The SLEEPER *of the* Moonlit Ranges

A New Novel

BY

Edison Marshall

Author of Seward's Folly, etc.

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Illustrations by
JES W. SCHLAIKJER

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Mount Pavlof, in the Aleutian Range near the end of the Alaska Peninsula, is in eruption according to the report of the Steamship La Touche, plying in adjacent waters. The entire south side of the crater has been blown off, and the flame from its crater is plainly visible at Anchorage, seven hundred miles distant; but as Pavlof is in a practically uninhabited country, little or no loss of life is feared. This eruption may equal that of Katmai, another peak of the same range, the convulsion of which in 1912 formed the famous Valley of Ten Thousand Smokes. . . .

From an Alaskan news dispatch of 1924.

The SLEEPER *of the* Moonlit Ranges

CHAPTER I

DEEP, far-carrying, mysterious as the horn of an ocean god, the whistle of an inbound ship rolled in surging bursts out of the sea's mist. It thrilled the group of loungers on the lonely dock. To the young squaws, grimacing, and muttering in the lifeless guttural tones of their kind, it meant a few hours' intercourse with the outside world, a rift in the fog of exile, perhaps a dull flirtation with various members of the ship's crew. To Tylee, superintendent of the cannery, it promised certain communion with his kind, vital as food and even more necessary than drink in this lost and empty end of the world; and besides, it assured him a stock of empty cans for the impending salmon run. To the workmen, some white with that extreme whiteness of Norse blood, but mostly breeds, it was a chance for mail from the "Outside" and a sociable break in the monotony of their lonely, outcast lives.

Only one of the waiting group did not seem to enter into the spirit of the occasion. One man stood apart, and for him the ship promised cargo neither in the shape of letters nor in that of social diversion. In that interested group he was a somber figure, not expectant like those who should have been his fellows, the natives; not hopeful like old Isak Kristensen, web-foreman at the cannery, who still looked for a letter down out of one of Norway's fjords —a letter that in ten years had never come; not anxious and full of business like the cannery superintendent; but to all outward appearance, stolid, cold, and disdainful. The only beam in dark eyes, set wide apart under straight brows, was as of dying coals—strangely arresting to all that beheld it, yet conveying nothing of the childish anticipation of the others.

Yet for no one in the group had the nearing ship such meaning as for him. There was not one so deeply stirred by its low wail in the fog, by the mystery of its advent on the face of the deep. Outwardly he was aloof and imperturbable: in his heart he knew dreams so eerie and fanciful as to estrange him even from his dark-skinned companions of Pavlof village. He was watching the phantom of the ship's hull, taking depth and substance out of the wet, gray mist; and he found it hard to credit his senses. Some poetry in his nature was quickened as if by an apparition.

It was always this way, when the ships came in. The coming was so mysterious: suddenly, out of nowhere, a living figure on the face of the gray,

dead seas. His earliest memory was of these same northern seas, moaning and tossing like a giant in pain—desolate with that desolation peculiar to the North Pacific.

Here, where the warm breath of the Japan Current froze and perished on the cold lips of Bering Sea, the storms passed in a never-ending procession. Demented winds shrilled by, ever to an unknown destination far beyond the crags. In summer the mist lay heavy, or was riddled by the lances of the rain. In the fall the rain chilled to sleet, and from this it was no great change to the swirling, wandering snow-flurries of winter. In happier realms the grayness was relieved by an occasional verdant island, but here the shores were no less dreary than the waters, beating against them. Here were only the craggy isles, storm-swept and fog-laden, where no tree dared raise its head in defiance to the blast; and the empty tundras and hills of the mainland, rising at last to the white divide that is the Aleutian Range.

Part of the land that the man knew was of Alaska proper—the tip end of the long peninsula that separates Bering Sea from the North Pacific—yet it contained nothing of the friendliness and charm that mark so much of the great territory. It did, however, have a quality of beauty, a strange, forlorn beauty that men find difficult to describe. Even Breed Bert could not deny this. It lived with him, and he knew.

That any kind of life could move in this water-desert as well as on the bleak shores had always moved him to wonder. A lifetime acquaintance with the myriad sea-life never changed him in this. It was as if the creatures that he knew so well—that provided his livelihood—were not real living things, but more the spirits of the deep, as much a part of it as the storms that harried or the fogs that dimmed it. Of course in his good sense he knew that this was not true. One who has spent a large part of a lifetime drying salmon for winter store cannot doubt the vital flame in their fishy hearts. Yet the lazy fin of the orca always startled him, as did the waterspout that an idling whale blew up far out at sea. Even to practical minds the water-birds have a strange appeal, and Breed Bert thought that a legend he as a child had heard from an old sailor accounted for them best. He had heard that the gulls and the frigate-birds, rising and falling in tune with the wind's gusts over the waves, were really the souls of sailors who had died at sea, and in some mystical heart of hearts he believed it.

Now to see that strong ship sailing in, so bold, so proud, had for him a quality of the miraculous. It was as if the dead had come to life—as if an old spell had been broken, an evil charm for the moment lifted.

The secret thrill that passed over him had still another cause, one not abstract, but personal. He had always watched the incoming ships as if they were concerned in his destiny. He never had business with them, and apparently never would have; yet he had always felt they were coming straight to him. . . . It was nothing he could lay his finger on, nor could hope to explain even to himself. It was evidently pure fancy, because the ships always turned and went away unheeding of him, leaving him no wondrous cargo, sailing on to distant ports and forsaking him to the monotony of gray days. . . . This was an old humor of his. He had experienced it when he had first seen a ship, and it had endured into manhood.

The ship was now almost to the dock, riding clear and vivid out of the last dim wraith of fog, and Breed Bert could identify her as the Catherine D., one of a fair-sized fleet that plied through these perilous waters in the fish trade. He could see Captain Knight, calling his orders from the bridge, and lined against the railing were the customary sailors, cannery-workmen, and, thinly sprinkled, tourists of a bolder sort. Because he was easily the most unusual figure on the dock, these last returned his gaze with frank interest.

Breed Bert hardly looked like a breed. True, he was dark, but in a far city his brunette skin might easily have been attributed to a vigorous outdoor life, the work of those incomparable tanners, sun and wind and weather. All Western Alaskans darken in so many weeks' exposure, and a newcomer looks sickly white in comparison; so his walnut complexion was not the least index to his race. Many white men were darker than he, many full-blooded Aleuts lighter. On the whole his features were regular and good; and they lacked that alien look usually bestowed by even a small proportion of native blood. Tactless people now and then had told Breed Bert that he could pass for a white man; and for all the violence of his denial, the statement was perfectly true.

It would have flattered the common run of breeds, but it did not flatter him. Many young squaws would have sold their immortal souls—if indeed they had not already bartered them away for one thing or another—to possess his Caucasian looks. His cheek-bones were not particularly high; his coal-black eyes were like the Aleut, yet they are seen in many whites with Latin forebears. His hair was black, straight, and coarse; his jaws bony but not heavy; his mouth rather hard, almost cruel when its humor had been ironed out.

The squatty physique that characterizes so many of the aborigines, and is marked among the salmon-eating tribes of the Alaskan coast, was conspicuously absent in him. He was more like an Iroquois, exceedingly tall

and limber, with lean arms and legs. There were plenty of men on the dock who at first glance seemed of superior physical development, and this impression persisted until one saw Breed Bert in motion. There was something stimulating and enlightening in the way that he moved. People watched him a long time without just knowing why, and thought of the wild things abroad on the tundra.

None of these externals reached or approached the soul of the man. Looking at him, even studying him, resulted only in the most superficial idea of a strangely profound and complex nature. Even the luminous dark eyes hinted but vaguely of the fire behind them. A girl looked at him from the deck of the ship which was coming to dock, and what had been an idle, wandering glance was arrested, but even her woman's intuition, strongly marked in girls of her type, could not pierce the mask of stolidity.

Grace Crowell moved in a somewhat exalted circle, and she had an idea of what made a face distinguished. The flat, the dull, the commonplace could rarely summon her from the beauty of her own thoughts. Yet she found herself looking twice at Breed Bert. Her eyes received an image of a dynamic and forceful personality, but at the same time she was vaguely dismayed and repelled. In one long glance she was aware of a cold, ruthless, perhaps a cruel and brutal man, to whom the lovely spirit of her being was diametrically opposed.

"He's a hard-boiled specimen, isn't he?" her companion said in her ear. She started slightly to hear him: so absorbed had she been in her character study, that she had forgotten Paul's presence. "He looks as if he'd do murder for a dollar and a half."

"He is certainly hard," the girl agreed. "I don't think you could pay him to do murder, but he might do it for the fun of it. Paul, I hope we won't be thrown with many like that."

She turned away with her companion to watch the sailors' activities on the deck, and Breed Bert continued to eye her with a bitter and unwilling fascination. Ordinarily this class of people angered him, waking a hateful mood, yet now, though dark and intense, his look was not that of hatred. . . .

Meanwhile the ship was heaving to. She could not come alongside the wharf itself, because of a huge barge, docked at the cannery permanently and used as a floating warehouse; but she came to a gentle stop beside the other boat. Lines were thrown and snubbed, and a gangplank was run out amidships to the superstructure of the barge from which the passengers could make their way ashore.

Guided by Paul Fieldmaster, Grace Crowell reached the head of the sharply inclined plank, leading to the barge. She paused, hardly a second, evidently somewhat reluctant to attempt the steep descent, for the slight movement of the ship on her snubbing ropes—washed as she was by the swell—caused the plank to move back and forward a little on its roller. Except to such embittered eyes as Breed's she made an entrancing picture, standing on the rail, her hand held by the handsome, dark-complexioned man below—so vivid and bright and lovely that the fogs were helpless to bedim her. Her face was a flower such as never grew in Hopeless Land. Old gold was in her hair, for all that the sun was hidden. Her eyes, colorful and bright, had that undying gayety which will be the final requisite of the chosen.

Exactly what happened in the fraction of a second immediately following, even those who watched her closely never exactly knew. Suddenly the picture she made—grace and beauty rarely seen in this outcast end of the world—was shattered to ruin. It may have been that her foot, beautiful as the rest of her, slipped on the fog-wet rail; and her hand, grasping at the rope railing of the plank, missed its hold. Or perhaps the sullen gods who sit and glower over the waste land could not endure this moment's flash of sunlight, this gayety that she brought to the hearts of a cold and hopeless people, and so they cast her down.

The onlookers on the dock and the barge saw her pitch forward; and at the same instant their hearts filled with black dread when they saw her companion snatch for her in vain. They heard her sharp, despairing cry as her body flashed and fell, down between the dark hulls of the two boats.

CHAPTER II

EVERY one of the inert and stricken group that saw the girl fall instantly gave her up for lost; and this included not only the few tourists, on the deck of the Catherine, but the workers and the fishermen, used to this stern land and the rough-and-tumble story of life. Even men like Tylee and Knight, not yielding easily to terror and trained to grasp a situation quickly, saw no hope for her; and for all their long journeys and adventurous experience were white, drawn, and sickened at the thought of what would soon lie between the two huge hulls. At midships, where the girl had fallen, there was little more than space enough for her slim body to drop down between, and the particular horror of the thing lay in the fact that even this space did not remain constant. As the Catherine surged gently back and forth with the movement of the swell, it closed and opened like the crushing surfaces of a great mill, now wide enough for a body's passage, in an instant more so close that a hand could hardly be thrust between.

The loud splash of water indicated plainly that the girl's body had fallen free; but this would not affect the outcome. The boats were now at the point of greatest divergence—perhaps three feet apart at the water-line—but presently they would converge again. And now Paul Fieldmaster, leaping upon the railing, seemed about to follow her to destruction.

For a certain time he was the center of all eyes; and that time seemed prolonged to tragic hours. Fieldmaster was waiting too long. No blame could be laid on him—there was never any wisdom in hurling away a life on an all but useless chance—even though the best and bravest have always stooped to just such folly—yet gruff old Knight, too far away himself to be of any possible aid, cursed him where he stood. If there were the slightest image of a chance to rescue the girl before the Catherine's hull closed in again, surely it lay with Paul—the only man close to the point where she fell—yet he could not go through with it. Perhaps he knew his limitations. Possibly he understood the hopeless aspects of the situation better than any other spectator. He faltered, leaning forward, but his hand clung to the rope railing of the plank as if it were locked there by electricity. There he hung throughout a long-drawn instant—a space of time hardly to be measured with a stop-watch, yet tragically and hopelessly long to those who pinned their hopes on him—then, straightening, made the first motion to tear off his coat.

The breeds on the dock were not deceived. Their experience with the more cultivated types of white men was decidedly limited, yet they were of humankind, and they knew perfectly that this was purely a defensive act. In such language as they had heard and knew Paul was “stalling for time.” Men who mean business do not remember the confining cloth of a coat. It would seem the girl must meet her end, unaided by any mortal hand.

Yet it came about that Paul’s first movement to throw off his coat was all that the spectators ever saw. At that point—hardly a second after the girl had fallen—his very existence was ignored. Another player took the stage; the drama whirled on and forgot Paul. A lightning flash of movement in front completely obliterated him.

Even while the girl was tottering, before ever her hand had groped in vain for the guard-rope or the gasp of horror had gone up from the little crowd of spectators, help was dispatched toward her from an unknown source. What had been a dull, insentient frame came to life with such a rush, such a blinding swirl of movement, that the deadened senses of the spectators could hardly follow it. One was reminded of a wolf, leaping at its foe, or the rush of wind through trees. The girl had hardly more than struck the water before Breed Bert had leaped from his place on the dock to the superstructure of the barge.

He did not hesitate at the railing, nor did he pause to remove his coat. Blind to the fact that the hulls were converging again—that the little space between them was slowly closing up—he dropped down, light as a bird, between them.

A few of the men on the deck of the barge were quick enough to reach the railing in time to see him come up after his dive. In the same glance they saw the girl struggling in the close, dark confinement between the hull of the Catherine and the comparatively low, abrupt side of the barge. As they watched, the great ship swung in with resistless pressure.

It was a row of white, horror-stricken faces that looked down. For all his physical prowess it seemed simply beyond hope that Breed Bert could either save the girl or escape the mill of death himself. He was not to work unimpeded. They saw the drowning girl’s arms go about him in that tragic frenzy which so often characterizes water disasters—the final expression of terror and love of life which frequently defeats its own end—and the men groaned at what seemed the last straw needed for certain defeat.

Breed met that impediment with considerable resource. His rough life had bestowed upon him certain training, and he handled this crisis in an

entirely characteristic way. Ruthlessness was a trait men thought they saw in him, and never so much as now. They saw his bony fist flail up from the water and shatter down with stunning force into the girl's lovely face.

Her violent struggling instantly ceased. And instantly thereafter both bodies, propelled by a tremendous impetus given by Breed Bert's thrashing feet, vanished beneath the waves.

And now the drama was hidden from those who watched from above. The Catherine, swinging nearer, had closed up the space of dark water, and for all they knew the physical perfection they had admired a moment before was already crushed in shapeless ruin between the two hulls. Only a few of the more alert seamen guessed Breed's simple tactics; and this did not include hope of his success. The disaster had been too swift, too sweeping and complete to permit any thought of hope. Yet while they stood waiting, holding their breath, Breed Bert was carrying on the fight in the still darkness below the converged hulls.

With all the agile strength that was his most conspicuous gift, Breed was diving straight down, and he carried the almost insensible girl with him. To the flounder and the perch that brushed against him he might have seemed some unfamiliar ocean monster, dragging his prey down to a dark lair among the submerged reefs. In reality he was following a fixed plan, playing his only possible chance for life and safety.

He could not hold the hulls apart with the strength of his arms. He knew —no one better—the almost incredible power that dwelt in his long, thin muscles; but he also knew the Widow-maker, the gray mistress to whom the strongest ship is but a plaything. He was diving down simply to take advantage of the slope of the Catherine's hull, knowing that could he but dive far enough, he would find space in plenty to work the girl out.

Into a strange world of silence and darkness he plunged, down until the passage between the hulls permitted him free use of his limbs. Then he worked his way along the side of the barge toward the bow.

It was no little test to his body, and a cruel trial to his spirit. Except for his training in the outdoors, he could hardly have endured the long under-water swim at such squeezing depth; and save for a certain fighting instinct, a determination and steadfastness for which even his enemies gave him credit, the pain and horror of that prolonged battle in the darkness might have hurled him gasping up between the grinding hulls.

Fortunately the Indian weakness of lungs had not been passed down to him. His heart was sound and strong, a deep drum in the cavern of his breast. Yet his lungs were bursting before ever the long trial was done and his heart seemed to be pounding itself to shreds. There came a time, at last, when he had to come to the top. He had endured all he could. The strange, brooding spirit of the man, like a glowing ember, still lighted the way for him, but his spent body would no longer obey its commands.

The time actually spent under water was not great compared to the long immersions of practiced swimmers, but the intensity of his struggle at such a depth had overwhelmed him, ravaging him to a degree unknown to the semi-conscious girl in his arms. How far he had gone he did not know: he scarcely dared hope that he had rounded the Catherine's curving hull to a point where it no longer touched the barge. . . . The water was not inky black, as at first, but wanly lighted as if under open sky.

Fighting still, Breed slanted toward the surface. The light grew slowly, and no ship's hull rose to block his way. He came up to the dismal Alaskan day.

When the swimming man and his living burden appeared in the open water near the bow of the ship, a cheer went up from the crowd of spectators. It was true that the white crew of the Catherine carried the impetus of the cheer and furnished much of its volume, but even the breeds on the dock raised their voices which, for them, was showing almost unheard-of enthusiasm. Why, the girl was sound and unbroken, struggling feebly in his arms; and it was plain she had escaped the grinding pressure of the hulls. . . . The cheer, however, was not altogether unanimous. There were two of the most interested spectators who made no sound at all.

One of these was Fieldmaster, who with his coat half off stood clinging to the rail from which Grace Crowell had fallen. Perhaps the horror of the thing was still upon him; possibly the very poignancy of his thoughts kept him from utterance. The other of the two was Tylee, superintendent of the cannery. Tylee did not cheer because he had more important matters on his mind.

From his place near the water's edge he could plainly see both principals in the episode; and he noticed certain things that his hilarious workmen overlooked—for one the peculiar darkening of Breed's face. A dullness had come upon it, a stolidity that was excessive even for a half-breed Indian. In one quick look Tylee knew surely that the man had all but reached the end of

his rope. He could move his arms a few times more, and then the glory of motion that had thrilled them all would abruptly pass from his body. Breed's wolflike strength had its limits; and these limits were reached. His swimming movements bore out the same fact: he was paddling just enough to keep himself and the girl afloat. And there was a strange red aura in the water about them that moved Tylee to sudden horror.

The latter whirled about, made one quick gesture to Wagner, his assistant, who stood behind him, and then half slid, half fell down a barnacled ladder, leading to water-level. Wagner all but tramped on his chief's fingers in following him. Both men jumped into the skiff that was always kept at the foot of the ladder and, grasping the oars, pushed out at the fastest possible rowing gait toward the two in the water. Up to this time Tylee had uttered no sound, and now his single remark was shot out as his shoulders lurched at the oars, so that no time was lost in its utterance.

"Row like the devil, Wagner," said he. "That brute out there will drown before he'll ask any one for help!"

In a moment more they had reached the sinking pair, and by their combined efforts succeeded in dragging them into the boat. Both were too far gone to help themselves, the girl half conscious, Breed at the verge of collapse. And now the red trail they had left in the water was simply explained. Breed's forearms had undergone torture in the dark passage between the hulls. He had struggled fiercely against the crusted sides, and the barnacles that clung below the water line had flayed him from his elbows to his wrists.

The girl lay limp on the floor of the skiff, but Breed Bert would not yet yield to his almost overpowering fatigue. He scorned to bow his head and let these men take care of him; and knowing him well, Tylee found this action perfectly in character. The latter would not invite a rebuff by urging the man to rest, or by attempting to stanch his wounds. He knew that Breed Bert would continue to play his own game in his own way.

Rowing around the dock, he guided the boat into shallow water and presently made a landing on the beach. Most of the cannery force crowded the shore to receive him, and awkward, fumbling, but withal tender hands reached to lift the girl from the boat. They were not, however, to extend their simple help. The little throng was suddenly silenced by a chill, determined voice behind them.

"Stand aside, please, and let me pass," some one ordered in a tone of authority. The crowd obediently parted, and the girl's companion pushed

through.

Paul Fieldmaster had recovered from his horror. He was quite himself—self-assured, detached, dominating the situation. He bent, lifted the girl in his arms and, running with her into the cannery, began to administer first aid in a thoroughly competent and businesslike way. Some of the spectators now devoted themselves to Breed Bert, but met no kinder reception. The latter rose slowly and somewhat unsteadily until he stood erect, shaking off the hands that reached to uphold him.

"Go away and let me alone," he told the people; then, scorning them all, walked up on the dock and lay down with arms outstretched. Here he lay, scrutinized by a silent, interested group, until Paul had time to give him some attention.

Meanwhile Grace Crowell was responding to Fieldmaster's first aid. The battle under water had been violent but not long, and limp in her rescuer's arms, she had fared much better than he. Almost at once she opened her eyes, and ten minutes later the fact became perfectly evident that she was not in the least danger. She would be the better for a day or two of rest, because of the severe shock which her nervous system had undergone, but any permanent ill effects were unlikely. She changed to warm dry clothes and, lying on a couch, prepared to make herself comfortable before the big stove in Tylee's quarters.

"I ought to see about that chap who got her out, first thing I do," Paul remarked to Tylee. "I suppose he knew what he was doing, and how to do it. Just the same, it was a brave act. He was in the water before I had a chance to see what had happened."

Tylee grinned slowly. "He's fast on his pins, Breed Bert."

"A breed, is he? Well, I owe him something, and I intend to pay it. Of course I was about to rescue her myself, but he didn't know that. I suppose he realized there was not any great danger——"

Tylee, smiling cheerfully before, instantly sobered. "There was more danger than I'd like to face, Mr. Fieldmaster. Don't make any mistake about that. It is a wonder to me yet they both were not crushed to jelly between those hulls!"

"Well, I shall see that he's properly rewarded." Paul spoke hastily, as if anxious to escape from the subject.

The girl, who had listened intently, now turned vivid, hazel eyes. "It was the bravest thing I ever knew," she told them, speaking very softly. "Is the

man much hurt?"

"Not seriously, I think," Tylee answered. "He's filed all the skin off his forearms against the rough hulls. He's pretty well all in, too, but entirely conscious."

"Won't you bring him in here—so I can thank him? I owe my life to him ____"

"You can thank him in good time, Grace," her companion told her. "He merely happened to be the first man to jump. There were ten more of us in the crowd who would have gone to help you, if he hadn't. Besides—I imagine a bit of substantial thanks in the way of a greenback or two will appeal to him more than anything else." Paul smiled dryly. "He is a breed, you know. We'd naturally handle this thing a little differently, if he were one of our own sort."

"Oh, I know you'll do what is right! But be careful not to hurt his feelings, after he has done this wonderful thing. Who is the man?"

"A fellow they call Breed Bert. He is the hard-looking chap we saw from the ship—the man you said you didn't want to be thrown with!"

A shy hint of a smile lurked at the girl's lips; and Tylee glimpsed, never to lose sight of it again, the gayety of soul that was the essence of Grace Crowell. "Thrown with him!" she echoed. "Isn't that good? Well, I certainly misjudged him. Paul, won't you go and speak to him now?"

"You can go and try to thank him, but I won't promise you'll get any thanks for your trouble," Tylee observed, musingly. "He's an unsociable bird. I'll tell you more about him when we have time. I don't think you'll get very far with him."

"I am not worried about that," Paul replied with bland assurance. "He may not care for what I say, but I have something in my pocket that will appeal to him. Mr. Tylee, will you ask him to come here?"

Tylee sent one of his men, and Breed Bert, who now had put on a dry suit of denims, entered presently with his battered hat in his hand. "This lady wants to speak to you," the superintendent explained. "This is Bert, Miss Crowell—one of my men."

Breed looked full into the girl's face, his dark eyes glowing and magnetic. "What do you want?" he asked bluntly.

"If I could, I'd like to thank you," she told him. "I know I can't thank you. I can't say anything to express how I feel——"

A grim, hard smile bent the straight line of his lips. “Is that all you wanted of me? If it is, I’ve got some other things to do.”

In all her days Grace had never been spoken to in just this way. She had never heard so hard, so cold a voice. The look he gave her was ruthless and unmoved. Hurt to the quick, she turned to her companion.

“Will you speak to him, Paul? He doesn’t seem to care for my thanks.”

With a knowing and self-satisfied smile—as if Breed’s conduct had fulfilled his own predictions, and he was now about to prove even further his understanding of inferior peoples—Paul groped in his pocket, bringing out two bills, each of which represented a week’s pay to common labor. He held them carelessly in his hand, watching Breed’s face.

Presently Paul’s position began to be embarrassing. The seconds dragged out interminably without developing any change in the other’s expression. No twitching of his hand gave him away, no eager light shone in his eyes. He continued to regard his proposed benefactor in stony and sullen silence. At last Paul held the bills out toward him.

“I guess that’s more the kind of thanks you want, isn’t it?” he asked.

His manner was even more patronizing; yet his knowing tones did not sound genuine to Tylee, but as if he were somewhat baffled by this extraordinary situation.

“I can’t take money for that,” Breed replied.

“Oh, we know you didn’t do it for hope of reward,” Grace interrupted in an eager voice. “I know how you feel: you don’t want pay for doing a noble thing——”

“That’s not it, madam.” Breed’s gaze was unwavering. “I don’t want pay —for being a fool!”

“A fool!”

“That’s all I was—a fool. I might have been crushed to jelly. I don’t know why I did it—to risk throwing away a life that to you—and your kind —isn’t any more than a leaf on a twig. I work for my money. I don’t clown for it. I acted without thinking.”

Deeply hurt but proud, the girl straightened and seemed about to give him a fitting answer. Then, for the first time, she noticed the little dark red stream that ran down his hands and fell on the rough floor. The response was instantaneous—a lovely and rather startling luster in her opening eyes, and a

gracious softening in certain little lines about them that had begun to harden. “Oh, you are hurt!”

“I’ll get over it. It serves me right. Don’t let yourself be concerned.”

“I can’t help being concerned, when it was done for me—even if you regret it now.”

He made no answer, and deep color flowed slowly into the girl’s white face. “I want you to tell me,” she went on. “Are you sorry you leaped in and saved me? Are you regretting—you didn’t let me die?”

“You wouldn’t have died, anyway. Your friend says he would have got you out if I hadn’t.”

“You haven’t answered my question yet.”

He looked at her, and he tried to speak. The sullen glow grew between his lids, but it could not now find expression in words. He saw the girl’s eyes, more beautiful than any image that his dreams could conjure, than any inland lake that once had mirrored his *bidarka*. He traced every feature breathlessly and intently: the clear-cut line of her chin to the whiteness of her throat, the silken skin, the chaste clarity of brow. He looked at her hair, gold except for its dusky shadows; he stared at the tapering loveliness of her hands.

“No, I’m glad!” he told her in self-contempt. His tone was harsh and cold. “I’d do it again—because I’m a fool!”

Then they heard him tramping through the corridor and out into the chill, late-April day.

CHAPTER III

To Tylee, it was all but incredible that a humble character like Breed Bert could for a moment draw attention from the young and distinguished Paul Fieldmaster; but he had done just this. Only after Breed's footsteps died away in the hall did the superintendent remember his guest. For the first time he was acutely conscious of Paul's presence. He was an interesting type, this man from the "Outside." His coming had been heralded by letter and wire from Bellingham—the manager of the cannery-chain had expressly wished all his associates to put themselves out for Fieldmaster and his party—and on close study, he seemed quite worthy of the attention paid him. Tylee wondered that he had ever seemed obscured.

No one could doubt Paul's up-bringing and sophistication; both were written all over him, from the barbering of his black hair to the soles of his trim sport-shoes. His clothes alone would have distinguished him even in a more brilliant company than any he could find in Western Alaska. He wore soft linens, golf stockings, knickers, and jacket of imported rough cloth, clothes not only perfectly tailored, but studiedly fitted to his style. There was more to him than this. His voice was level, deep, and full, indicating the poise and self-esteem that mark the well-bred man; his address was frank and easy, yet not undignified; he possessed the charm of unimpeachable manners. Physically he was not unattractive. He was almost as dark as Breed himself, and Tylee guessed he was given to healthy outdoor sports. He was not tall, but rather solid and heavily built; no one could mistake him for a weakling. He had a full face with heavy jaws, high cheek-bones, large features; the pink surfaces of his out-turned lips were only slightly too prominent.

In these respects he was quite at odds with Rufus Carter, a gray-haired man of fifty-five who completed the party. Carter was a lean, nervous individual, fastidious to a shade; and his pale lips and peaked features disclaimed any kinship between the two men.

Fieldmaster stood at the window, looking out at that dismal, fog-draped sea which constitutes most of Western Alaska scenery. The others were somewhat mystified by a strangely alert, almost excited look about his eyes, and in the set of his heavy lips. "Tylee, yours is a picturesque country!" he observed.

“It’s not my country!” the superintendent answered promptly. “You couldn’t give it to me! Mr. Fieldmaster, this was never a white man’s country, and sometimes I am doubtful if it can ever be. There is plenty of territory in Alaska that seems to be made expressly for an enlightened people, but not this Land of Forgotten Men. Can you see that sweet little breeze, beating the water against the rocks?”

“I felt it, a few minutes ago.”

“Let that whistle past your ears for a given number of years and you’ll get my idea. I think that even civilized people would have their joy in living blown away in time, and become like the Aleuts you saw down on the dock.”

“Surely that breed wasn’t a fair sample.”

“No—simply because he is more intelligent than the rest.”

“I’ll admit the country has a most curious atmosphere,” Paul went on slowly. “Somehow—it grips my imagination. It draws me, yet in some ways it repels me too. I have never regarded myself as being unusually superstitious——”

“I wouldn’t say we’d had a very auspicious introduction to the country,” the girl observed.

“It has given me a queer feeling, that I can’t just analyze,” Paul went on, evidently missing Grace’s remarks entirely. “I have a sort of warning about the place—I wonder if it is a premonition of some terrible disaster out there on the tundras of the mainland. At the same time I feel an eagerness for our expedition that I haven’t felt before—as if it were part of a special, ordained Destiny, if you know what I mean——”

“We don’t, exactly,” Grace told him.

“Well, I like the country—and at the same time I’m afraid of it.” He paused, groping for words to explain his mood; and then Grace was surprised to see him glance about in a curious, almost furtive way, as if some mental discovery, hardly glimpsed himself, had startled him, and he feared to have his friends follow his thoughts. When he spoke again it was in a rather hurried, studied manner.

“I guess my imagination has been running riot,” he explained. “And I can readily understand the fear of this country by our family history. Our relations with it have not been particularly fortunate.”

“For instance?” the girl questioned.

"For instance—today. That escape was narrow enough for any one."

"But you said—*your* family."

Paul smiled, and Tylee, watching her from across the room, beheld a lovely tide of color flowing in her face. "You are not quite in my family yet, Grace, but I am hoping that deplorable condition can soon be remedied. Mr. Tylee, perhaps I should explain that Miss Crowell is my fiancée, and the ward of my mother. Mr. Carter, who accompanied us, is our old family lawyer. Grace, yours was but one of the narrow escapes our family has had in this end of the world. I think you have heard about the Floyd J. Cook."

"Why, the Floyd J. Cook had her mishap within a few miles of this cannery!" Tylee exclaimed.

"Yes—and somewhat before your time."

"Somewhat before yours, I should say. I must have been a little shaver four or five years old. I've heard the old-timers speak of the wreck."

"I wasn't even that old—I was a babe in arms. That was my first experience in Western Alaska. My mother and I were on the Floyd J. Cook. She was sailing from Skagway, you remember, via Kadiak and Dutch Harbor to Seattle. We were going to meet father in Dutch Harbor—Unalaska, you call it now—and go with him to Seattle. This was in '96. Father had been all over Western Alaska in the interest of the fur trade, for the preceding six months. I have heard mother tell about the accident. The ship was full of sick or disappointed gold-seekers, turning back home or else going out for the winter, as well as a few other passengers from Kadiak and other Alaska villages, and except for all the luck in the world it would have been one of the worst sea tragedies in history."

"There were quite a few lost, I believe."

"Only five or six, I think, after the passenger list was thoroughly checked over. These were drowned in lowering the life-boats, and a good many more were more or less injured in the rush from the dining-room. Mother herself was caught in the jam and laid up for several days. The passengers were at table when the ship struck an uncharted reef; it was quite a smash, and a panic resulted."

"Yet if every one had stayed on board, no one would have been lost at all."

"Precisely. The ship didn't go down, but was ultimately towed into Dutch Harbor. There we met father, and he went with us back to Seattle."

“What other little adventures have you and your family had up here?” Grace asked.

“That is all—for mother and me. Father had quite a few before we joined him. He was a fur trader—Prentiss Fieldmaster, one of the heads of the old Alaska Commercial Company. Perhaps you have heard of him, Mr. Tylee.”

“I don’t believe I have——”

“I thought perhaps some of the old-timers might have spoken of him. Of course, this was twenty-eight years ago.”

“I hope your luck changes from now on, Paul,” Grace remarked gayly. “For my part, I’ve had enough adventure to last me some time. Mr. Tylee, I do wish you could explain that man’s attitude—I mean the Indian half-breed. He certainly has courage; and then to behave as he did when we tried to thank him——”

“It’s entirely characteristic, Miss Crowell,” was the reply. “Bert is one of the most surprising men I know. None of us can tell just what to make of him. Somehow, he’s a misfit. He got hold of the tail of the wrong destiny, if you see what I mean.”

“I don’t know that I do.”

“It seems to me that Bert is a mighty unfortunate combination,” Tylee explained thoughtfully. “He is a native that has been cursed with white blood—or perhaps, a white man with the everlasting taint of native blood. Just which, I’ve never been able to figure out. I know his mother—old Maria—and she is the kind of squaw that is never seen on magazine covers, but appears frequently enough among these coast tribes. Miss Crowell, she would be difficult for you to understand. It would be hard for you to think of her as a woman—filthy, profane, drunken, absolutely without morals as we know them, horrible to look at. Thirty years ago she was an attractive young klooch, as far as an Aleut or Eskimo girl can be attractive. Now she is an old tartar, a hideous witch—unbelievably wrinkled, debauched.

“Here she is—Bert’s mother. Father unknown—some white man who wandered through this country—perhaps a fisherman or sailor, possibly even a gentleman—a big-game hunter or government man. The thing has happened frequently, you know. Since Bert is so dark, it seems unlikely that his father was Scandinavian, the usual infusion in this country. Unlike most breeds, Bert seems to inherit mostly from his father. He perhaps got the native tendency toward sullenness and solitude, but certainly he has the

innate intelligence of the best type of white man. Hang it all, the man has dreams!"

The girl's eyes showed how intently she was following this recital.

"Oh, isn't it a shame!" she cried.

"Isn't it? The tragedy of the half-caste! He is out of place in this environment, and yet he can never leave it. He has the ideals that all of us are reaching for, a love of beauty, a need of finer things, a zest for achievement almost unknown among these improvident natives. He wants to rise, and he is fastened down. He is forever removed from his people—in temperament, in ideals, in everything that matters—and he is forever barred from any real association with the whites.

"No wonder the man curses the day he was born. No wonder he hates the white race."

"He hates us, does he!" Paul remarked grimly. "Just why?"

"He looks on us as the ruthless conquerors who will destroy or debauch an inferior people for a moment's pleasure or a dollar's gain. Unlike many of these bootlicking breeds, he curses every drop of white blood in his veins. If he can't be all white, he would prefer to be a native, pure and simple, reconciled to this hopeless environment—an environment which you, Miss Crowell, can scarcely imagine. That hate is crystallized, you might say, in his attitude toward his father. He does not know who his father is—certainly not the degenerate breed who was old Maria's so-called husband; but whatever his name or his place—whether he is alive or dead—Bert curses him and all his race."

"Which includes himself."

"Yes. He is self-cursed, no doubt. For the sake of an hour's adventure, his father is responsible for a God-forsaken half-caste, a misfit, an exile who can never return home. He has done worse, Bert thinks, than damn a human life. He has brought down a living curse on his own son, and Bert can only reply by cursing him back with words. He has given him a capacity to enjoy better things, and banished him to a life of squalor, degradation, filth, and hopelessness."

"And he can't rise above it," Grace commented.

"He cannot escape from it, surely. Such whites as would accept him he won't accept. He can never marry a white woman—his principles keep him from that—and he resolves he will not curse any future generations by

mating with a squaw. The young Aleut girls have tried hard enough to win him, but he ignores them. Yet, in a sense, he *has* risen above his environment—so far as he can. He keeps clean. You won't realize what this means until you see some of his fellows. He is really self-educated, but calls himself a fool to know and read books which only further estrange him from his environment. He can not only read and write, but he has a knowledge of literature and science. Perhaps with the idea of killing time and escaping from himself he keeps active, never loafing and idling like most of his people. And he is a marvel at all outdoor activities. Except for the fact that he is a breed and my men refuse to work under him, I would have had him for my foreman long since. He is one of the best workers I have. Bert is a hunter and trapper and fisherman, and has developed a physique of which he himself doesn't know the limits. He is the only breed I know who can out-work and out-walk a white man. I don't know how he would be under great excitement—I suppose he would go to pieces like all the rest of the breeds—but I've never seen him lose his head yet. He is as much out of place at that little village of Pavlof——"

"Pavlof!" Paul whirled in his chair, obviously startled. "Did you say Pavlof?"

"A little, far-remote, inland village beyond Izanback Bay."

When Paul spoke again his voice had a strained, anxious tone. "What—what did you say the name of Bert's mother was?"

"Maria."

"Sure it isn't Sindy?"

"No. They all call her Maria."

"Well, we've got to talk to him, anyway," Grace interposed. "It might be he can tell us what we have come all the way here to find out—anyway, he can show us the way to his village. Do you think he could be hired as a guide?"

"Yes. He has done that kind of work before. Some of his parties swear by him, and some—at him."

"Big-game hunters, I suppose?"

"Entirely. He always helps his people to gain their trophies, but he won't act the underling. Many hunters expect an obsequious attitude on the part of their guides, particularly if they happen to be breeds, and Bert won't fill the bill."

“I don’t think he’d fill the bill with us, either,” Paul observed. “I wouldn’t mind his airs—incongruous though they are in a breed—but his sullen, hateful ways would keep me from hiring him. Grace, he is out of the question.”

The girl’s quick gaze showed she was puzzled. “I can’t understand your attitude, Paul,” she replied. “If he can help us in our quest, of course we must take him—whether we personally like him or not. This isn’t a pleasure trip. You remember your mother’s orders—to leave no stone unturned. It was a great bit of luck to find a man from Pavlof village. We mustn’t overlook it.”

“He grew up there,” Tylee told them, “and if he would be valuable to you, I’d loan him. I don’t mind saying I’ll hate to spare him.”

“You think he’d be useful to us, do you?” Paul asked.

“Not knowing the nature of your expedition, I couldn’t very well say.”

It was not until Grace and Carter, the lawyer, had gone to their appointed quarters that Paul had a chance to make explanations to Tylee. “My mother, Mrs. Prentiss Fieldmaster, is the spirit behind this expedition,” he said. “We have been sent up here to find a young man, about my age, the son of a squaw named Sindy. We are to bring him back, and she will educate him and try to give him a chance in life.”

“And your mother thinks a mature Aleut or half-breed can be successfully transplanted into civilization?” Tylee exclaimed incredulously. “To move in a circle with people like yourselves?”

“It is ridiculous, isn’t it? I never realized it until I saw the people up here. But as I say—it is mother’s idea. It seems to be a kind of religion with her. She’s getting old and quixotic. Since she is financing the whole thing, we had to comply with her desires.”

Tylee did not entirely like the man’s manner, but Paul was his guest, so he put up with it. “You don’t know anything about the boy or his mother?”

“Nothing, except that the family live in or near Pavlof. The whole hope of finding the boy hinges on that. It was just this winter that mother was able to trace the old squaw to that particular village, although certain clues had led there long before.”

“I believe your mother has made previous efforts to find the boy. I think I heard something about it.”

"Yes, she has. I suppose she has made herself a nuisance to people up here for the last twenty years. She has hired detectives and made inquiries all over Western Alaska, and one of her men once got as far as Pavlof village, but turned back. Now that she has substantiated the Pavlof theory, she felt justified in sending out this expedition. Her health wouldn't permit her to come herself, or she'd have been with us. It will cost the old woman a lot of money that could be better spent—I can see that—but she can afford it, and insisted on doing it."

Tylee's eyes opened, and he wondered if he could possibly be mistaken in Paul's station in life. Men whom he considered his equals did not as a rule speak in quite this manner of the fountain of their lives. "Your idea, then, is to get an outfit and go on to Pavlof, with the hope of finding this native and bringing him back?" Tylee asked.

Paul nodded. "That's the big idea. The next question that naturally presents itself is—what does she want of him? What claim has the man got on her, that she would go to all this effort to help him?"

"One would naturally be curious, of course."

"Well, to tell the truth, mother has never explained the matter to me. She has always been very vague about the whole thing, evading me when I tried to question her. I guessed the truth, however, years ago."

"And she has since verified your guess?"

"She didn't need to. It is self-evident, it seems to me. Mother, you must understand, is a very conscientious woman. She has a strict sense of duty and a code of ethics that she runs absolutely into the ground. She has most aristocratic ideas, and she seems to think that her blood and breeding only impose further obligations upon her."

"*Noblesse oblige*—something like that, eh?"

"That's the idea, I guess. A little of it may be all right, but she carries it to an absurdity—and what she believes is her duty drives her into all kinds of foolishness, including so much charity that she deprives her family. However—it won't be this way always. She thinks she owes an obligation to this half-caste swine, and just why is easy to guess. You remember I spoke of the many accidents our family has had in this country?"

"You said something about it."

"Well, I have it figured out that the thing that brought us up here was another accident—one that happened to father. He was something of a

Lothario, I fear. He was in this country, you know, about thirty years ago. . . . Before he died he must have confessed to mother about the brat, and half-caste though he is, she plainly feels a sense of duty toward him for father's sake."

CHAPTER IV

UNDER pressure from Grace and Carter, Paul Fieldmaster himself sought out the sullen man who had moved so darkly into his life, intending to hire him as a guide to lead an expedition into Pavlof. It was an unwelcome idea to Paul. He had not liked the venture in the first place, and now he particularly disliked taking Breed Bert as head guide. Just why this was so, he could not tell. The cause was printed plain in some secret consciousness, but was still darkened in his thoughts. It was an instinct so deep and sure that it counterbalanced reason.

He had argued that the seeming morose and sullen nature of the man would make him objectionable on the trip; yet he knew in his heart that this was a subterfuge. The real truth was that his basic self feared the man. His fear was not a physical one which he could explain to Grace and which she would easily understand—the fear of violence and crime when they were at his mercy in the wild fastnesses of the Peninsula. It was subtler than that. Somehow, it was as if Breed Bert were actually his evil genius, waiting for him here in this gray country of his destiny—face to face with him at last in this strange land that seemed to have called to him across the sea. . . . Was this just fancy? Had some jungle-brain in the back part of his skull, submerged before, ascended over his reasoning consciousness to lead him into absurd superstitions?

The man seemed to cast a shadow over him. Paul wondered if the instinct was jealousy, somehow concerned with Breed's brave act at the dock. He himself had failed to come through; Breed had snatched the opportunity away from him. The time would come when he could find excuses for his failure—indeed, he was already beginning to balm it over with self-lies—yet now he knew a great self-resentment that somehow reacted against Breed.

He wished he could do the sporting thing and give the man full credit for his act, bless him for saving a life which was inestimably dear, and thus honor himself even as he honored Breed; but when he tried to do so, he could only remember his rancor, his jealousy, and his fear.

A man of his station, he argued, should scorn to be jealous of one so lowly; and should be mortified deeply to fear him. Yet this healthy self-scorn and mortification would not come. Only the beginnings of hatred

came in its place. This was not self-hatred, an emotion which a gentleman can understand and know, but hatred of another, which is incompatible with nobility. It tended to put him on the same plane with Breed. He wondered whether this attitude reflected on his love for Grace: is it humanly possible to hate the man who has saved one's beloved? Somehow, he forgot Grace in such moments, and could remember only the clean-cut, aquiline face that had dwelt forever in his darkest dreams.

Yes, Breed's shadow was upon him, and he could not cast it off. Through unhappy circumstances the man was to be with them on their trip. Paul had been unable to dissuade his companions from the idea of hiring him, simply because he could put forth no valid reasons for rejecting him.

"The man is going with us, and you may as well make the best of it," the old lawyer told him. "Grace won't hear of anything else, even if I had the nerve to argue the point. You know she is the real head of this expedition. Your mother put it virtually in her hands. You and I are just scenery, luggage-boys, and chaperones."

"If you would stand in with me, we'd talk her out of taking him."

"Yes, and she would soon suspect us both. She'd accuse me of sympathizing with you in your real attitude toward this expedition—an attitude she will get on to one of these days if you persist in taking such a stand as you took today concerning this half-breed." Carter was not referring to Paul's secret fear.

There was certain other understanding between the two men.

"I really think he'll he unpleasant to have along," Paul persisted.

"Undoubtedly, but what difference does that make? Grace is willing to endure almost anything to put this thing through for your mother; and you must make at least a pretense of doing the same thing. She wants him along for the same reason that you want him left here—because his presence may make the expedition a success."

"Can you blame me? It was a quixotic idea, all the way through."

"Your mother's heart is in it, Paul. But of course your own attitude is perfectly natural. You don't want a half-brother thrust on you, one that none of your friends can accept, and that will be a problem the rest of your life. And Paul, I've got you sized up all the way. You can't fool your old lawyer. You don't want her spending any of those dollars on somebody else!"

“Naturally, I wouldn’t. It’s silly nonsense. This whole trip is a silly idea. You know how niggardly she is with me—she’ll be even more so, if she thinks she has to educate and take care of an Aleut half-breed out of her income.”

“And maybe you are worrying a little about the principal, too. You think a good slice of it may be left to your half-brother when you can find a handy use for every dollar of it.”

“No, I’m not much worried about that. After a few months of his charming company, she’ll be glad to ship him back to Alaska. She wouldn’t dare disinherit me to the amount of a dollar for any oily breed.”

“Don’t you be too sure of it!”

Paul gave him a quick look. “What do you mean?”

“I mean just that—don’t be too sure about your mother. She dares do anything she wants to do. You know she hasn’t been any too pleased with you these last years. You’ve acted like a booby, and you know it—and two or three of your little streaks she doesn’t care for at all. Look how she has opposed your engagement to Grace—not on your account, but on hers. Any mother who thinks her own son isn’t good enough to marry her ward is likely to do queer things in her will.”

Paul opened his eyes at this, but he managed a confident smile. “Oh, I know she opposed me. She thinks I’d be untrue to Grace—possibly following father’s example. I haven’t deserved such treatment, either—she has given me a rotten deal all the way through.”

“Nonsense! She has treated you a whole lot better than you deserved. I can understand you perfectly, Paul—and have always been willing to help you—but you’ve been a mighty poor excuse for a son. If you had any decent competition at all, she’d cut you off with a pittance. I admit there doesn’t seem to be much danger from the illegitimate son of her husband, but just the same I’d watch my step. Throw a monkey-wrench into this expedition if you want to, but don’t be brazen about it, and don’t let either Grace or your mother suspect that you haven’t done the very best you can to make it succeed.”

The law laid down to him in this way, Paul offered employment to Bert. His manner, however, was as repellent as he could make it. He resorted to every air of patronage and snobbery that cheap friends had taught him; his tone and expression were of obvious contempt. Bert answered his insults

with a steady, disconcerting gaze, yet it was plain that he was entirely sensible to them.

"We want some one to guide us over to Pavlof village, and back again," Paul told him. "We understand you came from there."

Breed nodded. "I came from the Pavlof country."

"We are prepared to offer you the usual wages for head guide, you to be in charge of the packers and other camp help. Mr. Tylee says he will spare you, if you want to take the job. Just how long it will last I can't say. We are looking for a certain man whom we hope you'll help us find—the son of a squaw named Sindy."

"There's an old woman they call Sindy in the village, but she hasn't any son that I know of."

This shot evidently went straight home. Paul's manner showed distinct relief. "Do you know whether she ever had a son—perhaps one who died in infancy?"

"I've never heard of it; but it wouldn't be unusual. Our babies die like rabbits, up here."

"Pavlof isn't so big a place that you'd fail to know for certain whether Sindy has a grown-up son?"

Breed smiled. This was the first smile or echo of a smile the visitors had seen in him. Resentful and sullen though it was, it offered infinite possibilities—actually like a beam of light across his stern lips. "I guess not. Pavlof is hardly a post, any more—only Mount Pavlof, back of the village, keeps its name alive. There was a strong tribe, once."

"In recent years? I mean, has there been any recent plague or disaster that might account for the disappearance of Sindy's son?"

"There are always plenty of things to account for the disappearance of any one—in Western Alaska. This is Hopeless Land. However, you may be looking for another Sindy. It is a common name. . . . The village itself has never had more than a handful of people. The tribe's day of greatness was when the people lived on the shore—before they sought refuge in the mountains. Naturally, this was before the white man came."

"You ought to be glad he did come. He brought you the Christian religion, guns, and all the advantages of civilization—if you had sense enough to use them."

"And they brought us death—to our bodies and to our souls." Breed Bert spoke with sudden deep feeling, in a tone so bitter and intense that Paul was impressed in spite of himself. "We won't speak about that," Breed went on. "The tribal history is very simple: nothing unusual for this country. The Russians landed at the tide-water settlement in the beginning of the last century: they came to convert and civilize the people. It happened that the tribe had several thousand sea-otter. The Russians acquired them in the approved fashion."

"Trading?"

"Too slow. Massacre. The handful of survivors went back into a remote valley at the edge of the mountains, and there they have lived ever since. Only the missionaries and an occasional trader were able to follow them, and even those don't come any more. There are comparatively few of us with the blessing of mixed blood!" His dark eyes flashed under his straight brows. "Like all the Western Alaska people, we have the benefits of the Russian Church."

"You must have thought that the whites weren't so bad after all, to have adopted their religion."

"On the contrary we thought that any religion which would save the souls of such men as those early Russian adventurers must be big medicine, so we clung to it. Frankly, I think it has helped us."

"I am glad you admit that, at least. Now for business. We want to start within the next day or two on this long trek to Pavlof. We are prepared to make every effort to find Sindy's son and we think you'll be able to help us."

Breed did not reply at once. His eyes were cloudy, his bitter mouth in repose, as he searched back through the years. Somehow, this name Sindy had a familiar ring—he seemed to know it in some other connection than that of the name of the Pavlof woman he had first mentioned—yet the memory-threads would not weave themselves into a recognizable pattern. "I don't think I can be any help to you," he answered gruffly, at last.

"At least you can guide us to the village, where we can make our own investigations. We need you, as well as some other laborers. Will you take the job?"

It had been in Breed's mind to refuse the offer. He had not dreamed of any other course. The sight of this smug, contemptuous man recalled all that was hateful to him—the curse of his mixed blood, the ruthless dominance of

the white man—and Paul's personal manner had been more than usually offensive from the first. He needed money to help in material ways his stricken, hopeless people, yet he felt it beyond him to take Paul's pay or to bow his head in Paul's service. This was an instinct with him. The very presence of these white people embittered him, simply because they represented all he had dreamed of in vain—beauty, refinement, the better things which he loved, but which were shut from him forever. This was true of Paul and Carter, but it was particularly true of Grace Crowell. He could not look at her without remembering with bitterness and hatred his own predestined environment. Her brightness cast a shadow over all he had, all he had ever known. The gayety in her face accentuated the hopeless, sunless, bitter mood of his Alaskan crags. Surely, the closer relations with them which such a contract entailed would only keep him from peace.

Yet the words of refusal would not come. They would not shape themselves on the hard line of his lips. His self-belief had always been his bulwark, until now; but he called on it in vain. It was as if some personal need—some inarticulate longing in his heart—carried everything before it. It overbore his judgment. It was stronger than his strength of pride on which he had come to rely. It was even mightier than his hatred. He was swept along like driftwood in a cataract.

"I'll go," he said. His eyes were lifted as if he were following a star.

CHAPTER V

THREE days after the Catherine had shoved in at the cannery, a morning dawned that seemed auspicious for the start of the expedition. This was the momentary pause between one storm and another; the wind, though brisk, was right to blow them northeast up the Peninsula, and the seas were safe for a shallow-draught launch. In such a craft the trio from the "Outside," with Breed Bert and his crew of three native packers, pushed through Isanotski Straits into Bering Sea. From thence they turned to the right, following the craggy coast in a northeasterly direction toward Bristol Bay.

In that first day's sailing Paul had got some idea of the land he had come to. He saw the wave-beaten reefs where many a good ship had died, the yellow barrens beyond brushed by a wind that was never still; he saw the bare gray hills, still touched with snow at their crests, rising at last to the lofty eminences of the Aleutian Range. Nowhere was there a place for a boat to land. The country seemed barricaded against all intrusion, as if its gods meant it ever to lie accursed, voiceless, and forsaken, wedded only to the storms sweeping its fastnesses. Where the hills sloped gently down to the beach, long shoals, washed by the tides, prevented even a dory from reaching the shore, or else outlying reefs forbade approach. Where the water was green and deep the land came down in abrupt cliffs, the mountains themselves dropping sharply off into the sea, and here the waves leaped and broke in deadly ferocity. . . . And though Paul looked till his eyes were tired, not once did he see a tree.

He was not greatly surprised. In his dreams he had seen these gray hills, lying naked to the ravishment of the storm; yet the sight made him brooding and wistful, and the secret fear he had experienced on first coming to Hopeless Land was enhanced. . . . Even his fear was somehow confused with exultation. Strange though his destiny would be in this most desolate of all countries, it was as if his heart leaped to meet it.

In the early evening the boat pushed into Izanback Bay, a long dent in the land offering the only shelter for hundreds of miles of rock-ribbed shore, and here the party disembarked. The launch turned back at this point, leaving a power dory to convey them the remainder of the water journey. The island where they had landed was a mere waste of sand and low moss-

grown hills; yet the spirit of Hopeless Land was over it; and Paul was again swept by a mystery he could not trace.

He felt it more and more with the passing days. It was in the wind that shrilled down over the hills; in the forlorn calls of the waterfowl, streaming in V-shaped flocks out of the South; and it whispered and rustled at night in the wastes outside the tent. He did not escape from it when, five days after leaving the cannery, the dory deposited the last of the outfit at the farthermost end of Izanback Bay, the start of a long trek across country to Pavlof village. Here at their first camp on the mainland his random thoughts in regard to it—the mystery of the land—began to group themselves in certain definite trains leading toward even more mysterious conclusions.

The first camp was on the yellow tundra facing the beach. Behind them rose the hills; in front were the long, gray reaches of Bering Sea. Sitting at the door of his tent with Grace, Paul saw the sun go down in red clouds—one of those ineffably gorgeous sunsets that so often cast a weird glare upon the waste places of the earth—and the peaks lit up like torches. Far away and behind them, on Unimak Island, Smoky Moses and his two tall brothers were wondrous and glowing, incarnadined all their length as they reared up out of the sea. The smoky trail that drifts ever from Moses' crater was a crimson wraith, hinting at the sleeping fires out of which the land was born. The wonder, the particular impressiveness of these Western Alaskan mountains lies in their setting. They do not spring from a lofty divide which breaks the sweep of the eye: they leap up full-grown with their roots in the sea. They are sharp and unworn, and, reckoned in geologic time, they were born but yesterday. The ruggedness and the glory of these unearthly mountains uplifted the girl's spirit, and because they imaged the beauty of her thoughts, her eyes filled with bright tears.

Soon the ruddy light died, leaving the whole range dead white and spotlessly pure. Grace still watched, unable to speak. In some ineffable way, the unsmirched loveliness of those heights found an answer in her own soul. She knew a magic to which Breed was blind, which to Paul was not even a dream.

Paul's thoughts turned inward rather than soaring aloft, and he was moody and remote as she had never seen him. In the enchantment of this hour he felt at the border of a profound discovery, more moving and portentous than any event of his life so far, yet ever elusive. He sensed the spirit of the land as never before; and it just missed having concrete meaning for him. . . . More and more this seemed the country of his destiny. As he

meditated, he heard the waterfowl passing to their roosting islands at sea; the haunted northern night crept in over the water.

The sharp edges of the distant mountains grew soft, as if by centuries of erosion. The country lost its harsh, stern, formidable aspect. The greens and blues of the sea changed to grays; the foam thrown on the beach was wanly white, ghostly in the deepening shadows. Still the wind swept by like a river, unvarying in tone, desolate as all winds blowing over waste places; and it seemed to carry a man's soul with it, out of the warm confines of his body and into gray space intervening between one world and another. . . . It had very little sound, considering its power. It moaned a little as it swept down over the flat, and the sea's voice was doubtless louder on account of it; yet Paul was aware of a startling, almost a dreadful silence.

This was the forsaken land. Paul knew it now. Only a forsaken people, asleep with that curious lethargy to which all races come before they pass away, could fit in here—these and the wild creatures that were the country's natural denizens. And the dim herds of caribou—the only animals abroad now in any numbers—seemed hardly animate but rather wandering spirits fitting to the place.

"Grace, I've been here before!" he exclaimed. The easy communion of ideas between himself and Grace had been denied him of late; but the boon had for the moment returned. He spoke softly, not to violate the night's rule of silence, but his tone had an intensity she had rarely heard in him.

"You've never told me that," she replied.

"I never knew it before. . . . Oh, of course I haven't really—unless you want to believe in the transmigration of souls. I have the queerest feeling of familiarity with this country. It all seems just right."

"You mean it exactly suits you?" she inquired.

"I can't say that. In fact, I hate the place—at least I'm afraid of it, some way or other. I suppose I mean that it has turned out just as I knew it would turn out—far down in some secret consciousness that knows more than I do. I feel as if I have been away a long, long time—but have come back at last."

"I have never given you credit for such an active imagination."

"I have always had one, just the same. It has always taken peculiar turns: particularly in the line of mysticism. I've always found myself looking for a mystical rather than a natural explanation for things I couldn't understand. But this feeling I have tonight seems stronger than mere imagination. I wish I could explain it better. . . .

“This country is getting to me, Grace—changing me, or rather running off a thin skin I’ve put on some place or other and leaving the real Paul Fieldmaster. I hope you are going to like him better. I hope he’ll grow before your eyes.”

Grace returned his rapt look, and the longing, the gracious tenderness in her eyes made them almost star-like in the growing dusk. No, she could not love Paul Fieldmaster more. She had given him the fullness of her love long before this. She wondered whether it ever could be less, whether any change in Paul, any growth or decay, even any change in his attitude toward her, could ever affect it. It was hard for her to believe that the walls of her heart would stand with her love gone out; it seemed part and parcel of her life. . . . Yet she feared what this land might do to him. She had already begun to notice the shedding of that outer skin he spoke of, the beginnings of a transformation which she could not understand.

It haunted her dreams.

She began to regret that she had urged Paul to come. It had been her own idea: Mrs. Fieldmaster had opposed it. She had assumed that the older woman’s reluctance to have him go was due to disapproval of their engagement, and having the trip in charge, Grace had insisted on his presence; but now she began to wonder if there could have been a deeper reason.

In the days of travel that followed Paul did not speak of the matter again, and whether it had been just a vagrant fancy, soon forgotten, or a reality so moving and extraordinary that he had actually begun to conceal it from her, Grace did not dare guess. However, there were certain pronounced changes in Paul Fieldmaster. In the first place, he was harder to reach; more difficult to talk to. She sensed an invisible barrier raised between them; and she could not ignore it as a foolish fancy. While in some ways he was a more ardent lover than ever, she seemed to feel a spiritual indifference to her, a falling-away of a fine comradeship that had been the dearest thing in her life. What was left, a purely physical desire like fire dancing in his eyes, estranged her.

It seemed to her there was even a retrogression in his once perfect manners. He appeared to forget many little things which were tenderly dear to her. He was less careful of his appearance, too, but this fact could perhaps be attributed to the difficulties of the trail. In the cold windy dawns or the tired-out twilights even the most simple toilet required a distinct effort. Often he seemed absorbed in his own musings to the exclusion of almost all other interests.

He failed to stand up well under the hardships of the journey. Although he carried no pack, the labor of walking across the marshy flats and over the moss-grown hills proved highly distasteful to him, and cost him his usual good-nature and amiability. His temper turned out to be an uncertain thing. He was ill-at-ease with Grace, sullen and suspicious toward Carter, and insulting to Breed Bert. The latter, in fact, got the benefit of most of his employer's irascibility. Curiously enough, Paul got on fairly well with the other men. He became rather familiar with them; and their laughter at his jests, their flattery and obsequious service seemed to mean much to him.

Because of Paul's attitude, that which had promised Grace a lively, unique adventure became a real trial. She longed for the journey to end. The glittering spire of Pavlof Mountain, rearing up above a fair white range, could not approach too quickly. The long miles crept beneath her impatient feet.

In these same days of wilderness travel, certain less pronounced changes appeared in Breed. He was not now so openly antagonistic toward the whites. Reserved and unsociable he remained, coldly indifferent to Grace; yet sometimes she was startled and vaguely appalled to find his dark gaze fixed on her, and sometimes his harsh speech seemed to break and soften. He took Paul's insults in remarkably good part; and he seemed to be doing his utmost for the welfare of the party. His men grumbled under his harsh rule, talked mightily and carried tales to Paul, but it was noticeable that the outfit moved along. Camp-work was quickly and efficiently done. The journey was made in slow stages, the packers going ahead and establishing supply camps, breaking camp behind them when the party had moved forward. This was the only possible method of travel in this trackless country and the immense amount of detail, planning, and supervision necessary for comfort rested entirely in Breed's hands: that he was equal to it both Grace and Carter were free to admit. His success was all the more notable because it was in spite of certain annoying interferences on the part of Paul.

One night, when Breed spoke sharply to a mutinous packer, Paul's meddling all but precipitated a crisis. His temper had been uncertain all day, and he seemed to take it out on Breed. "Who do you think you are, a white man?" Fieldmaster demanded angrily. "You've got no authority to boss those men around. You are no better than they are."

"Nonsense, Paul!" Grace interrupted, hoping to save the situation. "Bert is in charge of the outfit, and you know it."

“Not if I know myself.” Paul turned to the girl with blanched face and trembling lips. “No half-breed is going to be in charge of me, and he’s not going to take too much authority around here, either.” As he turned back to Breed he was plainly in a reckless, almost a frenzied mood.

“Don’t think you’re any better than those other men because you’re part white,” Paul went on vindictively. “A drop of native blood makes a native, and you’re a Siwash like the rest of ’em, for all you’re a squaw-man’s son. So don’t put on any airs around me.”

This was so utterly unjust—the imputation that he had tried to step out of his place—that Breed’s first emotion was simple amazement. Then the words sunk home but still he looked calmly into Paul’s face, rising above his insults in a way that amazed both white spectators. Just what restrained the tempest of his rage even he did not know—it was a new gift in him—but whatever it was, it made him master of the situation. Paul’s strong words became the babbling of a child, not worth a man’s time to answer.

“Oh, chuck it!” Carter exclaimed. “You are making a braying ass of yourself, Paul. You’re showing off in a mighty bad light.”

It was true. The country threw a sharp, bright, but certainly unfavorable light on this cosmopolite. The strange look of his heavy face shocked Grace, filling her with misgivings, as he turned into his tent.

His conduct the next few days showed he was somewhat ashamed of his outburst. He devoted more attention to Grace, and his manner toward Breed was not openly insulting as it had hitherto been. Indeed, as they camped in the hills two days’ journey from Pavlof village, he came to Breed’s tent for a conference.

When the two men began to talk in the guides’ quarters, no visible signs indicated that this might develop into one of the memorable hours of Breed’s life. The setting was wholly commonplace; the white canvas, shivering in the wind, the floor of cut grass, the glowing camp stove that had been borne by human muscle across the wilderness, and the wan, yellow beam of two candles. Paul came merely to ask for further information regarding the Pavlof woman whom Breed knew as Sindy.

“You say this Sindy has no son and never had a son so far as you know,” Paul began. “Of course Sindy is a common name and this might not be the one we want, but I think she is worth looking up. Do you think you would recognize a picture of her?”

“I am sure I would. I’ve known her a long time.”

“Well, I have a picture here of the woman we want—the mother of the boy we are looking for. The picture was taken over twenty-five years ago, but maybe you can see some resemblance if it is the same Sindy that you know.”

From a leather case Paul produced the picture, carefully protected by a metal sheath. He put it in Breed’s hands.

The latter glanced at it carelessly, noting first that it was an informal photograph of a group of people, probably taken with one of the earliest types of portable cameras. It was good photography, superior to much that is produced today, and the railing behind the group indicated that the picture had been taken on shipboard. As Breed’s eye lighted on the figures, his gaze seemed to lock, and the ebbing color in his face left the weather-beaten skin like brown, dead leather.

No other change was visible in him. He did not perceptibly start. The hand, holding the picture, trembled not at all, but was steady as when—on the windy tundras—he had taken aim with his rifle at the caribou. There was not even a tremor on his lips. Yet Paul’s voice seemed to reach him from a great distance, and the words were all but lost in the swirling storm in his brain.

“She’s the one at the left—the native woman,” Paul was saying. “Does she look like the Sindy that you know?”

But Paul did not need to point out the woman. The other’s look had already fastened on the indicated figure, as if it could never be torn away. “It’s not the Sindy that I know,” was the dull reply.

Something in his tone quickened Paul’s interest and possibly aroused suspicions of his sincerity. “You’re sure, are you?”

Breed nodded. “Entirely sure.”

“All right. I’m afraid it’s a goose-chase. We will probably never find the beggar.”

He took the picture from Breed’s steady hand and put it back in its case, then went out. Breed watched his departure with a smile so bitter, with eyes so glowing and strange as to change his whole outward aspect. . . . But Paul had been mistaken in one thing. The expedition was not a goose-chase, doomed to failure. The beggar had already been found.

The woman in the picture, the commonplace native woman squat and ugly like so many of the rest, had been known as Sindy to Mrs. Fieldmaster,

but Breed knew her by another name. He knew her by an even more significant title than Maria, which she was called in the tribe. He knew her by the name of mother.

CHAPTER VI

It was not so much to Breed Bert that he knew his father's name at last. The fact that it was Prentiss Fieldmaster, known as a gentleman, could not greatly affect the destiny of his outcast son. Indeed, Breed would have preferred that his father were proved an unlettered fisherman or trapper, so that the evil of the adultery might be less. The tide of bitterness which now seemed to supplant the lifeblood in his veins came from the full realization, at last, of what might have been; of his own loss; of the irremediable wrong that had been done him. For the gratification of a momentary desire, Prentiss Fieldmaster had been false to his race, to his line, to his wife, and to himself; he had bartered away his son's birthright of white blood for a base lust.

Most of all, he had been false to the potentialities of fatherhood, the gift of giving life.

It had been said, long ago, that the sins of the father must be visited upon the children. Breed did not know why this was true—why any Lawmaker should order it in His wisdom. He could not see the justice behind it; but surely he knew its truth. The sins of Prentiss Fieldmaster had surely been visited upon him. Because the heart of the man was white, because—unlike many of mixed blood—he knew the dreams and the urgings that have inspired the white race to greatness, he had paid the penalty to the full. He had been cursed with an ancient curse; and the lifting of it was beyond any power of heaven and earth that he knew.

It was not so much to him that Paul Fieldmaster should be proved his own half-brother. Such was the case, according to Paul himself—that while the latter was Prentiss Fieldmaster's son by his white wife, the boy they sought was his son by the squaw photographed on shipboard—but this made little difference to Breed. Paul's insults would be no harder to endure; his attitude of contempt and scorn and assumption of superiority would, though infinitely ironical, disturb him no more or less. The thought that plagued him was still the sin that had been visited upon him. Except for a momentary weakness on the part of his father, a base desire that was gratified and forgotten, Breed might now be standing where Paul stood, with Paul's chances for happiness, for life and for love.

The truth would not have cut so deep had he learned it before the start of this fateful expedition. He could not deny this fact. Until lately he had only

conjectured the opportunities which he was denied; now he had seen them with his eyes. The full magnitude of that sin of nearly thirty years before had come home to him at last. For the first time he knew what lay beyond the gate to which the key was lost. He had seen the light beyond, only to know he could never reach it.

As he looked toward that light, in fancy—like a moth that will beat its wings in vain against the glass—the character of his vision changed. It was not now just a bright gleam of happiness and hope, of advantages unprized by those who possess them to the full; it became the immortal radiance that shines forth from a splendid soul. Beauty, grace, loveliness, all the habiliments of such a soul were Paul's to gain, to love, to throw away if he chose, and he hardly cared. Except for one great fault, that blessing to gain and love—but never to throw away in this life or the next—might have been Breed Bert's. The charm of the reality before his eyes surpassed all those dear figments which his beauty-loving fancy had created. The hand which in his dreams now touched and clasped his own would, were it his to have and hold, lift him far, far beyond the sway of shame and wrong, protect him far more than his great strength could protect it; hold him up and bear him on.

No wrong could touch him! No jealous destiny could cast him down!

The hours passed and found him sitting where Paul had left him, staring at his brown hands. Oh, they were mighty hands! Unaided, they could shatter such a man as Paul. The latter would be a child in them; in one rending grasp they could wrench away his life. . . . But there was no good in this. Such could not change Breed's destiny. It would only bring tears to those eyes which should be full of the sun. It would not help him, but only defeat his new-found purpose, by which he might yet find an excuse for life, thus to tear his brother from his love's arms.

At last the candles sputtered out, and darkness called him from his thoughts. He got up slowly, as if this hour had aged him, and stood at the door of his tent. For a long time he listened to the wilderness's familiar voice.

He heard the soft, hushed noises of the night: the gurgle of running water, far away; the thin, almost imperceptible rustling of grass-stems under the wind; the click and rattle of alder-boughs rubbing together. A living thing coughed softly on the hillside—one of the smaller denizens of the barren lands—and after a long pause, some water-bird called far away, just a mere black tremor of sound creeping in over the wastes. . . . It was a cold night, ruthless to all living things abroad. The little noises of the moist,

drinking earth were stilled. Tattered rags of clouds were blown through the sky, and sometimes they revealed a blue-white star, and once the moon showed through, unusually white and metallic-looking through the clear air, bringing out for an instant the far-off outline of Pavlof Mountain. A queer suspense and breathlessness abode in the air; and since Breed had thought upon a certain name deeply enough to broadcast it far, he wondered if his father's ghost had heard and stood beside him on the wind-raped hillside. If so, he must have come to beg forgiveness for an old wrong, a most unnatural wrong, in that it had been committed against his own son.

Breed's penetrative thought sought in vain for any chance of a mistake. Without doubt he was the man for whom the search-party had been sent. The picture was unquestionably Maria's. Now that his thought had been given the proper direction, many little mysteries were cleared up. He remembered about Sindy. What had been the vaguest kind of recollection—sought for in vain when Paul had first mentioned the name—now was recalled as a distinct experience. He remembered that his mother had had a visitor from among the natives of Kadiak—the great island to the south and east—and this woman had called her Sindy instead of Maria, the name known to her neighbors. The intimate acquaintance of the two women indicated that Maria, also, had been of the Kadiak people, and for some reason had emigrated to the remote, all-but-lost Pavlof village. This had never occurred to him before. If it were true, Maria had certainly kept the fact from him intentionally: she had always let him think he was rooted in the Pavlof tribe. This concealment was doubtless for the same reason that had brought about her change of name.

It was an unusual act for an Aleut woman—to conceal her identity and her tribe—and she must have had urgent cause. There seemed to be but one logical supposition—that even in those days, she had been afraid her baby would be taken from her. Probably she had discovered Mrs. Fieldmaster's early attempts to find Fieldmaster's half-caste son, and realizing that an effort might be made to transplant him to a happier environment, the Indian mother not only fled from her native village but had gone to some effort to conceal her flight.

She had done just the thing a primitive woman might have been counted on to do.

The present revelation threw light upon another dimly recalled incident of his boyhood. He remembered, that almost twenty years before, a white man had come to Pavlof, making inquiries, and his mother had conferred long and privately with some of the old men of the village. It was a

significant fact that during the white man's stay, the child, Bert, was kept closely in the house. After the man had gone, Maria and he had forsaken the wretched igloo they had known as home, and had built a *barabara* in the mountains several miles back from the village; and here the old woman still lived. It was plain enough that this man had been one of Mrs. Fieldmaster's detectives. By some cunning or crime on the part of the Pavlof people he had been put off the trail.

With just a little variation of event the detective would have found him then, and sufficient pressure might have been brought to bear on Maria to make her give up her child. Possibly Mrs. Fieldmaster could have worked through the Russian priest, father of the present priest at Pavlof, who had been one of Maria's lesser gods. In this case, what would have been his destiny? Whether he regretted that things were as they were he did not know; he was rather doubtful if one of mixed blood could have ever become one with the whites, even though he were cast among them in infancy. Here, on these dreary, reef-bound shores, was the fitting environment of the Aleut; in Mrs. Fieldmaster's home he might have been an anomaly hard to handle.

All this, however, was of the dead past. The point that now struck Breed with singular force was that even if such a transplanting had been possible in his early boyhood it was out of the question now. It was a preposterous idea. A half-breed son of her husband would not only be a stranger to Mrs. Fieldmaster—as much so as if he were picked up out of the street—but he would be an alien. No ties of blood would bind them to each other. Commendable though the white woman's intentions were, surely they were folly. The idea of revealing his identity and going back with the search-party was not worth his thought.

Not for a moment did he consider such a plan. In the first place, he did not want his father's help, directly or indirectly. The name of Prentiss Fieldmaster was hateful to him; he hoped he would never hear it again. He wanted to forget his white blood; it was only a torment to him. To accept his stepmother's charity would cost him his faltering self-respect; even the filth and squalor of the squaw's *barabara* was better than to be patronized, snubbed, and apologized for and to remain a misfit through it all. His basic qualities of strength forbade that he consider such a course, even if his pride had permitted, and he was swayed by a certain weakness as well as by strength. He could not enjoy a lifetime of Paul's insults. . . . He was doubtful if he could tolerate even one more now that he knew who he was, and who Paul was. Sometime the storm of his rage might be loosed with disastrous consequences. Above this, and beyond it, there was one supreme reason why

life in or near the Fieldmaster household could not be suffered. The breadth of seas must keep from his vision the sight he could not bear to see—a girl in her lover's arms.

The thing to do was to leave tonight. Tonight he could vanish into the fastnesses of the ranges, never, if he chose, to see a white face again. Far back in the snowy valleys he could live the life of a hunter, killing his own meat, catching his own furs for garments, dreaming by his own lonely fire. In dreams of solitude he must find his happiness, from now on. At least he would have these, and if he yielded himself to them wholly, he might believe them real. . . . When the fire of alder-boughs was ruddy-red, and the wind wailed at the cavern mouth, and all the land was an unbroken snowfield turning a man's thoughts inward by its likeness to eternity, those dreams would almost come to life, peopling his rocky lair with phantoms. This was all he could ask for now.

He walked farther into the darkness. No one was watching him; he need make no explanations. When the camp stirred at dawn, his departure would be attributed to the irrational impulse of an eccentric man. He would not take any of the party's equipment—only his own rifle, shells, and knife and his camp-axe slung on his belt. Even in this unfavorable season, when the lingering shadow of winter was still over the land, he could make his way unaided. Such was his strength and training.

He encircled the heavy growth of alders that sheltered the camp, and the wind pounced upon him with savage force. He stood bracing himself against it, caught up by a new train of thought. . . . He had forgotten this wind, resisting all intrusion into Hopeless Land. It was the very voice of the cruel natural powers which here were in dominance. Hateful of the sound of human voices in their old silences, these powers would fight the newcomers as with tooth and claw. Tender ones from afar were easy prey; it might be that the expedition would find only disaster at the end of its search.

Breed advanced until he stood just outside the wall of Grace's tent, listening as if for the whisper of her breath. Even her spiritual strength might not prevail against the rough forces of the wilderness. It could soften a man's heart, it could sweeten his bitter thoughts, it might save his darkened soul in a way undreamed of by the native medicine-man who still repeated sacred words in the lost temple of Pavlof village—yet it was powerless against the North. If he turned back she must go on alone. Except for him she must face danger virtually unprotected.

A wan smile crept over his stern lips. It was an acknowledgment of defeat: he was no longer his own master. Destiny was too strong for him, after all, as it is for all men, sooner or later. Lest he make some awkward sound and disturb her sleep he moved softly away from the tent. He did not head up into the hills. He turned back into his tent, lay down on his rough pallet, and drew his robes over him.

CHAPTER VII

THE next day's travel brought the party to the edge of the snow. They followed a range of foothills that gradually led them into the heart of the mountains. This was a wilder country than Grace had seen so far: the grandeur of these heaped-up mountains awed her. No need to tell her that the mountain-makers were still at work at this end of the world. She could almost hear the ring of their anvils.

Sometimes the high plateaus were black with cinders from a subterranean forge; the land was ripped and torn as if it had been the playground of careless gods. Frowning cliffs, mountains unrounded by the gentling processes of erosion, fang-like peaks, deep, dark gorges where the eye scarcely dared wander, crags piled upon crags in aimless fury, rock-heaps strewn where Titan hands had dropped them.

Paul was another deeply sensible to this witchcraft region. In worshiping it, he all but forgot the girl at his side. Here he seemed to escape from her more and more, and Grace was vaguely appalled at what she read in his face. It was one thing to be stirred and glorified by the scene: it was quite another to turn pale and wide-eyed, and to be carried out of one's self like a man in a trance. Paul was remote from her, as she had not believed he could be, forgetting that he had known the communion of her lips, failing in the little services she counted on.

It must have been her desire for sympathy, cut off from her fellows as she was, that seemed to bring Breed Bert nearer. He was alien and an outcast, yet he seemed to sense the bitter loneliness that she found here among the crags. He was not so stern, today, not so rough in his speech and ways; his look was not so bitter and cold. The fortune of the trail kept him at her side the whole day; yet she was not sorry. She still feared his intent gaze, but now it was more as if he were guarding her. In the late afternoon these two were thrown even closer together.

They had come to a deep stream, rushing out of a steep-walled valley, and a conference was necessary as to how it was to be crossed. "There isn't a great deal of choice," Breed explained. "We can either plunge in and get wet, or else go upstream and look for a place to ford. There's one not more than a quarter of a mile above here."

“How much farther is the camp?” Carter asked.

“You can see the white tent in that valley up ahead—not more than a mile, at most.”

“Then I’m going to prance through and get wet. It isn’t over our necks, and we can rush out and get into camp in no time. The boys will have a big fire to dry us off, and we can pretend we’ve had a bath. We haven’t much chance of getting one any other way. I’d sooner get wet than walk an extra one of your half-miles.”

“How about you, Miss Crowell?” Breed asked. “I don’t imagine you’d care to be wet; and it’s pretty deep to attempt to carry you over. A man would have to pack you high up in his arms, and then he might not keep his balance on the slippery rocks.”

“I wouldn’t want to get wet; I’m sure of that,” Grace replied. “I’m afraid that water isn’t quite the temperature I prefer. How did the men get their packs over?”

“They must have found a ford, probably the one upstream. I’ll guide you up there, if you like. We can cut across and get to camp almost as soon as the others.”

Grace hesitated, waiting for Paul to express a wish to accompany her. Paul, however, had other intentions. He also was eager to reach camp, and personal comfort lacked the meaning it had once possessed for him. Lately she had seen a most remarkable change in him; while he dreaded physical labor even more than formerly, complaining and being out of temper with it, he was notably less fastidious in regard to exterior conditions. He would tolerate what Grace thought an objectionable amount of dirt rather than go to the effort to clean it up. He was less particular about his food and its preparation, and the care he received from the men. He failed to notice whether the cook’s hands were clean: at times he was almost careless about his own. He would sooner go unkempt than take the trouble to groom himself. Many of his sensibilities had apparently faded away. His attitude now reflected a philosophy to do without rather than to make an effort. He would walk a mile in wet, sloshing, cold clothes, unbearable to Grace’s sensitive skin, rather than take the roundabout way of comfort. The fact that he must leave his sweetheart to her own devices restrained him not at all. He would not walk the extra half-mile on his own account, so why should he on hers?

She saw him splash into the water, flounder through, and go on up the opposite bank. If he made a sign for her to follow or even looked around, she did not see him. Doubtless he was eager to get to camp. . . .

"I'll go on too, if you don't mind, Grace," Carter told her. "Bert says he'll take you around the ford."

Carter was as good as his word. Grace and Breed Bert were left on the bank alone. The former could hardly restrain tears; and almost unbelieving, she watched her two protectors trudging steadily on toward camp. At last she descended to the water's edge as if to wade through and follow.

"I'd be glad to show you the ford," Breed said, speaking from the bank behind her. His voice was phlegmatic and unfeeling. She turned to him brightly, concealing not only the wound she had just received but her fear of the guide. Tender-hearted as a child, she did not want him to know that she dreaded him even more than the river and was painfully reluctant to go alone with him in search of a crossing. . . . Yet she would be thrown with him only for a few hundred yards' walk up the stream—and quite likely she would remain in sight of her friends all the time, provided they would condescend to turn and look. She was also urged by her pride. The ancient business of cutting off one's nose is often prompted by pride as well as spite, and she could not bear to let Paul see her come splashing through the stream behind him.

Against her wishes and in spite of her fears, she nodded in assent.

The two struck off up the stream. It turned out to be an adventurous quarter of a mile. They clung to steep banks, they skirted thickets of brush, they worked their way over the cool, moss-covered rocks at the very gurgling edge of the water. Once, as they crossed a huge crag—hurled like a flint from some distant crater—his hand accidentally touched hers; and it was cold like the rest of him. . . . But the short walk was not only adventurous. It was also futile: when Breed reached the end of the quarter-mile, the ford was not there.

The river ran swift and full, the green water showing considerable depth. The man stood on the bank, looking up and down as if he had lost his way. "This is where I've always crossed," he said in a puzzled tone. "What has been happening to this stream?"

Grace searched his face for any sign of insincerity, and found none. If he were pretending, hoping to draw her on farther into the wilds, he had missed

his calling as an actor. Evidently he was faced with some bewildering transition in his familiar scenery.

"This is the devil-country!" he exclaimed with some ardor. "Miss Crowell, you've heard the expression 'as old as the hills.' It doesn't work out here. A hill may be here today and gone tomorrow. A man can't figure on his landmarks a year ahead. You see, a great part of this country is still changing. The mountains can all turn into volcanoes, it seems. You've heard of the Valley of Ten Thousand Smokes? It is not far from here, and until twelve years ago it didn't exist at all. It was caused by the Katmai eruption, in 1912. Islands appear and disappear in nearby waters, and navigators out here say they can't trust their charts because of frequent changes in the ocean floor. They call these waters 'the ships' graveyard' and that is one of the reasons. There must have been some big doings around here sometime last winter. It looks as if a big earthquake in this gorge had turned the bed of the stream, and new springs have opened into it. There is more water here than I've ever seen, considering the season."

"That is all very interesting, but what are we going to do? Go back and wade?" The girl's tone was not cold, but rather anxious and uneasy.

"I hate to turn back. We're bound to find a ford in a short time—the higher we go, the better our chance. . . . Miss Crowell, I believe this creek is rising."

"What will it mean?"

"Nothing very serious. However, it may mean that the men caught that ford below here just in time. Something is happening up in the headwaters: either a big quake has opened up new springs, or else there has been a snowslide into some little lake, making it overflow. In this weather snowslides are rare—they won't be along till later in the spring—so I consider a quake will furnish the true explanation. It's nothing for us old trappers out here to have our dishes jump around on the table, as if they had something alive inside of 'em."

With this remarkable statement he started up the creek, and Grace was obliged to follow him. She was considerably ill-at-ease. She was far from her friends and the distance between was steadily widening. The latter were out of sight, and now she found herself virtually at the mercy of this dark man whose heart she could not understand, a stranger and an alien.

As they went up the gorge, the stream became a series of cascades, musical in the still glen but filling her with dismay. Here were the clear, icy

depths that the trout loved, behind huge bowlders and at the base of waterfalls; whirlpools swirled at her feet; natural caldrons between the rocks seethed with white foam. Realizing the girl's anxiety, Breed became troubled, too, and occasionally he paused as if about to turn back.

There is something seductive about the curves of a stream. Fishermen and fowlers know this, know how it is to be drawn from one long bend to another by the promise of better sport; even lazy wanderers follow miles beyond their intentions. It is as if each curve were a horizontal rainbow. A tricky scheme of nature to take advantage of man's optimism and curiosity! Sometimes the curves beckon to an ultimate pot of gold, but they are not to be trusted. They are just as likely to come out at Nowhere.

On this early May evening these two wanderers, hoping always that a passable ford could be found beyond the next bend, were lured much farther into the gorge than they intended going. They never found the end of any particular curve; instead, merely the first turn of another. As the gorge narrowed, walking became more difficult, and both ignored the rapid passing of time. Breed was too busy picking the course to keep track of the minutes, and Grace, painfully tired and at the verge of panic, would not let herself think about them.

Presently she saw a curious grayness floating toward her in frowzy strands down the gorge. She looked at it hard, wondering if it were a trick of her tired eyes; but it increased in quantity and depth. Her first fancy was that this might be twilight, miraculously taking substance. But the day lived yet, and it was immediately plain that they were being overswept by the vapor-clouds that abide in the hills.

The mist poured down around them—nothing less than a cloud of cold steam—and thickened like gruel over fire. It changed the landscape. The curves of the stream no longer beckoned: only a few feet of water were visible, flowing from nothingness. The divide above them was obscured: Breed's landmarks faded more swiftly than by the shaking-down of the land he had complained of earlier in the day. The little, struggling alder bush, that ever tries to be a tree and never can lift its branches from the ground, looked misty and almost beautiful against the infinity of fog behind, as if it were the last growing thing at the edge of the world. Even these two people were dimmed to each other, the gray vapor drifted so thick between.

"We've got to work out of this," Breed said. He spoke flatly as ever, and how this sudden blinding had affected him she could not tell. His dark face was in repose: the glowing in his eyes alone reached her clear and

undimmed through the mist. “I guess it’ll be clear on top the hill. I’ll try the first place that offers any chance to cross.”

They pushed on again, and two hundred yards up the stream Breed found a possible ford. The water poured down in a smooth sheet, evidently not of great depth but with startling momentum. He belted tight the top of his hip-length wading-stockings, hoping thus to keep any quantity of water from running in, then plunged into the flood.

Grace saw at once that this was to be no little test of his strength. The demons that lived under the water did not mean he should cross in peace. Breed knew them of old, and many times he had fought them, but he had never met them in such a mood of fury. They sprang at him like wolves; they tore at his thighs with a ferocity and violence that almost overbore him at the start. His loose-hung shoulders lurched as he braced himself to meet the onslaught of the waters; his smooth brown neck became an irregular column as the veins leaped and twitched from the sudden pressure, counterbalancing that of the flood, of the red river of his veins; and the hard little muscles rippled like ropes. He plunged on full to the center of the stream.

It was just above his waist at this point and for a moment he paused as if to test his strength. He seemed to revel in the fury of this attack: for the first time since they had met, Grace saw his somber eyes light up in what was almost a smile. This was a startling phenomenon, changing the entire aspect of his face, revealing a new side of his nature, and, for the instant that it endured, lifting from her her fear of him. For the moment she forgot this crisis, her position, and the clamoring frenzy of their foe, the river.

He took two steps upstream to prove his mastery, then waded across and left his heavy pack and rifle on the opposite bank. Presently he stood at the girl’s side again. “I’ll have to carry you,” he told her simply.

She could discern not even a slight change in his tone, nor did any quickening of breath indicate the effort he had just made. He seemed wholly indifferent to it, and, for that matter, to her. She was about to suggest that he let her wade, helping her with his hand, but his inscrutable face seemed to silence her, in spite of herself, in spite of the rebellious fire that burned through her. . . . Yet she could not quite hate this man. When she tried to do so, she kept remembering a red trickle down his hands, that far-off day at the cannery. Now it seemed he would do the same again—play the sporting chance in a manner that would have honored the best in the land—in her

heart was the certain knowledge that he could be counted on for just that thing. . . .

He stepped to her side and lifted her in his arms, this in a matter-of-fact manner that dispelled embarrassment. He did it without show of effort, and calmly. Holding her against his breast, he stepped into the flood.

Until now she had not realized the full might of the stream. Like a current of electricity of which he was a perfect conductor, it carried through the man's frame into her own body. Although no drop of water touched her the fight became, in a sense, her own: it was as if she, too, were struggling against the water-devils that tried to sweep them down. For an instant, facing this danger together, she and the man in whose arms she lay were brought strangely, wonderfully close. She forgot the barrier between them; they were not Indian and white, but two mortal beings, facing a common enemy. For the time she had established a certain comradeship, almost a oneness with him.

She felt the thrilling play of his back and shoulders. Through his sleeves she knew muscles like steel bands. Suddenly she found a deep sense of security, one of the most poignant and telling emotions of her life; a surety that this man would bring her through. The river-demons clutched at him in vain. The waters clamored and roared, but they could not tear him down.

Yet she must help him all she could. She must not hang dead weight in his arms. Her own arms went about his neck, sustaining her to the limit of her strength. And here, in the middle of the stream, she heard him utter a queer, whispered sound, like a deep gasp that had been wrenched out of his heart. It was such a sound as an oak might make when it is cleft asunder.

CHAPTER VIII

THE instant he set her down, Grace's fear returned: fear of the North and of Breed. The comradeship she had felt for him was instantly dispelled, and the remembrance of it was all but incredible to her. The image of her arms about his neck, so natural before, now filled her with dismay. She realized that she had done a reckless thing. This man could not be expected to make a true interpretation of her act, and would probably try to take advantage of what he would deem a familiarity. She would be fortunate if he went no further: the act might easily waken the wild beast in him, and she could not dismiss the thought that she was at his mercy.

This danger made her position here—lost in the fog in this lonely glen—all the more formidable. Breed did not pause. He started climbing up the mountainside, evidently expecting her to follow him.

No other course appeared to be open. Her eye told her at once that the steep walls of the gorge would not permit her to go back the way she had come to the point where her friends had crossed the river. Her safety depended still on the guide. And now another menace was added. Plainly the day was dying, and twilight was crowding in just behind the fog.

Like most women—and most men, if they would but confess it—Grace had a primitive fear of the dark. She was far from the friendly camp-fire, the haven of the tents, and she did not know the way to find them. She had lost all sense of direction in the fog, and besides, she doubted if she could pick her way over the cliffs and hills. Her only help lay in this sullen savage whom she feared as much as she feared the night itself. She could not forget that darkness blinds a man's conscience as surely as it blinds his eyes, and all that is wild and terrible in the natural man comes creeping forth like a beast from its lair. She was not merely uneasy now; she was close to the edge of terror.

The night came on with startling rapidity. The heavy clouds as well as the thick fog cut off any after-glow, and the light languished and faded. Now, for the first time, Breed himself seemed to be uncertain of the course. He had a troubled look she had never seen in his impassive face, and now and then he paused as if in doubt where to go. Just once he turned and asked:

"Am I going too fast?"

He spoke rather gently, for Breed; yet the girl was not reassured.

"No." She tried hard to speak with calmness. She had an instinct against letting this man know her fear. "I wish you'd try to hurry. I want to get to camp before it's pitch-dark."

She thought she saw a trace of a sardonic smile curling his lips. "We don't want to go too fast," he cautioned gravely. "The night won't hurt us, but a bad fall might." His voice dropped a tone, as if he were ashamed of the pity he felt for her. "I'll see that you come to no harm."

Yet it was plain that the growing dusk had discomfited him. He knew the feel of the land, but the fog had concealed his landmarks and now the twilight shortened his vista to a few yards. The much-vaunted sense of direction with which wilderness men are blessed is usually a matter of keen observation, retentive memory and knowledge of the general layout of mountain regions; and only one of these three tonight was in Breed's favor. He had never been in this immediate canyon before; the fog and the twilight limited his view; and finally, the adjacent country had undergone such changes that he felt himself almost a stranger in it.

He was not lost. In one sense, a true wilderness man never can be lost, although he may occasionally lose his wickiup. Breed was sure of getting the girl to shelter as soon as certain difficulties were surmounted. He had already realized the impossibility of following the creek down to the mouth of the valley leading to the tents—in other words, of back-tracking. The gorge was too steep to attempt after dark. His plan now was to work up over the top and down, the most direct path to the camp.

He mounted slowly, choosing his way with care. Considering the fog and twilight, he found excellent walking for the girl who toiled behind him. Because she had nothing to do but follow, she thought that his gait was unnecessarily slow; and near as she was to panic, she grew suspicious of his motives. Was he trying to detain her here on this desolate mountain? She was yet to learn that this careful advance was the proof of his long wilderness training, the index of his cool, unfailing self-control.

He reached the crest in the lingering gloom of late twilight; and to the girl's dismay, stopped a full minute to look about him. Her nerves twitched and leaped; and the pressure of tears tormented her eyes. For all that her heart raced from the long climb, that her muscles ached and every breath was drawn in pain, she was wild to go on in search of the camp.

“Oh, won’t you try to hurry?” she begged at last.

He glanced at her quickly, evidently startled by her tone; then stepped close, so absorbed in her as to remain unconscious of her look of terror. He seemed to be lost in speculations regarding her; and what these were she did not dare think.

“Are you very tired?” he asked sharply.

“No—no! Can’t you hear me begging you to go on? I’m not tired at all.”

“We’ll go on—as soon as we can. Not a minute sooner. I’m afraid we’ve been going too fast.” As he spoke he reached a long arm and touched his fingers to the warm flesh of her throat.

She flung back, ready to scream, forgetful of the gorge behind her. Except that he caught her hand she might have lost her balance and pitched down the steep descent.

“Don’t be a fool!” Breed reproved her, gruffly but not unkindly. “You’re all right yet a while, and you’ll break your neck down that canyon if you’re not careful. I only wanted to feel that artery.”

Whether this was a subterfuge Grace did not know. Certainly his manner seemed sincere. She submitted to his touch, and for a moment he seemed to be listening to her sharp, quick breathing. “I guess you are all right,” he told her. “I was afraid I had let you overdo. That was a steep climb.”

“Then if you’re satisfied—about my condition—why can’t we go on? We’re not getting anywhere, here on this mountain.”

The look on his face was almost humorous, and in spite of her alarm, she could not help being reassured. The mood which she feared was across the world from humor.

“Where would you suggest that we go?” he asked. “I surely don’t have to tell you that we’re not going down that cliff.”

Breed pointed ahead, and for the first time she saw that their forward advance was cut off. They were standing at the brink of a sheer precipice, falling away in darkness far below them. Compared to this, the mountainside behind them was an easy grade.

“Don’t—don’t you know the way?”

“Sure, but sometimes the way is impassable, especially after dark. Don’t be alarmed, Miss Crowell. I’ll do the best I can for you.”

He headed slowly along the ridge. Heart-sick, Grace tried to hasten him by walking close behind. Presently he found a spring at the head of a draw, and although the sound of falling water showed that the creek-bed dropped sharply off, he followed down it a short distance. He soon came to a small patch of alders, growing almost at the brink of an abrupt wall.

Here, where once a stream had played, he paused before what seemed to be a black shadow hovering under overhanging rocks. He bent down, groping with his hand. Presently his voice rang like a deep bell in the twilight hush.

"Miss Crowell, you're in luck after all!"

She had never heard him speak in this tone before. She had not known that his voice possessed the range and timbre that it displayed now; in some momentary enthusiasm, which as yet she did not comprehend, his dead tones had come to life. Grace was lifted up by the ringing notes.

"Are we close to camp?" she asked.

"A long way, I'm afraid. Just the same, you're not going to have to sleep under the sky. I was worried for a while, because I haven't tarpaulins in my pack, and a brush camp is mighty uncomfortable without them. We just ran into this by a chance in a hundred."

Hopeful yet of some other interpretation of his words, she searched his face. She swallowed painfully when she tried to speak. "You don't mean—you don't mean to stay *here*?"

"Of course stay here." He relapsed again into the flat, guttural tones she knew. "We can't go on, Miss Crowell—it's out of the question. This is a big, dry cave—and I can make you as comfortable as in your own tent."

As yet, Breed had no conception of the extremity of terror that possessed Grace. She believed she read his wicked purpose and she struggled to rally her faculties, thinking her only hope lay in a bold front—in the basic superiority of the white over the red man. She blessed the darkness that hid the pallor of her face.

Paul had been right about him, after all. Her instincts had deceived her; and now she was at his mercy.

"It's an absurd idea," she answered with coldness. Her tone of authority sounded entirely genuine. "I wouldn't dream of camping out here. Take me to camp as quick as you can."

The gloom did not let her see the quick decline of his spirits. “I can’t take you into camp,” he told her.

“You don’t know the way?”

“I know the way, but we can’t make it. Camp is on the other side of this precipice. We can’t possibly get down it in the darkness, and we can’t find our way around it until daylight. I’ve been looking for a decent place for you to pass the night ever since we got on top of the ridge.”

“Then please point out the direction camp is in, as near as you can. I’m going on alone.”

He shook his head. “It won’t do, Miss Crowell.”

“You mean—you’d try to restrain me?”

“I would—if I had to. Maybe you don’t understand. If you tried to climb down that cliff tonight, you’d be killed—every bone in your body broken to bits in the gorge below. You are tired out now, so nervous you couldn’t even make a start. You’re safe here—nothing in the world to harm you.” His tone softened, as if he were trying to persuade her against folly. “I’ll make you comfortable, never fear. I’ll have a fine fire for you in a minute.”

“Please point out the way,” she ordered. “You seem to forget you were hired as a guide.”

“That’s just it. I’m the guide. I might let you go and break your neck except for that. I might—but even then I’d be a fool and try to save you. As the head guide of this party I can’t do it, and I won’t do it. The first duty of a guide in this North country is to look out for the lives of the tenderfeet he’s got in charge. You might as well make yourself as comfortable as you can.”

“You mean—you’ll hold me here by force?”

“Sooner than let you break your neck on the mountain.”

His casual tones did not in the least conceal their sincerity. He meant quite what he said. And now her terror was giving way to rage.

“You tricked me here!” she told him. “You led me out of the way on purpose. Breed, you’re taking a dangerous chance.”

This was the first time she had called him Breed; and he did not miss the scorn in her voice. He recoiled, but at first he made no reply. He leaned his rifle against the rock, apparently oblivious to the fact that it was in easy reach of her hand; then unslung his pack. Presently he straightened, looking directly into her eyes.

“I hadn’t ought to answer that charge, but let you go ahead and think what you say is true,” he told her with deep feeling. “I guess it would be turn about, fair play—the whites have never cared what their hours of pleasure have cost us, and maybe we ought to pay ’em back in kind. They’ve gone their way in spite of God and the devil. Just the same, you’ve sized the thing up wrong. I couldn’t play the game that way, even in revenge. I’m keeping you here because you can’t go on—and I tell you—I give you my oath that is as sacred to me as any man’s could be, that you’re as safe here as in your mother’s arms.”

He turned from her then, and made a bed on the floor of the cave. She did not touch his rifle.

CHAPTER IX

BREED was as good as his word in one particular at least. He made her just as comfortable physically as she could have been in her own tent. His pack turned out to be a treasure-trove, with a bit of everything for her convenience. She found herself wondering how he had carried it all; and she would have been surprised to know it was the usual outfit carried by packers plus a few extras of which long experience had taught him the value.

He had sent on his own bed-roll with one of the packers, and he carried instead the expensive eiderdowns used by Rufus Carter. The duffel included not only canvas-lined quilts, but a pneumatic mattress weighing only a pound or two and the first friend of those who go abroad in rough country. When the mattress was inflated just to the point where it would hold a reclining body off the ground, and when the quilts were spread and tucked under, and Carter's small feather pillow placed in the inviting opening, Grace had a bed that could not have been surpassed in a metropolitan hotel. While she rested here, Breed went on with the labor of making camp.

In addition to his rifle and knife, a small axe was a part of his regular equipment; and Breed could tell of a night, were he the telling kind, when this little wedge of steel on a hickory handle had saved his life. With this he went into the snarl of alders, clinging to the shoulders of the cliff, and in a short time he emerged with an armful of hard, heavy red sticks which, with driftwood, is the western Alaskan's only supply of fuel. In a remarkably short time thereafter the hilltop was dimly lit with the friendliest, cheeriest, warmest glow that a tired traveler might wish to see. Its bold little dashings struck away the darkness, its gay crackle took the edge off the enfolding silence, and its companionship relieved in some degree a girl's bitter and terrible loneliness.

It cheered her a great deal, for she felt that if he had decoyed her here, he would hardly risk pursuit by lighting a beacon fire. Premeditated evil has no use for light. It was also true that the blaze would ward off the prowling folk of the mountain, a childish fear of which she had not yet overcome. Breed could tell her as often as he wished that these rustling, whispering people meant her no harm, but she remembered nursery-tales much more convincing, and she was glad of the yellow haven. And she thought it

possible that her friends would see the fire from their camp and make an investigation.

In the skillet which was Breed's single cooking utensil he put a quantity of rice grains, a piece of dried caribou-flesh, and water from the spring. This was allowed to stew over red coals, and in a short space of time he filled a tin plate with the hot, savory, nutritious mixture and brought it to the girl's side. A moment before she had been convinced that no food of any kind could tempt her. She had planned to refuse his proffer. No doubt it was the suppressed eagerness in his face, combined with a desire not to hurt his feelings and possibly waken his anger, that caused her to change her mind. He went out immediately, and she could have thrown the mess away if she had so desired, but somehow, it tasted better than she had anticipated. The entire portion disappeared before she got through tasting it.

After Grace had eaten, he furnished her with soap from his kit and a folded towel that looked fresh, and she made a hasty but satisfying toilet in the cold waters of the spring. This completed the night's business: once more she entered her dark cavern. Through its maw she watched Breed eat his meager repast, after which he cut and piled fuel for the night. For a time she had almost forgotten the alarming and unusual character of her predicament, but now, as the deep night closed down, she recalled it with painful vividness. A ribbon of light still traced the western hills: how long before she could watch for it in the east? Her fear grew upon her, crawling over her body, clutching her breath and burdening her heart. She had escaped from it during the supper hour; but now the creeping minutes had brought it back. Surely, the crisis of the adventure was close at hand.

She saw Breed stoop and enter her cavern, carrying his rifle in his hand. In the low light of the camp-fire his face looked dark and drawn: she was conscious of the lithe, catlike movements, once giving her pleasure but now terrible to her. She met his strange, somber gaze.

"What is it?" she asked.

Once more he turned that quick, startled look he had given her on the hilltop; but the shadows on his face concealed his mood. "I'm going to turn in for the night, and I thought—I wondered if I could do anything more for you."

"No. Nothing. I want to go to sleep."

"That's best for you, quick as you can. I'm going to leave my rifle in here, if you don't mind. We might get some dew before morning, and I don't

want it to get rusty."

He looked straight at her as he talked; and she was sensitive to him as she had never been before. She was burned with the fires within him; she knew his strength, his dominance, his iron self-rule. She feared him still, yet she knew that whatever wickedness he did would be deliberate and premeditated, not the indulgence of any weakness. Perhaps he would master her before he was through, but never at the cost of his own self-mastery. She no longer need fear that a wild beast caged in his heart would leap into dominance. By the force of heredity, environment, or event Breed Bert had come to be the captain of his soul.

"I'd be glad to keep it for you," she told him in infinite gratitude. "I'd feel safer with it. But won't you need it, sleeping out there in the open?"

"I don't know why I should. The only wild animals that have ever been known to attack a man in this country are the Kadiak bears, and they'll turn and run a thousand times where once they show fight. Besides, all the bears are still in hibernation except maybe a few stragglers."

"And no people, either?"

"I'm not so sure about the people," he told her after a second's pause. "Of course we're getting near enough to Pavlof village to meet an occasional straggler—a trapper not yet gone in with his furs, or maybe even a deer-hunter. There must be a couple of men trapping this country in here, but they wouldn't be very likely to stumble on to us. I expect we'll see their camp in the morning."

"Close by?"

"There is a *barabara* in here somewhere which they are likely occupying. I've never seen it, as it was off the trail I usually took, but I think it's fairly close. No matter, Miss Crowell. I'm not going to lie awake worrying about them."

"Are they enemies of yours?"

"I don't know who is trapping in here this year, so I can't say. I've got plenty of enemies sprinkled here and there through the country, anxious to pay back old scores. Don't let me alarm you. I just mention these fellows in contrast with the bears. A man in the wilderness has to watch out for his fellow men occasionally, but there's practically nothing to fear from the so-called lower animals." He leaned the rifle against the rock wall close to her side. "It's loaded, but it won't go off unless somebody pulls the trigger. . . . I hope your bed is comfortable."

“It is, thank you. . . . Good night.”

“Good night.” His harsh tones fell away as he gave her this ancient blessing. Then he bent his tall head and withdrew, seeking the comfort of his fire.

Grace had no intention of sleeping and her tired nerves prevented any immediate relaxation. She saw him build up the fire, then sit down before it with his head bowed on his knees. It seemed to her a bad sign that he did not at once go to his blankets, but she made a mental apology to him when she discovered a good reason for the action. She was lying snug and warm between all the robes that his pack had contained.

As a little of her fear passed away she began to be conscious of a striking picture. She saw it all through the mouth of her cave, a rough and jagged frame that added to its effect. The moon was riding in and out of clouds so that its light ebbed and flowed like a pulse, one moment showing the whole land in considerable detail, the next, enfolding it in gloom. The white mysterious peaks appeared and disappeared as if a dim spotlight were being turned on and off. In the foreground smoldered the fire, a circle of living light in a cold, dead, moonlit world. In a sense, it reclaimed the waste place, showing that man’s dominance had spread even here and that raw nature no longer ruled unchallenged. Beside the fire sat a bent, dark figure—remote, lonely, full of thoughts and dreams she could not begin to follow.

This was a vista of the ages. It was as if the scroll of years had unrolled to her sight, and the world were young again. . . . The same moon was lighting rugged, unworn peaks; the same gray seas moaned among the reefs. On the hill, by his low fire which his hands had struck, squatted the mighty one, the monster terrible beyond any Cyclops that myth could picture, the great Jove who had conquered the parents of sea and storm who brought him forth. He was a dreamer even then; but his dreams were always a little beyond him. Never content with what he had, he longed for the unobtainable. He groped for a star he could not reach. . . . In these overreaching dreams lay his greatness, but sometimes they betrayed him. His enemies learned that when he sat thus, lost in his musings, he often forgot his vigilance; and they were quick to take advantage. They hated him because he could dream and they could not, because he ruled them with his wonder tool of flint, and they crept about his fire seeking a chance to overthrow him. . . .

Absorbed in his thoughts Breed Bert did not hear soft steps on the wet earth. He did not see the two figures that had stalked him until they were at

his side, and he was unprepared for their coming. His lack of precaution emboldened them to walk full into the circle of firelight, while otherwise they would have lurked and crept about in the darkness like the wild beasts they were. They had found their master off his guard, no tried weapon in reach of his hand.

Breed raised his head, looked leisurely into the faces of his visitors, then —to all appearances—went back to his musings.

Grace, watching, experienced a rapid and pell-mell rush of changing emotion. Her first thought was that help had come, that these men were of her own party who had sought her and who would carry her back to the safety of her tent. Then she saw that she did not know the men. They were not Breed's packers; she had never seen them before.

Her next impulse was to reveal her presence and to ask them to guide her back to the tents. Even if they were not her friends, they were human beings, and they would help her out of Breed's power. She started to get up, and then, with narrowing, alert eyes, quietly lay down again. There was no great hurry about summoning help. She had got on fairly well so far. Perhaps she should wait until the situation was made more clear. It was as if she had learned that particular kind of watchful waiting that is taught in the wilds: to lie peering in the silence and the darkness until one is sure of his ground.

There were certain signs not entirely encouraging. The two visitors were hardly the type she had wished for. They were as far removed from her as Breed himself, and she searched their faces in vain for such gallantry and chivalry as she had need of now. They did not convey the idea of resistless physical force that she saw and feared in Breed, and they had a general ugly make-up that he missed entirely. Of course they were natives: whether breeds or full-bloods she did not know. In either case they possessed all the earmarks of an inferior people. Their dark skins, making Breed's deep brown look almost fair, their slanting brows and heavy, brutal jaws, their unlit, unintelligent eyes and particularly the dirt and unhealthiness of them all said Siwash unmistakably: these were the salmon-eaters indigenous to the country. The more she looked at them the less inclined she was to appeal to them for help. She did not wish to jump from a fairly comfortable frying pan into the blazing fire. She lay breathless, watching, and the little drama swept on apace.

One of the men, the younger who showed her a snag tooth when he opened his dark lips, made some remark in the vernacular; and his cruel, gloating expression repelled the girl more and more. His manner indicated

that this was a long-awaited moment. His companion, a slightly older man than either Snag-Tooth or Breed, leered in response, and a long white scar extending across his nose and down his cheek, bent in the middle and changed shape. He was evidently keenly appreciative of his friend's wit, but in this he was not joined by Breed. The latter slowly turned his head, glanced once into Snag-Tooth's face, and then looked away as if he had not heard.

In that look was the most maddening contempt that a genius of pantomime could portray. Breed achieved it almost without change of expression, and subtle though it was, the man was fully aware of it. The look inferred that nothing that Snag-Tooth or Scar-Face said or did could mean more than the senseless barking of a Siwash dog.

Scar-Face tried his luck next, speaking in the same tongue, and now Breed condescended to answer. "I don't speak the language of dogs," he said sharply and distinctly. "If you have anything to say to me, Scar-Face, talk English."

Scar-Face grimaced, and his brand shook. "Engless, huh?" he echoed. "You change since we meet last time. Maybe you no hate the white man now. White blood not so bad after all, maybe."

Grace pricked up her ears. The native was quite right: a surprising change had certainly come over Breed. It was not quite in character for him to renounce the tribal language for the tongue of the hated white. He was either acting a part—for a certain definite cause—or else she had discovered an inconsistency in him which she had not believed was possible.

"Maybe not so bad," Breed repeated. "What do you want?"

"Oh, we come visit. We down in *barabara*, see your light. Foxes no good now—got lots of time—come up and keep you company."

"I don't want any company." Breed spoke now in a clear, rather loud voice; and Grace was no longer in doubt why he had insisted on talking English. "I'm all alone, and I want to stay alone."

The man she had feared so bitterly had assumed the rôle of her protector. The girl sank down in the quilts lest a beam from the fire shine on her white face and reveal her presence.

The white scar wiggled and twitched in triumph. With exaggerated carelessness the native strolled to the opposite side of the fire so that Breed was between himself and his friend. "Lose'm pard, huh?" he observed. "Maybe lose'm gun, too. What you do if bear come visit, too?"

“Only a Siwash squaw is afraid of a bear. Besides, I’ve got a gun.”

“Where? In cave?”

“On my hip. I’ve got a six-shooter. I don’t use it on bears—just to scare dogs out of camp.” Lest this insult should fail to go home, Breed looked up with contempt first at one man and then at the other.

The scarred face worked, then grew sharp with cunning. “Let’s be friends,” he urged, looking Breed over. “This gun I got here, him shoot straight, kill’m bear every shot. Let’s see your six-shooter—maybe trade.”

The trio in the fire’s glow seemed to understand one another very well. Scar-Face’s manner showed that a dream of hate had come true; he had caught Breed in an unguarded moment. If the latter had a rifle, it was out of reach in the cavern. The lone wolf was trapped at last. His enemy did not believe Breed had a revolver; there was no sign of a holster on his lean hips. Breed knew that intimidation was his only hope. The imaginary pistol was the only card he had, and the cowardice of his foes his only strength. They were like coiled serpents, ready to strike if he moved, or if he stayed still. One motion in his own defense or in an attempt to reach his rifle would invite their venom of lead.

“If I bring out that six-gun,” he told them, without a flicker in his flat tones or an instant’s faltering of his gaze, “it won’t be to trade. I told you what it was for; go before I show you.”

Because Scar-Face seemed the stronger of his two enemies, Breed addressed his words to him and was obliged to disregard Snag-Tooth, standing behind him. This proved to be a mistake.

It was true that Scar-Face, the older man, was ordinarily more to be feared than his companion and with him the threat was not without effect. While it added fuel to the fires of his hate—an ancient hate of a weaker creature for a stronger—it also cooled his courage. His heart burned, but his liver grew cold; he tried to leer but his lips fell loose, showing the ugly cavern of his mouth. But it was Breed’s look, more than his words, that impressed Scar-Face, and Snag-Tooth unfortunately could not see it.

The younger native possessed a certain frenzied bravery, a desperate recklessness characteristic of weak things in general. The sight of Breed’s back emboldened him, and he spurred into action with a rush. “He ain’t got a gun,” he shouted, at the same time leveling his rifle. “Shoot him if he makes a move.”

Breed glanced over his shoulder; then threw his arms into the air. The ruddy firelight had found an answering glow in the eyes he saw beyond the rifle sights, and his life hung by a thread. Seeing him helpless, Scar-Face cursed in hate, and raised his own rifle.

There was a certain admirable deftness in the way they handled their prisoner. Prodding him with the rifle, Snag-Tooth forced him to the edge of the cliff, where he was told to stand facing the black chasm while Scar-Face searched him for weapons. The pistol proved to be a figment, but a hunting-knife was taken from its sheath and hurled away. Scar-Face was an old hand, and he wished to provide for all contingencies. He had seen Breed Bert in many tight corners, and in getting out of them a trail of ruin was usually left. It paid to be careful with a man of this mold. So that they might have perfect peace of mind, while they entertained him in the next hour, his hands were drawn back and lashed with deer-sinew.

Safe from the flailing fists at last, Scar-Face kicked at Breed's shins until he fell to the ground, and bound his ankles with a piece of rope from the blanket-roll. Then the two conquerors stood back to view their handiwork.

This was more than they had ever hoped for in their most sanguine moments. It was hard to believe that the Brown Bear of the mountains was really caught; that this helpless, prone figure, theirs to beat and spit upon at will, was the Proud One who had cursed their dreams. He had dominated them from childhood, but they had brought him down at last. Great was Scar-Face, he who had fastened the thongs. Even more great was the young Snag-Tooth, the dauntless warrior. Whose was the rifle that had forced the Mighty One's hands in the air? The medicine-men whom Breed laughed at and despised had conjured him in vain; but young Snag-Tooth had cast him to the ground.

This man used to bend them to his will, but now he was bent with the pain of their thongs. He had held himself above them, refusing to be one with them in heart and spirit. That he had helped his people, curing their sickness in a way unknown to the witch-doctors, alleviating their poverty and teaching them things by which they might prosper, had made them hate him all the more, because it showed his strength and their weakness. And most of all, they hated him for his dreams.

He kenned beauty where they found only fear; he saw light where they could only shiver and quake in darkness. They could kill him for the meaning that the snow-peaks had for him; they could burn him at the stake

for the visions that passed before his eyes. But in his dreams they could not follow him.

"You call us dogs, huh?" Scar-Face cried in his exultation. The white brand did a dance on his face, and stepping close he kicked the bound figure.

"Curs—not dogs," Breed Bert said. "A dog is almost next to a man." This was his only response to the taunting words; of the pain of the blow he gave no sign at all. There was still black magic in the straight gaze of his eyes, and Scar-Face moved where he did not have to meet it.

"The curs can bite," the native taunted. The heavy shoe-pack drew back again, and this time it aimed at the fallen head. Even more than his panther-body they hated his long, full-fronted, shapely head, and it was rapture beyond any tribal dance to stamp it into the dust. The kick went home, and the coarse black hair slowly grew matted and wet.

This was too much for Snag-Tooth. For all that he was the greater of the two—greater even than the medicine-men or the chiefs—he was losing out on the best part of the evening. His companion was taking most of the rewards. Snag-Tooth let the rifle fall to the ground, and then leaped, the heavy toe of his shoe-pack crashing into the level eyes of his victim.

Breed would not call them curs very soon again. A curious ripple passed over his body; the drawn limbs slackened and the tense muscles relaxed. He was a man of rock and steel, but he was impotent, crushed, and silenced at last. He fell into a deep coma that is kindly nature's last extremity, an escape from pain that in a sense carried him out of his enemies' power.

But they were not through yet. They were only fully aroused, capable of those atrocious acts which stain the records of tribal wars. There is a distinct streak of Sadism innate in the American aborigines, proved by the details of the emigrant massacres of the last century. Snag-Tooth and Scar-Face would soon tire of brutal kicking. It was a gross pleasure at best. And what turns their thought would take, what new forms of entertainment might occur to them before the dawn, only the old Indian-fighter, disillusioned and unmoved, could dare to prophesy.

Yet it came about that their simple pleasures were to be interrupted. They were not to put into play the unique diversions which Scar-Face had thought of and which made his long brand flicker and bob like a marionette. Just as he had taken out his knife and was fingering it thoughtfully, an incredible figure appeared at the dark mouth of the cavern.

Scar-Face did not doubt, at first, that this was an apparition. The ghosts, haunting the Hopeless Land, were known to take strange forms; and he could think of none more terrible than that of the White Squaw. In the low beam of the dying fire, in the silence and darkness of this mountain fastness, it was a visitation unutterably weird to the two madmen; and the rifle in the spirit's hand made it no better and no worse.

Their first terror was such as could easily have been fatal. The tree of their nerves might have died from the sheer violence of the stimulation it received. Fortunately, it lasted only an instant. In a second glance the fact began to dawn on both of them that the pallid face with the wild eyes at the cavern mouth was that of a human being. Even the ghostly shadows and the dim glow of the fire could not blind them to this.

Now their minds could conceive of a pursuing spirit in the shape of a white squaw haunting this mountain cavern, but a white squaw real and alive, was almost too much for them. Just enough of Snag-Tooth's faculties returned for him to think of his rifle, lying on the ground. It was at this point that the weapon in the woman's arms became a decided factor in the situation. Unnoticed before, it became, as it were, the center of attraction. It became impossible to think of anything else.

She was holding the butt tight against her shoulder, and she was looking along the top of the barrel. True, it moved about a good deal as the gun shook in her arms, yet its black mouth crossed and recrossed his body from time to time. Utterly cowardly at heart like all his kind, the threat in that small black hole proved too much for him, and he started to raise his hands into the air.

He never got them there. Snag-Tooth had supposed that she had got the drop on them with the idea either of taking them prisoners or of driving them from their prey, but he was wrong. Such had not entered into the girl's thought. She knew only one thing to do with a gun, and this she did. Something that felt like a red-hot brand passed through his clothes against his shoulder.

Nothing was to be gained by further delay; he dropped his arms and started to run. At the second shot a great wind blew at his hand, and the member flopped back and forth as he ran. He started out along the ridge, Scar-Face close behind him, and to all appearances about to overtake him.

The girl's shooting had not been of the best so far, considering the close range, but at the third shot she fell into form. Scar-Face, just about to pass his friend, pitched forward, but immediately got up and ran on. This was not

in her plans, so she fired at him again. The range was farther by now, so the shot went wild.

The two men ran a long way down the bare ridge. In spite of his flopping hand Snag-Tooth still led. Scar-Face did not overtake him after all. After the first fifty yards the race was all the younger man's, and indeed, his companion was not even able to hold his own. Shortly he began to drop behind, and Snag-Tooth lost sight and sound of him altogether.

He reached his *barabara* after a time and waited for his friend to come. It began to appear that Scar-Face had decided to sleep out. This was a correct deduction; Scar-Face would sleep out tonight. He had run awhile, and then he had walked, and after considerable time he had paused before a thick clump of alder bushes on the hillside. It seemed to invite him, beguiling his fancy, and he could not pass it by.

As the moon passed in and out of clouds, and as the wind continued on its long, straight journey that apparently would never end, Scar-Face crept into that alder-thicket. It was quite dark and still in here, and immensely reassuring. He lay rather quietly, and almost the only moving thing about him was the white scar, on his nose and across his cheek, that kept bending in the middle. In a short time it also was still.

CHAPTER X

It seemed to Grace Crowell that she was rid of Breed's hateful company at last. She thought that his soul had gone out of him during that brief, brutal attack, and already was blown away on the wind. He lay with no sign of life. The dying fire threw a sullen glow on his battered, bleeding head, but it showed his face gray and fearfully calm, as under the gleam of vigil-candles.

Dry-eyed and in a bewildered way she set about certain necessary tasks. She leaned Breed's rifle against the rock wall of the cavern, then bent and threw fresh fuel on the fire. She must not forget the night's bitter chill. As the fuel caught and the small red flames began to dance and crackle in the gloom, she walked into the cave, picked up a blanket and carried it to the side of the fallen man.

It was her idea to cover his stained and battered face. As she bent over him, spreading out the blanket, her hand chanced to touch his. "Oh!" she cried, very softly—a cry that was half a sob.

It was the first utterance she had made since bidding Breed good night, countless dark hours before. Deeply startled, she touched the face she had been about to hide. At that instant she snatched away the quilt she had been about to spread and went to work.

An extraordinary change came over her. She had been crushed a moment before, dulled with horror, and she had moved about with that queer listlessness seen in a sleep-walker. Almost instantly she was wide awake. A strong leap of her heart shot a column of bright blood through her veins, her brain cleared, her eyes lost their far-away look and resumed their normal focus, her faltering hands grew steady and strong. There was need of her now, and she responded with a celerity and energy that told plainly of the fine temper of her spirit. In that one touch she had made the discovery that Breed was full of life and vitality.

The warmth she had felt was not just an after-glow. She knew this fact if she knew her own name. It was the warmth that comes from a dynamic engine of being. Behind the warmth she felt the slow, strong flow of his life-tides. She had not dreamed that a mortal being could undergo the punishment Breed had received and still retain abundant life; and this was her first inkling of what a rugged, almost fool-proof mechanism is hidden

under the human skin. In reality she had no great right to her amazement. Breed was neither a rabbit nor a bird, and it took more than a few kicks to kill him.

Yet she had saved him none too soon. There were likely serious results enough. She had every reason to think that some of his facial bones were broken and that his skull possibly had been fractured by the first cruel kick to the side of his head. There would be plenty of work to do if she were to bring him through; and this steeled her to the coolest and ablest hour of endeavor she had ever known.

She did not try to carry him into the cavern, though it is probable she could have done this, too, if she had tried. She lugged out the quilts and beside the fire made a bed which she rolled him in. She heated water to a boiling temperature in Breed's skillet, let it cool to blood-heat, and washed his wounds; then with bandages made from her own clothes, sterilized in boiling water, she fastened down torn strips of flesh. When she had given all the first aid she knew, she covered him with the quilts and sat down beside him to watch and to keep the fire blazing bright.

All these things she did with a gentle strength that made her what she was. There were many who knew her gentleness—more than one had loved her for it—but the strength that tonight was combined with it would have surprised even those who knew her best. Tonight she showed the greatness of soul which betokens the mother of men, and which no cynic dares deny—the might of virtue that will endure when scornful tongues are stopped with dust!

The disagreeable tasks she performed ungrudgingly, almost happily. A prince of the realm could have received no kinder, sweeter treatment at her hands.

The night was far advanced when she won him back to complete consciousness. She watched with keenest interest its slow return—the flow of color into his gray face, the change in his breathing and his pulse, the movements of his head and hands, and, at last, the departure of the dazed, bewildered look from his dusky eyes.

It was at this moment that Grace beheld what to her was very near a miracle. Breed Bert smiled.

She had heard him laugh, before, and once or twice she had seen a softening about his lips that promised much, but this was the first time she had known him really to smile. This was not just a drawing of the lips; it

flashed to her that ancient signal of comradeship, of humorous resignation to life, of kindliness and generous understanding which is *the soul of a smile*. It changed his whole aspect of sullenness and hate. She wondered that his mouth could have ever seemed hard and cruel. It was like the break of dawn in the darkness of his face.

He smiled full into her eyes, without shame, with a manly and irresistible simplicity. He could never again be the stranger he once was. She knew that his ruthless and bitter look was gone, never wholly to return. The ice in his heart was thawed.

"I'm not much hurt," he told her simply, looking quietly into her face.

Even his voice was changed since the last sunset. It had more of his heart in it, nor was it so cold, rasping, and toneless.

"Don't try to talk," she cautioned. "Just lie still and rest."

After a long, significant pause he shook his head. "I must talk—and you must listen."

Not knowing why, she was deeply startled, and carried out of herself by the moving solemnity of his tones. There was nothing of brusque command in them, not the least shadow of a threat. It was just as if he were voicing an incontrovertible fact from which she could no more escape than could he. It was true; he must say what was in his heart, and she could not help but hear. She could not, even if she would, deny him this. This was like a prophecy that was to be fulfilled, a foreordained measure of their destiny.

"It won't hurt me to talk," he went on gravely. "I'm not badly hurt—I know that, by the way I feel. Maybe it would be better if I was, because it would give me an excuse to tell you things which, by *your* code, I have no right to tell you. For that, as well as for other reasons, maybe it would be better if this were my dying word."

He was speaking slowly, with pauses between his sentences, and not only his careful choice of words beyond his usual gifts, but his moving tones told her that this would be no ordinary conversation. The glow in his eyes enlightened her too. He was like one inspired, and perhaps that was why she did not fear what he had to tell her.

"By your code I have no right to tell you," he repeated earnestly, "but that can't stop me now. I have the right by a bigger code—that of a man to tell, when he can't keep it any more, what is in his heart. Grace Crowell, I am a man. When a man opens his heart at last, it is his right to have a hearing, no matter who he is, no matter who his hearer is."

“Hadn’t you better wait till morning?” she asked him gently. “I’m afraid it will wear you out to talk.”

“I’ll go to sleep afterwards. My strength wasn’t even scratched by that attack tonight. I was just knocked out and bruised and cut; I’ll be myself tomorrow. When that time comes, maybe I won’t be able to talk. Maybe my lips will be locked again, by hate of my life, by hate of my destiny.

“I don’t think so, but I don’t dare risk it. The words are on my lips now.

“I wish I could make it clear just how I feel—that I will speak these words because it is my need—not for anything you will say to me in return. I don’t ask you to do anything except listen—and try to understand. There can be no return for what I have to offer. I give it humbly, with no hope of reward.

“From the hour I saw you, I was a changed man. I had dreamed about you since earliest childhood, it seems to me, but I thought that you were just a dream and never could be a reality. When you stood before me in the flesh I tried to disbelieve in you. When you spoke to me, I knew that the dream had come true—at least, as near as it ever could come true. Oh, I’ve heard your voice a thousand times, on a thousand lonely nights. I could listen to none of the voices of our women—the squaws that are my own people—because I had heard yours. I heard it in the wind blowing about my lonely mountain camps, in the half-hidden sounds of running water that all we wilderness men come to listen to, in the end; and sometimes I could hear it in the sea. Underneath the deep moan of the sea it came to me, clear and strong.

“Don’t you think I have seen your face? A thousand times—drifting into my thoughts whenever I didn’t keep them busy at other subjects. Could I look at a squaw’s face after I had seen yours?”

The girl leaned forward, her eyes burning. “Are you sure it was my face, Bert?” she asked, almost whispering. “Wasn’t it just a type—an ideal that perhaps I fulfilled?”

“Maybe it was—a type. I was a lonely child, lost and friendless, exiled by birth in an environment in which I could never feel at peace. I am a breed, and can never be anything else, but just the same, white blood is in the ascendancy in me, and I inherited all the dreams that have made the white race go on to greatness. I am speaking from my heart—I can’t lie to you. It may be as you say—that you fulfilled an ideal of loveliness and beauty that I have always had. I was starved for beauty—for hope—for

light. They never came to Hopeless Land until you came. In you, I found them all—all I had missed and longed for—the heritage I was cheated of. You personified it—the longing that has always cursed and blessed the white man, in all times and all environments—maybe you'd call it a reaching-upward for finer, brighter things. You were a dream come to life.

"We went out on the trail together. I tried to shut my heart to you, and I couldn't. Every hour you were doing something lovely and fine which I tried not to see, because I thought that my only chance of happiness lay in hate and pride. Sometimes it was only a look that you gave one of the packers—to help him over a hard place—sometimes it was a smile, brighter than any star I have talked to on winter nights—sometimes just an expression on your face. Don't you know I could feel the beauty of your thoughts? After knowing them, could I ever look again to those whose thoughts never rise above lust, and fear? I watched every motion you made—I couldn't help it—and I loved every one. Every one reflected you. Every word you spoke to your lover showed me that you are as beautiful within as you are in your face and body—and you can't dream how I have longed for beauty!

"Grace Crowell, I have always stood alone. I never turned my back on my people—I dominated them in order to help them—but they turned their backs on me. They know me for an alien, even though I am the son of a squaw. I took refuge in solitude. We all must have something to live for, and I lived for hate. There never was a greater mistake.

"When I was thrown with you my hate began to die. You had that in your face and your soul that would not let it live. Hate can never stand against love—even the abstract kind of love that you gave me along with every other living thing, great and small—and it can't stand against kindness and beauty and virtue. I couldn't be cruel and hard with you as I thought I wanted to be. It was as if the light in your soul drove out the darkness in mine. And there is a light there, Grace Crowell—I will kill the man who denies it! You were always doing or saying something to make some one else happier, or make him feel good or gay or cheerful, and I couldn't resist you. Every day you tamed me, softened me, cast the demons out of my heart!

"I felt your fear of me, climbing up this mountain. The last little bit of hate that was left in me rejoiced at it. That any one could dream of hating you, in the slightest degree, or could be anything but gentle and loving to you is almost beyond my comprehension now, yet I tried to—even today. I am ashamed now. Tonight came the climax. I don't know what you did, but my rifle leaning there, the brass of an empty shell and the fact that the men

are gone shows that you drove them away. You must have risked your precious life to save my worthless one."

Grace's eyes were now misty with tears. "Oh, didn't you do the same for me?" she asked, as he paused. "Didn't you do the same?"

"It wasn't the same. That dive between the ships was nothing to me. I have always put myself to tests like that just because I was careless of life. You had everything to lose, and nothing to gain. I had everything to gain and nothing to lose. I had the joy of fighting and of winning, and besides, the glory of saving from destruction the most beautiful living thing I had ever seen. I tried to deny the thrilling happiness I got out of it, but even then I had to back down. You were something to me, even then. I am nothing to you, and never will be anything to you, yet tonight you risked death and maybe worse to drive these wolves from my body.

"That noble act has driven the last bit of hate out of my heart. I believe I've lost the power to hate. That isn't all: you've given me a new theme, something to live for.

"All that I am is yours from now on. I mean just that. I can't help it, any more than I can help telling you. You've saved my life, and what is infinitely more, you have saved my soul, and both of them are yours to do with what you wish. I feel—I know that this won't embarrass you, or make you unhappy. You understand how it is with me."

He paused, and when he spoke again it was in a strange, deep monotone, more moving than any utterance she had ever heard.

"I am a breed. That fact alone shuts me away from any dream of requital from you. It won't embarrass you to have just a breed love you, any more than the love of an old servant, perhaps, or even a faithful dog. My love for you is neither that of a servant or a dog, but of a man—this is the truth and I must tell it—but the gap between you and me is so great that such a love ought not to trouble you or make you ill-at-ease in my presence. You are too big for that. You are too big to feel or to show scorn. Perhaps it even ought to please you, a little—to think you have the qualities to waken a half-breed's devotion—a devotion with no thought or dream of return.

"You owe nothing to me because of it. You have already given more than I could ever repay, with a lifetime of service. These days on the trail with you have meant more to me than all the rest of my life so far. I will be with you some days more, and then I will be content. I will have lived my life. I will have found out what life can mean. Just years cannot mean life: perhaps

a moth that flies among the flowers for a single day, and then dies, has lived in a sense that many an old, old man cannot imagine. These few days with you pay for everything, all that is past, and all that will come after you are gone.

"I had to tell you these things, and I know you won't make light of them—even though they come from a breed. I have only one thing to ask—that you let me be of all the service I can to you. In that I will find all the happiness I can ask for. Your wish will be my law: that is not just talk, but fact. When you call I will answer, no matter what part of the world I am in. Anything you ask of me I will do; and it seems to me that there is nothing in the world that can hold me back. I hope you believe me in this, because it is true."

"I believe you," she told him simply.

"I might see a chance to be of great service to you before this journey is over. Somehow I feel I will, and I am glad. That would make my life's story complete; and I can go back to drying salmon with a high heart. When the test comes, there will hardly be any limit to my strength. I feel it surging through me now, such strength as I never dreamed of before. *I feel it burning me like fire!* I could get up now, and carry you on my shoulders down off this mountain, if I had to. I couldn't earlier tonight, but I can now."

She looked soberly into his face, then stared out over the moonlit ranges.

"That won't be the kind of help I need, I'm afraid," she told him.

Not only the mist of her tears, but her subdued tone told him how poignant this moment was to her. "I won't fail you, when the need comes," he promised, with inspired self-belief.

"Perhaps—perhaps the need has already come . . . I'm not sure."

"And will you give me a chance to help you?"

"Yes, and I will bless you if you succeed . . . Bert, I believe in you. I can feel that strength you speak of—just sitting here beside you—and I trust in it more than I can understand. Bert, that strength is born of your love for me, and it has saved you. But can it save my love?" She faltered, and clasped her hands. "Is your love great enough to save my Paul for me?"

It was a strange moment. The wind blew, and the fire cast its sullen glow, and the peaks lit up and died away in shadow. "Is that the greatest service I can do—to save Paul?" he asked at last.

“Yes. I’m losing him, Bert. I want him back—in my arms.” Her face was dead white except for the crystal of her tears. “If there is one thing you can do—and how I don’t know, yet I feel you can—it is to bring my love back to me . . . I don’t care how: I just want him back. . . . Maybe you can save him for me, with that strength of yours. Maybe at the same time you can save him from himself.”

CHAPTER XI

MORNING dawned at last on that camp on the heights, and the sun shone here while twilight still lingered in the gorge below. Breed and Grace made preparations to join the outfit. What might have been a serious problem was simplicity itself when it became apparent that neither of them had suffered any great harm from their trying experiences; and although they had slept little both were virtually as good as new. Grace was blessed by a sound, healthy nervous system, and her terror and her trial had had but slight effect upon it. Breed's recovery was nothing unusual to one of his energy and physical resourcefulness. What he had undergone was nothing to shake a man of his stamp, who had lived as he had lived. His wounds, though serious enough to interrupt consciousness for a short time, were painful but really trivial, partly because luck had been with him, mostly because the brutal attack had been stopped before it was well started. The powerful healing agents of his healthy frame went to work at once upon the bruised, torn flesh, and he had no reason to fear ill effects.

Indeed, as far as he knew the adventure had been without serious results for any one. Both the girl and himself assumed that all four rifle shots went wild.

In spite of Grace's protests Breed loaded the pack on his back and began to work slowly down toward the camp. He rested often, and he told the truth when he said he was doing himself no harm. Halfway down they met a party from the outfit on its way up the mountain in search of them.

Grace found to her surprise that neither Paul nor Carter had been greatly concerned about her welfare. They seemed to take it for granted that she was safe in Breed's care, and would return to the outfit in due time. Carter was considerably excited at the account of her adventure with the two natives, but the apathy that had settled over Paul in the past few days prevailed upon him still, and her story failed to arouse him.

"I suppose Breed got what was coming to him," he remarked with some spite. "I suppose they were getting back on him for some past meanness, and I'm almost sorry you didn't let them go on and have their fun."

An instant later he realized that he had perhaps expressed himself too bluntly. Her gaze was not only amazed but indignant too. "That is an

unworthy and ungrateful position for you to take, Paul," she told him coldly. "Those men would have killed Bert."

"So you are on the first-name stage with him, eh?" her fiancé interrupted grimly.

Grace was wounded deeply at this vicious retort, and the vulgarity of it, the crudeness so unusual in him, shocked her to no little degree, though she chose to disregard it.

"We've called him Bert from the first—you know it. As I started to say, they would have killed him if I hadn't shot at them and driven them away. You apparently forget that the man is a faithful employee of ours, and if for no other reason, he is entitled to your respect. In the second, I think that both of us—at least, I—owe him a considerable debt."

"I suppose you mean for jumping off the boat that day. The beggar knew there wasn't any real danger."

"What do you suppose his purpose was in doing it?"

"For effect, like as not. Maybe to get a job with us. He probably had heard we were coming; and that is why he refused the bills."

"Paul, that's silly, and worse than silly. He saved my life; and last night he took the best kind of care of me, as far as his physical condition could allow. Not once did he step out of his place."

She made this last statement before she thought; but she did not feel the need of retracting it. After Paul had turned away she subjected it to a careful scrutiny, only to arrive at the conclusion that it was entirely true. Even in the declaration of his love Breed Bert had not stepped out of his place. She knew this to be true because of her own reaction; she was not frightened, not made ill-at-ease, not even embarrassed. When he spoke to her now, and she saw the devotion in his glowing eyes, she was neither mortified nor perturbed. Indeed, she accepted this outcast's love as one of the highest compliments that had ever been paid her, simply because it asked nothing—except an opportunity for service to her—in return. This wilderness idealist had been sincere with her, and sincerity is the first requisite of good taste. . . . Her own attitude of life was simple, straightforward, and sincere, and she found in his words nothing in any way offensive or revolting: Breed Bert was an outcast, but at the same time, in certain deep-lying traits, he was a gentleman.

At Grace's request the party rested for a day before going on toward Pavlof. She spent the day on her cot; Breed "took it easy" and did no more

than two men's usual work. When another day was gray in Hopeless Land they broke camp and started on.

Before noon they reached a second and larger fork of the creek just passed, and pushed up into the valley out of which it flowed. The flat itself was the most fertile strip they had seen on the trip so far, an abundance of game finding sustenance on the rich, yellow grass. Squawking ptarmigan got up from under their feet, an occasional red fox barked in excitement as they approached too near a precious secret hidden in the weeds, a wolverine crossed the middle distance at an awkward gallop, and hundreds of heads of caribou made little dots of gray over the landscape. These latter creatures were a great delight to Grace, and in her heart she skimmed with them over the hummocks.

But this teeming life ended with the rising hills. On these and on the peaks behind the desolation was complete: no moving dot to indicate a fox or a deer, no track in the bleak expanse of snow, not even vegetable life beyond the first tables of the mountains. Of course there were no trees. This land had never known the blessing of the green giants, defying the storm.

Now, as the valley narrowed and the day drew to its close, the travelers looked up to a desert of rock and glacier where not even grass found root. The hills that had shut them in became sheer cliffs, sweeping up to the sky and tiring the eyes that tried to follow them to their snowy crests. Some, too steep for snow to cling to, stood frowning bare-faced over the landscape, and others were marked with streaks and patterns of snow, as if Mother Nature had gone in for decoration on a large scale. Often the rock walls were slashed with ravines, like great caverns carved out with the sword, and from these, small, wild streams, white with foam, plunged and roared under snow-bridges to join the river flowing down the valley. Directly ahead of them loomed Pavlof Mountain, the old white king of the range.

A full two miles it swept into the sky. There was no intervening plateau; as they looked up from its base its head pierced the high levels of clouds. Beyond its first slope it was all snowswept, and the whole effect was tiring, stupefying, and terrifying rather than exalting. It would either make a race of giants of those who dwelt in its shadow, or humble them to the dust. Its presence would be more than ordinary happy human hearts can bear.

Grace thought that she sensed a mighty, destructive force—whether physical or only spiritual she did not know. She was not only humbled, but somewhat appalled, mystified, and darkened by the very vastness of its brightness. . . . Men cannot live too close to the gods. Their fragile souls

simply cannot stand the pressure. . . . Above and beyond this she glimpsed the spirit of the land as never before, and as never before she was anxious to turn back. She wished that the adventure could be quickly over, and she could return to civilization. Even if she spent a lifetime in this place she thought she could never think of it as home. It would remain strange, hateful, uninviting, constantly and irremediably foreign. As Tylee had told her weeks before, this was not and never could be a white man's land.

She was made thoughtful that Paul's reaction should be so entirely different. She wondered if he were the sensitive man she had always thought him: this point could not affect her love, yet it distressed her vaguely. Regardless of its truth or falsehood, she was disappointed that her mind did not move more intimately along with his. She would have liked to think that they were mentally mated as well as physically and spiritually, that they shared impressions and felt alike about exterior things. It turned out that instead of sympathizing with her mood of fear and darkness he was moved almost to rapture. It was as if the land welcomed him rather than estranged him. Its spirit acted on him like strong drink, thrilling him, brightening his eyes and flushing his dark cheeks.

"That's the most wonderful thing I have ever seen," Paul told Grace. "Just imagine—being able to look up any minute and see that mountain. . . . It isn't just the mountain. It's all that goes with it: these crags, the barrenness and the Hell of it all. Not a tree, to break up the view. No sound but the wind, whistling off the peaks. Grace, when we are married, why can't we come up here to live?"

"I'd sooner not be married," was the spirited reply. The girl spoke with her old gayety but it was forced.

"Come! I'm serious, Grace. Of course we wouldn't spend all our time here, maybe, but why couldn't we have a *barabara* up here in the shadow of that mountain! With mother's income we could have a pleasant winter home in the city and go back and forth, living up here just during spring and summer and fall. You'd like it after a time, I know. There would be all kinds of outdoor sport—how I'd love to catch the salmon that run up here a little later in the spring! I can almost see them in my dreams—the river full of shining, darting bodies. . . . We could hunt, and dream the days away."

"And look at the mountain!" Grace prompted.

"Yes. That would be the best of all."

"And listen to the wind."

“Be serious, Grace. About the wind—I really don’t mind it. It seems natural to hear it blowing and whooping by the tent.”

The trouble with Grace was that she was too serious already. She tried hard not to be, but the mood was stronger than her best intentions. “I’d sooner marry Bert and live in civilization than up here with you.”

She regretted the remark the instant it was out. It was a silly thing to say, at best, and somehow it was unfair to the grave, high-minded man who had confessed his adoration of her a night or two before. It laid her open to a charge of vulgarity. The thought had not seemed vulgar, but its utterance would surely appear so to Paul. The girl that Paul loved did not make jokes about marriage with a half-breed Aleut.

But the response he made was not at all what she expected. Lately he had given her many surprises; this was simply one more. He did not seem to regard the remark as vulgar. She was spared the shocked look she had feared. Instead he went white with anger.

For an instant she expected him to strike her. All she lived for, she thought, hung by a thread. Once before she had seen his cheeks heat white—the day he had raved at Breed. His fury then was nothing compared to what it was now. His dark eyes looked like deep, red craters, and the pursy sacks beneath them were swollen and unpleasant to see.

“Oh, I didn’t mean that,” she told him contritely. She heaped in the words before he could speak. “It was just a silly joke——”

“You did mean it. You’d throw me over for that breed! How do I know you haven’t already——”

“Paul!” The brilliance in her eyes startled and silenced him.

The file had marched on and left her alone with her lover in the growing twilight, so she was free to break down what stood between than before it was too late. Moving closer to him, she stretched out her hands.

“I didn’t mean anything, my dearest,” she pleaded, in tones that laid bare the inmost treasures of her heart. “Don’t be angry any more.”

She hoped he would take her in his arms, but he did not grant her this. Enough poison still ran in his veins to make him turn from her, and tramp on in the rear of the file of laden men. She walked behind, silently; she made no further advances. There was that in her heart which, were he a wise man, he would be quick to assuage with caresses and penitence.

They were almost to the roots of the mountain now, and the journey was at its end. In a little hollow at the foot of the long steep, they came upon the village. The girl paused, wondering what her destiny might be in this lost, remote encampment behind the ranges.

Even in the dusk that softened it Pavlof was characteristically Aleut. Except for the sight of an occasional native they might have missed the place entirely; it was hardly reclaimed from the wilderness that howled around it. There was only one wooden structure, a small building of unpainted boards surmounted by the Greek cross. Every habitation was a *barabara*—the combination turf-house and dug-out that is the lair in which men live on the south shores of Bering Sea. These houses looked like grassy mounds, unrecognizable as homes except for an occasional glass window or a black pipe smoking in the air.

Pavlof seemed to be sleeping in the dusk. Grace glimpsed a degenerate, apathetic people, with other history and other mind, whose philosophy was as far from hers as day from night.

The wind strode over the turf roofs as if they were not there. The voices of the wild were clear and bold in the passages between the huts. Only at intervals a light burned, and this feebly, as if it were afraid; and the gale caught the smoke from the chimneys and dissipated it in an instant.

She was startled to hear Paul speaking at her side. He had apparently forgotten his anger. “Oh, what a wonderful place to rest!” he told her. His tones were flat, dull, never the full-voiced utterances of the man she loved; and she knew he was lost and remote in some abstraction she could not enter in. She could have thought him in a trance.

In the wan light his face looked dark and unfamiliar.

CHAPTER XII

MORNING came to Pavlof village the same as elsewhere. Though the place looked as if its regular setting were the twilight and the bright light of day would dissolve it, yet Grace found it even more interesting when she looked upon it from the door of her tent, after a long, restful sleep. She was beckoned forth to explore it.

She went first to the low, damp turf-house where Paul had chosen to sleep, there to beg his company on her ramble among the huts. She called him through the grass-grown door, but his replies lacked enthusiasm. He was tired from the long trek, said he—glad that it was over—and she wouldn't mind if he spent the day resting. No, she told him, she would not mind at all—probably it was just what he needed. He agreed gratefully; would she now go away and let him sleep?

She went away, yet she wondered at several things about Paul. In the first place, she was surprised that he would take chances on an unoccupied native house when with a little delay and effort he could have slept in his own cool, airy tent. Indeed, he had seemed to relish the dark, close confinement of the dug-out, and his last words had been in praise of the smell of damp earth. She was also curious about his refusal to get up and accompany her on her walk. He had always been an independent lover, but at least he formerly was not so attached to his rest. The air of the village tended to make her restless and active rather than indolent. She wanted to transact their business with all speed, and go, not to spend the days in idleness.

She was turning back to her tent with the idea of postponing her explorations until Paul felt like accompanying her, when some one restless as herself emerged from a native house and joined her. It was Breed, and his manner was of a man ready for any kind of expedition she might propose. Who could show her Pavlof better than he? She expressed her wish, and he guided her between the huts.

He pointed out his own house, by far the best-constructed *barabara* in the village. It was not as large as some, but well-lined, warm, and dry; and when he held the door open for her to peep in she saw that it was actually clean-looking. He explained that this was his home during his occasional visits to the village, and it was left strictly unoccupied while he was absent.

It had taken some little time to convince the villagers that they were not to move in, with their various, sundry, and sometimes multitudinous families, when he went away; but he had made the fact plain at last. Such persuasions as he had used were securer than any kind of lock on his door.

Empty huts were common, showing that the tribe was on the decline. At this season, when some of the men were still out at their traps, the village contained about sixty people—dark, short, indolent men, stolid squaws, and a few rather sober, undeveloped children. Their garments were mostly deer-skin or fur; otherwise they would have been indistinguishable from the natives whom Grace had seen on the dock at Ikatan. While the level was somewhat higher than that established by Snag-Tooth and Scar-Face, these two men could have fitted in here without being especially conspicuous.

The only point of real interest was the old Russian church. Small, crude, unsightly, it was still a thrilling monument to a people's devotion. The fact that its walls were of lumber was a wonder in itself. This was a treeless country; every board had been shipped from a far-distant port, unloaded at Unga or some other old Russian town, and then transported here. Apparently it had all been carried over the ranges on the backs of men, incredible though the supposition was. Breed suggested that possibly a raft of lumber had been anchored beyond the reefs in Bering Sea out from the mouth of Pavlof River, and towed in, a piece or two at a time, by native *bidarkas*, after which it was lined up the stream. Either way implied almost insurmountable obstacles. Within the church Grace found attempts at beautification that brought tears to her eyes.

The form if not the spirit of the Russian Church prevailed yet upon the people of Pavlof village. In and about the chapel were the characteristic sacred symbols, some of them having certain intrinsic or historical value. The ikons were of some dark, tarnished metal which Grace thought was silver, and a pair of candlesticks seemed to be of gold. The latter were obviously the pride of the flock, inciting a pathetic remnant of what had once been a moving fervor. No doubt the great religion which had once spread to them from the west had largely degenerated now. The mass pronounced was no longer in supplication to a just God, but in propitiation of the powers of evil. Within the temple itself were certain signs of a relapse of standards, indications that the natives had reverted to their old habits of mind. No effort had been made to keep the church clean. What had been white walls were soiled by the marks of hands, and a broken window pane had been stuffed with rags.

Grace turned to Breed with a questioning glance. "You seem unmoved."

"I am unmoved. The God I know lives on the hills."

"Yes. . . . Surely not here. Only Fear lives here."

They met the priest—the shepherd of the flock who from the pulpit pronounced holy words he did not understand. They found him quite in character, fitting into the background of superstition and mysticism. He was about forty years old, a breed, and was known as Father Nick. His last name turned out to be Pavlof. Whether this was merely a coincidence or a title somehow connected with the name of the town, river, and mountain the girl could not guess and Breed was unable to explain. Father Nick's office was probably hereditary, and he was undoubtedly part Russian—that unfortunate combination with the Aleut that the early Muscovite graciously called a Creole—but it was a trifle hard to think of him as a holy man. He was short, swarthy, mastered by passion, and was, in fact, more of a medicine-man than a priest. The people held him in fear, not for any piety they saw in him, but because they thought him in league with devils.

Nick Pavlof could speak broken English, of which he was very proud, and his talent was shared by quite a number of his parishioners. Breed spoke to a few whom he met in the stroll through the village, addressing them usually in the vernacular but frequently in English, and to Grace he pointed out some of the more important local figures. He showed her Sleepy Owl, a venerable headman, and Sindy, who Paul had at first supposed was mother of the boy they had come to find; and he named two or three of the younger squaws and the more prominent braves.

In less than half an hour Grace had seen everything there was to see. She was already tired of Pavlof. She went back to her tent, hoping that her business here could be quickly done and the party headed back toward civilization.

Paul took his day of rest, and the next day busied himself with investigations among the villagers. Unlike Grace, he was in no hurry at all. He conferred long and pleasantly with the old men of the tribe, he studied local history, he hunted for clues. The reports he made to Grace and Carter were rather vague. He picked up one clue only to drop it for another. He was always sure that the mystery of Sindy's son would be solved after one more conference or another day's investigations. He searched burial grounds, he scrutinized in great detail the life of the woman whom the tribe knew as Sindy, and he spent a great deal of time with Fishback Joe, a young unwholesome-looking native whom he called his interpreter. There was one thing, however, which he did not do. He made no mention of starting home.

He seemed to get on surprisingly well with the natives. They invited him to their potlatches, they brought him gifts, and they laughed uproariously at his jokes. Because Grace got to see so little of him it naturally followed that she saw more of Breed. The latter ran her errands when she had any to run, he tended to her personal comfort, and he acted the part of a loyal, devoted servant. Sometimes he talked to her—never longer than she wanted to listen—and thus she heard of his strange boyhood, his early revolt against his environment, his longing for better things that ultimately resulted in a most extraordinary self-education. Not once did she hear him boast, yet the account of his adventurous life interested her deeply and even thrilled her. It appeared that he had received no particular benefits, in the way of a broadened outlook or valuable experience, from the war. As soon as he had heard of the declaration of war—several months after it had occurred—he went down to Kadiak to enlist. He explained definitely that he had not been prompted by any impulse of patriotism—he had been at war in his heart with all white peoples—but only through love of adventure which was his life.

Unfortunately, he was not thrown with white men even then, but was inducted into a native company and shipped to Siberia. Here he found a country strikingly similar to his own—bleak, storm-swept, and forsaken—and the natives of the small, desolate seacoast town where his company was billeted might have been the folk of Pavlof. They were dark-skinned as himself, ghost-ridden, and of an inferior race. He was shipped home and discharged at Kadiak without any of the contacts which he would have made in France, and with no particular change in his ideas.

He loved to tell her of his dreams, and she seemed to like to hear them. Indeed, she tendered him the first real sympathy he had ever known, which was far removed from pity which he could not have endured. No wonder he blessed the day of her coming.

Thrown much with her he seemed himself less like an Indian. He was not so repressed, sober and stern; and the glow under his brows was more like sunlight and less like firelight, and he let his voice out in harmony with his mood. He relapsed but rarely into the flat, dull tones of the Aleut people. Instead of being cold and cruel she began to think he was really rather warm-hearted, gay if one would give him half a chance, and possessing considerable natural chivalry. Often the thought occurred to her that if he could be proven the outcast son of Prentiss Fieldmaster this expedition might yet prove a complete success, vindicating the woman who organized and financed it. She could almost believe that in spite of native blood Breed

would be assimilated by civilization. In spite of the squalor in which he was reared, the drunkenness and brutality and filth, he showed an amazing refinement. He never offended her with coarseness or vulgarity. He seemed to possess unerring standards about little things. Two forces had been at work to achieve this, she thought: gifts which he had inherited from a white father and, what was really contingent upon the other, the influence of things he had read and dreamed.

Grace concluded that heredity must be the greatest force in the world.

Paul seemed to avoid Breed, and the latter was not sorry. He sensed a prejudice amounting to an acute dislike on Paul's part, and for Grace's sake if for no other reason he was glad thus to stay out of trouble. Living in different parts of the village the two men exchanged hardly a word from one day to another. Once, however, they met with a serious clash of wills.

There came a bright day to the Pavlof country. Such were not unknown according to the archives of the tribe, and the Fieldmaster party was lucky enough to experience one of them. For some unguessed reason the cloud-armies took another road than through the skies of Hopeless Land. Grace looked up to the serene, calm, ineffable blue. Unstinted sunlight, blessed to behold, poured forth upon the tundras; snow-peaks flashed with a billion tiny sparkles merging into one great light; water glistened under dark banks; misty distant hills, their presence hardly guessed before, thrust themselves boldly into view. The sunlit heights beckoned to Grace. Bored and tired with the long days in the village in which her only pastime was talking to Breed or reading his books, she expressed a wish for a long tramp abroad.

She went to Paul first, but he explained in considerable detail that he had a conference with one of the old women of the tribe, from whom he hoped to gain information of great value to their quest; and although he regretted the engagement immensely he believed he ought not to try to break it. In addition to this, he was not feeling very well, and he thought a long walk might not agree with him. He did not wish to overdo. . . . He would doubtless feel better in a few days, and as their business would probably be completed by then, the party could start back toward civilization.

She thanked him; then walked slowly and rather listlessly toward her tent. On the way she met Breed, as if he had been especially provided by a kindly Fate so that she might have her outing. No doubt Breed would go with her, if he were asked. He had no conferences, and he was always feeling the best. It was quite a satisfaction, she reflected, to have some one

near on whom she could always rely; and she was a little afraid she might miss him when she returned with Paul to her home.

She could see no harm in asking him to go, particularly since a definite reason for going had now occurred to her. It is a very pleasant trait in human nature that men—and especially girls—can almost always find reasons for what they want to do. True, her last adventure with Breed had not been without unpleasant aspects, but today the sky was clear.

"Bert, are the bears out of hibernation yet?" she asked.

"Quite a few out now, I should say. They always appear in considerable numbers after the middle of May. There haven't been any big storms lately to keep them in."

"I wonder if we couldn't get a bear skin. I'd like one very much, to take back. I don't know that I'd like to see one of the creatures killed——"

"Don't you worry about seeing one of them killed, provided he has a good coat of fur. It's a crime to kill them needlessly, but not for a good rug."

"Isn't that rather a selfish view to take, Bert? To take a life for our profit?"

"It's selfish, but it's natural. It is a bit hard to draw the line between one kind of killing and another. Little animals are trapped and killed—some of them raised and killed—to make your fur coat. Cattle are slaughtered for your meat and for the leather in your shoes. Killing seems to be a necessary—at least an inevitable—part of our business. The only line that I can draw is to kill sparingly, because some one else may want to kill too."

"Besides, bears are dangerous animals, aren't they?"

"So the natives say. Many white men all over Alaska say so too—want them exterminated; but it's a poor excuse for killing them out in this empty country. I kill them because I want to kill them—and I don't try to find any excuses. I'm quite sure, Miss Crowell, that we could get a bear-rug for you if you wanted one."

"In one day's hunt?"

"Very likely. We're just at the edge of the finest bear country in the world."

She sent him to get his gun, meanwhile making hasty preparations for a day in the interior. Among them, necessarily, was informing Paul of her

plans, so that he would not worry at her absence. And now certain difficulties presented themselves.

"I won't hear of such a trip," Paul informed her with some heat. "It is not only unconventional—I consider it actually dangerous. I can't imagine why you trust this half-breed the way you do."

"Because he has shown himself worthy of it," was the spirited reply.

The look of rancor and malice that she had seen in him too many times at mention of Breed's name was particularly marked now, and Grace not only deplored it as unworthy of him, but feared it too. "I won't hear of you going," he repeated. "I'm responsible for you out here—your physical welfare as well as your reputation. I'd think you'd care about the former if not the latter."

"I don't care enough about either to stay in that tent today."

"You don't care enough for me to do it?"

"Not for your silly opposition. Paul, you haven't been particularly considerate of me lately; and until you become so again, you can't expect to have your way with me in everything. I'm going bear-hunting today with Bert. I asked you to go with me, and you wouldn't. I'm sorry if it offends you, but I'm going anyway."

He heard in her tones and saw in her face the certain fact that she meant what she said. She was going hunting with Breed. Paul was not only jealous —with that secret jealousy which had cursed him since he had first met Breed Bert—he was outraged and indignant. "Well, if you insist on going I suppose I'll have to call off my conference and go along to take care of you," he told her.

"Nothing could please me more. That was my original plan."

She declined to dismiss Breed after engaging him, so it happened that the three of them started out together, Grace blissfully happy to be away from the village even for a day, the guide sober but entirely cheerful, and Paul sullen, querulous, and fuming. Paul had been forced to go by jealousy, and thus the difficulties of the trail were ten times increased. His ill-temper cost him the self-control and coolness necessary for easy progression over rough country. The slow anger in his heart used up energy sorely needed in climbing the steeps. Worse still, his two companions seemed to be having a splendid time in spite of him. He resented Breed's friendly, interesting, but never familiar discourse; and he felt he could strike Grace's happy laughter from her lips.

Soon after mounting the first crags Breed spied a bear moving slowly up a steep grade about a half mile beyond. Even at this distance Grace got some idea of the size and power of this most noble of American animals, the largest bear and also the largest carnivorous animal in the world. He hesitated not at all at the steep slope, but moved along with a rocking motion that might have been comical if it had not been thrilling, and apparently resistless as the moving glaciers.

"He's a big fellow—one of the biggest I ever saw," Breed told them. "But it doesn't look like we're going to get him. He seems to be heading straight up that mountain."

"Why can't we go up after him?"

"Because he's soon going to be in deep snow, and not being caterpillar tractors, it would be killing labor trying to get in range of him. Except for the trail he'd make for us we couldn't follow him at all."

"If you are convinced of that, why don't we turn around and go back?" Paul questioned coldly.

"When both of you are ready, we'll go back. We haven't gone very far yet. We'll watch the old fellow——"

Presently the bear climbed onto a ledge, and the next instant disappeared. They watched in vain for him to appear on the mountainside beyond the ledge. "Where has he gone?" Grace asked.

"I'm sure I don't know. He may be resting up on that ledge: if he is, we can get him. There may be some ravine leading down that we can't see from here. We'll try it anyway."

The three pushed on, and soon encountered the huge fellow's tracks in the snow. They lost the trail almost at once on the nearly sheer face of the cliff, and here they mounted only with the greatest difficulty. The last hundred yards leading up to the ledge were all but inaccessible, and had to be negotiated at a snail's pace, on all fours, with some danger of pitching off into the gorge below. At last they found precarious footing just below the ledge, and putting himself up Breed peered over.

"I can't see him," he whispered. "He must have got away, but I don't see how——"

His companions now climbed to his level, and finding herself in an unstable position, the girl wiggled her athletic form up on the ledge itself.

What was in her face as she opened her eyes instantly hurled Breed up on the rocks beside her.

The bear had not gone on, after all. Twenty yards from them, in a little hollow on the narrow ledge, the huge creature lay asleep, and Breed had simply overlooked him from the lower position. He reached and touched Grace's shoulder, lightly forcing her down to a supine position on the rocks. At the same instant he touched his finger to his lips.

The rest of the little drama was enacted in almost perfect silence. Both simply lay watching. Pulling his head and shoulders above the ledge and resting on his forearm on the rock itself, Paul watched too. Even Breed, an old acquaintance of the Peninsula bears, could scarcely believe in the creature's size. He was vast—legs hardly to be encircled by a man's arms, huge burly head, the shoulders and frame of the mountain king he was. It soon became apparent that he was fast asleep, and because the wind blew down the mountain his keen nose gave him no hint of his foes' presence.

Noiseless as a snake, Breed crept near enough to whisper in the girl's ear.

This was the softest whisper that could be imagined, yet she was so keen, so stimulated by the crisis, that she heard every word. "It's old Dirty Face," he told her. His shining eyes told her still more—that here was the culmination of a long acquaintance with the monarch among bears.

She touched her finger to her lips, but he shook his head. "He can't hear this. Creep back down the ledge, soft as you can. He's no good—his fur's all rubbed and worthless. Besides, it's too close quarters. He'd knock us off sure."

Breed seemed to think that she needed convincing of the folly and danger of launching an attack; but he never made a greater mistake. She was entirely willing to retreat in peace. She did not crave his explanations, and she was deadly afraid that even this subdued whisper would waken the monster.

In this particular moment the two companions had forgotten Paul, looking over the ledge behind them. Suddenly they heard him whispering, an angry whisper carrying all too clearly to their ears.

"Why don't you shoot?" he was demanding. "Are you afraid?"

Breed nodded emphatically, at the same time giving the sign of silence. Grace looked at her fiancé with sudden anxiety, then at the monstrous shaggy heap twenty yards away. The Kadiak bear, like most huge things, is

often a remarkably sound sleeper; and even Paul's whispering had not disturbed him yet. And now the girl made the first motion back toward Paul, hoping to quiet his reckless mood by the touch of her hand.

"Are you going to let him go, you coward?" the latter whispered. His enmity toward Breed had seized this as an issue. "Well, I'm not——"

Paul was resting on his left forearm, his head and shoulders visible above the ledge. Now his right arm came up, too. In his hand he held the automatic pistol that he carried as a side-arm.

He aimed the weapon toward the bear; but he did not fire. With a swiftness like that of a snake's head when it strikes, Breed lashed out a brown hand. It caught Paul's wrist, and although that was furthest from the latter's intention, he dropped the pistol.

Slowly the bear heaved up his mighty bulk and looked about. He glimpsed the three figures immediately, but partly because of indifferent eyesight, and mostly because in these forsaken lands he had had small contact with human beings, he did not at once translate them. It was his next play. He might either withdraw from the field or, in that careless, steam-locomotive way of bears, try his luck at knocking these suspicious-looking figures from the ledge. A great deal depended on the humor in which he had wakened. He was the king.

Breed slipped over the safety-catch on his rifle and waited for the turn of the card. Lanterns hung in his eyesockets, but the line of his lips was thin and cold, and his long hands made no movements. Grace was frozen in her place, half with terror, half in the contagion of Breed's still, alert mood. Lifted out of himself by the archaic grandeur of this wilderness picture, for the moment Paul overcame the fury which had been sweeping him off his mental balance, and watched with starting eyes.

Old Dirty Face, the king of bears—so named for dark patches on the yellowish fur of his brow and nose—regarded the strangers with bored indifference. He grunted loudly, sniffed, then wheeling with the grace and ease of a battleship in a narrow channel, he slowly, solemnly made his way up the mountain.

Breed was the first of the three hunters to get back on an every-day footing with life. He threw off the spell that the bit of mountain drama had cast upon him, put his rifle at safe, then sat upon the ledge. "Everybody happy, and no harm done," he observed pleasantly. "It looked rather ticklish for a minute."

“There was some harm done,” Paul returned in a most strange, repressed voice. “You not only forgot your place—and it hasn’t been the first time either—but you interfered in something that didn’t concern you. I demand an apology.”

“It did concern me. It concerned all of us here. I apologize to you freely for snatching your wrist instead of explaining the situation to you, as I would have liked to do. I did the only thing I could to keep you from shooting and at the same time not alarm the bear.”

“You acted as if he were a pet of yours.”

“Well, I do feel for him. He’s an old fellow that has ranged in here since I was a child, and how much before I don’t know. I wouldn’t be surprised but that he is one of the three or four biggest bears in the world, and old and wise and worthy of a man’s respect. His coat is not any good—he’s simply too old, and he’s rubbed the hair off in a dozen places. There’s no excuse on earth for killing him. Above and beyond that, we were in a mighty dangerous position.”

“I’ve always understood the natives are afraid of bears,” Paul remarked contemptuously.

“I’m free to confess that this native was afraid of that bear. If we had shot at him, I think he would have charged. Bears don’t often charge, but the close quarters, and the fact that the steep mountain was the only way out would have made him come our way. We just had sixty feet to stop him in, with one rifle—and a big bear like that will often run away or fight with a dozen high-power bullets in him. Your pistol would have only angered him. He could have batted us off the ledge and killed all three of us before I could stop him with the rifle.”

“You knocked the pistol out of my hand.”

“I couldn’t help it. I had to keep you from shooting. I know Kadiak grizzlies, and you don’t.”

To Grace this was a perfectly lucid explanation and entirely justified Breed’s actions. She rejoiced that Paul seemed to take it in fairly good part too: at least, he made no further comment, but picked up his pistol, fingered it a moment thoughtfully, then thrust it back in its holster. Except for one insignificant point he was once more his superior, collected self. For the first time she noticed that the veins of his hands looked oddly swollen and dark, and the fingers were curled up close to the palms.

He crawled down a few feet until he found secure footing, then stepped to one side to let Breed pass, falling in behind him. This was not quite the order in which the three usually walked. Breed had almost always gone in front, guiding, Grace came next, and Paul brought up the rear, thus being in a position to help the girl over difficult places. Now he was letting her feel her way along as best she could, displaying an indifference to her welfare that wounded her sorely.

It turned out that only by the seventh chance the three of them got down to an easier grade without mishap. It was not a bear, but a cold, gray, inanimate foe that menaced them now—a hundred-pound bowlder which all three had noticed on the way up and, because it seemed to be unstably rooted on the slope, had been careful to avoid touching. As Paul worked past it on the way down, it suddenly leaped from its shallow bed of gravel and plunged down the steep.

Grace saw the missile in the air and cried a warning, but the man at the head of the file had no time to act upon it. It was not her scream that saved him; it was simply the fortune of the hour. The stone seemed to be aimed directly toward him, and how it would strike him, carrying him in its rumbling onslaught down over the rough ledges at last to hang in ragged waste upon some up-jutting crag Grace could picture in her horrified fancy—in one glimpse she could see it all—yet in one glimpse more she saw that he was safe. The rolling death had passed him by. Only the wind it carried had brushed him.

“I must have touched it with my elbow, or else just passing close to it made it fall,” Paul explained. “I hope you’ll excuse it.”

“Certainly,” Breed told him. Then he stepped to one side to let Paul lead the way.

CHAPTER XIII

Both Grace and Breed were in a somewhat thoughtful mood the rest of the day. Paul could not join with them in this because he was too busy. He had his belated conferences with the natives to attend to, and these not only deprived him of Grace's company but occupied his own mind against any intimate communion with himself. Both of the others had time to spare, and when the last of the daylight was herded up the ravines to make a farewell gleam on the mountain peaks, and when the dark closed down and the moon rose, a restless humor took Breed out of his house for a moonlight walk among the crags.

Mountain stretches are almost beyond belief in bright moonlight. The airy beams work a change that is difficult to accept without at the same time letting go all safe and sane ideas. The rational mind is bewildered; the poet, on the other hand, sees all things, heaven and earth and what is behind them, with a wonderful clarity. These sharp, rugged, unblessed Aleutian mountains are none too well-acquainted with such a steady flood of moonlight—simply because of the troops and squadrons of clouds that are always parading back and forth in the sky and shutting off the view; but they yielded to it beautifully tonight, and their savage mood was soothed. Huge, rough, gray crags turned out to be of inestimably precious metal, deep gorges were black with the blackest witchcraft ever conjured, ordinary brooks became wondrous rivers of life or of years or something else beside mere water that gleamed mythically as it moved.

On such nights, perspectives are hopelessly false. Distances are twisted about to suit some mountain god with a grotesque sense of humor. Cliffs all but tumble down on the lonesome wanderer, far mountains rush up and almost step on him, and nearby promontories are spirited away when he tries to touch them. Above and beyond this, an air of enchantment supersedes the every-day atmosphere he habitually breathes. He wanders about on tiptoe, as if he fears to waken a Sleeper. Who this is he dares not think, but he knows at last that all these ranges, and all the hills running up to them, and the lands and seas and the stars that shine in the seas, and himself too—yes, even himself—comprise not even one of that Sleeper's fleet, flickering dreams.

A wanderer among the crags would like to think upon these things without interruption; but such is not the cosmic arrangement. It so happens that a man's time for thinking is decidedly limited, perhaps so he will not discover items not meant for him to know; and a succession of small, earthly matters soon steal in to occupy his mind. Thus it was with this man of the Pavlof village. He could not escape the drama of human lives in which he was involved, even if he had cared to do so.

Walking up a rocky hillside, just beyond the town, Breed made the sudden discovery that he was not alone. Besides the pixies who lived in the rocks and other presences whom all wise men believe in, there were two human beings, sitting close together on a natural bench of rocks. Breed's pleasant thoughts and absurd fancies were instantly dispelled, and something very like nausea took its place. One of the two was Paul Fieldmaster. No doubt could exist of that fact. His clothes proved it, even if the moonlight shone but darkly on his deeply brunette face. The other was a native girl. If Breed was not mistaken, it was Veda, a sister of Fishback Joe, with whom Paul was so intimate.

Breed could understand a white man's temporary weakness in relation to a squaw. He was not an angel himself, nor had he ever claimed to be, and he knew that men will commit strange evils in the solitude and the moonlight. The thing that appalled him and sickened him most of all was the implication of equality in the relations of the pair. Paul was showing himself off at what he deemed his best: brilliant, attentive, and chivalrous; and the girl's talk and manner had a distinct proprietary air. This was more than a midnight assignation impelled by an ancient curse. The affair was obviously of several days' standing and of undoubted significance.

Breed was not inclined to stay and watch them. He heard both of them laugh with that coarse, mirthless laughter of the damned, he caught the flat, lifeless tones of their intimate speech, and he saw Paul kiss the brown lips. Then he walked silently back to his *barabara*, sickened at the black arts that this bright moon could practice on the hearts of men.

He sat at the door of his turf-house, and the minutes passed neither fast nor slow because he was oblivious of them. He was torn, haunted and enticed, as he had rarely been in his life; yet almost from the first he knew what his course would be. It would be, and it must be. Not only the extraordinary strength of this strange man's will was behind it—that vigor of soul which his fellows knew and feared—but a foredoom, a compulsion, and a certitude beyond himself. In that lonely and bitter darkness a light burned for him yet.

No doubt he was greatly tempted. In lonely years to come it would be an enduring consolation to him—a factor of great moment in his life—could he know that Grace was free of Paul's arms. Why should he not stand aside and let this unblessed land do its work of estrangement and ruin? . . . Yet this was denied him. He could not let this thing he had just seen go on. For all his belief that Grace's happiness as well as his own demanded that she and Paul grow apart, he must still play the game according to the rules. This was a law with him. This was his vow of that strange hour upon a distant mountain. It was a pact he had made by a temple on a hill.

"That strength is born of your love for me," Grace had told him, "and it has saved you. But can it save my love for me?"

Could it? Was it great enough? "I'm losing him, Bert. I want him back in my arms." . . . Her voice wafted to him like a floating cobweb lit by the sunlight, out of the days and the distance—an urge and a melody he had heard a thousand times before ever her ship sailed into Hopeless Land. . . . "I don't care how; I just want him back. Maybe you can save him for me, and at the same time save him from himself."

He waited until the moon was hidden, and a bitter wind off Bering Sea was rolling black, dense clouds into the sky; then he crossed the village and halted at the door of Fishback Joe's *barabara*. He knocked loudly.

"Who come—Joe?" a girl's voice answered, the same muddy, toneless voice that marked the hopeless people.

"No. It's Bert." Breed's voice was sluggish too, yet the squaw feared it. "Dress and come out."

There ensued a short pause. "What you want?"

"I want you to dress, and come on out. This is Bert speaking."

No further urging was needed. The girl got up and began to draw on some of her outer clothes. The headman of the village, venerable Sleepy Owl, could not have summoned her more quickly, nor could Nick Pavlof who communed with devils. She lighted a lamp, burning seal-oil so as to ward off evil, then came to the door.

"What you want?" she questioned again.

Breed looked at her in the lamplight, and his eyes frightened her, and hatred of his mastery over her burned in her heart. She would have won him if she could, long ago. She would still discard Paul for him, even Paul, who

kissed her blunt, ugly hand. Failing in this, she would have stabbed him if she dared.

As the Aleut women go Veda was an admirable specimen. No white blood—neither the Russian, which is darkened by the Tartar, nor the Scandinavian, whitened by the snow—had bleached her walnut cheeks. She was sleek, not greatly fat, above average height, and comely according to the native standards. In the lamplight her large teeth gleamed white as her lips were drawn back; her gaze was dark and sullen.

"I have something to tell you—and a command to give," Breed answered her simply. "Are you alone?"

"Yes. Joe, him gone."

"Where?"

"He gone with Paul. I thought maybe him come back."

"Will he be back soon? I want to talk to you alone."

"Pretty soon. He go part way with Paul—show him trail—then come back here."

"Where has Paul gone?"

"Veda promise no tell. Maybe will tell, sometime. You come see about Paul?"

"I came to see about you." Breed's tone deepened. "Veda, I came not only to give an order, but some advice, too. I know about you and Paul. Tomorrow when he comes, you must tell him to go away. You must tell him to take the white girl and go back to the country he came from. You must not see him again."

Veda shook her head. "No. Paul—he my fellow. He marry me. He turn away the white girl, marry me. He tell me so."

"And you have no more sense than to believe him? Veda, don't you know that the white men have promised the native women the same thing, over and over, and almost never kept their word? Don't I know, Veda? I am the son of a white man—I don't doubt my father made the same promise to Maria. I hope he didn't, but I don't doubt he did. Men like Paul never marry squaws or if they do, they give them children, then go back to their own country. In these days a few white trappers and fishermen, ignorant men or just riffraff, marry native women, but never men like Paul. He'll take all you give him, and soon there will be children, cursed with white blood under a

brown skin. Even before the children come he will tire of your brown face, and hate it—and after while he will throw you away."

"He no throw me away," Veda insisted stubbornly. "He love me."

"He can't love you. It isn't possible for him to love you, any more than for a swan to love a crow. Don't I know, Veda? Do you dare question me? This man is a white man, and he has already given his love to a white woman. Who are you, compared to her? You know. My telling you can't make any difference."

A weazened look as of desperate cunning crept into the girl's face. "You love the white woman," she whispered. "Veda—she know! You can no lie to me. Why not you take white woman—run away into the mountain? You give Paul to me."

She searched him for any weakness, but though his eyes burned his face was like flint. "I can't give Paul to you, Veda," he told her after a pause. "He's not mine to give. He belongs to the white girl—he can never belong to you. All he will do is break your heart—all that you have to break—and in doing it, he will break hers too. He won't stay with you. He can never be like you, never be your mate because you and he are a world apart. Now we've talked enough. Tomorrow you will tell him to go."

"No." The girl shook her head again, and a sudden intensifying of her look, almost a light in her somber eyes under the lamp's gleam, checked the engine of his thoughts. The wind blew her long straight hair, and she had the air of a prophetess. "Veda no send him away," she went on slowly. "You not know."

"No one knows better than I do."

"He never throw Veda away. He stay with her. We live together—while the snows come many times. We get along fine."

Her tone was of calm conviction; and without knowing why, Breed felt on the eve of a profound climax. "It's never been done yet, Veda," he managed to say.

"It work this time, fine. 'Cause——" And now she spoke with ill-restrained eagerness.

"Yes——"

" 'Cause Paul—he no white man."

CHAPTER XIV

For the first time since Veda had known him, Breed Bert seemed baffled, incompetent, and overwhelmed. At first he stared in disbelief, and beholding the solemn earnestness in every line of the girl's dark face, he simply yielded himself to the turmoil of his thoughts. This was not a mere subterfuge on Veda's part. Whether or not the momentous statement were true, certainly she builded on it. And now a hundred confirmations shouted its truth in Breed's ears.

Whether he wanted to believe it he did not know. He was not all iron. This factor of the case could not now be considered—that must come in a lonely hour and a calmer mood. It was enough now that Veda had surely told the truth, and why or how, and what significance it had for him he could not and would not contemplate. He was called from himself by Veda's low voice.

"I no give Paul up," she told him.

She shook her head as she spoke, firmly and decidedly, but now she had a troubled look he could not fathom. Was she regretting her betrayal of Paul, or did she have some deeper, more selfish motive for her growing uneasiness? Breed asked at last:

"Does Paul know this—that he isn't a white man?"

"Yes—he know. I tell him," was her answer.

"You told him—to hold him?"

"I tell him so he never go away." Suddenly she began speaking with breathless eagerness. "Bert—Paul no like this business—he no want to be native. He rich now—he fear maybe be poor, like native. Paul, he go tonight to Maria's cabin, start two, three hours ago."

Breed's hard hand seized her wrist. "What did he go for, Veda?"

"Veda tell—don't hurt me. A man come long ago, brought—what you call him?—proof about Paul. Old Sleepy Owl, he steal 'em, give 'em to Maria: she got 'em in her *barabara*. Paul go tonight to get 'em, tear 'em up, so no one find out him not a white man. Maybe you lay on trail, take 'em away—make him be native. Then I keep Paul, you take white girl. He make me promise no tell you—Sleepy Owl, he say no tell too——"

"What has Sleepy Owl to do with it? Paul will destroy the proofs as soon as he gets his hands on them! Veda, tell me quick—which way did Paul go?"

"He go down river, Joe show him the way—then over hills to Otter Creek. You know way to own *barabara*!"

"Is Joe going with him all the way?"

"No, he come back after he take Paul over first hills."

"That's all I want to know. Veda, say nothing about this to any one—not even to Joe. You know me, and that is my order. Now go in."

Breed turned away, and running to his turf-house, made preparations for a little expedition of his own. In his pocket he thrust a few sticks of jerked caribou flesh; over his back he hung his snowshoes and rifle, and in one hand he carried an oil-burning lantern. Then without a moment's delay he turned toward the hills.

He did not disregard the fact that Paul had two or three hours' start of him, and Maria's *barabara*, his old home, on the upper waters of Otter Creek was ordinarily only a five hours' tramp, the roundabout way down the river and across the hills. But there was another trail!

The big bears of the country, disdaining any steeps or snow, did not take five hours from the foot of Pavlof Mountain over to the upper gorge of Otter Creek. Scorning the long way around, they headed straight up over the cliffs that frowned down upon the town and into the gorge beyond. Could Breed follow their high trails? In this black night, could he go where only twice before he had gone, and then in daylight and late in the summer, when the snow was all but melted from the passes? He believed wholly that not only Paul's fate, but his own, and the fate of Grace, too, hung on this one question.

He crossed the narrow valley and started to mount the lofty wall which shut it in. In daylight, when the mountaineer could pick the best trail and look for footholds, the cliff offered a difficult but not particularly dangerous climb, but it was a sporting chance tonight. On the abrupt wall the lantern lit only his immediate position. He could not map out his course ahead, and what was even more important, the wan beams lied about the very niches and projections to which he trusted his life. Mere roughenings of the rock wall, emphasized by a deep shadow cast beyond, seemed to offer firm footholds. Handholds disappeared as he groped for them, and every aspect of the cliff was misleading and treacherous. The fact that he had but one free

hand was a grave hindrance, and the necessity for utmost speed precluded careful scouting and maneuvering.

At the same time he possessed several advantages and gifts which gave at least a fighting hope to what would have been otherwise almost certain failure. Breed knew the feel of the land. He appeared to possess certain special senses like delicate antennæ, feeling out his course and helping him over seemingly impassable places. The contour of a few feet of stone seemed to convey to him an idea of the topography of an entire cliff. It was as if he could see his way. And he was almost incredibly sure-footed. In long years of mountain roaming he seemed to have taken on that peculiar, thrilling, but almost comical complacency of the mountain goat, that old, whiskered, Swiss guide of the western ranges, which will deliberately stop, turn around, and gawk on a ledge so thin that it looks like a mere crack in the face of a precipice. Breed was self-mastered, and thus his hands reached and clung according to his command, and his feet went where he told them to go. His breath was slow, regular, and deeply drawn into his chest-cavity; and his heart was a steady, booming tom-tom in his breast.

Yet the chance remained sufficiently risky for any sportsman. The too-shallow niche, the loose stone, and the overhanging ledge had lost none of their effectiveness. But this was a desperate cause, and Breed was prepared to run the most desperate race of his life. If the mountain tricked him, it would not be because he had not dared.

He crept up the scarred faces of cliffs; he worked his way around crags and pinnacles; he climbed broken ledges, mounting from one lofty landing to another until the snow began to streak down to meet him. Once an eagle, nesting on a narrow ledge, flushed up with a shriek and thumping of wings, and once he stopped and pressed flat against the rock to hear an old she-bear, with cubs, grunting and rolling stones in the darkness above him. More than one wild thing wondered at this little yellow star that climbed steadily toward their lofty retreats. Sometimes the lantern cast pale beams into black, incognizable caves; sometimes it played on strange forms, the cubist sculpture of the land's witless gods, in granite and lava; sometimes it lit gaping crevices; and occasionally instead of austerity, harshness, and desolation, it revealed vistas of actual beauty—running water, snow-filled ravines, mossy chambers, a mural painting of many-hued strata. Here were battlements, abutments, and ramparts, as though the gods were at war.

In a half-hour's steady climb Breed got into the snow, and now he could make better speed. The drifts which could not cling to the steep just passed, here indicated an easier grade, and their whiteness helped him to see his

way. Soon it became too deep for easy progress, and he slipped on his snowshoes.

This high pass, bitter-cold and wind-swept, was nothing to him. He scarcely gave it a thought, but trotted among its little hills like one of the wild people of the snow. Only the stairways, leading up and down, he hated and feared; one was past, the other—less formidable in itself but actually more hazardous because his course ran down instead of up—awaited him just beyond. . . . Not once, in the short run over the plateau, did he see a living figure or an imprint where a living thing had passed. Only the tracks of the wind were here, and except for the wind's spirit, never resting, Breed Bert journeyed alone. On the wan drifts and in the faint light Breed looked like a spirit too—not a man who could breathe and speak, but merely a lonely, voiceless phantom, symbol of the land.

Presently the snow was less in depth, and he removed his snowshoes. Soon afterward he crossed the brow of the cliffs of Otter Creek, and began to work down into the gorge below.

There had been few harder tests in his life.

How Breed Bert made his way down this unbending cliff with darkness over him and only a deeper darkness below—how he wriggled over the brink of ledges where the she-bear would hesitate to lead her cubs; how he dropped from crag to crag, sliding where he could not cling, crawling where he could not walk, springing from one slippery landing to another when rock-faces, bare and unseamed, forbade any other means of progress—clear to a narrow shelf that hung but twenty feet above the easier grade near the bottom of the mountain, became in time a legend among the Pavlof people, a tale to tell when the old men gathered and the young braves boasted of their feats. How he did it, Breed himself did not know. He only knew that he stood at last on the lowest table of the mountain looking down at what seemed an impassable barrier.

Holding his lantern out he could see he was within twenty feet of the bottom of the cliff. Beyond that point the mountainside was steep, strewn with great bowlders, yet permitting easy descent. From thence on he could walk upright, following the grade down to the bank of the stream and to Maria's *barabara*. Safety was near, and yet treacherously far. The twenty feet between, the upright side of the ledge or table of rock on which he stood, was a vertical wall of smooth, gray stone.

It was such a drop as no man can make without serious injury. He would strike the mountainside below with shattering force, and his momentum,

impossible to check, would hurl him down the rocky slope to the bottom of the gorge. He sought in vain for any cracks in the rock that would give his fingers hold. The large block of strata appeared to extend a great distance on either side, and as far as he could tell the gap between its edge and the rock-strewn slope below was everywhere else even more formidable than at this point.

He moved a short distance along the ledge; and presently he was given his one chance. The gnomes who live in the grottoes of the cliffs must have laughed as they presented it. Such a fitting finish it was to his great achievement; such a grim joke to play on one who had so ventured and come through! Halfway down on the abrupt wall there was a small break in the strata, and here the process of erosion had made a minute foothold. Here the rock was crushed and broken, and in the crack that had been formed grew a stunted alder bush.

It was only a branch. Except for the dauntless will to live which pervades the least of living things, it could not have hung on at all. Breed blessed the Spirit who has let the earth bring forth grass, the herb yielding seed; yet he feared the trial before him as he had feared few things in his life. This little branch must break the force of his fall. Catching it, he could drop down to safety.

Could he seize it as he fell? Would his hand go true? The fewer questions asked, the cooler his nerve for the test. For almost a minute he directed the light down, fixing in his mind's eye the exact position of the little shrub and the contour of the rock on which it grew. Groping, he found a firm hold for his fingers at the edge of the ledge above the bush. Slowly he let himself down.

He used both hands at first. Gripping hard the edge of the ledge with his right hand, he now lowered the left holding the lantern, and looking down, once more scrutinized the shrub beneath him. His last act of preparation was to drop the lantern.

Instantly the dark pressed in about him. Into it he dropped.

Breed did not miss. It was not in him to miss, this night of nights. He grasped with both hands, and both of them clutched the tough stalk of the shrub. As he fetched up, his muscles flexed to endure the shock, and they did endure it, and the puny, stunted shrub endured it too. It was a partner of his tonight. Unseen, unblessed, a homely vessel of being in the midst of the desolation, it had played its part; it was its great brother's keeper. The stalk

held, and the roots clung fast to the rock. The cliff that hated it and him could not break its hold.

Breed lowered himself as far as he could, then dropped on down to the base of the rock. He landed on his feet, and with considerable effort saved himself from pitching down the steep grade. The going was easy from now on. In the darkness he made his way to the foot of the mountain, and up the creek to the little, grass-grown mound that had for him such poignant memory.

There was no light under the door, no sound of voices from within. Old Maria was asleep, and Paul had not yet come.

CHAPTER XV

For the second time tonight Breed knocked at the door of an unlit turf-house, and for the second time a voice called through to know his mission. The words spoken now were Aleut, but except for a querulous note of age the tones behind them were not greatly different from those heard on the previous occasion. Their only quality, remotely resembling life, was a dull whine, running through them. The soul that might have vitalized them was dead.

"It's Bert," the visitor answered in the vernacular. "Sindy, I want to come in."

He heard her get up, light a seal-oil lamp, and come straightway to the door. No preparation was needed to greet her boy. Between the soiled bed-robes, she slept in the same clothes she wore all day except for her shawl, moccasins, and her cold-weather parka. The light revealed the amazing scroll on her leathery face; the gray hair, unkempt about her shoulders.

This was Veda in forty years. Sindy—or Maria as she was known—had also been active once, not greatly fat, sleek and smooth-skinned. She had possessed a certain animal attraction for not-too-fastidious white men. None of these things was true now. Breed never liked to think about her, and now he deplored to look at her; no possible sentiment between mother and son could beautify her in his eyes. She had gone to bed drunk with her home-made vodka, and though she had slept off most of the effects, she was still unsteady, her eyes unwholesome, her mouth loose and shapeless.

"Mother" has always been a word to conjure with. It strikes to the root of the spirit. To Breed, seeing her, it was a travesty.

He looked at her unmoved; and the look she returned was poignant only with hate. The lingering sentiment that a spectator might have expected, the echo of the fierce, animal love she had once known, was not only wholly absent: an emotion even more terrible than love sometimes is, one that is spared the beasts but is all too well-known to beast-like people, dwelt in its place. Maria shared the sentiments of the rest of her tribe. Among other things he was cursed with, Breed believed firmly that he lived under a more awful curse than that which a ruined king has in a strange tale hurled upon Goneril—mother-hate.

“What do you want?” the woman asked in her own tongue. “Why have you come here?”

“I want the truth—at last,” Breed answered. His voice was deep and full, and though not loud it boomed in the close, wretched room. “Sindy, I came to get it.”

“I don’t know what you mean——” The woman spread palsied hands.

His remorseless voice cut into her complaint. “Only the truth, Sindy, from now on. I know about the things that Sleepy Owl took from the white man and gave to you. They are hidden in this house. Sindy, you know me?”

“I know you.” The woman’s lip drew back, but not in scorn.

“Then you know I will have what I came for. Will you give it to me now, or shall I rip apart this house and sift its dirt through my fingers until I find it?”

The vernacular of the Aleut lends itself to picturesque and extravagant expression, yet Sindy was not deceived. He would do nothing less than what he threatened, and perhaps he would leave her to the storm. . . . One spark in her gross frame glowed still. Now she thrust forward her evil, wrinkled face, and for a space looked him full in the eyes. Foul, hideous, and debauched, yet the depths of her cold hate could for the instant almost be mistaken for dignity.

“I give it to you now,” she told him at last, and the whine was almost gone from her voice. “There was a time that I cared, but it is past. There was a time when I wanted to keep you away from your own mother. It was past long ago.”

For the first time Breed seemed to break under the ordeal. He reached as if to touch the woman, but this was not vouchsafed him even in this instant of the greatest travail he had ever known. There was no help for him here, no remorse—only the barrier of race built high by hate and malice.

He looked at her, and he thought she symbolized Fate. Fate could do just this thing: play with a man’s life as the wind plays with a cobweb. The wind of Hopeless Land cared no less for the flimsy thread it wafted than did Fate for the silver cord of a human life. She looked like Fate, too, perhaps less like the Jester than those images in which a wiser, older people picture the power over their lives, the idols that sit calmly in Oriental temples. She too was calm, ruthless, inscrutable. Her face was a mask like theirs. In his life he had known awe of many things—of mountains, wide snowfields, hard storms, and tempestuous seas, and sometimes of what dwelt in his own heart

—but never such awe as he knew now of this half-human thing before him. He had not been his own master, after all. Here was his master, the pilot of his life. This woman's emotions—first, love and at last, hate—had made a plaything of his destiny. She, an interloper, had not only shaped his course, but for all he might do, for all the struggle he might make, she and the things she had brought about might still remain the greatest factors in his life.

Not only Paul's fate hung in the balance tonight, but his own! The truth had sunk home to him now; Veda had set him on the right track and now he had put two and two together. Details he did not know—very likely they would be found among the documentary proofs in Sindy's charge—but the main situation, the crux of his life and of Paul's, could no longer be questioned. He had taken long enough to learn. Even the young squaws knew what was hidden from him.

"Sindy—for that is your name—why didn't you tell me long ago?" he asked, as near pleading as she had ever heard him since his childhood. "When you quit caring, why didn't you care enough for the boy you had once loved to let him know the truth? Didn't you care that much for the memory of my lips on your breast? . . . Why couldn't you let me go among my own people?"

"You know why," she muttered.

"Yes, I know why—because of hate. You hated me for what I was—because I could not be one with you—because even though I drank of your milk and grew up in your house I was still white—white all the way through. They all hate me—all the tribe, you with the rest—because I rose from among them instead of staying down with them. They hate me for my power over them. They center on me their hatred for their own brown skins—because they are brown, and I am white.

"Yours was a sweeping revenge, Sindy. If I wouldn't be a native, at least you would keep me from being a white man. If I wouldn't stay on the level with you, at least you would hide from me the knowledge that would have let me go among my own people. I suppose the old men and women of the village have known the truth from the first."

She nodded, wholly unmoved by his fervor and eager now to go back to her bed. "A few of them," she told him.

A grim travesty of a smile touched his lips. The flood of his bitter thoughts was for a moment checked as he pondered on a startling Indian trait, the gift of silence. Not one of the older Indians had ever hinted of

Sindy's secret. Only a young squaw's love for a half-breed stranger had at last spilled the truth. She had not cared for Breed, nor was she interested in his part in the affair; she had simply been afraid of losing Paul. She had sent Breed here solely to prevent the destruction of evidence that might hold Paul in her arms.

The man rallied his scattered faculties. "I certainly must congratulate you all," he told her dully. "You cooked my goose—first with your love, Sindy, and then with your hate. You must have loved me when you sent Mrs. Fieldmaster's detectives off the trail. You couldn't have begun hating me until after that—until I began to be a man—a white man, not a native. You've all kept your secret mighty well. I've guessed the truth at last—but I'm afraid I guessed it too late to do me any good.

"Sindy, you can go to bed now—have a pleasant sleep—but tell me first where the things are that Sleepy Owl gave you—the evidence he stole from my mother's detectives. I'll look them over while I'm here."

The squaw hobbled to one corner of the cabin, then dug with a piece of alder-wood into the dirt floor. Soon she brought forth a tin can, one which had once contained some food product. This she put in Breed's hand.

"The stranger had many more things," she told him. "Pictures and papers. This was all Sleepy Owl was able to get." Her tone dropped to a senseless muttering as she turned away.

In the can was a single envelope of hard, strong paper, and this in turn held several close-written sheets. He had been at sea, and one glance told him that these were clippings from the log of a ship, doubtless obtained by Mrs. Fieldmaster as a matter of record and taken into the North country by one of her agents, of course for the purpose of establishing a parent's claim. The entries were isolated ones of the months of October and November, 1896, and had been cut out from the original sheets to make a complete story.

THE LOG OF THE FLOYD J. COOK.

We sailed from Unga, on the Shumagins, at six P.M., bound for Seattle via Dutch Harbor. (So a voluble skipper had written.) At 11.10 A.M., in a dense fog, we struck an uncharted reef, approximately Latitude 54° 50′ North, Longitude 163° East, south by east of Muscovia Bay.

After Chief Engineer McLane reported, all hands were ordered to the boats. In the meantime our passengers, mostly gold-seekers

bound home from Skagway, had rushed from the dining saloon where they had been at table when the ship struck. Some were hurt in the jam in the after companionway, and several women fainted.

I regret that there was considerable confusion taking to the boats. A great many men essayed to lower boats without help from the crew, and our only known loss of life occurred during one of these attempts, boat No. 4 tipping over when it struck the water. Fortunately we had a fairly smooth sea or others would have perished. In the confusion the following five persons were drowned:

Mrs. A. Martin, Astoria, Oregon.
Olga Dimich, native woman from Unga.
Jim. Four-year-old son of Olga.
P. Larsen. Residence unknown.
Florence Jenkins, Seattle, aged 13.

As soon as it developed we would remain afloat, some of the people who were in life-boats asked to be taken aboard, but several boats had drifted into Muscovia Bay. . . . Undoubtedly the squaw Sindy and Mrs. Fieldmaster's baby were in one of these boats, although in the excitement no one took the trouble to trace her movements carefully.

In all disasters there is usually a freak accident, and this was ours. As far as we can figure out, Sindy, a squaw we had picked up at Kadiak, bound for Unalaska to meet a white man named Oleson whom she claimed as her husband, was in the dining-room when we struck, seated with other natives at the table we had reserved for them. She forced her way through the jam in the companionway and rushed to the deck, where she had left the box which served as her baby's cradle. It appears that when she arrived on the scene she found the cradle tipped over and the baby gone.

What happened immediately afterward we can only guess. She of course supposed that her baby was lost, washed overboard in the seas which were at that moment rolling over the after deck, the bow of the ship being elevated on the reef. Being a squaw she made up for the loss in the only way she knew. Sindy had to have a baby, her own preferably, if not somebody else's. In judging her the women must remember she is not a white woman, but a native. Rushing forward, she must have caught sight of Mrs. Fieldmaster's baby, sleeping in its cradle in its mother's stateroom.

The door of the room was open, and her instinctive act was to snatch up the infant, wrap her own infant's blanket around it, and rush for the nearest life-boat.

We now seem to have the whole matter fairly well straightened out, and have figured, from various clues, about what happened. She got away on one of the first boats which subsequently drifted into Muscovia Bay and landed on the beach, and immediately she vanished into the interior with her stolen baby. No doubt she will be easy to trace. We have tried to assure Mrs. Fieldmaster that the return of her child is only a matter of days and weeks, but naturally she fears the worst.

It has been the wonder of us all how well she has stood up under her great distress. She has not only held back from nervous collapse, which many of the women feared, but has mothered Sindy's native child, who showed up, safe and sound, after the confusion had begun to die down. It appears that Second Officer Kris Johanessen saw that the infant's cradle had been rolled over by the wash on the after deck, and that the baby itself would be lost in another moment. He picked it up and put it in the hands of the first woman he came to.

It appears that Mrs. Fieldmaster was injured in the jam in the companionway and was not able to reach her stateroom for a half an hour after the accident. At first she was hopeful that some one had taken her baby in view of rescuing it, but further investigation has established the real truth. The poor deserted waif of Sindy's owes its life to Mrs. Fieldmaster. She seemed to feel responsible for it, which is a strange thing. She was the only woman on board able to nurse the child, and she put it to her own breast. It seems to be a pretty fine specimen of native child, obviously a half-breed and so light it could almost be mistaken for a white child.

Mrs. Fieldmaster left us at Dutch Harbor, where she joined her ailing husband. She took Paul (so she calls the native child) off with her, with the idea of returning him to Sindy as soon as her own baby is recovered. This may take longer than we hoped for at first. Sindy seems to have covered up her tracks very well, from all we can learn, fearful that her foster-child will be taken from her. The search will be further delayed, I fear, because of temporary lack of financial means on the part of the child's

parents and by Mr. Fieldmaster's condition. Doubtless it will be successful in due time. The truth is bound to prevail in the end. . . .

The author of the Log of the Floyd J. Cook had been quite correct. The search was successful in due time. The truth had prevailed in the end.

Most of the few little questions lingering in Bert's mind almost answered themselves. Paul's true name, of course, remained unknown: who his white father was, was not cleared up in the document; and it mattered little.

The wreck on the wave-swept rock south by east of Muscovia Bay had cast away two human lives, the white man among the natives, the Aleut among the whites. And surely, the intervening years were too many and long ever to bring them home again.

Bert folded up the sheets, put them back in their envelope, and placed them in an inner pocket. His manner was now indifferent, almost casual. The fires of his passion were burning low: only embers were left in his heart, and only a spark of the gleam that had lit his eyes. He was not bewildered now—only deeply tired, humbled, and wistful as he had never been. His mind refused to shape any kind of course for him. He was a strong ship without a rudder. For once in his life he did not know which way to turn.

He walked to the door of the turf-house and opened it to the dawn. There had been a violent weather-change since the preceding day. The inshore wind had brought a snow storm, a counter-attack by the retreating winter loath to yield the land. This was not an uncommon occurrence in the Peninsula country in May, and often the parting shot was not fired until middle-June; but today Bert regarded it with a grim fatalism, as if it were a supernatural accompaniment of his own mood. The fierce wind tried to cram itself into the narrow confines of the gorge; and the moderate snow it brought whirled in violent, futile circles and never rested on the ground. The flakes themselves were fine and dry as ground glass.

It might have been a typical spring storm except for the intense cold. The latter was unusual—the sharp darts hurled into his face told Bert of a close-to-zero temperature—but otherwise this was a common manifestation of the violent, hateful spirit that is the special god of Hopeless Land. As Breed stepped out, it pounced upon him in fury.

It was nothing to him. It shrieked about his head in vain. He was glad of a chance to pit his might against it, thinking that for a little time it would free him from the darker storm of his thoughts. . . . The Sleeper of the moonlit ranges did not dream so peacefully now. Perhaps all this—the wind

and the scudding clouds and the eddying snow—was a storm in *His* thoughts creeping through *His* dream. . . . He would ride it through with ease, tramping back to Pavlof village. He did, however, find himself conjecturing about Paul.

Paul should have been here, long since. Had he given up the expedition, going back with Joe? Bert's desperate race over the mountain had not been necessary, after all; but he did not regret the test it had given. Perhaps Paul had not even started at the time Veda had said, but had waited for daylight. In such case he would likely not start at all, because he would be unwilling to brave the storm. There was no cause for worry or for hope. A dark hope rose in Bert he hated, yet could not fight off—but nothing remained except to return to the village. Once there he could decide what to do.

He took the long way home. He need not risk his life again on the snow-wet crags of the divide, now even more treacherous than at the time of his crossing. He tramped up the creek, full into the teeth of the storm.

It strove in vain to beat him back. The wind exerted its full force, complaining at him as he pushed through and sweeping the fine snow into his eyes, but he scorned it; and he scorned the cold that would have fastened on him if it dared. A formidable storm to a tenderfoot, to this man it was virtually powerless. It could quicken his fancy and waken a sleeping ardor of emotion in his heart, but physically he rode it down as he had ridden many obstacles before. He followed up the stream until the abrupt cliffs gave way to easy rolling hills, then started across toward Pavlof River.

He climbed the low divide between, and for a brief space stood on its highest point, a target for the full onslaught of the elements, looking out over his familiar fastnesses. He could not see far; the mountains he knew were hidden by clouds, and the snow, though fine and in not great abundance, dimmed the atmosphere after a certain distance. In this treeless land vision is usually almost unlimited—on the bare hills a porcupine shows as a moving dot even at a range of several miles—but today he could not see the dunes at the river mouth. He did, however, see a minute, moving figure clear at the farther limits of his vista.

He peered intently, trying to dispel the mists that dimmed it. Perhaps it was a bear, ranging down to the lower waterways to be on hand for the first rush of running salmon; perhaps a caribou, separated from its band; these were one's usual neighbors on the Peninsula. Still the dark speck against the white hill puzzled him, kept him watching after bodily comfort had urged

him on. His curiosity got the better of him at last; and he turned from his course.

He crossed more than half the intervening distance before he was able to make a positive identification; and now he understood why he had been puzzled so long. This was neither a caribou nor a bear, nor any of the wild folk that Bert knew—yet it moved on all fours. It was Paul, and he was climbing along the hill on his hands and knees.

They had both become lost tonight; one in the labyrinth of event, the other in the maze of hills of Hopeless Land.

CHAPTER XVI

THE fact was plain that Paul was near the end of his rope; but as yet he had likely sustained no great damage. Saving him would be a simple problem. Simple, that is, provided one was not tempted to walk away and let him die.

For it would be even simpler not to save him. Paul had not gone to sleep yet, but was counting on doing so without delay. Even now he had pushed into an alder thicket, out of the wind and the storm. Though he watched close, Bert could see no rustle of branches to show him carrying on.

And now, in the storm and the wilderness, Bert was visited by one of the darkest, most enthralling thoughts that he had ever known. It was something his heart whispered to him, and the wind, whistling over him as he hurried on, caught up and echoed in his ears. The raw wild, hating him since he first rose to master it, had turned friend at last. It was doing his work. It was solving the problem of Paul in its own way. Unless he interfered, all trouble would right itself. His rival would not return to the village to stand between him and his happiness. Only a shadow might lift itself out of the bed of snow, and this, falling between him and his bright dreams, would soon pale and die. This is a world of the living, and as far as it is concerned, the dead cease to be. Human beings take the world as they find it, making the best of those who live upon it; and those that are gone are but shadows, impotent and fading. Paul would never get to the village by his own efforts. Except for Bert's interference his doom was already sealed.

Why should Bert interfere, when all self-interest was against it? No one need ever know that he had seen this crawling thing in the snow. Paul would fail to come home, and after a time Grace would forget her sorrow. . . . All Bert had wished for might come true. Until now, Paul's end could have affected his destiny but little, but now it meant the whole world. He did not forget that he was Bert Fieldmaster, the white man, and Paul the outcast. No gate except that to Grace's heart was closed to him now, and with Paul gone, even this might open! Stranger things had happened.

On the other hand, Paul's life meant his own death. It meant just that: the death of the soul and the mind which is more than the death of the body. In one flash of insight, vivid as lightning, Bert saw where he stood. As long as

Paul lived and the girl's love lived too, Paul must remain the white man, Bert the native. Last night's wondrous revelations must come to nothing.

He could not thrust himself between Grace and her happiness. He could not ruin the man she loved, thus ruining her. But why need Paul live? Had he not shown himself unworthy? Was he not now engaged in an infamous affair with a woman of his own race, a fact that pointed to ultimate heartbreak for Grace? Finally, Paul had been proved a half-caste, and to save Grace from the certain disaster of an interracial marriage was a providence.

A providence! The whirling engine of Bert's thoughts paused at the word. He could not go on. He was not Providence: he was only Bert, a man, merely a pawn of Providence, a subject of Law and Power he could not even understand! He could dream and wish for Paul's death to the end of the chapter; but it was not in his power to take one step to make that dream and wish come true. He could not be the arbiter of Grace's destiny. Nor could he forget the promise he had made.

"I will bless you if you succeed," she had told him, in reply to his prayer to help her. Every tone, every pause, every moving note of the woman's voice lived in his memory still: the image blotted out all else. Could he forget the mist through which her eyes had pleaded? "Bert, I believe in you . . . that strength of yours is born of your love for me, and it has saved you, but can it save my love? Can it save my Paul for me?"

Again the strange, mystic moment lived. In the storm and the whirling snow-dust he saw the fire's sullen glow, the moonlit peaks beyond, the girl's clasped hands, and the wonder of her tears. . . . "I'm losing him, Bert . . . I want him back in my arms . . . *I don't care how: I just want him back.* . . . Maybe you can save him for me, with that strength of yours, and save him from himself. . . ."

What else remained? He was deaf to all the rest. The words cut through all other threads of thought. Bert could be ten times the man he was, with the strength of ten, yet he would not be the one who must be returned to Grace's arms! He would have liked to look at this thing from his own viewpoint, but he kept seeing it from hers, and hers must rule his conduct in the end. *She wanted Paul back, and she did not care how.* He was her love, not Bert; and as long as he remained so Bert must carry on. This was his law, his life, his dream, and his destiny. It could not be otherwise.

The battle was fought and over in a few seconds, so swift is the flight of thought. By the time Bert reached the covert where the sleeping man lay he had escaped from all the abstract aspects of the affair and was wholly intent

on the work before him. One glance at the prone figure showed that he had come in plenty of time. Signs of life still abounded in the man's face, he was breathing fairly easily, and he had not yet begun to struggle with his garments, a most deadly sign in one who is found lying in the cold. One touch of his throat showed that his heart was beating faintly but steadily.

This one glance, and a glance backward at a long, curving trail in the snow told in considerable detail the story of Paul's mishap. It was plain that he had lost his sense of directions and had been running in a circle about the hills between Pavlof and Otter streams. He had fallen exhausted only a few minutes before. Sometime in that frantic run he had broken through the ice over some pool or spring and had gone in to his waist, most of his soaked garments being now stiff with ice.

Help had come in time, but no doubt it was sorely needed. Swift and hard work alone could save him, particularly if Paul were not to suffer permanent mutilation from frost bite. No gentle methods were availing now. Bert reached a long arm, clasped Paul by the collar of his jacket, and literally jerked him to his feet. Then he shook him until Paul's protests showed that he was wide awake.

"Let me alone," he begged. "You can have everything, you devil. . . . Just go away and let me alone."

Bert's only reply was to slap the dark, cold face until he saw a faint glow shine through it. Paul pleaded and winced in vain; and when anger began to take the place of his first protestations Bert knew surely that the thing was virtually done. He now rubbed the man's face and hands with snow, putting plenty of energy to the task, taking care only not to rub away the frozen skin. Ordering him to keep moving, he now ignored him just long enough to take off some of his own raiment.

The frozen clothes that covered the lower half of Paul's body were now removed, some of them with the aid of Bert's pocket-knife. At the latter's harsh order, Paul drew on the dry, warm clothes, and Bert did what he could with the discarded things. Fortunately, Paul had worn his waders, and though water had run into them they of course were not frozen, and worn outside the frozen trousers they would help to hold Bert's body-heat for the long tramp home.

Paul was now fully wakened, tingling from his exertion, and the love of life commanded him once more. He did not protest as Bert pointed the way over the hill.

Without a word to each other they filed up the divide toward the village.

The long march over the hill and up into the gorge of Pavlof River proved a most grim and trying ordeal. Paul's first burst of energy carried him across the divide and over the first few ridges beyond then he began to lag behind. This was not altogether lack of stamina. He had been undergoing intense physical strain for hours, and the founts of his vitality were running dry. He was drawn, pale, and faltering, close to the brink of absolute exhaustion. Once more it became necessary to force him on.

Bert did this with words alone at first—ruthless, overbearing, merciless words. He hustled him when Paul begged to rest, he cursed him and taunted him, he drove him to anger with deliberate insult. The time came soon that words alone would not suffice. Once after a short rest Paul refused to get up, and was summarily snatched to his feet. Occasionally he was sent reeling forward by a blow from behind. When it was evident that he had all but reached his limit, Bert took him by the arm and led him.

As the village drew nigh the white man carried more and more of the native's weight. Paul lurched along, hardly able to lift his aching feet off the ground. The time came at last that he could not even do this, and except for his foe's strong grasp would have sunk down helpless in the trail. But now the ordeal was all but over. Less than a half-mile tramp remained.

Bert lifted the spent figure and put it face downward across his shoulder, clasping one thigh according to the army manner of carrying a wounded man. Except for his own fatigue he would have scarcely felt the burden. The denizens of these wilds were used to seeing him tramp through their still retreats with his back laden with no less weight, and such was his pride. In spite of all he had endured the preceding night and morning, he had plenty of strength left to carry on and through. Except for unseen disaster he would make it in.

He was bringing Paul home—to his love and to his happiness. He was returning him to Grace's arms. He had kept his promise, fatal though it was to his hopes. And as far as he dared to dream, this was the trail's end.

It had led him far, but this was the end. The few things remaining to do—a few words to say to Paul—would only be the aftermath of what was past. A greater burden than this on his shoulder—yet symbolized by this—bowed his head. The poignancy of his thoughts dulled every sense, and he walked blindly up the trail.

He walked blindly, and perhaps that is why a small disaster overtook him. Forgetting his vigilance, he fell into a trivial ambush of the mountain gods. Infinitely ironical it was that he should now fall where an awkward tenderfoot could pass in safety—that after all he had been through tonight he should be laid low by a ground-squirrel's diggings. Bert's toe caught in a miniature grotto, and he fell heavily on the rock-strewn trail.

He did not get up. He was not in the least hurt, but simply stunned by the shock; yet it was as if the bowl of his life were cracked and the vital forces that carried him on had run out. The spirit to get up and push on languished. And now it appeared that this trivial fall, this insignificant accident, might mean the end of him. He was dulled a little by the impact, and utterly indifferent to all consequences; lacking the impulse to decide upon a course, he pillowed his head on his arms, relaxed, and almost immediately went to sleep.

He was tired and listless, so he slept. He kept awake just long enough to see Paul, hurt not at all by the fall but on the contrary stimulated by the shock, get up and reel on down the trail. Seeing him lie so still, the hateful gods who glower over Hopeless Land could hardly believe their eyes. Long and long they had tried to ambush him—in vain they had hurled against him their most baneful shafts—and now he was felled by a pebble's blow. Here he lay, yielding without a fight. All that remained was to set upon him with their spears of cold.

There was no help for him in the man he had brought home. The fall had broken a jet of latent energy in Paul, and he was making the most of it to push on the remaining two hundred yards into camp. No one would blame him when, collapsing in his own *barabara*, he would forget to send help to Bert. No one need know about the still form on the trail until Paul wakened after a long sleep, and the help that was dispatched then would hardly arrive in time to matter one way or another. He was not a moral fool, like Bert! Even now, close to collapse, he knew what was at stake, and he would play for it like a man. Best of all, he had the beginnings of hate to uphold him.

He went down into the village. Watching the trail, Grace saw him come, and she ran out into the storm to meet him. She seemed not to see his drawn face, his bent shoulders.

"Oh, where's Bert?" she cried. "The people said he was with you!"

CHAPTER XVII

EXHAUSTED though he was Paul responded to his sweetheart's question with a startling ferocity. His pale cheeks flushed darkly; certain lines drew about his lips and eyes so as almost to conceal his identity. This was just the medicine needed to keep him on his feet a few seconds more. It was evidently a better tonic than the slaps and manhandling with which his foe had wakened him from sleep. "*Bert!*" he echoed. "You ask about Bert, when you see *me* here hardly able to stand——"

"Oh, forgive me!" Grace reached out her hands. "I didn't mean to say that—I only meant to ask about you. I want to take care of you——"

"You're in love with him—don't I know? You'd throw me over in a minute for him. Go ahead for all I care——"

He shook off her hands that groped to help him and, reeling, made his way to his *barabara*. Deaf to his words and alarmed almost to distraction by his obvious infirmity, she followed him through the door and in spite of him began to help him into his bed. For a certain time she worked about him lost to all other interests.

This was what she wanted to do—to give him every thought and concern—but presently he saw her start and her plying hands grow still.

She had not wished to ask about Bert, and now she did not want to think about him, yet he was forced to her attention. Her eye fastened on certain of Paul's garments that had been cast off and thrown on the floor. She was haunted by an image she could not dispel.

"Paul, those are Bert's things!" she exclaimed. "What has happened to him? You *must* tell me, Paul——"

"Bert!" the man echoed in bitter scorn. "Why should I know about your Bert?"

"You were with him. You must have been—and something has happened to him. Oh, he's nothing to me, but I can't let him die, out there in the storm! I know he's been hurt, or he would have come in with you——"

"I hope he's dead—I shouldn't wonder but that he is. Why don't you quit pretending you care about me, and go and bring him in——"

She gripped his hands tight. “Where is he, Paul? You’re out of your mind yourself, or you wouldn’t talk that way. I am going to get him——”

“Find him, if you can. I don’t know where he is—I walked ahead and wasn’t watching. I was too near gone myself to keep track of him——”

Grace did not hear all the remark. She drew the bed-robes over her lover—lest he should fall asleep and suffer from the cold—then sped out the door and to the tent occupied by Rufus Carter. She burst in upon him without warning, finding him huddled before his stove and deep in a book.

“Rufus, one of our men is hurt and needs help,” she told him. “It’s Bert—he was with Paul, and he didn’t come in. Oh, won’t you come and help me find him——”

Carter sprang up and stood beside her. “I think you’re mistaken, Grace. I saw him not ten minutes ago——”

“Oh, you did——” Her face still showed uncertainty, yet tremendous relief.

“Yes. I went to speak to one of the men about fuel, and I saw him coming over that rise about a half mile up the creek——”

“Are you sure it wasn’t Paul?”

“No. It was Bert. I could see his form plain. He had a big load on his back——”

“Then he’s between here and there!” Her fears overswept her again, like a returning tide. “Come—maybe there isn’t a moment to lose. Paul said he might be dead——”

Driven by her will, Rufus leaped for his heavy clothes, but she did not wait for him. Into this storm that kept all the natives indoors she sped, into the teeth of the wind a defiant and unconquerable figure. And almost at once she saw the snow-strewn form of Bert, lying in the trail.

Even in this first glance something in his posture made her think of death. Perhaps this was merely the effect of the fine snow sifting over him, obliterating him, concealing him like the rest of the landscape, conquering him at last. In her startled, darkened fancy it was a shroud. Death was so easy in Hopeless Land: life so hard. Then for him to lie here on the rocky trail, seeking not even the comfort of the thicket, had for her a dreadful significance. She flew to him, fearful as she had never been in her life, to touch his face.

But he had not yet gone away. One touch assured her of his undiminished life. His soul might be dead—he had a look she had never seen on a human face before—but his strong body had taken no harm, and he did not even appear to be deeply unconscious. The cold had not taken hold of him yet. The powerful river of his vitality had forced it away. He had received no visible wound from his fall, but dulled and stunned had simply gone to sleep. His was but a deep, healthful slumber now, easy to cast off; but, except for her, it would have been something more before the morning.

Without thinking what she did, as if it were the wholly natural thing, she sat down beside him and drew his head against her breast. They were all alone, here on the mountainside. . . . Even Carter had not come yet; he was still struggling with his muffler and his greatcoat, his cold-weather cap and his overshoes. . . . There was no one to see them, to change them and to pull them this way and that. They could just be themselves, the two of them together seeking a strange, happy union against the onslaught of the storm.

Even in his slumber he felt the baptism of her tears. Through the mists of his dream he knew the loveliness of her kiss with which she sought to waken him.

For his part, her kiss was only a dream, yet making this hour of slumber more memorable than any hour of wakefulness. He wakened with no thought but that he had dreamed it all; but though he believed it only the ghost of a kiss, it was still more dear, more moving, more beautiful than any reality he had ever known.

It would never fade from his dream-life. The dear little ghost would never cease to haunt his lips. It atoned for almost everything. On her part, she would find excuses for it, blaming it on the witchery of the hour, her own hysteria and fear. Yet she did not regret the act. It had most poignant memories for her, too.

“You must get up, Bert,” she told him, her lips close to his ear. “You must get up and come home.”

Bert opened his eyes, smiling faintly. “Do you still need me?” he asked.

“Oh, I do—all of us need you! We can’t get along without you. You mustn’t lie here and give up. You must come in out of the storm.”

His eyes glowed, and he was caught up by the girl’s fervor. “My whole life is a storm,” he told her soberly. “. . . But I’ll get up—I’ll play the game to the last card. I was a fool for going to sleep.”

She attempted to help him to his feet, but his lithe muscles flexed and in an instant he was towering above her, outwardly strong and unconquerable as ever. . . . But they were cheated of further communion with each other. Fully protected at last against the cold, Rufus Carter ran up and joined them.

Carter it was who made a discovery which to the girl seemed of moving significance—the story of the tracks in the snow. She knew now the nature of the burden that Bert had carried on his back. No wonder the girl's eyes dimmed with grateful tears. He had been true to his word, given beside a distant camp-fire.

The three filed back to the village. Each went to his own shelter. Chilled through and painfully tired, Bert retired to his cot and slept until darkness pressed against his window-pane. Then he got up, because he had many things to do.

He dressed in dry clothes, cooked and ate a meal, and then made his way to Grace's tent. He must be sure about Grace before he went on. He must not retain one vestige of doubt to torment him in years to come. Even if he embarrassed her and made himself ridiculous he must know exactly where Grace stood. This was better than a lifetime of uncertainty and regret. He must not throw the whole world away in vain. He called through the lowered door of the tent, and she answered that he might come in.

His drawn, haggard countenance riveted her interest at once. "Oh, you're not well——"

"Yes, I am, in my body," was the grave reply. "Maybe there's something preying on my mind. Miss Crowell, if a man has something to give—something that means more than life to him—he wants to be sure that the person he's going to give it to really wants it. He doesn't want to throw it away. So many things, inestimably precious to the giver, are thrown away by those who receive them."

"That's true, Bert. What is it that you want to ask me?"

"I want to ask you first if Paul is still everything to you. It may seem a strange question, coming from me—but I have a right to know. Just what that right is I can't tell you now—except that it concerns my continued service to him."

"I couldn't refuse to answer any question of yours, Bert," she told him earnestly. "I would be an ungrateful girl if I did. What you have done for me—for us—is a debt we can't ever repay. I know what you did today. You brought Paul back—just as you said you would."

“I helped him today, and I’ll continue to help him—in ways you can’t dream of—provided I know that your relations with him are still what they were that night on the mountain. I have a reason for asking. If they are the same, I will be the same—your guide, your servant, content to help him because that way I’m helping you. Will you forgive the question, and answer it?”

Only for an instant did she seem to hesitate. “Yes, Bert—everything is just the same—with me,” she told him slowly. Her eyes were suspiciously bright, and her trembling lips shook the very core of the man, as would some mighty force. “Just the same,” she repeated. “He is still my whole life.”

“And you want him back—just as you told me before?” Breed spoke softly, yet with utmost intensity. “You couldn’t bear to lose him?”

“No, I couldn’t bear it. I just couldn’t—that is the simple truth.”

“Oh, I know it is! No matter what his fortunes are, you’ll be loyal to him just the same. You’ll go with him wherever he goes, down or up. Tell me, Grace Crowell! There’s nothing in the world that would make you give him up?”

“Many things, Bert. I would give him up if he proved unworthy. It might kill me, but I would do it. I would not follow an ignoble man.

“I wouldn’t follow him if I lost his love,” she went on. “I would be too proud to do that, even if he would let me follow him. Maybe my own love would die in that case—I didn’t think so, once, but I am persuaded of that now. I think that is the way of women’s hearts. We can’t love, unless we get love in return. And maybe it goes hand in hand with devotion, too; and that is why my love couldn’t live if Paul proved unworthy of it. But he won’t prove unworthy—I know he won’t! I have always idealized him, but I know he’ll live up to it in the end.”

“He has changed since he has been up here.” Bert spoke frankly, because he knew that this was the time for frankness.

“Oh, I know it! He doesn’t seem the same man. He has always had a bad temper—I used to see signs of it once in a long time—but up here he wears it on the surface. I know how he has treated you—the last way in the world Mrs. Fieldmaster’s son should treat any one. I have been ashamed. And I know too that the men must have wondered at the way he has treated me. It isn’t like him to be so indifferent, so neglectful—almost rude at times. This is all part of the effect that this awful country has had on him. Do you wonder that I’m anxious to take him home?”

“You believe he will be himself again when you get him back to civilization?”

“I’m sure of it—at least I want to be sure of it. He was always so devoted, so loving and ardent—it was only at long intervals that I used to wonder at him. Now I wonder at him all the time. I know this is nothing new to you, and it is a world of relief to talk to you about it. . . . You always seem to know just what I want.

“Bert, when he gets back among men of his own kind—seeing their way of life, and living as they do—and where his invalid mother’s and my own influence can work on him—he’ll be the same Paul I have always loved. This environment has brought out a side of him I hardly guessed that he possessed—at least he possesses it in greater degree than I believed possible—and he’ll escape from it when he gets among his own people.”

Knowing what he knew, Bert’s lips curled downward in a grim smile. Instantly he was serious again. “Then you brought me home today just so I could continue to help Paul?” he asked gently. “You went out into the storm—alone—and brought me in—and I must know why you did it. I must know just how I stand. You went yourself, instead of sending some of the men. Was the interest that you showed awakened merely through Paul—because you thought that some way or other I could save him and bring him back to you?”

Her hand went to her lips, as if to steady them. “That must have been the biggest reason,” she told him after a pause. “Somehow, I feel that my whole happiness depends on you. I rely on you more than I am able to explain—on your strength—and your devotion to me. Why, I don’t know, but I feel that you alone can save Paul, just as you said. I feel that except for you I’d lose him.”

“And that’s why you brought me in?”

“It must have been, Bert.”

His eyes were dark as jet in the strange pallor of his face. “Then that’s all I want to know, Miss Crowell,” he told her simply. “It decides everything for me. I’ll play the game through to the end.”

He turned and walked out, emerging from the warmth and light into the cold, hopeless darkness of this Alaskan night. The snow had ceased, and a single star glittered at the spire of Pavlof Mountain, but the wind prevailed. It rushed up the gorge and over the mountain, on and on, conveying an image of infinity that was like death. Bert feared it as never before.

He headed at once toward a *barabara* at the opposite side of the village. His mission was to save Paul from himself.

CHAPTER XVIII

Bert Fieldmaster knocked on the rude door, and entered and sat down at the edge of Paul's bed. The man he had brought in was still resting from last night's grueling experience.

Bert sat contemplating the turf-house interior, the ugliness and the squalor that marked it as a native habitation. Paul was the first to speak. "What do you want?" he demanded sullenly.

The other turned somber eyes, studying Paul's face. It was a wonder that he had not already guessed his race. The instant the hint was given, from Veda's lips, he had known the truth; and only a strong bias otherwise had kept it from him so long. Paul had the mark of the native. He was not only dark: he had the characteristic native build, the undeft hands, the eyes, the lips, even the pronounced cheek-bones. As if he were conscious of these features, he now seemed to fear Bert's scrutiny. He could only take refuge in a false boldness, an insolence which he did not feel, and which his wavering glance belied.

"I want many things," Bert told him at last. "Nothing that is impossible. Paul, I came to offer you certain terms, and you can accept them or pass them by. Those terms won't be changed or modified in the least degree. The situation is not what it was. I am not your guide now, and can speak with authority. To be your guide now would be incongruous, to say the least."

Paul shivered with the beginnings of some fierce emotion. "You've been to see old Maria?" he asked uneasily.

"Yes—your mother. I got the whole truth, most of which you must already know. You are the native. I am the white man. Fate played us a queer trick."

"And I suppose you've come to tell me that you are going back, and take my place in my home—as Mrs. Fieldmaster's son?"

"That depends." Bert smiled bitterly at the hopeful gleam in the other's face. "I could go back, if I decide I want to. You know that very well. My mother has tried almost thirty years to find me, persistently and patiently after most women would have given me up. It is the dearest dream of her life to have me back. Don't think I can't take your place. Some of the things

you have confided to your fellow-tribesmen have been carried to me, and I know that one of the reasons she has been so untiring in her effort to find me was her disappointment in you. I could be a son to her in a sense that you never have been. I am bound to her by the strongest tie there is. In spite of this environment where I was raised, I am a white man through and through—I have always been. We can't get away from what we basically are. It won't take me long to learn to fit in as if I had never been away—self-education, standards inherited from her and from my father, and a few little ideals I have tried to live up to, will all help in this. Instead of the son, you were the interloper all the way through. You relied on a tie of blood that did not exist, and you have admitted yourself you have estranged the love your foster-mother felt the first few years she took care of you. I have only to go back to become the virtual head of the Fieldmaster family, the son and heir. You know that is true."

"Why do you tell me all this, damn your garrulous lips!" Paul cried. "Why don't you go back and do it?"

"Perhaps I will. That depends."

"Depends on what?"

"On your decline or acceptance of certain terms. A good deal depends on your own ability and the way you feel, whether at heart you are an Aleut—or a white man."

"That's ridiculous, Bert." Paul spoke with some candor. "Of course I'm a white man. It would be foolish for me to deny that my mother—that I am half-Aleut in blood. The older natives were all careful to explain the situation to me, and anyway, the truth is now self-evident. Just the same, my share of white blood and particularly my twenty-eight years of living as a white man more than counterbalance any strain of native. If ever any great test was put to me, I'd prove the white man instead of the Aleut. Environment is a stronger force than heredity, any time."

"I don't think that is so. It hasn't been so in my case."

"You are the exception. Besides, you are all white in a native environment. I was half-white in a white environment."

"I would like to believe you, Paul—for certain reasons I won't explain at present—but just the same, I can't get rid of a few doubts. A human being is a mighty delicate mechanism. Not much is required to upset it. There is a saying that one drop, no matter how minute, of color in a solution will tinge the whole. I do know that color is an active force in a white man's veins. It

is strange that a weaker race could impress its characteristics on a stronger, but no one who has seen some of the quarter-breeds in Western Alaska can doubt it. Up here a quarter-breed is usually a native; he looks like a native, he thinks like a native, and he usually lives like a native. When the test comes, instead of showing himself a white man, his one-fourth-native blood sweeps into dominance. Nature has a way of bringing inferior streaks to the surface. Perhaps this is a natural law by which she keeps her species segregated."

"There is no danger of reversion in me. I'd welcome a test to prove it to you—if I wanted to take the trouble. I'm a white man, Bert, and I can't ever be anything else."

"In that case, I don't see how you can be attracted to Veda."

Paul bounded up as if to fight, but at once relaxed in his robes. "You've certainly been busy in somebody else's business," he complained.

"Well, perhaps—but you must admit pretty near everything you do is my business from now on. I want an answer to that question before I go on."

Though it was gall and wormwood, Paul dared not refuse to answer. As yet he did not know Bert's game, but surely it held out the only possible hope for him. "Veda is nothing to me," he said. "I've been fooling around a little with her for the amusement I got out of it—as a white man will. There is nothing to that."

"I wish I could be sure. It is a dangerous symptom, at best. . . . Paul, it may be that I'll give you a chance to prove what you say is true. My reasons are rather private, and naturally you are not interested in them. It may be that your old associations can win for you after all, provided you get away from this, your natural environment."

A queer brooding look, mystifying to the white man, stole into Paul's dark face. "I can't get away for a couple of weeks more," he returned hurriedly. "I've got quite a few things to straighten up——"

Bert looked at him in wonder, and he was startled to see his trembling hands. "We can't wait a couple of weeks, Paul," he told him softly. "If you go at all, it must be in the next few days—as soon as we can get the outfit together. It is proving too much for you here. You must get back to civilization. That's your one hope.

"Paul, I'm going to give you a chance to stay white. I'm going to get you out of here and send you back—with Grace—to your old home. For the time being I will stay in the background."

"I can't go now," Paul answered feebly.

"You must go now." Bert's tone now changed to one of prophecy and judgment. The other listened spellbound, hating the words for all the hope they held for him, and yet powerless to answer them. "Paul, I'm going to let you go on being the white man, until you prove yourself unworthy of the trust. I will not push my claim at present—a claim I have only to put forward to have granted. You can hold your place in your own circle, marry Grace, and be my mother's son. All this depends upon you—upon your own conduct.

"One of my terms is that you leave this village at once, and go home. Now it will take two or three days to get the outfit together, and I can't stand guard over you all the time, so you must agree not to see Veda again. If it was only an amusement for you it was a base one; it was a dangerous one, too.

"You must tell Grace that you are part Indian. She will then decide how to go on. If she marries you, you will still be on trial. You will not be rid of me. Remember, Paul, that I am your evil genius—I can destroy you at a word. I am Mrs. Fieldmaster's son—you are the outcast, the bastard breed. Remember, I will always be behind the scenes. I will watch you as you never dreamed you could be watched. I will know everything you do.

"If you can remain worthy of it, you can hold your old position in safety. If you prove unworthy, down you go without mercy from me!"

"How do I know what your ideas are?" Paul demanded. "What I can do and what I can't? Oh, I know you! You are just taunting me, for the pleasure of seeing me squirm——"

"You never made a worse mistake. Paul, the test for you is—Grace. As long as your wife loves you and clings to you that will be a good argument to me that you are playing the game. When she turns against you, I turn against you too. I won't wait for any gross lapse in your treatment of her. At the first cruelty, the first neglect, you will be instantly tumbled out of your high place. That means the end of Paul Fieldmaster!"

Paul sat up, struggling with anger. "What gives you the right to say this to me?" he demanded. "She is nothing to you——"

"I am simply giving you a fair warning, Paul. You ought to be grateful. I'm not doing it on your account—only on hers, to give her the best chance for happiness I know.

“Remember, you are not worthy to tie her shoe-string, yet she thinks you are, and perhaps you can make her continue to think so. That is your one hope. Take it or leave it!”

“I have to take it! You’ve got me where you want me, and you love to gloat over me.” In the shadowed *barabara*, Bert failed to see a dull glimmer in the Aleut eyes, something that was like cunning about the out-turned lips. “I agree to everything you said.”

“You will help me get ready to leave here as quick as possible.”

“Yes. The sooner it is, the better I’ll like it.”

“You will not see Veda again?”

“Not even to explain——”

“Not even to explain—because there can’t be any explanations.”

“No, I won’t see her again.”

“This is the contract. Remember all the rest of it. And bless Grace, and never stop blessing her, for the chance I have given you.”

Without another word Bert turned and walked out the door. He had played his last card. He had carried the thing through. The players were gone, and only his bitter thoughts were left, these and the wind that blew forever over the desert. The wind blew, and the water ran, and the mountains lifted their white heads, signaling one to another, but all else was silent and forsaken. He knew solitude in a sense he had never known. He knew bitterness “deep as a well—wide as a church door.”

The trio would be leaving in a few more days. He would go with them to the shore, and then he would watch them dimming into the fog out of which they had come. The sea’s mist would conceal the loveliness that had upheld him, the beauty he had followed like a star; and he would have nothing left but the broken bubble of his dream.

He would wave them good-by with yearning, empty hands.

This was his life’s adventure, never to be forgotten; but the three would forget him soon enough. The fog would hide him, and the mist of years would dim him in their memories. Perhaps Grace would sometime think of him with gratitude when some small incident recalled her Alaskan experience. Perhaps full of happiness, she would forget his very name. He had learned a bitter truth: that the giver must not hope for gratitude, but must find his payment only in the joy of giving.

His ship had come in, and soon it would sail on. The cargo he had watched for all his life had been heaped into his hands, but he had thrown it down. And was it all for nothing? Had he bartered away his birthright for a vain dream? Was it all wasted, all thrown away? These were the dregs of the bitter cup!

The blast met him with a taunting yell. "*Fool! fool!*" it cried, as it shrilled down the gorges, and the voices of the flowing water echoed the cry —"Fool! fool!"—running to tell the sea. . . . Yet in spite of all this, in spite of his doubts and fears, he was saved regret. He knew that he had done the only thing he could do, according to his law. If the opportunity returned he would do the same again.

Meanwhile a strange monodrama, fraught with a startling depth of passion, was taking place in Paul's *barabara*. The man lay quietly enough at first, only his dark thoughts moving in ever swifter cycles. Presently he sprang up and began to rage up and down the small, darkened room. To a friend, he would have been almost unrecognizable, so drawn he was, so white-hot, so branded by the violence of his emotion.

Fury, like strong drink, must never be yielded to in solitude. It is devastating enough even when it can be vented upon an enemy, but it ruins, rends, and destroys those who suffer it alone. Paul was shaken with it, poisoned with its venom, brutalized in a way that would have sickened Grace to see. Bert had wakened his rage on many previous occasions, but never to such a degree as now.

The mood that followed did not redeem him. Abruptly he paused in the center of the room. His body stiffened, his jerking hands relaxed and grew still, the flow of his incoherent words was checked. He half turned his head in an instinctive furtiveness—as if he feared an eavesdropper to his thought. He was not simply tired from the tempest of his anger. His mood now was so intense that anger's half-unconscious expressions were forbidden. He stood entranced, his eyes out of focus, his hands limp at his sides.

He was in command of himself again! He had been a fool—this silly raving got him nowhere. . . . Only a fool stormed in anger when he might find a more effective self-expression. His need now was for cold planning, stealth, stratagems, cunning.

Bert had spoken true in many things. Bert *was* Paul's evil genius. What Paul had sensed so vaguely at first had come true. Bert was his other self,

his William Wilson who might at any time rise up and overthrow him. He could not deny that he was in the white man's power. At a whim this stranger could hurl him into the background as the nameless son of a squaw mother. He might even take from him Grace's unvalued love.

He must keep his mind on these aspects of the affair. . . . These gave him a certain strength of will and cunning: they were like a drug that a man might take to nerve him to some bold deed. These cold-blooded considerations made a man of him—resolute, daring, and clear-headed. They gave him a purpose to work for, solid ground to stand on. When he thought of them his brain reached out to practical schemes whereby he might combat them. . . . Yet when he tried to fasten on them, other thoughts kept creeping in, like venomous snakes! These were all trivial things, yet they burned up his heart and took the steel out of his hands.

He kept remembering how Bert had rescued Grace from between the ships' hulls, when he himself could not go through. This was easy to bear, easy to force from his mind, compared to Bert's more recent exploit—that of the morning just gone. Bert had saved *him*—carried *him* strongly through the snow and the storm that had beaten him down, doing what he himself could not do, all the way through. This man had gone where he could not follow, he had endured where he himself had failed. Yet these too were of trifling moment compared to the hateful fact that Bert had dreamed a dream that Paul could never see!

Oh, he hated him for that dream! He could forgive everything else. Bert had been willing to withdraw in favor of his enemy. He would stand back, and let Paul go on. He not only dreamed it, but he had strength to live it. He was the fool—the strong, wise fool that Paul could never be.

Paul raised his eyes and cursed the God Who made him brown. And with that curse a hate that had been conceived long since ripened into fullness. In general it was the hate of a weaker thing for a stronger, of an inferior race for a superior; but in particular it was an unbridled hate for the white man who kept him from the sun.

CHAPTER XIX

THE next two days were busy with preparations for the journey home. Equipment had to be over-hauled, outfits collected, and the larder replenished by fresh and jerked venison. The latter task fell mostly upon Bert, with the result that he spent the greater part of both days on the hills and barrens, hunting for caribou.

He was glad enough for an excuse to go abroad. Out here in the open, absorbed in an exciting and at times difficult quest, he could find some refuge from himself and his bitter thoughts. There was none at all in the village that overflowed with Grace's presence. This was only one reason. There was another the full ramifications of which he did not understand. The attitude of the villagers was such that he thought it wisest to keep out of their sight.

They were making this settlement in which he was raised too hot for him. For his part he might have welcomed some small disturbance—it might divert him from less welcome themes—but for one paramount reason he must go to all pains to avoid it. He did not forget Grace—he had already learned the impossibility of forgetting Grace. This girl who had come into his life from afar had been and was still the cardinal factor in his fate, in small as well as in all-important things. For her sake he must keep the peace. An outbreak among the natives might have serious consequences for her. At present she was safe from them, as far as he could tell; but he knew rather too much of the way of Indians under acute excitement. He would prefer that they be not aroused. So long as Paul kept his present semblance of decency in regard to her she was safer with Bert out of camp than in it.

He had never seen the people in such a hostile mood. They had no affection for him; they would have destroyed him with great pleasure had an occasion offered; but they had never been openly antagonistic: they had been servile rather than threatening in his presence. Now they followed him with hateful eyes, showing him sullen faces and closed lips when he came upon a group of them. Once or twice, when numbers made them bold, they ventured one remark or another that at some other time and place he would have taken satisfaction in thrusting down their throats.

It was plain enough that some sinister influence was working on them. Their minds were being poisoned, and their bold attitude suggested an

unaccountable self-reliance not common in the Aleut when he faces a superior foe. . . . Of course they were many and he was only one, but this fact alone could not explain their sudden temerity. The same odds had prevailed a long time. Except under stress of certain mass-emotion, the fish-eating native has no tribal consciousness, and a group of twenty ordinarily remain twenty individuals with no consciousness of strength above that which each man has in himself. To all appearances they had now found a leader in whom they relied and who was rallying them against their foe. . . .

However it was, Bert promised himself they would have small satisfaction. He would stay out of camp as much as possible, avoid trouble, swallow all they chose to give him, and in a few days move on with the outfit toward the settlement.

Though he did not know it, Grace was experiencing something of the same thing. The natives were not hostile nor threatening, but they were uncommunicative, and she sensed an attitude of distrust and prejudice she could not begin to explain. . . . It seemed to radiate from a certain Indian girl, Joe's sister, whom she had talked to once or twice and had noticed as a likely specimen of young native womanhood. . . . She wondered at it, but she was acutely distressed at the frank hatred and defiance that she heard everywhere expressed for Bert. On the second night after the storm the malice began to find a more concrete expression.

On this second night the wind died. With a startling suddenness it fluttered down out of the sky like a lowered flag. For no apparent cause—unless it had just blown itself out and all the wind that lived in the sky and beyond the sea-crags was used up—it was no more to be heard in the gorge, blowing at the deep cleft as a giant might blow at a split reed, rushing up the hills, or shrilling in futile bombast over the flats. The pause was like a mysterious break in a long parade. Doubtless it would start again soon, but in the meantime Hopeless Land forgot itself and was altogether foreign.

A most curious thing it was to see the canvas wall of a tent hang loose without a ripple. To see smoke drifting up from a chimney—straight up until it was lost in the higher reaches of the sky—was all but incredible. Voices, used to speaking above the wind, sounded loud now that it was dead. Little sounds never heard before came out of nowhere. The whole land was articulate with voices that had been overwhelmed into silence before—little, hidden, secret speech that a man heard more in his soul than in his ears. Grace was not sure that she liked the calm. She hated the wind, but Hopeless Land was even more mysterious now that it had passed. The whole world seemed to hover. . . .

This was the queerest feeling of all—that the very elements had stopped their mighty works and were waiting for something to happen. The suspense was in the air, and the silence of the night, and in the ground under her feet. The river still ran, but she seemed to detect minute pauses between one musical gurgle and another, as if it were waiting too.

She was uneasy, and she wished Paul would come to her tent. Of course Paul would not come—he had explained that he would be occupied with a final investigation in view of the chief purpose of the expedition. He was going to collect data for his report to Mrs. Fieldmaster, so that she might know how complete and exhaustive their efforts had been and would not blame them for the failure of the enterprise. She must be convinced, Paul had explained wisely, that the man they sought had either died in infancy or else had gone on to some other country to which he could not be traced. . . . Just the same, Grace wished that her fiancé would for this one night forget his commendable diligence, and stay near to keep her company. She was acutely lonesome, rather depressed, and for some reason beyond her, more than a little frightened. She was awed by a silence too vast and perfect to endure. She had a ridiculous impulse to stand on tiptoe and hold her ears. . . .

Having no Paul to lean on, her thoughts flew to Bert—a direction they had often taken in these past days. Bert was never too busy to come when she wanted him, if he were in reach. He had gone down the valley to bring in a caribou he had killed, and had told her not to expect him until an hour after nightfall.

As the time he had named was now at hand, the possibility presented itself that he had already come in and, contrary to his usual custom, had failed to report to her. No harm in going to his *barabara* to see. She thought of several small chores he could do for her, an errand or two to run and a duffel-bag to pack; and while these things could conveniently wait till morning, she felt inclined to have them attended to now. She slipped on her heavy jacket and went out in the clear, still cold.

The dark was not heavy tonight, probably because of the earliness of the hour. She could make her way easily between the huts. Half-way across the village she reached a point from which she could distinguish the dim arch of Bert's turf-house, and the absence of any light in its single window indicated that its owner was absent too.

A succession of small events kept her from immediately turning back. She could dimly see a man's figure emerge from around one of the nearby

barabaras and make its way to Bert's door. She thought at first that this might be her guide, returned from the hunt, but a peculiar slowness and stealth in his movements disillusioned her in an instant. Besides, this was a shorter man than Bert, more heavily built. She saw him pause outside the door, stoop as if to listen, and then go in.

This was decidedly against rules. Bert had made it plain, long since, that the villagers were not to make themselves free of his cabin either in his absence or in his occupancy. He had impressed that fact upon them with singular emphasis. Either they had lost their fear of him, or else this visitor was on business of prime importance.

Grace waited in the darkness, watching. Such was a safer course than to try to return at once to her tent. For a second or two the window was lighted wanly, as if a match had been struck within, and a few moments later the man emerged. He withdrew as stealthily as he had come, and presently vanished in the darkness.

Grace walked back to her tent and though her loneliness was more acute than ever, she found herself thinking more about Bert than of Paul. Almost as urgently as she had once wished him absent—one memorable night on a mountain-top—she now wanted him to come. . . . And he did come, as was to have been expected. He had a way of coming in answer to her longing—his dark eyes alight, his long body lithe and capable and strong. From her tent door she saw him making his way up the valley, walking lightly and easily in spite of the burden on his pack-board. He made his way straight to her tent, laid down the caribou-meat, and presently towered above her.

"Did you tell any one to go in your house tonight?" she asked promptly. "Did any of the men have business there?"

"No. These fellows all understand they are to keep out."

"Well, one of them didn't keep out. I happened to see a man go into your house not ten minutes ago. I don't know who he was, except he was built like most of the village men. He scratched a match, then went out."

Bert looked deeply puzzled. "Of course it might have been a thief, but that's pretty bold. . . . Thank you very much, Miss Crowell, for telling me. I think I'd better investigate."

He turned to go, and he was a little surprised to find her beside him. "I'm not going to stay here," she told him frankly. "Paul is gone, and I'm a little bit jumpy."

He regarded her gravely. “I don’t know as I ought to let you. If the fellow is still around, we might have some trouble.”

“He isn’t. I saw him go. I want to go with you to find out what he was doing, and then I want you to come back with me to my tent. You can bring your sleeping-bag and sleep outside the door of my tent. It’s not very conventional, but I’m a long way from conventions, and Bert—I’m nervous. Paul is so busy he can’t look after me, so I guess you have to.”

They went together into Bert’s turf-house, and because their scrutiny was negative, they did not at once find positive evidence of the intruder’s mission. They expected to find missing some of the owner’s few belongings, yet everything seemed to be in place, nor was there disorder of any kind. Grace could not imagine a more neatly-kept interior. His duffel-bag stood in one corner, and a glance at its lowered cover and at the objects on top indicated it had not been rifled. The few pieces of rustic home-made furniture were free from dust, the walls and floor were clean, and his other possessions lay on shelves or hung on hooks instead of being strewn in an unfathomable litter on the floor. Certainly as an Aleut Bert was a dismal failure.

“I don’t know what to make of my visitor,” he observed. “I wonder if it wasn’t some one looking for me—and he just walked in and out when he found me gone.”

“I suppose so—yet he didn’t act the part. I couldn’t see him plain, but it looked to me as if he sneaked in—afraid of being seen. Of course he might have wanted to see you privately, and not let any one know he was here.”

“It’s a funny business, anyway. If you wait just a minute, I’ll roll up my sleeping-bag and we’ll go back to your tent. I’ll only be too glad to sleep close by, if you would feel any safer.”

Only a few minutes were required for his preparations; and so the chiefs of Pavlof village must be given credit for working swiftly. Just as they blew out the lamp and turned to go a dusky, excited delegation met them at the door.

“I couldn’t keep them from coming, Bert,” a familiar voice rose from the rear of the group. “Of course it’s nonsense——”

At this instant, in the middle of a sentence, Paul’s eyes fell on his betrothed. A syllable of an oath cracked from his lips, and he pushed forward and confronted her.

“Grace! What are you doing here?”

“I came to ask a favor of Bert, and I don’t want to be questioned about it *here*!” Grace replied. Her tone might have warned him at any other time. Not loud, but perfectly clear, it rang like a steel bell with indignation.

But Paul was losing his grip, and restraint was not in him. Evidently he was keenly conscious of the tribesmen at his back, a victim of that strange toxin which emanates from a mob, because Grace had never seen him in such a reckless, dangerous mood. “You will be questioned about it!” he cried angrily. “In this man’s house, after dark! What are we to think——”

“*We!*” The word seemed to have startling significance for her, and she repeated it with scathing contempt. But the reaction set in with oversweeping violence, and presently her tone was almost pleading. “Paul, you *must* be careful what you say—before these men. Oh, if you’ve got a spark of decency left——”

“Yes.” Like a blade Bert’s voice cut through the little noises of the crowd. He touched a lighted match to the wick of the lamp, then turned so they could see his eyes. “*Be mighty careful, Paul.* If you don’t want your back broken over my knee, don’t make one more remark like that.”

This was a voice that some of them had not heard, and none of them had heard frequently; but the occasions when it had been used were of greater or less importance in tribal history. It dampened their enthusiasm. Fishback Joe, Paul’s right-hand man, drew his knife but his hand trembled, and the blade glittered and twinkled in the light. Nick Pavlof was the priest, and he was sensible to the people’s reliance in him, so he attempted to make some sort of an answer, but the words were deep in his throat and so unintelligible that they seemed to have been intended for home consumption. Old Sleepy Owl was not the man he once had been, and he ruled the tribe rather through wisdom than superior physical prowess, so he moved back in the group and permitted some of the younger men to push in front of him. The wisdom that was his forte seemed to instigate this very action. A few of the young men, hot bloods and the only thing that the tribe had in the way of braves, grunted and muttered to some extent, but said nothing at all worth hearing. And finding it troublesome to look at Breed they all looked at Paul—as if waiting for his reply.

It can be said for the latter that in some degree he rose to the occasion. True, he did not pursue his former subject of conversation. He made no evil, base, suggestive remarks regarding his promised bride, not even the one more of which Bert had tentatively spoken. He did, however, plunge at once into the main business of the delegation.

“Go ahead, men, and search his quarters,” he ordered, turning to his fellows. “I thought he was innocent, at first, but I’m not so sure now. Any man who betrays a friend as he did——”

This language was somewhat complicated for his fellows, and they strained toward him. “Search’m house?” Fishback Joe asked.

“Yes!” The men gathered around him, taking heart. “That’s what you came to do. If he’s innocent he’ll be glad to let you search.”

“You men came here to search my house?” Bert asked.

“That’s the idea,” Paul replied. His courage mounted as the men pressed close behind him. It was evident to them all, at last, that for the instant Bert was unarmed. As he had opened the door for Grace he had laid his rifle down with his sleeping-bag on the floor of the turf-house, and several distinct motions, each taking a fraction of a second, were required to pick it up and get it into action. In the meantime these men had him virtually covered. Their rifles were cocked, and, though they held them loosely, it was apparent that their muzzles pointed more or less in his direction. Though a notoriously poor shot even an Aleut could hardly miss at four paces.

For the first time Bert realized the true seriousness of this situation. These men were in a deadly mood, and, led by Paul, were escaping the leash in which he had always held them. Paul had been backward at first, almost apologetic for the intrusion, but now, as he took the foremost place, a peculiar psychological reaction of fury and reckless courage appeared in them as well as in him. Their manner would almost indicate that they were moved by religious fervor, sometimes a dangerous manifestation among savage peoples. Bert knew perfectly the consequences of a dive for his rifle. The savages were hoping for this very thing, simply because it would give them an excuse to open fire. It would be more than an excuse; it would actually play him into their hands. In some ways these men were quite like beasts, amazingly subject to suggestion, and any sudden motion either in defense or offense would surely incite them to violence. Only one little spark was needed to set off the compressed gunpowder in their hearts. They wanted him to snatch for his rifle not only for the excuse but for the courage the act might give them, the shot of dope necessary to stimulate them to action.

Paul’s mental state was more difficult to read. At first he had been acting a part—in a greater or less degree—and this fact had been apparent at his first words; but now a certain earnestness, terrifying to the girl, was appearing in him. This was not just personal anger and dislike for Breed,

and it was above and beyond his interest in any material stakes he might be playing for. In spite of his detachment at first he could not now hold himself wholly above the crowd. Its spirit was taking hold of his. If Bert reached for the gun, Paul might be the first to fly at him.

Bert did not mind dying, provided no other course was open, but he did strenuously object to a rabbit's death. It came to him now that he wanted no tame finish to the exciting drama of his life. He would not eschew a fighting end—indeed, in this last moment, a warlike zest had descended upon him out of nowhere, a pagan spirit superseding the sacrificial one which had swayed him of late—but he wanted it to amount to something. There was little satisfaction in being shot full of holes before he could get his gun to his shoulder. Besides, he distrusted the natives' marksmanship. Some of their bullets were bound to hit him—so close was the range—but some others would surely fly wild. The Aleut uses no restraint in his shooting, and once started, is hard to stop. Not only Paul might be shot in the excitement—hoist with his own petard in a way that might not be so disadvantageous after all—but Grace would almost certainly fall a victim to the tribal enthusiasm. In view of these things Bert decided he would not only refrain from any overt act, but let the men search his house.

No reason why he shouldn't! He thought he knew what the men wanted—the documentary proofs of his own and Paul's identity procured from Maria a few days previously. He naturally supposed that Paul had incited the search in the hope of obtaining and destroying the hated story of his birth, and he assumed that the intruder whom Grace had seen a short time before had been one of Paul's agents, on the same quest. Certainly the documents were not worth fighting for. As long as Mrs. Fieldmaster lived they were not necessary to Bert for the establishment of his claim. Their purpose had been served now that he had read them and learned what they contained. Mrs. Fieldmaster doubtless possessed other records that would establish the truth in case of legal complications. What Paul could hope to gain from them he could not guess, any more than he guessed that the searchers might have other objects in view.

The men came in, and some of them looked in his bed-roll, on shelves and in shadowed corners, and the old chief, full of cunning, peered into the stove. Fishback Joe contented himself with picking up Bert's rifle, which he held lovingly while the men crowded about the room; and his master looked on in sullen silence from the doorway.

Nick Pavlof, known as the Priest of Moscow, himself searched through Breed's duffel-bag. To the white man's surprise he tumbled out the small

packet containing the proofs without even looking at it. This surprise was mild compared to that of the next disclosure. With a grunt of triumph Nick brought to light two objects in metal, gleaming dully in the lamplight.

In one glance, Paul identified them as the two golden candlesticks from the altar in the temple. In one glance inward he recognized his failure to take the chance of his rifle as the most vital, dangerous, and perhaps the last, mistake of his life.

CHAPTER XX

THE instant that followed the surprising revelation was one of profound suspense. The natives crossed themselves piously, then stood regarding the gold ornaments in stony and pregnant silence. At last Sleepy Owl, an old man brown and lean and with the face of Buddha, stood straight and looked the white man in the face. “You steal’m candlestick,” he pronounced gravely.

The chief’s sincerity could not be questioned. His hand shook with emotion, and ancient, ghost-ridden, withered though he was, he was wrapped in impenetrable dignity.

“No, Sleepy Owl,” Bert answered directly. “I haven’t even touched them.”

“You steal’m blessed, holy candles,” Sleepy Owl insisted. “My young men—they kill you. You go to hell.”

“I didn’t take them, Sleepy Owl,” Bert told him in the silence that followed this awful judgment. “I didn’t know they were here.”

“It looks bad for you, just the same, Bert,” Paul commented. Bert turned, studying intently the former’s pale, triumphant face. “Joe says he saw you go into the temple early this evening and come out with something under your coat—that’s the report he gave. I tried to keep the men from coming here to search, but anxious to see you vindicated, I came with them. I had no idea but that Joe was mistaken, in spite of the fact that my only acquaintance with you began with this trip. In one way, I thought maybe it might be best that they make the search, just to prove your innocence. Frankly, I don’t know what to tell them now.”

“I know what to tell them!” some one proclaimed. Grace pushed into the center of the group, and the faint tinting was quite gone from her face. Her eyes blazed in a singular pallor of skin that troubled the natives in spite of their gathering passion. Such an extremely pale squaw was outside their immediate experience. “Paul, you’re going quite a little too far. Tell these men at once that you know he is innocent.”

Her fiancé turned her a savage countenance. “You stay out of this,” he ordered roughly.

"I won't stay out of it! If you're the Paul I know, you won't either. What time did this fellow say he saw Bert come out of the temple?"

"I'd advise you not to mix in this mess," Paul went on darkly. "These men are in a dangerous mood. I don't know that I could defend you from them."

Watching her intently, Bert did not see her flinch as the natives, keyed to Paul's suggestion, pressed nearer and eyed her in hate. She ignored them, but to Paul she gave a look that was half reproach, half incredulous amazement. "Are you trying to get me into trouble too?" she asked bitterly.

"Don't mix in it, I tell you! I'll see that Bert gets a fair trial. I might have expected you would join in with him."

"Paul, this isn't worthy of you. I tell *you*, Paul, to throw your influence on Bert's side at once. The whole charge is trumped-up. I asked you, when did Joe say he saw Bert with the things?"

"One, two hour ago," Sleepy Owl informed her.

"Then I can prove he didn't take the things. He has been caribou-hunting all afternoon, and I saw him when he came in. I have been with him every moment since. He got here just before you men came. Moreover, I saw a man steal into this house while Bert was still out hunting, and come out again. What was he doing in there? He was hiding those candlesticks, with no other plan than to get Bert in trouble."

This announcement caused no little sensation. Those natives who could understand her simple English were plainly impressed, and the others grunted and questioned. Paul tried to speak, but the old headman interrupted him.

"Who you see?" the latter asked.

"I don't know, great Chief Sleepy Owl. It was too dark to tell. He was short and heavy, not tall like Bert. Chief, some of your men have tried to do wrong to Bert. I think maybe it was Joe. Who tried to get you to come here and search?"

"Joe, he tell Long-Journey Paul——"

"Who is Long-Journey Paul?"

"Him." The chief pointed to Paul, Sindy's son, who was not now without a name among the Pavlof people.

"So that is what you call him! Did Paul tell you what Joe said he saw?"

“No, Joe tell. Long-Journey Paul come along with Joe, listen, ask question. He say search house, maybe find candles. We search—we do find candles.”

“But they were placed there, chief, by Bert’s enemy. I give you my word he did not take them.”

The old chief nodded, and some of the other nodding heads brought about an immediate change in tactics on Paul’s part. Perhaps, after all, he had been too hasty in publicly arguing Bert’s guilt. The affair needed delicate treatment.

“I didn’t advise searching—I only said that a search would probably show whether he was guilty or innocent,” he explained. “I urged that point for Bert’s good.” Looking straight at Grace, he closed one eye in the time-honored signal of guile. “Well, men, I guess we’d better return these candlesticks to the altar,” he went on busily. “We’ll leave Bert for the present, and talk this over in the chief’s house. We can soon decide who is guilty.”

He began herding his grunting, dissatisfied, suspicious brethren out of the house, and Grace watched them go with mixed feelings. Somehow, she failed to react properly to this officiousness on the part of her lover. His wink had meant that he was on her side, perhaps that he was about to attempt an artifice in Bert’s behalf, and with this end in view he would beguile the men away; yet her gratitude remained strangely mingled with alarm. She found herself struggling against an unhappy and, she hoped, unjustified suspicion of Paul’s motives. Why should he lead them away the precise moment they began to doubt Bert’s guilt—to a secret session at which she would not be present? She knew that he disliked Bert, but she would not tolerate treachery. To be convinced that Paul would take advantage of his foe’s present perilous position and try to incite the people against him would simply mean the ruin of her hopes. She could not love, and she would not marry an ignoble, revengeful, conspiring man.

Further than this she would not let herself go. There were certain aspects of this affair which she resolutely barred from her mind.

As the men started to go Bert stepped quietly to her side. “You’re my only chance,” he whispered. “See if you can get my rifle.”

She had forgotten that Fishback Joe had confiscated Bert’s weapon, his trust and, for all she knew, at the last stand her own defense. She called to Paul at once, and he paused in the darkness in the van of his men.

“What, Grace?” His tone was impatient.

“Come here a minute.”

Paul spoke softly to Joe, then hurried to Grace’s side.

“Don’t you know they’ll suspect me, if you call me off to talk to me?” he whispered.

“I’m not worrying about them suspecting you,” Grace replied with considerable spirit. “You seem to be on pretty good terms with them. But I don’t want them to suspect Bert of the theft. Paul, see if you can’t get his rifle and give it back to him.”

“It’s out of the question!” He spoke with an excited emphasis. “They’d suspect me, and I’d lose my influence with them—the only hope of saving Bert.”

“I’d sooner have my rifle, and try to save myself, if worst comes to worst,” Bert told him.

“It wouldn’t do you any good, against such odds. If you give me time, I’ll fix this for you. It would be dangerous to ask them to give you the gun now. They are terribly wrought up against you, and it might precipitate a massacre. They wouldn’t only kill you—they’d probably kill Grace too—or worse.”

“I wouldn’t be surprised. You have already put the idea in their heads,” said Grace.

“What do you mean?”

“I mean what you said in the cabin—how you couldn’t defend me from them. Paul, if you have any influence with them, you can get his rifle for him.”

In his face—as on the brown flat of a beach—she could see the rise of an angry tide. “You stay out of this, Grace!” he told her with but half-repressed savagery. “They’d turn on him, and you and me too if I tried such a thing. As soon as they quiet down, I’ll get it and bring it to you.”

He started to go, and Grace laid her hand on his arm. “Then give him your pistol, Paul. He’ll keep that until you get his rifle for him.”

Paul’s welcome of the idea was not especially hearty, yet he plainly found it difficult to refuse. Indeed, Grace gave him no chance to refuse. Reaching to his holster she drew out the weapon and placed it in Bert’s hands.

“Where are some extra shells?” she asked.

“I haven’t any more with me. Grace, you are certainly zealous for your friend. You would risk my life to save his.”

“You are in no danger. You have just told us of your influence with the men.”

“Maybe he’ll wish I didn’t have so much! Now good night—have a good time, both of you.” With this comprehensive insult, he left them and joined his fellows. Presently the entire party moved on, and the sound of their voices was blended and lost in silence.

Bert now resumed his interrupted preparations for the night. Throwing his sleeping-bag over his shoulder, he led the way to Grace’s tent. He entered with her and built up the fire in her stove; then she was surprised to see him unroll his bed in front of the opening.

“Bert, you are not going to stay here!” she exclaimed.

He straightened, questioning her with his eyes. “Why, I thought you wanted me to——”

“Oh, I do want you to, except it isn’t safe for you. Bert, can you exist out there”—she pointed to the hills—“without your rifle? Can you make it through to some settlement with no weapon but a pistol?”

“Sure, I can, but I’m not going to. I could get through with nothing except a knife.”

“And no outfit?”

“Nothing that I can’t carry on my back, and easy too in spite of the fact that the only settlements in this end of the Peninsula are the canneries of King Cove and Port Moller, both as far as Ikatan.”

“Then don’t waste any time. Every minute you stay here your life is in danger. You can’t tell when those men will come and try to kill you.”

“You don’t think you convinced them of my innocence?”

“I made them doubt your guilt, but who knows what they will decide when they get together and talk it over among themselves? Bert, a mob is the most terrible, crazy thing in the world. You must go at once.”

Bert looked at her very soberly. “Is that an order?”

“Yes. I can’t let you take a needless risk.”

"Well, for the second time when you've given me an order, I can't obey."

She did not seem as angry as one might have expected. "Do you refuse to go?" she asked, wondering.

"Absolutely. Miss Crowell, as you say, a mob is not to be trusted. I really don't think there is much danger, for the present. These wolves will bark and howl a long time before they bite—that is, unless they go into a frenzy. Just the same, I'm not going to take a chance. I can't leave you in charge of Paul and Carter. Carter is past middle-age and hardly a fighting man. Paul doesn't seem to understand the danger. Until you can go too, I'm going to stay right here."

"Surely you don't think there is any danger for me!"

"No, I don't—at present. But as long as the natives are in their present excited state I prefer to be here."

"How long before the whole party can get away?"

"I think the day after tomorrow. Perhaps late tomorrow night, if necessary. That is, to go with a complete outfit. If it became necessary, the four of us could leave in an hour, and by standing a lot of hardship, make it through. Of course that would mean no tents, sleeping out by camp-fires, and a diet of meat, and as yet there's no occasion for you to stand such discomfort."

"And besides, Paul is not here to go with us. We can't go without Paul."

"No. Mr. Fieldmaster probably wouldn't take to the scheme."

"He doesn't seem to take kindly to the idea of going at all. . . . It distresses me a good deal. . . . I must tell you how I appreciate the way you have put up with him. It was one of the finest things I have ever seen. To disregard him, and then to do everything you have done for him—and for me—is just a wonder; and I don't doubt you have helped him in ways that I know nothing of. For you to stay here now, risking your life to look after this party, almost moves me to tears. I will never forget it as long as I live. Whatever class you were born to, you have stepped out of it by your conduct toward us. I can't think of you as a servant any more—only as a gentleman."

She was wide-eyed, flushed by her earnestness; and her voice, clear and full, was more lovely in Bert's ears than that pure flute of Hopeless Land, the song of the yellow-crowned sparrow wakening him at dawn and lulling him at evening. In her look and tone as much as in her words she settled her just debts. Bert knew a depth of longing beyond any emotion of his life—

more moving even than those inner storms he had known in many a wild conflict or adventure of his young days—but he also knew he had received his wages. No matter what his fate henceforth, he had been paid in full.

"God bless you for that," he told her simply.

"I hope He blesses you, Bert. That hope is one of the strongest I have ever known, stronger than I had dreamed it could be. . . . You have kept your word with me. Whether or not Paul is saved, I know you have done everything you could do—I feel that you have done more than would be possible for any man less true. . . . You have been true to me and to yourself, and Bert, I can lift my hand and swear that you have kept the faith! The full meaning of this I do not know—maybe no living soul can know how much it means—but I do know that it counts more than any other earthly thing. You can believe me in this, because it is true."

"And you won't change your opinion if—if Paul is lost, after all?" Bert asked.

"No. If Paul is lost, we must make the best of it. But I haven't given up hope yet, Bert. His mother has always predicted disaster for him and me, but I won't believe it yet. Any son of hers couldn't be all wrong—he'd have to be all right in his heart—and the mysterious, almost unbelievable effect of this present environment can only be temporary, considering who he is. I know he has responded to this country—or something—in a way I can't begin to explain, but it hasn't such a hold on him that we can't get him away, and he will surely be himself again when he gets home. He will forget this country that attracts him so, and will be the Paul I used to know and love."

She spoke with less conviction now, as if she feared the wish were father to the thought, though still with soaring hope. Bert did not trust himself to speak.

Meanwhile the same thought which was on Grace's lips was lingering pleasantly in her sweetheart's mind. He toyed with it, and he took satisfaction in it. . . . Yes, when he returned to the white man's country he would be a white man again. Indeed, he had never been anything else—surely the mere fact of his native blood could not offset the effect of his former white environment—and he would forget the country, shake off its spell, and take up his old life. He could leave any time he liked, he mused. . . . It was true that he had entered in some slight degree into native life, but he had done it with ulterior motives—simply to use the villagers as his tools. When they were no longer useful he would drop them. He had amused himself with them, and particularly with Veda, but all the time he

had remained detached. Of course he had. . . . In a little while more he would take up his old life anew.

It was clever how he handled them! They followed him like dogs. It was cunning and sharp how he had got them away from Grace, when she was about to convince them of Bert's innocence. . . . In a few words he was able to offset her testimony. She was lying, he explained, to save her lover—yes, the two were hand in hand. Likely he had promised *her* the candlesticks.

"Sleepy Owl always hear you marry white squaw yourself," the old chief objected. "Now you say she marry Bert. Maybe throw you down, uh?"

"No. I threw her down. I'm going to marry Veda."

"Steal'm holy candles present for white girl, huh?" The old headman shook his head sadly. "Then we kill Bert, maybe kill her too."

"No, not the girl. Long-Journey Paul doesn't want her killed—she probably wasn't to blame for the theft."

"But you say——"

"I said he was going to give them to her, but maybe she thought he had bought them."

"Buy holy, blessed things?" the chief echoed in horror. He crossed himself piously, warding off the evil of such a thought.

"Well, she mustn't be killed. Her friends from far away would make us a lot of trouble. Maybe some of the young men will want to marry her—bring more white blood into the tribe."

"Um," Sleepy Owl replied with a depth of meaning. He nodded in great wisdom. "Anyhow, we kill Bert first."

Indeed, Bert's early assassination was almost a fore-gone conclusion. Joe reported he had not fled from the village as was feared, and wrought up as they were by the sacrilege of the supposed theft, the natives could be easily led to fall upon him, in the face of which odds he was bound to fall. They could be weaned away from their almost superstitious fear of him. . . . Of course no blame could be attached to Paul. One man could not hope to stay the righteous wrath of so many: Grace and the rest would appreciate that point. It would be a regrettable accident—most regrettable—but quite unavoidable. Paul could prove that he had remonstrated with the infuriated savages. . . . What an unusual coincidence that Bert's end should so affect another's destiny—no more to know the hatred of his eyes, the fear of his strength, the dread of his shadow darkening the days to come! The white

man would never supersede him then. He could go his way in safety. In all his circle, Mrs. Fieldmaster alone would know the true story of his birth, and she would not last always. . . . He was lost in strange, intriguing speculations.

He would go back, in time, and take up his old life where he had left it. As far as men could see there would be no change in him. He was a white man still; and he defied this land to make him otherwise. *He would willingly be put to trial!* He would welcome the blood-test to prove him white or brown!

So beguiling were his thoughts that he looked up resentfully at the growing light which called him from them. The *barabara* had been in close, almost total darkness, friendly to his dreams, but now the gloom was fading in a queer, slow way that grew upon a man. His hands, mere ghosts of hands before, were now plain to his sight; the habitation's crude furniture projected slowly out of the darkness; the old chief sitting opposite was visible once more. His first thought was of the dawn that spreads soon after midnight at this time of year; but he remembered at once that the night was not yet far advanced. His next supposition was that some one of the natives was approaching the window with a lantern.

Yet lantern-light is yellow, not red. This slowly-deepening radiance on the window was distinctly red. His hands were red; across the room Sleepy Owl looked like an image in burnished copper. Was this Aurora Borealis? If so, it was an unusual display for this time of year. Fighting against a creepy fear, he got up and opened the door.

He threw back his head until he faced the sky. The source of light was high above him, and its mighty fountain was an old crater almost at the top of Pavlof Mountain.

CHAPTER XXI

At first Paul was more awed than alarmed at this activity in Pavlof's crater. It was not yet discharging molten lava and no terrifying sound broke the almost perfect silence of this Alaskan night. No rocks crashed with rumbling echoes, and any cinders and ashes blown out of that mighty furnace were wafted away on some unfelt wind among the peaks. The only change in the snowy mountain was the ruddy fountain at its crest, the torch of the gods. . . . Besides, Paul was impressed by Sleepy Owl's behavior. Except for the glitter of his paling eyes—perhaps simply a reflection from the crater's glare—the aged chief showed little sign of excitement. He grunted softly, picked up his rifle, then turned as if to go.

"What are you going to do?" Paul asked.

"Pavlof shoot'm fire," was the grave reply. "We go dance!"

"It's a queer time to dance. Isn't there any danger?"

"Oh, Devil, he build'm fire before. We dance—chief, young men, squaws, all dance. He like'm dance—fire go out."

So they would dance in propitiation of a god of evil! Paul found it impossible to smile into the solemn face, and scarcely knowing why, he followed the old man down to the *barabara* occupied by Nick Pavlof, the priest. Here the twain found him already arrayed in the ruin of his once costly vestments, undoubtedly hoarded for the more important religious festivals. He was walking grandly up and down, and his eyes were shining.

In a few moments all the adults in the tribe gathered as if by prearranged agreement. Although many were garbed in their usual clothes of fur and deer-skin, several of the older men wore highly decorated extra pieces that seemed to have religious significance, and even the most humble had ornaments of beads, bone, teeth, or walrus ivory which Paul took to be some sort of talismans or charms. He was vaguely amused at a tall, glossy silk hat, the grotesque memento of some drama of years agone, worn proudly by Veda's father. In significant contrast to his sacred vestments Nick now put on a most hideous mask of wood and leather, a grinning, evil thing that impressed Paul in spite of himself. This was really a masterpiece of the cubist art native to the degenerate northern peoples, yet he had no desire to examine it closely, and where this medicine-man had got the idea for it he

could not imagine. One girl wore a long robe of snow-white caribou leather, adorned with figures, and an old man carried a primitive kettle-drum which Paul had not known was in the tribe. All the braves carried their rifles as if for battle.

They pressed about Paul, but took little notice of him other than that paid to their headmen; and presently he found himself no longer surprised to be among them. Perhaps he was merely absorbed in the scene about him. The whole land was a study in red. Red grass grew on the hills, the lower mountains were ringed with crimson vapor, the river ran brightly red to a dark red sea. The hollows, cliffs and gorges swam in fire, and a man's heart was humbled to see them. The snow-peaks were pink as in a red dawn, and mighty Pavlof belched its flame above them all. The scene was of a world newly made, still red-hot from the forge. That human beings could move and breathe in such a world surpassed belief.

Paul thought of going in search of his white companions, but somehow, the idea passed from his mind. Somewhat dazed, and having lost the acute self-consciousness that is so strongly characteristic of the white man, he lingered with his new friends, and when they moved off he went with them. They walked stolidly and in silence, fetching up in a little rocky hollow immediately behind the church and just at the base of the long steep slope of Pavlof.

This place was like an amphitheater, and probably it was regarded with superstitious reverence. Paul stood at its rim, quietly watching. The natives immediately commenced the performance of their rites.

The men laid down their rifles within easy reach and formed a line, facing the line of women. They seemed to have no certain order, except that Sleepy Owl stood at the end of the row of men, opposite the girl in the white robe. Nick Pavlof did not take a place in either line at first, but lifting his hands walked down between.

He chanted slowly and earnestly, and this was the first sound any of them had made. It was, indeed, the first rupture of the baffling silence of this epochal night. In his mask of terror and death, walking slowly with uplifted arms, the priest was an impressive figure. The tattered robes began to have an almost superhuman significance. His people watched him with pale, blank faces.

What he said Paul could not understand, yet his voice was profoundly moving and his tone had an eloquence beyond the reach of mere words. As he spoke he lifted his face to the flaming mountain. The last note of his

chant died away as he reached the end of the aisle, and pausing, he stood in silent supplication.

In the hush that followed, Sleepy Owl cried out sharply, and Paul was shaken to the core. He started violently; and thus he failed to see that every man in the line started too. And now both lines moved toward each other, in dead silence and with a strange rhythm of motion.

Backward and forward, advancing and retreating, the Pavlof people commenced their dance to the Devil Fire. It was quiet enough at first. Their motions were rather slow and solemn, without accompanying recitation. Watching closely, Paul thought that the rhythm quickened by slow degrees.

The priest began to chant again, keeping time with the dancing, and when he paused Sleepy Owl carried on the refrain. His voice was shrill, the voice of an old man, yet the fervor behind it passed from man to man like a flame. After the sound died away another of the headmen chanted in an exalted, rather than a solemn tone.

Presently the girl in the white robe opposite Sleepy Owl danced forward out of her line and, waving her arms, began upon some sort of recitation in a clear, high voice. The rhythm of the dancers quickened perceptibly. Her words seemed to thrill her people even more than the chanting of the old men, and seemed to be a signal for a more general participation in the rite. With increasing frequency the men and women chanted or recited, and sometimes several voices were heard at the same time. Their language was generally the vernacular, but occasionally they seemed to relapse into gibberish marking the beginnings of a wild hysteria. Once Paul caught the refrain of the woman's song of the Eskimo, probably infused into tribal tradition during some forgotten war of centuries before. "*Amna ah ya*," an old woman sang. "*Amna, amna, ah-ya.*"

Presently a new voice was heard, low and dull at first, but thrilling these savage hearts in a manner lost to white men in the world's young days. Off to one side, in the shadows of a great stone, a kettle-drum began a slow, regular beat. It quickened, and the rhythm of the dancers quickened with it. A fierce and overwhelming excitement began to supersede the prayerful mood which the people had displayed at first. Their motions were more swift and strange, their cries wilder, more prolonged, and uttered at greater frequency; and this weird dance developed in frantic crescendo.

Yet not for an instant was the rhythm lost. It was like a river that flowed forever; it imaged the wind that had run crying over Hopeless Land. A spectator found himself watching it as a charmed bird watches the writhings

of a serpent. It locked the gaze, it caught and held the breath, it pulsed and throbbed in every nerve-end.

Paul, standing on the higher ground and overlooking the dance, observed its first measures with an air of detachment. He was an intensely interested spectator, yet aloof, puzzled, and even somewhat contemptuous. As the rite progressed, a rather startling profundity of emotion overcame him. These people were dancing their hearts out, and it must have been their superstition, their impotence, and their pathetic, childish faith that wrung his heart. At first he saw them through tears.

But soon his eyes were dry, and their surface lights seemed many times accentuated. He forgot the groping darkness of this black mass. The scene began to have an intense personal meaning for him. The wild figures, the rapt priestess in her white robe, the prancing holy man with his devil's head, and the old men who gesticulated and cried out with a fervor of religious ecstasy, no longer were utterly remote and foreign. As they danced on, the scene seemed more and more familiar. Its details fused, no longer fastening his senses here and there but permitting him to view the picture as a whole. This was not good for him. It dulled his critical faculties, by the exercise of which he remained aloof, and it took the every-day reality from the scene, its incongruous and mundane aspects, leaving it unearthly and enthralling. It became hard to remember that the awful figure leading the dance was just Nick Pavlof, a Russian half-breed; and it was impossible to recall the incongruity of that devil-mask of terror with the purity of priestly vestments.

Oh, his robes were splendid! The sight of them lifted up the heart! The girl in the white robe was a prophetess, holy and inspired! Could the Evil One who lived in the white tepee of the mountain remain unswayed by her appeal? Watching her ecstasy, would he not forget to tend his fires? Would his rage not be assuaged by the dance that she and her people did in his honor?

The witchery of the scene grew with the passing moments. The sacred mountain with its torch of flame lit the ranges and the sea, and Paul thought that it must be hurling its onyx glare clear beyond the sea and beyond the world and far into space. It was impossible to remember that millions slept and went about their dull pursuits in utter ignorance of this cosmic outburst, and that to millions more it was only a low gleam on the sky line, far to the north and west. To him this village and the craggy waste about it was the whole world.

The caldron among the rocks where the brown folk danced gathered the ruddy light. The waste was steeped in diabolic fire. Old gods, for a long time neglected but never quite forgotten, stalked through the land again.

None of this was new to Paul. . . . Palsied areas of his memory were healed and stimulated, and now he knew that he had seen all this before. In dreams he hardly knew that he had dreamed he had seen this same red sky arching the red world. In the remote and infinite labyrinths of the germ-plasm out of which his being came the scene had lurked, unglimpsed: the high peak pouring its flame into the sky, the barren hills alight, the priest and his people dancing in atonement. . . . It had all been branded on his soul. It was all true. It had happened long ago. The vista had lurked forever somewhere back of his eyes. It was recorded indelibly on a racial memory that was his heritage.

This was the land of the mountain-makers! The forges of the giants roared in their subterranean workshops. This was the country of the *Dancing People*, the inspired and wondrous folk who talked with gods!

Backward and forward, up and down! The rhythm lived in the very warp and woof of his being. It was much more a part of him than his English speech or these strange clothes he wore. . . .

The first beat of the kettle-drum rolled to his ear. He started, recoiling as if in horror, then waited frozen and inert. It came again. . . . This was more than sound: it was a veritable shock that surged and tingled to the last filament of nerve. This too was old; and the chords of an infinite memory echoed the low, deep, moving resonance. He heard it booming through the ages.

Boom! The beat was louder now, more compelling. In the little, breath-taking pause before it came he knew a suspense so racking and intense that he almost cried out. *Boom*, bom. . . . *Boom*, bom. . . . *Boom*, bom. . . . *Boom!*—with a slowly increasing tempo. The dance approached its apex of frenzy and madness.

Backward and forward, up and down—*Boom*, bom. . . . *Boom*, bom. . . . *Boom!* The girl in the white robe fell screaming to the ground, and the dancers wove back and forth about her. The witch-doctor yelled in his transports. . . . And now Paul, standing rigid at one side and watching with stark pale face and starting eyes, beheld the dawn of a miracle. Slowly he became aware of a growing shadow over the amphitheater.

The moving figures were perceptibly dimming before his eyes. Their faces were not so plain; the devil-mask of the priest became a nightmare thing, a symbol to crouch before and worship as the carmine glare upon it faded to a dull, angry glow. The volcanic light was not so vivid now. Lifting his worshiping eyes he saw that the flame, bursting out of Pavlof's crater, was noticeably less. The vengeful fire of the gods was burning down.

No wonder the dancers yielded themselves to frenzy. They flung into a wild abandon awful to see. Was not the red glare dulling and dying? They were dancing away the Devil Fire! The fire-god had seen them, and was appeased. The village would not be destroyed and buried under ashes. He had heard their supplications, and he was letting the torch of death burn down. Their devil-dance had propitiated the Evil One.

Boom, bom! *Boom*, bom! *Boom*, bom, *Boom*! The drum beat in tune with Paul's heart. With a loud cry he left his place and sprang in among them. *Backward and forward, up and down!* They closed in about him, dancing in a climax of ecstasy. He swung into the mad rhythm. Backward, forward, to the hollow roar of the drum, in the worship of the true but long neglected god.

CHAPTER XXII

HOPING to protect him against an attack by stealth, Grace had induced Bert to sleep in Carter's tent, just to one side of hers, rather than on the open ground in front. Here he would be equally in readiness in case she had need of him, and he was out of reach of a knife-thrust from the darkness. Under the sheltering canvas he was not wakened by the radiance in the sky, and he did not discover the activity in the crater until the low beat of a drum aroused him from his heavy sleep.

On opening his eyes he was immediately aware of some strange brightness outside. The ruddy glow came but wanly through the canvas, yet he saw the florid sky through a slit at the tent door. He got up, glanced once at the flaming mountain, then wakened Carter.

Without pausing completely to dress he went to the door of Grace's tent and called. "You'd better get up, Miss Crowell," he told her quietly. "We may have to get out of here on a moment's notice."

She started violently, knowing a most real terror, but the mood behind his subdued tone steadied and calmed her. When she answered her voice was rather quiet. "Are the men coming?"

"No. I don't think we need fear them now. Pavlof is shooting off a little—nothing but fire and smoke as yet. I think we'd better get ready, though, and pull out down the valley as soon as we can. You'd better dress for travel."

"I'll be ready as soon as I can."

"Good, but take all the time that's necessary. Get your warm things together and other things you absolutely have to have. I'll be with you in a minute."

Bert returned to Carter's tent to find the older man in a flurry of excitement, but he also was steadied by the sight of his guide's swift but quiet preparations. In a moment both men were completely dressed, and Bert had strapped on a light pack, containing a blanket or two, his axe, and a few other articles needed for travel in the waste country. The twain met Grace outside her door.

"Where's Paul?" was her first question.

"I don't know. He may be asleep in his *barabara*."

"One of you must go and see. He might be killed in his bed."

As Bert was busy packing the girl's simple outfit, Carter offered to go across the village and arouse Paul. He returned in a few minutes to report an unsuccessful quest. Paul was not in his house, nor was he anywhere to be seen.

The confused sounds which all three had heard and no one had spoken of, the faint cries stealing through the silence and broken by the rhythmic boom of a low drum were now made clear. "The whole village is having some sort of a jamboree in that place back of the church," Carter told them. "I could hear 'em plain when I was over at Paul's place—yelling and crying like crazy people. I couldn't see any of 'em, because they're down in a hollow. What do you suppose they're doing?"

"They're doing the devil-dance, I guess," Bert replied. "It is one of the tribal customs."

"You don't think——" Grace paused, fighting a bitter fight against her rising fear. "You don't think he's with them?"

Bert looked into her pale face, lit by spectral fire. "I shouldn't think so. But I can't imagine where he could be——"

"Oh, why doesn't he come!"

"If he doesn't come before I finish this little packing, we'll go look for him."

Carter turned a drawn face toward the fiery mountain. "If you don't mind, I'm going to start now," he told them. "It'll save time in the end—you know I can't travel as fast as the rest of you. Could I be of any help by staying?"

"Not the least, that I know of," Bert assured him. "I think it would be a good plan for you to start on." He looked to Grace for confirmation.

"Yes," she agreed. "Don't worry about us. We'll catch up with you."

"Follow straight down this river," Bert advised. "You can't get lost. At the river mouth you'll find a *barabara*, occupied by a half-breed trapper from one of the more civilized villages. He'll take you in and take care of you till we can pick you up. If there is a flood of lava down this valley, go up on the hills."

"Do you think there will be?"

“I don’t know. All these mountains are potential volcanoes, and many of them puff up from time to time without doing much harm. If it was another Katmai, though, we’d have to run for our lives.”

“Good-by then—and good luck!”

It was a sporting farewell, uttered rather cheerfully in the face of these Plutonic fires; and both of his friends paused in their thought to wish him well. They saw him start down the long, red gorge.

Bert finished his packing—rolling up a light outfit for Paul to carry—and now, except for the latter’s mysterious absence—they were ready to go. Grace still maintained a semblance of composure, due partly to the suggestion of her companion’s attitude, partly to the temper of her basic steel. She was a thorough-bred, and she never showed it more than now.

“He doesn’t seem to be coming,” Bert told her. “I think I’d better go and look at the native dance. He might have been curious enough to go with them and watch them.”

“Oh, you mustn’t go near them——”

“How else are we going to find Paul?”

“I don’t know. . . . We must find him, but yet I’d sooner—no, I take that back. . . . Bert, what shall we do? Those men will kill you if you come near ——”

“There’s mighty little danger of that, I think. I really believe they’ve forgotten about the candlesticks. They will be too busy trying to dance away the devil-light to pay any attention to me. They are probably lost in hysteria, by now. Listen to that drum!”

Both of them could hear the hollow sound, rolling in at ever-decreasing intervals as the spirit of the rite progressed. “Oh, let’s do something!” she pleaded.

“I’m trying to decide what to do. . . . And now I know! They’re dancing too fast and hard to be on the lookout for me. They are down in that rocky hollow behind the church. I can get up to them easy without being seen, and if Paul is there I can spot him. Then I’ll try to get word to him. If you’ll wait here——”

“I don’t dare wait here, Bert. I’m going with you——”

“No. There’s not much danger, but I believe it’s safer for you here.”

“Just the same, I’m going with you. Oh, don’t you know that if anything happens to you I’m lost, anyway? They wouldn’t spare me. Paul couldn’t protect me—even if he’d try!”

For the first time since she had known him he reached and seized her hands. His eyes searched hers. “If that is so, why can’t we go on and leave him?”

“Because I have to be sure. . . . I must know for sure. . . .”

He did not know exactly what she meant. Possibly she also did not know. One thing, however, he knew: his obligation to Paul was not done yet. Until she freed him, he must work for Paul as well as for her.

“You stay here, and I’ll bring word at once,” he said.

“No. If he is there with the others, you might need me to bring him. He hates you. He won’t come for you. Anyway, where you go I’m going too. I’m safer with you than in this tent alone. I feel it, and I know it’s true. You are my only hope.”

They went together through the town, and presently they were making their way along the base of the mountain. Bert knew the lay of the land in every detail, and in spite of the garish gleam illumining the village he was able to guide her in safety behind one of the crags on the farther rim of the amphitheater.

“The light’s dying down a little,” he told her as they crept up to the edge. “If Paul’s here, we may be able to get hold of him and take him away without showing ourselves. . . . It’s quite a little darker.”

Together they peered through a cleft in the crag. And at what she saw, as she looked down at those ghost-ridden, darkened souls, she sobbed.

Bert did not speak. No gesture or movement showed that he had seen. With a poignancy of longing a lesser man could not feel, he wanted to take her in his arms, to close her dry, wide eyes with his kiss, to warm her chilled breast against his—but like her, he must be sure. . . . He was not a superman, but a faltering human being, and he dared not stretch out his arms. The only soul that he knew was his own, and it was timid and lonely, and it was not in him to know that hers might be lonely too.

It racked the man to see her heart draining empty before his eyes. He longed for the relief of her tears. . . . At last her stiffened body relaxed, and she met his eyes, themselves deep craters filled with fire.

“Bert—is he—one of them?” she whispered. He read her trembling lips, rather than heard her.

“Can’t you see?”

“Yes. . . . It is clear enough now. I should have known, long ago.”

There was a second’s portentous pause. “Shall we go?” he asked softly.

“Yes. We may as well go.”

He turned to lead her back the way he had come, but now a new madness in the throng below froze them in their places. Paul, prancing in ecstasy between the two weaving lines, suddenly stopped dead-still with lifted arms. His mood flashed to the others like lightning, and every moving form grew fixed under his rapt gaze. To a curious spectator this would have been a wonderful example of the power of suggestion. The dancers were already close to a hypnotic trance, and they were keenly sensitive to this Priest who had returned from beyond the seas. . . . But it was not curiosity that locked a girl’s gaze upon him. It was horror.

The drummer held his hand. A profound silence fell over the amphitheater, broken at last by Paul’s exalted voice.

“My people!” he cried. “It is I, your Chief from far away, who will tell you why this evil has come upon us!”

An old man straightened in his place. “We hear you, Great Chief Long-Journey Paul!” Sleepy Owl replied, speaking for all this straining, wide-eyed throng.

“A voice has spoken in my ear,” Paul went on, his voice ringing with self-belief. “Were not the holy emblems stolen from the altar just tonight? My people, the Great Spirit is angry. That is why his flames leap into the sky. We cannot drive them away with dancing! They die down, but they leap up again. See, they are leaping high again now! Bert, your foe, has brought this upon us. Chase him down, my brothers. Only the thief’s life can save us from the flames. Destroy him or the Great Spirit will destroy us.”

The tribesmen understood the spirit if not the full meaning of the dramatic words. It was a curious fact that even those who spoke no English seemed to leap to the idea without translation by their fellows, perhaps through some psychic gift which finds its fullest expression during mass-frenzy, perhaps simply because they had heard Bert’s name. No doubt a strange, perverted sincerity ran through Paul’s charge. In some exiled consciousness he knew that Bert had not stolen the sacred emblems, and

indeed he knew the full story of that theft better than any man in the tribe, but in this mad hour such knowledge was lost to him. His self-bias could lie to him at will, and he would believe it. His hatred, superseding all other emotion, could actually burn out and eradicate the truth from his mind, blinding him to all he did not wish to see.

"The girl too?" a woman's voice cried. This was the most terrible voice that had been lifted up so far, and the zeal behind it sealed Grace's doom with the tribesmen. Bert heard the voice above the stream of his thoughts, and he recognized it as Veda's. In it was that unearthly fury with which a primitive woman will fight for her lover or her child, and it was charged with venom. "Bert steal'm candlestick, give to her. He her fellow. Grace—she die too!"

Paul hesitated, but Nick Pavlof answered for him. "Death to the whites!" he proclaimed in English. He stood up on one of the smaller crags and shook his clenched hands toward the village. "Bert—the girl—the old man!" Then, in the vernacular: "He speaks true—they have brought this trouble on us. She has betrayed you, Long-Journey Paul, and us too. Death to all the whites."

The crowd took up the cry. Overborne by their fervor, their pseudo-religious hysteria which can be one of the most deadly emotions known to humankind, Paul gave up hope of saving Grace. It was a small price to pay if the red curse were lifted. He had lost her anyway—she was an alien and a stranger—and the Devil Fire was leaping up again.

It was cheap enough if those fire-spirits, leaping ever higher in dread and awful splendor, were driven back into their rocky vaults. He would sacrifice her freely to his remembered deity—the Fear-God who ruled his people. Besides, it would mean full feeding for the Fear-God of hate in his heart.

"Death to the whites!" he echoed, because he was a brown man. He had no idea what he was saying. The men reached and seized their rifles.

While the fanatical throng below was condemning himself and his companion to death, Bert was busy counting his chances. It was apparent at once he could not lead back the way he had come. The natives cut off the open end of the valley, and standing on a rocky eminence, Nick Pavlof had most of the immediate territory under surveillance. Except for the fact that they were lying in a depression in the hill he would have already spied the twain and set on his dogs. To steal by unnoticed was out of the question. The

mounting flame from Pavlof's crater lit up the hollows and dispelled every friendly shadow that might have concealed their flight.

Bert counted up his chances, and he found but one. This one chance looked to him rather favorable, so he played it for all he had. He and his companion would not attempt to leave their hiding-place for the present. He thought it probable that the entire, pious crowd would rush out the natural exit of rocks at the opposite end of the amphitheater and swoop down upon his house. While they were searching for him he might lead Grace across the village and over the divide to Otter Creek. There were good reasons why he would refrain from giving them a race up the mountain behind him. He was a fast runner, but he wanted an open trail. After a short climb he would encounter a barrier which human beings cannot ordinarily cross—the deep snow that enfolds the higher reaches of the Aleutian range. Those trackless drifts, softened now by a thaw, might conceivably be passed with the aid of snowshoes and superhuman effort, but the former were out of reach in his *barabara*, and the latter came and went by the will of the gods. Besides, he would not choose to flee toward the flaming crater.

Grace was watching his face for a signal; and he simply touched his lips. Then both lay flat in the little hollow. The event seemed to be working out as he had anticipated. All the tribesmen were running back through the village on the man-hunt. Very likely they would discover evidences of packing and flight, and would sweep on a short distance down the valley, giving himself and the girl a fighting chance to cross the village and climb the perilous but comparatively low divide to Otter Creek. Once there, he could lose his pursuers in the hills. Of course they would see him on the naked, fire-lit cliffs and give chase, but he would not begrudge them this. They could not follow as fast as he could fly, provided he kept out of range of rifle-bullets, and tracking him, they would not encounter and destroy Rufus Carter, on his way to the river mouth. If a few of the more stout-hearted natives ran Bert down in the caverns of the cliffs, he would be glad to give them satisfaction. In the close work on the rocks Paul's pistol might prove useful after all. . . .

But he was only dreaming, and he knew it. The trail was not open yet. Surely the tribesmen were making a thorough and conscientious search! And now he saw two of the villagers moving off in what he considered a most alarming direction. They had gone just where he had hoped no one would think of going—toward the divide on the opposite side of the village.

One of these two was Sleepy Owl, the chief; the other was Veda. Bert feared them in his heart above all others in the tribe. Had these two, working

separately, arrived at tactics which he could not combat? They were a dangerous pair, the wisdom of one complementing the jealous hate of the other.

He had been grim and cold before, but now his iron look gave way to a profound tenderness for the girl at his side.

"Miss Crowell," he whispered, gravely, "I think our chances are fading."

She looked at him in utter faith, but at first could not trust herself to speak.

"I'm not sure, but it looks to me like that she-devil is leading him up the hill so they can look over the village. If they do that, they'll see us sure. Then we'll have to fight."

"We couldn't fight against them all," she told him soberly.

"Not here, anyway. . . . We'll play the game as long as we can. Lie perfectly still. They may overlook us——"

Bert's fear was now proved a certainty. The two began to climb up the cliff, and in her dreadful zeal, the squaw took the crags like a mountain-ewe. In the vivid, awful light from the crater the two in hiding could see her every motion. Presently she paused, and turning around, looked down over the village. The fugitives were in plain sight of her now. The old chief crawled up and stood beside her. . . . They seemed to be looking everywhere except directly toward the hollow where their prey crouched. Soon they climbed down and made their way leisurely toward their fellows.

"They didn't see us," Grace whispered.

"I can't see how they missed us," Bert muttered. "I wish I could be sure they weren't pretending. These are a treacherous people——"

Risking exposure, he lifted his head above the hollow to watch. He saw the two spies disappear behind a *barabara*, and presently a number of the villagers ran to join them, summoned by a secret signal. Others followed, and a good part of the tribe were seen assembled around their chief.

Knowing what lay before him, Bert waited to be sure. He saw the tribesmen begin to deploy in a long crescent that is the time-honored battle-line of the Indian; and the chief, excited past restraint, pointed an arm in toward the amphitheater. And now Bert knew that the waiting time was done.

He had already slipped off his pack, retaining his camp-axe, knife, and pistol. Now he reached a hand and lifted Grace to her feet. Thrusting her before him as a she-bear thrusts its cub, he began the race up the mountain.

The instant that he showed himself upon the crags a triumphant cry went up from the villagers. Bert had known all the wilderness voices, some of them sweet but many fearful and cruel, and he had listened to the fierce cries of the beasts of prey, but he had never heard a sound like this, that of a people changed to wolves. The horror it wakened could easily cost him the last vestige of his failing chance, bewilder him and cast him helpless into their hands.

Because they were busy with firing, the men's cries echoed in the rocks and died away, but the squaws clamored in increasing excitement. Presently the rifles added their spiteful voices.

The fugitives could not hope to reach the cliffs leading to Otter Creek. Their foes would cut them off or bring them down with rifle fire. They must take the direct course up the mountain. Bullets whistled about them, cracking on the rocks on all sides, and regarding these Bert had but one consolation. This was unutterably grim: that any bullet which struck her must strike him too, running in front of him as she was, and that any bullet felling him would also destroy the girl, not leaving her to the mercy of the howling savages.

Like Charles IX, who stood at the casement of his castle on an unspeakable day of an all-but-forgotten century and cried, "My God, they are escaping!" Paul could not hold aloof from the murder-madness. He also emptied his rifle at the fugitives. Fortunately he was an indifferent shot, and the cruel dumdums in their jackets of steel whistled harmlessly by. If Bert lived, he would never again fire in sport at a fleeing animal.

The distance was about two hundred yards at the start, not a difficult range if the tribesmen took careful aim. The frenzy of the latter was now the couple's salvation. As usual in a crisis the natives fired more or less at random, at times actually forgetting to sight at all. Their befouled pieces were none too accurate, the red light was deceptive, and they were clumsy shots to start with. The range increased as Bert and his charge raced up the mountain.

Many of the braves were close to exhaustion from the devil-dance, and soon dropped in the rear. The others lost time as they paused to fire, and what was more important, not one of them possessed the physical prowess and stamina to race on such a course with Bert. Helping Grace did not seem

to retard him. He had strength to spare, and since her movements were swift enough to keep her on her feet, his hand at her waist swept her along as if a kindly Providence had given her wings.

As the chase was prolonged the tribesmen dropped farther and farther behind, because all of them were now carrying a burden far heavier than the beloved weight which Bert thrust before him up the steep slope. This was the burden of their fear. They had not left the Fear-God in their rocky crypt below. The devil-mask that symbolized him had been dropped off and forsaken, but he ran with them still. His hand was upon them, just as Bert's hand was upon Grace, but it held them back rather than hurled them on. Its cold touch on their hearts checked their strongest exertions. It was not Bert whom they dreaded now, his eye or his hand or his dream. He was only one, unarmed for all they knew, and they were many with rifles. But they did dread, with a deathly, devouring dread, the Fire-God dancing on the mountain.

Bert and the white squaw climbed straight toward him, but the Aleuts did not follow with good spirit. The Fire-God was a mystery to them, a weird and awful specter beyond their wit to know. They could never look him in the face. He was Satan in garments of flame. . . .

Besides, the hunters could afford to be patient. Their prey might not conceivably escape. Let the mad squaw, Joe's sister, shriek at them—they need not follow her into the blood-red drifts. Rather would they call their victims down with singing bullets. If these failed, a little waiting would win for them in the end.

They had virtually won already. The white people were trapped. Beyond them lay the impassable snow, extending over Pavlof's shoulder on the peaks beyond, and neither fuel nor food grew upon the mountain. Even Bert, the White Wolf, could not survive here, nor could he break through and escape. When the flames died down or when the cold set in, the tribal victory was certain.

The men lingered in nests of rock and tried their hands at sharp-shooting. Their quarry had doubled the original distance from them now and this range demanded the most careful sighting, yet because some pains were taken with the rifles Bert and Grace were actually in more danger than before. A high-powered bullet carries almost point-blank for four hundred yards, and though this is a long shot, even for a good marksman, out of so many bullets one was likely to go true.

With never a glance behind, the two climbed steadily on, trusting to distance to scatter the hail of lead. They reached snow-line in less than a half-hour's climb; and here, sheltered behind a large bowlder, they took their first rest.

Sorely needed it was. Even Bert was suffering acutely from the long climb, his heart drumming and his lungs aching as he gulped the thin, cool air. Grace was dangerously close to collapse. Stark pale, her temples wet with cold drops, she tried to speak, but her breath failed, and she wilted in his arms. These were her only haven now. They would hold her from the chill enmity of the snow. She lay a long time in silence, and Bert peered down at his foes.

"Bert!" she whispered at last.

"Yes, Grace." He called her so.

"I can't go on. My heart's pounding to shreds. You give me the pistol—and go on."

His arms trembled and tightened; and his eyes smiled even though his lips were grave. "Grace, we'll play this thing through together," he told her.

She smiled too, in ineffable bravery; and he knew that the gayety that was the soul of her was only sleeping, not dead. "But you mustn't hang back—for me," she went on. "I mean it, Bert. Somehow, it has come to mean a great deal—whether you come through. There's no use of throwing away your life when you can't save me anyway. . . . Maybe you can push through and out, if you go on and leave me. . . . Your life is very dear to me——"

"Grace, we'll play it through together." The iron of the man was in his rapt, still tones. "Dear, I want you to understand. When I loved you, I gave myself to you, wholly and utterly, and I kept nothing back. My life is yours. I am not a child, to go from one thing to another. You saved my soul as surely as a holy priest ever saved the soul of a heathen, and it's yours to keep or throw away, then and now and forever—but I won't throw it away for any man's life, mine or any other.

"My life doesn't mean a great deal to me, but this other thing does. Up here alone, where I've had a chance to think, I've thought out how little and fleeting and unimportant life is. This dream of mine *is* important. It is the one thing that is mine, that can never be taken away from me. A germ can take my life, but God alone can take away my dream. . . . What a man dreams maybe doesn't make any difference, as long as he is steadfast in it. . . . You are my dream, and I can never have another.

“Do you suppose any number of years on this earth could pay for throwing it away? I’d rather be with you, in this last hour, and see it through at your side, than live a whole lifetime of riches and glory somewhere else. . . . Those men down there can’t hurt me. They can’t take away anything I value, except as they hurt you.”

“Then—then if they can’t hurt you, they can’t hurt me either!” She reached up her arm and drew his head down to hers and kissed the mist out of his eyes. “We’ll laugh at ’em in the end.”

For a long time she held him thus. He knew the glory of her lips. Her kiss was chaste and sweet like the rest of her, imaging her, conveying her to him, never wholly to be lost again by any disaster life might heap upon him. Indeed, no evil or man could ever harm him now. All debts were paid. Life itself, until lately the great insolence, was atoned for.

Her purity made him pure. This was not a sentiment with him, but fact—the return of an old miracle that only a fool has ever doubted. Loving her, he was receptive to her; the pure heart within her was the saving grace it has ever been. It was stronger than wickedness or death. This was truth. She healed him, as a holy man can heal the sick.

Knowing her lips, her heart against his, he could not possibly know fear. Their sweetness blinded him like acute pain, and holding her close, he could not see the spiteful bullets striking near nor the heaven-leaping flames above him. . . . It seemed to him now that the red glare was less. The shadows were deepening, as they had done before the fires leaped forth anew. What did this pause foreshadow? No homage to a Fear-God had done this; he was bowed down before another Spirit.

“Bert!” the girl whispered, her lips moving against his ear.

“Grace?”

“I don’t think we are going to die. I feel—I almost know we will get through. We haven’t been cheated.”

“No matter what happens, I haven’t been cheated. I have been paid in full. Why, Grace? What is it you see that I don’t?”

“Nothing yet. It is just a premonition. You and I are going to get through—and go on.”

He searched her eyes, wide and light in the sullen glow from the crater, and he read their prophecy. “I believe you,” he told her. “I don’t know why, but I do. . . . There doesn’t seem much chance——”

“The light is not so bright now.”

“But the deep snow, Grace—up ahead! We can’t get through it. If the crater dies down so that those men aren’t afraid, they’ll come up here and attack. If they don’t come, in time we’ll have to go down to them—driven by the cold. It looks as if we were trapped with no hope of escape. Just the same, I believe you. . . . I think we’re going to go on, you and I, through some gate I haven’t figured on. I brought you up here looking for the hundredth chance, and maybe we’ll find it yet.”

“I know we will. . . . The men aren’t firing so often now.”

“They’re waiting for better light, and for us to come out and show ourselves. Grace, they may make an attack any minute now. They’re afraid of the crater, but they may take courage during this lull.”

“Shall we go on higher?”

“I think they’d follow us just the same, and we might not find such a good place to make a stand. This is almost a natural fort. Besides, right here we’re rather out of the track of any snowslide starting around the crater—an easy thing to happen. Dear, in case they do attack—I want some directions.”

“What?”

“Sometimes if the leaders are killed, the rest lose heart and fall back. This is especially true of primitive people like these, depending on hysteria rather than bravery. We have only a few shells—just the ones in the magazine of the pistol. In case we are attacked, do you want me to shoot first at—at the leaders?”

She looked him full in the eyes. “Do what is best,” she told him. “If it helps our chances—shoot down the leaders first.”

They waited, but no grouping of the men below indicated an immediate assault. The latter were waiting, patiently enough, for the crater fires to burn still lower. Then they could launch their charge with spirit.

The charge was never made. The gods laughed at the thought.

Only a few lesser aspects of the convulsion of the next moment were discernible to human senses. Much of it was simply beyond sense. Because mountain-making is an almost forgotten trade, and the earth’s crust was largely fixed before human life came to it, man has gained no supersenses whereby he may grasp such a thing as now came to pass at this Land’s End on the edge of the world. Man can only stare, and lift up his hands, and perhaps die from overstimulation of his nerves. This is not Nature’s fault.

She was careful to do most of her mighty works before man came. If he venture here, in this last of her workshops, the consequence must be on his own head. Nature is not yet ready for him in Hopeless Land, and he is an interloper. Perhaps that is why here she remains so inhospitable, with her winds and her fogs and her desolation.

This man and woman, hovering in the snow, were nothing to her. In this vast outburst they were no more than two stones hurled into the air, and those who shrieked and fled at the mountain's base were as cinders carried on the winds. They were forgotten, and they forgot themselves. They forgot that they lived, that they ever were. The thing went on as if they were not there; and it was all beyond them, outside of them, and unconnected with them. It was cosmic, and they were little and mortal. It was aboriginal, and they were passing dust, blown by the Wind of Life.

The solid ground below them began to roll like water in a storm. The folds of the earth's crust rippled and changed. The huge strata blocks that composed the mountains quaked and stirred, then were shifted, tipped and dislodged. Crags were split apart in travail.

Somewhere in the bowels of the earth a sound began. A stir, a sigh, a long groan, a rumble that grew into a roar, a thunderous and stupendous crash, and after this great waves and volleys beyond all hearing; riding, sweeping, unconscionable hosts of sound. In that swirling tempest of vibration not only hearing was numbed, but the blast was carried over those mysterious wires that connect the senses, and all sensation was obliterated. It was as if the light rays could not pass through the sea of sound, and darkness dropped over the eyes as in sudden blinding. Within that sea, the groan of a cliff split in twain was overwhelmed and lost. The shriek of a mountain in labor, forcing from its womb of rock a new hill, was little and shrill like the cry of a strange bird, heard at night. The shattering of a promontory was a muttered rumbling, far away.

Change. Renewal. Overthrow. . . . Leaping flame and surging lava. . . . Bowlders hurled and falling. . . . Havoc. Dissolution. Darkness. Cataclysm.

CHAPTER XXIII

BERT opened his eyes after a time, was conscious of light, and then went to sleep. The monitors of his being, watching over him, the guardian subconscious, ever wakeful and vigilant, prodded him while he slept, so he wakened soon. . . . Just how long a time had passed he did not know, and he never did know. Dawn had come up in the meantime, a queer, red, incredible dawn, perhaps like that first dawn, when the darkness that had been upon the face of the waters was divided from the day, and the earth was without form and void.

It was queer to see grass trying to cling in the gravel below snow-line. . . . A violent wind sweeping up the mountainside, an aftermath of the eruption, recalled him to the warm burden in his arms, and thus, in a dim commencement, to himself. Fortunately they were both protected by their rocky nest, or Grace would have certainly been blown from his arms. He held her close, sheltering her; and this was an instinctive rather than a conscious act on his part.

Except for the hurricane, already dying away, he was aware of no great tumult in the elements. At intervals he heard the distant roar of a snowslide, and everywhere were low, rumbling, rolling noises that were the outcry of the land settling down again. Occasionally a bowlder crashed down the mountain, leaping and bounding in insensate fury, but all this was so much bigger than he was, so beyond him to check or to stay, that he gave little more thought to it than man gives to a star that may sometime crash into the earth and destroy it. Far beyond the hills he heard a swelling murmur that might be of a tidal-wave; and he thought of Rufus Carter, fleeing toward the sea, and of the villagers scurrying down the red gorge like field-mice when the plow destroys their nest of grass.

Grace was awake, but bewildered and unable to speak. As far as his quickening gaze could tell she was not hurt. The contemplation of this fact steadied him, brought him back partly to himself, and cleared his addled brain. Certain self-knowledge and identity returned to him. Thinking of her, he was able to think of himself and of life as he knew it. He began to look about and try to understand. A childish curiosity wakened in him as to why he still lived, why the girl lay, whole and unshattered, in his arms.

He began to look about. It was obvious at once that the immediate part of the mountain on which he lay had suffered no great convulsion. Some bowlders had fallen, and one made a road through the gravel but a few feet from where he lay, and had disappeared behind a mysterious wall of steam below him. Many of the rocks were dislodged, and even some of those among which he lay had moved and shifted about; but none of them had crushed down against him, and the huge stratum that was the bed-rock of this immediate neighborhood had suffered no great change. Evidently the main convulsion had occurred on the south and west sides of the mountain.

It was apparent that the smoking, fire-filled crater above him had been blown out and enlarged, and it was likewise apparent that danger from this source was far from past. He and his charge must not linger here on the mountain. The great quantity of ashes discharged from this and other new craters was still held aloft by the winds, but molten lava now made wide, moving lakes in the white snow above them. The dark streams poured not only from the original crater, but from innumerable seams and crevices in the broken strata, and flowing slowly down the slope, they would surely reach them in a short time.

"Grace, we must go," he told her, speaking quietly in her ear.

The quickness of her response amazed him. She got up like one who is abruptly called from sleep. Of course she was still dazed; but he thought the trials that faced them would soon call her to herself. Hand in hand, they started back down the slope.

They learned soon enough that escape down the gorge and the river to Bering Sea was cut off. No savages menaced them now, but they found an even more puissant foe. A short distance below their refuge a fault had seamed the strata, and the imprisoned giants in the mountain had found this weakness. It was as if one of them had thrust through a hand and ripped apart the strata. A huge crevice was left, miles in length. From this smoke and lava were pouring, and the village at the foot of the mountain had been utterly overwhelmed by the boiling flood.

No ruin was left to show that it had ever been—only a dark red lake of lava settling slowly down between the abrupt walls of the gorge. Grace looked in vain for the river she had loved. This was the first fatality on the list. The gurgling, glimmering cascades had possessed life for her, and now the stream had died.

Whether human lives had been swept away in the fire-flood she did not know, but it seemed probable that by running fast and climbing up to the

hills all or most of the villagers had escaped. . . . The trail along the hills was closed to her and Bert. In one direction the crevice below them ran clear among the new craters at the west side of the mountain, now the scene of violent volcanic activity, and extending across the mouth of the valley and the flanking ranges, it circled the mountain out of sight.

To follow it was the only possible course, seeking some way across or around it. Hand in hand they went on, voiceless and stricken by the mighty change. It was a strange quest they made, this for life among the ruin of the mountains. They were like two children, lost on an uninhabited sphere. This was all as a dream through which they wandered—gray, desolate, vague, and unearthly.

Great bowlders rolled at them from the heights, but crashed by hardly seen or heard. Bert led her over heaps of shattered rock, around overturned crags, past fissures where the steam-jets took ghostly forms. He avoided new crevices and miniature craters; and once they had to run to escape a narrow, swift-flowing river of lava, pouring down the steep course of an old waterway. Vagrant winds that crept and hunted through the gullies occasionally hid them in clouds of ashes and cinders, and at such times they clung fast to each other and waited for the light.

Wide-eyed, pale, with the aftermath of their terror still visible in their drawn faces, they wandered on through this limbus of snow and fire. The urge came from within; neither was conscious of a directing intelligence, or realized the almost superhuman effort they were making. They chose their path by instinct, as might the wild things terror-stricken on the surrounding hills. Because hope is a personal emotion, contingent upon a vivid self-consciousness, these two dreamers could not at first experience it, any more than they could experience despair or even self-associated fear. As Bert's steadily rallying faculties tendered him the capacity to hope, his sharpening perceptions denied the sense of hope. He found hope only to lose it.

For this seemed to be a losing game. The longer they stayed on the mountain the less their chance to get off. Violent quakes were frequent, new fissures were forming, lava flowed, and the enemy on the heights cannonaded them with bowlders. Every way they turned a new foe rose to confront them. And now they came to what seemed the end of the trail.

As far as Bert could see they were blockaded on all sides. Behind him were the fiery craters. Below was the long crevice that severed them from the valleys and ridges leading to the sea. In front, breaking his heart, was a shallow gully in the mountainside, and down it ran a river of lava connecting

with the crevice. Above was only the deep snow, threatening every instant to pile down on them in an avalanche, and beyond human strength to push through.

He turned to her, and she sighed and rubbed her eyes with her hands. He saw her try to drive off the mist of dreams, and rally her faculties so she might follow his thoughts. “What now, dear boy?” she murmured.

“It looks like we are beaten, after all. The way is blocked. Of course we can go up and try to force through that eight feet of snow, but we’ll never make it. . . . A man can’t push through snow like that unless he has snowshoes, or a trail to follow.”

She looked up dully to the white desert above her, clear to the flames that burst above it from the original crater on a hidden shoulder of the mountain. Her gaze quickened, and then she laughed aloud.

This was not a sob which sometimes sounds like a laugh. Her eyes and her lips and the music in the sound itself established this fact. The laugh was not quite sane; it was on the edge of hysteria, yet ringing, happy, and childish, not wild and harsh, and even as he feared it, it lifted up Bert’s heart.

“Oh, I knew it, I knew it!” she exulted.

“Grace—knew what!”

“That we’d get out. That we’d come through! Who could hold you back? Bert, didn’t you say a *trail*—a trail to follow?”

“Grace, what do you see?” Bert looked back over his head.

“Old Dirty Face—that’s what I see! Look at him, Bert. Old Dirty Face has come to show us the way.”

Above him, and behind him, she pointed out a dark dot moving slowly through the snow, the form of one of the Peninsula bears. Whether it was the venerable Dirty Face he did not know, but certainly it was a monstrous fellow who rammed the drifts like a plow. Those adamantine depths were nothing to him. He was all but out of sight under the feathery barrier, but he steered a straight course and his motions were as regular as those of thrusting pistons. Whatever his name and his degree, this old mountain-ranger was not turning a hair.

He could well be Dirty Face. Such would be eminently fitting. Bert was calm enough to think the coincidence almost too strange to credit, but at

least this bear was one of the old monarch's subjects, paying the debts of his king.

A trail to follow, Bert had said. Here was a trail to follow through the snow!

Old Dirty Face (if such he was) cared not at all about these two who trailed him through the drifts. He was absorbed in making his escape from this topsy-turvy mountain and seeking an adjacent valley where he might dwell in comfort and security. It is doubtful if he even saw them. They were almost out of range of his near-sighted eyes to start with, and because they could not travel as fast as he could break trail, the distance between him and them slowly widened. No one cared about this. His acquaintance with human beings was limited, and the less he saw of them the better he liked it. On their part, they were content to follow leisurely behind him.

He had probably been on the mountain before its eruption; and by crossing back in an oblique course up the mountain the twain soon encountered his tracks just above snow-line. From thence they went upward into deep snow where they could not have hoped to push through unaided. Here his huge body left a wide path that was almost a tunnel through the drifts.

Even now the mountain remained all but insuperable. No ordinary effort could win for them. Bert was obliged to lend much of his strength to Grace, and extraordinary man though he was, he got her up to the shoulder of the mountain only after a stern fight. Yet not at any time did he doubt that he could carry on. This help had not come to taunt him with false hopes; and somehow he would find the way through and out.

The bear chose his course like a veteran—up to and around the small crater the lava from which had cut off escape from the foot of the grade, then around the shoulder of the mountain and down on the opposite side. The Kadiak bear is famous for an extraordinary intelligence and resource, and to these the rescued pair were grateful. They followed his trail clear down to snow-line on the east side of the mountain, arriving in time to see him vanish into the thickets below. Then, and not till then, they sought their own course.

Another night lay over the land when they reached the first alder-thicket near Pavlof's mighty base. Here they made a primitive camp: simply a low fire of alder boughs to repel the worst of the cold, and a nest of grass for the

girl's bed. She slept fitfully, hungry and close to exhaustion: Bert squatted by the fire as might his Neolithic ancestor, napping between his periodic trips after fresh fuel. In the dawn they rose and pushed toward the glint of gray water far below.

And they made it through. Aching, lame, and muscle-bound, only partially rested by their broken sleep, and acutely hungry from their long fast, they stood on the shores of that long blue finger of the North Pacific that men call Pavlof Bay. They had crossed the divide from Bering Sea. On the way they had chances at game—first a ptarmigan which Bert stalked with protracted care only to miss when the pistol shook in his unsteady hand, and then, near the shores of the bay, a porcupine which he ran down and killed with ease. On the shore they made a fire of alder boughs to roast the creature's uninviting flesh.

But the meat gave them strength, and they pushed on down the bay. They would win out now, even if they had to follow the beach clear down to the open sea and around to King Cove, at the mouth of a deep-cut bay to the west. The pistol would supply them with food—a caribou to stalk with consummate stealth and kill at ten paces—and they would know low fires in the alder-thickets at night. Skilled hunter that he was, rough-schooled in an inhospitable wilderness, Bert could not fail to carry his loved one through.

They were spared the long trail. Shortly after noon they heard the shriek of a ship's whistle, and presently saw a sturdy launch pushing up through the ash-strewn waters. It turned out to be the Warrior, sent out by Bradford of the Squaw Harbor cannery in search of the watchman of his fish-trap, located in the upper waters of the bay. A signal from Bert brought a skiff to the beach, manned by blond, blue-eyed seamen in Bradford's employ. . . . Knowing this Land's End, they smoked and mused while he narrated the main events of his great tale. . . .

In Bradford's comfortable quarters at Squaw Harbor Grace rested, bathed, ate good food, and slept the lameness from her muscles. Yet before she went to sleep in the cool room, overlooking the sea, that Bradford had appointed for her use, she settled certain matters of profound moment in the lives of herself and Bert. She felt that she owed this man immediate hearing and judgment.

Moreover—she could not wait herself.

"Bert, we've been drawn wonderfully close to each other in the past weeks—and the last two days have been the equal of a lifetime," she told him, as he bade her good night beside her couch. "Your love for me did part

of it—what you are yourself did the rest. Now—now we've got to decide what to do."

"It is for you to decide that," he told her.

"I don't know. . . . I'm not sure of anything. Perhaps it is for you to decide. Bert, I have always been a victim of my heart. It rules me, instead of my ruling it. And there is a side of me that responds deeply to another's love. I need love, even more than most women. . . .

"We must decide whether we can go on, or whether we had better say good-by. . . . It may be, in a little while, I will come to love you as you love me. After weeks and months have passed and certain memories begin to fade, I don't think I can resist loving you, if we go on together. My heart tells me that. . . . I have had your kisses, and have been in your arms, and have felt your love for me, and all of these have great meaning for one who is created as I am. . . . I will be able to forget Paul, in time: I have been forgetting him for many days. The question is now—whether I dare let myself grow to love you, whether you dare let me love you.

"If I learned to, I would marry you—and I would let nothing stand in the way. If you left me now, I could bear it. It would be harder than you know, but I could—I could let you go. If I learned to love you, I couldn't let you go. That is Grace Crowell. . . . That is the way I am made.

"We must decide now whether to go on together, or part. If there is a barrier of race between us, I think it is best for both of us to take the latter course—now, before it is too late. We can stand it now, for the good of both of us, in spite of your love for me, and my growing fondness for you. . . ."

She had never seen his eyes shine as they shone now, burning into her, overpowering her with his fire. "You speak—as if you doubt that a barrier of race does exist."

"I do doubt it. I can't help it. I have been putting two and two together. Paul was not the Fieldmasters' son, and she sent me into the North to find some one. . . . It is all very strange."

"And if that barrier is not there—if what you guess is true—you will let me go on?" He held her hands in a firm grasp. "You will let things take their course, come what may?"

She smiled through a faint luster of tears. "Come what may," she replied. "I could let myself learn to love you, then—without fear, or holding back."

"Then, Grace—we shall go on together. We shall see how it goes. We will take what is given us."

"Because?"

"Because I am white."

Soon after this he left her, to pleasant and untroubled sleep. Yet not all of him went away. Some of him stayed in her heart, and his kiss lingered, warm and serene, upon her lips.

In due time Grace and Bert sailed in the Catherine D. around to Port Moller, the salmon station on the Bering Sea side of the Peninsula, there to make arrangements for the rescue of Rufus Carter. The rescue itself proved a thrilling episode. A cannery tender was anchored in deep water opposite the mouth of Pavlof River, and an Eskimo youth rode his *bidarka* through the surf to the beach. Presently he came flying out with Carter—pale, tattered, not overly clean, and terrified at his wild ride, but inexpressibly happy to see white faces again. It turned out that he had suffered no great harm. As Bert had predicted, the native trapper at the river mouth had taken him in and cared for him. His flight first from the village, then from the lava, and finally the breath-taking, heart-stopping trip in a native skin boat through a white surf made tales for Carter to tell the remainder of his life. He had had his great adventure.

He reported that the Pavlof people had suffered but few casualties. By far the greater part of the tribe had moved down into Izanback Bay, and here a cannery tender would meet them with supplies and equipment whereby they could carry on their primitive pursuits in Hopeless Land.

From Port Moller the three white people returned with the Catherine D. to civilization. There is no need to follow them, and to tell of that which shone in an invalid woman's face at the sight of her repatriated son. . . . Grace was never certain that she saw Paul again. As the ship passed Izanback Bay, her binoculars brought out an Alaskan scene that seemed of profound significance, yet whether he was the central figure in it she never knew.

The shining bands were running up the salmon-rivers, just as Paul had wished to see. Beside a little stream, flowing into the bay, two natives were busy at the country's first industry. A man was netting salmon, which he gave to a woman to dress, hang up on racks, and dry. Through the small

bright circle of the lens the man looked like Paul. The woman resembled Veda.

No doubt Paul also had come home.

“And God said, Let the earth bring forth the living creature after his kind, cattle, and creeping thing, and beast of the earth after his kind; and it was so.”

THE END

TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Misspelled words and printer errors have been corrected. Where multiple spellings occur, majority use has been employed.

Punctuation has been maintained except where obvious printer errors occur.

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[The end of *The Sleeper of the Moonlit Ranges* by Edison Marshall]