not to be caught. That's all," said Ted.

"Very well. I expect Alice's relations will hide you for a time and send a cablegram to Jim, and his reply would put all straight. If, however, Houghton seized you first, Jim's lawyers must fight for you and the judge might decide that your grandfather was your proper guardian. In fact, you see, you must not be caught."

"I suppose that is so," Ted agreed. "But you thought the police would not look for us on the hills."

"We might run up against gamekeepers who know about the robbery. If we do so, there's not much use in running. Perhaps you have watched a

young grouse drop in the heather? So long as it doesn't move, you can walk all round the spot and not see the bird. There's your plan——”

He stopped, for a faint noise, like distant hammers, rolled down the hill. A shooting party was on the moor and Hugh wondered where they would go when they left the butts. To cross the beaters' line might turn back the grouse, and he would sooner not run up against a gamekeeper whose drive he had spoiled, since the fellow's reward depended on the sport he supplied. At all events, Ted needed a rest, and they waited until the guns stopped.

In the afternoon they labored across broken ground. Tall hummocks of peat dotted the slope and the soil was torn by winter storms. For the most part, one could not see beyond the ridge in front, and the grouse were numerous. When a flock got up and went noisily away Hugh frowned.

“The third lot we have put up since we crossed the ghyll!”

“I don't think the ground's been beaten, and our excursion may cost somebody his tips. When you get a good day's shooting you are expected to be generous, and since the war a keeper reckons on a nice roll of notes.”

“Then we'll steer for a quieter spot,” said Hugh. “If you see a gamekeeper, remember you have nothing to do with me. Drop in the heath and wait.”

They followed a ravine, and now and then the whirring flight of grouse marked their advance. It looked as if they had plunged into something like a gamekeeper's special reserve, but the sun got low and Hugh imagined the grouse were being left for another day. At the top of the gully a little stream splashed down a limestone crag and Hugh steered for a gap in the rocks. He was in front of Ted and when he reached the corner he stopped. Thirty yards off a man scrambled across a boggy hummock. The fellow's look was savage and he carried a thick stick. Hugh signed Ted and went forward carelessly.

“Where the—— are you going?” the other shouted.

“I'm going across the hill. Since the ground is not fenced, I don't see why you inquire.”

“Then you'll soon find out. To begin with, open your bag.”

Hugh risked a backward glance. Ted had vanished, but his coat was behind the game-bag, and if the fellow were keen, he might think Hugh's carrying two coats strange.

“You certainly are not going to meddle with my clothes; you don’t imagine I could catch grouse with my hands? All I want is to cross the moor, and to turn back the coveys I have disturbed will not bother you much. Anyhow, I’m willing to pay for your trouble.”

The other’s face got red and his look was scornful. By contrast with the sportsmen’s tips, all he thought to get from Hugh was not much.

“You can talk about it to Mr. Marshall. Come on. He’ll show you if you can spoil his sport!”

Hugh smiled and braced his muscles. Mr. Marshall had perhaps heard about his flight from Gatesgarth; in fact, he might know Houghton.

“I’m not going a yard,” he said. “If you think you can force me, I’ll wait for you to try.”

The gamekeeper hesitated. He was young and rather raw, and although he carried a useful stick, Hugh was hard and athletic.

“Well?” said Hugh. “You’re not very keen! Then, perhaps, you’ll tell me where the nearest highroad is.”

The other sullenly directed him, and when he went down the ravine Hugh waited for Ted. The sun was getting dim and the west was dark. So far, the weather was splendid, but Hugh knew the North.

“I bluffed the fellow, but we’ll get off his beat,” he said. “We might find the going easier by the rough pastures down the hill.”

They started for the valley, and when they reached the first high fields the light began to go. Dusky pinewoods dotted the slopes and, a mile or two off, a belt of mist marked a river. Sheep bleated mournfully and in the distance a dog barked.

Hugh followed a loose wall along the bottom of the heath. Ted was tired, and they must find a spot to camp. The light went and for some time all was quiet, and then Hugh heard a shrill scream. The scream was nearly human—a half-strangled cry of fear and pain.

“A rabbit, in a snare!”

“The brute who snares rabbits in order to save cartridges ought to be shot,” said Ted. “It screams like a tortured child. Come on! We’ll let it go.”

Hugh jumped on the wall and two or three stones crashed. The fellow who set the snare might be about, but Hugh hated cruelty, and a fainter scream urged him to speed. Not far off, a hole for the sheep pierced an

intersecting wall, and at the mouth of the tunnel something struggled. Hugh dropped on his knees in the grass and felt for a peg and wire. The thin wire was round the tortured rabbit's neck, and, in the dark, to push back the loop was awkward. For a few moments he was occupied, and then stones crashed and somebody dropped from the wall.

The wire slipped over the rabbit's head, Hugh leaped to his feet and a man jumped for him. Hugh's fist jarred on the fellow's jaw, but another ran up, and the fight was short. Hugh took a smashing knock, struck savagely, grappled a big fellow, and was on the ground. Somebody fell on him and they rolled about in the wet grass. After a few moments he was pulled up and thrown against the wall. The flash from an electric torch dazzled his eyes.

"We're lucky. It's t' fellow who shifted t' grouse on Greenside Moss," somebody remarked.

"Shove him along," said another. "I'll pick up the hare he wired."

Hugh saw his luck was bad, for the light the fellow flashed about touched a hare. The animal was dead; in fact, its stiffness indicated that it had not died very recently. Besides, a hare is powerful, and Hugh doubted if it could be stopped by the thin wire. The gamekeepers had set a snare for a poacher and had caught him. When he scattered the grouse he had cheated them of their tips and now they had got their revenge. Besides, they would give their employer somebody to punish for the poor sport his party would get in the morning.

"I took a rabbit from the wire. The hare was killed two or three hours since," he said.

The gamekeeper flashed a beam from the torch on the sheep-hole.

"Then, where's t' rabbit?"

The rabbit was not about and Hugh shrugged.

"Oh, well, I suppose there's no use in arguing. It looks as if you know your job!"

"You can argue with Mr. Marshall, but I doubt you'll not persuade him. Get for'ad."

Hugh went. The men were muscular and one carried a stick. Since he had spoiled an important shoot, they would not take a bribe. He thought them under-keepers, but the head man would support them, and when their

employer knew he might disappoint his guests he might not weigh the evidence. The only comfort was, his captors had obviously not seen Ted.

They crossed some fields to a lane and went down a long hill. At the bottom, lights shone in a clump of trees and the others pushed Hugh through a gate. They stopped in front of a large house and one went up the steps. The other held Hugh firmly and balanced his stick.

After a minute or two a group of men and women came to the porch. Their clothes were fashionable evening clothes, and when the light from the door touched Hugh he saw his coat was torn and his collar was broken. A gentleman gave him an ironical glance.

“Poaching is a risky occupation and I expect we will convince you it does not pay.”

“If you allow your gamekeepers to convince you I, twenty minutes since, killed a hare that has obviously been dead for some hours, you are pretty trustful,” Hugh rejoined.

The gentleman’s look grew thoughtful and another ordered the gamekeeper to hold up the hare.

“His argument is plausible. For a recently killed animal, the *rigor mortis* is rather marked,” he observed.

“We’ll talk about it after dinner,” his host replied, and turned to Hugh. “I do not know if my locking you up is justified, but the police station is some distance off. When I’m disengaged, you may perhaps answer a few inquiries.”

He gave the others some orders and they pushed Hugh along the terrace and up a staircase outside a building at the back of the house. One opened a door and shoved Hugh into a room. Then the door shut, the lock groaned, and he was alone in the dark. His matches were not in his pocket, and when he went to the window he saw the ledge was some distance from the ground. Feeling about, he struck a large chest, and he sat down and pondered moodily.

CHAPTER XVII

THE LOCKED DOOR

Ted was bothered to climb the broken wall. The top was loose and the stones rocked. When he jumped down Hugh had vanished and a few moments afterward he heard the gamekeeper shout. Steering for the other wall, he crept along in the gloom, but when he reached the spot the fight was over. It looked as if the gamekeepers had not remarked his cautious advance, and he crouched against the stones and tried to think——

He could not help, and since the police looked for a man and a boy, his capture would entangle his friend; besides, Hugh had ordered him to push on and join Alice's relations. Hugh, however, had calculated on the chance of his being seized by the police. The gamekeepers' stopping him was another thing. Anyhow, Ted did not mean to steal off like a shabby hound.

When the indistinct group started he crossed the field. The dark figures vanished in the gloom by a hedge, but nailed boots rattled on the stones in the lane, and Ted, keeping the grass, crept along a hundred yards behind. When the party stopped at the house he took the lawn and got behind a rhododendron clump that commanded the steps.

The door opened and Ted saw a big hall, a servant, and two or three gentlemen whose white shirts reflected the light. In the background was a group of fashionably dressed women. Where their faces were distinguishable, he thought them politely amused, and he clenched his fist. The party was going to dinner and they thought it a joke that Hugh might go to jail.

Hugh's figure cut the reflections from the hall. The outline was dark and sharp like a silhouette; his pose was stiff and he lifted his head, as if he gave the gentleman on the steps a level glance. Ted had not before remarked that a pose expressed emotion as plainly as a face, but he knew Hugh was scornfully impatient.

If the people thought Hugh a poacher, they were fools. Ted wanted to jump up and humiliate them, but he saw he must not. To declare who their prisoner really was might be rash. A young girl came clown the steps and stopped at the bottom. Ted noted her slender figure and her short dress. She seemed to study Hugh, and then she looked past him, as if she tried to search the dark bushes in the background. Ted wondered whether she thought

somebody was behind the rhododendrons, but the gentleman on the steps ordered her back, and soon afterward the gamekeepers pushed Hugh along the terrace.

When the door was shut Ted got up, but he had been forced to wait for a few moments, and when he reached the corner of the house the group in front had vanished. A light shone across a flagged yard, and since he dared not cross the illuminated belt, he crept back on to the grass. By and by a door shut noisily, and then the light went out and all was quiet.

Ted leaned against a tree and brooded. The evening was cold, thin mist floated about, and he felt horribly forlorn. He imagined he ought to push on for Westmorland, but for him to cross the bleak hills alone was unthinkable, and if he took the road the police might send him back to Gatesgarth. Anyhow, he was not going. Hugh was a prisoner, and he must find out where the gamekeepers had locked him up. Ted admitted he had not a plan, and if he did find out, it might not be much use.

For five or ten minutes he pondered moodily, and then steered for the back of the house. Small buildings loomed against a background of trees: a garage, a stable, and so forth. Ted tapped on a big sliding door and whistled softly under a window, but nobody replied, and by and by his foot struck a bucket. The iron rang like a bell and he jumped for the dark wall. On a calm night a noise carried far and to prowl about was risky. Ted admitted he was beaten, but so long as Hugh was at the house, he was going to stay. Although the gentleman stated the police station was some distance off, Ted had not heard a car start.

In the meantime he was tired, and he made for a bench he passed by the edge of the grass. When he got there he stopped and clenched his fist. A bright flash dazzled him and he knew somebody on the terrace carried an electric torch. The light left his face and somebody laughed.

“Now you’re caught! If you try to run away, I’ll shout.”

Ted did not try. A thick hedge blocked his path and the voice was a young girl’s voice.

“Very well,” he said, with pretended carelessness, “I’m not going for a few moments. What do you want?”

“If you like, you may sit down,” said the other, and cut off the light. “I thought somebody was behind the bush, and when I’d got my rubber shoes I went to look. To begin with, you are *the boy!*”

Ted said nothing and tried for calm. The girl's figure was indistinct, but it was short and he thought her very young. Her voice struck a note of fearless confidence and he thought she was amused by his embarrassment.

"You ran away from your grandfather; but I don't see why you went poaching," she resumed.

"We were not poaching," Ted rejoined. "A rabbit screamed in a snare, and we meant to let it go. A snare is horribly cruel, and one hates to think about a tortured animal. That was all."

"Well, somebody has poached our hares and netted the partridges, and father was much annoyed because our gamekeepers couldn't catch the men. I rather think I see a light——"

"When you went down the steps, I suppose you wanted to find out who was behind the bush?"

"The leaves moved and I saw a boot. The boot was not a man's big boot and I was interested——For one thing, the servants had talked about your running away."

Ted was horribly disturbed, but he thought the girl's not proclaiming all she knew was rather remarkable. Although she had seen him she said nothing and went alone to investigate. Well, she was a plucky kid.

"Did your father really think my pal was poaching?"

She laughed, and Ted thought the soft, girlish laugh was like a thrush's song.

"He was puzzled; perhaps he was surprised, but sometimes grown-up people are dreadfully dull. I expect he'll consider for an hour or two——"

"But what are you going to do about it?" Ted asked in an anxious voice.

"I don't know—— In a way I'm responsible and I must not be rash. Perhaps if you honestly told me all, I could decide. But we mustn't stay here. Somebody might come out for a smoke. We'll go to the garage, and if you run away, I'll ring the fire-bell."

"It looks as if I must trust you. I don't see another plan," said Ted.

"You are not very polite," she rejoined, and flashing the torch on the stones, ordered Ted to go in front.

At the garage the girl got a light and when Ted pushed back the door, motioned him to a bench. He was tired, but for a few moments he studied

her with anxious curiosity. Her hair and dress were short, her eyes were very blue and, when she saw his fixed glance, twinkled humorously. In fact, she was an attractive youngster, and somehow he thought her cleverer than he.

“Well?” she said. “Why did you run away?”

Ted was as frank as possible, but the narrative was awkward and Houghton was his grandfather. When he stopped the girl gave him a thoughtful glance.

“You wanted to join your brother, but your relations wouldn’t let you go? I suppose you’re satisfied your friend did not take the notes?”

“Hugh is not a thief. Since you have seen him, you oughtn’t to doubt.”

“Oh, well, I really think the other was the thief. Anyhow, to let your friend go would rather be a joke.”

“Can you let him go?” Ted asked eagerly.

The girl gave him a twinkling smile.

“If you are sure he was not poaching, I might; I wonder whether you imagined all I wanted was to talk to you. At one time the garage was part of the stable, and the room on top was a hay-mow. Then they fitted it up for a chauffeur, but the man we have now lives in the house. Your friend is in the room above your head.”

“But I expect the door is locked.”

“That is so,” the girl agreed. “Sometimes one’s grown-up relations are not very keen. All they thought about was to lock the door! Well, the window opens and we have a ladder, but a ladder is an awkward thing to carry about. Nobody bothered to fasten the trap through which the hay was thrown into the mangers. Perhaps you can get up.”

She moved the light and Ted saw a trap-door in the roof. Climbing on the back of a car, he beat on the boards and called softly. After a few moments some furniture above was dragged away, the door was pulled up, and Hugh dropped from the hole.

“My pal, Hugh Stannard,” said Ted with formal politeness, and turning to the girl, resumed: “It’s awkward, but I really don’t know who you are.”

“I am Veronica Railton; but you have stayed for some time and dinner will soon be over. I suppose you did not steal our hare, Mr. Stannard? Ted declares you did not carry off the notes—and somehow I don’t think you did.”

“Thank you, Miss Railton,” said Hugh. “I had nothing to do with the hare.”

“Then, since I don’t know if my father’s quite satisfied you are a poacher, perhaps you ought to start. I expect you would sooner he did not find out?”

“That is so,” Hugh agreed. “All the same, we must try to fix things so you will not be implicated.”

“You are rather nice,” Veronica remarked. “However, the way you got out is obvious, and since I’m supposed to be in my room, nobody will suspect me. Now help me slide back the garage door.”

The big door ran smoothly and Veronica put out the light and guided Hugh to the corner of the building.

“Cross the grass and climb the fence,” she said. “I wouldn’t take the road, but if you follow the wall up the hill, you’ll see a small, thick wood, where nobody goes. But wait behind the bushes for a few moments.”

She vanished and rejoining them by the bushes, gave Ted a large bunch of grapes.

“Hambros; they’ll help your supper. I rather think Cailey meant them for his dessert and he will not talk about their vanishing,” she said with a soft laugh. “When you get to Canada, I would like to know. Good luck, Ted.”

She melted in the dark and Hugh started for the hill. Following the wall for some distance he saw a wood across a field. The spruce trunks were close and thick and the ground was covered by the dry dead needles. The wood was warm and Hugh, finding a hollow between two big roots, lighted the spirit kettle.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE LAST MARCH

Hugh turned in the hole between the roots and stretched his cramped legs. He was cold, and after sleeping on the ground his hip-joint hurt. Pulling out his watch, he rested his back against a big spruce trunk.

It was seven o'clock in the morning, but the wood was rather dark. For four or five yards from the ground the straight trunks went up like pillars, and then the branches spread across the roof of thick, matted twigs. Hugh had thought to see the light outside pierce the wood, but the background was indistinct and blurred. Although, for the most part, the withered needles were dry, an ominous trickle ran down a neighboring trunk and a little pool occupied a hollow in the roots.

Hugh frowned. So far, he had made good progress, but rain would stop him. Ted could not push through tangled, dripping heather and labor across soft bogs. The boy was asleep, and Hugh turned and gave him a thoughtful glance. Ted's cap had fallen off and his face was pinched. He was very lightly built and Hugh imagined the force that had carried him across the hills was rather nervous than muscular. For a time, the thrill of freedom had lent him powers not properly his, but it looked as if the reaction Hugh expected had begun, and he was moved to pity and anger.

Seymour had cunningly planned to break the boy, and had Ted remained at Gatesgarth, he might have finished the job. His stern physical discipline had worn out his victim's frail body, and calculated domination had undermined his nerve. All the same, Hugh must not allow anger to carry him away and he knitted his brows.

He did not want to linger in the neighborhood of the country house, but the wood was thick and Ted had had enough. To force the exhausted lad to face the rain was unthinkable. If they waited for dark, he would be fresher and they might risk taking the road. Hugh picked up the little tin kettle and pushed through the wood. At the wall he stopped and looked about. Gray mist rolled across the moor and slanted rain swept the boggy fields. One could see for three or four hundred yards and then all was indistinct. The morning was not the sort of morning for sportsmen to take the hills and pheasant shooting had not begun. Hugh thought he could reckon on a quiet day.

He must, however, get breakfast, and as a rule water is not scarce in Cumberland. A little beck splashed along the bottom of the wall, and when he filled the kettle he went back through the wood. At the spot where they had camped Ted ate black grapes.

“One ought not to be a pig, but if you had stayed much longer they would have all been gone,” he said. “They’re bully grapes and Veronica’s a jolly kid. To steal the bunch the butler cut off for himself was rather a joke. The queer thing is, when she held me up with the torch I wasn’t much afraid. Perhaps you have remarked that one trusts some people for their voices?”

“I think that is so. You’re a philosopher!”

“Oh, well, you don’t know all my talents; but to eat the grapes and not think about Veronica would be piggish. When we get to Montreal, I’ll send her a silver-enameled maple leaf or something of the sort. She’s a sport. Sometimes you meet people you would like to know, and then they drift off into the dark. The other kind seem to stop about for good. But when do we start?”

“Are you keen to get off?”

“I’m not keen,” Ted admitted. “However, if we must go, I’ll try.”

“Your pluck is pretty good, but I think we’ll wait for dark,” said Hugh. “If the mist did not clear, we might take the road and lie up in the morning. At all events, we’ll risk an off-day. Let’s get breakfast; and then we’ll build a hut.”

He lighted the spirit-lamp and when the meal was over carried dead branches to a rock in the recesses of the wood. Gathering bark and twigs, he covered the slanted poles and threw dry needles on the floor. The lean-to bothy was three or four feet high, and he doubted if it were warmer than the wood, but the comfort he reckoned on for Ted was not material comfort. Hugh had camped in the Northwest wilds, and admitted he was moved by queer atavistic instincts to build some defense against the daunting solitude. The boy stretched himself luxuriously in his dusty bed and was soon asleep. Hugh smoked and studied the map.

If Ted could keep it up and their luck were good, two six- or seven-hour marches ought to see them out. Alice’s relations would then be accountable for Ted, and Hugh himself must not stop. In the meantime that was all he knew. At five o’clock he boiled the kettle, and when they had satisfied their appetites, he strapped on his load. The bothy was dark and cold, but it was shelter, and by contrast the quiet wood was bleak.

When they had climbed the wall, mist rolled about the fields, but the rain had stopped and Hugh steered for a broken hedge. The grass behind the thorns was tangled and wet, and his boots sank in the peaty soil. To take the road was the proper line, but for a moment he stopped by the gate at the bottom of the hill. On the moors one knew where to hide and one could trust one's speed; to be spotted on the highroad was another thing. Dusk, however, was falling, and the next march would be the last.

They went up a valley. A hundred yards in front the walls grew indistinct. On one side vague alders curved about the fields and a river brawled in the trees. By and by they crossed a bridge and saw the dusky flood break against the piers. Then the road went up a wooded ghyll. At the top the walls vanished and the wet road melted in an open heath.

"Buck up and shove along," said Hugh. "By daybreak we'll be in Westmorland."

For an hour all was quiet, and then they went down a steep hill and a beck throbbed in the gloom. A slanted hedge bordered the road and dead leaves dropped from bent ash-trees. At a gate Hugh saw a guide-post, and since he had studied the map, he knew a cart-track crossed the hill to another dale. Some time afterward he stopped by the hedge. Nailed boots rattled on the stones, but he thought the man who advanced to meet him was not a farmer. The step was quick and measured.

"That fellow has carried a rifle; I believe a number of the police joined up," he said. "Get into the field, Ted; if he is a policeman, he mustn't think we're going south. I'll look out for you by the guide-post."

Ted vanished and Hugh pulled out his pipe. He must account for his stopping, and when the steps were near the spot, he got a light. The man stopped and Hugh noted his peaked cap and shining cape.

"Good evening, sergeant," he said, and dropped the match.

"Constable, sir," said the other.

"Oh, well, your step was not the country policeman's tramp. If the platoon was forming front, you'd know where the boys should go."

"All I got was two stripes and I was glad to be back," the constable replied. "Are you going my way?"

Hugh imagined the fellow had studied him and when he held the match to his pipe his carelessness was calculated. If the other were ordered to

watch the road, he would not expect the man for whom he looked to steer north.

“My map marks a green road to Yewdale and I thought I might stop at the inn,” he said. “Sometimes, however, when the tourists are about the moorland inns are full.”

“Yewdale’s off my beat, but I expect you’d get a bed at the Salutation. If you like, I’ll put you on the road. Was you in France, sir?”

They began to talk about the war. Hugh had found out that the fellow did not go to Yewdale, and since he thought him a walking tourist he would not inquire if he did stop at the inn. The drawback was, Ted was tired and they were not going the proper way.

At last the policeman indicated the guide-post, and when he went off Hugh started up the hill and for three or four minutes kept the boggy track. Although he did not think the other waited he must not run a risk. By and by somebody whistled and Hugh, running back, joined Ted at the gate.

“The fellow did not stop?” he said.

“I heard his steps for some time,” Ted replied, and added drearily: “if he had not arrived, we’d have been two miles further on.”

They set off, and for the most part the road was lonely. Sometimes they passed a dark farm-house, and dogs barked; once a straying horse followed them a short distance. Hugh kept his hand on Ted’s arm and when they climbed the long hills the boy’s step got very slow. To urge him was cruel, but Hugh knew he must.

At length they stole through a silent white village. The trees behind the houses were very dark, but where their tops cut the sky the outlines were distinct. The wind got colder, and the mist rolled away. The night was nearly gone, and when day broke they must not be on the road. By and by the stars paled and the moor’s black tops grew sharp. A cart-track went up the hill and Hugh, stopping at the gate, thought the deep wheelmarks were not fresh.

“I expect we’ll find a quarry at the top,” he said. “Anyhow, day is breaking and we must lie up.”

Ted said nothing. He labored up the hill, but when Hugh let go his arm, he sat down slackly on the broken stones bordering a dark gulf. Hugh followed the steep track and saw a pale-colored rock, cut by ragged terraces, and two or three stone sheds, roofed by heavy slabs. One was obviously a

stable, another a forge, but nothing indicated recent use, and when he examined a crane the wheels were rusty.

Some fern in the stable was not remarkably damp, and Hugh, calling Ted, lighted the spirit kettle. Ted's appetite was languid, but he drained a can of tea and crept into the fern. When Hugh was satisfied all the food was gone, he stropped a razor on his boot. He must go to the village and since he wanted people to think him a tourist he must not look like a tramp. Anyhow, he had some hot water and in France one often shaved without a mirror.

Waiting for some time, he bought the articles he wanted at the village shop and inquired about the moorland roads to the north. Then, crossing the heath to the quarry, he sat down in the fern and pulled off his wet boots. For six or seven hours that was all he knew.

A cold touch on his skin disturbed him, and he felt his face was wet. Looking up languidly, he saw big drops splash the floor. Rain beat the roof and the moor outside was blurred. Hugh got up and cut some bread and ham, and brewed strong tea. The rain was awkward, but in bad weather there would not be much traffic on the road, and if their speed were good they ought to arrive before their hosts went to bed. All the same, he hated to waken the exhausted boy.

When they took the road Ted limped awkwardly. He said his wet boots galled his feet and when he was warm they would not bother him, but Hugh doubted, and when they faced a stony hill Ted gasped and stumbled. Dusk had begun to fall, the rain was heavy, and they must not go to an inn. When the journey was nearly over, to risk being stopped was unthinkable.

"Brace up hard," said Hugh. "Three or four hours will see us out, and if you hold on you'll soon be on your way to Canada. If you're beaten, you'll go back to Gatesgarth and I can't meddle."

"Don't talk!" Ted said hoarsely. "Shove me along."

Dark fell, the wind was cold, and the rain beat their faces. Hugh stuck to Ted's arm and on the hills the boy leaned against him. Sometimes a car's dazzling lights swept the road and Hugh lunged for the hedge. He thought the effort cost Ted much, and if they were forced to stop for a minute or two, the boy would stop for good. To steal through a village where the cottage lights shone and the reflections from a leaping fire touched the windows of an inn was hard, but Hugh set his mouth and stubbornly faced the dark and the driving rain.

His feet hurt, the straps had galled his shoulders, and the water from his coat trickled down his aching legs. Ted lurched about as if he were asleep. Hugh dared not be pitiful. The distance they must go was getting shorter, and his business was to finish the job.

A bright beam leaped round a curve in a narrow ghyll and Hugh knew his figure was distinct against the shining road. A noisy beck plunged down the ghyll and he had not heard the car. To jump for the wall would excite the driver's curiosity, and, steadying Ted, he kept the road. The car went slower, and he clenched his fist. If the fellow was going to meddle, he must fight. Then the car stopped and somebody said:

“Mr. Stannard?”

Hugh's heart beat. The man's voice was friendly, but he must use some caution.

“I am Stannard. I don't know you.”

The other laughed. “Perhaps you know Miss Cunningham, and I imagine you are going to my house. Since you did not arrive when we calculated, I thought I'd search the road.”

“You are very kind,” said Hugh hoarsely. “I was nearly beaten and the boy's knocked out.”

The car rolled ahead and turned, and a man threw back the door. “Put him on board and jump up. I have a thick rug, and we'll be home in twenty minutes.”

CHAPTER XIX

USEFUL FRIENDS

After breakfast Hugh's host took him to his smoking-room. Now the strain, for a time, was over, Hugh was willing to indulge his fatigue. His muscles were sore and his brain was dull. Bodily effort had not altogether banished disturbing emotion and he was more tired than he had thought to be. Moreover, the big chair was easy and the fire in front was soothing. Rain beat the windows and one heard the dreary wind in the trees. In fact, it was not the sort of day for one to take the moors and until morning Hugh was satisfied to rest. In the meantime, his host waited. All Hugh knew about Foster was that he was Alice's relation, but he liked the fellow.

Foster was not old and it looked as if his main occupations were shooting and fishing. Yet his house was not large and nothing Hugh saw indicated extravagance. Mrs. Foster was young and at breakfast Hugh had thought her sympathetic. She and her husband obviously knew something about him, but for the most part their talk was carelessly polite. Now, however, Foster waited for his confidence.

"But for Ted, I should not have risked entangling you," said Hugh. "So long as we were together, I could not hope to hide the boy, and I concentrated on getting him to your house. My plans stop there, but when I'm gone Ted perhaps will be safe."

"Then you think about starting soon?"

"It's obvious that I must. For one thing I am, so to speak, the connecting-link with Ted; and then I mustn't compromise you. The trouble is, the boy trusts me and I hate to leave him."

Foster smiled. "You are not selfish, but I think we might chance your stopping until you make fresh plans. If it will help to persuade you, my wife agrees."

"All you and Mrs. Foster know about me is that I'm wanted by the police."

"Alice Cunningham's letter carries some weight," said Foster, and gave Hugh a keen glance. "She is my relation and I have some grounds to know her judgment's sound. Then my wife is not at all a fool, and she's your friend. I rather think the boy has captured her."

“He has not yet got up?”

“Mrs. Foster ordered him to stay in bed, but his breakfast was pretty good, and after a day’s rest she imagines he will not be much worse for his long walk. So far, we don’t know much about your excursion.”

Hugh lighted a cigarette, and stretching his stiff legs to the fire pondered languidly. His hosts were kind and he imagined Ted was safe with them, but all he had thought about was to reach their house. Now he must look ahead, and to begin with he saw his stopping might cost Ted much. At all events, it would embarrass Foster; but he would weigh things in the morning, and he narrated his adventures.

“Railton’s gamekeepers stopping you was awkward, but so long as nobody spotted Ted perhaps it’s not important,” Foster remarked in a thoughtful voice. “To fix what we ought to do about the boy is a lawyer’s job, and I don’t see much light. All the same, I don’t want to give him up and, if you are willing, I’d like to talk about it with a neighbor. Markland is a shrewd old fellow and a clever business man, and I’ll guarantee that he will keep your confidence. Since he sometimes comes for lunch, I’ll send the car across.”

Hugh was not altogether willing, but he agreed. Although he would sooner not trust a stranger, he needed help. He thought Foster’s talent was rather for sport than business. By and by the car went off and Hugh brooded by the fire. He had not thought to go to sleep, but when he heard steps in the passage two hours were gone. Foster pushed the door back and Hugh saw the sportsman whose gun he had loaded.

“When I returned from a recent shooting excursion and some news reached my friend’s house, I did not admit I knew you,” the old fellow remarked with a smile. “Now, however, we need not pretend to be strangers.”

“Ah,” said Hugh, “I imagined you would see a light, but somehow I hoped you would not give me away.”

“Then you do know Stannard, Markland?” Foster exclaimed with surprise.

“Not long since Mr. Stannard loaded my guns. He was a good loader and I suggested that, if he liked, he might keep the post. However, I understand he is going to tell us why he carried off Houghton’s grandson.”

“You don’t imagine I carried off a bundle of notes?”

“It does not look like that,” Markland replied with a smile. “Had you taken the notes, I expect you would not have embarrassed yourself with the boy.”

Hugh resolved to be frank, particularly since Foster did not yet know much about his grounds for running off with Ted, and for a few minutes he narrated all he thought the boy had borne at Gatesgarth. Then he said, “I admit the tale’s not plausible, and I’d like you to find out how far Ted supports me. I will not go with you, but you might state I want him to answer all you ask.”

They went off. When they returned Foster’s look was rather grim and Markland’s thoughtful.

“On the whole, we feel you were justified in carrying off the boy,” said Markland. “All the same, one hesitates to admit the awkward implication — Well, you were at Gatesgarth and we were not.”

“So long as I stick to a plain statement, I am on safe ground. To picture Seymour’s object is another thing,” said Hugh. “Besides, when he steered for Ted’s door I doubt if Miss Cunningham had reached the spot. My story about his masquerading might not carry much weight and Ted’s would carry none at all. It would look as if I’d meant to use the nervous boy’s illogical fright. In the circumstances, I think we’ll leave the Jacobite’s ghost alone, so long as you are satisfied Ted ought not to go back.”

“We are satisfied,” said Foster, and turned to Markland. “The situation’s awkward. Do you see what we ought to do about it?”

Markland lighted a cigarette and knitted his brows.

“Since Mr. Stannard is implicated in the robbery, the letter James Houghton gave him loses its importance. We must hide the boy and telegraph his brother to give us fresh authority. He must reply by cable that proper documents are on the way. In the meantime we can see a lawyer. Perhaps Mr. Stannard will help us draft the message.”

Hugh agreed; the plan was his plan. When the long and expensive cablegram was written Markland asked for an envelope.

“To telegraph a message like that from the village might be imprudent; I think we’ll post it to my London office.”

He sealed the envelope and turned to Hugh.

“Until Houghton’s reply arrives, Ted must keep the house. What about your plans?”

“To see Ted safe was all I wanted,” Hugh replied. “So far, you can claim you are justified to meddle; but you are not entitled to help me cheat the police.”

“We are willing to chance it,” Foster declared. “Well, Markland?”

“My notion is, Stannard ought to get across to Canada. If he faced his trial now, to prove him innocent might be hard. A strong motive weighs and he had admitted he must get money. In fact, his motive was obvious and Seymour’s was not. Then to talk about the Jacobite’s ghost and so forth has some rather evident drawbacks. All the same, when Mr. Houghton begins to ponder I doubt if he will apply for extradition. In fact, if Stannard can baffle the Canadian Immigration Bureau I imagine he need not bother about the police.”

Hugh’s heart beat. Since he had risked his freedom, freedom was dear, and if he stood his trial Alice was the only witness for the defense. To entangle her was unthinkable, and he certainly must not argue about Seymour’s object for implicating him.

Then Markland gave him a friendly smile.

“I am a ship-owner, Mr. Stannard,” he resumed. “Although our boats are not passenger-boats, I can send you across, and we have an agent at Montreal, who might smuggle you ashore. Our next boat goes from London.”

“To get to town would be awkward, sir.”

“Something depends on where the police look for you,” Markland replied, with a twinkle. “In a few days I join a Yorkshire shooting party and although you refused another time, my offer stands. Your job would be to brush my clothes and load my guns. When the shooting’s over we’ll start for London.”

“I think the plan would work, but I’d hate you to pay for your generosity.”

Markland chuckled. “You mustn’t be scrupulous. I’m a meddlesome old fellow, and now all my business is to rule directors’ meetings, I have not much occupation. Then for long I was a sternly industrious shipping-clerk and when my reward came youth and the golden days had vanished. After all, to indulge in a romantic exploit by proxy is something, and I expect to enjoy the adventure.”

Hugh thanked him and when all was fixed went to Ted's room. Ted was not asleep. His thin face was colorless and his pose was languid with fatigue. When he saw Hugh his look grew anxious, although it was not the dreary, resigned look he had worn at Gatesgarth. The boy was no longer daunted; he was getting back his pluck.

"You and the others were plotting something," he said.

"We have cabled Jim for authority to send you across and as soon as his message arrives Foster will put you on board a steamer for Montreal. In the meantime you must keep the house."

"Ah!" said Ted, in a disturbed voice. "You are not going to stay?"

"For me to lurk about might give the police a clue, and until Foster gets Jim's cablegram your grandfather could force him to give you up. We expect the message in a day or two. Since I mustn't stay, I'm joining Markland. He's engaged me for his servant, and as soon as possible he'll help me on board a Canadian cargo-boat."

Ted frowned and Hugh saw he had got a knock, but he used control.

"I hate to let you go. So long as you were about, I knew I was safe," he said very quietly. "However, if you must go, I mustn't be selfish."

"Markland's a jolly old fellow, and I expect my job will be soft," said Hugh.

He began to joke about his occupation and Ted played up; but to do so cost him something, and by and by his look grew dull. Hugh saw the boy was going to sleep and he stole away.

Two or three days afterward, Markland's car started one morning for the market town up the valley, and Hugh and some luggage occupied the back. The old town, surrounded by the folded moors, was small and quiet, and the express's arrival was something of a daily event. When Markland's car stopped a few passengers and a number of unoccupied people walked about the station.

Hugh got down, took Markland's coat, and opened the door. Markland gave him some orders, and Hugh, picking up a gun-case and a bag, called a porter. Then, carrying his load, he started for the ticket-office and looked anxiously about. A gamekeeper pulled along a leashed couple of Labrador retrievers; two smart policemen paced the platform and Hugh rather thought they studied the waiting-room windows and the groups on the benches. Unless he stopped he must meet them, but he reflected that the country

policeman's habit is to be about a station when a train is due. Anyhow, he must not hesitate, and although they waited by the ticket-office he went to the counter.

One gave him an interested glance, but he was rather obviously a gentleman's servant and had got down from the big car. Buying a first-class and a third-class ticket, he waited and counted the money he got back. Then he gave Markland his ticket and some newspapers from the bookstall, and pulled out his watch. The express would not arrive for five minutes.

To wait was hard, but at length whistles screamed and two big engines rolled round a curve. Steam blew about the glass roof, porters shouted, and doors were noisily opened. Hugh followed Markland to a compartment and gave him his coat, and jumped into a third-class smoker. The whistle blew, the engines snorted, the policemen's figures became indistinct, and the long train plunged down the valley. Hugh leaned back in his corner seat and lighted a cigarette. They were off, and the trail was broken. Nobody would think to find him valeting a rich sportsman at a country house.

CHAPTER XX

HUGH COMES HOME

Smoky red reflections shone along the prairie's sharp-cut edge; the sky above the glimmering belt was green. A wood, like a dark-blue smear, curved about the banks of a hidden creek; the scorched grass in the foreground was yellow and silver. All the colors were strong, but the calm was the brooding calm of Indian summer.

A battered dusty car lurched along the broken trail. Sometimes the wagon-ruts clamped the wheels, and brush rattled on the wings. Sometimes the driver left the road and steered across the grass. Although the obstacles were numerous, he did not use much caution. He was a Western optimist, and when one drives a flivver across a prairie trail one trusts one's luck and lets her go.

Stannard braced himself, rather wearily, against the jolts. For three or four weeks he had borne some strain, and for the last three nights his bed was a hard shelf on board a colonist car, and a bench in the marble waiting-hall at Winnipeg. His habit was not to brood, and the wide plain and sense of freedom banished moody thought, although he admitted he had not much grounds to be cheerful. His journey was nearly over and in the morning he would be home, but home was a farm that had broken him, and he might not be allowed to remain. Anyhow, he had carried out his job, and he was going to Houghton's for the night.

If Ted had not actually got there, Hugh imagined he would soon arrive, and to reckon on Jim's generous welcome was something. For two or three hours he could relax and indulge in friendly talk; and then in the morning he must shoulder his load. The sunset faded, and the horizon cut the melting orange like a dark-blue band. Lights twinkled by a dusky bluff and the car stopped.

"I got a good piece yet to go," the driver remarked. "Maybe you can pack your baggage up the homestead trail?"

Hugh's luggage was a sailor's kitbag and he sent off the man. He imagined the people at the homestead had heard the car, but they had no grounds to expect him and he pictured their surprise. When he reached a belt of stubble, a small dark figure leaped a fence and sped across the crackling straw.

“Hugh, old scout!” a boy’s voice cried, and Ted seized his bag. “Let go! You carried my stuff to Westmorland, and sometimes I think you carried me. I’m your porter, and for a week I’ve been watching out for you.”

Hugh was rather moved. The boy’s delight was sincere, and his voice was happy. The fear he had known was vanished and youth had conquered, but after all Hugh had given Ted his freedom. Then Houghton met them and gave Hugh his hand.

“You’ve made it, partner!” he said with feeling. “When Ted arrived and you did not, I was bothered.”

“If you were logical, you’d have bothered before Ted arrived,” Hugh rejoined with a laugh.

“I think not; you see, I knew my man. Until you were satisfied Ted ought to go, one could trust you to wait; when you were satisfied, you would see he went. Well, I expect you had an awkward job. But come on. You want some food!”

Wheeler, the hired man, and Mrs. Wheeler were at the door. They knew something about Hugh’s exploits, and when the little noisy group pushed him into the kitchen he thrilled. He had done all he agreed to do, and his friends acknowledged he had made good. Mrs. Wheeler, however, went to the stove and, for a prairie homestead, the supper she presently served was something of a feast.

When the plates were cleared, she and her husband went off and Hugh and Houghton lighted their pipes. The evenings were not yet cold, the window was open, and Hugh smelled peppermint hay and the resin in the boards. After the formal service and silver at Gatesgarth, he felt the Homeric simplicity was homelike. In fact, the Manitoba plain was home, and all he wanted was to be left alone.

“I suppose you cabled Foster to send Ted across?” he said.

Houghton nodded. “A Brandon lawyer drafted the message and the following letter. Ted arrived by the first boat, with a ticket to Winnipeg and proper documents. Well, I know something about Foster; but who is Markland? And why did he meddle?”

“He’s a very jolly old fellow; a small ship-owner whom the war made rich, I imagine,” Hugh replied. “Well, he’s not altogether Mr. Houghton’s and Foster’s sort, but Foster has been a useful friend. Markland knows, and I think his habit is to pay his debts. Perhaps, however, that’s not all. The old fellow’s kind and has romantic impulses he owns he has long suppressed. A

shipping-clerk cannot be a sport, but now he's the company's chairman he can follow his bent. Since his youth is gone, he must undertake his adventures by proxy. Something like that, anyhow."

"I think I see," said Houghton. "Well, Markland helped you across?"

"A steamer of the company's was going to Montreal for wheat, and Markland put me on board. All was done properly, for I was on the seamen's roll and was provided with another man's discharge. She was a small well-decked tramp, and for fourteen days she butted along, bows under, against a northwest gale. The forecabin was flooded, the galley fire was drowned, and we seldom got a proper meal."

"I expect the trouble began at Montreal," Houghton remarked. "You were on the roll and a captain must account for his crew. Somebody helped you bluff the Immigration gang?"

"Markland has a Canadian office and it looks as if the staff-work was pretty good," Hugh replied with a laugh. "An old wooden propeller tied up alongside us at the wharf, and when she loaded from our hatches I was told to jump on board. A shipping-clerk stated that all was fixed. We went up the canals and across the lakes, and nobody bothered about me. I kept my watch and helped the boys heave out freight. When we stopped at a wharf by Thunder Bay, the captain hinted that I might walk ashore. I went, and got the cars for Port Arthur."

"The staff-work at Montreal was pretty good," Houghton agreed. "I expect you know you were up against Merchant Shipping Acts, Seamen's Unions, and the Canadian Immigration Office. Yet you made it, and before you started from the Old Country Ted was safe, and you had planned to send him across——" He stopped for a moment and resumed with a smile: "You are the sort one bets on. Somehow you get there!"

"Hugh gets where he wants," Ted declared. "At all events, you can bet on the old scout's getting where he thinks he ought to go."

"Ah!" said Houghton, "that's another thing! Well, I like your stanchness; but now you have heard about your pal's exploits, you must go to bed."

Ted grumbled and went off. Hugh lighted a cigarette.

"I can't boast I'm much of a farmer, Jim. How are things at the homestead?"

"When one cannot hire proper help, to break a prairie farm is a long job and your luck was bad. All the same, I think I wouldn't bother about the

blowing sand. Unless June is dry and the wind particularly strong, the grit will not hurt your crop, and in June rain is the rule. Well, we have turned a summer fallow, harvested some wheat that was not much damaged, and so forth. The sum we agreed about is at your bank, and if you can hold on I expect you will win.”

“Thanks,” said Hugh in a quiet voice. “I wonder whether I’ll be allowed to try!”

Houghton frowned. “I’m sorry, Hugh; I’d hate to see you pay for carrying out my job. Well, my grandfather is old and obstinate, but he’s not altogether a fool.”

“Seymour’s my antagonist. The fellow’s unscrupulous and remarkably cunning.”

“It looks like that,” Houghton agreed. “Our talents are not remarkable, but somehow our lot put across the jobs they undertake. There, perhaps, is our apology. On the plains we’re rather makeshifts than specialists, but the Dakota and Ontario men, sprung from pioneering stock, don’t beat us much. Anyhow, to boast will not carry us far, and although Seymour’s my relation, I hardly know him. You were at Gatesgarth——”

“Seymour frankly puzzled me. He’s dominating and you feel his cleverness. To some extent, I think him sincere; he’s absorbed by his researches, and believes he has got a clue to some important discoveries. Yet his ambition is not selfish. I imagine he feels his business is to conquer baffling disease. You see, I want to be just.”

“I see you hate the brute,” Houghton remarked.

“Well, perhaps that is so. My notion is he’s not *normal*; he’s not bothered by scruples the rest of us would weigh. He needs money for his experiments, and I believe he’s resolved to get money where he can——”

“For example, the money my grandfather means Ted to inherit! The boy was an obstacle?”

“Something like that,” Hugh agreed. “For a time, I tried to conquer my suspicion; to suspect him was theatrically ridiculous. His training for Ted was the healthy athletic training one gets at an English public school. Ted, however, is not the standard public school type, and I began to see the fellow was breaking the boy.”

Houghton clenched his fist and his face got red.

“I hope to make him accountable. But what about his playing the ghost?”

“Since Mr. Houghton had refused to let Ted go, Seymour’s object was perhaps to terrify the boy and force him to run away. If, after all, Ted went with me, the old man might resolve to leave him alone for good. It’s plausible; but my notion is, Seymour meant Ted to stay, and thought the shock would help his plans. At all events, for Ted to talk about the ghost would justify his using sterner control. He did not, of course, reckon on my being about.”

“It’s very possible,” said Houghton grimly. “However, was not Alice about?”

“I don’t know when she arrived, but I rather think Seymour had vanished. He’d argue that nobody would believe the boy’s queer tale, and since the notes were gone, my supporting him would not weigh. A fantastic tale about a Jacobite’s ghost would not be much defense.”

Houghton pondered and then gave Hugh a searching glance.

“Alice was your confederate, and she’s an attractive girl. Are you satisfied all Seymour wanted was to persuade my *grandfather* you had stolen the notes?”

“I am not satisfied, Jim; I think he had another plan. Miss Cunningham’s charm is marked, and one evening before Seymour knew me for his antagonist I was at his room. Something of his baffling reserve was gone. He admitted he was flesh and blood, and talked about primitive forces an ambitious student must control. Afterward I began to see light; he was up against human passions, love and jealousy. In order to carry out his experiments, he must get money, but I imagine Miss Cunningham is not rich.”

“Alice is not at all rich,” said Houghton dryly. “Besides, Ted declares she hates the brute. Well, perhaps Frank has shot beyond his mark. My grandfather thinks me an independent wastrel, but sometimes his judgment’s sound; and for all Mrs. Maitland’s deafness, she is pretty keen. When the old fellow weighs things, I doubt if he will disinherit Ted and allow the police to ask for extradition. In fact, I rather think he will find Seymour out. If I were you, I wouldn’t bother. I’d trust my luck and get to work.”

“If you will drive me across, I’ll start in the morning,” Hugh replied, and they began to talk about something else.

CHAPTER XXI

A SURPRISE PARTY

Indian summer lingered and the evening was calm. Yellow leaves thinly dotted the birches in the bluff, but for the most part the branches were a dark network, outlined against the orange sky. In the hollows silver frost began to sparkle on the grass, and when Hugh's team climbed a rise, the plain, touched by melting color, rolled back and vanished in a smear of ethereal blue.

All was serenely quiet but for the jingling harness and the beat of horses' feet, and Hugh, leaning against the birch logs, sang a careless song. After breakfast, he had started for the bluff and labored with ax and saw. Coal was expensive and the trail to the railroad was long, but the small woods were numerous, and as yet a farmer might cut the fuel he required. The snow would soon arrive, and unless one's cordwood stock was large one ran some risk of freezing when an arctic blizzard swept the plains.

By and by Hugh stopped singing and beat his hands. He must send for thick mittens, and his fur coat was old. The hair had come off and the ragged skin was not much protection against the frost. Furs, however, were expensive, and he must wait. Stern economy got monotonous, but his luck might turn.

In the meantime, Hugh was philosophical. Houghton would help him sow a fresh crop and the police had left him alone. So long as he made good, he could be happy on the plains; if one were not daunted by strenuous labor, the life had some charm. For all that, he recaptured with something like regret his excursion to the Old Country.

The smooth calm and old-fashioned cultivation at Gatesgarth attracted him, and Houghton's neighbors were his father's sort. Hugh liked their urbane politeness, their fastidiousness and their quiet resignation. They knew their traditions were broken and their sons must use fresh rules, but where one could not fight to grumble was not dignified, and soon the merchants and manufacturers would take their estates. In a utilitarian age they had some drawbacks, but their virtues were obvious.

The Canadians were another type, and Hugh frankly disliked the ugly wooden settlements that sprang up along the railroad-track. For the most part, he thought the small merchants and hotel-keepers a raw, materialistic

lot. It looked as if some cultivated rudeness and to annoy a customer was a queer satisfaction. Yet they were optimists and one admitted their pluck. All were persuaded the unattractive settlement would soon be a town, and they bet all they had on its prosperity.

Something of the others' aggressive hardness marked the farmers, but the old grim type was vanishing. The pioneers' sons had had enough, and their ambition was to get rich by trade. Young men from the Old Country, Ontario towns and American cities began to take the farms and push on into the wilds. Their code was the modern college code, but they had heard the prairie's call. They were marked by romantic, youthful confidence, and although the road was hard, Hugh imagined some would go far.

Then the plains were losing their austerity. Telephones, windmill pumps, creameries, and power-houses followed the branch railroads. Tractors and electric cables lightened labor; churches, schools, and good houses sprang up. The homestead's mistress was no longer pinched by frugality and worn by toil. The college-bred farmer might take a wife of his own type. In fact, if Hugh made good, he might marry Alice Cunningham.

He frowned and braced up. His musing carried him nowhere, and to think about Alice was ridiculous. Although she was friendly, nothing he recaptured implied that she might be willing to take the plunge. His poverty was an awkward obstacle. Besides, he knew another——

A wheel broke a badger's earth, and the wagon rocked. For a minute or two Hugh was occupied, and when he looked up he saw with some surprise that his homestead windows shone. Hugh let his horses go. Houghton was across not long since, and if he were at the house it was because he had some news from Gatesgarth.

When Hugh jumped down, two or three dark figures came to the door. One was a woman, but that was all he knew, and he went to the steaming horses' heads. The light touched his face; his figure was indistinct and bulky in the big skin coat. The group at the door was a sharp, black silhouette.

"It looks as if I had visitors," he said. "I'll be back in five minutes to light the stove, but I doubt if you'll get much supper."

A boy laughed, as if he thought the remark a first-class joke; and then the harness rattled and the horses moved off to the stable. Hugh loosed and fed his team as fast as possible. He knew Ted's laugh, and Houghton had obviously driven across. Jim's news was, no doubt, important, but Hugh did not see why he had brought Mrs. Wheeler.

When he reached the homestead door he stopped. A woman was occupied at the stove, but she was not Houghton's housekeeper. Houghton carried some plates to the table, which, for once, was covered by a white cloth, and a man Hugh did not know pulled a billet from the wood box. The strangers were city people, for the woman's clothes were fashionable, and Hugh pulled off his ragged coat. Then a girl he had not yet seen advanced and his heart beat, for he faced Alice Cunningham. Houghton put down the plates and laughed.

"Something like a surprise party! Mrs. Galt, may I present our host and my particular pal, Hugh Stannard?"

The lady by the stove gave Hugh her hand. She was young and attractive. Hugh thought her a city-bred Canadian, and he liked her humorous smile.

"Jim Galt, of Brandon," Houghton resumed. "Alice you know."

Alice's look was calmly friendly, but Hugh imagined a faint touch of color came to her skin. Mrs. Galt, however, beckoned and they began to serve the meal. The bacon was thin and crisp, the fried potatoes, dusted by curry, were golden brown; the hot biscuits, light flapjacks and flavored syrup looked appetizing.

"After the Old Country and Brandon, a prairie bill-of-fare is frugal; but since I was not the cook I mustn't apologize," said Hugh. "At all events, I don't seem to know the stuff I bought."

Mrs. Galt's eyes twinkled, and Houghton laughed.

"The explanation is, we know your Spartan habits, and feared to trust our luck. Then a surprise party properly supplies the feast." Houghton turned to the others. "Hugh eats in order that he may work."

"If that is so, my object's good," Hugh rejoined.

"I expect all agree," said Alice. "Some people live in order to eat. In Canada, perhaps, they're not very numerous."

She smiled, but her voice was thoughtful. Hugh's look was fine-drawn and, in a way, ascetic, and she had studied his house and remarked his poverty. But it was not the poverty that springs from slothful carelessness. The cheap food and awkwardly mended clothes moved her to pity. Hugh's body was his servant, and she knew from Jim that all his thought was for the fight in which he was engaged. Well, she had liked Hugh in England; at work in Manitoba she thought she liked him better.

Hugh was a polite host, but, as far as possible, he allowed the others to talk. Galt was Alice's cousin and an engineer. At the beginning he sold agricultural machinery for a famous Toronto house, and Mrs. Galt was the daughter of somebody at the works. Although she was cultivated, she was obviously a first-class cook, and she admitted she had not much help at their Brandon home. Galt afterward took a post at a grain elevator, and now his business was to visit the wheat belts and advise the company where new elevators would best draw supplies. Mrs. Galt and Alice were to stop at Houghton's until Galt returned.

The Galts, however, were important only because they accounted for Alice's visit. Hugh, driving home an hour before, dared not picture her at his table; but she was there in flesh and blood, and the house lost its shabbiness. The thing was strange, for all at Champlain was cheap and sternly utilitarian, while Alice was thoroughbred. Yet her background did not jar; Hugh felt that all she touched became fine.

Perhaps he was romantic, but he thought some women were like that, and after all the old prairie type was vanishing. A fresh type sprang up, and although men must labor for money, they began to value grace and beauty. It was not important if the old spaciousness and freedom went. Individual effort was extravagant, man's instincts were social, and coöperation for scientific agriculture would banish the farmer's poverty. Where the ugly settlements stood noble cities would grow, and churches, libraries, and opera-houses replace the shabby pool-rooms and mean, false-fronted stores. But somebody must lead, and to do so was the business of women like Alice and Mrs. Galt.

Hugh smiled a rather dreary smile. In a week or two Alice and the other would be gone. Looking about the room he noted the thin, cracked boards, spotted by resin, the bare floor, the cheap rusty stove, and the black stain where the pipe pierced the roof. All indicated poverty, and his guests had supplied the food they ate. Before the pioneers' reward arrived he might be broken. He braced up, for he was host and Galt had begun to talk.

"The Middle West provinces' future is agricultural, and your business is to stay with it and farm. You have not yet got all you want——"

"Jim and Mr. Stannard agree," Mrs. Galt remarked, noting the others' smile.

"Anyhow, they have much they not long since went without. In the sections along the railroad you see the dug-outs, turf bothies, and birch-pole shacks the first pre-emptors used. All were mortgaged to the storekeeper,

and when the crop was not frozen he took the lot. Nobody had a loose dollar, and the hired man must fight the boss for his pay.”

“Where you get back from the railroad something like that is yet the rule,” Hugh said dryly.

“So long as you use a prairie trail, transport is expensive and its cost absorbs the farmer’s profit,” Galt agreed. “Soon, however, you cannot get back from the railroad; where good wheat is grown the track and elevators will arrive, and prosperity follows the line. The locomotive stands for canceled mortgages, brick homesteads, and cheap machinery.”

“But the wheat must pay for haulage, and sometimes it does not,” Houghton rejoined. “Reckoning all the set-backs, one-fifty a bushel would not pay me, and old-timers talk about wheat at a dollar.”

“Dollar wheat is gone for good,” said Galt. “The world gets crowded and the standards of life are high. Europe, England, Belgium and Germany are dotted by manufacturing towns. In America, industrial expansion’s vast, and Chicago operators will presently be satisfied to supply American needs. My notion is, the prairie provinces and perhaps Siberia will by and by, like old Egypt, feed the world.

“Some time since we thought we had touched the wheat-plant’s northern limit; now we have pushed across the Lesser Slave Lake and are plowing by the Peace River. Where the summer is short we use seed that ripens fast; we cross-fertilize for resistance to blight and rust. Then the queer thing is, where you cultivate the soil the frost comes later. Well, I admit I’m an optimist, and perhaps I’m a bore; but I’m betting all I’ve got on the prairie, and my wife agrees.”

“That is so,” said Mrs. Galt. “After all, women must help to meet the bill.”

Hugh gave Alice a quick glance. She looked straight in front as if she pondered, but he thought her moved.

Ted began to banter Hugh, and Mrs. Galt ordered them to carry off the dishes.

CHAPTER XXII

STANNARD'S MASCOT

Silver light and puzzling shadow checkered the steep bank of the ravine. Sometimes one saw the moon behind the trees; sometimes the laboring team was in deep gloom. The wagon groaned, the high wheels jarred, and down where all was dark a little creek splashed. Hugh slacked the reins; the horses knew the crooked trail, Alice occupied the other end of the spring seat, and he was not keen to go fast. Her light figure swayed with the jolts; sometimes her clothes touched him, and he thrilled.

Hugh imagined Houghton had planned for Alice to go with him. Since she had not long left England, he knew they had much to talk about. Anyhow, when the party was starting Houghton remarked that a neighbor had promised to bring him a sack of flour and some groceries from the settlement. The night was fine, and if Hugh took one of his passengers he would like to pick up the load. Hugh went for his horses, and although Jim's plan was perhaps rather obvious, Alice agreed.

So far, both were quiet, but where the trail curved a horse snorted and flung up its head. Pole and harness rattled and Alice looked about. Dead brushwood snapped as if a startled animal stole off in the gloom, but she saw nothing.

"A prairie wolf?" she said.

"I rather think it's my friend, the badger," Hugh replied. "The queer thing is, I haven't seen him since we stopped his earth, but his digging the tunnel had important consequences."

"For you?" said Alice, in a puzzled voice.

"For me and Jim and Ted. Had the badger not undermined the trail, I would not have gone to Gatesgarth. When I went it looked as if I must sell the farm, but since I undertook Houghton's job, I could take his help. Well, Jim is generous, and I think my luck has turned."

Alice had studied his house and larder. His fight was hard, but somehow she knew he did not think the important thing was his earning the other's help.

"Jim's luck was not remarkably good. He broke his leg," she said.

“I was sorry for Jim, but sometimes one is selfish. When he fell at the corner, a few yards back, my adventures began, and I feel as if they have not yet stopped. If some time I build a good homestead, I think I’ll carve a badger for a totem above the door, and so long as I’m at Champlain nobody shall shoot my mascot.”

Alice said nothing. The jolting shook her and she watched the horses labor up the steep incline. At the top they stopped and Hugh let the reins go slack. The moon was behind the bluff, and the shadows of trunks and branches were black on the sparkling grass. In front, the plain slowly melted from silver to blue and vanished in the velvet dark. In the elusive moonlight all was vague and mysterious, and the distance called.

“At night one feels the prairie’s vastness,” Alice remarked. “It looks as if the grass went on forever. How far does it really go?”

“About twelve hundred miles to the Rockies. Something of a country! I hope you like it. How long do you mean to stay?”

Although Hugh’s voice was careless, Alice was not deceived and she admitted a queer disturbing thrill. Since he stole away from Gatesgarth he could have found out nothing about Houghton’s plans. For him to do so was important, and she could give him some news; but he wanted first to know if she meant to stay.

“I expect to be at Brandon for the winter,” she replied.

Hugh’s heart beat, but he thought he knew his part and he said, “In winter a small Western town is dreary. At Montreal you’d have social functions and fashionable friends, toboggan slides, snowshoe clubs and skating rinks—in fact, all you’d get at a first-class Swiss winter-sports resort.”

“At London I might have theaters, night-clubs, and dancing-teas,” Alice rejoined. “Perhaps it’s strange, but I wasn’t much attracted. Besides, jazz is expensive and in the North we’re poor. It looks as if you and Jim are satisfied to farm. Do you think no others love the sunshine and the lonely places?”

“The Border hills are quiet and sometimes the sun does shine.”

“Oh,” said Alice, “you drive the plow, but I have no occupation. In the war I was a V.A.D. nurse, and when they shut the hospital all was flat. A reaction from the strain was perhaps instinctive, and one wanted something fresh and bracing, but our friends would not come back, and the war had

given us another load that is hard to carry. We are forced to be parsimonious, and after all the new lot's extravagance has not much charm."

The horses moved ahead and Hugh let them go. He did not see Alice haunting fashionable hotels, smoking and drinking cocktails like a man; she was not the sort to hire a dancing partner. Well, perhaps he was not up-to-date, but after a month or two in town he had had enough.

"Adventure called and you started for Brandon," he said with a smile. "In the West we're a sober lot. Were you disappointed?"

Alice laughed. "The West was not all I pictured, and I began to think the railroads had banished romance. Now I doubt. For example, although Galt is modern his spirit is the spirit that moved the old adventurers. When he had laboriously built up his implement store, he sold all he had and took a cheap post. His real talent was not for business; he thought to help the province's advance, a finer job. Now he builds elevators to gather the wheat in the freshly opened belts and I think he's happy. But, in a sense, all are rash, indomitable optimists. Manitoba is going to flourish and they mean to push their town ahead. In the Border hills one feels the golden days are gone and one looks back—— In Canada one looks, hopefully, ahead."

Hugh nodded. Alice's judgment was keen and accurate. She was not jarred by the surface rawness; she saw the fine metal behind the dross.

"Mrs. Galt is kind?"

"Myra Galt's a dear! She's clever and cultivated, but she's satisfied to keep her husband's house. When I arrived she had for help a little Swedish maid who knew no English. The girl went out one morning and did not come back; we found she had married a railroad man whom she met the day before. Now a Chinese boy stokes the basement stove, Myra cooks and bakes, and I clean the house. Although I'm not a first-class housemaid, I rather like my post."

The trail curved down an incline, and the team went fast. Harness rattled, wheels jarred, and the wagon rocked. Sometimes the board seat slanted and the springs cracked. There was not a rail, and when the wheels sank one risked going overboard; but Alice's balance was easy and her gentle swaying was rhythmical. Hugh felt all she did was somehow harmonious. To picture her using Mrs. Galt's domestic tools did not jar.

By and by the trail grew sandy and the horses slowed. The jolting stopped and Alice looked up.

“Would you sooner talk about Canada? Not long ago I was at Gatesgarth. Aren’t you interested?”

“Sometimes my pluck’s not very good. I expect that explains my waiting,” Hugh replied. “Do you think Mr. Houghton means to leave me alone?”

“He did not give me his confidence. Mrs. Maitland, however, is your friend, and she was very frank and rather scornful. When the police inquired about her pearls she declared them worth five pounds.”

Hugh frowned and clenched his fist.

“Then Seymour implied that I stole the pearls?”

“Mrs. Maitland thought it something of a joke, and I doubt if Houghton was convinced.”

“Oh, well,” said Hugh grimly, “the brute meant to make a proper job! But please go on.”

“Seymour, for all his cleverness, does not know where to stop,” Alice resumed in a quiet voice. “At the beginning Houghton was carried away by his anxiety to get Ted back, but now I think he ponders; and Mrs. Maitland believes the police are not very keen to follow Frank’s clue. Although Houghton allowed Frank to dominate him, sometimes he is shrewd, and he begins to be annoyed because Frank called the inspector. In fact, when he knew Ted was in Canada, I believe he rather indicated that he was willing to let things go.”

Hugh squared his shoulders, as if he threw off a load.

“Then you really think I may be left alone! Well, that is something, although it’s not all I want. But what about Ted? Did my carrying him off cost him his inheritance?”

“Mrs. Maitland doubts. She knows her brother, and although he’s angry, she does not think he will keep it up for long.”

“If that is so, we have baffled Seymour,” said Hugh. “All he has got for his scheming is my disgrace. Well, in Canada I can stand for it, but some time I hope to face the brute——”

He stopped. So long as he dared not return to the Old Country, Seymour was not altogether baffled. Hugh wondered whether Alice saw the fellow’s object. Seymour had not reckoned on her visiting with her Canadian friends.

For a few moments she was quiet, and then she said:

“Frank is a dangerous antagonist, but I think his plotting has cost him more than he yet knows. Mrs. Maitland is frankly hostile, and I think Houghton begins to suspect——”

“Ah,” said Hugh. “Jim declares the fellow shot beyond his mark!”

“It is very possible,” Alice agreed, but Hugh thought her voice disturbed when she resumed: “By and by he may find out his power is gone, and look for some revenge.”

“Then, I hope he looks for his revenge in Canada. All the same, I hardly expect the calculating brute to be moved by rude human emotion. He declared he was flesh and blood, but one feels his blood is thin. In fact, he’s not normal.”

Alice looked straight in front, as if she pondered. Hugh knew her pluck, but he thought her afraid.

“To some extent, perhaps, Frank is not normal, but his passions are strong, and his control might break. However, we won’t speculate—— Are we not some distance from Jim’s farm?”

Hugh urged his horses and the rocking wagon sped across the frosty grass.

CHAPTER XXIII

ALICE REFUSES

Alice sealed the envelope and got up to look for a fresh sheet of note-paper. Galt and Mrs. Galt were at a meeting, but Alice had resolved to write some letters. The room across the passage where she expected to find the stationery was dark, and she pulled back the curtain from the double window.

Galt's house was on the hill above the railroad, and the first snow of the season blew about the little town. Not far off, three or four high rows of lights pierced the shadowy bulk of a hotel, and at the bottom of the slope a dull illumination marked the railroad-yard. In the dark, across the line, the river went down the valley.

Alice shivered and, indulging her imagination, followed the railroad west. At Brandon one did not bother much about the winter. Galt's house, heated by the basement stove, was warm, and when the sun shone the frost was bracing. Guilds and societies got up meetings, and one went to see one's friends. On the plains, however, all was dark and dreary, and Alice pictured Hugh brooding by the stove in his thin clapboarded house. Sometimes, perhaps, for a week or two he could not get across to Jim's, and to start for the settlement was a rash adventure. She thought about his shabby clothes, his ragged skin coat, and his melting stock of cheap groceries. When savage winds hurled the snow across the plains, the lonely settlers ran some risk of starving.

Getting a light, she carried the note-paper to the other room, but found she could not concentrate on the letters. She imagined Hugh thought about her. He was proud, and to know people believed him a thief must hurt; but she did not see what he ought to do about it. So long as he remained in Canada, he at all events might keep his freedom; if he went back to England, to prove he was innocent might be hard. Alice felt he must not risk it, and yet——

The house was drearily quiet. Although the wheat was going east, the snow muffled the locomotive bells and the noises at the railroad-yard were faint. Wheels no longer rattled in the street, and one could not hear the foot-passengers on the plank sidewalk.

Alice hoped Mrs. Galt would not be very long; but she must get on with her letter, and for a few minutes she wrote steadily. Then she stopped and turned her head. The faint throb under the floor was the wind in the basement stove. She thought she heard a rattling noise; the Chinaman had filled the stove an hour before and she had thought he was gone. A board in the passage creaked. Somebody was in the house, and the step was not the Chinaman's. Galt, however, had hesitated about going to the meeting because he thought a friend might come across.

The door opened and Alice looked up with keen surprise, for Seymour came in. He had pulled off his thick coat, but the snow stuck to his rubber overshoes, and Alice saw why he had not made much noise. She wondered whether he had meant to go quietly; but he must not imagine her disturbed, and she gave him a careless glance. She was not going to pretend satisfaction, and politeness was rather hard. Seymour was urbanely inscrutable, but Alice got a hint of resolution.

"I did not know you were in Canada," she said, as coolly as possible. "Why did you not ring?"

"It looked as if the bell were broken, and nobody was about. I put my coat in the hall, and steered for the light above the door; the transom, isn't it? However, perhaps I'm lucky, because Galt is not at home."

Alice wondered—— Since the Vancouver express arrived some time before, she thought Frank's waiting strange; but it was possible he had waited because the hotel clerk had told him about the meeting.

"I expect Tom and Myra very soon," she said, and noting his smile, resumed: "Are you stopping at Brandon?"

"My object was to look you up. I may get the Western express in the early morning; but I don't yet know."

"Then you are going West? I suppose Houghton sent you?"

"I shall not, for Houghton's sake, bother Jim or Stannard," Seymour replied. "In fact, when I left Gatesgarth the old fellow was not friendly; he made me responsible for letting his grandson go. At all events, the boy was gone and I was not needed to superintend his education. Then it looks as if a paper I wrote about my discoveries had excited some speculation, and not long since an American scientist asked me to join him at his private hospital in California. His laboratory is famous, and I'd have means to make experiments I dared not risk in England. Since Houghton didn't seem to want me, I took the American's offer."

His statement was plausible. Alice knew his talent and his ruthless enthusiasm. "Ruthless" was perhaps the proper word, because she thought his patients might run some risk. Yet she was not altogether satisfied. Frank was not the absorbed, passionless experimenter his relations thought.

"Well," she said, "I hope your partnership will be useful; but as a rule you do not boast, and you have not much grounds to think me interested."

Seymour gave her a queer smile, and his mouth got very firm.

"At Gatesgarth we were antagonists; but sometimes a touch of antagonism is attractive, and I liked your pluck. In fact, I saw you had qualities I admire. The joke was, when you helped Stannard you didn't know my object was his and yours."

"Your claim is strange," Alice rejoined, and her eyes sparkled. "You tried to break Ted's spirit; your last plan was to work on his nervous fears."

"I thought the boy ought to join his brother, and you agreed. In fact, I hoped his fright would force Stannard to carry him off. Now Houghton has done with me, I admit Ted was an obstacle. If Ted and Jim annoyed the old fellow, I would be his heir. Anyhow, I might have interested him in my experiments, and unless I could get a useful sum I must stop."

"You were cheated. Do you expect me to sympathize?"

"Not at all," said Seymour coolly. "My disappointment does not weigh much; I no longer need Houghton's help. I stopped at Brandon in order to ask you to marry me."

The blood came to Alice's skin. Her look was scornful, but she knew herself afraid.

"Now you are ridiculous!"

"I wonder—— You are modern and have talents I expect you are willing to use. The Canadians you meet at Brandon are not your sort; their drawbacks are rather obvious. In England your relations are impoverished. You have youth and spirit and beauty. I don't see you brooding in the melancholy hills. So far, my argument is not romantic; but I want you for my wife."

"One drawback is, I am romantic," Alice rejoined.

"Before I knew you I was not attracted by women," Seymour resumed. "All I wanted was to concentrate on my occupation. At the beginning I think I hated you for disturbing me."

“My doing so was altogether unconscious! I suppose you feel you must apologize for being human?”

“The important thing is, I stuck to my labors, and it looks as if I am going to get my reward. Now I expect to conquer, I can let myself go, and before long I can put you where you ought to be. Your friends will be cultivated, and a cultivated American is a first-class type; you can indulge your ambition for a noble house and so forth.”

“In fact, for all a woman wants?” said Alice, with a scornful smile. “If it were all and I were greedy, I might hesitate, because you have not yet made good. Since you don’t pretend to be romantic, you ought to be accurate. However, if you were already famous, I would refuse.”

Seymour got up. His mouth was set and his face was red.

“You cannot marry Stannard. The fellow is a thief.”

“Stannard is not a thief; but since I have not much grounds to think him my lover, for you to look for him would be useless malice.”

“The plan might have some advantages. So far as I know, when the notes vanished only Stannard and I were about,” Seymour rejoined, and added with a laugh: “So long as he’s not your lover, you will not be disturbed, and there’s no use in my trying to make a theatrical bargain for his freedom. All the same, to find the proper man would banish people’s doubts.”

“If you meddle with Stannard, you are very rash,” said Alice in a quiet voice. “To begin with, you don’t know where he is, and your inquiring might help Jim Houghton to find you. He’s resolved to make you pay for all Ted has borne.”

“Oh, well, I’m not remarkably afraid of Jim, but I must get to California, and I stopped at Brandon in order to carry you off. I rather doubted your willingness, but you are going.”

Alice fought for calm. Seymour’s queer smile and firm mouth daunted her. Sometimes one felt Frank was not altogether like other men; one sensed a strange, dark vein— Anyhow, she must not get up. He commanded the door and to push by might provoke him to seize her.

“Since I suppose you are sober, your remark is not very humorous,” she said.

“I am not at all humorous,” Seymour declared. “My train goes in the early morning, and when I start, you will go with me.”

Alice laughed—a scornful laugh that cost her much. Although to be afraid was ridiculous, she was horribly afraid. Now she knew why she had instinctively shrunk from Frank. In some respects, he was not altogether *sane*.

“Oh,” she said, “you bullied a nervous boy and dominated a weak old man, but I am a modern woman—— Besides, somebody is at the door.”

Seymour did not turn his head. His look was ironical, and Alice’s breath came fast. For a moment or two she doubted if she had heard somebody, and then the hall door jarred. Steps echoed in the passage, and a man came into the room.

“The snow is pretty fierce and the bell doesn’t ring,” he said. “Looks as if Jim Galt is not at home!”

“He is at the meeting, but I believe he wants to see you. Shall I try to call him on the ’phone?”

“Well, I hate to bother you, and you have got a friend.”

“Mr. Seymour must get back to the hotel. I was alone and he meant to stay until somebody arrived. Now he’s going.”

Seymour went and soon afterward Galt returned. When he let his visitor go, Alice, using some reserve, narrated her interview with Seymour.

“One mustn’t exaggerate; but Frank is a queer, unscrupulous fellow, and I rather think Jim and Mr. Stannard ought to be warned——” she said.

The dull tolling of a locomotive bell rolled up the hill and Galt pulled out his watch.

“The west-bound local. If Frank means to get after our friends, I expect he’s on board. Anyhow, I’ll find out and send Jim a telegraphic night-letter.”

He went off and when he came back he frowned.

“Seymour is on the train, and the operator doubted if my message would get through. A blizzard is raging farther west, and the wires are down. Then, if the snow is deep, nobody might go to the settlement for two or three days. However, we may find out something in the morning.”

Alice admitted it was awkward, and resigned herself to wait.

CHAPTER XXIV

STANNARD'S WINDOW

On the plains the snow was light, a half-moon shone between thin clouds, and the evening was cold and calm. Houghton's horses labored up the trail from the ravine, and at the top he gave the reins to Ted and beat his stiff hands. Stannard's house across the belt of stubble was dark, but a faint plume of smoke indicated that the stove was burning.

"I expect Hugh's at Gordon's for supper," Houghton remarked. "Drive to the stable. We must wait for him to come back."

They loosed the horses and Ted took his new small-bore rifle from the wagon.

"I think I'll go up the ravine for half an hour," he said. "Hugh shot two or three jack-rabbits not long since and I might find a coyote's tracks."

"If you can hit a rabbit with a rifle bullet by moonlight, you're a pretty good shot," Houghton rejoined and let him go.

He liked the boy's keenness. Since Ted joined him he had put on flesh and a healthy color had come to his skin. He was not the highly-strung, delicate lad Houghton had pictured, although when he first arrived Jim knew Stannard had not exaggerated. As a rule, Ted refused to talk about Gatesgarth, but sometimes he did so and when Jim pondered his tale he clenched his fist. If he and Seymour met, Frank should carry his mark.

The homestead kitchen was cold, and Houghton threw fresh cordwood in the stove and got a light. Since Hugh would not risk his fire's going out, he would not be long. He had not a curtain for the double-windows and when he reached the homestead trail he would see the illumination and know somebody waited. The front window near the door was large; the other on the opposite side was small. Houghton sat down by the stove, and lighting his pipe studied a letter from Mrs. Maitland.

"Mr. Stannard is my friend, but he is not my relation, and I would sooner you told him as much as you think he ought to know," Mrs. Maitland wrote. "To feel you can banish his anxiety is some satisfaction. In a few days Frank Seymour leaves us; I understand he goes to California, but I am not much interested. Frank was not my favorite. For some time he ruled my brother, but since Edward needed him I did not meddle. My infirmity is an awkward

handicap; Edward is obstinate, and when one gets old one perhaps get slack. For all that, I was not satisfied——

“Stannard carrying off Ted, however, shook my brother’s confidence, and I think the knock was bracing. He began to weigh things, and where he had trusted he began to doubt. In particular, Frank’s calling the police annoyed him; and I imagine he would sooner have let the money go. At all events, Frank saw his influence was gone, and it, no doubt, accounts for his emigrating. Edward, however, is bothered about Stannard, and admits Frank may not have spotted the proper man. So far, that is all; but he is very honest, and when he has had time to ponder you can reckon on Hugh’s getting a generous apology.

“Then I imagine the police inspector remarked Frank’s eagerness to supply a clue, but is following another. The man is shrewd, and perhaps I have helped his cautious inquiries. He has, of course, not given me his confidence; but the important thing is, I have some reason to believe his officers will not ask for authority to seize Stannard. At all events, they have not yet done so.”

Houghton put up the letter and smiled. He knew Mrs. Maitland and felt she implied more than she stated; Jim saw her using some effort to put the inspector on the proper track. Anyhow, Hugh would rejoice to get her news. There was another thing. If Houghton found out Frank had cheated him about Hugh, he might find out he had cheated about Jim. Jim wanted nothing for himself, but the old fellow was his grandfather and the head of the house. Although Jim had, perhaps foolishly, annoyed him, he was persuaded Frank had magnified the offense.

By and by he thought he heard steps in the snow. If Hugh were coming from the stable, he ought to have heard the team; but he was musing. Since the light in the room was good, he could not see out and there was no use in his looking round. Then the latch rattled, somebody pushed the door back, and Seymour came in.

Houghton fought for control. He occupied Stannard’s chair and faced the stove, and Seymour, steering for the window, had, no doubt, thought him Hugh. For a moment or two the other, bothered by the reaction from the cold, might not find out his mistake. Houghton waited for him to advance, and then he pulled round his chair.

Seymour stopped and the blood leaped to his face. Houghton saw surprise melt into rage, and rage to something like fear. All the same, his nerve was good, and he gave Houghton an ironical smile.

“I didn’t reckon on meeting you, Jim.”

“It’s rather obvious,” Houghton rejoined, and measuring the distance to the door, thought he could get there first. “You expected to find Stannard! I suppose you were going to bluff him about the police?”

Seymour braced up. As a rule, he calculated; but when he left Gatesgarth emotions he had sternly subdued broke control. Houghton suspected he knew something about the stolen notes and all chance of his being the old fellow’s heir was gone. In fact, he had some grounds to think he must not stop in England. At Brandon, Alice’s scornful refusal moved him to primitive jealous rage, and he had thought to carry her off by force. Baffled by the visitor’s arrival, he resolved to punish Stannard for her obstinacy. He knew himself ridiculous, but after long repression blind passion conquered.

“Stannard was very rash to step on British soil,” he said. “Since he did so, he must bear the consequences.”

Mrs. Maitland’s letter was on the table, and Houghton, reaching for the envelope, laughed.

“Oh, well, since you have arrived, I’d like to talk about something else. You persuaded my grandfather I was an obstinate, extravagant fool. You broke my brother’s health and tried to break his pluck; but for Stannard you might not have stopped there. Then you plotted to ruin my best pal. Now you are going to pay. Pull off your coat, you unthinkable swine!”

He jumped up and shoved the table against the door. Seymour threw down his big coat and braced his muscles. He knew something about boxing and athletic games, but he was soft; Houghton had for long driven the plow and piled the heavy sheaves behind the binder. Jumping for his antagonist, Jim took a smashing blow. He reeled and Seymour’s other fist crashed against his ribs.

The table brought him up, but Seymour did not stop. They had not engaged in a boxing match, and he meant to knock out his antagonist. Houghton’s guard, however, was quicker than Frank had thought, and when he allowed him to clinch he was rash. A man who labors for twelve hours a day is hard, and Jim had loaded up sacks of wheat that weigh two hundred pounds. Getting Seymour on his hip, he threw him over his head.

For all that, Houghton went down, and they rolled about the floor. Sometimes Houghton was undermost, but so long as he jammed the other’s arms, he was satisfied. Frank on his feet, with room to maneuver, was the better man; Jim’s plan was to hold fast and wear him out. Straining and

gasping, they went under the table and Houghton beat Seymour's head against a leg.

The other's knee jarred his side and his hold grew slack. Seymour rolled free and Houghton felt for the table top. He was battered and shaken, but Frank must not get up first. With something of an effort he pulled himself to his feet and fronted the other.

Houghton's face was wet by blood; his head and side hurt, and his wrist was stiff. So far as he could see, Frank was not much marked, but his chest heaved and his skin was very white. Well, they had not an umpire, and he must not risk Frank's horrible quickness and smashing knocks. The brute was not going to fight politely and by rule. Houghton braced up and plunged round the table.

Seymour did not stop for him, but when at length they grappled Houghton thrilled. For all the knocks he had taken, in a locked struggle he was the better man. Although Seymour kept his feet, Houghton knew he weakened. Jim's brain was dull, but he pictured Ted at Gatesgarth, dominated by the brute, and the picture fired his blood. His mouth was salty and his eyes were dimmed by sweat, but he held on doggedly and took the knocks he got. Frank was getting slack. Sometimes when his arm was loose he did not strike. Houghton rather thought he pulled at his clothes.

At length, Houghton placed a blow on the other's ribs. Seymour's gasp was ominous; his hands went down and Houghton struck for his chin. Seymour reeled back and fell against the wall. The match-boarding cracked and his body went limp. His arm was behind him, as if he used it for support.

Houghton thought the time to finish the fight had arrived. Although he was horribly battered, he was fresher than his antagonist. The fellow, however, was not beaten; his glance was fixed and malignant, and Houghton dared not let him go. When he had got his breath he advanced; his fists clenched and his legs braced for a jump. For a moment or two Seymour waited, and then pulled his hand from the wall. A bright flash dazzled Houghton and he crashed on the boards.

The concussion shook the lamp and the flame leaped up and sank. When the light was steady, Seymour threw down the smoking pistol. Houghton's head was on his arm and his face was to the ground. Seymour, using some effort, pulled him on his back, and saw his eyes were shut. His skin was white and getting cold. The bullet was heavy and one must reckon on the shock.

Then Seymour saw a small clean hole in Houghton's shirt a few inches below his shoulder, and he felt for his knife. He had not killed the meddling fool, but if the bone had turned the bullet downward, it might be awkward. Besides, the frost was keen and the fire would soon get low. It was obvious Houghton had not shot himself, and Seymour must find out where the bullet went. Opening his knife, he began to cut back Houghton's clothes.

His curiosity was not satisfied, for some time before he reached the house, Ted, at the top of the ravine, heard a horse's feet and stopped under a tree. Somebody was coming from the settlement, and after a minute or two the stranger's figure cut the sky. Ted thought he rode like an Englishman and his pose was not altogether strange. Then the moon perhaps sparkled on the rifle, for the horse plunged and the jolted rider swore.

Ted mechanically shrank back into the gloom. He knew the voice, but although it sometimes haunted his disturbing dreams, he had not thought to hear it on the Canadian plains. His hands shook, and until the ominous figure vanished he was very still. Then he was ashamed and annoyed. Seymour could no longer bully him, but he was going to Stannard's and when he found Jim there they might fight. Moreover, he was going fast, and Ted started for the house.

By and by he saw Seymour had tied his horse to a tree, and since the frost was biting he thought his doing so was ominous. When he was level with the window at the back of the house, he began to run. The reflections of moving figures, black like old daguerreotypes, leaped across the glass. For a few moments they occupied the most part of the illuminated square, a strange and disturbing shadow-show, and then suddenly vanished.

A muffled pistol-shot pierced the walls and Ted went faster. When he could look into the room, he gasped and his skin got cold. Jim was on the floor and Seymour, kneeling by him, had pulled out his knife.

The knife was small, but the fellow was a doctor.

Ted's horror vanished and he was carried away by rage. The brute had shot Jim and meant to finish his job, but Ted carried a rifle and was justified in shooting. Moreover, since the rifle was not a repeater, he must not miss. The trouble was, his hands shook, he was breathless, and his legs were not firm. The butt went to his shoulder and he tried to steady the barrel. Seymour must be stopped, and stiffening his arms, he pulled the trigger. He rather heard the tinkle of falling glass than the report; the lamp went out, and somebody ran from the house. Ted pushed in a fresh cartridge and started for the door. On the whole, to hear the other go was some relief, but if he knew

who had disturbed him, he might come back, and Ted dropped in the gloom by the wall. Fifty yards in front, a dark object sped across the snow, and Ted, steadying his arm against the boards, pulled the trigger. The dark object swerved, leaped ahead and vanished by the ravine. Ted got up, and with shaking hands pushed back the door.

CHAPTER XXV

HUGH TAKES THE TRAIL

But for the glimmer of the stove the homestead kitchen was dark. By the ravine, a horse's feet beat a dull, muffled rhythm. Seymour was off, and it looked as if he went as fast as his horse could go, but the noise died away and all was ominously quiet. Ted thought he knew where Stannard's matches were and he felt for the shelf. When he found the box he stopped and leaned against the wall. He hated his nervous slackness, but he felt he dared not get a light.

After a few moments he rubbed a match, and when the lamp was burning crossed the floor and sat down on the boards. A dark smear of blood stained Houghton's shirt, and his eyes were shut. Ted touched his skin and shivered, and knew himself afraid——

Five minutes afterward, he heard rattling harness and the soft roll of wheels in the snow. The team stopped, and when Ted looked up Stannard was at the door. Jumping in, he glanced at Houghton and pulled Ted to his feet.

“Put the kettle on the stove and hang the blankets from my bunk where they will get warm. Hustle!”

“Then Jim's not dead?” said Ted, in a trembling voice.

“Certainly not. Get busy!” Hugh replied, and began to pull back Houghton's shirt.

He was not a doctor, but he had helped hurt men in France, and when Ted rejoined him he said, as cheerfully as possible:

“A pistol shot in the shoulder does not knock out a man like Jim, and although I'd sooner know where the bullet went, not to see blood about his mouth is something. Anyhow, he mustn't freeze. Help me put him in my bunk.”

The bunk was across the floor, and when they awkwardly lifted Houghton his mouth went crooked.

“Go easy, partner; my shoulder hurts.”

They put him down, his eyes shut, and Hugh gave Ted a smile.

“He’ll soon be about again. Get the blankets.”

He packed the hot blankets round Houghton, and put two bottles where they would warm. Then he glanced at the shattered window and the hole in the matchboards.

“Well? How did Jim get shot?”

“Seymour was here; they fought!” Ted replied.

Hugh gave him a surprised look and clenched his fist.

“The blasted swine! But go on.”

Ted narrated all he knew, and Stannard, nodding, went to the stove. When the water was hot he put the bottles by Houghton’s feet. Then he brewed some coffee and gave Ted a cup.

“My team is outside. I want you to drive home as fast as you can go and send Tom for the doctor. Then you must bring Mrs. Wheeler across.”

Ted stopped for a moment by his brother and went off. Hugh carried the hot coffee to the bunk and lifted Houghton’s head.

“Try to drink, Jim.”

Houghton drank and choked, but a touch of color came to his face.

“I begin to think I’ve cheated the swine,” he said and languidly turned his head, as if he remarked the broken window and the bullet hole in the wall. “Looks like an Arizona shooting-up.”

“The shot was Ted’s. He declares Seymour had a knife. But where do you think the bullet is?”

“Feels as if it had smashed my shoulder-blade; I’m not a doctor,” said Houghton faintly.

He shut his eyes, and Hugh, stopping the hole in the window, threw fresh wood in the stove and resigned himself to wait. Sometimes Houghton groaned and moved restlessly, but for the most part he was quiet and Hugh thought him asleep. After an hour or two Mrs. Wheeler arrived and took control, and in the morning Houghton called her.

“If the pain would stop I’d feel pretty bright, and I must talk to Hugh. You might shift the pillow to support my head.”

“Very well. I’ll give you ten minutes, but if you don’t talk quietly, I’ll fire Stannard out,” Mrs. Wheeler replied.

She took Ted away and Hugh crossed the floor.

“Perhaps you ought to wait until the doctor arrives, Jim.”

“I think not,” said Houghton. “When the fellow has done with me I expect I’ll not be keen to talk, and you must hit the trail as soon as possible. Well, here’s something that might interest you. Since I can’t see which is the proper part, you must read the lot.”

He indicated Mrs. Maitland’s letter, and when Hugh gave him back the envelope he thrilled.

“The news is bully news, Jim! In the meantime, we must fix what we are going to do about Seymour.”

Houghton nodded agreement. “So long as the swine’s at large, I’m afraid for Ted and you. You see, I thought him *dangerous*; so to speak, off his balance. Anyhow, he must be stopped.”

On the whole, Hugh thought Jim’s remark was justified and he admitted a stern satisfaction because the job was his. In Canada a gun-man runs a daunting risk, but before the police could be warned two or three days must go.

“As soon as the doctor fixes you, I’ll shove off,” he said. “I expect Seymour will hesitate to make for the populated country along the C.P.R. track. His line is north, and he might risk getting on board the cars on the new northern road. All the same, I imagine he’d be afraid of the telegraph and he’ll take the timber belt.”

“For a tenderfoot the timber belt, in winter, is a hard country and when the brute has had enough he may try to bluff. Since he’s a doctor, I expect he doesn’t think me dead.”

“The bluff wouldn’t go, Jim. Sooner than agree with Seymour, I’d stand my trial.”

“You don’t risk a trial,” said Houghton, smiling. “Mrs. Maitland is satisfied the Old Country police will leave you alone. The joke is, Seymour doesn’t know she has enlightened us—— Well, I’m tired—— You will take the road——”

He turned his head and was quiet, and Mrs. Wheeler sent Hugh off.

In the afternoon the doctor arrived and got to work. When he called Hugh to the room Houghton’s eyes were open, but he laughed and talked in

a queer, hoarse voice. Hugh thought Jim babbled like a drunken man, and he gave the doctor an anxious glance.

“The anesthetic; I was forced to use a powerful dose,” said the other. “Well, I got the bullet, and in five or six days I guess he might go home. Now about this shooting? Mr. Houghton did not tell me much——”

“Since that is so, I’d sooner you waited until he is able to put you wise,” Hugh replied.

His pack was made, and when the doctor had answered his inquiries he went for his team. The last he heard was his friend’s hoarse voice, and the meaningless babble nerved him for the trail. Wheeler waited at the table. He was a tall, lean plainsman, and he carried a heavy single-barrel gun.

“She’s full-choke and up to fifty yards she balls the shot,” he said. “I haven’t much use for a rifle when the timber’s thick.”

He led out the team and they got on board. Hugh’s driving-ropes were not good, but in the wagon one might keep moderately warm. The snow was dry and thin, but when they reached the forest belt they must send back the horses and use a hand-sledge.

“It looks as if you knew the sort of man we are up against,” Hugh remarked. “I mean to get him, but if he takes the cars, we may be forced to trail him across the Rockies. Are you willing to stay with it?”

“You bet you,” said Wheeler; “I’m going all the way. Jim Houghton’s sure a good boss and Ted’s a bully kid. You show me Mister Seymour’s trail and watch me shove along.”

“It’s possible he will not risk the cars. For one thing, he doesn’t know when we can send word to the police and he might reckon on their wiring their western posts before he left the train. If he headed for the timber, could he engage a guide?”

“A few *Metis* breeds and mean whites are located back of the last settlements,” said Wheeler, in a thoughtful voice. “They do some trapping and now and then pack for city sports, but I guess their job’s smuggling liquor to the Cree reserves. If your man paid high, he’d get a guide all right.”

Hugh pulled up the skin robes. The snow was loose and dry like flour, and the team went fast. Bright sunshine touched the sparkling plain, but the beams were cold. Hugh’s hands and feet got numb, and where his breath floated about his cap the fur was beaded by frost. He concentrated on his

driving. To talk would not help, and the man he wanted had got away eighteen hours before.

The sun got low, and for a time dark woods and rises cut the orange sky. Then pale stars began to shine, and a silver gleam behind the trees marked the rising moon. The trees were numerous and jackpines dotted the poplars and birches, for in front was the park country, where the plains melt into the coniferous timber belt. In the dark the cold got biting and Hugh beat his hands, but for some time he sent the team along.

At length a light shone behind a split-rail fence, and Wheeler dropping from the wagon, awkwardly pulled down the bars. When the way was open the horses trotted across the snowy stubble and Hugh, knowing they would find the stable, let them go. The reins he had slacked slipped about in his stiff hands.

A man carrying a lantern came from a small loghouse and helped them to loose the animals. Seymour had stopped for the night and in the morning saddled up and inquired for the railroad, but that was all the farmer knew. If the others wanted to stop he could fix them, and they had better bring along some hay.

Hugh thanked him, and when the horses were fed they went to the kitchen. The farmer gave them salty bacon and fried potatoes, with a doughy flapjack for dessert. After supper they lighted their pipes and Wheeler inquired:

“Do you know Jan Laurent?”

“I’d know him if we met up,” the farmer replied.

“Well, supposing you wanted to beat it for the woods? Would you hire Jan to pack for you?”

“If I put up the money, I’d get him,” the other replied and gave Wheeler a queer look. “Are you for the woods?”

Wheeler smiled. “You know who Mr. Stannard is and I guess you know my boss. All we want is to find the fellow who stopped with you last night.”

“Then, if he has hired up Laurent, you ain’t got a soft job,” the farmer rejoined. “Maybe you better leave it for the red-coat boys.”

He began to talk about something else and Hugh played up. It looked as if Laurent, and perhaps some others, engaged in smuggling liquor and the fellow was resolved not to meddle. Besides, he was an old-type plainsman

and not the sort to give a stranger his confidence. After a time Hugh spread a bundle of wild hay on the boards and he and Wheeler were soon asleep.

Dawn broke stormily. A bitter wind wailed in the thin woods, and soon after they started Hugh's hands got numb. So long as they hurt, however, he was not disturbed; insensibility would indicate frostbite. To know he would soon have done with driving was some comfort, for when he reached the settlement in the evening he must arrange to send back the team.

Hugh began to doubt if he would reach the settlement. The ground was broken and one could not see far in front; the wind grew savage and the snow blew about like dust. At noon they stopped behind a birch bluff and brewed some tea. Hugh pulled out his watch.

"A west-bound train leaves the settlement about four o'clock. Can we make it?"

Wheeler studied the threatening clouds. "We got to try, and I guess we'll start. The snow's not far off and I want to get there first."

The afternoon was gloomy and entangling woods cut the view. Once or twice Hugh was forced to lead the horses down a ravine, and in the biting cold to walk was some relief. Speed, however, was important. A snowstorm threatened, and he had not yet got supplies for a camp. Besides, Seymour was in front.

Shivering behind the skin robes, Hugh tried to argue like the man he hunted. If he could cross the Rockies by the northern line, to find him would be hard; but he must risk the stations being watched. For all that, the Royal Northwest Mounted Police were not numerous and, for the most part, their posts were in the populated belt. On the whole, Hugh thought he would risk the train, but Seymour was a stranger and might hesitate. When he made the settlement he would find out, and he urged the tired horses.

By and by the light faded and snow began to fall. Hugh had not thought sunset came so soon, but he could not pull out his watch. His body was numb and he could hardly grasp the reins. The team went slowly, but when one is very cold one does not bother. All he knew was, if he went north he ought to cut the railroad-track.

The horses stopped and he let the reins go slack. So far as he could distinguish, he had crossed a small prairie surrounded by thick woods. A bluff in front was dark and somehow solid, and Hugh thought the trees were spruce. Perhaps he ought to push in under the thick branches and camp.

"Do you hear something?" Wheeler asked.

Hugh heard a horse shake its harness and the wind in the trees. Wheeler turned his head.

“Come on! Steer for the thick bluff.”

The horses went slowly forward and when they stopped by the wood a high metallic note pierced the wind’s turmoil. Hugh knew the throb of telegraph wires.

“We’ve made it!” Wheeler shouted and jumped awkwardly from the wagon.

He urged the horses through a tangle of snapping brush, and Hugh saw a tall post and, for twenty yards, the snowy railroad-track.

CHAPTER XXVI

THE TIMBER BELT

Hugh floundering in thick brush, tried to start his team. In the gap between the woods the wind was savage, and the exhausted animals would not front the gale. Hugh did not know where Wheeler was, but the light wagon rocked, as if he tried to lift the wheels across an obstacle. A few yards off the telegraph-wires vanished in the blowing snow, and if he could follow the track he ought soon to reach the settlement.

To be stopped was galling, and Hugh pictured Seymour waiting at the station. If he were held up, Seymour would get on board the cars, but the wagon was entangled in the brush and he must not leave the horses to freeze. Besides, he doubted if he could make the settlement on his numbed feet.

A fresh noise drowned the throb of the wires and yellow reflections shone on tossing snow and rolling smoke. Hugh swore and loosed the headstall. The train was going by, and he was beaten. Then Wheeler shouted, and Hugh turned his head. Where he had thought to see the lights from the car windows all was dark. Moreover, the big, snorting machine was not an ordinary locomotive. Perhaps the gale had swept the snow from the track, and the plow had gone ahead for water in advance of the train.

Smoke and red cinders blew about the wagon and the horses plunged. Frightened by the noise and light, they started and Hugh came near to going under the wheels. Staggering back, he seized the tail-board, but the wagon was high, his muscles were cramped by cold, and it looked as if he must let go. Wheeler, shouting hoarsely, was two or three yards behind and could not help. To be left, however, was unthinkable, and Hugh got his arm across the board. Then he swung his legs back and somehow was in the wagon.

Ten minutes afterward, the wheels jolted across the rails and he got down behind a wooden shed. Lights burned in the agent's office and fifty yards off the windows of the two buildings shone. So far as Hugh could distinguish that was all.

Two or three men in rough skin coats stamped up and down where the shed cut the wind. One said the train was not far behind the plow, and a stranger had stopped at the hotel, but he did not know where he was. Hugh

dared not cross the track to inquire, and he waited. If Seymour had remarked his arrival, he would try to steal on board.

A measured snorting rolled along the track and a fan-shaped beam pierced the snow; a bell began to clang and lights flickered in streaming smoke. Then the locomotive forged by and the long cars stopped. A few indistinct figures came to the vestibules and a baggage-car door was noisily pushed back; but nobody got up, and Hugh ran along by the wheels. When he was level with the locomotive he stopped. There was no platform and Wheeler had followed the other side of the train, but nobody had crossed the track.

The coupling strained, the bell rang, and the lights melted in the snow. Seymour was not on board and Hugh admitted he ought to be satisfied, but he frowned. The lighted cars stood for much that civilized man hated to go without; they carried the comforts one enjoyed in the cities across the snowy wilds. One's bed behind the curtains was warm, one's food was properly served, and a blizzard did not bother one by the smoking-compartment stove. The train, however, was gone, and he must face the arctic cold in the lonely timber belt. Well, where Seymour ventured he must not shrink, and going for his team, he crossed the track to the hotel.

After supper he made some inquiries, but did not find out much. Seymour had stopped at the house and arranged for the livery-stable keeper to send back his horse. Then he asked if he could engage a man who knew the woods, and set out for a trapper's shanty. He did not state where he wanted to go, but if he could stand for the trail in winter, the landlord reckoned he was pretty tough. He thought Hugh could get a hand-sled, but he must go a long way north for dogs, and nobody at the settlement had much use for snowshoes. The landlord stated his neighbors were white men and implied that they had nothing to do with the half-breeds in the woods.

Hugh got a sledge and the supplies he needed. Although he did not know Seymour's plans, the settlement commanded the trappers' and prospectors' line to the Northwest, and where the other went he was going. When he had got all he needed he went to bed. His room was seven or eight feet long and not remarkably clean. By contrast with the biting frost, however, the stale air was warm and Hugh was not fastidious. Before he next slept under a roof some time might pass.

In the morning Hugh and Wheeler started north. The snow presently stopped and the white trees sparkled in the sun, but the pale beams carried no warmth and the frost was biting. The bluffs became large and numerous,

for the tangled forest that rolls across northern Canada was not far off. As a rule the small, ragged pines are valueless for lumber, and for the most part only the fur companies' servants use the trails across the wilds.

When the sun was low Wheeler stopped in front of a small log shack. Slanted pines, broken by the wind, enclosed the dreary spot; nobody was about, and Hugh forced back the door. Opening the stove, he pushed his hand into the ashes; and then saw Wheeler's smile and stopped.

"If Laurent hired up with Seymour, he pulled out at sun-up," Wheeler remarked.

Hugh agreed. The stove would soon get cold, and sitting down on a bench he lighted his pipe. On the whole, he thought Laurent had started recently; somehow the shack had not the desolate look an unoccupied dwelling wears.

"Well, I suppose he is gone, but his door was not locked."

"Jan has no use for a locked door," Wheeler rejoined. "I guess his warehouse is a cache in the bush. He don't want folks to think he has something to hide——"

He crossed the floor and looked about the room.

"Wood-box pretty full! A *Metis* doesn't chop for long ahead; I reckon Jan meant to stop until he burned the lot. Flour bag's clean, fresh from the store, but half the stuff is gone. Looks as if he'd skipped some into another bag—— Now I see where some went on the ground. All the salt pork's the gristly bit he didn't cut off the string."

"Then, we'll allow he recently took the trail," said Hugh. "It does not imply he went with Seymour."

"Jan was not alone. I don't see any boots and moccasins; his skin coat and blankets and small ax are not around. A trapper has a pretty good outfit of winter clothes and skin shoes. Looks as if he didn't know he was going and the fellow who hired him was a tenderfoot. Jan put up the camp truck the other hadn't got. Then he took his sledge; the stranger couldn't help him *pack* much of a load."

Hugh agreed that Wheeler argued plausibly. Tom was the better woodsman; in the timber belt, he himself was something of a tenderfoot. For all that, he thought he saw Seymour's line. Where the woods are tangled one uses the waterways.

"They'll go for Brant Lake?"

Wheeler nodded. "Certainly. Then up Swift River and across the divide. I'd steer north for Loon Lakes, and if I wanted to cut out Edmonton, hit the old Athabasca Trail——"

Knitting his brows, he looked straight in front, as if he followed the snowy trail across the vast solitudes. For a minute or two Hugh speculated —— If Seymour took the lonely road, his pluck was good; he risked something worse than punishment for pulling his gun, and since he was a first-class doctor he no doubt knew Jim was not dead. In fact, his hardihood was puzzling.

Hugh frankly did not want to start. He was tired and the woods were getting dark. To camp in the snow had not much charm; he would sooner wait for morning by Laurent's stove, but Seymour was ahead.

"We found no sledge tracks," he remarked.

"Jan knows his job; he hit the trail before the snow had stopped," Wheeler replied.

"Oh, well, let's shove off," said Hugh resignedly and went to the door.

For a time he laboriously hauled the sledge. The woods got darker and the red sunset melted behind the trunks; the frost was keen and by and by the moon came out. In the meantime, Wheeler studied the ground. In order to march, one must sleep and to find the proper spot for a camp requires some thought. At length Wheeler stopped by a clump of spruce, and got to work. In the woods the snow was thin and Hugh scraped back the fine dry powder from the dead needles. Wheeler cut green branches for a bed, and then chopping a dead tree, hacked off resin knots. By and by a fire snapped between two small logs and smoke curled about the camp; but Hugh, mixing dough for a bannock and cutting frozen bacon, hated the labor.

After supper Wheeler wrapped a thick blue blanket round his body and was soon asleep. He was a typical plainsman rather primitive and sternly practical; efficient was perhaps the word. Hugh threw fresh wood on the fire and looked about. In the gap where they had chopped the tree bright stars twinkled and tapering spruce tops, like black spires, cut the sky. Below, for a few yards, the fire touched the trunks and then all was impenetrably dark. Wheeler was as quiet as if he were frozen, and when the snow slipped from a branch the noise startled Hugh. The cold and the stillness were daunting. It looked as if in the vast desolation only he was alive.

But he must not exaggerate. Seymour and his half-breed guide were not far in front and Hugh speculated about his line when, at length, they met. He

had no authority to seize the fellow; Seymour was athletic and a good shot, and would probably fight. For all that, Hugh must somehow convey him back to the settlements. Now he thought about it, his resolve was perhaps not logical. Seymour was Houghton's relation and Hugh doubted if Jim, after all, would let the other go to jail. In fact, he must not take Jim's warning the police for granted. He thought Seymour would not do so. Frank knew the Houghton's family pride and their dislike for notoriety. Yet he had risked the plunge into the arctic wilds. There was the puzzle.

Hugh began to see he really wanted to account for his determination to run the fellow down. He hated cruelty and to picture all Ted had borne fired his blood. Then Seymour had plotted Hugh's disgrace and shot his pal. He ought to take his punishment; but to punish him was Jim's part, and Hugh perhaps was not entitled to meddle. Moreover, Mrs. Maitland declared the police would leave him alone.

All the same, to be left alone was not enough, and Hugh began to see a light. Alice knew he was innocent, but others did not, and all must admit her trust was justified. To some extent his object was selfish, and in the first strain of the pursuit he had not realized that he was unconsciously animated by a vague hope. Seymour must go back to Jim's and they might force him to acknowledge that he himself took Houghton's money.

Now Hugh saw his line, the snowy pines grew indistinct, and the reflections from the camp fire sank. English alders spread their branches across a sparkling pool, and Hugh was back with Alice Cunningham by the river in the Border Hills.

CHAPTER XXVII

THE POWDERED DAY

A sledge trail like a faint-colored ribbon crossed the frozen lake, for where the surface was furrowed the snow was rather blue than white. Wheeler thought the marks fresh and two men had gone across; one breaking the trail for the other who hauled the sled. Moreover, they wore soft moccasins, which one dried by the fire at night. When one used boots and rubbers one risked frozen feet.

Hugh's small sledge ran smoothly, but his head was lowered, his mouth was tight, and his muscles were cramped by cold. Yet the afternoon was calm and the low sun shone. The trouble was, icy particles danced, as dust motes dance, in the slanted rays. The air scintillated like sparkling wine, and when Hugh looked ahead, the blurred woods across the lake trembled in illuminated haze. Unless he was forced, however, Hugh did not look up, for the icy specks stung his eyes and cut his breath.

For a time his face had smarted as if pricked by needles, but now the blood was driven from his skin and he knew the ease from pain was ominous.

The day was the French-Canadian woodman's *jour poudré*, when it looks as if the air itself were frozen. On the windy plains Hugh had not known a proper powdered day, and he thought he would sooner front a raging blizzard. Flesh and blood could not long support the deadly cold, but the trail led on and the woods were yet some distance off.

"When we make the trees I've got to stop," he gasped. "A breed might hold on, but Seymour's white. Where do you think they are, Tom?"

"In the bush ahead. When they broke the trail maybe their feet were warm. I guess our boots are going to bother us."

Hugh said nothing. His feet were numb, but since he could feel them beat the snow, they were not yet frozen. He did not know about his face. Anyhow, he must as soon as possible get off the lake, although even in the thick woods he himself must build some sort of shelter from the icy haze, and unless he used proper effort, he might freeze. On the north trail man fought Nature for his life, and sometimes Nature won.

Then he reflected that Seymour had, no doubt, reached the forest before the powdered day broke. Hugh pictured him cooking supper in a sheltered camp and animal-like savageness helped his advance. For a time he bent his head and concentrated on the trail. So long as he saw the trampled snow roll back, he felt he made some progress; when he did look up, the woods seemed to get no nearer. All the same, to push on was ridiculous. Every labored step carried him farther from the settlements, and some time he must turn and begin a fresh fight to get back.

At length, Wheeler shouted and Hugh looked about. The puzzling glimmer was fading and a light wind blew across the snow. A hundred yards off, dark trees dotted rising ground, and he saw he had reached the end of the lake. The trees, however, were thin and until he found a thick clump, he must not stop. In front a level white belt curved between steep banks and he must follow the river into the woods.

The sledge began to jolt, as if the ice beneath the snow were uneven. Hugh thought they went down a rapid; at all events when the river froze the current was swift. By and by the blurred gray sledge trail grew distinct; the runner grooves and tramped snow were black like ink. Hugh threw down the traces and swore.

Sometimes the ice on a swift current works and it looked as if the water had recently burst through a crack. The exposed surface was probably frozen, but under the snow the crust might not be thick. For all that, the bank was steep and Hugh did not see himself dragging the sledge up the snowy rocks.

“Are we going to take the chances?” Wheeler asked.

All they risked was a plunge into three or four inches of freezing slush, but when the cold is arctic one keeps one’s feet dry. Hugh hesitated, and then seized the traces. He did not see a spot where they could camp, and to climb the bank and return to the river was unthinkable.

“Shove across!” he said.

For three or four minutes the snow carried them, and then the crust broke. The bottom was soft and slippery, and the sledge sank. There was now no use in making for the bank; they must cross the wet belt as soon as possible. Wheeler pushed the sinking sledge. The wet snow clogged the runners and packed against the frame; the men gasped and floundered. They dared not go slowly, and they savagely plowed across the freezing belt. A few minutes after they reached the other side, their boots were crusted by

ice, and the rubbers got stiff. Hugh could not feel the snow on which he trod, and he balanced mechanically, as if his legs were wooden.

By and by Wheeler swerved and they crashed through a fringe of snapping willows. In front were dark branches, and brown needles dotted the snow the sledge-runners threw back. Hugh threw down the traces and seized the ax. Since he did not want to freeze, he must banish his queer languidness and get to work. When he stopped, smoke curled about the camp, and cheerful flames leaped in the falling dark. The stinging ice motes had vanished, and the powdered day was gone, but Hugh did not yet know all it might cost and he pulled off his boots.

His feet were blanched, and when he rubbed the livid skin with snow, he did not for some time feel the friction. At length, however, faint sensibility returned and he got fresh stockings from his pack. His feet had gone dead at other times and he was not going to bother.

After supper he was quiet. Where the powdery frost had stung his face the skin tingled, and his brain was dull. Although he shivered he dared not front the blaze, for after cold and fatigue the reaction hurts. Now he thought about it, when they camped dusk had but begun to fall, and he had generously fed the fire. Some of the wood was green, and the thick blue smoke would float about the trees. He ought perhaps to have used some caution; but after all, if Seymour were near enough to see the smoke, they would soon run him down. In the meantime, he must sleep.

He wakened with a sort of jolt and looked about. But for the wind in the spruce tops, all was quiet, and Wheeler was as still as if he were dead. The fire was not low, and red reflections wavered across the trees. Slender trunks leaped from the gloom, and melted; the blaze dropped and darkness invaded the lonely camp.

Hugh wondered whether he had dreamed, for he had thought somebody had laughed. The thing was, of course, ridiculous, and on the North trail one must not indulge illusions. In fact, Hugh resolved he would not get up. He was not warm, but so long as he did not freeze he must be satisfied. The firelight sank and he turned his head. Some snow slipped from a branch and splashed in the red ashes, and that was all he knew.

At daybreak he saw Wheeler occupied by the fire. Hugh admitted he was selfish, but if Tom wanted to cook breakfast, he would indulge him. He frankly hated to throw off his blanket and front the cold at dawn. When he did get up he rubbed his foot. The skin was but slightly sensitive and

rubbing did not induce warmth. Hugh pulled on his stocking, but did not see the others he had put by the fire.

“Where’s the pork?” Wheeler inquired.

“I fastened it to a branch.”

“That’s so. All I see’s the string.”

They searched the camp. In winter, bacon is perhaps the small farmer’s main support, and on the snowy trail, one’s body craves for fat. Moreover, one cooks bannocks and flapjacks in the greasy pan. To lose the stuff was awkward, but after a few minutes they were satisfied the slab was gone.

“Well, we got to eat bully beef; I’ll thaw some out,” Wheeler grumbled.

Hugh put a frozen bannock in the hot ashes. He was puzzled, but before he began to talk he must satisfy his keen appetite. When the hard bannock and canned meat had vanished, he said, with a touch of embarrassment:

“In the dark I woke up and I thought somebody was about the camp.”

“You thought somebody was about! Didn’t you go see?”

“I did not,” Hugh admitted, in an apologetic voice. “I didn’t want to be ridiculous, and if I had gone to look, I might not have got warm again.”

Wheeler jumped up and went to the sledge. A bag of flour on the top was burned, as if somebody had pushed a hot stick through the cotton. The holes were not large, but a perforated flour bag is an awkward load.

“Although I thought I dreamed, I believe I heard somebody laugh,” said Hugh.

“Sure you did! The joke’s on us all right!” Wheeler rejoined, and picked up Hugh’s stockings.

Hugh swore, for the stockings had been cut across, and the feet were gone. Wheeler began to study the ground, but the snow was trampled and there was not much use in looking for fresh marks. After a time, he returned to the sledge, and stuffed some paper into the holes in the bag. His shotgun, in a woolen case, was under the load and the barrel stuck out.

“Maybe I left the stuff like that, but it looks as if somebody had tried to get my gun, and stopped when you woke up,” he said.

“If Seymour was at the camp, he’s not far off. Let’s get after him,” said Hugh savagely.

In five minutes they took the trail. The morning was dark and a dreary wind blew across the woods. Hugh was puzzled, and bothered about the pork. He doubted if their canned food would carry them very far and bully beef was not a good substitute for bacon fat, but in the meantime he must concentrate on getting forward. The short day was for labor; when the march was finished one could talk.

After an hour or two, the sledge track forked, and Wheeler followed one fork up the bank. When he came back he stated he had found a spot where he thought two men had camped. The stained snow was much tramped, and the ashes were fresh.

“If it was the fellows who stole our pork, they’ll hit up the pace,” he said.

“But you know the men were Seymour and Laurent,” Hugh rejoined.

“I’ll wait. If we don’t find where they nooned, I’ll allow your guess is right.”

Hugh nodded and started the sledge. On the winter trail a white man must be generously fed, and stops at noon to eat, but one cannot stop unless one makes a fire. If the snow on the banks carried no marks, it would indicate that the men in front had good grounds for using speed. Hugh searched the steep white slope, but the smooth surface was not broken, and the sledge track, without swerving, led on up the frozen river. So long as the others pushed on he must follow.

The afternoon was gloomy and dry snow blew about. The white dust drifted across the runner marks, and by and by large flakes began to fall. Dark was coming soon, and the sledge went heavily. Hugh set his mouth and strained at the traces. He was persuaded Seymour was in front. Moreover, the trail was filling up, and in the dark one could not see a camp fire’s smoke. In consequence, he might overshoot his mark. At length, when the track had vanished, he shouted to Wheeler, and they climbed the bank.

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE BROKEN TRAIL

When supper was over Hugh lifted his pipe. The wind was strong and snow blew about, but the spot was sheltered and he languidly stretched his legs to the fire. Although he had gone down to the bank, one could not see twenty yards in front, and a half-breed would know where to hide his camp. At length, he was entitled to rest, and his foot hurt.

“We must try to fix who stole into our camp last night,” he said.

“I thought you fixed it was Laurent,” Wheeler remarked.

“I’ll state my grounds. Since the trail led up river, the fellow who robbed us is ahead, and the chances are against three parties starting north in about twenty-four hours. Then Laurent is a woodsman, and if he knew he must make a long hike, he’d put up all the food he needed. At his shack, your point was he didn’t know. Seymour offered him a large bribe, and they didn’t dare stop to buy supplies.”

“I reckon you have it,” Wheeler agreed, and resumed thoughtfully: “The queer thing is, all they took was the pork. Other stuff a hungry man would find some use for was lying around. Then if they’d taken the lot, they’d have forced us to quit.”

Hugh knitted his brows. On the surface, the explanation was obvious; Laurent wanted bacon and was satisfied to steal the slab. He was a rude trapper, and might not see the advantages of the plan Wheeler indicated. All the same, Seymour was highly cultivated and keen. It was possible Hugh had disturbed the fellows.

“When they got busy they perhaps made a noise, and it was the noise woke me,” he said.

“Maybe so,” Wheeler agreed. “Somebody tried to pull my gun from under the load; but burning the flour bag was a kind of loco trick.”

“Seymour is a queer sort. But go on,” said Hugh.

He wondered whether Tom had given him the word he wanted. Seymour certainly was not mad, but his imperturbable coldness suggested a sort of abnormal vein. Hugh had sensed rather freakish cruelty, and perhaps when

the brute fought with Houghton his passions had broken control. For all that, Hugh imagined Seymour's burning the bag was calculated.

"Looks as if the fellow wanted us to know he was around," Wheeler continued.

"It's possible," said Hugh, with a puzzled frown.

Since flour was valuable, the leaky bag might embarrass them, but it would not stop their march. Hugh hated to lose his stockings, particularly since he had now not another pair. Yet the loss, although annoying, was not important; the freakish damage, so to speak, was rather an affront than an injury. Then, as Wheeler's mittens were left alone, the affront was personal; the joker implied that Hugh would know who he was. Hugh did know, but to see the fellow's object was another thing.

"So far, I'm baffled," he resumed. "Anyhow, our business is to keep the trail."

"Then I guess we'll watch out," Wheeler replied. "If them jokers come along again, my gun won't be under the load."

Hugh took first watch. Wheeler's gun was under his blanket, for although he carried a small automatic, in a puzzling light to hold a pistol straight is hard. If Hugh were forced to shoot, he meant to hit his mark. Fine snow blew about and sometimes he shook the stuff from his blanket. The night was very cold and he was tired, but his foot throbbed and helped him conquer his drowsiness.

He did not think Seymour would trust his luck another time. Frank's plan was perhaps to keep him awake and wear him down. Anyhow, he was not much behind the others, and had obviously forced them to hit the pace; Seymour was a tenderfoot, and could not keep it up. Hugh himself had frankly had enough.

At length, Wheeler relieved him, and when he wakened day had broken. Wheeler was cooking breakfast, and admitted that he went to sleep and slept longer than he had thought. The wind was savage; the trees tossed and the snow from the branches splashed in the fire; but when breakfast was over they dragged the sledge down the bank, and began the dreary march.

Snow drifted across the river, and the sky was dark. The storm had smoothed out the trail, but by and by fresh marks curved down the bank and led on in front. Although the track was faint, Hugh imagined he could keep it, so long as fresh snow did not fall, and he braced up. If his luck were good, when dark fell he ought to run Seymour down.

His foot began to bother him and he imagined his boot had galled the frozen skin. The snow, however, was soft, and since one could not go fast, to limp was not a great handicap. The limp grew worse, and the blowing snow grew thicker. He could hardly see the trees on the bank and the trail filled up. Yet the gale was not a blizzard, for the cold was perhaps less keen, and although Hugh's hands were numb and his face smarted he pushed on. Some time before sunset, dark began to fall, and Wheeler stopped and braced himself against the wind.

"She's storming pretty fierce. We have got to quit," he gasped.

"For all we know, Laurent's but a mile or two in front," Hugh grumbled.

"I don't know about Jan; the other fellow's surely had enough," Wheeler rejoined. "If we shove on, we'll shove past their camp."

Hugh moodily agreed. He hated to be baffled when he thought the hunt was nearly up, but the advantage was obviously with the party that was not forced to break the trail, and he dragged the sledge up the bank.

They broke camp in the dark. The snow had stopped and the clouds had rolled away, but when dawn came only the white spruce tops cut the sky. Since Hugh had rather thought to see a plume of smoke, it looked as if the others had started first. They could not camp without a fire, and he was satisfied that the storm that had stopped him had stopped his antagonist. Limping ahead of the sledge, he went as fast as possible, but they must break the trail and the labor was hard.

For a time Hugh said nothing. He was getting disturbed and he saw Wheeler's look was thoughtful. The river curved into the woods like a smooth white road, and the snow on the banks was not broken.

The thing was queer. Laurent was, no doubt, a good woodsman, but Seymour was fresh from the Old Country. He could not have kept the trail in the dark and storm, and Hugh calculated the fellow was not far off. In fact, they ought some time since to have seen the track from Laurent's camp. Yet they had not.

After an hour or two, Hugh stopped at the beginning of a long, straight reach. The snow sparkled in the sun. One ought to distinguish a blue sledge track some distance off, but so far as Hugh could see the surface was white and even. Hugh was baffled and his foot hurt. He sat down on the sledge, and knitted his brows.

"I calculated on Seymour's going straight ahead for the Northwest."

“If I reckoned the police were after me, I’d want to get back as far as I could from the railroad,” Wheeler agreed. “Our line’s the best line for the divide, and the old Athabasca Trail.”

“After all, he might argue that the police know the trails.”

“He’d calculate he got off two or three days ahead,” Wheeler rejoined. “Well, maybe Jan has a shack somewhere in the rocks right off the track; in winter, a trapper works from a fixed camp. It’s possible he’s hit the woods; I sure don’t know.”

Hugh hesitated. If the others were in front, to search the woods would uselessly cost some time, and Seymour might have calculated on his stopping. If they had left the river, to push on would be to lose the trail for good.

“Then, I think we must find out, and I’ll go on,” he said. “Suppose you take the bank.”

For some time he followed the river, hauling the sledge, but his foot got worse, and by and by he left the load. The wind dropped. Now and then the white branches shook, and the snow they carried fell, but the soft thud hardly broke the strange calm. The loneliness began to weigh on Hugh, and at length he stopped.

Although he could see for some distance ahead, the glimmering white belt his glance searched was nowhere furrowed. Had his antagonists kept the river, he ought to have hit their trail an hour ago; in fact, only his refusal to calculate had urged him onward. To push on farther from the sledge was rash. The ax, without which he could not make a fire, and his blankets were on the load, and he doubted if he could get back by dark. Unless he started soon, he might freeze.

He set off moodily. Now he knew himself baffled, he shrank from the effort he had so far used. His labor had gone for nothing, Seymour had cheated him, and he must be resigned to carry a thief’s disgrace. But he was not resigned. Not long since he hoped he might force all to acknowledge he had not taken Houghton’s notes. However, it was done with. The trail was broken, and he must rejoin Wheeler and pitch camp. To get back would cost him something, for his foot was horribly sore.

When he reached the sledge he sat down slackly. For a few minutes he could bear the cold, and he doubted if he could haul the load up the bank. In the east the light was going, and the woods and snow were gray. By and by,

a dark object cut the vague background. It advanced fast and Hugh knew Wheeler's walk.

"Well?" he said, when the other stopped.

"Laurent has bluffed us."

"Ah!" said Hugh. "He has gone for the woods?"

"He has *gone back*," said Wheeler, and supported his statement by calculations of speed and distance, and the absence of fresh tracks since the snow fell. Moreover, although he had searched the woods, he had not found the half-breed's camp.

Hugh clenched his fist. Keen to get forward, he had not thought to look behind, and Seymour had calculated on his folly. Now he saw why the brute had cut his stockings and burned the flour bag; to imply that he was not far off would urge his pursuers to fresh effort while he himself went the other way. Well, Hugh was properly cheated, but he tried to brace up.

"If he has gone for the lake, he's steering for the settlements!"

"I sure don't get it," said Wheeler. "Laurent is not in front; that's all. Anyhow, we must wait for morning."

Hugh hated to wait, but to get off the sledge hurt and when they climbed the bank Wheeler remarked his awkwardness. After supper he ordered Hugh to pull off his boot.

"I want to see your foot," he said.

So long as Hugh had thought the chase nearly up, he was satisfied to leave his foot alone, for if it were badly galled he would sooner not know. When he pulled off his stocking he frowned. While the flesh was partly frozen, he had not felt his boot chafe his heel, and now the spot was raw. In the biting frost the wound would not close.

"It's awkward," said Wheeler soberly. "We're a good piece back from the settlements, and you can't stand for a long hike."

"I'm going to try. Seymour's now a day ahead."

Wheeler shrugged. "Oh, well, we have got the sledge; but you can't have your stocking rubbing across the spot. S'pose you tear your handkerchief!"

The handkerchief was all they had got for a bandage, and when Wheeler had tied it Hugh moodily stretched his legs to the fire.

CHAPTER XXIX

SEYMOUR'S WALLET

The wind had dropped, and Jan Laurent, squatting by a small, clear fire, waited for a blackened can to boil. The wood was resinous, and the thin blue smoke faded into the background of gray trunks. For the most part Laurent's face was covered by his big fur cap; the skin it left exposed was dark and his glance was fixed and inscrutable, like an Indian's. He had inherited a vein of Indian blood, and his French ancestors were famous *coureurs de bois*.

Seymour sat across the fire, his back against a tree. His furs had cost a useful sum, and Laurent himself had dressed his soft moccasins, in which, when they are dried at night, one's feet do not freeze. The white man was properly equipped for the woods, and Jan admitted that his nerve was good.

All the same, the half-breed knew the strain had broken the other's muscular strength. His face was pinched, and his pose was slack.

Laurent knew when a man was beaten. Moreover, when they started in the dark Seymour had fallen down a rock and got an awkward knock. Laurent knew they were followed, and the stubborn plainsmen pushed him rather hard; but if he could keep in front for another day and snow fell, nobody would hit his trail. In the North they would be safe.

A stick cracked and Seymour turned his head. His glance was almost as calm as Laurent's, but the half-breed saw his mouth harden. Three or four yards off a tall, dark-skinned man pushed back the branches. Seymour wondered whether Laurent had heard the stranger's advance; he himself had not imagined anybody was about.

The others began to talk in uncouth *habitant* French. Seymour's French was classical, and all he caught was *les habits rouges*, and *sacrés cochons*, but it gave him to think. The uniform of the Royal Northwest Mounted Police was British red. He thought the stranger an Indian with a diluted strain of French blood, for until the railroads crossed the plains, the Hudson Bay's *Metis* ruled the North. The man would not stop for food, but he asked for tobacco, and refusing Seymour's, took from Laurent a quantity of the bitter, granulated stuff the Quebec French use.

"Now I go to warn the others," he said, and vanished behind the thin spruce trunks.

“A good hunter, that Jacques. When one uses the long smooth gun one goes quietly,” Laurent remarked in French. “Well, his news is bad. Two police troopers take the woods, and our road is closed.”

Seymour looked up, and although he was careful to turn his head slowly, Laurent smiled.

“It is not you the pigs want, my friend. Yet they go where my camp is, and when they arrive I must not be about. They are good woodsmen, these police, and I, you see, have affairs in which they must not meddle. In short, since they go north, we go the other way.”

Seymour had not yet admitted the police looked for him, and to know they were otherwise occupied was some comfort.

He imagined Laurent smuggled liquor for the Indians, and supplied moose and caribou heads to city sportsmen, although game laws and expensive licenses are designed to stop the traffic. For all that, he was disturbed. The half-breed, for a large bribe, had undertaken to convey him to a spot where he might hide, and now their line was cut.

“If we turn back, we will meet the men I want to avoid,” he said.

“It is awkward. These fellows are obstinate,” Laurent agreed. “Well, perhaps, we cheat them, and the affair is arranged——”

He lighted his pipe and pondered. It looked as if the police had found out a supply of liquor waited transport not far from his shack in the North, but now his confederates were warned, the stuff would not be there when the police arrived. Seymour had fixed to pay him a useful sum, of which he had got half. Laurent was willing to earn the other half, but, to begin with, he must throw his two pursuers off the track.

Seymour solved the puzzle and Laurent approved.

“It will go, my friend,” he said, with a quiet laugh. “We must wait for the snow that is coming, but in the meantime the others march fast. I think we will take the road.”

In three or four hours snow began to fall, but the camp they pitched in thick spruce was sheltered, and after supper Seymour smoked his pipe by the snapping logs. He was very tired—his plunge down the rocks had shaken him worse than he had thought. Well, it might soon be possible for him to go slowly, and for some hours he could rest. Then, feeling for his tobacco, he got a nasty jolt.

At Montreal he had changed an English check for Canadian paper money and fastened a number of the bills in a safe pocket. The others he had thought to use were in his wallet, but the wallet was gone, and since he must avoid the settlements where the banks and telegraph offices were, he could not get fresh supplies. Then he saw Laurent remarked his disturbance.

“I have lost something. We must go back,” he said.

“It is not possible,” rejoined the half-breed. “If we leave camp, we freeze.”

Seymour hesitated. By and by he must pay his guide another sum, and when he had done so the notes in his pocket would not carry him far. He imagined he had pulled out the wallet when he gave the Indian his tobacco, but perhaps it fell from his pocket when he went down the rock. Anyhow, he must go back some distance, and he doubted if flesh and blood could face the storm.

“Tonight it is not possible, and in the morning you might meet those others,” Laurent resumed. “When we have let them go in front we make a proper search.”

Seymour saw the half-breed studied him. So long as he was paid, Seymour thought he would do all he had engaged to do, but he must not know his employer had lost his money.

“Perhaps it is not very important, and I must wait,” he said, but when he lay down his sleep was disturbed.

Their next march was slower. At dark, Laurent went off alone, and returning some time afterward, said he had seen a fire in the trees. On the trail, one slept soundest before midnight, he remarked, and in three or four hours they would steal into the others’ camp.

They did so, and Laurent seized the slab of pork. Seymour burned the flour bag and cut the feet from Stannard’s stockings. Then he stopped for a few moments and looked about. Snow sifted between the branches, and by morning their footmarks would be covered. Wheeler’s head was turned the other way, and his even breathing implied that he would not wake. Stannard slept quietly, and when the firelight touched his face, his look was calm.

The blood came to Seymour’s skin and his mouth got hard. His habit was not to indulge his passions, but he was human, and since Alice’s scornful refusal he had let himself go. Stannard had baffled him, and he imagined Alice loved the meddling fool. Impulses he had not thought were his moved him, and his glance rested on the sledge, from which Laurent

tried to pull Wheeler's gun. If they noiselessly hauled away the sledge, his triumphant antagonist soon would freeze.

Seymour's mouth was parched, he clenched his fists, and his pose was stiff, for passion and his cultivated intelligence fought. When he shot Houghton he had let himself go, and it had cost him much; he must not again be conquered by blind, revengeful lusts. Besides, Laurent was about, and if he could be persuaded to steal the food, he might afterward demand an extravagant reward for saying nothing. For all that, Seymour wavered; savage impulse and reason nearly balanced, and then the half-breed's laugh tipped the beam.

Laurent pushed the cut stockings with his foot, and his laugh was low and guttural, but Stannard moved and turned his head. If he woke, the jest might be expensive, and Jan beckoned Seymour and picked up the slab of bacon. Treading noiselessly, they vanished in the gloom.

When they reached their camp, Seymour urged their turning back at daybreak, but Laurent refused. The farmers, he argued, were not fools, and would soon find out the trick. For a day, at all events, they must be given a trail to follow; and then Laurent wanted wind or fresh snow to fill up the marks. His argument carried weight, and Seymour, rather unwillingly, agreed.

They carried out the half-breed's plan, and turning back when he was satisfied, steered for the spot where the Indian messenger joined them. For some time they scraped back and sifted the snow, but the wallet was not about, and they pushed on for their other camp. The march was long and hard, and Seymour, breaking the trail for Laurent, pondered drearily. He was getting exhausted and could not much longer front the arctic cold. His plan had worked, and for a time he had done with Stannard, but he dare not stop. Before he did so he must find his wallet.

When they arrived at the other camp, he set his mouth and turned from his companion, for the half-breed must not know the knock he had got. The rock from which he had fallen was covered by snow, and the wind had piled the white drifts against the bank at the bottom. Until winter broke, nobody would find the wallet, and if he was in Canada when the snow melted he would be in jail.

Seymour was frankly daunted. Unless he had money, he could not hope to baffle the police, but the most part of his money was gone. Then unless Laurent were generously paid one must not reckon on his stanchness. Seymour might be forced to cheat the fellow, and he admitted that to do so

implied some risk. He looked at the white woods and shivered. All was desolate and forbidding. His numbed body shrank from the cold.

CHAPTER XXX

A FORLORN HOPE

After a few moments Seymour sat down on the loaded sledge. He was tired and the knock had left him limply slack. For all that, Laurent must not know, and he tried for calm.

“The thing I lost is gone for good,” he said, with pretended carelessness. “Well, we have not yet talked about our next move and we cannot stop in this freezing wind. Where do we go?”

Laurent gave him a queer, searching glance. Since they turned back all the other had thought about was to reach the spot and look for the object he had lost. In the circumstances, one might guess what it was.

“It is plain we do not go north,” the half-breed replied in French. “The Red-coats are in the woods, and the stubborn pigs of farmers are on the river. By and by they will find we are not in front, and return to look for us. You do not want to meet them, my friend! We go south.”

“But the railroads and the settlements are south. Where there are houses and telegraphs one cannot hide.”

The half-breed shrugged. “For me it is equal. So long as I am not in the North when the Red-coats arrive, I am content. Well, I have another cabin nobody knows about, and I think we will stop there until the police are gone. A good cabin is warmer than the woods and I expect the snow will soon cover our tracks. Courage. Come on!”

He seized the traces, and pulling the sledge up the bank plunged into the woods. Seymour labored after him, and when the snow began to fall they pitched camp in the thick timber.

Three or four days afterward they reached a small log shack, built against a rock in a ravine. The roof was rudely made of branches and bark, and snow had sifted under the broken door, but the big fire they lighted in the open hearth soon banished the frost, and Seymour slept for fourteen hours. When he awoke, Laurent was cooking the stolen pork, and after breakfast they loafed and smoked in front of the snapping branches. By and by Laurent knocked out his pipe.

“Before they built the railroad the cabin was a trapper’s camp,” he said. “Now I think nobody knows about it, and if one had food, one might stop for the winter. Well, we have some pork, but of flour and tea and other things there is not enough for long, and I go to the settlement. In six days I am back with a load. You give me some money.”

Seymour wanted Laurent to think him generous, and he pulled out twenty-five dollars. The half-breed took the bills and smiled.

“At the new settlements food is dear, and there is another thing. I agreed for a good sum to go with you, and I have but got half.”

“When the other half is earned it will be paid,” said Seymour firmly.

“Me, I do all that is possible,” Laurent rejoined, and his look got truculent. “Nobody looks for you at my cabin, and when the Red-coats are tired, if you like, we return to the North. But unless I am with you, you will freeze in the woods. Well, I am a poor man. I want my money.”

“Until our arrangement is carried out, you must wait.”

“Ah!” said Laurent, “you lose your wallet! Twenty-five dollars is all you have got!”

“It is not all,” Seymour replied, and feeling for the roll of bills, pulled with pretended carelessness the automatic pistol from his pocket. He pushed back the pistol and closed his hand on the notes.

“I pay when the job is finished,” he resumed. “If you want your reward when it is due, you will start for the settlement and be back in six days. All you will take is the sledge and the food you need for the journey.”

Laurent knew men, and for a few moments he pondered with an Indian’s calm. Seymour had meant him to see the pistol, but he dared not let him see the roll of bills. Laurent reflected that he had already got a useful sum, and the white man was exhausted by fatigue and cold. In fact, he was going to be an awkward embarrassment, and if he froze his guide might be made accountable. For all that, his nerve was not broken; he was not the sort one tried to rob.

“Very well. I go for the food,” he said.

In half an hour he set off, and when he vanished behind the trees Seymour frowned. On the whole, he thought his experiment had cost him twenty-five dollars, for he doubted if he would see the fellow again. Well, if Laurent did not come back, Seymour would not be forced to pay him the sum agreed. Then, although he had taken some food, he had left supplies for

a week or two, and fuel was plentiful. Besides, Seymour was worn out, and to loaf by the fire was some relief.

He waited for six days; and then one evening lighted his pipe and pondered. All was quiet, but sometimes a branch snapped in the frost, and although the flames leaped cheerfully about the stone fireplace, the shack was not warm. Laurent had not returned, and Seymour's stock of food was getting low.

He did not know where Stannard was. If the Indian's news was accurate, the police had gone north; Laurent thought their business was to track the liquor smugglers, but Seymour doubted.

Anyhow, he could not stop at the shack for long, and if he pushed south for three or four days, he ought to make the railroad. When he reached a settlement he might run some risk, but, after all, Stannard and the police thought him in the wilds. They would not reckon on his steering east for the populated belt and the prairie towns. In fact, the proper place to hide was, perhaps, a town, particularly since the hotels were crowded by men whose occupation the frost had stopped. Then, by and by, he might steal across to the United States.

He must, however, get money, and the agents for a Montreal bank would meet his check. He himself dared not present the check, but another might, after some time was gone. It must be somebody who knew him, and Seymour thought he saw a plan. The plan was something of a forlorn hope, but he did not see another and he could not stop in the woods. In fact, he must start in the morning and he began to make his pack.

Seymour started at daybreak, and reaching a settlement on the railroad, rested for a day or two, and took the cars east. Nobody bothered him, and on board the train he pictured Stannard obstinately searching the frozen wilds.

Stannard, however, had given up the search, and one afternoon he got awkwardly off the sledge. In the woods the snow was thin, and for three or four hours Wheeler had hauled him along. Hugh was nearly frozen, and although his foot hurt horribly, to get up was some relief. Anyhow, he must help pitch camp.

After a few hesitating steps, he stopped and his mouth went crooked. The pain that had for some time bothered him had recently gone into his leg. Limping to the branches by the fire, he sat down.

"You didn't want to get up. When I'd fixed things, I was coming for you," Wheeler remarked.

“I reckoned you had had enough,” said Hugh. “In fact, I think you ought to leave me and shove on to the settlements for help.”

“If I’m forced I’ll go; but we got grub for a while, and when we can’t stand for a full day’s hike, we can stand for a half.”

“You’re a first-class pal. Where you have got to break the trail, and haul a hundred and sixty pounds a five-hours’ hike is pretty good work!”

Wheeler said nothing. He was a plainsman of the old type, and sternly practical. Since he did not mean to leave his crippled friend, there was no use in talking. He began to mix dough for a bannock, and Hugh shivered by the fire.

When he was satisfied that Seymour had baffled him, he had started south. His outward march was obliquely from the railroad, and now, steering directly for it, he ought to cut the track by a much shorter line, but at some distance from his starting point. His advance, however, was slow and painful, and after a day or two he could not force himself along.

A day’s rest in camp did not help much. His foot and leg throbbed, and he did not sleep. In the morning, when he was fresh, his habit was to limp behind the sledge, his fists clenched, and his forehead lined. When the pain conquered him, he crawled on to the load and slowly froze. Wheeler stuck to his hauling pluckily, but he could not keep it up for long. Hugh did not know how far the railroad was, and dared not try to calculate.

By and by Wheeler signaled and Hugh looked up. Two men pushed through the wood. One hauled a neatly-loaded sledge, and Hugh knew them for the Royal Northwest Mounted Police.

“Hello, boys!” said Wheeler. “I guess you’re not after us.”

“If your grub-sack will stand for it, we’ll hold you up for some bannock and coffee,” an athletic young fellow replied, with a laugh. “We hit your trail a piece back. Say, you’re going slow!”

“My partner’s crippled. He got his foot froze.”

The other policeman gave Hugh a sympathetic nod. He was older than his companion, and wore the stamp of authority.

“Hard luck, farmer! Your mate has hauled you along?”

“For some days,” said Hugh. “Do you know I’m a farmer?”

“You are certainly not a woodsman. We studied up your camps.”

“The bannock and corned hash won’t keep hot. You better get busy,” Wheeler remarked.

When the meal was over the officer inquired how far north they had gone, and resumed: “Did you meet up with an Englishman and a half-breed guide?”

“Who is the man you want?”

“Francis Stephen Seymour; age thirty-five, height five-feet-nine, complexion pale——” the officer replied, as if he quoted from a document. “Did you see the fellow?”

“We did not,” said Hugh. “All the same, I imagine he was in our camp one night.”

“He stole our pork,” said Wheeler. “Burned our flour bag, and cut my partner’s stockings.”

“But why——” the officer inquired with surprise.

“The dispute began in the Old Country,” Hugh replied. “Then Seymour not long since shot up a friend of mine. I expect you are acting on James Houghton’s complaint?”

“My instructions are from division headquarters,” said the officer shortly. “Do you want to lodge a fresh charge about a fight?”

Hugh was frankly puzzled. It looked as if the other did not know about the shooting, but since the Royal Northwest knew where to use reserve he must not ask.

“If Houghton has not complained, I think I’ll let it go,” he said.

“Very well. I’ll note who you are, and then you can tell me where you hit Seymour’s trail.”

Hugh supplied some particulars, and the officer signaled his companion.

“I must make the settlement and use the telegraph. Take the sledge and all the grub but four days’ rations, and watch out by Wolseley Creek. When I get fresh orders I’ll send for you.”

In five minutes the young constable was gone, and the other turned to Hugh.

“If your partner hustles he won’t stop me much. Climb onto the load and let’s pull out.”

Now two men hauled the sledge, their progress was fast. A doctor at the settlement dressed Hugh's foot, and two or three days afterward he narrated his adventures in Houghton's homestead. Houghton's wound was healing, but some time would go before he got about.

"It looks as if my habit was to give you my awkward jobs," he remarked.

"In a way, the job was mine," said Hugh. "You did not inform the police about the shooting?"

"That is so," Houghton agreed in an apologetic voice. "I felt I'd hate the notoriety, my grandfather might be annoyed, and so forth—— If you had dragged the fellow back, I'd have bluffed about sending him to jail, but so long as he engaged to leave us alone, and get out of Canada, I think I'd have let him go."

Hugh nodded. Although Jim was a prairie farmer, he had inherited the pride of the old school. His sort did not publicly fight out a family quarrel. Moreover, for him to do so might be awkward for Hugh.

"All the same, the police are hunting for Seymour. Do you think the doctor put them wise?"

"He promised he would not."

"Then their wanting him is queer."

Houghton smiled. He thought he saw a light, but Hugh perhaps was rather dull. Anyhow, he must not yet excite hopes that might not be fulfilled.

"Oh, well," he said, "we must wait. If Frank is arrested, we may find out something."

Hugh frowned. "I'd like to indulge you, Jim, but I cannot. As soon as I can pull on my boot, I'm going back to the railroad. My luck might turn, and if I can find your relation, he must state who really stole your grandfather's notes."

"You are an obstinate fellow," Houghton remarked. "However, I hope you may be able to force the confession you want."

He lighted a cigarette and pondered. On the whole, he thought Hugh's luck would turn, and it might do so soon. In the meantime, he was not going to talk about it. They must wait and see.

Hugh was not at Houghton's for long. At the warm homestead his foot got better quickly, and as soon as he could limp about he sent for soft Indian moccasins and started for the northern railroad.

To take the woods was impossible, but he resolved to hunt the settlements along the new track. Since the police had stopped Seymour's road to the north, he must sometime return to the line for supplies, and when he arrived Hugh hoped to be about.

Loafing, one afternoon, by the stove at a dreary boarding-house, he heard a locomotive bell. To watch the train arrive might break the monotony, and Hugh went for his coat. Two or three people got down from the cars and when the train rolled away along the snowy track Hugh saw Ted.

"Did Jim send you?" he inquired eagerly. "I suppose he has got some news?"

"I hate to disappoint you, but Jim did not know I went," Ted replied with a grin.

"Another train goes in the morning and I ought to send you back."

"Hayward, who drove me to the station, didn't stop at the settlement, and I might wait for some time before I could get home. Then I have not much money."

"My wad is not very large," Hugh remarked. "Well, I suppose I must be resigned, although I don't see why you joined me."

Ted gave him an apologetic smile. "Perhaps my help is not remarkably useful, but Wheeler's not with you, and, as a rule, when you undertake Jim's jobs you get hurt."

They went to the boarding-house and Ted asked: "Have you found out something fresh?"

"I have not and I don't know where the police are," said Hugh. "All the same, I think they have stopped Seymour's road west, and for us to go the other way might be a good plan. If we went by short stages, we might get some news at the settlements."

"Alice is at Brandon, and when Galt was at Jim's he invited us to come across," Ted remarked.

Hugh gave him a keen glance but the boy's look was sober.

"If I find out nothing fresh by morning, we'll start east. I am, however, not yet going to Brandon," he said dryly.

CHAPTER XXXI

SEYMOUR'S CAPITULATION

Dusk was falling at Brandon and Alice, going home along the snowy street, stopped by a corner. She had thought somebody followed her, and when she looked back a man stood in front of an illuminated window. He waited, but when she turned her head by the next block he had again advanced. Alice went faster, although she thought she had no grounds to be disturbed and in a few minutes she would be at home.

When she was level with the house, the man was a few yards off, and Alice's heart beat. At length she knew it was Seymour, and her first impulse was to run for the steps, but he signaled commandingly and she waited. She must not admit she was frightened.

"You know me?" he said. "We must talk for a few minutes; I am coming in."

"Don't you think that would be rash?" Alice inquired.

Seymour smiled. "I'll risk it. Galt will not leave his office for some time; I asked about him at the hotel. Mrs. Galt is at the drygoods store, and since she sent you on, I expect she will not arrive just yet. However, I am not going to bully you and five minutes is all I want."

Alice's curiosity was excited, and she reflected that the Chinese servant was in the house. She went up the steps and called the big fellow.

"Wait in the passage, Ah Lee," she said. "If I ring, you will come at once."

Then she showed Seymour into a room, and indicating a chair, sat down some distance off. The spot commanded the door and the electric bell, and she knew Frank remarked her caution.

"I do not want to hurt you, and if I tried your house-boy would soon knock me out," he said. "In fact, to some extent, I'm in your power."

Alice was highly strung, but she was rather conscious of hostility than alarm. Seymour's face was pinched, his furs were torn and greasy, and he looked broken. Alice was not at all pitiful; she had good grounds to hate Frank, but she admitted her curiosity.

"Why did you risk coming to Brandon?" she asked.

“For one thing, my friends in Canada are not numerous.”

“Jim Galt and I are not your friends.”

“Your antagonism is rather obvious, but perhaps it’s not remarkable,” Seymour rejoined with ironical calm. “At all events, you know me; I’d sooner not look up my bankers, and my money’s gone. In the Canadian frost frugality is hard, but I don’t expect you to sympathize and I am not going to beg. The bank at Montreal will meet my check.”

“Ah!” said Alice. “You are afraid the police have warned the bank, and if you presented the check you might be seized for shooting Jim! But I don’t see why I should help you escape your punishment.”

Seymour gave her a thoughtful glance. She was frankly hostile, but had Houghton not made a quick recovery, she would have taken another line. The Chinaman was in the passage and a telephone call would bring the police. Her coolness implied that Jim was not much hurt. Well, he had calculated on something like that.

“On the whole, I imagine Jim would sooner I was not tried for the shooting,” he said. “He’s fastidious, and my exploit would make a romantic story for the Western newspapers. Then there’s another drawback. Sometimes revenge is expensive, but in the circumstances mine would be cheap. I expect you see where I lead?”

“Mr. Stannard is not afraid. Perhaps you know he looks for you.”

“I was in his camp one night,” said Seymour with a laugh. “If I were a theatrical villain, I might have carried off his food and left him to starve, but I was satisfied to joke. Hugh is an impulsive fool and does not weigh the risks he runs. All the same, if I went to jail, he would not enjoy his freedom very long.”

“After all, I doubt if you really dare allow the robbery at Gatesgarth to be properly inquired about,” Alice rejoined in a scornful voice.

Seymour said nothing and she wondered whether he was disturbed, but she had not time to speculate. The important thing was, he did know Hugh was in Manitoba. He obviously thought Hugh her lover, and perhaps he was not mistaken. At all events, she meant to fight for Hugh.

“Mr. Stannard wanted to surrender and stand his trial,” she resumed as coolly as possible. “I thought he ought to do so, and we could show he was not the thief, but the revelations it implied would humiliate Mr. Houghton and our friends in the Old Country. Besides, they might be awkward for you.

Well, if we can satisfy you I expect you would be willing to leave Stannard alone?”

“Your supposition is accurate,” Seymour agreed with ironical politeness. “All I want is some money in exchange for a check, and I’ll agree not to bother you and your friends again——”

He stopped for a moment and his look got rather grim, as if he fought some strange embarrassment. Then he went on:

“You are keen and you ought to see I don’t mean to cheat. When I was in the woods I lost my wallet, and in the Canadian winter one cannot go without proper food; but cold and want alone would not force me to use your money. Since you know I loved you, perhaps you can picture my humiliation——For all that, if I go to jail for shooting Jim, I’m done for; but if I can reach the United States, I may yet make my mark. To be rid of me for good is worth something to you and Jim. Well, I’m willing to go.”

Alice’s eyes sparkled and she colored angrily. At the beginning Seymour’s talents and the hint she got of reserved force attracted her, but when she knew him she shrank. Although she had approved his ambition, she began to see it was ruthless; he would not stop for obstacles that daunted normal, scrupulous men. Now she frankly hated him.

“You did not love me,” she rejoined. “I expect I pleased your eye; you like the smoothness of my skin, and the color of my hair——For a girl, perhaps, you thought me intelligent! Well, I was not flattered; the qualities I hoped would move my lover were not the qualities that attracted you. Besides, you began to see your rashness and weigh my drawbacks. I am poor, and you must not let your romantic impulses carry you away.”

“Not long since I was willing to take the plunge.”

“Sometimes perhaps you are like other men, but we will not dispute about it,” said Alice coldly.

She saw he was resolved to escape from Canada and his resolve was logical, but she felt he had an object she did not know. If he went, however, he dared not come back, and she had just got some money from the bank.

“If I give you the sum you need, you must write a statement admitting you took Houghton’s notes and Mrs. Maitland’s pearls. And you must state where they are.”

“Then you don’t imagine I used the money?”

“I am not a fool,” said Alice. “Your plan was obvious. After all, you are not a common thief.”

“Oh, well,” said Seymour, “I suppose I cannot refuse, and if I reach America, for Houghton to find out will not hurt very much. But Mrs. Galt will soon arrive——”

He stated the sum he needed and when Alice declared it was more than she had, he shrugged.

“Then, I must be frugal. Before you send the check to the bank, you will wait seven days.”

Alice indicated Galt’s desk and went for the money. When she returned Seymour gave her the check and a document.

“Our interview has rather been businesslike than romantic, and perhaps I ought to state that two witnesses are generally required. The bankers, however, know my hand.”

Alice studied the document and gave him a roll of bills.

“It was only possible for our interview to be businesslike. Good-by,” she said.

She rang the electric bell and the Chinaman went with Seymour to the porch. When the door shut she sat down and stretched her arms across the table. She had borne some strain and now she was slack and trembling. By and by she began to speculate about Hugh. For his sake, she had given Seymour all she had and extorted his confession, but perhaps Hugh would sooner she had not meddled. She pictured him stubbornly searching for Frank, whom she had helped to cross the frontier. But in a few minutes Mrs. Galt would arrive and Alice got up. Until the seven days Frank had stipulated were gone perhaps she ought not to give Myra her confidence.

CHAPTER XXXII

THE LAST ENCOUNTER

Hugh and Ted got down from the train at a small settlement thirty miles farther east. They went to a new wooden hotel and the landlord inquired if they were stopping long.

“For a night or two you can have a room, and then I guess you must make out with a shake-down on the floor,” he said. “A contractor’s gang is coming in from the woods, and they’ll bunk with me while they load up their stuff.”

“Where was the boys’ camp?” Hugh asked.

“About thirty miles back; you got to go some distance for good spruce poles. They been up there since the snow fell, but the boss sent a message they were breaking camp and might be around for a day or two.”

Hugh said he was not fastidious and when the gang were at the house he would sleep where the landlord liked. Since the men had been for some time in the woods, he might get some news from them. After a day or two heavy bob-sledges, carrying spruce trunks, arrived from the north, and the teamsters stacked their loads by the track. Hugh imagined the poles were for telephone lines and the teamsters were a hard lot. As a rule, the men who labor at the snowy lumber camps are not at all cultivated.

For the most part, his cautious inquiries were not politely received. A few stiffs and hobos, looking for a job, had hit the camp, but the boss did not hire up trash like that. If Hugh wanted dead-beats, his plan was to take the cars for Winnipeg; if the job was a police job, he wanted to watch out. The boys were lumberjacks and had not much use for helping the Red-coats.

Hugh thought their rudeness sprang from the lumberman’s dislike for meddling authority, but he spotted one, a sort of second foreman, whose antagonism had perhaps some other grounds. He, however, found out that although the most part of the gang would take their pay and scatter, some were going east with the logs and the contractor’s plant. Nothing indicated that Seymour was at the camp, but the foreman’s hostility was perhaps significant. Hugh thought if he were Frank, and met the gang, he might bribe the fellow to smuggle him on board the cars. The police would not inquire about a bunch of lumbermen.

At all events, Hugh resolved to wait. If Seymour had bought a confederate, he would not loaf about the hotel. The other would find him some occupation until the gang was ready to start. Anyhow, the time would not be long, for a load of cook's tools and camp furniture had arrived. On the next evening the landlord signed Hugh to his desk.

"If you and the kid want to stay, you can have a pretty good room tomorrow."

"I don't know——" said Hugh. "Are the boys going?"

The other gave him a warning glance and Hugh saw the foreman was not far off. It looked as if he was interested, and the landlord opened his register.

"The gang goes out on the east-bound in the morning. You can have room six," he said and added in a low voice: "The teamsters and two or three who are cleaning up will put the horses on board the evening freight. She comes along about four o'clock."

"Very well," said Hugh carelessly. "I'll be here another night anyhow. Book me number six."

Hugh had got a useful hint and he was at the station to see the men start, but Seymour was not among them, and when the train rolled away he pondered. After all, he did not know if Seymour had gone to the lumber camp: in fact, only the foreman's suspiciously watching Hugh suggested that he might have done so. The man perhaps did not want to lose his bribe. On the whole, Hugh imagined there was not much use in his loafing about the dreary settlement.

His foot, however, still bothered him. All he could do was to watch the line, and two or three of the lumbermen had not yet come down from the camp. The cars the others had loaded were in the side-track, the horses were at the stable, and would be put on board when the train was signaled. Hugh was getting cold, and since he did not want to join the teamsters at the pool-room, he set off along the trail to the woods. By and by his foot began to hurt and forced him to stop in the trees by a ravine. The dead underbrush cut the wind and he must rest for a few minutes before he went back.

After a time he heard a sledge-team and he got behind a tree. The steaming horses plunged down the hill and when they climbed the other bank three or four men jumped off the sledge. The last of the lumbermen had left the camp, but Seymour was not with the party. Hugh waited for the sledge to vanish behind the bluff, and then beat his hands and limped back to the hotel.

When dinner was over he pulled a chair to the stove and lighted his pipe. The afternoon was dark and the room was bleak and cold, but his foot hurt and he resigned himself to loaf. He had warned Ted he must not question the men, and although the boy prowled about the track and stables he found out nothing fresh.

About four o'clock the teamsters put their horses in the cars, and some time afterward a bright beam pierced the falling dusk. Hugh fastened his coat and went to the station. The agent, swinging a lantern, crossed the rails, and an indistinct group waited by the cars in the side-track. Hugh strolled past the men and glanced into the caboose. Seymour was not about; he had not really expected to see him. He rather thought the fellow was across the frontier and all chance to vindicate himself was gone.

The freight-train stopped and the rails and snow sparkled in the reflections from the head-lamp. Outside the dazzling illumination, all by contrast was very dark, and Hugh thought nobody saw him by the lumber-cars. In a few minutes the locomotive bell began to toll and two men hurriedly crossed the snow, one a dozen yards in front of the other, whose step was awkward. Then Ted stole round the car and touched Hugh.

"Those fellows are from the stables and I think the last man was in the hay-mow. Anyhow, when I looked in a minute ago all I saw was the other," he gasped.

Hugh pushed him back against the car and turned his head. The uncoupled locomotive rolled along the line and the snow shone like silver. The man Ted indicated was near the rails and the head-lamp picked out his face. He stopped, as if he were dazzled, and Hugh jumped across the track. The fellow was Seymour.

For a moment or two they were enveloped by the flood of light and Hugh saw the other knew him, but he did not try to get away. He balanced himself awkwardly, as if he were ill or numbed by cold; his face was pinched and he shivered. Then the bell clanged a few yards behind them and the dazzling beam moved ahead. Seymour shrugged with ironical resignation.

"I expect Ted spotted me at the stable. His luck is better than yours——"

Somebody shouted and waved a lantern. The locomotive had crossed the switches and rolled back noisily for the lumber-cars. Hugh seized Seymour, who did not move.

“In five minutes I’d have cheated you. As soon as the cars are coupled up the train will start,” he resumed coolly. “However, you need not use much force. I am ill.”

His voice was flat and spiritless and Hugh thought he did not pretend. For all that, the cars were but five or six yards off, and he was not going to run a risk.

“We’ll see you to the hotel,” he said grimly. “Come on; the cold’s pretty fierce.”

“If you are resolved, I must go; but I don’t think your stopping me will help you much.”

“Then you are not very keen,” Hugh rejoined. “To begin with, I want your written confession that you took Houghton’s notes and Mrs. Maitland’s pearls. There’s another thing—— but we’ll talk about it at the hotel. I’m nearly frozen.”

“If you insist, I’ll go in a few moments; but Alice has a statement in my hand. I was at Brandon not long ago,” said Seymour and narrated his interview. Then he resumed: “Alice, in exchange for a check, supplied the money I needed for my escape. I don’t imagine she was moved by pity; I rather think she saw my statement clearing you is all your friends can reasonably want. If you are not a fool, you’ll see her supposition’s justified.”

Hugh’s heart beat, but he must weigh things and he tried for calm. The trouble was he had obviously not much time. Looking up the line, he saw the engineer and the station-agent talking. As soon as the man had got his instructions, he would pull out the cars. Hugh had not much grounds to trust Seymour, but somehow he was persuaded the fellow did not lie.

“If I let you get on board, I lose you for good,” he said.

“On the whole, it ought to be some relief,” said Seymour dryly. “However, if you are not satisfied, you have time to telegraph Alice and afterward warn the police to search the train for me farther along the line. You need not bother about my jumping off when we stop at a water tank. I’m ill, and all I want is to steal across the frontier. If I’m left alone, I think I see a plan.”

Hugh did not doubt he was ill, for he saw him shiver and his pose was limp. Moreover, he thought Jim would be satisfied to know the brute was gone. Yet for them to talk about it calmly was strange. Their last encounter was not at all the rather theatrical climax he had sternly pictured.

“How did you get ill?” he inquired.

“I don’t know that it’s important, but you pushed us hard on the river, and I was afterward forced to lurk about and go without proper food. I think the cold really broke me—— But they are signaling the engineer.”

The cars shocked and a lantern flashed. Ted turned and touched Hugh.

“He’s beaten and cannot bother us. Besides, if he stopped, we might be forced to acknowledge him for our relation. Suppose you let him go?”

Hugh pushed Seymour to the cars.

“Ted’s argument tips the beam. Get on board!”

Seymour climbed into the caboose, the bell clanged, and thick smoke, flung up in explosive blasts, steamed along the train. Wheels groaned and braced frames rang, for the iron had shrunk in the biting frost, but the couplings held and the cars lurched ahead. When the tail-lights swung round a curve Hugh beat his hands and crossed the track to the hotel.

CHAPTER XXXIII

HUGH MAKES GOOD

After the cold on the plains, Houghton's room was almost insupportably hot, and for a few moments Hugh leaned against the table. Since daybreak he had shivered on the driving-seat of a Cloverleaf wagon, and now his head swam as the blood returned to his frozen skin. Ted was not as much embarrassed, for he had buried himself in prairie hay at the bottom of the wagon.

"Keep back from the stove," Hugh ordered him, and limping to the chair Houghton fetched, awkwardly pulled off his thick mittens. "Will you light me a cigarette, Jim; my hands are frozen."

Houghton gave him a cigarette and waited for a few moments. Then he said, "Well?"

"Seymour's gone. We found him at Mattaginic. He got on board a freight-train going east and seemed to think he could make the frontier——"

"Hugh ought to state I persuaded him to let the fellow go," Ted interrupted.

"Perhaps you are not entitled to boast about it, and by and by you must account for your being there," Houghton remarked. "But go on, Hugh."

Hugh narrated his meeting Seymour. On the whole, he thought Jim philosophical; to see he was not annoyed was some relief.

"Well, well!" he said when Hugh stopped. "If Frank does make the boundary, I think I'll be resigned, but I doubt. Soon after you went two police troopers looked me up to inquire about him."

"It's queer—— Unless, after all, you reported his shooting you."

"I did not. You may get some light another time," said Houghton, as if he were amused. "Anyhow, you decided you would not give up my relation. In the circumstances, your generosity was rather remarkable!"

"The cost was rather yours than mine," Hugh rejoined. "Then, there is not much use in knocking out a beaten antagonist, and Seymour declared he had given Miss Cunningham a statement admitting he himself took your grandfather's notes."

“You believed he wrote the statement?”

“Perhaps it’s strange, but I felt I might run the risk,” Hugh replied thoughtfully.

Houghton smiled. “Well, for once, Frank did not cheat. Alice has got his confession and will hand it to you soon. Perhaps she thought the document too valuable to mail; perhaps she reflected that she had not yet inquired for me. At all events, we expect her and Mrs. Galt tomorrow.”

“That’s fine! Alice is a first-class sort,” said Ted.

Hugh said nothing, but his heart beat and he agreed with Ted. Where he was baffled Alice had conquered; moreover, she had fought for him. Yet he was not satisfied that Houghton had told him all he knew.

At daybreak they started for the railroad. When the train arrived Houghton said he must get his team and would pick up the others at the hotel; he had not wanted the horses to stand in the frost. Mrs. Galt went off with him, but the afternoon was calm and Hugh and Alice walked up and down the beaten snow.

“You found Seymour? I am glad you were not revengeful,” she said presently.

Hugh thrilled. Alice’s approval was his reward; moreover, he knew Seymour’s escape did not account for her satisfaction.

“To act for another is embarrassing, and perhaps I was slack where I ought to have been firm. But since you agree and Jim is not annoyed——”

“I expect you knew the line Jim would take, and perhaps you knew I would agree,” said Alice with a smile. “Well, I really think Frank ought to take his punishment, and had the police found him I would not have meddled. For us to give him up was another thing.”

In a way she was not logical, but Hugh himself was not. Alice’s fastidiousness was the proud fastidiousness of the old school. Her sort did not carry their disputes to a public court. Moreover, she implied that he belonged to her circle. Hugh reflected with grim humor that it did not look like that. His skin was darkened by the frost and his furs were old and shabby; in fact, he was rather obviously an impoverished farmer. Alice pulled out an envelope and faint color touched her face.

“Frank wrote the enclosure at Brandon. I think you’ll be interested.”

“Ah!” said Hugh, “you have brought me his confession——”

He stopped. Alice gave him the envelope, but somehow he got a hint of disappointment. She had thought to carry him joyous news and, were he not a fool, he might have played up.

“Jim told you?” she said calmly.

“Seymour did so; I rather forced Jim to admit you had the document. Jim uses some tact; I expect you know I do not.”

“Oh, well,” said Alice, smiling, “you are stanch, and the main thing is to be sincere. But are you not going to read Frank’s confession?”

Hugh tore the envelope and when he looked up his eyes sparkled.

“That’s fine; you were fine! Jim and you know his hand; I don’t think a lawyer could dispute the document. Well, you have given me my freedom and helped me throw down a load I hated to carry.”

Alice blushed and turned her head.

“Jim has got his horses. He mustn’t wait for us.”

They went to the hotel and a few minutes afterward Houghton started his team. When dark fell the cold was biting, but all were young and their mood was buoyant. Mrs. Wheeler had cooked a feast, and Hugh thought the evening at the homestead the happiest he had known. At length, however, Mrs. Galt and Alice went to bed, and Houghton gave Hugh a friendly smile.

“I don’t know if I was justified, but I kept a letter back for you. For one thing, I knew what the letter was about.”

Hugh took the envelope and for some minutes was absorbed. The letter was from Gatesgarth and Mr. Houghton’s hand was shaky.

“When you left my house, my eagerness to find my grandson led me to agree to measures I now admit we ought not to have used,” Houghton wrote. “After a time, however, I had some grounds to think my anxiety was exaggerated and your judgment was better than mine. In fact, it began to be obvious that you had, in difficult circumstances, stanchly carried out the duty you had undertook for Jim. Perhaps I ought to have acknowledged my injustice, but I felt I must be certain. I hope you can make some allowance for an old man’s cautious obstinacy.

“From the beginning my sister was your champion, and her resolve to vindicate you to some extent accounts for our recently finding the vanished notes. All the circumstances indicated that you had not put the roll where it was discovered, and moreover, pointed to the culprit. Well, I admit I got a

nasty knock and to implicate my relation hurt; but to do so was my just punishment.

“The police have applied to Ottawa for Francis Seymour’s extradition, and if he is sent back, you will be publicly vindicated by his trial. To carry out my duty in this manner was all the amends I could make for the undeserved trouble you have borne, and if it is possible for you and Jim to help the Canadian officers, I hope you will not hesitate——”

Houghton closed with a generous apology, and Hugh pictured the old fellow’s humiliated pride and his resolve to be just. The picture moved him and he gave Houghton the letter.

“Your grandfather is a sportsman, Jim.”

“He’s an old-fashioned English landlord,” Houghton remarked and, studying the letter, resumed: “But you mustn’t exaggerate. To sic the police to his relation no doubt cost him something; but, after all, it was the only line.”

“The only line possible for a man like that! Well, to know I did not stop Seymour is some satisfaction, and, for your grandfather’s sake, I hope he’ll make the United States.”

“If the brute does get across and cheats the Immigration Bureau, I rather sympathize with the Americans,” said Houghton.

Hugh lighted a fresh cigarette. His troubles were vanishing, but by and by he looked up.

“Why did you keep back the letter, Jim?”

“I thought I’d wait until Alice arrived,” Houghton replied with a twinkle. “You see, when she forced Frank to own himself the thief her object was to clear you, and I rather wanted her to enjoy her triumph. I thought for you not to know about the letter might help you play up. I suppose you did so?”

Hugh’s face got red. When Alice gave him Seymour’s confession he had not played up as he ought.

“Sometimes I’m a darn fool,” he said.

“Oh, well,” said Houghton, smiling, “as a rule, your object’s good. However, it looks as if you don’t yet know Frank. Since he’s a doctor, he saw his shot had not knocked me out, and he did not take the woods because he thought I would call the police. He had some grounds to imagine they *were* on his track.”

“Ah!” said Hugh. “Now I see a light——”

Houghton nodded. “When Frank left Gatesgarth he knew my grandfather had found him out and as soon as he was quite satisfied, for your sake, must apply for extradition. At Brandon he bluffed Alice, since, but for his stating where the notes and pearls were, all he admitted my relations already knew.”

“By George!” said Hugh. “The brute is cleverer than I thought. Well, at length, we have done with him, and perhaps we ought not to enlighten Miss Cunningham.”

“I will not,” Houghton agreed with a touch of humor. “By and by Alice will find us out, but since she’ll see our object, she may not be annoyed. Now I think all is plain. Suppose we go to bed?”

The homestead was rather crowded and after breakfast Hugh started for his farm. For a day or two he was occupied; and then one morning he harnessed his team. When he got near Houghton’s he saw Ted and Alice by a bluff where a steep bank dropped to a frozen pond. The boy pulled a small sledge and it looked as if he had tried to make a toboggan-slide. Hugh jumped down and Ted went to the horses.

“The frost is pretty keen and your team ought not to stand,” he said. “If you bring the sledge, I’ll take them along. The slide’s not good and I expect Alice has had enough.”

Hugh looked at Alice, and when she smiled he signed Ted to get on board. The wagon rolled away, and they followed the trail by the bluff. The morning was calm and in the sun the cold was bracing.

“Had you not arrived, we were going to drive across to your homestead,” Alice said presently.

“I would not have stayed away for long. Jim’s house, however, is not very large and I felt I mustn’t bother him too much.”

“Your modesty is typical,” Alice remarked with a queer smile. “Don’t you know Jim feels his house and all you’d like that’s his is justly yours?”

“Jim is a generous pal,” said Hugh, and for a few moments was quiet. He wanted to know when Alice would start for Brandon and he hardly dared inquire.

“I suppose you go back soon,” he resumed with pretended carelessness.

Alice was not deceived. She remarked his disturbed look.

“If we are not home in three or four days, Galt will grumble, but we mean to stay as long as we can. Myra wants a holiday, and for all the cold, I like the plains.”

“In winter the plains are dreary.”

“Jim does not grumble.”

“Jim has a good homestead and some society. A small farmer is forced to live alone. But will you be at Brandon long?”

“I don’t yet know. Myra Galt urges me to stay, and perhaps I might. I really think my help is useful, and I’ll soon be a good housekeeper.”

“To picture you cooking and mending clothes is hard,” said Hugh with a moody laugh. “Your proper background is an English country house. For a few weeks Brandon is something fresh. The merchants and hotel-keepers are not at all your sort. When the freshness wears off you’d get very bored.”

“Ah,” said Alice, “sometimes your imagination carries you away! Was not Gatesgarth, for example, bleaker than Jim’s homestead? And have you some grounds to think I would be daunted by duties women for the most part must undertake? It looks as if you would sooner I did not stay!”

Hugh said nothing. He did not doubt her pluck, but he must not be selfish. His business was to refuse all he wanted most. All the same, he began to feel he could not keep it up. Alice’s color was rather high and he got a sense of tension when she resumed:

“One tires of sports that lead one nowhere; I am not rich and my talents are not remarkable. My set and all they stand for are being crushed by forces they cannot fight, and I am not keen to be left alone like a melancholy survivor. Well, I have some strength and courage, and adventure calls. Others have found an occupation in the new countries. Why should I not?”

“You would make good where you wanted. The trouble is, it might cost you more than you think,” Hugh replied with an effort for control, and turning abruptly, faced her. “If I were selfish, I’d urge you to make the plunge, but I dare not. You see, I know the drawbacks. I doubt if you’d be happy.”

“It’s possible I would not be happy at Brandon; but I did not mean to stay with Myra Galt for good. My people were country landlords and I love horses and I love the soil. I thought I’d sell my small, vanishing inheritance and risk all I’ve got at a prairie farm.”

“The experiment is risky and you would need proper help,” Hugh remarked, with pretended carelessness.

Alice gave him a smile that fired his blood.

“That is so. I need a man I could altogether trust: a staunch, kind helper who would always see me out. Do you think I could not get a helper like that, Hugh?”

Hugh’s heart beat and he thrilled triumphantly. Yet his mouth was tight. Alice blushed, but her glance was level and proud.

“I know your modesty, and you force me to be frank. The old rules are gone, Hugh; and you are the man. Are you going to refuse?”

“My dear,” said Hugh hoarsely, “when I met you at Gatesgarth I was a broken farmer and I saw I must not be a fool. Then Seymour entangled me, and until you forced him to confess, I felt I was done with. For your sake, I tried to conquer my rash ambition, but I could not. Now all I know is, I love you.”

“Ah,” said Alice, “but that is all I want.”

Hugh took her in his arms, and when they went back to the homestead his look was joyously confident. At the door Houghton noted Alice’s blush and gave Hugh his hand. Ted’s smile was frankly triumphant.

“You are a fine old scout, Hugh, and I’m not jealous. Alice was my champion first, when I needed help like hers. Where things are awkward you can trust her, and now she has joined you, the combine’s invincible.”

Alice did not go back to England, and six months after she resolved to remain, Hugh one summer evening pulled up his horses by the ravine. When he had lighted his pipe he leaned against a wheel and glanced at Alice on the fragrant load of prairie hay. Her skin was brown, her look was tranquilly satisfied, and although she had helped Hugh put up the load he saw she was not tired.

In front, the dark-green wheat rippled in the wind. Where the spiked heads bent, one saw touches of coppery red, and across the summer fallow the oats were going yellow. Soon they would be ripe for harvest, and tall stalks and strong color promised a full bin of “prairie gold.” The snow had melted early and Hugh, urged by Alice, had bought a tractor and broken fresh soil. Her fortune was small, but it had banished his difficulties, and

since she was resolved to speculate he had not refused. In June thunder-rain stopped the cutting sand, and the wheat choked the thistles.

“The crop is fine,” said Alice. “It looks as if we are going to make good.”

“When I married you my luck turned,” said Hugh. “Not long since I saw the badger whose tunnel brought down Jim’s horse. Nobody shall shoot him. He’s my tenant for life.”

“Oh, well,” said Alice, smiling, “you did not break your leg! But, in a way, all began with Jim’s fall, and broken legs mend.”

“Like broken fortunes,” Hugh remarked. “That’s some comfort——”

He stopped, for Ted, on a young horse, pushed through the trees. Ted’s skin was bronzed, his eyes were bright, and his nervous look was gone for good. His body had filled out, his muscles had got hard, and striding the big horse gracefully he stood for splendid, conquering youth.

“Hello, Alice; I expect you’ll give me supper, and I’ll go along and light the stove,” he said, and resumed with a meaning smile: “Shall I take your horses, Hugh?”

“So long as Alice is on the load, I’ll stick to the team,” Hugh rejoined.

The young horse plunged, Ted waved his hand, and when the dust of the summer fallow rolled about his swaying figure Alice turned to Hugh.

“The crop is fine, I think we are going to win, but perhaps Ted is our triumph and our apology,” she said.

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.

[The end of *Prairie Gold* by Harold Bindloss]