

*TWO ENDS
OF
OUR SHOESTRING*

Kathrene Pinkerton

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THREE'S A CREW

ADVENTURE NORTH

KATHRENE PINKERTON

Two Ends
to
Our Shoestring

A stylized, cursive monogram or signature. It features a large, elegant 'P' with a long, sweeping tail that loops around and ends in a small 'hb' at the bottom.

HARCOURT, BRACE AND COMPANY, NEW YORK

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Two Ends to Our Shoestring

1. Cupid Travels Light

As I crossed the coffee shop to join Robert at our usual table I felt we were about to say momentous things to each other. We were meeting to discuss, or perhaps to verify, the amazing fact that we had suddenly found ourselves engaged to marry. The engagement had happened without warning the previous evening.

I was still startled. And I'd noticed that Robert's voice had sounded a bit shaken when, over the telephone, he'd asked me to join him for midmorning coffee.

We'd known each other only a few weeks. Neither knew any of the things one is supposed to know about the person with whom he proposes to spend the rest of his life. But we did know we enjoyed doing things together.

We hadn't had time to do very much. We'd shared evenings and mealtimes and had talked endlessly at this same table where we now met. But I felt there were still many things to talk over. I wasn't suffering qualms of doubt and I trusted Robert wasn't wavering. But during my walk to work that morning I'd suddenly realized I was planning to marry a man of whom I knew a great deal, and yet very little. We'd discovered each other as persons, but neither knew anything of the other's orbits.

I knew he was a newspaperman who had aroused the envy of settled males by his happy fashion of dropping any job, at any time, and disappearing for months or even a year. He'd been an in-and-outer on an astonishing number of metropolitan newspapers and friends said he could go places if he'd only stay and do it. But they had said this rather enviously.

Colorful tales of his wanderings had proceeded his arrival in Milwaukee, but these stories of winters spent in logging camps and summers on wilderness canoe journeys had not aroused my interest. There was nothing admirable in so wasting college and newspaper training. I was prepared to dislike him thoroughly and fully intended to do my bit toward puncturing any big he-man gestures. But he didn't indulge in any. He merely seemed to regard enjoyment as a natural aim in living, an attitude which produced adventure even in prosy Milwaukee.

In the surprise of our engagement we hadn't gone beyond a blithe decision to marry, but I knew, even if Robert didn't, that we faced practical

details. Marriage entailed a home, and a home had to be set somewhere. When, where and how, unfortunately, were important questions even in high romance. We weren't a pair of birds who need only wing south together. And possibly birdland romances weren't as simple as that. Even little Miss Robin may look for bits of string and promising twigs when she has heard a song she likes.

It would have been strange had I not been aware of matrimonial conventions, for my life had followed the usual pattern. In education and training I was just one of thousands of young women turned out of our universities every year. I had chosen to major in Latin largely because I had admired a high school Latin instructor, and then in my third year at Wisconsin I had discovered economics and sociology through that inspired teacher, Dr. E. A. Ross. Immediately I had changed to social service in the field of public health. After graduation came a Russell Sage scholarship, a housing investigation and residence in Hull House and Chicago Commons. Now for a year I had been absorbed in a pioneering campaign for the prevention of tuberculosis. I had plunged into the battle with a crusader's zeal and life seemed unsupportable until the common drinking cup and towel were banished and tuberculosis no longer entailed a social stigma.

My earnestness amused Robert, and I gathered he hadn't known many earnest women. To me, my secretaryship was a job which needed doing and I never thought of it as a career or of myself as a career woman. But there was a basis for the aghast faces of Robert's old newspaper pals when they met him so constantly with a "welfare worker."

My attitude toward the business of being a woman and toward a woman's background was even more conventional than my education. I had been reared in a family which had the "own your own home" fixation. On the rare occasions when sound reasons had compelled a move, we sold one home and immediately bought another. Rather, I'm sure, it must have been the other way about. Under no consideration would we have sold one house before we possessed another, and thus have become even for a moment that feckless object, a family without a home.

Neither were our possessions shed lightly. Enormous carved walnut furniture went wherever we went. The massive pieces might make a new home appear to be on the eve of an auction, but in time that home would be made to fit us and our belongings. This sometimes required a major operation, as when the dining room ceiling had to be raised to accommodate a sideboard of altarlike proportions. But no one suggested, and I'm sure it

wouldn't have been considered, that the sideboard be cut down to fit the room.

This belief in the sanctity of property had carried us tranquilly through a thrice daily torture. I'm sure my parents must have secretly admitted that our dining chairs, fiddlebacked and with slippery seats of black horsehair, were uncomfortable and much too fragile in a household of four active youngsters. At least one chair was in a cabinet shop at all times, but no one ever suggested that the chairs be permanently retired. For they were ours!

Thus I had been conditioned to a belief in stability, permanence, and the virtue of possessions. And having heard Robert boast that he could pack everything he owned in one suitcase, I realized, even if he didn't, what a change he faced. Romance was about to sell him out to impedimenta, but I trusted that he'd never feel its burden. While his past life might not have been one long earnest drive toward a fixed goal, I assumed that now his odd habit of periodic disappearances was as finished as the single suitcase era.

Such a transformation fell within the fixed pattern with which I was familiar, and it was as true of his family history as of mine. We'd both had wandering forbears. Robert's grandfather had run away to sea from Edinburgh University, shipped as a cabin boy, crossed the equator thirty-six times, and had not returned home until he was captain of the same ship on which he'd run away. He'd fought with rope's ends, and once when drunk, he'd kicked the sacred bull of Calcutta and had been saved from an infuriated populace only by the providential presence of the British Marines. But eventually he'd settled down as a farmer-parson to preach fiery sermons about sins of which he must have had first hand knowledge. Robert remembered him as a colorful old fellow who could still knock his opponent from a prize ring, read his Greek Bible and write his grandson an original verse in Latin on each birthday.

My grandfather had been more reticent about his seagoing youth. I'd thought of him only as a dignified patriarch who each morning was driven to his office by a coachman. And then a belated investigation of a bygone ship's mutiny summonsed grandfather for testimony. He had actually seen men walk the plank! As we children watched him set off the morning of the trial, the punctilious old gentleman was probably swaggering a bit. But I was sure I detected the rolling gait of a sailor. The coachman looked at him with new respect and, I thought, so did the span of horses. Grandfather had gone to great pains to make it clear he'd been on the side of law and order, but not for a moment did we youngsters believe him. We weren't letting stuffy virtue spoil this thrilling flotsam from an adventurous past.

I must have had other sea-roving ancestors for there are ships, points, islands, and a channel in New York harbor which bear the family name. As a child I'd had to ferret out these exciting facts for myself, for my aunts, self-constituted family historians, placed entire emphasis on a royal grant which had given the family vast holdings on the Hudson River. It was a great shock to me to discover that not a foot of this land was still in our possession, but I felt better when I learned it had been confiscated when my forbears chose to fight on the wrong side of the Revolution. Thus I have no 1776 heroes in my family tree, but at least my ancestors had been willing to pay for their convictions.

Restlessness had played no part in our parents' history. Robert's father had such distaste for the open spaces that he refused even to go on picnics. But he had enlivened a country medical practice by driving fast horses and made widely separated patients the excuse for owning some which could do a three-minute mile. My father's business of canning vegetables and making pickles was even more prosaic, but he'd had his moments of revolt. Greatly to the mortification of his sisters, he had chosen the family crest as a trademark. He would never admit anything derisive in this use of armorial bearings but, young as I was, I knew his pickle label was a comment on the importance of the present rather than of the past.

Family histories like ours were commonplace in the Middle West and I'd noticed that the final settling down of restless forbears was usually attributed to one reason. Practically all sagas of male roving ended with, "And then he married your grandmother."

Already Robert had indicated a tendency to fall into this set pattern. At least he'd shown flexibility, for the overnight stop in Milwaukee which he'd intended had been stretched into sufficient weeks to get himself engaged. To make this extended visit possible he'd even allowed himself to be impressed into labor, a part-time publicity job which didn't interfere with his helping life roll by.

Now as we waited for our coffee to be served and for the waiter to get beyond earshot, I was expecting momentous statements, plans for permanence and stability commensurate with this great occasion. Robert had been very quiet. Undoubtedly he'd been wondering about this new companion whom propinquity or an emotional upheaval had thrust so suddenly into his life. And he'd evidently foreseen adjustments, although I'm sure he intended his remark to be the graceful speech of a man in love. When the waiter had finally departed, Robert smiled at me across the table.

“Anyway,” he said, “when we have to get out of town on a shoestring, we’ll each grab an end.”

I laughed. I really thought he’d made a joke and Robert was not aware he’d made a profound comment. But he’d stumbled upon a fundamental, and the momentous statement I’d been awaiting had been made, only to pass unnoticed.

It was a year before Robert’s speech began to have meaning for me, or that I even suspected successful marriages always have, and always will, operate on the shoestring principle. This shoestring is seldom so obvious and easily evaluated as the last few dollars in the bank. More often it is a basic asset, a common fund of courage, of vision, of hope or determination. It may be only a conviction that being together gives life its zest. But so long as each will grab an end, any pair can get out of towns, out of tight places, even out of disaster, together.

When I laughed at Robert’s remark I was only a single-minded female intent on seeing a rosy dream assume concrete form. I sobered instantly and asked if he had a sound idea about our future.

“I’ve held forty-two jobs in the last five years,” he said.

“Heavens!” I cried. “Couldn’t you ever keep one?”

“Never been fired yet,” he said. “Once I decided not to work at any job more than a week. Put it over for a year, too.”

He appeared to find this record quite commendable.

“Then the half-job you have now fits the picture,” I said. “It will be finished in ten days.”

He grinned. “Looks like I’d have to catch me another. You want to stay in town?”

I’d hoped to complete some pet projects. And two pay checks seemed advisable for a pair whose combined property was a typewriter and an alarm clock. I owned the clock.

He was startled when I spoke of buying household equipment.

“We don’t want to be cluttered up with things,” he said.

I stiffened. During the housing investigation in Chicago, I’d seen people uncluttered by possessions. Housekeeping rooms in brownstone fronts, rusty gas plates and limp lace curtains—in these dead ends of defeat I’d seen college emblems and framed photographs of fraternity groups, reminders of

what can happen to high hope. Eyes had been averted as I filled my questionnaire. I was primed and ready to tell Robert that not owning things does something to people.

He looked daunted, but he brightened when he discovered I was only defending a creed and hadn't actually worked out of the price of self-esteem in van loads.

I didn't know how great a beginning we had made on practical problems until a few evenings later. When I joined Robert for dinner it was evident he had news. He couldn't keep it until cocktails were served so that we might observe the occasion properly.

"Just got my fourth, fifth and sixth jobs," he said.

"Six jobs!" I gasped. "Not all at once?"

He nodded. "When people heard I was getting married they seemed to think I'd stick around for a change. I can see a wife'll be a lot of help."

The six jobs were an odd assortment—press agent for three theaters and a welfare association, editor, and sole contributor, of a small magazine, and an assignment for a series of special articles. I wondered when he'd ever be in this future home of ours.

Jobs weren't all he'd collected. He had four replies to an advertisement stating that a nice young couple, unencumbered by pets or children, desired to rent a furnished apartment. I'd read the notice in my daily perusal of the want ads and hadn't recognized ourselves.

"Wanted to surprise you with something good," he said.

Robert's laconic description had brought in not mere nibbles but real strikes. Four women, none of whom had ever leased her possessions, were eager to leave them in our care. The shortest suggested lease was a month, the longest a year.

I was still weighing the merits of Oriental rugs against a southern exposure when Robert held out a letter.

"This is the place for us," he said. "They want to rent for an indefinite period. That won't tie us down."

We rushed through dinner and called on the "indefinite period" couple. They loved their home and I'm sure they would never have allowed a tenant in it had they not loved Dickie more.

Dickie was a capricious canary who required daily exercise, a half hour of flying in the apartment. His owners instructed us in his schedule of baths and food and taught us the peculiar chirp which recalled him to his cage. It seemed simple, but we didn't know Dickie's capabilities when we accepted his custody so lightly.

Had anyone seen us a half hour later as we stood in the street and studied the exterior of that building, he might have concluded we were planning a second-story burglary. But we were only ascertaining the exact location of those corner rooms. Those lighted windows completed a marvelous day.

"Seven jobs, a home, a canary," Robert said. "What more do two people need?"

And so we were married. That was early in 1911.

Our cook materialized as magically as did the six jobs and the apartment. Anna, a successful cateress, opened the negotiations. She said it would be restful to take care of only one couple, but apparently she had forgotten how to rest. When there were only two to eat the nightly banquets, her disappointment was so intense Robert and I felt compelled to go into the highways and byways in search of guests. We fed people whom we knew only slightly. We even fed comparative strangers but Anna was completely happy.

I noticed that more and more Robert took on this task of picking up the odd guest for dinner. He was filled with the zeal of a recent convert and would even bring home men for whom he'd never cared especially.

"The fellow's lonely and I felt sorry for him," he'd explain.

His manner suggested that he generously wished to share good fortune, but I knew he loved showing off his home. Then I understood that Robert was "settling down" and I began to be as proud of that apartment as had been its owners. I forgot even their existence. It became home to us.

Even Dickie seemed ours. The daily struggle to lure him into his cage became a household rite. We hadn't mastered canary language or he presumed on good nature for he changed the exercise period into a protracted game of tag. He worked out cunning elaborations and would sit poised on his perch until we closed in upon him and then wing off like a yellow streak before we could shut the cage. Once, and that was a household crisis, he escaped to the out-of-doors and sat in a tree while Anna, Robert, and I stood at open windows and chirped continuously for three hours. Only oncoming darkness or Dickie's conscience decided him to end our torment.

Our life had become so regular, so occupied and filled with deep content, I was startled one evening when Robert broached a new idea. He'd come from a chat with Bunnie Hoyt, an old newspaper pal who had sold stories and a play and maintained that anyone could write. Bunnie had expounded this theory over several beers. Impressed, Robert had stopped on his way home to examine an array of periodicals on a corner stand.

"Every one of those magazines buys words," he said. "Anywhere up to 100,000 words in an issue and twelve to fifty-two issues a year. Think of it!"

I tried to, but a figure which extends past three ciphers becomes a mental blur for me. And there wasn't any time for writing stories.

Robert watched my face and then concluded rather lamely, "We could live anywhere if we wrote for magazines."

The seed Bunnie had planted lay dormant until we happened upon a magazine article on fiction writing. The author, a productive writer, gave his formula, and a temporary lull in publicity work gave us leisure. We got out the typewriter and faithfully followed the recipe. Robert knew the north woods and I thought I knew women. We pooled our ideas and finished the novelette in five days.

Bob Davis bought it for a Munsey publication on its first trip out. When the check for one hundred and fifty dollars had actually confirmed my belief in miracles, I got out paper and pencil and computed our possible income. Six periods of five days each in every month and twelve months in every year could produce seventy-two yarns. The extra day left over in the longer months was neatly disposed of as a quiet week end. But when I multiplied one hundred and fifty dollars by seventy-two, the result didn't make sense and I ascribed this to my mental blur when confronted by three ciphers.

Robert can bandy imposing figures, but he didn't believe my results. Had he accepted them as a remote possibility we would have begun at once on another story. We were tempted to do so when our yarn appeared in print, sandwiched in between stories by Mary Roberts Rinehart and Frank Condon. The magazine, *Cavalier*, lay ostentatiously on our library table for weeks.

But some strange lack of faith in that so-called foolproof formula restrained us. Robert was sure there'd been a trick in it which we hadn't mastered. So for the time the fiction incident was closed. At least I thought so, until Robert turned the pages of the *Cavalier* one evening.

"Wish we could knock off and try selling words," he said.

And I failed to see another signpost.

One evening I was feeling enormously efficient. I'd opened a savings account and the banker explained the dazzling rewards of investment. I remarked that our rent money would go a long way toward buying our own things.

Robert agreed, and then added, "But we don't want to do that yet."

I didn't discuss his final adverb. Perhaps I only sensed its implication. Restlessness was too definite a word for the state of mind of people whose whole thought and drive was centered on starting a home. But a sense of impending change was in the air.

The change began in an unexpected quarter, and as a farce. Robert shook me awake at three o'clock one morning to explain he'd been warned that another mastoid would be serious, possibly fatal. Until then I'd never heard he'd had a mastoid. Naturally, anything which had happened to him was enormously important to me, but I did inquire why he had chosen this strange hour to go into the past.

"Because I've got one now," he said.

I switched on the light.

"Mastoid!" I jeered. "You've got the mumps."

"Really?" he asked happily. "How'd you know?"

I handed him a mirror. And we both laughed. Mumps seemed only a slightly ludicrous personal misfortune until the weeks passed with doctors, nurses, temperatures and complications. Apparently there was no end to the ingenuity of the human body in revolt. When the worst was over and Robert was up again, but weak and shaken and unable to carry on even one job, I went to a doctor who knew Robert's history. I didn't get much sympathy, but I did get the truth.

"We've been kicking that man out of town for years," he said. "Known for months he was asking for a crack-up. Six jobs! Whose bright idea was that? You ought to know what happens, once bodily resistance has been lowered."

The doctor and I talked over a new regime and I took the prescription home to Robert. No office work, no cities, an outdoor life, exercise and absorbing interests.

As Robert listened to his sentence he looked like a man who was being granted a reprieve.

“Gives us a chance to try out that fiction formula,” he said.

The idea was cheering. I’d been trying to imagine what the wife of a hunter, trader or trapper did with her days.

“And weren’t we smart when we didn’t tie ourselves down?” Robert demanded. “You and I can be out of here in a week.”

It was then that I thought of the shoestring and I began to understand a little of what Robert had really said in the coffee shop that morning a year before.

2. *A Few Things Are Free*

FOR a year Robert's glowing accounts of the wilderness had ended with the promise that some time he would show me "the bush." It was very much as other young husbands say, "Some day, when we're all set, we'll take a trip around the world." And like all other young wives I'd listened, and agreed, knowing always how many things can interfere with plans.

Now a pleasant daydream had suddenly become reality and Robert's next disappearance into the North was to be aided and abetted by a wife.

"Let's choose a country we can have to ourselves," he said as he brought out the maps.

A district in western Ontario, lying north of the Great Lakes, was as vacant a land as we could have found without becoming real explorers. Except for a transcontinental railroad, the great region of forest, lakes and muskeg was untouched by civilization, and in that emptiness all the sinews of a home, game, building logs and cabin sites, were ours for the taking.

I quickened to the word home and asked Robert if he were sure he could build a log cabin.

"Alone and with others, I've built six," he said. "Ought to be able to run up another."

"And you're sure that country has things to eat?" I asked.

"Best eating you ever had!" Robert answered. "You don't know food until you've tasted moose meat, or whitefish out of icy water. Finest food in the world and it costs nothing. You'll forget what a grocery bill looks like."

This slight exaggeration was intended to console me. We'd already taken financial stock and I'd been amazed at what we'd spent. I'd left household shopping to Anna, but that evening as I looked over old grocery slips I wondered what, besides eating, was done with butter. And I'd understood why "Fancy Groceries" in bold black type headed our merchant's billheads.

However, all that was money over the millwheel. My concern was the low level of the millpond, which had been further drained by Robert's illness. And I was puzzled as to how to budget for this fabulous land where even food and shelter were free. But Robert had gone on to more aesthetic matters and was becoming almost lyrical.

“Wait till you see a northern lake at sunrise! Or paddle down a river between endless miles of forest! Never a road or a dwelling! You can travel for days, weeks, and never meet a human being!”

When the first flush of excitement was past, a natural candor compelled Robert to add a few unimportant details. None of the six cabins had been larger than sixteen by twelve feet and some had dirt floors and were roofed by poles. But he hastened to assure me we’d have a real log cabin, made very elegant with imported grandeur after we’d sold some fiction. He admitted further that, while I would come to love the lakes and rivers of the North, I might find the waterways a bit trying until I’d learned the swing of paddling.

“But you’ll get onto the hang of the North,” he said. “That country was made for a feller who flies into things like you do.”

Any comfort from that remark was shattered in the next few weeks as friends jeered at pioneering pretensions in a girl who’d never cooked a meal or scrubbed a floor, and who assumed water came only from a tap.

One of Robert’s many ex-bosses probed deeper.

“Two people shut up together in a cabin!” he exclaimed. “Never able to get out of each other’s sight! Does Kathrene know she’ll be cold, damned uncomfortable, maybe hungry? You’ll claw and snarl, be back here in six months, grubstake spent, and a busted romance on your hands.”

He was optimistic. Most friends gave us the summer.

He was wrong, too, about the grubstake being spent in six months. It was gone in three. We may have chosen a country we could live on, but to equip ourselves for it we almost wiped out our savings by the purchase of a canoe and camping outfit. We were set down, F.O.B., the Wilderness, with less than a hundred dollars.

Some of Robert’s forecasts were equally wild. His caution that at first I might find northern lakes and rivers a “bit trying” was inexcusably inadequate. In those early days of search for a cabin site, when my hands were all paddle blister and my shoulders one stabbing ache, I stared at those unending stretches of lake with deep hatred. Only by remembering that I was supposed to be one of those people “who fly into things” did I drive myself to another stroke.

But a time came when I was more rapturous than Robert as, two paddles swinging, we set off across a northern lake at sunrise. Our blades dipped into a rosy shimmer and showered drops of crystal. A group of pine-crowned

islets rode high in the dawn mirage and a reflective loon surveyed us from an airy pedestal. Over the encompassing hills marched the unbroken forest in a glistening phalanx. Even the air seemed to sparkle and give joyous promise. I knew the incredible beauty of a new-born world.

We chose our home site on a lake. It was a half day's paddle from a small settlement known as "town" by virtue of store, postoffice and a railroad station. The cabin we built that fall didn't exactly conform with Robert's glowing promises, but I forgot them as I watched a home spring from a forest. "He went into the wilderness and hewed for her a home."

I watched our log walls mount tier by tier and helped in the lifting of our own ridge pole. Then together we transformed a bare shell into a home. Some of Robert, and some of me, and all of our hopes and dreams, went into the building, and because thoughts do work a transformation the completed cabin had for us an intrinsic beauty.

Our friends probably gathered that we'd built something which combined the grace of a Swiss chalet, the charm of an English country house and the romance of a hunting lodge. I didn't intend my letters to be misleading but I wrote with lyrical abandon. I couldn't describe that one-room cabin dispassionately. I knew what had gone into its making.

I wasn't unaware of the fact that the floor, of wide boards with cracks between, was always draughty and in winter was very cold and that the so-called "bathroom" was a Spartan arrangement of tin tub and a barrel of water concealed behind a screen of birchbark. The kitchen corner was as simple—a cookstove, shelves and a table. A typewriter made a workroom in a third corner and in the fourth we arranged a living room with a pole spring couch and a comfortable chair for lounging. Except for a few pictures, books and a rag rug or two, everything had been contrived from the resources of the country. And because the grandeur we'd expected to import did not promise to be immediately forthcoming, we worked the harder to achieve an attractive home. "Boughten" furniture couldn't have pleased us half so much as the huge armchair that Robert hewed of dry cedar and I stained and then upholstered with marsh grass stuffing and a dyed burlap sack.

In early fall we tried the fiction formula. Its only sure-fire feature was the prompt rejection of every story. Just what we'd done the first time, and didn't do the second, or the third, or the fourth, we didn't know. That mystery bothered us as much as the returned manuscripts. I began to dread the mail trip, knowing that at the end of a cold half day's paddle I would

have to watch at least one of those depressing Manila envelopes slid across the blackened counter at the store.

Because our first story had found its home with the Munsey Publications, we made that office the initial port of call for every yarn we wrote. Bob Davis tried to soften refusals by writing cheerfully that we had hit the bull's-eye with our first story and needed only to repeat. He undoubtedly intended to encourage beginners, but he only sunk us lower.

"Good thing we hadn't discovered the flaw in that foolproof recipe for fiction the evening we decided so blithely to go to the wilderness and write," I said one afternoon as we were paddling sadly back from town.

Like most feminine attempts at cheer, my speech misfired. Robert was beginning to get mad.

"We don't have to write fiction," he said.

"No," I agreed, and then added, "but authoring would swing the kind of life we want. It's worth trying for."

Robert beamed. "Hoped you felt that way about it," he said. "We're probably letting ourselves in for something."

Early winter brought on a crisis. Those friends who'd said we would be back within six months almost won their bet. It began to look as though we'd have to go. Our stories had outdone homing pigeons. I needed warm clothes, woolen underwear most of all, and there seemed no prospect of purchasing this basic garment. Supplies for winter must be bought and paddled to the cabin before the lake froze over. After that the trip to "town" would be an all-day toboggan haul for Robert.

The ex-boss had guessed wrong about the snarling and clawing, for if ever that era was to set in, it would be now. Robert and I hold no awards for angelic dispositions and we don't look at life through the same lenses. One is apt to become extremely myopic when the other is suffering from astigmatism, but these differences adjusted themselves even in a one-room cabin. We were too occupied in fighting side by side to beat the North to have time or energy for petty bickering. The land was adversary enough.

And that probably explains the durability of frontier marriage. I had imagined that the pioneers had a greater nobility of character, but now I wondered if they hadn't been just people, and no more forbearing than the rest of us. Undoubtedly they too had their off moments, but the job of pioneering doesn't give much leisure in which to brood about an injured psyche.

The ex-boss was also wrong about our being hungry. But we were leaning heavily on the resources of the country. Even beans were purchased with great discretion and we hadn't bought butter for months. When we put that on the prohibited list of luxuries, I became strangely wrathful about the butter bills of our prodigal days. No longer did they seem merely money over the millwheel. Such large financial gestures didn't come so easily when funds were at the zero point.

Robert's promise of a fabulous land where food and shelter cost nothing had been truthful but incomplete. He'd forgotten to specify just what foods were not free, and as yet we weren't willing to forego flour, sugar, tea, coffee, canned milk, tobacco and most of all that important incidental, postage stamps.

Something had to be done, and soon. I turned to things while Robert still stuck to ideas. Since our Indian neighbors made a good living as trappers, I set out a line of mink traps. Robert decided to abandon fiction for the time and to write articles. There was no mysterious formula in newspaper features or in the factual stories in outdoor magazines. *Outer's Book, Recreation* and *Outing* bought words, and if an account of a few weeks in the wilderness could be sold by sportsmen, certainly our earnest efforts to survive were worth a few stories.

Ideas won. Robert sold two articles before I sold a mink. The same mailbag contained both checks and we spent the evening in a buying spree. We'd already done our window shopping. The mail-order catalogue had been worn to tatters while we decided what we'd buy, if and when we got some money. We were thoroughly conversant with all the data regarding flannel shirts, mittens, caps and socks. And as for that ignoble garment, a woolen union suit! I knew the difference in models down to the very last pearl button!

The order went off and ten days later Robert hauled a loaded toboggan up the lake. His arrival after dark permitted a dramatic entrance as he dragged the toboggan, still snow-covered, into the cabin. Brown paper packages containing winter woolies can't be made to sound thrilling. But to us they were. They changed a threatened rout into a determined stand, for now the troops were clad.

The purchase of winter clothing concluded our first round with the North. We didn't do much scoring in the next rounds, but we stayed in the ring. The North showed what she could do in the matter of blizzards and "cold spells," when the temperature went to fifty or more below. Then there

was an ominous quality in her attack. Cold was no longer an imponderable. It took on force and weight and even imparted a sense of inexorability which left me shaken. I began to understand how native peoples evolve their gods, for when ice in the big lake whined and thundered, I too heard the voice of a threatening presence.

But our answer to all this was practical. We boomed the fires. Often we added a third pair of socks to the two we always wore inside our moccasins, and we remained a respectful distance from frosted windows and draughty corners. When the pale winter sun slipped behind the pine ridge, leaving a world suddenly very cold and terribly still, we made preparations for the night. If the thermometer were dropping fast, we'd both work to carry great piles of wood into the cabin.

I think Robert liked best of all those winter evenings when trees snapped and crackled in the cold and ice in the lake boomed. As he thrust great chunks into the heater, I expected him to break out in a war cry. And even I, safe and snug inside our cabin, made a derisive gesture at our enemy, the North.

But the North didn't always threaten. She was capable of graciousness too. There were days, even weeks, when the weather moderated and it was a joy to be abroad in a clean white world. Then I discovered the incredible beauty of the winter woods. My trap line was the doorway into fairyland, a dazzling domain of white and crystal, of lovely contours and gentle lines. There was a disarming softness in the muffled forest. Never had I known such silence. A hush, so deep that one could almost touch and feel it, lay over all.

As I snowshoed winter trails I felt the North was kind, and could even be tender. I confided this to Robert.

"She's a treacherous hussy," he said. "Don't get to counting on her."

He added other admonitions. I was not to sit on a snowbank and moon about the beauty. I was to keep on my feet and moving, and I was never to go for snowshoe tramps when he was away from home. Before he'd finished warnings about the dangers of freezing, I regretted that I'd ever brought up the subject of the winter North. My little effort at interpretation had merely made me a prisoner in the cabin on mail days.

In November when ice had formed, I'd counted confidently on making mail trips with Robert, but one attempt proved even to me that I couldn't take that all-day snowshoe jaunt. "Town" was out of my life until canoe time in May. I faced the prospect of "wintering in" with more dismay than I

admitted. Not only did I like the sociability of the store, but I dreaded those long hours while Robert was out alone on that great expanse of lake. My imagination conjured up all sorts of horrors—wolves, treacherous ice or injury on the trail.

The woman who waits at home with even a decent show of tranquillity has proved her fortitude. My stock in that kind of courage must have been extremely low for I found the passive role of watcher mentally wearing. By midafternoon five minutes seemed like an hour and my thoughts had changed from, “Why doesn’t he come?” to the alarming, “What if he doesn’t come at all?” By dusk dread would become a certainty and I’d try to drive my panic-stricken forces to coherent planning.

I never could decide how I would meet this disaster. But I’ve noticed that these cool-headed people who prepare themselves to face emergencies generally end by doing what the rest of us do in a crisis—carry out the plan which occurs to them at that moment.

Robert never knew what lay behind the ardency of my greeting when at last he entered our bay. To me he was a husband, miraculously restored to me. To him I was merely a wife whom he was rejoining at the end of a usual day. But in time I grew accustomed to this miracle of his return and became almost confident that it would happen, even while the fearful side of me was declaring that it could not.

I had dreaded those five months of imprisonment, and yet when the lake was again free from ice in mid-May I was astonished that the months had fled. I had thought the monotonous routine would seem endless but I discovered that uneventful months slip by quickly. There are no markers along the way to bring awareness that time is passing. One day is like another. Days blend into weeks, and weeks fuse into months and months merge into a year. And because nothing very much has happened, one looks back and wonders where the months have gone.

It was hard to believe that a year of wilderness life had passed before we made our first real score against the North. We’d sold enough non-fiction wordage to permit us to take off six weeks from the typewriter and build an addition to the cabin. We added a kitchen, bedroom, screened porch and even a fireplace in the living room. Articles on outdoor life, which both were now writing, paid for screen, floor and roof, our only imported grandeur. All other elegance was of our own making. Furniture, even marsh hay

mattresses, were products of the country. When we'd finally learned how to make the North give, she gave generously.

We built industriously for six weeks, and then spent almost another week admiring our handiwork. I could never decide whether the cabin looked more imposing from the lake or from the hill.

"This is the cabin I'd hoped to build when we came up here," Robert said.

Oddly enough I was glad he hadn't. I liked our home better as it came, out of the country, out of ourselves, out of failures and small successes.

We were still far from affluent. Robert's ex-boss wouldn't have considered us even comfortable, and perhaps we weren't from my old standards. We were not yet able to buy butter, but we had shelves filled with home made jam, and after a year of failures I'd managed to make bread which didn't resemble rubber. The odd-looking loaves I'd first turned out, which could only serve as stage bread, had marked my greatest liability as a cook.

There was an asset in my complete lack of culinary knowledge, however. I knew no sauces and so was left unhampered to discover natural and distinctive flavors. Because my cooking attack had to be simple, I tried to make it intelligent and we had meals which epicures would go miles to find. Even the ex-boss wouldn't have felt sorry for us, reduced to eating well-hung moose, venison and partridge, whitefish and lake trout from icy water, wild rice, high bush cranberry jam, huge, juicy blueberries, tangy raspberries and fresh vegetables grown in a forcing climate which brought crisp radishes from seed to table in three weeks.

A second summer and autumn flew by and we found ourselves looking forward to the winter. In October supplies for months were stored in the cabin. They had been earned by a combination of ideas and things when Robert had guided two moose hunters. His pay for three weeks brought in more money than the cabin had ever seen. We felt wealthy.

I spent those three weeks alone in the cabin. Whether I should be permitted to do this had been a matter of considerable argument. I was determined that not a penny of precious guide's wages should be expended on my board and room in town. Robert pointed out that I'd never been alone at the cabin for more than twelve hours. I admitted this but countered that

many people had never been cut off from all contact with their fellow men for even half that long. So in a way I had taken a preliminary canter.

“And you’ll be with other men,” I added. “So I won’t worry over you.”

“How about me?” he demanded. “I’ll know you’re here alone.”

“Try developing a bit of feminine fortitude,” I said.

I approached this venture in solitude with some trepidation and considerable interest and I was inclined to regard it as a unique experience until I realized that in the pioneering era wives were often left alone. They spent days, weeks, even months, completely isolated. While husbands were gone for supplies or to market products, the women had to remain to care for stock or to see that no harm befell the homestead.

Such records dimmed any heroism in my own short experiment. I felt considerably deflated, which was just as well, for it put me on my mettle. I determined to conduct myself so circumspectly that there would be no unfortunate incidents. This was a time when adventure would most truly be proof of incompetence, and in carrying water, making fires, bringing in wood and, most of all, in my afternoon hunt for partridge, I was three times as cautious as I’d ever been when Robert was within hail at the cabin.

And while I did not feel that I had a natural aptitude for a hermitlike existence, I wasn’t really lonely. When I’d read stories of pioneering women I’d wondered how they filled the lonely hours, but after three weeks I began to suspect they’d learned to employ their leisure in thinking. It’s really a pleasant sport. There are many things about life, people one has known or emotional values which bear thinking about. One may not make any great intellectual discoveries but at least the findings are one’s own.

This may be one explanation of those so-called “original characters” the city man is always discovering in out-of-the-way places. That much-admired store of wisdom and homely philosophy is probably no more original or brilliant than the city man could have achieved had he had a few months to find out what he really thought about essentials.

Often in those first wilderness years I was tempted to write the ex-boss and ask what he’d meant when he said we would never be able to get out of each other’s sight. He must have imagined pioneering with hotel service. In the real game separate activities were inevitable. There were so many things to do. The woodpile, daily chores, mail trips to town, a trapping line, fruit to gather and preserve, a garden, fish net, the meat larder—and always the typewriter.

In the second winter another activity was added. Robert completed a three-dog team by making me a Christmas present of what I considered a husky.

“Just a good sledge dog,” Robert called him.

But the thick pile of Doc’s cream-colored coat was like that of a husky. His tail was plumed and his ears were pointed and he howled on proper schedule at nine, midnight and three. And he could throw his whole weight against his collar when he heard “*marchon*.”

Sledge dogs and a cariole changed the winter North for me. Ice-sheathed lakes and snowy trails became places of adventure. I’d never known a more thrilling sport. Housework, trap line and typewriter were forgotten. I gave over my days to driving.

To me spring meant only that ice was going. I came out of my dog-driving trance a bit startled and regretted winter had ended.

And then somehow we were off on another building spree. It may have been that it was spring, or that we still had hopes for two novelettes despite their extensive travels. Or it may have been that, though I was not actually making tiny garments, I ought to have been working on them.

Instead I worked at cabin building. In June the home grew into six rooms, living room, storeroom, kitchen, study and two bedrooms, one for us and one for a nursery. We’d spread out in many ways. Six puppies, our future dog team, had arrived. An ice house was filled, and at the landing we had a gasoline launch which ran sometimes and sometimes didn’t.

Sale of those two novelettes, which came in just under the wire, accounted for much of this grandeur, but more than anything else it accounted for a change in us. After two years of trying we’d beaten the fiction jinx. Those two yarns had no heady first trip triumphs. They’d commuted between Ontario and New York, had been travel worn, recopied, reworked and manicured many times before at long last they were bought by Thomas Costain of *MacLean’s Magazine*. His enthusiasm was tempered, but he’d asked for more.

There wasn’t much likelihood he’d have more very soon. We couldn’t afford to take fiction flyers in the months ahead, for the coming of offspring would require that we stick to sure-selling articles. But at least we could begin to hope that we would some day beat the fiction game.

Our optimism was reflected in many ways. Butter now appeared on our table and I was secretly astonished to discover that its flavor didn’t come up

to memories of it. We'd gone so long without it we had ceased to miss it. Often we forgot to spread it on our bread and as I cleared the table I mourned the untouched pats.

"What's so important about butter?" Robert asked.

After two years of perfect health, I couldn't base an argument on diet deficiency, but to me butter was enormously important.

"It's probably only a symbol," I admitted, "but this summer you and I are going to get used to elegance."

It may not have been elegance, but it was tranquillity. My own happiness was a deep content. I wanted the coming child and the period of preparation seemed only a foretaste of my joy. Together we worked to pile up a grubstake for parenthood. Robert finished a volume on the canoe for the *Outing* handbook series and I began one on woodcraft for women. To be asked to appear in this famous series of outdoor treatises pleased us both enormously, and royalties had a promise of stability and permanence.

No longer did we have to make a mail trip to find out if we had money for beans and pork. Robert's visits to the postoffice got farther and farther apart. He had not been in for two weeks in mid-August and on his return he began shouting at me from the water.

"The world's at war!" he yelled.

I thought he'd gone slightly mad. But he had brought what newspapers he could collect to prove his astounding statements. Our previous mail had given no intimation of international strain, and now in one swift glance I read in the headlines that England, France, Germany, Austria-Hungary and Russia were at war. To us alone there in the wilderness, dependent for two years on monthly publications for information, this news was incomprehensible.

In early November, on the last day we could reach the railroad before the big lake began to freeze, we left the cabin, left the North, and "went outside." We had planned to delay our departure until after the freeze-up. But Robert had a sudden panic over three weeks' imprisonment while ice was making and firmly refused to take any chances on having a baby "on the country." His pioneering fervor had completely broken down.

When we returned to the North in early March we brought a seven-weeks-old daughter. Our intention to do so had aroused a storm of protest

and we'd discovered that parents weren't expected to have freedom. I explained repeatedly that a baby belonged rightfully at home and I gave the many reasons which made that cabin waiting in the North our real home. But my explanations were quite wasted. The opposition to our second departure for the North made the disapproval of the first seem like heartening cheers.

The day of homecoming arrived at last. Bobs and I, riding in the cariole behind the dog team, Robert breaking the trail on snowshoes, we three swept around the point into our own bay.

I held my breath and waited, for suddenly I knew how very important this moment was. Down in the States I'd said all the things any woman is supposed to say about her home and her devotion to it. I'd believed I felt so. But now that allegiance would have to be a deep conviction welling up inside of me. A warm surge of homecoming would grip me, or it wouldn't. I couldn't summons it or repress it. The emotion was something quite outside me and in an odd way I felt myself to be a test tube.

And then I saw the cabin on the rise and my heart went out to meet it. I knew beyond any doubting that it was our home and the North was our homeland. I'd never felt so firmly planted.

3. *Strike One*

OUR months “below,” waiting for Bobs, gave a host of outsiders opportunity to question our isolated life in the north woods. Rare visitors in the cabin, the odd trapper or wilderness wanderer, had seen nothing queer in a man and woman sharing a lonely existence. Their only curiosity had been in why two people chose to live so far from “town” when no job, such as trapping or mining, compelled isolation. That there could be any social rigors in our twosome existence never occurred to them for they were accustomed to encountering a married pair living in splendid solitude.

But our friends on the outside asked countless questions. They wanted to know how we spent our leisure, what we did for entertainment and how we escaped boredom, both individual and reciprocal. Their relief in learning I’d run a trap line, and often spent a whole day driving dogs, obviously showed they regarded these as successful, although desperate, measures to escape from home. And I refrained from admitting both activities would be ended by the arrival of progeny.

Interest in our social life was universal. Everywhere I went I was deluged with the same questions. Toil, hardship, cold, mosquitoes, danger, fun, hard times and good times, the growth of the six-room cabin, all were accepted and sometimes envied. But weeks, months, even years, and no one within miles, except an Indian handicapped by my limited Ojibwa vocabulary! What was the true story of that isolation? Searchers prodded through our closets looking for the family skeletons. A few, more imaginative, commended the gallantry of my reticence.

I tried to maintain a decent silence and it is with great reluctance that I here reveal our domestic scandal. Soiled linen should never be washed in printer’s ink, but here goes. I know it is a damning admission of extreme dullness, yet solitude did not bore us, depress us, make us long for excitement or put us in the mood to fly at each other’s throats. These things can happen, and frequently do, in a partnership of lonely men. But such an association is not so basic as that of man, woman, child, a job and a home in the making.

Never were we compelled to devise expedients to take care of leisure or relaxation. I was always greatly embarrassed when friends exclaimed, “You people must know a lot of fine two-handed games!”

I could only mutter something vague about double dummy bridge, solitaire or cribbage, and hope they wouldn't discover how rarely we played any of them. Both of us liked games and we'd spent hours playing them in groups when no one can go on talking forever—or even remain silent. But in the wilderness the game of living was so absorbing we were not forced to turn to pastimes to sharpen wits, for excitement or the fun of gambling. The North supplied all three.

In the woods there was always the odd job. Many, perforce, were after supper tasks. In winter, when daylight hours were few, we used the evenings to put new lashings on snowshoes, stretch fur, repair dog harness, make clothes and knit socks and mittens. In summer, late darkness made it possible to use evenings to replenish the meat larder, reset the whitefish net or even to paddle to the berry patch and gather fruit for canning—all this after the day's work was done. In those rare moments when a job was lacking, we could always read.

Nor was I ever aware of conversational dams which had to be washed out in a spring freshet of words on the rare occasions when we had a visitor. When we were alone our talk, both in volume and quality, was much the same as when we had lived in a city. We commented on any unusual event turned up by the day and occasionally discussed vital matters. We were never forced to wring dry any topic by our need for saying or hearing words. Rather, just the opposite was true. In a home of closely knit activities and interest, the minutiae of living doesn't have to be eternally discussed.

But all this outside interest in our life in the cabin had made me much aware that our existence was considered a tricky passage, a Scylla and Charybdis affair between isolation and restricted privacy. If we weren't shipwrecked by one we must certainly have been caught in the other. But privacy depends infinitely more on the individuals than on a physical set-up, for the most important privacy of all is that of one's inner self. I've known people to commit more invasions in a half hour of a complex existence than most of us could have been guilty of in a lifetime of twosome isolation.

To be physically alone, at least occasionally, is a universal need. In our first winter, with a one-room home, I often made the rounds of my traps when there wasn't the slightest chance of finding fur. I'm sure that Robert sometimes put in an afternoon at the woodpile when he had a comfortable supply ahead. Each sensed the other's mood. Robert wouldn't have offered to do the traps with me, or would I have sat on a log and watched the chips fly.

In the second year when we had three rooms, outdoor retreats were unnecessary, yet I often busied myself in the kitchen or bedroom, for my own sake or for Robert's when he was struggling with a story. In the third year, when we had a home of six rooms, and one a study, to be alone or not was a decision either could make. But had each not respected the other's rights to privacy, sixteen rooms would have given no protection. And that is much as it is everywhere. For the person who has no possibilities within himself is always a public menace.

So in the wilderness cabin Robert and I were merely a normal pair who shared experiences, laughed at the same jokes, had a common goal and approached it with sufficiently different viewpoints to give zest to living.

Bobs' arrival had the inevitable effect of making Robert's and my activities more divergent. Her first summer entailed a bath-and-bottle routine and everlasting concern for the fly net over crib and pen. In fall and early winter I guarded an earnest creeper against cold floors and in the early spring I rode herd on a toddler with a passion for research. But these were purely physical tasks. Much as I admired Bobs, I didn't find an infant mentally stimulating or completely satisfying as a comrade, and I continued to turn to Robert for companionship. But together we watched, laughed at and enjoyed this young thing growing up.

We shared another truly absorbing interest. Bobs was several months old before we had sufficiently recovered from the financial stresses and strains of hospitals, doctors, nurses, baby paraphernalia and the months "outside," to take another flyer in fiction writing. I had been declared in on collaboration and the serial which went off was signed by both. For months we had talked, dreamed, eaten and lived with that story. We believed in it enough to start it in a new and better market.

Three years of striving was behind that yarn. We'd gambled our grubstake in the writing. The weeks of waiting for a decision were tense, but they made a perfect build-up for the news when it came. *Adventure* bought the story for six hundred and fifty dollars.

The sale meant many things—a secure winter, no imperative need for writing outdoor articles and, best of all, the interest of *Adventure's* editor, Arthur Hoffman. For the first time we'd found someone who would point out mistakes, tell us what a story must have and what it must not. We got our first inkling that a story was not a jumble of events but a finely articulated whole.

With Hoffman's help, and his six hundred and fifty dollars, we worked all winter. Perhaps it was a combination of both which permitted us to hit the bull's-eye. Not a story came back. The mail bag ceased to be my dread.

When snow left the ground in late spring the three of us formed the habit of noon strolls which usually ended by our sitting on the slope before the cabin. Our walk had been concluded in this fashion one day in late May. I was lying on my tummy with the warm sun on my back and the earthy fragrance of young growing things in my nostrils. In another month our world would be in bloom. I was trying to convince myself that this was indeed the beginning of Bobs' second summer, for the swift passage of time is a natural phenomenon with which my mind must wrestle. Events I thought of as yesterday's were always proving to have occurred a year, or even two years, before and having been set right so many times I'd formed the habit of making a cautious mental reconnaissance. My research into past history was interrupted by a famished mosquito which made me aware that summer was almost here and would bring us a new problem. I killed the early comer and turned to Robert.

"This year we'll have to make Bobs a headnet," I said, "and then watch every minute to see she keeps it on. Can you believe it's fly time again?"

"We've got a calendar in Bobs," Robert said. "Fifteen months since we got back."

I wondered what we'd done with all that time, and Robert looked a trifle sober. He was thinking, just as I, about an unfinished serial we'd been writing. The serial was a major effort and we'd planned to have it in the mails in May. Now we'd have to hurry to get it off in June.

The delay had been due to interruptions, all unavoidable, and I recalled rather wistfully the simple routine of the old one-room cabin days. This bigger, better life hadn't been all gain. Our larger house needed more fuel, and more fuel meant more woodpile hours. Added rooms had made more housework. More varied foods had led to more hours at the cookstove, and more clothes and more people had increased laundry. Better living had meant more freighting and more errands to town. There was more of everything except hours in the day, and they definitely were shrinking.

For the first time I understood the principle of compound interest. Yet I still wondered where all this might end. If it kept on we'd soon be spending all our time waiting on ourselves.

“What do you suppose we’ll be doing fifteen years from now?” I asked.

Robert considered a moment.

“About this time of year you’ll be jittery with excitement over Bobs’ return from boarding school,” he said.

If he was trying to get my mind off the unfinished serial, he certainly succeeded. I sat up abruptly.

“Or had you planned to take charge of her education?” he asked.

I bridled at his tone. “I could manage her Latin,” I said.

“And maybe third grade arithmetic,” he added.

This new and startling matter of education rendered the insect problem comparatively simple. I remarked almost comfortably that for the present we’d only have to keep Bobs from being scarred for life by black flies.

“I’ll put my typewriter on the veranda,” I said, “so I can watch her while I work.”

“Except for Bobs, we’ve got nothing on our minds but that serial. Lucky we don’t have to do anything to the cabin. Our building job is over.”

“I like building,” I said.

Robert eyed me suspiciously. “If you’ve got any ideas—”

“Really, I’m not planning another room,” I protested. “Couldn’t use it if I had it. Only—” And I paused to get my thoughts in order. “Completed things are sort of sad.”

If either remembered this conversation, it was only as a pleasant hour in the sun when we’d considered life in general and reached no weighty conclusions. But that was probably the day when those busy little fellows who take care of our mental machines while we go off the job first began to earmark information about the cabin.

We didn’t assign the task to them. We never do. The capacity of the subconscious to work without direction is its most satisfactory quality. We merely toss into the hopper all the grain and chaff, the importancies and the unimportancies, and let those overworked chaps below use their own judgment in sorting over the litter. They work better when they’re on their own. The trash is all neatly disposed of and never again called to our attention and the significant information is catalogued and filed where they can instantly lay their hands upon it.

In June we sent down a lot more data. The little fellows must have had a harder seven days than we. The week began with a balky marine motor and the launch was out of commission until the motor had been torn apart twice and new parts paddled out from town. The hectic period continued with the murder of our best hen mother by a hawk, making it necessary to hunt down and execute the murderer and to make arrangements for his real victims, a brood of orphaned chicks. Then frost blackened every green vegetable on the place and we replanted the garden. The next morning we found that an ermine had slit the throats of five hens and frightened the others into nervous tremors. It was evening before we'd finished making the hen house ermine proof.

The week ended in a grand finale when a moose crashed through the dog corral. He went in one side and out the other like a tractor. Of course the dogs went with him and finally surrounded him in a distant swamp. To kill the moose, care for the meat, retrieve the dogs and rebuild the corral took a day and a half of hard work.

After each interruption we were sure it would be the last, but with the moose episode we began to wonder if this reign of terror ever would end. Then the North took pity on us, or ran out of ideas, for there followed several weeks of calm. The serial reached the mails.

It sold. *Adventure's* check, in four figures, was more editorial money than I'd ever expected to see in one piece.

I was still dazed that evening, but the busy little fellows below had cleaned up our mental hoppers, had catalogued and filed, made their findings and felt compelled to send up the report. Robert's slave rendered a formal statement first, but mine had prepared me for the shock.

"People who can earn sixteen hundred dollars with a serial can't afford time for pioneering," Robert said.

I came out of a pleasant glow. "You mean—" And then I stopped because I didn't like to say what I knew was in the minds of each.

"Did we come up here to pioneer or to write?" he asked.

"The reasons certainly started out as a team," I said.

"And now one hoss is holding the other back," he said.

I knew then that the home in the North was ended. That each had so instantly accepted this sudden conviction was proof of its soundness.

We sat and talked through the long sunset and the coming of late darkness. We avoided the details of departure, for each knew our going would be very hard. We spoke only of the bigger issues and for the first time each revealed the meaning “home” held for him.

We found we felt the same. A home must serve its real purpose. It must be an asset, never a liability. It must fit needs of the moment, never fetter or make unreasonable demands. Home dividends flowed on a two-way circuit, one from the home to the builders and the other from the builders to the home, and if one circuit breaks the other is put out of order.

To frame an idea in an impersonal creed was one thing, but to carry it out would be quite another.

“I thought we’d live here always,” Robert said. “This knocks the props out from under me.”

I too was reeling a bit. We’d reached some sort of halfway station between the opposite poles of our original beliefs. Or had we met, I wondered?

“You with your one-suitcase boast, and me with an inherited respect for things!” I said. “Now we’re equally unhappy about our going.”

“Guess I’m more so,” Robert said soberly. “Never put anything of myself into a place before.”

Neither had I, but I didn’t point out that his was the zeal of a recent convert.

We stopped talking and stepped outside for our nightly rite, a before bedtime look. Robert still believed he went to make a weather forecast, but I knew we surveyed the sky, the encompassing forest and the silver sheen of the lake as an instinctive avowal of our kinship with the land.

Side by side we stood. I wondered where we would be this time next August. Now that the pain of parting had been acknowledged, I was aware of a little tingle of elation.

“Our next home won’t be outdated in five years,” I said.

“Hope not,” Robert agreed. “But let’s be canny.” He stopped, and after a long silence he said, “If things hadn’t broken just the way they did this summer, we might have been caught. What was it your family used to say about those precious chairs?”

“But these are ours,” and as I repeated the familiar phrase I looked back at the lighted doorway of the cabin.

The cabin was ours. We could never walk off and leave it, untenanted and unloved, to fall into decay. Empty, it would always reach out and lay its hands upon us. This was not the tyranny of possessions but a decent gratitude for past bounty.

For a month we didn’t get far in details of departure, except to know that we must go before the winter. We might be facing self-decreed exile, but we couldn’t evade the fact that it was exile. Our thoughts would travel back and our imaginations would be tormented.

“I can’t bear to think of the cabin lying here neglected,” I said. “This place has meant too much.”

“Has meant!” Robert exploded. “It always will mean too much.”

We weren’t happy in the only solution we could think of when we decided one evening that we would burn the cabin. It seemed only a little less dreadful than desertion. We made a brave show by talking of how clean is a fire, and how from its pyre the cabin would rise to be in our memories always as new and beautiful as now. Both dreaded the day when we must light the match.

We were saved from that ordeal by an unexpected visit from our friend, Gabriel Pombert. We’d never hoped to be able to give away the cabin because no one wished to live in so remote a place. Nor did we know that Gabriel’s French Canadian forest soul had revolted against his work for the railroad. Gabriel, of all the people we knew, understood why we lived there and envied us. He offered to buy our home.

Our price was his promise to burn the cabin if he ever had to leave. Gabriel kept his word and two years later when he wrote that he had done so, we knew the task had been as difficult for him as it would have been for us. He didn’t buy that cabin cheaply.

The day of our departure came. In sparkling mid-October we looked back from the lake at our cabin on the rise. The blue water of the bay was jeweled. Smoke rose from the chimney, and only Gabriel would have thought to light our fireplace. Behind the cabin was the backdrop of the forest—our forest, wearing its first tinsel dress of snow.

Tears were in my eyes, and Robert made a pretense of fussing with the motor of the launch.

“You will own homes, lady,” he said at last.

“Of course we’ll own them!” I said, and there was savagery in my voice only because I was fighting so hard to keep it steady. “We’ll always own them! Ten years from now that cabin will still be ours.”

4. First Across Pigeon River

THE following months in Wisconsin were not given to making our own plans but to sidestepping the plans of others for our next home. Perhaps the sudden release from a fixed abode had made us restless or we may have resented the very urgency of our counselors. We were surrounded by homeowners, fatuously complacent about the wisdom of their own choices, who were eager to help make up our minds, or even to make them up for us. And as their arguments grew more vehement, we became more wary.

There was sound sense in their viewpoint. People shouldn't shilly-shally about a home. Why not do as others did, settle down near friends and families and make no more fuss about the matter? No place was perfect, but being at loose ends was dangerous and must inevitably lead to instability and drifting. In the face of all these grave warnings our insistence that we did indeed intend to choose a home and were only waiting to catch a propitious current sounded very unconvincing.

Robert became interested in motor boat magazines and began to write letters to boat brokers. Blueprints arrived over which he pored and after considerable study he chose one to show me.

"Look at the swell home a boat could give us," he said as he spread out the plan.

His vocabulary, which had become nautical, didn't help to clarify the blueprint puzzle. Such words as galley, deck space, transoms, lockers and lazarette were thrilling until I discovered that a galley was a ship's kitchen and not as large as a self-respecting closet. And a locker! This was only a dressy term for a cabinet so small that house plans wouldn't even mention it.

"We'd summer in Maine and winter in Florida," Robert said. "Could do that easily in a forty-five-footer."

When I asked how large such a boat would be, he took me to the lawn and paced it off with expansive gestures.

"Foot longer than the cabin," he said. "Remember all the room we had there. Only," he added after a moment, "a boat isn't so wide and the bow is pointed, and the stern's elliptical and every boat must have a deck. So you mustn't expect full headroom."

I shook my head. "I don't want a home I have to crawl around in," I said.

"But you want to travel," Robert said. "You ought to see country before you decide where you want to live and you've been in only a small part of the United States."

I admitted this, and I'd always envied Robert his wider radius. His year with the Associated Press in Denver had sounded fascinating.

"But I can't see country from the water," I said. "Besides, a home should have touch with earth."

That firm statement ended all talk of a sea going home. As Robert rolled up the blueprints he tried to conceal his disappointment in me. But boat photographs and brokers' letters disappeared from his desk and in time even the nautical terms vanished from his vocabulary.

Instead we began to talk of motor cars. These, and many other things, we viewed through Rip Van Winkle eyes.

We had returned after a long absence to find many drastic changes. During our five years in the North the whole social structure had undergone alterations. Recreations had changed most of all. We'd left people decorously dancing the two-step and the waltz and we'd returned to find that the bunny hug, the turkey trot and the grizzly bear had come and gone. I never saw them danced. Theaters too were different. Before we went north I'd occasionally sneaked off to watch "moving pictures," which were usually shown in a converted store, and the dots and dashes on the screen suggested the action had taken place in a snowstorm. I'd enjoyed the adventures of the Biograph Girl and had tried vainly to inveigle friends to see her, but they scorned the idea of such childish entertainment. We returned after five years to find movie houses emptying respectable homes and the names of movie actors on the lips of children.

Families no longer gathered around the living room table of an evening. If they were not at movies they were playing bridge. And those same solid citizens who had once looked at us as being flighty now considered us stodgy stay-at-homers. The change had come about so gradually they believed the transformation had been in us, not in them.

Also the automobile had come into its own. When we had gone north cars were not uncommon but when we returned everyone owned a car or was planning to. Blacksmith shops were now garages. Cars were parked at hitching rails before country stores. Livery stables had closed their doors.

We'd missed the beginning of this era but we took a running jump and landed ahead of the procession. Transcontinental touring was an adventure, but we who had never owned a car decided that the way to see the country was by automobile. Road maps began to appear on Robert's desk.

Friends shook their heads. They pointed out that it was all very well to own a car for convenience, or to dare a countryside on a Sunday. But to start across a land which had no surfaced roads was only asking for trouble. And as for that much talked of Lincoln Highway! Everybody knew that in the West it was only a succession of mudholes.

They warned us of others' misadventures. These lurid tales were not honest first hand accounts but were always about a man who knew another man who'd heard about someone who had met disaster. Motors had burned out bearings in the desert. Cars had cracked their tummies wide open on sunbaked ruts of dirt roads in the West. Differentials had been broken fifty miles from a garage. People had been marooned without food or water. And whole families had been wiped out when trying to make narrow, twisting mountain grades. In comparison, the covered wagon days had been a carefree picnic.

My spirits began to falter. "Can all these things happen?" I asked Robert.

"Sure," he said. "Not only can, but do."

My previous introduction to canoe, paddle, tent, campfires and log cabin appeared to be mere child's play. Apparently wilderness simplicity had undermined my courage, for I began to dread our ownership of a car.

Its purchase was delayed by the threat of war. Few of our middle western friends shared our belief that sooner or later the United States must enter. Had not Woodrow Wilson been elected in November on his promise to keep us out? Our war misgivings were the inevitable result of having lived for the last five years in Canada! We'd better learn to think in the American way.

But we continued to foresee an ultimate declaration and I wondered how that would affect us personally. It is difficult to decide reactions until the actual question has arisen, but I sensed an uneasiness in our attitudes. In March, when I organized a local chapter of the Red Cross, Robert was tremendously interested in my efforts. In April, when war was finally declared, the question of our own participation came into the open.

"Sure I'd go if I weren't married," Robert said. "But right now there are plenty of men without families."

I had hoped he felt this way and I dared again to make plans for that home of ours. We were still a drifting family.

The next day a touring car was driven to our front door. Immediately those dire warnings of western hazards began to produce emergency equipment. Robert brought home a long black case which fitted on the running board. It was large enough to conceal a body and would have justified the suspicions of any policeman, but it contained two bed springs, two pads, a tent, tent poles and two folding stools. Four legs concealed in its innards enabled it to serve as a table when it had given up its booty. Robert set the whole thing up on the lawn and ran a trouble light from the car to give our home electricity.

"We can camp in luxury if we have to spend a couple of weeks in the desert waiting for busted parts to come from the East," he said.

Everything we added seemed only preparation for disaster. Each new canvas water bag, emergency gas container, wrench or car gadget drove my spirits lower.

I wouldn't have admitted this for the world, for it made me seem an ingrate. I was a lucky woman. A car, an imposing amount of impedimenta and emergency equipment were being collected so that I might see the country and select a home.

A few days later I found Robert studying a map of Canada.

"They're opening a new road along the north shore of Lake Superior," he said. "Think of being able to *drive* into Ontario!"

I had been thinking that soon it would be spring in the North. That land of lovely lakes and great stretches of forest had been tugging at me. I asked Robert if he too had felt a pull.

"Maybe," he admitted. "And we ought to spend a summer in a Hudson's Bay post before we really leave that country. No telling when we'll be near it again."

The new highway offered easy access. We could drive into Canada, leave the car and go on by rail and boat to a Hudson's Bay post. It was a detour in our search for a home, but as Robert rationalized the venture on the grounds of experience and material for stories, I realized he wanted to return to the North as badly as I did.

The decision didn't require much rationalizing, for the ease with which a writer can talk himself into a journey is one of the few assets of a writing

life. There are always logical grounds for going to a country one really wants to visit. Fresh experience, a fresh land and fresh people are stock in trade. Our conviction that we could not know a country until we had actually lived in it may have been a high standard of excellence, or a soothing alibi. I've always pitied writers who prided themselves on being able to gather and reproduce the savor of a background by a course in reading, a stretch of the imagination or a cursory glance, for they deny themselves one of the great perquisites of their trade.

In ten minutes Robert and I were thoroughly convinced that we owed ourselves a summer in a Hudson's Bay post. We did not propose to visit the long-established forts on the Bay but one in the more isolated district in the heart of Ontario where the posts were far from rail and steamship. There conditions would be more primitive.

How truly primitive they were, we didn't know, even when we read the reply of the first Hudson's Bay manager to whom we wrote. He regretted that he couldn't accept guests because the dwelling house would be overcrowded. "My two families will be with me all summer," he wrote.

I puzzled over that. "What do you suppose he means?" I asked.

"What any other man would mean," Robert said. "A widower remarried and now has two sets of children. Good place to stay away from."

We selected another post and were well established before we discovered that not being bright enough to guess the two-family riddle had made us miss a diverting summer. The man had meant just what he said. One family was his "country family," an Ojibwa woman and three offspring. His second family was his English wife and her two children coming for their first visit to Ontario. Had we suspected this courageous experiment in domesticity, nothing would have kept us from a visit to that post.

In promptness we outdid the builders of the new highway and arrived at Pigeon River, the international boundary, to find the bridge still an unfleshed skeleton. When the foreman had recovered from his astonishment at his early customers, he said firmly that the bridge would not be ready for another week.

We'd come too far to give up that easily and we found unexpected allies in the workmen. They dropped their tools and formed a ring as we argued our case. We won the sympathy of the courtroom.

“Ah, boss, let ’em try it,” a workman said. “We’ll lay the planks and they can drive on them loose.”

The entire crew plunged into the work. Planks, not flowers, were strewn in our path, and in a half hour our bridge was ready. The men waved their hats and shouted as we started on our way.

“First car to cross Pigeon River!” one of them saluted as we passed him.

The loose planks bobbed and rattled and even above their fearful clatter we could hear the roar of the river below. Robert made no pretense of sharing in the general rejoicing of the spectators. He was too intent on not establishing a second record of being the first car to fall into Pigeon River.

We helped make several “firsts” that day. We were the first car to drive the highway to Port Arthur. Highway was a courtesy title for what was still only a swath cut through the forest and which had never known shovel or pick. Several days’ rain had produced a thick black mud. We mired down and pulled free a half dozen times in the first few miles.

I was working up my touring manners. Every fresh experiment in adventure seems to call for a new technique. I remarked quite cheerfully that at least the road couldn’t get any worse.

“We’ll find nothing in the West to touch it for tough going,” Robert said.

He was right. We never did. A few minutes later we sank into a mudhole. Apparently it was bottomless for the car halted its downward trend only when it rested on the body and there was no chance to get a jack under the axle. Robert cut a long pole and pried, and I pried with another, and I think even Bobs took a hand. It was the first time that mud pie making had been approved.

“Maybe here’s the place to set up our new home,” I said.

I’d only intended a bit of whimsy and even when Robert carried the camping box to a dry spot under the trees I thought he was lightening the load. Then he said he would make camp later.

“You mean we’ve got to stay here?” I demanded.

He shrugged his shoulders. “No telling how long this job will take.”

Almost savagely Robert began to fell trees. When he had leveled a small jackpine forest, we really started to work. While he pried up the car with a pole, I slipped a block into the muddy chasm. An hour later we had accomplished a magnificent cribbing job which brought the car’s lower

extremities into sight. Robert and I each were encased in mud. And I was very tired.

I'd hoped the job was over, but it developed that we'd only begun. Now we faced a little matter of building a corduroy road to solid ground.

"I thought we came up here to drive this highway, not to build it!" I said.

"We can't turn the car around," Robert said, "so we've got to go forward."

We were so absorbed in our road making we didn't hear a wagon coming until the driver had reined in his horses.

"If I ever saw folks shot with luck, it's you," he said.

As we looked at that big tote team from a logging camp we agreed that we were lucky, but we didn't know the extent of our luck until he added, "Usually I make a trip every two weeks. This just happened to be an extra one between."

When the team had yanked us out, Robert started to cast off the tow rope.

"Better not," our rescuer advised. "You folks ain't seen nothing yet."

In the next six miles, as that huge tote team dragged us through a succession of craters of soft black mud, I wondered how many miles of corduroy road we would have succeeded in building in a week. This might not be the triumphant entrance into Canada we had visioned, but we grew more grateful by the minute. "Shot with luck?" We were riddled with it!

When the road was safe, the man drew up his team.

"Sorry I can't take you into Port Arthur," he said. "Guess you folks can make it now. But how in heck did you get there in the first place? That's the first time I ever saw a car just sitting off by itself in the bush."

Everyone made "firsts" that day, even a bear. An old fellow stepped out of the forest, saw the approaching car, raised up on his haunches to assure himself that this incredible object was indeed true, and then stood frozen with astonishment. He never moved as we passed by. I think that had we stopped and shaken hands with him, we couldn't have added to his bewilderment. Nothing like this had ever before gone through his forest, and his grizzled muzzle was still wrinkled in a ludicrous expression of disbelief as we drove down the road. That bear was probably the granddaddy of the black bears of our National Parks and I can imagine him snorting

contemptuously to his grandchildren, “Heck! I saw one of them things before you were born.”

Our record of “firsts” was completely disqualified in Port Arthur. Officials shook their heads and said that we couldn’t cross Pigeon River bridge.

“But we *have* crossed it,” we said.

“But you can’t!” they insisted.

The official ceremony whereby two nations formally declared the border open would not be held for a month and our premature arrival began to look like an international issue. Robert and I were becoming definitely worried while more head shaking was pronouncing us non existent. Then Robert had an inspiration.

“You’re right,” he said. “We didn’t cross it.”

They were as pleased as we with this practical solution and only the bear and the teamster kept their titles of being first.

5. We Start West

THE HUDSON'S BAY post on Windigo Lake was in the process of adjustment to its first touch with the outside world. Until the recent coming of the railroad, all trade goods had been transported in York boats from Lake Superior by a difficult route which had required more than a week for the journey. Now supplies had only to be freighted across the lake from steel. But, though the post was no longer isolated, the old regime still existed.

It was an interesting summer for our visit, and we were fortunate to be accepted as paying guests for three months. This was a rather unusual privilege, but Jerry Kerr, the post manager, liked us, and also he liked company. He was single, and the only white person at the post.

Jerry had been in the company's service since he had come out, a boy of sixteen, from England. He had been in many posts, nearly all isolated, knew many tribes of Indians, could speak native languages fluently, admired the red race and, more important, understood it. He believed its future depended on the survival of its culture. Like all old time Hudson's Bay men, he was a zealot in his devotion to the Great Company and took most seriously his role of Company representative. His Indians liked him and Jerry acted as trader, judge, father and giver of the last word on all domestic tangles. At times his decisions were rather startling but they were always practical because they took account of the mores of the red race.

As a host he was delightful. He had a sense of humor, was well read and had thought out his own opinions. He was almost embarrassingly considerate of our comfort. A lack of vegetables and fresh meat distressed him.

"I'm used to whitefish three times a day and I don't mind it," he said.

Neither did we after our first meal of the dry succulent fish cooked as only Emma, the Indian housekeeper, could cook it. We never tired of it and we fought Jerry's hospitable efforts to vary the menus with "tinned meat."

The post was on the shore of a large lake. Its buildings consisted of the usual assortment. The two-storied dwelling house was fronted by a lawn, a tall flag pole, a cannon and a whitewashed picket fence which enclosed the white man's domain. Outside were the trade shop and cabins of the

halfbreed employees. On a nearby point were birchbark wigwams of hunters who had come to trade or live near the only metropolis they knew.

That summer, despite Jerry's efforts to send his hunters to the bush, the Indians found constant excuses to remain around the post. They were having a civilization bust. These people, who had rarely seen more than one white man at a time, and then only at a Company post, could now inspect a bi-weekly transcontinental train. Not only could, but did. They gathered by scores every train night, swarmed aboard the coaches and stalked down the aisles of as many coaches and Pullman's as the short stop permitted. Invariably a great many overstayed. When the train got under way it spewed out sightseers as Indians shot from platforms and rolled into the muskeg.

The Indians were desirous of using the railroad but were frustrated by the simple needs of a primitive life, all of which could be obtained "on debt" at the post. But one old fellow overcame this handicap. After investigating the various conveniences of a railroad, he managed to use them all when he sent a telegram to a store fifty miles away, ordering a plug of tobacco to be sent by freight.

Another hunter, who had captured a den of live silver foxes, showed even more imagination. He spent his entire two thousand dollars traveling in a dining car. He didn't travel far but he traveled extensively, devoting the summer to shuttling back and forth between Windigo Lake and a whistle point fifty miles west. He chose this destination because in fifty miles he and the two Indians, whom he always took as guests, could eat to a state of torpidity. Then they left the train, slept off the orgy and were fresh and empty for the return journey. Reports of this endurance dining got more and more exciting as the summer went on until it was an even bet as to which would last the longer, the Indian or his two thousand dollars.

Windigo Lake brought me a novel experience. For the first time in the wilderness I was not required, in fact was actually forbidden, to perform any labor. Jerry made a great point of this and assured us that were we seen at so-called menial tasks we would lower the prestige of the white race.

The employees, one large family of three generations, lived in cabins near the trade shop. Alec, the grandfather, was the product of the "country marriage" of an old time Scotch post manager. Alec did not speak English. He had married an Ojibwa woman and their children and their children's children served the post. Theirs was considered a position of great honor and it set the Maclauries a notch or two above their own people.

Jerry assured us there were enough Maclauries to do anything for us which should be done. There were really too many. The habit of waiting upon ourselves was hard to break and Robert and I were always being caught off base as we brought in the odd stick of wood or a pail of fresh drinking water. We could pretend to be playing games with the stovewood, but the pail of water was awkward.

“We’re surrounded by eyes and ears!” I said. “They’re even psychic.”

“A bit hard on a nonconformist like you,” Robert said.

That was an unfair dig for I had never made a greater effort to conform to the mores of any society. My days were extremely ladylike. I wore dresses. I read and even sewed. I visited the trade shop daily and spent hours in the fur loft, where the year’s catch of a whole district was being baled for shipping. I gloated over huge piles of beaver, fox, mink, fisher and ermine until even my love of fur was satiated. Never before had I had hundreds of black mink to play with and I sorted through scores of cross foxes until I found a half dozen which matched perfectly.

Every morning I held a medical line-up in the kitchen of the dwelling house. When the Indians discovered that I had white medicine and an urge to dispense it, they laid awake nights to think up symptoms. Some were baffling but between Emma’s few words of English and a great deal of pantomiming by the patient we usually got them unscrambled. Distrust of my own ability, especially in medical dressings, was dispelled by Jerry.

“Anything you put on them won’t do any harm in the short time they wear it,” he said.

Then I understood why my dressings always returned so precariously adjusted. I taxed a woman, whose tubercular breast I’d been dressing each morning for a week, with having removed my medicine. The answer came back through Emma.

“She say maybe white man medicine good, maybe red man medicine good. She do both. Her man put on rotten beaver skin every night.”

After that I didn’t work so hard at medical line-up. I merely listed patients who should go to hospitals or see the doctor when the government party came to pay treaty money. Beyond that I gave sympathy, aspirin or a cathartic.

We'd brought two typewriters. I'd imagined that writing hours would be complicated by having to amuse Bobs, but my only interruptions were vain attempts to detach her from boon companions, a dozen Ojibwa children ranging from three to ten years.

"Why do you bother?" Robert asked.

"She might get hurt. They don't understand her language and—"

"Her language?" he scoffed. "She doesn't know a dozen words. And those kids are so tickled to have her."

They did treat this charge of a blonde tot as a signal honor and guarded her as though she were infinitely precious. Her fair hair fascinated them, as it did women about the post, who occasionally shyly tugged at it to make sure it was real. The language problem worked itself out by Bobs beginning to chatter in Ojibwa. Then it was I who needed the interpreter. I'd lead Bobs to Emma, who'd tell me that the child had come in for a hat, was hungry, or wanted a drink of water.

Bobs' greatest pal was Clement, a lad her own age, and when I saw that the two were going to be inseparable I verified my suspicion that he was badly in need of a bath. I scrubbed both children in the lake and that night at supper I reported the achievement. Giving a child its first bath does leave one with a sense of great accomplishment.

Jerry looked a bit bothered. "Indians don't bathe," he said.

"This one did," I assured him.

I decided to set a good example and one sunny day I went lakeward in my bathing suit. It was black, very circumspect and the trunks reached to the knees. Below them I wore black silk stockings. The white woman intended to do the white race proud.

I hardly had time to dip a toe before I heard a great commotion. Two Indian men cutting grass before the post dropped their scythes and ran to the dwelling house. Thinking there had been an accident, I ran too and found the kitchen filled with cowering Indians and Jerry standing in the doorway trying to quell the panic.

"What's happened?" I demanded.

He motioned me to the living room and there I learned I was the cause of the riot. It had not been fear for my safety but horror at the indecent exposure of my person. The stockings hadn't been enough. The Indians had seen my arms! Jerry's earnestness made me understand my social crime.

He'd done his best to whitewash my moral character but was not at all sure he had succeeded.

"If you notice any disrespect, report it to me at once," he said.

In the next few days faces were averted when I appeared. A week later an Indian woman, Mary, didn't step aside on the trail but took the center and forced me to walk around her. Mary had probably been selected to be the voice of public opinion because she knew all about morals. While the railroad was being built she had discovered the economic possibilities in construction camps.

I reported none of this to Jerry for I'd been quite enough of a disorganizer. Instead I borrowed a leaf from Mary's notebook and became very haughty. It worked. For soon the natives' mended manners told me that my scandal was forgotten.

With Jerry's permission, I tried to demoralize Emma. I invited her for a paddle and, when we were hidden behind a point, I suggested we go wading. I removed my shoes and stockings but kept my knees discreetly hidden while I splashed in the shallow water. Emma thought this looked like fun, and after hanging about the shore, and watching enviously, she waded in. But she wore shoes and stockings and never lifted her ankle-length skirts an inch.

On treaty day, later in the summer, I helped the government doctor in a wholesale vaccination. By this time I knew my Ojibwa manners and didn't argue when the women refused to bare their arms. Instead I waited to see what the doctor would do in this impasse between native and medical customs. But he had been confronted by that problem and knew how to solve it. He handed me his penknife and ordered a nice neat hole cut in each left sleeve.

I never learned the reasons for this excessive modesty. It held with all the Windigo Lake Indians, regardless of their morals in the sense that we know morals. Quite possibly this refusal to display bare skin was the vestigial remains of the religious teachings of the Jesuit missionaries who had visited this district before the coming of the fur traders. At least that theory conforms with the Indian's practice of taking only the shell of the white man's concepts.

Jimmie, a boy about ten years old, helped Emma in the kitchen and occasionally waited on the table. I presumed he was an Ojibwa, for he spoke

only a few words of broken English and his skin was dark. But one morning I happened to glance at him in sunlight and saw his hair was really brown and his eyes were hazel.

“Has Jimmie much white blood?” I asked Jerry.

“He’s all white,” Jerry said.

“But what is he doing—” I began.

“He’s a slave,” Jerry said. “Emma owns him.”

I didn’t comment at once. I simply didn’t believe that I’d heard correctly.

“Did you say slave?” I asked. “And he’s white?”

“Both,” Jerry said.

Later when I’d become adjusted to the startling statement I demanded the story. Jimmie was the illegitimate son of white parents. His mother had been a camp follower and his father a railroad worker. The baby had been abandoned on the Grand Trunk railroad and the Maclauries had taken possession of him.

Despite the kindness of Indians toward their own offspring, they have a capacity for cruelty. They are cruel as children are cruel, perhaps for lack of imagination. They will torment pets merely for the pleasure of watching them suffer. And deep in their hearts red men hate the white and resent the dominance of the white race.

So the child fared badly in this otherwise kindly household. A member of the hated white race was in the Indians’ power to torment and abuse. When Jimmie was two years old he was kept chained to a leg of the table and thrown bones and scraps as if he were a dog. He was beaten often and when he was six years old he was brought to Windigo Lake and made a scullion in the kitchen.

One night a former post manager had heard Jimmie crying after a beating and had brought him into the living room. Horrified by the grime and dirt, he had given the boy a bath. It was then that he discovered Jimmie was white. The manager was a kindly person and would have liked to act, but he recognized the impossibility, according to fur land custom, of freeing a slave. What he did probably worked more harm than anything that had as yet happened to Jimmie.

“Remember always,” he told the boy, “that you are a white man. They can’t take that from you.”

And Jimmie remembered, always.

“That’s why Jimmie hates Indians,” Jerry concluded. “You can see it in his eyes.”

“But why haven’t you done something about this?” I demanded.

Jerry looked a bit nettled.

“I have,” he said. “I’ve forbidden Emma to beat him. I see that he’s clothed and well fed and lives like any of the other youngsters. You’ve watched him playing around the post. He doesn’t look unhappy.”

“But he’s still a slave,” I said.

“Yes,” Jerry admitted. “But slavery is more or less a formality in Indian tribes. When he’s a man, he’ll be as free as any native in the district.”

“But no one can be free when he’s grown up thinking of himself as a slave,” I persisted.

Jerry was beginning to lose patience with me.

“There’s already been too much publicity given Jimmie’s case,” he said curtly. “Interference has done more harm than good. Now it’s a point of honor with the Maclauries not to give him up.”

Robert had said nothing, but he recognized by well-known signs that I was preparing to go into battle. He immediately became a pacifist and a moment later I found myself being led away.

“You can’t be here as guest of the company and stir up a rumpus,” he said.

“I don’t care what happens,” I said. “I’m going to do something about Jimmie.”

For a week Jerry and I avoided the dangerous topic. He was as uncomfortable about Jimmie as I, but he was not so determined. I began at once to get acquainted with the boy. Our conversation was limited by his meager English but we had a common interest in Bobs. Jimmie adored Bobs. He loved to carry her and nothing pleased him more than to have his picture taken with her in his arms.

When I felt that we were friends I asked him what he wanted to do when he grew up. “You know,” I said. “Big man, so high.” I indicated a great stature. “What you do then?”

Jimmie didn't hesitate, and there was a cold hatred in his eyes which I've never seen in the eyes of the young.

"When big man," he said, "I kill Indian."

He meant it. I was shaken, despite the fact that I'd been prepared for this very answer.

"Poor little devil!" Robert said when I told him.

"Don't you see what we've got to do?" I demanded. "We've got to take him away, even if we have to act as guardians."

Our course seemed so clear I couldn't understand why Robert didn't see it, and he thought my proposal was sheer folly. He pointed out the obstacles. Jimmie was already ruined, it was much too late to try to save him and he didn't have a high intelligence.

"And no wonder!" I said.

"Whether it's due to inheritance or environment makes little difference," Robert said. "The fact is that you have neither a promising white lad nor a self-respecting Indian. Do you propose to take him with us while you teach him elementary facts of white culture?"

"There are schools and institutions," I said. "Anything is better than what he has now."

Robert doubted that, but in the end he agreed that I could try it. That evening after dinner I asked Jerry if he'd help me to get Jimmie away.

Jerry didn't answer for a moment, and when he spoke I knew he regretted his answer.

"You're asking the impossible," he said.

He went on to tell me that Jimmie's case had been brought to public attention by a missionary society. The government had investigated and decided that Jimmie was better off where he was. All this talk had aroused the Maclaurie family and now more than ever they believed they were in the right.

Later in our room Robert pointed out that I shouldn't expect Jerry to upset his whole district for what was a lost cause.

"And you'd better think it over," he added. "You're taking on a big job."

"It's one of those things I can't think over," I said. "I've got to see it through."

Robert whistled when I said I would appeal to the Indian agent on treaty day. "That will stir things up," he said. "We'll be as popular as smallpox."

The Indian agent looked a bit weary when I opened the subject of Jimmie.

"The white slave," he said. "There's been more rumpus raised about that child! What's your idea?"

I told him, even while I knew I wasn't getting to first base. He had his answers ready because he'd made them so many times. Tribal custom. Precedent in fur land. The Maclauries were a powerful family and to offend them would stir up the big servant families at other posts. Jimmie's age, and birth and training. And even the boy's future!

"Out in the world he's got no chance to amount to anything," the agent said. "Here he will become a hunter and his family will be of help to him when he grows up."

"Especially after he's killed one of them," I said bitterly.

"The talk of a boy!" the agent said. "He'll feel differently when he's older. Jimmie's not a victim of cruelty now."

"He's a victim so long as he's a slave!" I cried. "That's what I'm protesting!"

The Indian agent smiled bleakly.

"Is it because he's white, not black?" he asked. "Does an American woman expect to persuade primitive people they have no rights in an institution which existed in her own country little more than fifty years ago? And your southern slavery had instances of real cruelty."

I had forgotten our Civil War. I'd been preparing to camp indefinitely in Canada, to harry the lawmakers of the Dominion and to carry on the battle until I succeeded or was thrown bodily out of the country. But now I paused. I was as disturbed about the boy as ever, yet I realized that the Indian department had experience and wisdom on its side. Neither was it deliberately countenancing cruelty, at least not obvious cruelty.

I was even sure that the Indian agent was not hard-hearted. Obdurate, yes! With all the obduracy of British officialdom. And he was only a small part of the government.

I arose and walked away. I went to the lake shore and threw rocks into the lake. For once I knew when I was licked.

No nation can build up world empire without learning the easy lesson of appeasement. I was not sure I had not substituted rationalization for a decent, righteous indignation.

The last thing I saw at Windigo Lake was Jimmie's eyes as he watched us set off one morning. They haunted me for weeks, and I knew that they would haunt me in the years to come.

Denver was the first pause in our western tour in search of a home. Robert had told me many stories of his year in Colorado and of his horse and collie dog and their afternoons on the rolling plains. But more than anything else he had talked of the gambling house, Navarre, where newspapermen had gathered from two until six in the morning. They'd sat before the great fireplace, consumed gallons of beer and swapped stories.

The Navarre was the first place we planned to visit, and as we drove into town I was struggling with the problem of a custodian for a three-year-old while her parents staged a homecoming celebration. To be sure I'd never seen the Navarre, but I felt like an old customer. That evening I didn't intend to be a mother.

"A trained nurse should be safe," I decided aloud. "Let's engage one to come to our hotel."

"What!" Robert demanded, and then as he unscrambled my speech he added, "We'll fix up Bobs later. First let's drive past the old Navarre."

As we turned down the street I was almost as nostalgic as was he.

"There it is," he said, and then I heard him gasp.

The building was there as he had predicted, but across the front was a large white sign.

"A cafeteria!" Robert said.

He looked as though he'd had a body blow. We drove around the corner before he got his breath. When he turned to me at last his tone was almost solemn.

"Never go back—to any place," he said.

We drove for a time in stricken silence. The collie dog was dead, the horse had been sold. Now the Navarre was a cafeteria. And then I looked out across the plains and saw the great stretch of mountains.

“The Rockies still seem to be here,” I said.

“I bet they’ve got a Y.M.C.A. sign on ’em,” Robert said. “Let’s go see.”

The rolling plains were drenched in sunlight and ahead, as though painted on the sky, stretched a great battlement of jagged peaks. I had never before seen a real mountain and I was breathless with delight. Robert seemed to feel they had worn well in his absence. He forgot about the Navarre.

“I said you’d see the big fellows!” he boasted. “Knew they’d do something to you!”

We turned into the foothill country and began to climb. As the car swung outward on the curves I could glimpse peaks and peaks and still more peaks. Bobs became round-eyed with wonder. We seemed to be driving straight into the heart of the Rockies, and then suddenly we rounded a sharp shoulder and entered a mountain valley.

The peaks towered all around us. Their sides were pine clothed and beside us a stream rushed on its way down from the high places. The water sparkled in the sunlight. The grassy banks were a vivid green. Crossing the stream was a tiny bridge.

“It’s lovely!” I cried, and Robert stopped the car.

Then it was that we saw a house nestling at the foot of a mountain. That house belonged there.

“What a grand place to build a home,” I said.

We drove across the stream. A carpenter, putting finishing touches to the interior, invited us in to see the place. Robert and I were standing in the sun porch, which looked to the head of the valley, when I remarked on what a wonderful place it would be for work.

I stood staring at a great peak across the valley and thought how lovely it must be in early sunlight. The carpenter spoke.

“Awful pretty place here in the morning.”

“What are the owners going to do with this house?” I asked.

“What folks generally do,” he said. “Live in it. Might say they’re living here now. Come up every week end to look it over.”

I glanced at Robert, thinking that this was Friday. But he’d already had the same idea.

“We camp right here,” he said. “Maybe we can talk ’em out of it for a winter.”

6. *Doorstep Tenants*

AFTER the carpenter had recovered from the shock of seeing a tent spring from an innocent black metal case, he devoted himself to our comfort. The house and, more important, its plumbing, were ours to command. He even heated the hot water tank for baths.

“Good chance to make sure everything is working right,” he said. “The Owens are liable to drive up any time now. Nice folks, too. You’ll like ’em.”

It was much more important that they like us and we determined to be on hand to offer our own explanations of our presence. This was much too delicate a situation to be entrusted to a proxy. Robert helped the carpenter on last minute jobs and I joined in conferences. We had some brilliant inspirations about changes in the kitchen. The carpenter, who lacked initiative, grew hourly more grateful for our willingness to make decisions.

“Fine!” he’d agree at each suggestion. “Mrs. Owens will be glad we thought of that!”

And we, torn between pride in our inspiration and an expedient caution, could only hope Mrs. Owens would.

Bobs investigated the neighborhood and reported a girl her own age, whose name was Meta. She owned a burro, which Bobs most evidently expected to ride. Bobs was highly pleased with the locale and all our plans about the house. It was the first time she had participated in the selection of a home and she saw nothing remarkable in our technique. We hoped Mr. and Mrs. Owens would accept facts as naturally.

Sunday morning I had stage fright when a car drove up and two astonished people stared at our tent. If the Owens jumped to the conclusion that we were eccentrics they’d never entrust us with their beloved house.

The first awkward moments were over before we’d even finished exclaiming about how well the house blended with its surroundings. The landscaping had been Mr. Owens’ contribution and he began to look on us as persons of discernment. At this point the carpenter asked the Owens to inspect the new location of the kitchen cooler and gave me sole credit for the change. I’d hoped this subject wouldn’t come up until later, but I could only follow them into the kitchen and hold my breath.

"It is an improvement," Mrs. Owens said. "You've saved us from one of those building errors everyone makes."

The time had definitely arrived for explanations of our presence. Until now the Owens had displayed admirable self-restraint. I looked meaningfully at Robert. He was the one to speak for he is so unaware of oddities in behavior that he manages to make any eccentricity appear normal. Also I distrusted my own more urgent method of attack. At least this was my excuse later when Robert accused me of deserting him in a crisis. But he really didn't need help. As he explained the situation to the Owens their expressions changed from incredulity to pleased surprise and finally to joyous mirth. They laughed so hard they couldn't speak. At last Mrs. Owens wiped the tears from her eyes.

"And we wondered how we'd find nice tenants if we ever had to rent this house," she said. "Why, they camp on doorsteps!"

We left Mr. and Mrs. Owens to go into conference. They gave their decision a half hour later and apologized for its hard terms. Rent must be sufficient to permit as attractive furnishings as they'd want for themselves later and they named a sum which, in view of our intense desire, was modest. Nor would they give us a lease, and I saw Robert's eyes gleam at this news. The final condition was addressed to me. Mrs. Owens explained they were busy professional people, could shop only in odd half hours, and that I must pinch hit in selecting the furnishings.

My enthusiasm astonished Mrs. Owens.

"You mean you'd really like to?" she asked.

"There's nothing I'd like better," I assured her.

We spent the afternoon measuring windows, discussing drapes, dishes, color schemes and furniture. When they departed that evening we'd made an engagement for a Monday morning shopping orgy.

And from then on the house was ours.

In a week we were settled and at work. It was easy to get into our stride for we'd developed a technique of collaboration. Sometimes one, sometimes the other, got an idea for a story. After he'd sold it to the other, we were off in a ways and means discussion on characters and plot. We clicked so well that half the time one didn't wait for the other to complete his thought. Method of actual writing varied. Sometimes Robert wrote the first draft and I the second, or this procedure might be reversed. Occasionally we played leap frog by chapters, or even by half chapters, if either struck a snag.

I jeered at Robert's love scenes and he said that my he-man stuff sounded like a Rollo boy after his first taste of red meat. The finished product was neither wholly Robert's nor mine but a halfway version in which neither could be sure just which pages he had written. Each vigorously denied poor passages and claimed authorship of the best.

That this odd method of collaboration ever produced fiction baffled me. When working singly, neither handled words, characters, situations or emotional content as did the other. But for two years we had been producing stories which sold on the first trip. So well oiled had our machine become we could count on having a sixty thousand word serial in the mails in twenty-eight days. The story occupied our minds completely during those four weeks. We argued it at meal times, discussed it late into the evenings. At any time and in any place one was apt to break in with, "Now in that scene where the girl—"

One writer in the home is an ordeal. Two are appalling. Even Bobs rebelled occasionally. Her rebuke was justified when one day at luncheon she said plaintively, "Please stop talking story and talk about me."

We expected an idea to come to us when it was time to begin a new yarn, but the excitement of a home in the mountains speeded up our fiction factory. There was not a thought in our heads that first day we took the covers off the typewriters, which sat side by side in our new sun porch.

One of us remarked that an Indian girl we'd seen that summer whose skin was turning white in patches might be considered by the natives to be a victim of conjury. The other became interested as to how this suspicion might affect a group of white men. The novelette which grew out of that thought was plotted in twenty minutes. It had very little to do with the Indian girl but a great deal with a trio of white men. In thirty minutes we'd begun to write. Five days later the story was in the mails. Arthur Hoffman liked the characters so well he suggested we do a series. And, as was his pleasant custom with every sale, he boosted our rate.

"With the head of that valley to look at, there'll be no holding us back this winter," Robert said.

Mornings were given to work while Bobs and her friend, Meta, played with the burro. Never before had we had a burro nursemaid and we were astonished by his peculiar fitness for the job. A burro is never light-minded and has few interests. This burro had only two. He wished to crop the lush grass beside the stream or to stare meditatively at the mountains. As he wore a bell and never strayed, a quick glance or a cocked ear would locate the

trio, a small gray-coated donkey and two little girls trying vainly to induce him to move from his favorite spot.

In the afternoons we put the covers on the typewriters and went for drives or walks. Occasionally we climbed a mountain, and then we discovered how very tough small children are. After an ascent which left us gasping, Bobs still had energy to explore. We'd reach home with only enough energy to carry us to the nearest couch, while Bobs departed for a before supper play with Meta. Robert grew somewhat bitter. He'd "held up his end" with good men in the bush, only to be outclassed by a platinum-haired tot who looked deceptively ethereal.

His most humiliating defeat was on our return from a two thousand foot climb. Robert's complaint about sore muscles was interrupted by the sound of Bobs' treble laughter floating through a window. He looked out to see her playing tag!

"That blonde brat delicate!" he snorted. "I've carried her up the last steep place."

He added that we'd better remember a lesson in parenthood we had learned from a small boy we'd known long before we had even considered offspring.

I'd always realized that the young are appallingly untireable, as does anyone who has ever had the custody of an average active five-year-old for even a day. Robert went farther in his estimation of their abilities, basing his contention on boyhood summers on his grandfather's farm and on Indian lads he'd known in the bush. He maintained that the very young can be efficient in the out-of-doors and that many of them are.

The basic questions of outdoor existence are well within the comprehension of a child. Shelter, food and comfort are earned by obvious tasks performed on the spot and not handed down from some mysterious place of business to which father goes every week day. Limitations of a grub sack are apparent to all. Travel is accomplished by sweat and toil, and often so is shelter. And the young, being extremely clear-eyed and logical, recognize the significance of their own tasks. They see that these are not setting-up exercises designed as a moral lesson but that they pay dividends in living comfort.

I had listened to Robert's stories of mere babes who'd shouldered adult duties, and had almost wept with sympathy. At least I had felt this way about it until I met Dudley, a boy of seven.

We had gone on a wilderness journey with him and an overly solicitous father and mother and a couple of guides. The guides were taken mainly for Dudley's comfort, and before a day had passed they had contrived to make his name sound like a hymn of hate.

Dudley was not permitted to paddle, to carry the smallest object, to help in camp making or to perform any useful task. Each day he was given a lesson in woodcraft, his father demonstrating some esoteric matter such as how to twirl a stick to make fire. Even Dudley knew what a joke that was. There wasn't the slightest possibility he'd ever get six feet from a box of matches.

Dudley's energies, being untaxed, could be devoted exclusively to the torment of his elders. The high point in his career was reached one night when, cold, hungry and exhausted from fighting a head wind all day, we decided on a single dish meal, a pot of mulligan. We were ravenous by the time it was cooked and set on the ground for serving. In our hungry glances Dudley recognized his great moment and before anyone could stop him he hooked a toe under the bail of the kettle and dumped the mulligan onto the ground.

A mother's presence saved Dudley's life. While we munched anything we could find, Dudley made his meal on the special diet carried for him. He sat gravely spooning up his supper while his mother explained to a circle of hungry people that Dudley was much too young to understand his crime. If Dudley's purpose had been entertainment, he certainly succeeded. The spectacle of four malevolent but helpless adults was funny.

Robert was still bitter when we went to bed that night. I dropped off to sleep to his reiterated mutter, "The little hellion figured that one out."

We left the party a few days later and never knew whether the guides really deserted or whether the father, in a moment of rare insight, stage-managed the crisis. We were told only that the family needed help to reach the railroad and it became our duty to find Dudley and his parents and bring them out.

We've never started on a rescue mission with less fervor. On our way in we spent most of our waking hours devising measures to make the wilderness understandable to Dudley.

But the North had beaten us to it. We carried little food because Robert would have to pack out the bulging packsacks of our rescues, but by the time we found them the packsacks had long since been abandoned. Food was on a ration basis and every hour of travel was precious.

This was a game of living Dudley could understand. If I hadn't witnessed the miracle of his reformation I wouldn't have given it credence. Don't tell me a seven-year-old boy must be coddled in the out-of-doors! Dudley swung a more effective paddle than his mother, and put in longer hours. He made his own bough bed, and after one night of discomfort he saw to it that the larger branches were well covered. He knew just how much food should be rationed each day.

Catching a lake trout brought the proudest moment of his life. We ate the fish for supper and we'd expected to hear boyish boasting. But Dudley was too single purposed to waste time in that futility.

"Every fish I catch will save bacon for breakfast," he said. "Then we won't have to worry."

The thought of Dudley worrying about food made his mother's voice choke up, but the rest of us acclaimed him as an equal. It was with real regret that we said good-bye to Dudley when we reached the railroad.

We had resolved to remember this experience with Dudley but we never consciously applied it. Bobs just naturally became one of a tight little circle of three. Our winter in the Rockies inaugurated a real companionship for she dropped babyhood and became a reasoning person who took an intelligent interest in the world about her.

Isolation might have been one reason for the very real sense of equality between us. We three were shut off from others. Our play hours were spent together and our work hours left Bobs free to develop resources within herself. Always we tried to treat her as a thinking person and I imagine many children would prefer to conduct themselves more intelligently than their adult companions permit.

We three took long motor trips in the Rockies, drove wherever a narrow road pierced the mountains. That great barrier of snow-capped peaks fascinated me. I could never get my fill of their imposing grandeur, although Colorado should satisfy any mountain fancier. It contains more than half of the eighty highest mountains in North America and its mountain area is six times that of Switzerland.

To me, who had known only Mississippi bluffs notched by narrow coulees, the whole sweep of the glittering battlements of the Rockies was breath-taking. When we'd climbed a mountain pass I'd look off to westward where as far as I could see one great peak reared behind another. And

beyond that forbidding and stupendous jumble, heaved up in the earth's making, lay the farther West and the Pacific.

"No wonder the 'mountain men' saw a challenge in the Rockies," I said. "No one could come this far and not go on."

"Some day we will," Robert said.

That old, old urge to see the other side of the mountain claimed us both, even while we knew that for the present it was impossible. We still had that home to find. I hadn't forgotten that we were home-seekers and should be engaged in settling.

Meanwhile we had the Rockies to explore. Fortunately, Robert's father supplied us with many errands among the high peaks. At least it was fortunate for us, although not perhaps for him. Like all doctors of his generation, he bought mining stock. Perhaps the old time physician felt that the earth was storing up treasure to compensate for the time and effort he gave with no hope of profit.

Robert's father did not write us of his investments with the idea that we investigate their worth. He wanted us only to have visible proof of his good fortune. Silver or lead or zinc or some exotically rare metal was about to bring him riches and he'd remind us that we too should be thinking of our old age.

The more distant the mine, the better we liked the errand. We always knew what we'd find, and the only doubtful point would be whether a caretaker lived beside the inevitable dilapidated gallows frame above a mine shaft. We liked to talk to these old watchmen and after we'd led them to philosophizing about the gullibility of mankind, they'd usually ask us why men who had never seen a mine thought they could pick a good one.

Robert was always primed for this.

"I'd like to know that answer," he'd say. "My father owns a few shares in this glory hole."

These hopeful hopeless investments bothered Robert more than he liked to admit. Theoretically he believes in freedom of action, but he's apt to make another fellow's troubles his own. As we drove home from a visit to a particularly flagrant piece of promoter's audacity, Robert remarked that his father might have had years of fun in travel and adventure with the money he'd wasted trying to buy a playtime in his old age.

"And then he'd *really* have had something," Robert said.

“Isn’t it a case where ‘every man should salt his own potatoes’?”

I’d learned that homely old wood’s saying years before from Robert. He’d used it often when defending a stubborn adherence to his own, even if inferior, methods. This seemed the place to quote it back.

Robert laughed. “You mean that buying mining stock gives Dad adventure,” he said. “Guess you’re right.”

Through the winter months we’d frequently driven to Denver, stayed overnight, gone to a theater or visited friends. We’d discovered a small group of writers, the first we’d ever known. They had gathered around that veteran producer of western fiction, William McLeod Raine. Writer’s talk was new and fascinating, the first shop talk we’d ever heard. We’d known that writers must exist and we’d wondered what sort of people they were. Now we were touched to be considered fellow craftsmen and we soaked up fiction prattle like a pair of sponges.

But I hadn’t realized how the habit of city outings had grown until a day in early spring brought a check for a story and Robert proposed we get off at once for a city celebration.

“But we were in Denver last week,” I said.

“Needn’t keep us from going again,” Robert said. “And look at your daughter getting out her city clothes.”

Naturally Bobs was willing. City meant fluffy dresses, dinner in a hotel’s big dining room and evening custody by a pretty nurse. Bobs loved to be included in grown-up affairs and honored them with her best party manners. Being a bit over three years old, and completely uninhibited, she usually convulsed head waiters and fellow diners by an exit speech at the doorway of a restaurant. Her childish voice would penetrate the farthest corner of the room as she said, “Good-by, and thank you for a nice time.” Occasionally she made the same speech as we left an elevator and Robert, a rather shy parent, always tried to hurry our departures.

The idea of a family bust in Denver rapidly gained favor, especially after Robert added, “We didn’t leave the north woods to hide out in a mountain valley.”

I considered that remark as we drove into Denver. When we had arrived in Colorado we were suffering a nostalgia for pine country. It had really been the thick dark green of familiar pines at the foot of the mountains

which had halted us. They were the first we'd seen since we had left the Canadian cabin and our homemaking instinct had flared at once. We, as do so many others, had left one home to search for another as nearly as possible like the one we had just given up. But now I'd seen mountains and valleys and I'd found beauty everywhere, even in the rolling plains which at first had seemed desolate and empty.

And Robert had become resigned to the changes he'd found in Denver. At first he had mourned the city he remembered, for he'd known it while it still had traces of the early fabulous days—gambling houses, famous western characters on the streets, a nickel the smallest medium of exchange, a free, wide and handsome attitude toward life, and a redlight queen accompanied by her most beautiful girl, both dressed spectacularly and always in wide plumed hats, who each afternoon had made a triumphant circuit of downtown Denver in a trap drawn by two bay horses driven tandem.

Robert had returned to find his newspaper friends scattered, gambling houses closed, the State experimenting with prohibition and even the trap and tandem banished. He mourned the passing of that spectacle as one would mourn the extinction of a public monument.

But now he had accepted these changes. To him Denver was no longer a fascinating hoyden, dressed uncomfortably in unfamiliar Sunday-go-to-meeting clothes. He'd begun to admire the reformed jade and to boast of her respectability.

As usual, we swung into our favorite drive through the western side of the city. I looked at the great peaks lifting beyond Golden, that little village which was so well named.

"What marvelous sunsets one would have here," I said.

"Pretty soft to live in a city and be able to look at that sweep of mountains from your veranda," Robert agreed.

We finished the conversation at breakfast the next morning. For weeks, perhaps for months, we'd been unconsciously getting ready for city life, and that convenient excuse, the writing game, stepped in to justify the move. I remarked that a house in town, with telephone, nearby shops and a maid, would give uninterrupted writing hours, and when I saw Robert smile I added the unvarnished truth, "Besides, we've lived out of the world long enough."

“If we ever feel cramped, we can step out our front door and see a whole range of mountains,” Robert said. “Think we could find a house with *nothing* between us and them?”

He picked up the morning paper and turned to the want ad page.

Two hours later we were renting a house on the edge of the city and there was “nothing between us” and a sweep of two hundred miles of Rockies. I wondered if furnished houses materialized from mere wishing, and the owner seemed to regard us as a gift of Providence. She’d begun to wish for tenants the day before when confronted by a crisis which demanded immediate departure.

Robert was so excited in ascertaining that we could see both Pike’s Peak and Long’s Peak from the windows he scarcely looked at the house. I finished my inspection and joined him on the veranda.

“Anything about the place to worry us?” he asked.

“Only a bird,” I said.

He brightened. “Another canary?”

“No,” I said. “A dead one. Stuffed! A Chinese pheasant. But it’s her pride and joy and she’s made me promise to dust it every morning.”

7. *You Can Take It with You*

OUR mountain view demanded heroic self-discipline and it was several days before we had trained ourselves to stick to the typewriters. I was settled for a morning's work when the new maid rushed in to report that Bobs was being kidnapped from the sand pile.

I dashed out to see her being led away by a colored woman in maid's uniform. The abductor's smile was as expansive as her person when she called back to me, "My missus just got to see this honey chile."

I watched Bobs convoyed into the next door garden. The friendly red brick house promised charming owners and I'd wondered who our neighbors were. But Bobs didn't supply much information on her return. She prattled about "Dacie," who had played the piano and sung while Bobs danced, and she said "Dacie" was beautiful and smelled nice. Bobs didn't think her sand pile clothes had been equal to the occasion and she remedied this by promptly making an afternoon call when she'd been bathed and dressed after her nap.

I waited for her return and at last went to Robert.

"You'll have to get that child," I said. "She'll be a nuisance."

Robert refused to become excited, but toward dinner time he reluctantly set out on the parental errand.

Nor did he return. Dinner hour arrived, and dinner and I both waited. Now I'd lost both a daughter and a husband. The maid looked intrigued and sympathetic and suggested that she go after them, but I vetoed the idea lest I lose her too.

At last my straying family returned. Robert was as pleased over his visit as had been Bobs.

"Do you know who we've got for a neighbor?" he demanded.

Obviously I didn't, but I suggested that he should know after all these hours.

"Remember how well I liked the *Chocolate Soldier*?" he asked.

I had reason to remember, for when we'd first met in Milwaukee, Robert had come from six months of "bush" life and in his enthusiasm for the

theater we'd heard the *Chocolate Soldier* five times in a week. But when he told me that Grace Drew, who'd sung the leading role, was married and lived next door, I forgave him a ruined dinner. No wonder Bobs had reported "Dacie" was beautiful and smelled nice.

That was the beginning of a joyous friendship, the rare sort which starts off without preliminaries and maintains an even tempo. We didn't have to get acquainted for we knew each other at first glance. Robert and I hadn't had many playfellows in our married years and friends might have been one of the things I'd been missing when I said we'd been out of the world long enough. This friendship certainly wasn't based on shared experience. The wilderness was just a word to Grace, and I'd known her world, that of the theater, only from the front. But she looked at life as we did, although we'd approached it on different avenues.

The new fellowship was good for us. Without realizing it, we'd formed a too tight little circle of three. Now Bobs discovered that parents didn't comprise the whole adult world and Robert and I had someone to promote bridge games and dinner parties. It was high time too that I knew a woman who believed clothes were a feminine obligation. I'd forgotten about the white woman's burden in the five wilderness years when I'd had to consider only durability and weather.

Clothes shopping will never be an engrossing sport for me, nor even entertainment for an empty afternoon. Theoretically I knew that even if a woman could walk out of a store in a frock, it was just as well that she didn't. But I'd become lazy.

Grace took me in hand in her forthright fashion. One evening she stared at a new dress I'd snatched from a rack in passing.

"Does a woman writer have to look as though clothes are beneath her notice just to show she has a mind?" she asked.

I agreed that she didn't and invited Grace and her pet seamstress to take over the heterogeneous collection in my closet. And after Grace had gotten me to such a state of rectitude that she could point to me with pride, she and I turned to the writing of a play. It didn't sell, but we had fun trying. Our method of collaboration was unique. I sat at the typewriter while Grace acted out the lines and business. A hard worker, she saw no reason for recess. The day I thought it was time to take "five" and announced that I intended to sit under a tree and think, she vetoed the idea sternly.

"Listen, dear," she said. "You sit right here and let me see you think."

That was a sound bit of wisdom on the job of writing, and it showed the different attitudes of the writer and of the actor. The writing job is necessarily a lonely business but the actor wants an audience to spur him on.

I knew much more about actors before the summer was over. Practically every stage celebrity who visited the West stopped to see Grace, and people who for me had been merely headlines in newspapers were now fellow guests at dinners. They were a joyous crowd. Nat Goodwin, encouraged by our shouts of laughter, was far more amusing on the subject of his matrimonial misadventures than any reporter had dared be.

Those stage folk I didn't meet in person I learned to know intimately. They peopled Grace's stories and she had a faculty, such as I'd never known, of making characters come alive. The personalities of Broadway became so distinct for me that in the end the ones I'd met in flesh and those I'd met in Grace's stories merged until I couldn't remember which I'd really known.

We liked Denver. We'd been so long away from cities that the convenience of shops, theaters and restaurants was almost a source of wonder. We liked being near our friends without having to give up easy access to the mountains, and as much as anything else we loved the view from our veranda. So, without talking much about it, Robert and I began to prowl the outskirts of the city, looking for building lots. And for the first time since the cabin days, we began to draw plans on paper.

"We'll have to build this house with words," Robert warned me. "Millions of words. For years and years."

Millions of words didn't dismay me but I didn't like the sound of "years and years." They were our most precious possession and I wanted to be very sure.

Robert laughed at my sudden wariness and reminded me that for weeks I'd been describing the kind of home I wanted.

"But that's because I don't like this house," I said. "It's only charm is the view."

The interior was what one would expect from a woman who cherished a stuffed Chinese pheasant. Alive, these birds are beautiful, and they had become quite common on the outskirts of the city. Years before several imported pairs had been released to roam the plains. I loved looking out the window to see a half a dozen brilliant-plumaged creatures on the green lawn.

But a long-tailed dead bird on the mantel was different. I developed a loathing for the creature as each morning I kept my promise to dust its plumage. Then I solved the matter by giving it one final thorough dusting, wrapping the carcass in tissue paper and laying it on a closet shelf.

Robert hadn't missed our specimen and I was surprised one afternoon when he asked what had become of it. I told him and went on working. Later his raucous laughter drew me to the veranda. For a moment I thought a fine cock pheasant, tamer than usual, was a principal in a love triangle. He stood motionless beneath a tree while another cock, accompanied by a hen, screamed imprecations across the lawn. The lady was looking speculatively at the handsome stranger, who apparently believed in indifference and didn't waste a glance at his conquest. The hen preened and uttered endearing calls, but when she drew nearer to find out just what was the matter with her appeal, her enraged mate could endure it no longer. He had started for his rival as I suddenly recalled Robert's question.

In my dash to rescue our sacred trust, I barely nosed out the assailant, and he wasn't any madder than I. Robert was rolling on the ground with laughter and he didn't hear my outburst.

"Why'd you stop it?" he demanded. "That fight would have been good!"

"And you'd have watched that precious stuffed bird torn to pieces for a laugh," I said bitterly. "Leaving me to explain to the owner!"

"My ringside seat would have been worth an explanation," Robert said. "After this stay in the house and write."

He was morose about the matter all afternoon and continued to speculate on what might have happened when the warlike cock found himself tackling a pacifist who wouldn't return a blow. But I never had the slightest doubt of the outcome. I knew. Once when I was very young and found myself decidedly overmatched in a fistic encounter with a brother, I fell back upon a precept of Sunday school. My teacher had solemnly assured us that the scheme would work. But when I tried turning the other cheek, the swat I got was my first great disillusionment.

War excitement was reaching fever pitch. It had been steadily mounting all spring. When Americans were drafted, the war began to seem our own. Robert registered and was given a deferred classification, but the fact that he had registered did something to our point of view. It must have been so with others. Women seemed to knit more vehemently and piles of rolled bandages

began to have more meaning. Youths marched away. Death lists were printed. Even people who had ridiculed the sugar and fat rations as unnecessary now made a patriotic point of strict observance.

Everywhere we heard martial music. Pictures of doughboys stared at us from posters with the caption, "Lafayette, we are here." And there were other and equally disturbing slogans. "Save Democracy" or "Make the World Safe for Your Children." No matter where we turned, a caption, poster, speech or headline drove home the fact that the war was ours.

"The war to end all wars" was a true crusader's battle cry.

It became increasingly difficult for Robert and me to adhere to our decision that he would not enlist. We bought Liberty Bonds, gave to the Red Cross and observed food rations. I knitted and rolled bandages. But none of that seemed to be enough. We worked harder and made more plans for the future in an effort to push aside the conviction growing on us. We tried not to speak about it but occasionally Robert would burst out with, "That damned music gets under a fellow's hide."

I wouldn't answer because I couldn't. War threatened years which belonged to us and I suspected that we, rational individuals, were being drawn into a vortex. I resented the compulsion and then wondered if my resentment were even decent. Where, after all, did our real loyalties lie?

It was a question which couldn't be answered as war excitement piled up about us. Each could only follow his convictions, and mine weren't even steady beliefs, but wobbled from day to day. I suspected Robert's too were wavering in the week in which neither commented on the headlines.

I'd expected the announcement he made as we were driving through downtown Denver. He'd decided to enlist. He was troubled by his decision, for he added, "Seems like a dirty trick to play on you and Bobs."

I wondered why he had chosen business traffic in which to break the news, and then I was glad his preoccupation with driving gave me a moment before I had to answer. I hoped my words were gallant and I managed to add that it might be a dirtier trick if he didn't go.

"Bobs will grow up in the better world we'll make out of the present mess," I said.

I felt very solemn. Never before had Robert or I been offered a part in changing the aspect of the world. I waited for him to laugh, as he so often did, at my tendency to emotional fervor. But he only looked relieved and said gruffly, "Hoped you'd feel that way."

That night at dinner Robert reported that he'd been provisionally accepted in the navy. He was delighted and suddenly very eager. The male attitude toward war baffled me. For months he'd argued with himself about enlistment, and now that the question was settled, his only anxiety was lest the war would end before he could get into it.

"You've wanted to go all along," I said.

"Sure," he agreed. "I'd had the time of my life and you'd had to stand the grief to pay for it."

I'd suspected he felt that way about it.

"Besides," he added, "here's the biggest adventure that'll come in my time. A writer ought to be in it."

The writing game was still a good excuse, but this was the first undertaking we'd not faced together. At least it seemed so to me, and in the days which followed I began to feel that every able-bodied man or woman, regardless of personal obligation, must be actively in the battle to save democracy. I couldn't decide whether this was a wish that the same enterprise absorb us both, a zeal in my country's service, or a bit of self-dramatics. I suspected it was all three. But when I was asked to serve as a hostess in aviation camps in France I was eager to accept. The government wanted college graduates of my age and I was pleased and touched that my country needed me. I began to talk about my duty in the war.

"But we can't both run out on Bobs," Robert protested.

Robert was clear-eyed about his enlistment. He pointed out that he would be fed, clothed, laundered and even barbered by his country. He would have no personal financial responsibility but his going would place a load on me. Then I began to wonder why the posters didn't carry a few pictures of dough girls.

Writing solo sounded lonely. I was afraid I'd never have a story idea without Robert around to argue its merits. These so-called intellectual discussions in a family are stimulating.

In our survey of how finances could be managed, we wrote to Arthur Hoffman of *Adventure*. He agreed that, although they'd never had a woman on the staff, my experience justified an exception. I knew nothing about editing magazines, but I'd known nothing of the wilderness, of fiction writing or of any other project I'd tackled in the last seven years. Being on the deciding end of a story appealed to me.

Nothing definite had been determined when Robert went up for medical examination. I'd known he was underweight, for we'd been working hard. But I didn't know how much underweight.

"Need twelve pounds before they'll take me," he reported.

This sounded like reprieve until he added that minor surgery would help him get his weight back quickly.

"Are you going to have it done?" I asked.

"Sure," he said.

He entered a hospital the next day. Hospitals were understaffed and overcrowded by war time conditions and a single room was unavailable. As I left him in a two-bed ward shared by an unprepossessing man, I felt that the hardships of warfare had already begun. I had misgivings the morning after the operation, but on the third day when he was still unkempt and babbling with a temperature, I went to the superintendent.

I had a long list of complaints. Nurses' duties had been left to overworked orderlies. Trays were bad. And, most of all, Robert needed a bath. I didn't get results, but I did blow off steam.

"I could do a better job of nursing with my left hand," I said, and I called an ambulance and took my patient home.

The doctor approved of my impetuous methods. Together we dragged Robert back the long road from a serious infection and when he had recovered he was not twelve pounds underweight but twenty-five.

"At least I did a little bleeding for my country," he said.

We certainly hadn't accomplished much in national defense, but for me those past weeks had been more than a gesture. We paid the inevitable bills of illness and totaled up our resources. In addition to Liberty Bonds, we still had a healthy balance.

"Guess we're safe now in buying that building lot," Robert said. "Nothing more to stop us from those years and years of words."

I didn't answer. I was thinking of all the plans we'd made and how cheated I had felt when I realized that perhaps they would never come to pass. Now our years together, those years which had been threatened, had been given back to us. We'd had a lesson without having to pay for our tuition. Never again would I have to be reminded that it is always "later than you think."

Robert watched my face. He imagined I was thinking of those “years and years.” So I was, but far differently than he surmised.

“From now on we’re going to be thrifty,” I said.

He looked startled. “Sure! That’s what—”

“I mean life, not money,” I said. “And if we don’t know now that years should be invested, we’re just too dumb to learn.”

“Oh! I get you! You mean—”

“I mean that we haven’t done one-tenth of the things we planned!” I rushed on. “Once I was afraid we’d never do them. For one thing, we started out to see this country. And we haven’t even crossed the Rockies!”

Robert’s eyes gleamed. “We’d need a larger car,” he said.

At that moment I would have agreed to a brace of cars and in the afternoon we sallied forth to shop for automobiles.

As we prepared for the journey to the farther West we had a buoyant sense of cutting free. This was different than anticipation of travel. In travel one knows that ultimately he must return to his old base, but we had no pledged loyalties to places or to things which would hamper or restrict us. I liked our sense of freedom, for I suspected I would never learn to be a happy traveler. My homing instinct kept me tied.

I tested out this theory on Robert, who looked slightly baffled.

“Odd idea from a woman who’s been clamoring to be taken across the Rockies,” he said.

“But it isn’t odd,” I insisted. “We’ll cast off mooring lines and have no destination. We won’t be onlookers. We’ll be homebodies because wherever we find ourselves will be our home.” I stopped and thought a moment. “You know, that’s why our departures are so painless to a fearfully faithful creature like me.”

“Sure,” Robert said. “You’re monogamous. You can love only one home at a time.”

In the excitement of preparation we attacked the burden of possessions. These had followed us from Wisconsin in heavy cases chosen for durability and repeated usage, for we suspected our home search might be broken by

temporary pauses. Robert called those several hundred pounds of freight “bringing up our rear.” I called it the decency of having one’s own things.

I looked at the strange collection I’d considered necessities and picked up a pan.

“Why did we carry this?” I asked.

“You said it was the right size for a pudding you make once a year,” he answered with fine male scorn.

I tossed it into the discards.

“I’m through being dumb,” I said. “Let’s sort all this stuff.”

From the household equipment I chose a small pile of “musts.” A kitchen spatula was one. We’d found it in a deserted mining town in the wilderness and it had been with me through my first attempts to cook and had scraped innumerable odd-looking messes out of pans. I couldn’t have deserted my accomplice in former crime. Our flat silver was a “must” too. It was more than tableware. It was a vote of confidence sent out to us at our marriage by friends who had believed in the venture.

Household knick-knacks to which my hands had become accustomed joined the discards. Each house we’d rented had abounded in equipment, and a year’s education in adaptability had proved that my methods weren’t necessarily inspired. Other women knew tricks too.

Our clothing contained remnants from every outdoor game we’d played—riding breeches from the cabin, the first stag shirt I’d owned, my capote, and Bobs’ small replica, both of white woolen cloth with gay L’Assomption belts. I hesitated over Bobs’.

“Didn’t she look cute in this!” I said.

I put it on her. The once perky skirt was only a skimpy ruffle and I was sorry I’d spoiled my memory of a toddler dressed for the northern trail. Robert picked up her first shoepacs, so small they’d been a special order.

“What do you do with baby shoes?” he asked.

I giggled. “From the nest of them I uncovered in my mother’s attic, I’d judge one kept them all,” I said. “I carried out several pecks. Let’s save Bobs that trouble.”

The shoepacs went into the discards.

We sorted, advised and reminisced. I'd expected that such wholesale parting from possessions would be sad but before the afternoon's job was done I knew that we didn't need mementoes. The years were ours.

"What grand times we've had," I said.

"No one's crammed more fun into seven years," Robert agreed. "Now what are we going to do about this junk?"

The answer was simple. "Musts" went into our luggage. Discards were left to confound our landlady. A woman who cherished a stuffed pheasant wouldn't object to a few more things. Remnants of our past life, too valuable to be so cavalierly abandoned, were boxed and shipped to Robert's family. We wrote his mother detailed directions about their care to impress upon her that they were a sacred trust until we were settled in a home. Our landlady hadn't been more earnest about the dusting of the pheasant. We thought this transfer of custody an inspired solution. And so it proved to be.

We were still jubilant over our job of elimination when William McLeod Raine dropped in that evening. He saw the heap of discards.

"Moving?" he asked.

He was startled by the news of our impending departure.

"Thought you folks intended to settle in Denver and write," he said.

"But we have settled and we have written!" I protested. "Now we're going to do a bit of living to sort of balance things."

He shook his head. "Writers aren't supposed to live," he said. "They're supposed only to go on writing. Ever hear of a successful businessman closing up his office and going off somewhere to live?"

It was a purely rhetorical question and he answered it himself by adding that we'd better get settled somewhere, pile up the words and forget this living urge until we were too old to pound the typewriters. In the face of all that common sense we didn't have the temerity to argue so frail and tenuous a creed as that of living, so we only muttered vaguely that settling somewhere was one of our chief reasons for driving West.

We'd said good-by to all our friends except Grace. Our last evening was spent in her home and after dinner we sat on the veranda and, as we'd done so often, watched the glorious sunset above Golden. It was more spectacular than usual. We three, on the edge of a city, seemed in a world of our own.

The sun slipped behind the mountain and its going left a hemisphere of flaming color. Slowly this darkened into bronzed lavenders and purples, the more startling against the clear tones of a green-blue sky. Dusk came at last. The rolling plains lifted to the dark rim of distant mountains where occasionally a car light flickered like a giant firefly.

I wondered when we three would again watch such beauty.

We talked late in the softness of a western night. All dreaded the time of parting.

“When will I see you Pinks again?” Grace asked.

“Friends always get together, somewhere, sometime,” I said.

It was only an attempt at cheerful prattle and I didn’t know I’d stumbled on a real truth. Friends, like ships, always do bespeak each other through the years.

8. *Beyond the Mountains*

AFTER a week of intensive shopping we'd bought a seven-passenger car, an Apperson Jack Rabbit. We knew its maker, Edgar Apperson, and the integrity and pride which had gone into his product. For us that was like taking out insurance. Edgar and his brother had built a gasoline-propelled vehicle in 1893, and it is on display in the Smithsonian Institution. They had built cars in the days when a maker had not only to drive his product to the home of its new owner but had to remain and teach him how to operate it. The Jack Rabbit had progressed a long way from that original model and for several years had won the famous Phoenix-Los Angeles desert race. While we didn't intend to enter road races, we wanted a car in which we had faith.

We left Denver as a quartet. The new member was an Airedale terrier, a recent purchase, whose patrician name we shortened to Sammo. Because dogs had played an important role in Robert's and my childhood, we believed every home and every child should have a dog. Bobs was delighted with our choice, but I had misgivings. A natural affinity exists between me and the canine race and Sammo was the first dog that had failed to recognize this tie. He was courteous always, but kept me in my place as merely the source of food and comfort.

Sammo was a specialist in devotion. When we'd bought him he distinctly heard us say he belonged to Bobs. This he accepted completely, too completely at times. He allowed no stranger to approach her, to speak to her and least of all to touch her. We barely prevented several well-intentioned people from being torn to pieces. Sammo showed no discernment in the matter. Once Robert caught him as he was flying at a policeman's throat. The officer had been attracted by a blonde tot sitting demurely in a car and hadn't seen the sixty pounds of ferocious devotion lying at her feet.

Bobs and Sammo were supposed to occupy the back seat of the car, and did during naps. But they spent the greater part of the day on a steamer trunk on the floor of the tonneau, and as the trunk was directly behind a passage between our two front seats, the four of us made a compact little group.

Our car looked almost austere compared to camping cars we met. Their interiors were usually a vast confusion of dangling bags, khaki-clad adults, shock-haired children and enormous bundles. And by their silhouettes one

could know them. They achieved odd effects as tents, rolls of bedding, springs and mattresses, even washtubs, were fastened in front, on top, behind and alongside in every conceivable fashion by which a bulky object could be made to adhere to a moving vehicle. The open road had developed a strange new species, the gasoline tramp, devoted to continuous migration.

Robert's passion for orderly outfits made our camping effects almost furtive. Tent and furniture were in the metal case on the running board, clothes and blankets in the steamer trunk and our commissary was a neat case containing nested dishes, a Primus stove and a limited assortment of food. We intended to stop at hotels when possible and to make camp when we couldn't reach a town.

We considered our camping outfit as equipment for emergencies and we didn't suspect we were encountering one our second day out when we'd stopped for gas at Pueblo. As the man filled the tank he remarked that we were smart to leave Denver.

"They say folks are dying off like flies," he added. "The plague struck sudden."

We blinked. And when he went on to say that Denver had been declared a closed town the previous evening we began to doubt our hearing. That was only six hours after our departure. Questions didn't clear up the mystery. He'd told us all he knew, a word of mouth rumor that a pestilence, like a plague of the middle ages, had struck Denver. Returned soldiers were held responsible for the epidemic.

The last fact suggested war hysteria and because our informant was evidently enjoying the role of disaster-mongering, we pretended to be shocked and credulous, and went off, leaving him to his delusions.

"That's how those crazy stories start and spread," I remarked comfortably to Robert as we drove out of town.

We'd expected to leave the good roads when beyond Pueblo, but we'd never seen a highway peter out more quickly. For miles and miles we had only a single wagon track, surfaced in spots and in others not even graded.

"Might as well get used to this kind of going," Robert said.

I didn't mind the going, for at last we were entering the real West. Even physically that land was fascinating. The earth had been scarred and rent in the turmoil of its making and already I saw evidence of that violence. The great plains had crushed up against the mountains and had been thrust into great rolling mounds and shattered by deep fissures. Now the mounds were

grass-covered, streams had found the canyons and trees bordered their banks, but there were still marks of that ancient impact.

We pitched camp beside a stream. I made a mulligan and even achieved dropped dumplings. Robert boasted of the refinements of our camping but an electric light dangling from our ridge pole seemed to me a touch of decadence. He argued that there was no virtue in disdaining comfort.

I had reverted to a more rugged school. After years of houses, I was again a nomad and when I live in a tent my thoughts are apt to be heroic. For me there will always be romance in those small bits of canvas which men have called home in far off places. A tent pitched in settlements may seem a sorry admission of defeat, but when flung out on plains, empty mesa or lonely desert, beneath towering peaks or in the far solitude of the North, it is a banner of defiance.

Tents have meant so many things to so many men, and my tent conversation turns to heroic sagas. I could tell these stirring tales to Bobs, but I had no way of inspiring Sammo with vicarious adventure.

Until he'd joined us, he'd been both the darling and an economic mainstay of an old maid. The size of his stud fees had aroused her admiration and she'd solemnly warned us against the inevitable charitable impulses of dogdom. Thus Sammo had lived a pampered and restricted life, and now he distrusted our whole outdoor venture. He was mystified when we ate in the open. He was distressed when Bobs and I took a sponge bath in the stream and he was panic-stricken when we disappeared into the upper berth to sleep. He broke down and whimpered when Robert vanished into the lower.

I turned on the light to comfort him, but he didn't want reassurance. He wanted a bed, and he asked as plainly as any dog could what arrangements had been made for him.

"Imagine our owning a dog that's never slept on the ground!" Robert said. "Let him learn!"

Robert's tone was adamant, but a few minutes later he went to the car, brought back a piece of canvas, spread it in the corner and rather sheepishly explained canine camping. Sammo got the idea and capered joyfully before he settled down to sleep.

The canvas didn't add comfort but it kept the record clear that a dog rates a bed, and every night thereafter Sammo supervised camp making until his canvas had been laid. In everything else he was willing to make

compromises with the strange ways of his new companions. But he'd been warned about rheumatism, and there were some risks even a canine adventurer should not be asked to take.

In the first days of our journey I gave full credence to all those lurid tales of western touring. Victories of our car's forbears in road races were only a mockery when for hours on end we crawled at a fifteen mile speed. Even that was dangerous on deeply rutted adobe which had been cut in the previous rainy season and then sunbaked through a summer. Our wheels had to find footing on rounded ridges of concrete, and the dire penalties for failure in this tight rope driving compelled success. Had we slipped off we would have cracked the base of the motor, and the nearest garage was a long way off.

For me the road became divided into zones. Twenty miles from a garage was comparative safety, forty miles was somewhat hazardous, and when even blacksmith shops were a hundred and fifty miles apart, I held my breath.

Ordinary dirt roads presented a nice problem too. These were deeply furrowed single wagon tracks which turned and twisted and once our wheels were established in a groove, they must of necessity stay. Then our car was no bounding Jack Rabbit but a bucking bronco threatening to throw himself. Fortunately there was little traffic and the embarrassing question of passing was seldom raised. I grew so accustomed to our solitary journeying that later when we encountered a two-way road I was terrified, for every approaching car seemed an engine of destruction bearing down upon us. Peril, like discomfort, depends on one's point of view.

But if it wasn't roads, it was something else. In the evening Robert would look at the speedometer, find we'd made only a hundred miles, and sometimes less, and vow that the next day would be different. He was getting fairly adept as a tightrope driver and furrow follower and had ambitions to establish a record of a two hundred mile run.

We toyed with the idea one morning as we started after an early breakfast. I didn't think we'd make it, and I almost hoped we wouldn't. Eastern New Mexico was much too lovely to hurry through. No one had prepared me for its beauty—a turquoise sky above, rare and sparkling air, plains which rolled to far horizons, and always purple chocolate mountains in the distance. I wanted to drive in that world of magic color for days and

days, and before long it appeared as though I might have my wish. I did nothing to bring this about. The tires did that.

Before we'd left Denver Robert had bought two cord tires. Sixty dollar casings and equally expensive tubes had seemed an unnecessary refinement in protection. Our car was equipped with fabric tires, which everyone used, but Robert had read the amazing claims for the new cord tires and life didn't seem worth living until he owned them.

They'd traveled into New Mexico as very stylish spares, but he'd put them on the two rear wheels that morning in preparation for this marvelous record run. His pride in our car's shoes made his chagrin the greater when after a half hour on the road we heard the scream of escaping air. We leaped out. One of the new cord tires was flat. We jacked up the car, demounted the rim, ripped the casing from it and found a six-inch gash in a new tube. Robert stared at it in stupefaction. I tried not to look superior.

We patched the tube, replaced it in the tire, got the maddening rim back on the wheel and took turns pumping fifty pounds of air. Robert explained that even the best equipment could go wrong at times.

The whole job had taken the better part of an hour and when everything was stowed again I admitted that tire trouble was something to avoid. My remark was a fine introduction to a second agonized scream. We'd gone a quarter of a mile. This time it was the other new casing, but the tube had the same long gash. While we made repairs, Robert's conversation dwelt mainly on the mystery of the repetition.

Ultimately we solved it, but knowing that the fault was wholly the manufacturer's was of slight comfort to us out there on those wide empty New Mexican tablelands. We were the tire maker's guinea pigs and he left it for us to learn that the beads of the casings lifted on each curve and cut a nice gash in the tubes when they settled back on a straightaway. One hundred and forty dollars' worth of tire equipment was useless.

But we remained dogged guinea pigs all that day and eight times we went through the dreary performance. The flats were nicely spaced for maximum annoyance, occurring after we'd gone only a few yards and hadn't yet recovered from the previous crisis, or delaying just long enough to arouse false hopes. As I listened for the unmistakable sound of a deflating tube I began to understand how wearing is a fireman's day.

That evening I looked at the speedometer in amazement. We'd been in and around that car more than ten hours, I'd labored like a galley slave, and we had forty-seven and four-tenths miles to our credit. Now Robert faced

two more tire changes. That evening the lowly fabrics were reinstalled. He looked a little sheepish and I felt sorry for him.

“If we had to try out those cords,” I said, “I haven’t seen a stretch of country where I’d rather spend ten hours.”

We drove into Santa Fe on corrugated adobe roads. We knew a little of its fascinating history. It had been the site of an early civilization thousands of years before the coming of our own people. Pottery, crumbling walls and human bones were all that remained, but the story of that fabulous buried city of gold had brought the Spanish conquerors. Soldiers in armor astride armored chargers had swept up to find the treasure.

This invasion made Santa Fe the second oldest city in the United States, but more stirring was the fact that it had continued to flourish since the Spanish era. The Palace of Governors, built in the seventeenth century, had been occupied continuously by a succession of Spanish, Mexican and American governors until 1909. Under the Spaniards, Santa Fe was the capital of an enormous district. It saw the subjugation of the Indians, served as a fur center for the mountain men and was the end of the old Santa Fe trail. It is still the capital of a state and trading center of a vast ranching area.

Santa Fe had never been refurbished or done in replica of its historic past. It had remained Santa Fe, had gradually taken on the patina of age and usage. So the authenticity of the town was inescapable. Old Spanish houses of adobe and stone stood just as they were built centuries before. Behind the high walls, which lined the streets about the plaza, families still lived and open gateways to the patios gave enticing glimpses of the courtyard life within. The city had the mystery and enchantment of ancient peoples.

For us, one of Santa Fe’s attractions had been a hotel room and bath. We asked directions when we bought gasoline. The garageman shook his head.

“Doubt if a hotel will take you on account of the plague,” he said.

This time we weren’t so contemptuous of hearsay rumor. We plied the man with questions and learned that the plague had a name, Spanish influenza, a strange new disease which was sweeping the country. Hospitals were overcrowded, patients filled hotels and the death toll was mounting. The most terrifying fact he told us was that many patients died after only a few hours’ illness.

We drove away to talk it over. I was sure we shouldn’t take chances in a hotel. Robert agreed, but warned we’d have to spend the night in a

municipal camping ground.

We found it, an adobe-walled enclosure in the center of town. A few Mexicans were cooking their evening meal over a smoldering camp fire. A flock of sheep had been bedded down in one corner of the court and another flock was flowing through the open gateway. Their bleats filled the air, as did also the cloud of dust stirred up by their coming.

This square undoubtedly was the same place where the mountain men had gathered and the ox teams had halted. Involuntarily I glanced about, expecting to see coonskin caps and powder horns or the dim shapes of great freighting wagons. Ghosts dwelt in that enclosure, but historical atmosphere was one thing, spending the night with Mexicans and sheep on a communal blanket of six inches of ancient dust was quite another.

“We can’t stay here,” I said.

Again Robert agreed, but he added that it was this or a dry camp on the mesa. It wouldn’t be a bone dry camp for we carried seven gallons of water. I made earnest promises regarding the Plimsoll line in baths, we bought provisions and drove out of town.

We chose our home for the night on the flat top of a mountain. As the sun dropped beneath the mesa’s rim only distant peaks were lighted. Privately I had delivered some exhortations to myself. It wasn’t Robert’s fault that evening had caught us in a town with no shelter. I intended to be gallant, and I found myself having only to be ecstatic.

As evening shadows gave way to darkness we were encompassed by a quiet so deep that the whole world was caught up in the enchantment. Bobs went to bed and even Sammo sought his canvas, but Robert and I could not leave that beauty. The night was warm and tender. Stars were close. They came out one by one until our sky was spangled. We did not talk. There was no need. It was one of those rare moments when man reaches an inarticulate understanding with his world. The universe was hushed in benediction.

We sat there as a late moon climbed above our rim of darkness and flooded the mesa with silvery radiance, a pale reflection of the golden day but more exquisite and more lovely. Beauty can be so great it hurts.

As we entered the tent we turned for a last look at our magic mesa.

“Some day we’re going to have a home here,” I said.

“That’s the third home you’ve picked,” Robert said. “This afternoon it was Glorietta Canyon.”

“What’s so wrong in a number?” I asked. “If we know a lot of homes we won’t get set and narrow-minded. This one—” and I stopped a moment. “Well, if life went terribly wrong, I’d come here to be healed.”

“Now you’re choosing asylums,” Robert laughed.

“No,” I said. “For if life were joyous, here it would be only more complete.”

Time turned back for us as we followed a winding dirt road on the Rio Grande. We passed native hamlets. Isletta was lovely with its white houses strung with garlands of red peppers and every Indian inhabitant wearing leggings of white doeskin. I wondered how they kept so white in a dusty land but Robert was more interested in the number of deer required to dress a village.

We left this dirt road for an even fainter wagon track leading across a vast rolling plain that formed the continental divide. It was hard to believe we were more than seven thousand feet above sea level. Mountains appeared only in the distance and hours of driving did not bring them closer. We journeyed in an emptiness like that of the sea. Only occasionally did we see evidence of life. It was always the same, a tiny block of brown adobe, remote even from the road, a Mexican’s home for which we could guess no reason. Each flat roof was covered with red peppers and the bright color dripped down the walls. Those people may never have bathed, but they lived in loveliness.

We stopped at the only two Mexican villages we encountered. They were as primitive as before the white man’s coming. Men sat in the sun and only lifted drowsy eyelids at our passing, and women, bending over outdoor tasks, seemed scarcely aware of us. We had a shopping errand. We were searching for gasoline and found ten gallons in the last of the two villages. We paid sixty cents a gallon, and were glad to get it.

We’d complained about the sunbaked furrows of adobe until one afternoon in Arizona when a downpour changed concrete into grease. Then we no longer balanced but weaved from side to side.

Making camp in the rain might be uncomfortable, but I felt that at least it was safer than such travel. Robert got out to find a campsite and staggered more drunkenly than had the car. In a few steps he wore thick soles of adobe, and because adobe attracts other adobe unto itself, almost at once he

was walking on adobe platforms. To lift his feet he adopted a prancing gait that left me hysterical with laughter.

He didn't see any humor in it as he tried to clean his feet.

"There isn't a stick in this damned country to scrape this mucilage off," he said.

At least Robert had proved the folly of leaving the car and we kept on slithering from ditch to ditch as we made our way to a hotel in St. John, the only chance for shelter. Apparently all the other trucks and cars had the same destination. We never knew from whence all that traffic so suddenly appeared. We passed cars as they slewed into ditches and they passed us as we slid off. A fear of limited hotel accommodations had changed touring into an obstacle race.

We didn't win, place or show, but we got the last bed, a double, set up in a draughty hallway. Later arrivals slept in their cars.

Our dinner was also only a minor triumph. Provision trucks had failed to arrive and store shelves were cleaned as though by locusts. Far-sighted guests had eaten early. We drew tomatoes and pie, but we got the last three pieces.

In the evening hotel guests gathered before a fireplace. We'd already encountered most of our fellow motorists. Traveling the same highway, we'd seen each other frequently as they passed us or we passed them.

Waving acquaintances had developed. We knew odd facts about our companions of the road, and undoubtedly they had made deductions about us. We knew which made late starts in the morning, which always went into camp early, which lunched in roadside picnics and which ate large noon meals in village restaurants. We knew which cars carried back seat drivers, and often we knew whether husband or wife was in the right.

We'd named our fellow travelers by cars and states. Mr. and Mrs. Buick were old friends. We'd visited their camp one evening and learned that they were ardent "See America First" fans. They'd wintered in Florida and had been lonely for the mountains of their own Northwest.

"But that was something to find out," Mr. Buick said. "Now we know what kind of country we want to see."

Mrs. Buick, a shy small creature, was almost tremulous over the daring of their camp existence. For years they'd talked about going adventuring on

the open road and when the baby of their family had married they had started out.

“First playtime we’ve ever had,” she said. “Good for the children too, not to have the old folks hovering in chimney corners.”

We’d also observed the life of Mr. and Mrs. Ford, and that of all their clan, the other Fords, which we designated by states. We knew Mr. and Mrs. Paige had tire trouble, that the Overlands had broken a rear axle, and we’d been fascinated by Miss Moon and her two men companions, mostly because they didn’t fit in any picture we knew.

Now the first rain of the year had brought us together for a night and as we assembled around the inn’s big fireplace I wondered if our road companions would prove to be the people we’d imagined. I thought it would be a test of our shrewdness in deductions but it was instead a test of our endurance. No one had a chance to emerge as a person. Miss Moon occupied the stage while her two press agents moved reverently from group to group, explaining that she was on her way West to fill an important, although unnamed, movie role.

“First movie actress to drive her own car across the country,” they’d whisper. “Won’t she move in on Hollywood!”

She certainly moved in on St. John. No one talked cars or roads or motor or tire trouble while St. John was providing a dress rehearsal for Miss Moon. But at least she cleared up the mystery about herself, or rather deepened it. We began to wish we knew her *real* history, for any woman who had driven those adobe roads that day and still had all that energy left over would certainly get somewhere.

We left early the next morning for there was no breakfast to complicate departure, not a sliver of toast or a drop of coffee. We drove for an hour on greasy adobe before an outcropping of rock permitted us to get out of the car and boil our own pot.

The night in the hallway in St. John had whetted my desire for a real hotel. I talked continuously of a bath and couldn’t get my mind off the subject, even when we made camp in the petrified forest. Prehistoric trees, no matter how lovely in hue, couldn’t compete with my vision of a shining white tub and an inexhaustible supply of hot water.

In our first town on the railroad I was searching the street for a hotel sign when the town constable flagged us down.

“You can’t stop here,” he said. “Town’s closed.”

“Influenza?” we asked.

He nodded. We’d expected to hear that the epidemic was under control. Like the runaway small boy who is astonished to return home and find the same old cat, we’d imagined events had occurred swiftly in the world we’d left. And they had. Influenza was now pandemic. The officer quoted startling figures. Thousands of cases. Fatalities had risen in leaps and bounds. Stricken cities had closed schools and public gatherings were forbidden. A few towns had banned tourists as a prevention against infection.

This was no minor public health disaster. A plague like those of the middle ages was stalking through the land.

“And if I was you folks, I’d stay out of cities,” the officer advised.

We stopped in the outskirts of the town to talk it over. I was frightened. Having been out of touch with newspapers, we were completely unprepared for news of such a catastrophe. Despite official figures, it was still incredible.

“That cop gave us good advice,” Robert said. “We’ve got a car and a home. Let’s steer clear of towns.”

This determination imparted a new leisure to our western trek. We struck off across the flats on a dim meandering wagon track toward the Painted Desert. We spent that evening in the Navaho country at a trading post.

We’d stopped to buy provisions, but we stayed to talk to the owner, a college man who had married a Navaho woman. Our years in the North destroyed any romantic attitude toward a “country marriage,” but I felt that the Gibsons were really happy. Mrs. Gibson was educated and evidently a leader of her people. Her husband shared her interest in the native culture and the bond between this isolated pair was very real.

We knew nothing of the Southwest Indians and that evening we traded our knowledge of the Ojibwa people for an absorbing lecture on methods and designs in Navaho rug-weaving.

News of our presence spread quickly. Before the evening had fairly begun, the store was filled with Indians. The rug-making circle turned out in a body. And we were expected to give a lecture.

The Navahoes wished to know how the forest Ojibwa lived, how he built his wigwam, caught his fur and what he ate. The Navaho women were curious about the fancy work of their Ojibwa sisters. We gave this

information in English to Mr. Gibson, who translated it into Navaho. If our audience was still puzzled, Robert or I acted out the data.

I'd had no idea how a Chautauqua lecturer must be prepared for all eventualities and I was worn out when the evening ended. I had been a woman sewing beads, had dried fish, had impersonated animals and paddled a canoe. Robert had trapped and snared and paddled and had built imaginary wigwams.

But we'd learned something too. When we went to our tent we were able to say our good nights in polite Navaho.

And the wit of the village called out the Ojibwa, "B'jou'!"

9. *Desert Country*

OUR wanderings on dim, gullied roads yielded dividends in beauty but they extracted payment. The Jack Rabbit suffered a few broken spring leaves. As we could never drive several hundred miles of rough desert road in a car afflicted with fallen springs, we stopped in Flagstaff. Our misgivings about finding parts for the Jack Rabbit were confirmed. The town's sole garageman shook his head and referred us to a blacksmith.

There our troubles ended. Springs were nothing in that blacksmith's life. The previous year he had wrought two tons of steel into springs for cars. He might have started out in life as a shoer of horses but he had moved along with progress.

While we waited for our springs we camped in a grove of gorgeous pines at the base of San Francisco mountain. The campsite lay just outside town and was apparently an asylum for distressed motorists. One tenant had been there for ten days while a whole rear end was being shipped from the East.

Camping beneath pines on a clean carpet of pungent needles with a mountain rising straight up behind us was an enrichment even of our ecstatic memories of the northern wilderness. Once I had thought that there couldn't be so lovely a country as our beloved Canadian North. Now I was fast reaching a state of awed wonder that our own America could be so rich in beauty.

I'd seen so much. I'd topped rises to find myself in a whole world of color—the earth, the rim of mountains and the sky. I'd seen buttes of rose-colored adobe catch and glorify the sunlight. Robert said their lovely lines and surface were the results of erosion, but I was sure a mighty craftsman had fashioned those great masses with magic-working hands. Only purposeful artistry could have achieved the cunning arrangement of one long palisade of buttes which I'd watched through a sunset as one after another donned its copper crown.

Early in our tour I'd given up trying to find words. As we drove I sat silent for hours, letting myself blend and merge with my surroundings. Robert feared I'd be depleted in emotion.

"Save some until we reach a real desert," he advised.

I didn't have to ration emotion. Each day renewed my stock, for each day brought fresh revelations.

We were both discovering how truly great was our land. We'd thought we knew this, but we found we'd had only the barest inkling. Our impact with the West had shocked us to a realization of how little we had really known about our country.

So our month's journey was an unforgettable emotional experience. It wasn't merely a matter of discovering grandeur or even vastness. It was something deeper, something inextricably woven with the history of our people. Perhaps the war had made us more sentient. For months our thoughts had been dwelling on foreign conflict and the European crisis. Our thoughts had been traveling abroad, and now they had returned to their homeland. More and more we found ourselves speaking of the country which was ours and of the people who had made it so. Our imagination had been quickened to a realization of our heritage.

For the first time I had gained some conception of the indomitability of that great western thrust. Each day spent in that challenging terrain was a reminder of the courage of the men who had defied it. New land, homes, gold, or perhaps only the wish to conquer, had carried them over forbidding mountain ranges, across desolate valleys and burning deserts. They had shown fortitude and steadfastness, and those qualities still lived in my people.

I needed to be reminded of the brave beginnings of our land, and mountains, valleys, plains and deserts told me of it. They spoke to me of valiant deeds. They stirred me, and they made a demand upon me. And in my own renewal of faith and pride and deep humility and confidence, the Old World's chaos and threat fell into right proportions.

We Americans had only to remember true.

Without planning, our touring days became a set pattern—a start at sunrise that we might watch the changing colors, a noon stop with sandwiches beside the car, an early afternoon nap for Bobs, which Sammo shared while Robert and I drowsed in a world drenched with color. When Bobs wakened there began what Robert called the daily conversational hour. Her fresh energies were always directed at exploration of a new subject and we could never guess what it would be. Usually the topic was suggested by something she saw beside the road, and whatever it was, she went into it exhaustively. It might be where lambs came from, where Indians found the

turquoises for jewelry, or how wool was woven into cloth, but always the inevitable questions proceeded from a real desire to know.

After I had passed or failed my daily intelligence test I was free for the remainder of the afternoon. Those last hours of driving were the most exciting time of the day for then the sun employed the theatrical tricks of a spotlight. I didn't dare take my eyes from the landscape because the changes were so sharp, so quickly come and so quickly gone.

Shimmering plains suddenly became soft blankets of misty blue. Mountainsides of glistening grays and greens transformed as miraculously to bronzed purples out of which deep shadows thrust. The last sun's rays might electrify a huge shoulder of a mountain in blazing tones, and even as I watched, the deeply crevassed slope would suddenly become smooth and tawny. "Elephant hide," I called it despite Robert's reminder that elephants were gray.

"But it gives that same feeling," I insisted. "It clothes mass and power."

Bobs was always willing to indulge me in my fancies. She too liked elephants, and as we drove down a valley in the soft evening shadows she agreed that the great slumbering mountains did look like prehistoric elephants at rest.

The country was all so new and absorbing we did not hurry. We left the main highway often, which sometimes proved to be wise and sometimes to be folly. We went out to meet the Painted Desert. We swung in a wide circle to include the Grand Canyon. Our days were a succession of swift changes on rolling plains and plateaus, through great valleys and steep-walled canyons, until I wondered why physical geography had seemed so dull and lifeless at school. Now each long steep climb held exciting promise of a vast country sweeping ahead, and in the dim blue-gray distance a narrow line on a mountain would tell us where our road led. The twists and turns between were hidden and we liked it better so.

"Way up yonder's where we're going," Robert would say, and I felt that even the Jack Rabbit responded to the excitement of that thought.

Mountain grades convinced us that westerners were daredevils. Never before had we encountered roads which ascended canyon walls in a series of hairpin bends so short we had to back and fill to make the turns. And when we reached the Gold Road Grade we suspected that Arizonians had crossed their cars with mountain goats. On those narrow turns we hung in space while Sammo gulped and looked anxiously at Robert. I gulped too, but I

concealed it beneath a jaunty air. It required real heroism on my part but at least it put me one up on Sammo.

That road provided an exciting gamble on whether we'd meet another car. Almost never was there room for passing. Once we had to back, or rather sidle, halfway up a mountain to let a fellow motorist by. He looked scared and I wanted to assure him he wasn't half as scared as I. When he stopped to thank us, Robert managed to sound very nonchalant about it all, but I noticed that his hands trembled when he lighted a cigarette.

Robert so seldom admitted apprehension that I was astonished when he confessed that the prospect of the real desert scared him. That was why we carried seven gallons of water and he didn't think it was sufficient for miles and miles of lonely waste shimmering in the heat of early October. I pointed out that we three could even bathe in seven gallons and that some car would find us before we died of thirst. But he wasn't interested in the possibilities of rescue. What he really wanted was to carry more water, and there wasn't space for another can.

I had intended to worry with him, but I forgot his water fears when I saw the beauty of the desert. I'd not dreamed there could be such color. I was saturated in it. The desert came alive each morning in shimmering gold upon which played indescribable tones of pinks, lavenders, warm grays and even opalescence. Each hour seemed more lovely than the last. I could never choose my favorite. I'd be convinced that sunrise on the desert was the magic time, and then I'd be caught by the beauty of the evening transformation when the purples and deep blues were swallowed by a velvet blackness so soft and so enveloping that I could almost feel its texture.

Even the air was different. It was light and had an intoxicating quality which added to my sense of ecstasy.

"Color, distance and far off mountains reaching toward the sky," I chanted. "Sometime we must live here."

"Another home?" Robert asked.

I had the grace to be embarrassed. My home feeling was beginning to get scattered.

Yet I knew the desert had laid her hand upon us.

Robert's misgivings about the water were justified. It was not we who needed liquids but the Jack Rabbit. That car never did things by halves. When it developed a leaky radiator it wasn't satisfied with a puny drop-by-drop dribble. It staged a deluge! Vibration on rough roads had split the

bottom pan of the radiator wide open. Escaping steam announced that the last drop of water had been poured on the desert. When Robert came up from his investigation under the front end of the car he said that a hundred gallons of water wouldn't do us any good. It would run out almost as fast as we could pour it in.

We were in the middle of the Mohave. There wasn't a car in sight and it had been hours since we'd passed one. Robert walked a hundred yards up a slight grade and when he came back he reported two dots miles and miles ahead. He thought the dots were buildings.

"But it's all down hill to them," he said. "We could coast from that next crest if we have water enough to get us there."

We gambled the whole seven gallons we could make the crest and that those two dots were buildings and one was a garage. I felt a bit solemn as he poured the water in.

We won all three bets. To do so we established some sort of record in long distance coasting. We'd traveled eight miles. Our momentum expired at the feet of a grinning mechanic. But we'd made it, and under our own power.

Womanlike I exulted.

"I knew that seven gallons was enough for a desert crisis," I said.

Our own near accident made us zealous to befriend others and any stalled car brought us to a stop. We halted to investigate a Maxwell which stood beside the road. A prospector's pick and shovel was tied on behind very much as those tools are carried on a burro. At our call, an old fellow emerged from the other side of the car. He was small and gray and his face was a mass of sun wrinkles. I'd read of old desert rats and it seemed a piece of luck to encounter one who might have stepped right out of fiction. I hoped he'd tell us stories of his years of desert wandering and I also hoped that whatever was the matter with his car would take hours to repair.

But there was nothing the matter with his car. He had merely stopped to rest. And as for his desert stories! All he could talk about was how his Maxwell had changed his life.

"I'm through staring at the hind end of a burro all day," he said. "Now I can go places no burro can take me. I can carry what I please and I don't have to worry about making a water hole every night."

Robert had to get out and be shown all the new refinements in his camping outfit. The old fellow was through with pork and beans forever. Now it didn't make any difference how many cans he carried.

We rejoiced with him in his metamorphosis, for who were we to sneer at progress? But I couldn't escape a distinct sense of disappointment and as I glanced back at the ancient prospector coming along in his galloping Maxwell I knew he looked lonesome without his burro.

Our only other attempt to play good Samaritan was equally fruitless. We'd stared at a strange apparition on the road ahead for some time before I dared to ask the question in my mind.

"Is that car coming toward us or driving backwards?" I said.

Robert assured me he'd satisfied himself that it was traveling in reverse. We overtook it. An ancient Chandler, filled with children and camping paraphernalia, was backing sedately up the road. The man leaning out the driver's seat waved cheerfully as we drew alongside. The rear of the car was so heavily upholstered in rolls of bedding it appeared equipped to act as a battering ram.

"Need any help?" Robert called.

The man shook his head. "Getting on fine," he said. "Drove this way more'n two hundred miles."

As we went on I remarked that that mystery would torment me. Robert felt the same way and we loitered at the next gas station. Robert cleaned the windshield, put air in four tires, wiped off fenders and chatted with the attendant about the weather, waiting for the backwards driver to arrive.

When finally he did so I counted heads. I counted twice to make sure that there really were nine children and two adults in that small car. Robert was so entertained with the man's story that he called me over to hear the tale. The man had been a laborer in a shoe factory in Massachusetts when he'd heard that in California whole families made their living picking fruit. Nine children were too great an asset to be wasted. He'd bought a car, loaded children and possessions aboard and started out. He'd just reached California when he'd stripped the gears. Having no money for repairs, he'd taken the transmission apart, found the reverse gear alone to be intact and had started on his two hundred and fifty mile backing marathon. Now that his goal was practically in sight, he wanted to make it through alone.

"It's not a bad way of traveling," he concluded, "except I got an awful crick in my neck."

In our month of wandering I'd ceased to brood about hotels and porcelain bathtubs but as we drove into Los Angeles, city sights and sounds recalled these comforts. Yet they seemed impossible of attainment. Inquiries in outlying districts had assured us that the influenza epidemic was far from being under control. If anything, it was getting worse. In Los Angeles we heard terrifying tales of hotel guests being carried off to overcrowded hospitals in which corridors had been transformed into wards. Cases and deaths had reached fantastic figures. And, more dismaying, this new disease was still a mystery.

I didn't wish even to stop in the city.

"We don't want to live in Los Angeles anyway," Robert said.

Since we had come to see the Pacific, we'd decided to live where it was at least in sight. In midafternoon we drove to Santa Monica. I was becoming very much aware of our need of grooming. I knew that we couldn't be as wrinkled and disheveled as I felt, but I was suffering that inevitable collapse of morale which results from the sharp contrast of outdoor garments with city clothes.

"Most of all," I said, "I want to rent a tub."

"How about a tub in a house?" Robert asked.

That was an idea. We went at once to a real estate office and were shown several houses, all equally bad. To pay a month's rent for one night was both fantastic and impossible. Our once healthy bank balance had been dissipated by the purchase of a car and a month of touring. Getting words into the mails immediately was imperative.

While the real estator tried to be patient with our indecision, I walked through the garden of a house we were on the verge of refusing, hoping that I could sell it to myself. I discovered a small door.

"Is this another room?" I asked.

"The owner lives in the basement," the agent said.

"Not with us upstairs," I said.

The agent couldn't understand this odd attitude and explained that a majority of house owners had some such arrangement. "In the season," houses paid their cost with tourist rentals while owners scuttled off into dark corners. Then I began to understand several small outhouses in the other places we'd inspected. I'd assumed they were chicken coops. One would

need to be as wary of owner's hideouts as of household pests. Owners might crawl out from under bathtubs, like cockroaches.

But we must have a place to sleep. Robert inquired about hotels.

"Of course it's your business," the agent said. "But I wouldn't risk *my* family in a hotel. Not with ambulances carting influenza cases away every hour."

We drove up the beach as the sun set. Having family conferences on the influenza crisis was getting to be a habit.

"I wouldn't *quite* risk death for a bath," I said. "But it would be a close choice."

"Don't be silly," Robert said. "We'll find a safe place to sleep, but you may not get your precious bath."

"Where?" I asked.

He didn't tell me as we started inland. We passed small villages and traversed great open stretches. Mountains began to enclose us as we crossed an arroyo. Robert turned into a great expanse of velvet lawn.

"Thought we'd find a park soon," he said. "Now if the cop hasn't locked the door to the comfort station!"

He hadn't. I'd never felt more burglarish in my life as we set up the tent and cooked a supper.

"What if a park policeman makes a night round?" I asked.

"We'll let him hunt us a house," Robert said.

We were up at dawn, packed and in the car before the park's day began. As Robert folded the last blanket we began to look sleekly innocent. One would have thought we'd merely stopped to admire Pasadena's pet city park.

That part of the city was beautiful but when we drove down Orange Grove Avenue we knew it was not for us. But not far away we saw a rose-covered bungalow. Beside it a pergola over a driveway was a mass of yellow roses. On the front lawn was a small "to rent" sign.

"See owner next door," I chortled. "At least we'll live alone."

Robert went next door.

"How soon can we have hot water?" was his first question.

"In thirty minutes," the owner said.

“Start it going,” Robert said, “and—Oh, yes—what’s the rent?”

I was in the bathtub while Robert was still bringing in bags. Bobs had chosen her room, had become thoroughly acquainted with the owner and had discovered that oranges, lemons, guavas and avocados grew in our garden.

Robert stopped in the bathroom doorway.

“We can be at work this afternoon,” he said.

I hadn’t contemplated any such rush. In our month of wandering, written words had become a rather vague commodity.

“We’ll darn near have to,” he added. “The first and sixth months’ rent check wiped us out.”

I began to soap myself more vigorously.

“As bad as that?” I asked. “Then I’d better go out this morning and engage a maid. With someone to watch Bobs and feed us, we can grind it out fast.”

“Sure,” Robert said. “We’ll get a novelette into the mails and sold before the next rent is due.”

10. *We Do Not Choose To Toil*

THE threatened first of the month crisis was averted and Arthur Hoffman pronounced the serial the best we'd written for *Adventure*. We felt cocky.

"That was cutting it close," Robert said. "But we cut it."

The last time I'd heard that speech was in the wilderness when we'd nosed our canoe around a point after crossing a windswept traverse. And now, as then, we grinned at each other. Getting out of tough spots together would always be fun and I extracted the last bit of flavor in my backward glance.

"In the cabin, if anyone had told us that we'd dare take on a seven-room bungalow and a maid on the mere belief that we could write fiction, we'd have thought them mad," I said. "We're swinging better paddles."

The crisis had done more than build up our morale. It had started a good working schedule and we continued it from habit. Six hard hours at the typewriters were always behind us when we were ready to take Bobs and Edna, the maid, on our daily drives.

I'd found Edna in an employment office. She had arrived from Iowa on a round trip ticket given her as a high school graduation present and was unique in that she didn't expect to enter the movies. Instead was a serene conviction she could promote a winter in California as a housekeeper. I liked her sense of adventure.

"The girl's never heard of a reference," the annoyed manager declared. "Says her family liked her cooking!"

We'd had maids whose families couldn't possibly have liked their cooking, and as for a reference, Edna said anyone ought to be able to know whether a person was nice. I mentioned Bobs' age and discovered Edna had been lonesome for her small brother. Our needs seemed to dovetail.

In common with very other Iowan, Edna wanted to see southern California and mail a full quota of picture postcards to the blizzard-harried folks back home. She accomplished both on our daily drives. Usually we started with no destination or hour set for our return. We might drive to the sea or to the mountains, or only prowl aimlessly, content with miles and

miles of orange groves against a backdrop of snowclad peaks. We might return to a dinner Edna miraculously whisked out of fireless cooker and icebox or eat in a distant town and reach home disgracefully past Bobs' bed hour. Either seemed equally normal to Edna, and further proof she'd chosen her vocation wisely. We'd both had luck. Edna couldn't have been more zealous in the care of her small brother than of Bobs, and Robert and I felt free to go off on trips by ourselves.

We deserted the pair frequently for we suffered from recurrent desert fever. My attacks were more severe. I could never forget that the Colorado and the Mohave lay within a few hours' drive and for the first time I took an interest in maps. I was obsessed by the desert's loveliness. I had to get back to it. I'd watch for the first signs of restlessness in Robert and waylay him with, "How about a spot of desert?"

Usually it worked. An hour later we'd be in desert clothes and started on a two-day bust.

In my first enthusiasm over the astonishing variety of desert cacti, I'd carried a botany and notebook, but keeping score on varieties made me miss a lot of country, and a lot of other cacti. No erudition was required to recognize a hedge-hog, beaver-tail, fishhook, barrel or pincushion at first glance, and those I didn't know I could christen. My names satisfied Robert's mild curiosity even better than those in the textbook.

I was never intended for a lonely scientific life and broke down in a frank admission that I would henceforth concentrate on the cultivation of emotions. This didn't deceive Robert. He knew how thoroughly feckless was my attitude toward all informative data and had despaired long ago of my learning names of passes, peaks or even whole ranges. I could recall a place only by what I'd seen or felt. His use of geographical names might be more simple and efficient, but my way was more fun. He remembered the name of the hamlet from which we'd first seen a road which would permit the Jack Rabbit to show its speed, but I recalled only that there we had emerged from the mountains to see the vast sweep of the Imperial Valley lying before us with a narrow ribbon of cement stretching out across the desert. He could state exactly how high the speedometer had climbed, but I remembered only the hazy Chocolate mountains in the distance, the great golden floor of the valley and my own soaring spirits as we raced through emptiness.

On that trip we were warned against a narrow trail skirting the western side of the Salton Sea. The danger seemed to be that we wouldn't meet another car, or that we would. If we broke down, we'd die of thirst, and if

we encountered another car we'd have to pull out in the deep sand. Then we'd have to deflate the tires to get traction to get back. Deflation was easy. Pumping all that air back into four tires in desert heat would be another matter.

But a sea less than fifteen years old was worth a visit. Just why we wouldn't follow the better route on the eastern side we didn't know, but we clung stubbornly to our original idea. Later I wondered if it hadn't been a bit of instinctive wisdom.

The road justified the warnings. Hour after hour we crawled in two deep furrows in sand. The February heat beat down upon us. We met no other car and saw no living thing. We were alone on that ancient ocean floor and the traces of a prehistoric beach, high above us on a mountainside, separated us by centuries, as well as miles, from all other humans.

Even the snail's pace was our benefactor. It gave time for brooding silence to catch us up and for beauty to filter into the inner recesses of our emotions. We seemed to be staring at infinity. We were part of its mystery, its promise, its limitlessness. The barrier between man and his universe was lifted and I began to understand that strange spell the desert holds for those who truly know her. Lure of gold did not keep old desert rats plodding behind their burros year after year. Those wise old men had found a far more precious substance. We had barely glimpsed it, but we'd discovered its existence.

We'd been cautioned about the danger of flash floods which rush down dry washes. That was almost as baffling as the "would or wouldn't meet a car" hazard, but our adviser had insisted that automobiles were engulfed and lives lost because a car couldn't climb out of those deep ditches in time to escape a torrent. After we'd encountered several dry washes I believed a car climbed out with difficulty, but I still doubted the torrent part. Robert explained that in mountain-desert areas the steep-sided, sunbaked earth did not soak up a rainfall. Water collected with terrible swiftness in the canyons and when it reached the desert floor it followed the great ditches dug by previous floods. Since the squall which caused the torrent might be many miles distant, a wall of water could descend without warning.

I listened, and still I laughed. Those dry washes didn't look as though they'd had a drop of water in them for a thousand years. I said so, and then in a particularly deep and wide wash we came upon a six cylinder motor block. It was all that remained of a flood-caught car. I gasped and glanced

fearfully up the wash, almost expecting to see water rush upon us, and I noticed Robert made the Jack Rabbit fairly leap as we climbed the appalling angle on the other side.

“That scare you?” he asked.

“No,” I lied, and then I added, “but it filled me with deep respect for flash floods. The desert has her own way of preserving loneliness.”

“Some day there’ll be highways crisscrossing this whole valley,” Robert said.

“Probably,” I admitted, but I knew that, despite cars and highways, the desert would still lie forbidding, enduring, and unconquered.

In the influenza epidemic most cities exhorted against crowds but Pasadena tried to render crowds safe. It compelled its citizens to wear gauze masks in public, and the law was enforced. Jesters who cut holes for cigars found themselves in trouble. Interurban trains were halted at the city limits while passengers rummaged through pockets and handbags for precious masks to tie across their mouths. Unlike dominoes, masks didn’t impart an air of hilarity. People looked sinister and automobiles filled with masked passengers suggested days of banditry. In food stores, where clerks wore white coats, masks made one think only of jolly things like operations, and a white-coated, masked butcher was grimly suggestive.

The masks may have been as unsanitary as critics of the law insisted, but they were a great social leveler. Strangers exchanged intimate histories and I listened to so many diverting stories I was disappointed when the law was finally laughed out of existence.

But masked or unmasked, in Pasadena or elsewhere, the epidemic finally ran its course, and as the virulence subsided so did the public’s panic. Cheerfulness returned to the communities. Southern California took heed of its tourist industry. Hotels announced calendars of events and Chambers of Commerce reported the total of sunshine days. Real estate promoters again provided free luncheons in distant subdivisions. Movie theaters won back their audiences. Flower festivals got under way and the citizens of Los Angeles and environs again became their usual gregarious selves.

The gregariousness of southern California was not the quick cordiality of the westerner. Impulsive western hospitality is a geographical trait, a holdover from the early days when houses were far apart, inns were rare and every stranger was in need of shelter, food and a drink. A new land was in

the making. The present and the future was of more importance than the past and what an individual had or had not done in his old home was not so vital as what he would do in his new. Appraisals were cast up swiftly.

That old spirit survived in the descendants of early settlers and the westerner, once satisfied that the stranger was a fair specimen of human being, was apt to put himself, his home, his possessions and even his friends at the disposal of the newcomer. This overwhelming heartiness was sometimes embarrassing to visitors from older settled regions, where life had necessarily grown more cautious, but we, after five years in the Canadian wilderness, understood it was only an outgrowth of "the ways of the country." It didn't mean the westerner was suffering from impoverishment of interest, was unduly eager for new contacts or that further obligation was implied on either side. The westerner made that first hospitable gesture as simply as his grandfather said, "Draw up your chair, stranger."

But the gregariousness of Los Angeles was not an outgrowth of the settling of the West. Its people did not stem from that early migration. Only recently they had poured in by train and automobile, seeking sunshine and climate. They had built homes and gardens, started fruit ranches and orange and walnut groves, had invested in real estate. Los Angeles was growing fast and threatening to fulfill the most ebullient hopes, but its history had yet to be written.

There was an impermanence about its people. They'd been transplanted but they had not put down their roots. They still missed old ties in the Middle West and had not yet found anything to take their place. Their physical beings, and their eager hopes of the future, were in the new land, but their hearts and their memories were still back in Iowa.

That first question asked almost universally, "Where are you from?", was less an interest in the newcomer than a wistful yearning to find someone who knew someone they had once known.

In shops, restaurants, hotels and parks I was always conscious of loneliness in women's faces.

"They rave about picking roses on Christmas Day," I said to Robert, "but any one of them would wade through four feet of snow to drop in on the Ladies' Aid back home."

In the spring I realized with a start how our own circle of friends and acquaintances had widened. Living in a community automatically made

contacts. It had been true of Denver and now I found we knew people for all sorts of reasons.

“I could write a column of advice to the lonely,” I said one night at dinner. “There are dozens of ways to know people.”

We reviewed them. There was the man who’d followed us home to read Sammo’s pedigree and had said that one could breed and breed and never produce such perfection. He’d stayed an hour and had returned often. But he was Sammo’s friend. And the little girl with whom Bobs played, and the little girl’s mother, and the kindergarten teacher who lived in our block and invited Bobs in often for what must have been a busman’s holiday. They were Bobs’ friends. I reminded Robert of the man whom he knew because each owned a Jack Rabbit car, and he spoke of women I knew because we’d selected vegetables from the same wagon.

We reminded each other of people we’d met who’d read our stories. That had been the most surprising encounter of all for we’d written for years without realizing our work ever went beyond an editor’s desk. Discovery of those unknown friends affected Robert and me differently. He felt an added responsibility in his writing and I merely felt inclined to become more chatty.

Besides chance encounters, there were people who’d hunted us up because they’d known our families or known us when we were young, and fellow writers we’d met through Arthur Hoffman and *Adventure* magazine. We’d had several shop talk evenings and had been enormously pleased to find established writers considered us fellow craftsmen.

Altogether it made a long list of contacts. I wondered if this were “settling down.”

“But it shouldn’t be done that way!” I protested.

I felt cheated. This was following the advice we’d refused in Wisconsin, to get “a home and think no more about it.” We were no different from all people we’d met who confessed they’d just happened to stop and had never gone on. A home needed more thinking about than that.

“You’d make it a ceremony,” Robert teased me. “We, the Pinkertons, do solemnly take you our home to cherish and support—”

“But a home deserves better than choice by inertia!” I said.

Robert agreed, although he pointed out with a fine show of male logic that inertia was an odd word with which to describe my emotions toward a

bath the morning we'd arrived in Pasadena. "And this bathtub had to be rented for six months," he added. "Besides, we needed to get busy."

I applauded his masterly handling of the situation. But now the depleted bank account had been fattened. And I'd taken a lot of baths.

"In the woods we often went into camp while we did our laundry or got meat ready for the trail," I said. "But we didn't build a cabin there."

Robert grinned and wondered if any female person should ever be inducted into the out-of-doors.

"Makes 'em hard to live with ever after," he said.

We'd met Bertha Bower and Henry Herbert Knibbs at the home of a fellow writer and a few days later she asked me downtown for luncheon. For years we'd been reading B. M. Bower's stories and had marveled that a woman could for so long produce each year two western novels. Always they were peopled by real cowboys and Knibbs assured us she'd forgotten more about the cattle country than most western writers know. When we met her we understood her steady output. There was an indomitable quality about that short, dark woman which was inescapable.

I'd been extremely pleased by her luncheon invitation, for she rarely interrupted a day's work. I hoped we'd talk shop. We did.

"Been thinking about you two," she said almost at once.

I glowed.

"You people ought to get on the job," she said. "Writing isn't done in union hours. Didn't you say you turned out a book length serial in a month?"

I came out of my shock. "You mean we ought to do it in less?"

"You probably could," she said. "And then you'd have a title and a bunch of words. Why don't you try living with a story? Make something of it. Build it into something. You're wasting ideas. Some day they won't come so easily."

I rallied to our defense. There were two of us. We worked hard while we worked. And we'd not had a story rejected since we'd sold that first yarn to *Adventure* almost three years ago.

"You're selling now," she agreed. "But will you always?"

I thought that was something no writer knew, but she thought otherwise and went into a discussion of the distinction between made writers and born writers. Born writers wrote because they felt the compulsion, made writers because it was an absorbing occupation for which they had some aptitude. Everyone had a few yarns in him and if he perfected skill and technique he had a fair chance of staying in the game. Otherwise he was through when he'd reached the bottom of his grabbag of plots. She was a made writer, had adopted the profession to meet an economic crisis and now, even though her economic responsibilities had increased, she knew she could write them off. She named an income which made me blink.

"I've got to make that every year," she said. "It can't be left to chance. I've got to dig those stories out of myself. That's writing as a profession."

I resolved to go home and read our fiction. I didn't think our ideas were as air-borne as she suggested. Nor was I sure her larger and more secure income was worth the extravagant price she paid.

"In six months you two have driven through more country than I've covered in six years," she said. "This is the first time this winter I've been downtown in the daytime. You're letting life get between you and your job."

I wasn't eager to debate living versus working with a woman of her intensity, but I made a try.

"Look!" I said timidly. "You're saying, 'Get this tiresome business of living behind you so you can go to work.' But living won't ever be tiresome for me."

She looked at me in astonishment. "But you're really living when you work," she said.

We both laughed. She wasn't as much a "made writer" as she claimed.

That evening I reported the luncheon talk to Robert. I was baffled and on the defensive. We worked hard, but her advice had left me bothered. Robert was not perturbed.

"Everyone works differently," he said, "If we shut ourselves off like Bower does, never went anywhere or saw anyone, we'd probably never have another idea. There are as many ways of living a writing life as there are writers. We've made this one work. Why not stay by it?"

"But there must be a middle ground," I insisted. "She's right about the need of our settling in a home."

"Where?" Robert asked.

Mrs. Bower had said one place was as good as another for a writer, but I couldn't agree. We hadn't put our roots down in southern California any more than had those around us. I wanted an atmosphere of permanence and established tradition even if it were vicarious.

"People down here have just lighted," I said.

Robert started to smile.

"All right, we have, too," I admitted. "But I mean they haven't taken possession. They've bought this land only with dollars."

He reminded me that I hadn't exactly come across the country behind a team of oxen.

"But my imagination did," I said. "That's why I want to settle among pioneering families. I want to have touch with that spirit. It couldn't have died out in two generations."

"Native son stuff, eh?" Robert said. "Our rent is up next week."

11. Bobs and Buttons

SAN FRANCISCO stood warm and friendly, yet not over-anxious, on her many hills. She was like a lovely woman decently conscious of her desirability. She had vitality and yet a calm assurance. Chance visitors like ourselves were welcome, but they were not buttonholed, enticed, deluged with oratory, drowned in climate.

When we first drove down Market Street it was seventy years almost to the day since gold had been discovered on the American river, since clipper ships had begun to disgorge the argonauts on the Buena Vista beach, and yet the city we saw was old, firmly imbedded on its sand hills. Its people had lived there always. They had crowded centuries of growth into those swift years. No other city I'd seen had thrust its roots so deeply or into firmer soil. I felt that I was really in California.

This had not burst upon me. We could have driven from Los Angeles in less than two days but we seemed to have developed a snooping way of travel and were ten days on the way. We followed the Pacific for a hundred miles and then turned in among the mountains of the coast range. We deserted the highway for dim dirt roads and camped beside small streams in hidden canyons.

We encountered fruit ranchers and small cattle ranchers and discovered they were Californians. They always had been, and their fathers too. They'd been there long enough to become part of the yellow brown hills and of the lush green of irrigated valleys. They were like people we'd met in New Mexico and Arizona, wholly unlike those we'd known in the Middle West. They prepared us for San Francisco.

Nothing is hidden in San Francisco. Even from lower Market Street Twin Peaks are always in view, and from Nob and Russian and the other hills the whole city, and the great bay, spread in all directions. My first impression was of an oddly attractive treelessness, my second that of keen delight in the intoxicating grays of the massed planes of miles of buildings. No American city I'd seen exposed itself so completely or with such charm.

But San Francisco was not for us, for we'd determined against a city background. The idea had originally been mine and on our drive north I'd explained to Robert that we'd now reached that period when devoted parents

moved to the suburbs for the children's sake. Smaller communities with trees, lawns, neighborhood groups of youngsters and the well-knit interests of closely associated families were ideal places in which to bring up children.

"I want a gang of Bobs' friends playing in our garden," I said. "I want to know their parents and to be part of the community in which we live."

I thought his quick assent was wholly parental zeal until he added, "We'd get all that in a college town."

An old cultural complex had cropped up again. When we'd left the Canadian wilderness he'd spoken wistfully of living near the University of Wisconsin. He'd regretted having had only two years of college, and a premedic course at that. His vague yearning for self-improvement had died for lack of wifely support and I'd thought he'd forgotten it. But a Scotchman never abandons an idea. He buries it, and then, like a dog with his bone, digs it up occasionally to look it over. After fondling this bone in secret, he'd brought it again into the open. Now he had sustaining arguments—access to a college library, contact with intellectuals and even college courses.

"Plenty of things I'd like to know," he said.

There were plenty I could know to advantage, but I suspected I never would, and that he wouldn't unless he learned by absorption. However, the academic idea narrowed our field of search for a suburban life. The state university was "across the bay" in Berkeley and Stanford was "down the peninsula" at Palo Alto, both considered good by zealous parents. Robert's and my aims may have differed, but we clicked geographically.

During our week of exploring San Francisco I had often to bolster my sense of parental duty. More and more we were falling in love with the gaiety and color of the city's life. Most of all we liked the cosmopolitan air of the city itself. My zeal broke down completely one evening and I sent out a trial balloon by speculating whether homes, like mates, shouldn't be chosen with the heart and not the head. Robert didn't even reply. The next day I realized how intent was his improvement quest when he didn't blench as a Palo Alto realtor spoke of a twelve months' lease. It was I who retreated.

On our return drive to the city Robert accused me of frivolous intentions toward a home and said it wasn't like me to shilly-shally. I claimed to be merely cautious, and I took a lot of credit for my caution the next morning. We learned that a progressive kindergarten was to be conducted on the Berkeley campus during summer session. A supervisor was being imported

from the East, bringing the most advanced teaching methods, and pupils were to be a select list of superior children.

“And we’d have missed that chance if we’d signed the Palo Alto lease!” I cried. “I knew something better would turn up.”

We caught the next ferry. I was in a panic lest the enrollment be filled before we arrived. I didn’t doubt that Bobs’ superiority wouldn’t be recognized instantly, but as we crossed the bay I went to great pains to impress upon her the importance of the occasion. I must have overdone it. At the kindergarten Bobs made sure of committing no error by doing and saying absolutely nothing. She was no help to me in my claim to be the mother of a superior child. But somehow she was accepted.

The house of a professor which we rented that afternoon was within walking distance of the kindergarten and in the very heart of academic atmosphere. It would be ours only during the owner’s summer absence and for the first time I heard Robert lament a temporary tenancy.

Our inspection of the house was conducted at practically a canter. The professor’s wife was gracious but so succinct that the lady realtor found herself moved expertly from room to room. But even with the moral support of a real estate agent, I’ve never been able to prod beds and peer into closets. I admit these matters have vital importance but at the moment they are, for me, only intimate details in the owner’s life. But such casual inspections have a certain advantage. When one finds that he’s leased discomforts he can always reflect that he doesn’t own them. He’s bought cheap experience in homemaking. Already I had a long list of mistakes to be avoided. We’d undoubtedly make others, but not those.

I’d realized that the bedrooms were on the Spartan side, but the professor’s wife, a charming woman, had evidently found them adequate. And after all we were renting an academic life. The attractive library was book-lined, comfortable chairs and reading lights were properly mated, the university library could be seen from our windows, a progressive kindergarten was within walking distance and our block was inhabited solely by faculty families. We’d accomplished a lot in one afternoon.

Within a week Bobs was playing with faculty offspring, Sammo was romping with faculty dogs, faculty wives “ran in” to see me and professors and their wives dropped in for informal calls. It was a friendly and delightful neighborhood. In the evening we sprinkled lawns and called back and forth, and occasionally gathered for a heated discussion of the League of Nations. It had supplanted the war, influenza and the peace treaty.

I enjoyed it, but I noticed that more and more Robert was slipping off to the engine house down the block to argue Willard versus Dempsey with the city firemen.

We didn't hear as many intellectual discussions as we'd hoped. The academic life, we discovered, was as occupied with mundane matters as any other. More so, we thought. Professors, we discovered, couldn't spend their own money. It wasn't so much a matter of the size of faculty pay checks as what they were compelled to do with them. Precedent, custom, pride of institution and department, enforced certain outward standards of living. There was no escape. The poor dears were denied even the joys of rivalry in their activity. They had to conform even to tax-paying opinion. It was rather a shock to us to discover that intellectual leaders were often weary, slightly frightened men who envied us the independence of our existence.

As we knew our neighbors better we understood the contrasts in our house, and why the hallway was as sharp a demarcation as the backdrop of a theater. Worn rugs, scratched furniture and bare bedrooms belonged behind scenes, together with the everyday world of cotton stockings and worry over the speed with which children's shoes wore out. The glorification side of the two-way existence was carried on in the attractive library where faculty teas brought forth fragile china, the good afternoon dress, silk stockings and carefree animation.

"The department likes its staff to be a credit to the university," I heard so often I could feel my face lift into a set smile when I crossed the threshold of our library.

"Six months of this and I'd be conditioned into a faculty wife," I said to Robert.

"No chance!" he said. "You'd run amok."

"I'd shock them into giving you a raise."

"Or kicking me out," Robert said.

Kindergarten opened at last. On the first morning Bobs appeared in our room at dawn and said she'd thought she heard us call. When I reminded her she'd used that excuse last Christmas, she said, "But this day's important too."

The importance of the day told in her tight small fingers as she slipped her hand into mine to walk to school. Her feet set an eager pace. But early as we were, we found the classroom filled with parents and small sons and daughters. A teacher arranged a row of chairs for those mothers who wished

to remain through the first day's session. I decided to be one of them until Bobs said, "Good-by, mother," in a firm tone which had the finality of the closing of a door. She had recognized the last outpost of babyhood before I did.

I lingered in the doorway to watch the low chairs drawn into a circle. I noticed a child dressed in what was apparently a grain sack, held at each shoulder by a safety pin. This precarious garment couldn't be an emergency for the child seemed completely at ease. While I was staring, a large woman standing beside me breathed ecstatically, "Isn't it wonderful? If only the rest of us had the courage to revive the beauty of the old Greek culture!"

I gulped and nodded. I wanted to say I thought the courage was demanded wholly of the child but I was afraid to discredit Bobs on her first day.

Robert looked forward as much as I to Bobs' report on school and I promised magnanimously not to let her talk herself out on our walk home that noon. It was an easy promise for she offered no information. During lunch her answers to our questions were monosyllabic and when this unusual reticence had gone on for several days, Robert asked me if I thought she were getting on well.

I wasn't as confident as I pretended when I said she was only becoming adjusted. Already I'd formed the habit of dallying about the classroom. I'd heard other mothers receiving gratifying reports, but a week passed before I was asked to the supervisor's office.

The gravity of her manner was portentous. I knew she thoroughly disapproved of me as a parent long before she'd finished her opening exhortation on the need of facing life's problems with complete honesty and courage. I stiffened for a blow.

"But you must not give up hope," she finished. "A great deal can be done for the subnormal child."

I came out of my daze.

"Bobs subnormal!" I cried.

The supervisor smiled incredulously. "You most certainly knew that," she said.

"I most certainly didn't. And I still don't—"

"Please!" she interrupted. "You must face this honestly if only for your child's sake."

She went on to enumerate the appalling results of my refusal to face facts. Already my pride had brought a bitter experience to Bobs. The school had done its best to soften the situation but Bobs must have discovered her own inadequacies. All that might have been spared her had I been honest the day of enrollment. And now, when their only desire was to help me find a proper environment for Bobs, a school or institution designed for children of her mentality, I still persisted in denying the facts. The supervisor's arraignment was vehement and I gave up even trying to interrupt. She finished at last and sat for a moment considering me as a problem. I knew she was taking my measure and I expected that I too was to be declared mentally incompetent when she arose and left the room. She returned with an assistant.

"Show what Bobs couldn't do," she commanded.

The assistant held out a small wooden frame containing colored wooden beads on wires. As she deftly shot the beads from one end of the frame to the other, her fingernails clicked sharply. I wasn't at all sure I could do the trick with such ease.

"But Bobs had a plaything like that a year ago!" I protested.

"Did she carry out any project on it?" the supervisor asked.

I couldn't say. I wasn't even sure what sort of a project could be managed on it, but I insisted she'd moved the beads. The supervisor smiled and held out two strips of cloth, one with a row of buttons and the other with buttonholes.

"Bobs can't even button buttons," she said.

That was on home ground. I assured them Bobs had buttoned buttons for a year. The two women exchanged glances. Now they knew I wasn't subnormal. I was only a barefaced liar.

"Really!" I insisted. "For a year she's been going to the bathroom—"

The supervisor again held up her hand as though begging to be spared intimate details of our home life. I was a thoroughly stupid parent and she was trying hard not to lose patience with me.

"Don't you see we can be of no help to you until you're honest with us?" she said. "I wanted you to take a hopeful attitude and work out a plan for her future training. It can't be with us, of course, but—"

I stood up. Bobs' connection with this particular kindergarten appeared to be ended. The supervisor walked to the door with me. Her manner

softened.

“Go home and think this over,” she said, “and see me when you’re more calm. I’ll make a list of schools and we’ll attack the problem together. But never give up hope!”

Bobs was waiting in the empty classroom and her glance searched my face. We didn’t speak of my office visit until we had crossed the campus and then Bobs opened the subject by asking experimentally if I liked the supervisor.

I said she’d seemed a very pleasant person and asked Bobs if she didn’t agree.

“Yes,” she said slowly, “only she keeps saying the same thing over and over.”

I admitted I’d noticed that. “But why didn’t you button those buttons?” I asked.

“I did!” Bobs cried. “But it didn’t button up anything. What’s the use of just buttoning and unbuttoning?”

It took me several moments to think of an answer. Bobs scuffed along beside me and her intense absorption in kicking small bits of gravel proved she wasn’t quite as conscience-free as she pretended. She made one last effort to establish her position.

“She kept one boy buttoning and unbuttoning buttons all morning!” Bobs burst forth. “I think they gave him that to do because he’s sort of dumb. Don’t you?”

I said I didn’t know the child.

“But he’d *have* to be dumb to keep on doing that,” she said.

The grave crime of refusing to button and unbutton buttons couldn’t be passed over so lightly. At luncheon Robert promised me support in an impressive discussion of obedience and co-operation. We started out well but that silly phrase of buttoning and unbuttoning buttons chanted back and forth across the table, undermined our efforts. One might as well try to be stern when speaking of Peter Piper picking peppers. Bobs may have lacked intelligence but there was nothing wrong with her sense of humor. Robert gave up first.

“I’m for Bobs!” he said. “To hell with the buttons!”

It having been proved that Bobs and the academic life were not yet ready for each other, she could return to normal pastimes. Twenty children moved into our garden, the eucalyptus grove beside our house and the street before it. Robert became the most popular member of the gang when he introduced a “kick-the-can” version of hide-and-seek, and the inviting jangle of a kicked tomato can called him more and more often from his typewriter.

The academic life was not doing any more for Robert than it had for Bobs. He’d never been inside the University library. He couldn’t have named one of the summer courses. And the writing game had come to a complete standstill. We’d plunged in with all our old fervor, planned stories which sounded inspired, only to have them dissolve mysteriously between mind and paper. Our ideas were as tenuous as soap bubbles. Robert sat at his typewriter, I sat at mine, and we made an encouraging din and clatter. But at the end of a morning’s work each had only a wastebasket of crumpled pages.

We knew no reason for this mental shut-down. We’d had no stories refused, no discouraging editorial comments. Arthur Hoffman wrote almost plaintively for a full length novel. We wanted to write it, were determined to do so, and at the end of each day we still faced blank paper.

I reviewed my luncheon conversation with B. M. Bower. Her comments had mystified me then. Now they sent cold chills up and down my spine. As I sat before my typewriter I seemed to hear an echo of her words, “You’re selling now, but will you always?”

Obviously not, if we couldn’t get a story down on paper. And we’d gotten on the job, if hours counted. We no longer knocked off for afternoon drives. We didn’t accomplish anything by staying home, but we couldn’t stop trying.

It was so frightening a crisis that we dared not admit it to each other. But at the end of two months I dragged the skeleton into the open. It wasn’t more courage, only less endurance, which made me ask quite suddenly one afternoon, “Are we ever going to be able to write again?”

“That’s what I’ve been wondering,” Robert said.

It was as bad, then, as I had feared.

“But professional writing is a matter of learning how to drag a story out of one’s self,” I said. “And once—”

“What in hell do you think I’ve been trying to do all summer?” Robert demanded savagely. “We’re through, I tell you! Finished!”

The rage in his voice admitted how great was his fear. I wondered if the apprehensions of the academic life had been contagious, and then I realized this was something much more devastating than professorial fear. Their securities were threatened only from the outside. Our inner citadels had crumbled.

“No one’s ever finished,” I said, more because I had to believe it than from any idea of scattering cheerfulness.

“If we were in the woods I wouldn’t worry,” Robert said. “Lot of things I could do besides write.”

“What?” I asked.

“Fish for the market, do some guiding, work in a logging camp. We could always eat!”

“I could cook, run a trap line, put up preserves, even do plain sewing,” I said.

Merely naming possible jobs pushed fear farther back. My thoughts began to right themselves. I reminded Robert that we were a long way from starvation or even poverty.

“It’s not now I’m worrying about,” he said. “But what’s going to happen six months from now when we go broke?”

I had no answer for that, and suddenly it was no longer romantic and adventurous to be two thousand miles from families, friends and associations which had promised security.

“Trouble is,” Robert said, “we’ve been writing about things I’ve known through jobs I’ve held. We’ve run dry. I’ve never worked so long at anything in my life as this fiction game. Maybe I ought to have a job again—for just a little while.”

He renigged with that last, but I understood what he really meant.

“Let’s both get jobs,” I said. “Real ones, tough ones, for day wages.”

His face was ecstatic when he looked up at me.

“You are a sport!” he exclaimed. “We’ll start looking tomorrow.”

12. Jobs Are Where You Find Them

WE went to San Francisco on an early morning ferry. Robert looked as though he'd shed five years overnight and I felt that I had. When I'd come downstairs in my smartest city clothes, he'd chuckled.

"Appearance counts," I'd said.

"Especially in the sort of jobs we're looking for," he'd said.

We went to Howard Street, "south of the slot," where all the big employment offices were within a few blocks. Few San Franciscans know this district. Through it have passed the men who have harvested the West's crops, cut its logs and dug its tunnels. They were hard men because it took a hard man to beat a hard life. The closest approach to this district I'd ever seen was the "skid road" in Duluth, but Howard Street was more varied. Hard rock men, bindle stiffs, loggers, and ranch workers crowded the streets and formed groups in doorways of employment offices.

We stopped at the first of these just as a crowd surged in to read what a man was writing on a huge high blackboard. We looked over their shoulders. The listings stated only the number of mill hands, fallers, flunkies, cooks and common laborers required and the rate of pay.

"But they don't tell where the jobs are," I said.

"No one cares," Robert said.

Before the complete listings were written, men began to form in line at a window of a small office. Robert left me after a moment and talked briefly with a man who was apparently in charge. I saw Robert shake his head and start back through the crowd to me.

"I turned down a job in a sawmill at Redding," he said. "Hotter'n the hinges of hell in that town."

"Isn't there something you can do on the coast?" I asked. "It's cooler there."

"This is no place to find out," Robert said. "Too many men for the jobs."

"We ought to talk to a foreman," I said.

"The camps, mines and ranches are hundreds of miles from here," Robert said. "These people do the hiring. I used to get jobs in places like this."

After we'd tried a half a dozen crowded employment offices we began to suspect our problem required individual attention. One of the managers confirmed this.

"Lady," he said, "the state employment bureau is run for folks like you."

There were no job claimants around its doors. We went in and talked to a man who seemed glad to have someone to whom he could offer a job. He had plenty of time to hear our wants.

"Got just the place for you," he said. "Telephone call came in this morning for a couple to work on Jack London's ranch in the Valley of the Moon."

Robert and I blinked at each other. In the cabin we'd read the *Call of the Wild* every six months and London's stories had been models for us. We'd felt almost a personal loss in his death two years earlier. The Valley of the Moon had become a shrine and now we were being offered a cottage on it, with two jobs at good wages.

"Can you drive a six-horse team?" the man asked Robert.

"Sure," Robert said.

I knew he'd never driven more than four horses, but I showed no surprise and he was equally forbearing when I answered that I had no doubt but that I could cook for ranch hands. I thought we were practically settled when Robert began to make motions of departure. The man in charge became quite insistent and as we left the office he said he'd hold the place open for us until the next morning.

"You folks sound like just the couple they need out there," he said.

I was inclined to agree with him as Robert and I stood in the street and argued. I hated to risk the man's promise to hold the job open. Some years later when I startled Charmian London at a dinner party by telling her how nearly I had come to cooking for her ranch hands, I was telling the absolute truth. At least I thought I wanted to take the job as I answered Robert's objections to it. Cooking for ranch hands or driving a six-horse team couldn't be half as hard work as that we'd been doing in the previous two months. But Robert accused me of being enamored with the idea of living in

the Valley of the Moon. Boiled down, it was merely working on a farm, and he'd done that in his boyhood.

We lunched at the Palace Hotel to talk it over. And perhaps it was the contrast between Howard Street and that great quiet chandeliered dining room which gave us our next idea.

"We're going at this all wrong," Robert said. "We ought to pick the jobs we want. But the camps are a long way off."

"Don't they have offices in San Francisco?" I asked.

"Sure, with presidents and general managers and such."

"Then let's talk to them," I said. "It's much nicer across Market Street anyway."

We made a list of things we'd like to do. Sheepherding had always appealed to Robert. So had logging in the redwood country, and if he worked in a sawmill he could live at home. "And how about going to sea?" I asked. I'd never gone to sea but the life of a stewardess sounded eventful. We got a telephone book, looked up addresses and started on our rounds.

Sheepherding came first because the office of Miller and Lux, the greatest ranch owners in the West, was nearest.

We were both more scared than we'd admit, but it was useless even to try explaining our errand to the receptionist. So we sent our cards to the general manager and were shown into his office a few moments later.

He listened, and became definitely hostile. His time wasn't usually taken up by sheepherders, and what was the game anyway? We insisted we were in earnest. And gradually his suspicions could no longer prevail against our almost lyrical account of the peace and quiet and adventure of herding sheep. He made one last effort.

"Ever hear a bunch of sheep?" he asked. "Their blahs would drive you crazy."

We said that, while we were not personally acquainted with sheep, we thought we'd like them. We touched on our previous outdoor experience and managed to give the impression that we really didn't sleep soundly when we had a roof over our heads.

"I believe you people could herd sheep," the manager said at last. "They say every sheepherder eventually goes nuts and you people are nuts to start with."

His eyes, when we'd entered, had been the coldest I'd ever seen, but now they twinkled in the friendliest way. Won over, the manager became practical. He pulled photographs of flocks of sheep, chuck wagons and maps of the country from a drawer. Sheep, apparently, were a valuable property, but he seemed in no doubt but that we'd be faithful custodians. By the time we got up to go he had caught fire and was doing all the urging.

"I'll fit you out with a comfortable chuck wagon," he said. "You could take some books. You'd travel through grand country. The three of you would have a fine time."

It seemed ungracious not to accept the sheep and chuck wagon on the spot, but we promised to think it over and let him know.

The lumber company was next on our list. We'd chosen this particular firm because it had camps and mills on the coast, operated schooners, owned thousands of acres of valuable redwood land and had probably furnished the lumber for half the houses in San Francisco.

"Any number of jobs in a concern like that," Robert said.

He admitted he'd not gotten his previous logging jobs in a president's office, but a president could do no more than throw us out. So we sent in our cards. When the president's secretary asked us to state our business we assured her it was a personal matter. It definitely was. Perhaps the most sympathetic men must in self-defense erect the most elaborate barricade, for when we'd finally got through three outer offices we found a fatherly old gentleman not in the least surprised we'd come to see him.

"You mustn't work in a camp," he decided instantly. "That would separate the family."

A sawmill job, several of them, was proposed for Robert. I was shown a picture of houses built for married working men.

"Nice little houses, too," he said. "I like to see a family kept together."

I warmed to one of my favorite themes. "If propinquity makes a courtship, it certainly shouldn't be left out of marriage," I said.

"Eh! What's that?" the president demanded.

"She's saying husbands and wives should stick together," Robert said.

"Sure! Sure! That's what I've been saying," and the president turned to beam in my direction. "I like to see a woman willing to go with her man. That's the reason I liked you folks soon as you told what you wanted."

I inquired what kind of a job a logging camp would hold for me.

"I'm glad you asked that question," he said. "Of course you'd want to be doing something. You can fill sacks with sawdust. It's a nice clean job, and piece work. So you can take your time and not be nervous at the start. Some women make good money at it. Kids and women all go out to the sawdust dump and work together. They tell me they have real good times."

I was sure they did, although my preference was still for the nomadic chuck wagon and the sheep. Robert had plunged with fervor into logging. I waited while the two men practically cut down every tree that had ever been felled in Wisconsin. When we got up to go, the president patted my shoulder.

"You folks won't be sorry you went to our mill," he said. "If a man likes timber and the smell of sawdust there's no telling where he might get."

We almost pranced out of the office. Three jobs, any one of which would settle our problem, was a good day's loot. Just to keep the record clear, we stopped in at a Pacific steamship company.

"Ought to collect at least one turndown," Robert said.

We collected it within five minutes. The executive of the steamship company was not at all amazed by our call. Apparently a working passage to the Orient was a common request. I admitted I never had performed a stewardess' duties but insisted I could learn.

"I'm sure you could," he said. "A nice person naturally knows how to make passengers comfortable."

Everything apparently was settled until he added that of course we couldn't ship on the same vessel. Husband and wife serving in the same crew was strictly against company rules. They invariably caused dissension.

We should have left the matter there but by this time we'd been carried away by our own play-acting. We looked so disheartened he felt sorry for us.

"But you people wouldn't make trouble," he said. "I'll take you on as seaman and stewardess on a ship sailing for China next week."

He thrust a form across the desk and held out a pen. I came to with a start. Robert broached our formula of "thinking it over."

"But we're signing the crew on now," he said.

Our retreat was almost a rout. We didn't dare plead the excuse of a daughter lest he'd offer to make an exception of her too, but our flight from

that last job shocked us into dropping all pretense. During our ride home on the ferry we suddenly knew we weren't going to take any of those jobs.

That evening we talked late. We were more rested than we'd been in weeks and I couldn't remember when we'd had a better time. We'd learned how to laugh again, a deep down joyous chuckle over all the fun that living promised. A sense of elation had put us forever beyond the reach of nagging fears.

"We'd manage if we never wrote another line," Robert said. "Why'd we get in such a panic?"

"Maybe it was the academic atmosphere," I suggested.

I couldn't have resisted that opening. I needed to know what had happened between a Scotchman and his complex.

"We only rented it," Robert said with what I thought was unjustifiable pride. "We can mail the key and a check to cover the lease, and be off tomorrow."

Our dress rehearsal for a crisis had done more than restore our confidence. It had broken a two months' tension and now we discussed the job of writing with some detachment. We agreed that we might or might not be writers, but that fact wasn't of any great importance to anyone except ourselves. If we never wrote or sold another line, we'd still be people. It was far better to be a good man in a sawmill than a frightened writer.

"And we don't have to decide now between the two jobs," Robert said. "Let's go somewhere and get a perspective."

Even one day's perspective had helped a lot, but I dreaded weeks or months with no objective. Until now we'd had our search for a home, but jobless people don't hunt homes. They find the job first and then settle down beside it.

"We've never yet been reduced to taking a vacation," I objected.

Robert didn't care what we called it. He said he was tired of facing those damned typewriters day after day, tired of working on a job with dull tools. Other people took vacations. Why was I making such a point of what we called it?

"But a vacation!" I wailed. "It's such a flat and dreary end for such a gorgeous day. We ought to think of—" I stopped to wonder what we should think of. Something fantastic. Something out of reason. "I have it!" I shouted. "Let's go look at Henry Martin's house!"

Henry Martin had written us after reading one of our stories. Then he'd come to call. He talked, and always about his log lodge in the redwood country, his "Dream House." It sounded impressive—a living room of fabulous size with fireplace to match, bedrooms listed as master bed chamber, family rooms, servant and guest quarters. The place had its own water system and even a private sawmill. Henry's thin face had lighted with a zealot's devotion as he described the three happy years he'd spent there. Now we understood that some unfortunate circumstance had compelled him to leave it.

"Wish you folks would take it," he'd said. "You can have it rent free for as long as you like. Then I'd be glad to sell it to you, and once you lived there you'd have to own it."

His misapprehensions about our income were gratifying, but we'd not wanted to risk falling in love with any place so definitely beyond our reach. And at the time we'd been absorbed by the settling project. Henry had called several evenings, growing more insistent that "Dream House" was an ideal home for writers. And each time he'd described the lodge it had sounded more magnificent and farther beyond our financial status. Our saying this made no impression upon him.

Like all writers, we'd received odd offers. We'd had people determined to live with us, and others equally determined that we should live with them. But this was the first time we'd ever had a palatial home thrust upon us.

"You can have it rent free, six months, a year, two years," Henry had pleaded. "I don't care, because I know that once you've lived there you'll never give it up."

Now, because "Dream House" was more than ever incompatible with our jobless state, it seemed the thing to do. We could resist its charms. Robert was captivated with the idea of having a sawmill for a plaything. We could move into the house easily. The place was completely furnished except for linen and blankets.

The next morning Robert hunted up Henry's card and telephoned, intending to make some sort of rental arrangement. He came away from the phone looking startled.

"Martin's driving up with us tomorrow," he said. "By leaving early we can be settled before dark."

I wanted to make one call before we departed. During the summer I'd seen a great deal of a neighboring family. The children were near Bobs' age and their mother and I had exchanged recipes and discussed diet and family routine. I'd been aware of her growing anxiety. She'd spoken vaguely of "changes in the department" and I'd understood that more were threatened. She'd regretted that her husband must lay aside the writing of a book and spend his evenings correcting papers, which was the result, I gathered, of "an unhappy situation." Week after week I'd watched new darns and patches appear in the children's clothing and had seen lines of strain and worry deepen in the parents' faces.

I knew what I planned was presumptuous but I liked her and felt sorry for her. And I was still exhilarated by our own sense of release. What had been a way out for us might be a way out for her.

I was glad to find her sewing on a dress which even I could see was beyond reclaiming with fresh collar and cuffs. She shared my misgiving when she said with a sigh, "Anyway, it will be clean. And they'll know I tried."

It seemed an opportune moment for a recital of our day's adventure in San Francisco. The point of the story was obvious but I tried to make it a humorous account of our enlightenment. As I talked she stopped sewing. She folded the dress and put the cover on her sewing basket and while she didn't actually move from her chair, I had a feeling she had retreated. Despite an effort at animation, I heard my own voice flattening out.

"But *we* couldn't do a thing like that!" she said.

Her words stripped my call of all pretense.

"Why not?" I demanded. "Herding sheep or filling sacks with sawdust can't be difficult. You'd be free from worry and the book could be—"

"You don't understand!" she interrupted.

She wanted me to understand and I sat there, miserably wishing I'd never spoken, while she talked of the impossibility of going backward, of giving up everything for which they'd struggled.

"Tom and I started from a farm," she said. "And now you—"

I feared she was going to cry. There was no way to square my blunder but I did what I could. I wasn't satisfied with my efforts. I could only hope she'd understand. She began to, and she smiled.

“My dear,” she said, “I won’t forget you were brave enough to try to help me. That took courage.”

I said it wasn’t courage. I was trying to share adventure. Sheepherding would be fun. She shook her head.

“For you, perhaps,” she said. “But don’t you see you’re different?”

“But we’re not!” I protested. “We started in a log cabin and tomorrow we’re going back to one. What I learned in those five cabin years made me sure I could herd sheep or fill sacks with sawdust or cook for ranch hands. I wouldn’t give up those years for anything.”

When I went home I wasn’t sure she had quite forgiven me, or that she ever would, or that I deserved forgiveness. That evening at dinner, when I told Robert, he agreed she probably wouldn’t.

“Don’t go around opening doors,” he said.

The car was packed by sun-up. Typewriters and town clothes had gone into storage and I’d thought our camping outfit had been put away with them. But at the last minute Robert carried the black metal case from the basement. I protested that the car had a load already with blankets, linen, food, and an extra passenger. But Robert strapped the case on the running board. It might be a good thing to have along, he said.

When we stopped to call for Henry Martin, he studied the blocked off car doors and demanded what on earth we’d brought along. He snorted as we described the neat arrangement and seemed to find it a reflection on “Dream House.”

“Once you’ve seen that place, nothing would induce you to live in a tent,” he said.

Henry Martin was interested in all sorts of subjects. During our long day’s drive he played with various intellectual theories as a cat plays with a mouse, but a great part of the time was given over to the events of his three-year stay at “Dream House.” Its kitchen was his pride. The scientific designing was his own and based solely on efficient routing of a busy housewife. Robert assured him that would mean absolutely nothing to me since I’d never been known to do anything twice alike. Henry looked pained and said that a methodical routine was a great labor saver.

In late afternoon we turned into a side road leading to “Dream House.” Henry was excited and I was in a tingle of anticipation. I didn’t want to fall

in love with that enormous house, but I was terribly afraid I would.

“Around the next bend you’ll see what I hope will be your future home,” Henry said.

We were leaning forward in our seats when we saw the large log structure. It looked as though the carpenters had gone home for lunch several years before and had forgotten to return. Piles of lumber, sawhorses, building debris and shavings were scattered about. Only the roof was finished. Two rock chimneys, still wearing scaffolding and neither completed, suggested that the masons too had forgotten to come back. I looked at Henry but he seemed quite unperturbed.

Henry led the way to the front door. We crossed a wide veranda and entered a living room. It was enormous, but as its only windows were under the low veranda roof we couldn’t see exactly how large it was. It stretched on and on, like a cave. We groped our way in semi-darkness but Henry seemed to know his way around. I stumbled over a pile of lumber, and sat down on it. It was the only thing I’d found to sit on. As my eyes became accustomed to the lack of light I saw other piles in distant corners.

Henry walked to the fireplace, a huge rock cavern at the far end.

“I said you could stand in it,” he said.

It was tremendous, and I did stand in it. I wasn’t sure just what that proved, except that Henry was a truthful man. From the fireplace I could see a row of rooms on each side, partitioned off by a wall, or rather the beginnings of a wall. The height changed every few feet, ranging from shoulder to waist height and then back to the level of the knees. I thought this might be a plan, but I couldn’t make the abrupt divergencies fit into any sort of pattern.

“Here is the master bedroom,” Henry said, pointing at a partition five feet high. He ceremoniously entered through the doorway but we peered over what should have been a wall. The room contained a bedstead equipped with springs. A million pack rats had occupied that room.

Henry threw open an inner door. “The master bathroom,” he said.

We looked over Henry’s shoulder at a tub, basin and toilet. None had connections for water or outlet.

Henry was careful to tell us to whom the other rooms belonged. His wife’s room and those of the children differed slightly from Henry’s in that

the partitions were of a different height. One room might have a cot, another only a chest of drawers. A third might be entirely bare.

We followed Henry down a hallway to inspect guest and servant quarters. Henry stopped often to tell us how good it was to be home again. Robert, Bobs and I said nothing. We couldn't. But I became tremendously impressed by Henry's ingenuity with the heights of partitions. I kept expecting that just once he would slip up and repeat himself. But he never did. I looked into the family's bathroom, certain I would catch him in dull repetition, but the man was positively whimsical. Here fixtures lolled on the floor as in the other, but protruding pipes in walls and floor indicated where they were going to be installed.

Henry saved his pride and joy, the kitchen, until the last. The cookstove had been used. The sink was equipped with faucets, but its drain ended six inches above the floor. And only a whirling dervish could have been efficiently routed along that staggered arrangement of cupboards and table. I looked at Henry with awe.

"Knew an efficient woman like you would appreciate this kitchen," Henry said.

"It's marvelous," I said, and I meant it.

Henry then led us to the veranda to watch the sunset. It was a lovely sunset. While Henry and I were exclaiming, Robert unlashed the metal case and set up the tent. He didn't make explanations. He merely did it. In times like that I always admire a certain definite quality in Robert. The tent up, he built a campfire and began to open cans.

After supper we sat on the veranda and watched dusk deepen and moonlight flood the forest. I felt as peaceful as Henry as our talk ranged from books to science, to the out-of-doors, to natural history and back to the charm of "Dream House." At last Henry yawned and stood up.

"Time to turn in," he said. "You people won't mind if I take my old room. Used to it, somehow."

We assured him we didn't mind. We listened to his retreating footsteps. He reached the master's bedroom without tripping over lumber.

"But he can't sleep there!" Robert said. "There isn't a mattress in the house."

"Shush!" I said. "You're always spoiling great moments with talk of material things."

Before we dropped off to sleep I heard Robert chuckle.

“This is one house you can’t rebuild,” he said.

In the morning we hadn’t yet settled the argument of which was to break the news to Henry. Robert reminded me that “Dream House” had been my idea and I tried flattery by applauding his decisive handling of the tent situation. Each intended to run out on the other, but Robert got away first. He picked up a kettle and started for the spring, and the taunting grin he threw back practically said that if we got away by noon someone would have to open the subject without delay.

Henry was sitting in rapt contemplation of the house. I’d rehearsed opening gambits but Henry spoke first.

“There’s one thing I’ve never been able to understand about ‘Dream House.’”

“Yes?” I said, still not believing Henry could produce another surprise.

“How could a woman, surrounded by this beauty and peace, go insane?” he asked.

I stared.

“My wife,” he said. “I thought you knew I took her from all this loveliness to a sanitarium.”

As soon as I could escape I went for a walk with Robert. There was to be no further argument as to who would deal with Henry.

“And you’d better be careful what you say about this house,” I warned in conclusion. “Henry’s liable to prove you’re crazy.”

I’ve never fathomed Robert’s inspired methods in diplomacy. He never uses them in my presence, but he has achieved astonishing results. When I next joined the two men they seemed almost chummy.

“Henry’s going to stay over for a day or two,” Robert said. “He’ll get a neighbor to drive him to a train.”

“In a big house like this, there are always little things to do,” Henry said. “I can’t bear to let the place run down.”

Henry was so amiable about our going that our sense of flight was almost ludicrous. Robert didn’t slacken speed until we reached the highway.

“Now what?” he asked.

Until then we'd completely overlooked the matter of a destination. I said that our original interest had been in the redwoods. So far we'd only seen the fringe. Robert put the car in gear.

"Let's go see the big ones," he said. "They'll be something real."

We'd known the physical facts about the redwoods. We knew they were among the oldest living things and that the great trunks of some were nearly thirty feet in diameter. They were the tallest trees in existence. But we were not prepared for their effect upon us. We'd heard them called "big trees," and mere bigness is never moving. We found them to be great trees, and greatness is always stirring. For more than fifteen centuries they had grown in stateliness and majesty, and now their magnificent trunks rose straight and tall, tapering with the beauty of Greek columns.

That afternoon we drove for miles and miles, not through a forest but through a mighty gathering of forest monarchs in which each tree possessed a kingship of its own. And gradually, as the sun sank and sunlight reached farther into their ranks, the bright green foliage became a great bronzed wall. Tree trunks took on an indescribably glowing tone of lavender and rose. A gathering of kings had donned royal garments.

We made our camp at the feet of those giants and we remained for days. We saw them in early morning when milky sunlight slanted between the great dark trunks. We sat with them through blazing noons and we watched the sun go down upon them. We walked among them in moonlight. Those days were days of living in a temple, and gradually the forest sages shed their aloofness and their serenity came to dwell in our own hearts. And man's concerns became at once both small and yet of great significance because they fitted in with an ageless pattern. Those voiceless trees had spoken and told us of a meaning, ancient and yet everlasting.

13. A Mountain Meadow

IN mid-August we camped in a meadow in the Sierra Nevada mountains. We'd been searching for one when, close to the Yosemite, we turned down a dim old road, and this meadow filled all requirements. It was small and parklike, had a spring, and was without signs of previous occupancy. Mountain meadows are always surprises. Shut off by peaks and forest, they are homey places. This one was so isolated we didn't need a tent but could sleep under the stars.

By walking three hundred yards to a spur of the ridge we could look into the valley of the Yosemite. We couldn't see the floor, and we didn't want to, for at that season it was crowded with vacationists. We had a box seat view of that astonishing slit in the mountains. No one could get between us and the feel of its silence and we could delude ourselves that this beauty belonged to us alone.

We'd no idea how long we would remain in our mountain meadow home. Our days were planless, and complete. But that had been true ever since we'd left the redwoods. We'd let the route grow up on us. For no particular reason we'd gone up the American River canyon to Lake Tahoe and then turned aside to camp at Fallen Leaf Lake. We'd chosen a lonely end from which we could see no inn or summer cottage and remained for several days.

Bobs and Sammo spent their time sailing driftwood craft, for Bobs had become intensely interested in establishing a steamship line to China. When she started her first ship, rice laden, Robert warned her she'd never be able to sell her cargo, that Orientals desired metal. When the last of my hairpins went down in a storm at sea, I suggested that we discontinue her education. Robert didn't agree until he discovered he'd lost some precious cotter pins.

"But, Dad!" Bobs said with fine female logic. "You told me I'd have to take the Chinese something they would trade for rice."

We left Fallen Leaf to travel old trails of the forty-niners through the Mother Lode. Some of the villages were mere ghost towns, but for us they still lived in Bret Harte's stories of the early gold days. Hangtown, Eldorado, Sutter Creek, Angel's Camp, Drytown, Carson Hill, Fair Play, Chinese Camp—even their names spelled romance. We turned and twisted, ascended

and descended steep-walled canyons through a country which had become only a stage setting for the past.

Time turned back for us. Heavy iron doors in the brick and adobe buildings still seemed to guard treasure. Ancient trees shaded hitching rails before which I expected to see miners' ponies. And the few gray-bearded loungers on the narrow porches of old hotels appeared to have been there in a strange state of preservation since the days of '49. We traveled through a Rip Van Winkle country.

We stopped at Columbia mostly because I wanted to see those few acres of ground from which eighty millions of gold had been taken. The town, once of ten thousand, now had less than two hundred people. We remained overnight because the citizens, mostly Italian, were so joyous we wished to know them better. The only compromise the rambling two-story hotel had made to modern times was the installation of a single bathroom. Our rooms, in the front, had doors opening on the balcony. They provided the only ventilation and when we went to bed we discovered the doors were of heavy iron fastened by enormous iron bars. Guests in the early days slept more soundly when they and their gold were hermetically sealed and beyond the reach of anything but a blowtorch.

Robert, a modest person, began as a matter of course to close the doors, but I protested.

"Surely we can take these nice people into our confidence," I said.

This must have been the modern custom for passers-by didn't even glance up as we undressed for bed. Nor did our presence interfere with the local habit of street singing. Half the night, snatches of Verdi's operas floated from below, sung by good natural voices, and until three in the morning the victrola in the dining room ground out dance music. It began again while we were dressing and I was delighted to find a breakfast dance in progress. Robert said dancing was indecent at that hour. So he ate while I danced. I was breathless, and still hungry, when we went out to look over the town.

A self-appointed reception committee took charge of us. They believed fervently in the future of Columbia as a gold town, but all had different theories as to where the precious substance lay. Facts were hurled at us. A thirty-five dollar nugget had been picked up the previous week in the dust of the main street, where it had been trod upon for fifty years. Any plot which had produced eighty millions could produce more. Reaching hardpan hadn't necessarily ended mining. We were swamped in mineralogy, structural

changes, deflections, slippage. Every man needed only a partner or a grubstake. And since in one morning we couldn't see all the likely diggings, we decided to see none.

We compromised and made everyone happy by a visit to the famous fire engine. The eighty millions, and the glory that was Columbia, may have gone, but the fire engine remained. Carefully housed, superbly polished, it was the town's pride.

The engine had been built to order for the King of the Sandwich Islands, but after being brought around Cape Horn it had been detoured for some reason to San Francisco. It was unbelievably ornate with elaborate hexagon glass carriage lights, a great deal of brass and a long hose made of leather, which one of the miners claimed to be buffalo hide. For all its decorative gadgets, it earned a bad name by running away on one of San Francisco's steep hills and killing two men. The Columbians, considering this only a minor record in crime, bought the engine and had it drawn to their town by six white horses. The entire citizenry had gone out to meet it and its arrival was the occasion for a public holiday. It was a matter of civic pride that they used a fire engine San Francisco had declared to be an outlaw.

It was still a matter of pride. When the director of a movie company had doubted the engine could pump water or that the ancient hose would stand a pound's pressure, the whole town turned out to man the pumps. And they made the director measure the distance of that stream of water, one hundred and eighty feet.

"We showed him the old girl's got life in her yet," a miner said proudly. "And he took pictures so we can always prove it."

The journey to our mountain meadow had been so leisurely and so unpurposed I thought it had been completely feckless. And then I wondered if this were so. We'd had no objective. We'd not even mentioned fiction material or plot. We hadn't spoken of any other job. Yet I had a sense of accomplishment. I said this to Robert one day as we lay stretched in the sun.

"Don't ask me to tell what this achievement was," I said. "All I know is that we've had a gorgeous time."

"Isn't that enough?" he asked. "And the good times are only beginning. Know what I was thinking?"

I sat up, expecting a plan for the morrow.

"When Bobs is grown and married, we'll get a roadster and do a lot of this."

I looked at Bobs' small blonde head bending over Sammo as she loaned moral support to the job of digging out a ground squirrel. Even the thought of that baby grown and married was ridiculous.

"Besides," I added, "by that time if anyone suggested that you leave your fireside and slippers and go lie on your back in a mountain meadow, you'd think him crazy."

But Robert was in earnest.

"No one has to get that way," he insisted. "Why let life do that to us?"

He might as well have said we weren't going to let our joints stiffen or the years take their tribute. I started to say this and found myself saying something vastly different.

"Maybe adventure muscles can be kept fit," I said. "You know—give 'em exercise."

We'd been a week in our meadow home and had seen no one. The days had sped, for August in those mountains made for enchantment. Never before had we been in open forest where one could wander at will. It was brushless, needle-floored, a succession of glades beautifully patterned in sunlight and shadow. Each day we went for a walk and often took our lunch and climbed a distant ridge.

Then secretly I wished our Jack Rabbit were a horse for Robert's long legs had Bobs and me at a disadvantage. I expressed my wish aloud one afternoon when we returned to camp with our tongues hanging out.

"A pack train trip!" Robert said. "Then we could really see these mountains!"

The wistfulness in his voice told me Bobs and I weren't the only victims. Our slower pace and lesser endurance were keeping him from the high places and, in opening the subject, I'd only called attention to female frailties. But even they didn't seem important later when we were bathed and cool, rested and yet so pleasantly tired. The aftermath of a long day in the open is even better than the day itself. It brings such a luxurious sense of well-earned weariness, a miracle I was always rediscovering. Life was so simple, and so good.

"We'd have to give up a lot of things on a pack train trip," I said. "We'd have guides, horses and strange equipment. Right now I don't see how we could improve on this."

Robert had started to agree, and probably amplify, when Sammo pricked up his ears, stared at the forest behind us and growled. And I thought I heard a voice. I couldn't distinguish words but a rhythm and sonority suggested poetry. I'd had only one pre-supper drink but I looked quickly at Bobs for confirmation. She was listening in a surprised fashion. Then words came clearly. The voice was a man's, deep, colorful and so resonant it rang across our meadow.

“I’ve stood in some mighty-mouthed hollow
That’s plumb full of hush to the brim,
I’ve watched the big, husky sun wallow
In crimson and gold, and grow dim,
Till the moon set the pearly peaks gleaming,
And the stars tumbled out, neck and crop;
And I’ve thought that I surely was dreaming,
With the peace of the world piled on top.”

Silence followed. None of us spoke because we couldn't. We were staring in the direction of the sound when the voice called: “Hi, Pipe Organ! Come on, Bag Pipes! The worst of the day is over.”

A man and two enormous burros emerged from the forest. One burro carried a pack and the other an empty saddle. The man came forward slowly and the burros looked more astonished than their master.

“Good evening,” we said.

“Wasn't expecting to find anyone in this meadow,” the stranger said, and that was his only comment on the recital of Robert Service's verse.

His face, tanned by many years in the open, his deep-set eyes and the sun wrinkles at their corners, made me guess him to be a prospector. And then I doubted this. I couldn't place him any more than I could have guessed his age. He looked like a piece of sound old oak, sinewy, hardened and impervious to change.

He introduced himself as Hugh Furnis and then formally presented his burros. Bag Pipes and Pipe Organ. We invited him for supper.

“I'd appreciate not having to cook tonight,” he said. “I'm tired. First I'll spread my bedroll and give the babes a bite to eat.”

The babes snuffed up dry oatmeal like reversed blowers. Hugh offered to hobble them in our behalf but we insisted we liked burros. So they came to supper too.

The meal was almost finished when he told his other name, "The Sky Pilot of the Sierras." I'd guessed everything but a missionary.

"Maybe it's just vanity of the spirit," Hugh admitted, "but I'm glad they call me that and look forward to my coming. For twenty-seven years I've ranged these hills, summer in the high places and winter in the low."

I thought of several omissions. A grace before supper for one thing. Hugh chuckled.

"Everybody has a different way of giving thanks," he said. "And I notice other people's ways are just as good as mine."

Then I wanted to know Hugh Furnis better.

His story came out slowly through a long evening. He talked with a curious mixture of eagerness and diffidence.

"I haven't any regular churches," he admitted. "I just keep going round among the men in logging camps and in the towns where they're paid off. It's there the hell-hounds gather to feed on them. Sometimes I'm able to keep a man from being robbed and sometimes I ease him out of a long drunk."

He broke off to sit staring at the fire. I was afraid he wouldn't tell us any more, but he'd stopped apparently to get his own thoughts in order.

"I don't suppose," he said, "I've ever held what could rightly be called a religious meeting. Somehow the God I serve never seemed to be the kind who'd want to be crammed down the throat of any man. Usually I just read, Service or Kipling or some other fellow who's written the kind of thing I'd like to say. But I've had camps of hard men sit quiet, listening, and I've looked into their eyes and seen thoughts they'd never say out loud. And then I've known that maybe they were thinking about a woman, back in the years behind 'em, and they'd have liked to tell her they were sorry."

"You did those men more good than hours of prayers or preaching," Robert said.

"Do you think so?" Hugh Furnis asked wistfully. "It doesn't sound like much. I couldn't be sure anything I ever said has changed a man or made him give up cussing and drinking. But I'd planned to wear out in harness, among the people who've come to seem like my own."

There was doubt, almost a question, in his words and sadness in his voice. I would have asked why he couldn't wear out in harness had it not

been for a dignity and reserve about our guest which forbade questions. So we tried to help by listening.

Our talk rambled over many subjects. He recognized the need of reading rooms, of movies and of entertainment in the logging camps and in the foothill country. He lamented his own lack of education because he couldn't discuss economics with the men. Now all he could do was read Robert Service's "Song of the Wage Slave." And somehow that didn't seem to be the entire answer.

"But it's the only way I know to tell 'em that there was someone who was sorry for what life had done," he said.

He was fumbling, and he knew it, but he'd thought out the rights of others, and his recognition of them had set rules on his own conduct.

"You know, I couldn't any more ask a man if he was saved than I could ask him if he took a bath," he said. "Salvation seems a personal affair."

"And it should be," I said.

"But the church says different!" Hugh Furnis exclaimed. "It says I should make 'em repent and enroll as members. Unless I do that I haven't done 'em any good."

At last the question he'd been arguing with himself had come out in the open. He gave the facts reluctantly and yet the telling of them helped his hurt. The last district conference had retired him on a pension and closed his post. Instead there would be small churches, but "real ones," he added, "with a list of members." Hugh Furnis didn't want us to feel too sorry for him. His superiors had meant it kindly. He and the burros could live on little and the pension easily supplied their needs.

"But when me and the babes started out this spring, all on our own, I couldn't bear to tell my people what the church had done," he said. "I let them go on thinking it was like it's always been."

"And why not?" I asked. "It's your affair if you're willing to go on working for them."

He hesitated. "I was wondering about that when I came over the ridge tonight," he said. "It's kind of puzzling." He stopped and then added, "You see now I haven't got any right. Maybe it isn't even honest to come to them as a man of God."

At last he'd divulged his real misgivings. Robert and I talked hard and fast and firmly. There was no doubt in our minds about his rights. Hugh

Furnis listened and appeared relieved.

“Funny I should find friends tonight,” he said. “I was wishing I could talk it out with someone. And here you were. I didn’t even catch your name, and you’ve most likely forgotten mine.”

A chance encounter, a common campfire, our hearts had opened, and we’d revealed ourselves to each other. Names now would mean so little.

“You’re the Sky Pilot of the Sierras,” I said and I was surprised to find tears close to the surface.

“Thank you, ma’am,” he said. “And you’re the lady who lives in a mountain meadow.”

I thought my title even nicer than his.

As he went to bed he asked how long we expected to remain and seemed disappointed that we did not know.

“It’s on account of the babes,” he explained. “Tomorrow I’m going across the canyon and up the other side on a funicular railroad to a logging camp. I can’t take the burros on the railroad and I’d been sort of wishing I could leave them with you for a week.”

“And I’d been wishing for a horse!” I cried.

Early the next morning we saw Hugh off. When he told the burros to be good babes during his absence, they looked at us so speculatively I believed they understood. Hugh assured us they wouldn’t have to be hobbled, and they didn’t. They were like a pair of dogs.

That afternoon we tried out burro transportation and the next morning we were off on a pack train trip, if Bag Pipes and his pack could be called a train. We hoped no expert would see our first attempt at a diamond hitch, and then we suspected that one had when Bag Pipes turned around for an astounded look. He carried grub and dishes. Bobs rode Pipe Organ with a roll of blankets behind her. And whenever Robert broke into his canter, Bag Pipes and Pipe Organ joined me in public disapproval.

The babes enjoyed that week as much as we did. I don’t know whether they grew fond of us or only accepted their master’s recommendation, but I became so accustomed to a soft gray nose nuzzling me, even in the middle of the night, that I wondered how we’d ever lived without a burro. They couldn’t possibly have been as sagacious as they pretended, but no guides are. So we unhesitatingly put all trail questions in their competent hooves.

We were sad when Hugh Furnis called for his babes. We stood in our meadow and watched them depart and Bobs was sure Pipe Organ's backward glances expressed reluctance. The camp seemed suddenly very empty and no one suggested we go walking.

"You wouldn't believe a couple of burros could make such a difference," I said.

"It isn't the burros," Robert said. "It's being September, and—"

"And what?" I prodded.

He looked a trifle shamefaced. "The last few days I've been thinking what was wrong with that serial we were trying to write for Hoffman. Now if we'd—"

I sat down. Within an hour we'd covered every scrap of paper in camp with notes. Our hero was a better man, the gal was discarded and the climax was contrived so simultaneously each of us claimed credit. Our fingers itched for typewriter keys and we behaved like a pair of distraught hens with eggs coming on and no place to put them.

I reminded Robert with some bitterness that storing the typewriters had been his idea.

"How was I to know we'd ever need them again?" he said.

Now we realized that the Berkeley drought had been the result of mental fatigue. It had come at the end of two years of hard work, our longest writing drive. In the Canadian wilderness we'd always suffered interruptions for we'd had to knock off each spring and fall to care for cabin tasks. When our living had been made both by writing and pioneering, we'd thought that if we were freed from pioneering we could devote ourselves exclusively to writing. So the first inevitable thin time, when energy and ideas touched bottom, had sent us into a panic. We'd not known that unproductive periods were just another hazard of the writer's life.

"Next time we won't get scared," I said. "Always we'll lug the typewriters along."

Robert looked at me in astonishment.

"Lady," he explained patiently, "you need more than a typewriter. We've got to have a home."

Two mornings later we drove into Carmel by the Sea. We'd come by the most direct route from our mountain meadow. We'd been attracted by the name of the town, which reminded us of our old desire to live within sight of the Pacific. The flu scare had detoured us the day of our arrival in California, but we were faithful to ideas.

"In Carmel we'll have the sea and pines too," Robert said.

We also knew we'd have writers and artists, but Robert's experiment with the academic life had destroyed any illusion that intellectual atmosphere could be absorbed. He was counting far less on the creative impulse than on the fact that Carmel boasted many furnished houses. We could get the typewriters into action quickly.

I'd not been able to shed my school complex as easily. Bobs was still too young for public school and yet too old for a sand pile while we did our daily stint.

Robert was sure we'd find an answer in Carmel. Not only did writers and artists produce young but they were famous for ideas on education.

"Like buttoning buttons," I said.

Carmel's unpaved main street and two blocks of single story shops didn't look promising, but we'd been told that redwood houses hid among the trees like shy quail.

"And not a real estate office to help us find them," Robert said.

I have one excellent rule. When I need to know anything I ask someone. Robert says I ask the nearest person but I maintain I select my informant with discretion and quote the instances when I've uncovered amazing data, forgetting all those times when my technique has misfired. This time I guessed right when I stopped the first car and asked the driver if she knew of a house to rent. She beamed at me over her spectacles. Not only did Miss Williams know of a house but she had the rental of one belonging to friends who had gone East.

"It's in Eighty Acres," she added dubiously. "And only writers seem to like it there."

Two more writers wouldn't clutter up the landscape. When she heard of our profession, Miss Williams marveled at my intelligence in stopping the one person who had a writer's house to rent. Writers, it appeared, didn't live where one house could be seen from the windows of another. Also each house must have detached studies. This house had two. Neither could be

seen from our house or even from each other. I felt relieved when Miss Williams spoke of them as “writer’s shacks.” I wondered if I could possibly have writing thoughts which warranted such splendid isolation.

The house itself fascinated me. An outside open staircase led to the bedrooms on the second floor. Miss Williams explained this very logically.

“After they got the house all built they found there wasn’t any place inside for stairs,” she said.

My direct methods for acquiring information were again justified that day. When we said we’d take the house for six months if we could find a school for Bobs, Miss Williams told us she conducted one practically next door. We inspected the school, which looked like a living room that had run extensively to tables.

“Every child works separately,” Miss Williams explained. “They’re all such different ages.” She turned to Bobs. “What do you like to do, my dear?”

The humiliation of those buttons must have still rankled for Bobs said without a moment’s hesitation, “I like to read.”

“Why, Bobs Pinkerton!” I exclaimed. “You don’t know one letter from another!”

I too had been scarred by the button incident and never again did I intend to sit through a lecture on maternal pride. If Bobs felt the need of doing a little boasting, she’d have to get out of that situation by herself.

14. *Nudes on the Picket Fence*

WE'D been in Carmel a year when Robert reminded me that another rainy season was due and we still had those outside stairs. The end of the first six months' lease had been overlooked because we were occupied with plumbers and carpenters in a fascinating job of making changes. Now neither spoke of the expiration of the second six months' lease.

"Ought to be some way to get those stairs inside," Robert said.

We'd toyed with the stair problem, hating to admit the contractor was a better man than we. He'd so contrived an upper half story and dormer windows that any logical site for stairs would lead inevitably into a low slanting attic from which we'd have to crawl.

"Let's try an illogical stairway," I said.

We did. We wound stairs around the central fireplace and somehow we got from the first floor to the second. Wide-beamed persons would have to sidle and the careless might slip on landings and break their necks. But no one would have to dodge raindrops to go to bed.

Since the staircase involved alterations in two partitions, I said we might as well rebuild a dressing room, add a large cooler to the kitchen and install a new water heater. Pencil and paper stimulated ideas, until closet space appeared from nowhere and doors became windows and windows doors. We might as well make the visitation of painters, carpenters and plumbers really worth while.

Miss Williams thought the staircase solution inspired and regretted that the owners, permanently settled in the East, could not see it.

"But it isn't sensible to spend energy and money on a place you don't own," she said. "Why don't you buy the house?"

That startled us. A year of living in it had seemed to bring complete possession.

"But we do own it—in a way," I said. "And we *want* to improve it."

Perhaps I alone understood that speech, for Robert added quickly that of course we were staying another six months.

We were still clinging to that six months' basis, although I suspected it was a mere gesture, and all that remained of a once cautious habit. For we were settled in Carmel. The important rite of choosing a home hadn't been as elaborate as I had planned. We'd selected one as simply as everyone else does, merely by finding a place we liked and remaining, but we shied away from the final act of putting our names on a deed. That troubled me and when we talked it over later I said rent and improvement money should be purchasing a home.

"Let's buy a little more freedom," Robert said. "We can always buy a home."

The charm of Carmel's setting had won us. The great crescent beach stretched from marvelous white sand dunes to the opening of the sunny Carmel valley and the blue mountains beyond. Pines came down to meet the sea and the town was hidden beneath them. The two dreary blocks of the main street were part of the community's intent not to cry its wares.

A few years earlier Carmel had been a literary colony. George Sterling was one of the early settlers. Mary Austin lived there. Jack London was a frequent visitor. Ambrose Bierce came. Harry Leon Wilson still lived at the head of a beautiful cove farther down the coast. Sinclair Lewis and a host of writers of the period had drifted in and out of Carmel. Old timers lamented the lost magic of those first years, and when George Sterling came, as he often did, they retold old tales. Carmel had been more simple then than when we found it, but it was still so simple and so merry we loved it. More recent leavening had only contributed to the joyousness.

This gaiety had a special appeal to us. We'd missed the usual playtime of early years of marriage and in Carmel we found release for a frustrated party spirit. Never before had we encountered such spontaneous conviviality. Because there were no offices, and hence no office hours, festivities grew up on the slightest excuse, or on no excuse at all. A parked car outside a house attracted another. An afternoon group naturally stayed for dinner and a dinner gathered others like a snowball gathers snow until it expanded into a dance. Even mail time was arranged to brighten life. In early afternoon everyone met at the village postoffice and it was a poor day that turned up no excitement. Plans were made for a walk on the beach, a swim, a drive into the hills, an abalone party, a game of baseball, or merely Carmel's chief sport, talk.

Whenever life seemed to be getting dull, someone was sure to plan a dancing party. Invariably it was a costume affair. We might dance to a victrola and drink red wine or, if the hosts felt affluent, we'd dance to a small orchestra and drink punch. But whichever it was, it usually lasted until time to watch the sun rise. That formality led to breakfasts and then, since the day was spoiled for work, we might as well move on and do something else. A pig roast was good for two days' entertainment, one to roast and eat the pig and a second to recover and talk over the affair.

There was only one tide in the ocean at Carmel, an abalone tide. On those low tides abalones could be harvested and, armed with the perfect tool for the job, broken automobile springs, we went down to the sea to pry the mollusks from the rocks. Then, booty laden, we took possession of someone's kitchen and pounded the abalones into a state of succulence. The wooden paddles of the beaters kept time to George Sterling's abalone song. An abalone dinner just naturally publicized itself, for a dozen lusty voices proclaiming the virtues of the fertile abalone over everything else—even such luxuries as quail on toast or alimony—would bring abalone enthusiasts from all over town.

Sunday afternoons were dedicated to softball. An impromptu game grew into a league with teams, captains and rules. Even batting averages were kept by the most zealous and the final game of the season had all the tension of the world's series. Each team was required to have two women players, one in the outfield and one in the infield. A more merciful rule prohibited any girl playing on a team captained by her husband. And whenever I crawled home thoroughly humiliated by having struck out with bases full, I was spared domestic upbraidings. If the unfortunate incident had helped Robert's team to win, I might receive applause, which was even more humiliating.

Once a week we met for an evening of *Commedia dell'arte* and rules for this game were as strict as those for baseball. Everyone had to supply a plot for a one-act play or take part as an actor. Usually everyone did both. The dialogue was unrehearsed. The author selected his cast, outlined the plot and the actors went out at once to put on the play. Costumes and stage properties were wholly a matter of the actor's inspiration and a *Commedia dell'arte* hostess spent the next morning retrieving scattered household equipment. Her precious trays had been used as snowshoes, her muffler worn to suggest a blizzard, her prize counterpane, held under the chins of two actors, had furnished the set for a bedroom farce, and her new hat had become entangled in the riotous melodrama which always wound up the evening.

The improvised dialogue was sometimes very, very bad, and often it was astonishingly good. The more frightened an actor, the better he might perform when he had to wrest his lines from sheer panic. His only hope was to throw himself wholeheartedly into the part, and then he sometimes stole the show. Or he might cross up the rest of the cast and enrage the author by converting a tragedy into a farce, or the other way about. It was interesting to watch an idea take shape. An inflection of the voice, a few laughs from the audience, and the plot was changed completely.

The game was far more fun than charades. Everyone liked it so well it was apt to start at any party. Then an orchestra, paid to play dance music, would be retired to the sidelines while the guests took over.

Robert and I had plunged into all these festivities with the exuberance of stored up party spirit and when our work consciences bothered us, we told each other we were making up for a missed playtime. We still worked hard when we worked and our industry astounded Carmelites. Thus, when a serial was refused by *Adventure*, the news came as a greater shock. Arthur Hoffman wrote that it was not up to standard. Moreover, he didn't think it could be made so. After reading his letter twice, I still couldn't believe it. Robert looked somewhat shattered, although he tried to appear philosophical.

"After four and a half years of selling first trip out, we were due for a turndown," he said.

The rejected story brought reform. We avoided all Carmel activities, shunned the afternoon mail hour and, even after weeks of toil, sent regrets for a party which neither wished to miss. The host called to argue our decision.

"Every writer turns out sour yarns," he said. "And you don't write evenings."

That was true, and we were the more receptive because in those weeks we'd manicured the serial and sold it to another magazine. Like a dead Indian, any story that's been sold is a good story.

"Perhaps we need a party," I said.

We went and the next week we seemed to need another. A short time later, when we'd written a serial which Arthur Hoffman liked, we agreed there was no sense in becoming panicky and missing fun and companionship because we'd slipped up on one yarn.

Probably more words have been spoken in Carmel about the story to be written or the picture to be painted than in any other community in the United States. This effortless parade of brain children saved much labor. When a story has been told a half dozen times, it no longer demands to be written. A picture described in vivid detail becomes a finished thing. The fine fervor of creative work has been enjoyed without labor pains and the fruits of the imagination have achieved an audience. Except for the monetary advantage of an actual sale, all rewards of painting or writing are in the artist's bag, and he has been spared possible chagrin in discovering that the story or the painting was not the masterpiece he had imagined.

This indoor sport of verbal painting and writing had other assets. The public's curiosity about the creative life was so completely satiated that no one was compelled to talk about his work unless he wished. With so many people willing to take up conversational slack, a harried artist was never forced to make that difficult choice between appearing ungracious in his reticence or pretentious in his talk.

Some writers didn't talk. We watched Robinson Jeffers build his rock tower and we understood he intended to write in it. But he never explained what he intended to write. I doubt if many in Carmel even knew he was a poet. And no one pried into what Van Wyck Brooks was writing, although later I suspected it was his *Mark Twain*. Harry Leon Wilson wrote *Merton of the Movies* without causing a ripple on Carmel Bay.

We knew more about the work day of Harry Leon Wilson because H. L. was our close friend. But we read his fiction as one reads the fiction of real writers, only in print. His work was wholly a matter between himself and his own integrity as an artist. In the Canadian wilderness we'd read and laughed over *Bunker Bean* and *Ruggles of Red Gap* without dreaming that some day we could count this man, one of the truly great, a close companion. As our knowledge of him deepened we understood the reason for his greatness. The man was as big as was his work. In twenty years of enduring friendship he was never for us less than a magnificent person.

All the blithe chatter about future masterpieces had another by-product. Painting and writing were such ordinary activities in Carmel, newcomers quickly shed all awe of the arts. Genius cropped out everywhere.

One woman turned artist overnight. She'd been a skilled carriage stripper, painting the thin lines on Mr. Studebaker's buggy spokes, and thus was able to appraise Carmel's art professionally. The seascape and bent cypress markets were overcrowded, so she stepped into the neglected field of nudes.

She may have been influenced by the fact that she lived on the highway and had a picket fence, for within a week life-sized nudes lounged the full length of that fence. They were startling in their outdoor setting. Louis Hill drove by one day and was so captivated he paid without question the asking price of two hundred dollars for one luscious creature who was coyly holding an abalone shell.

No one else in Carmel had sold art to the son of the famous railroad builder, James J. Hill, so the carriage stripper knew she had arrived as an artist and plunged into a feverish production of bigger and more luscious nudes. When the picket fence couldn't hold them, the village butcher invited the nudes into the meat market. There they hung, a line of opulent females facing a row of quarters of beef. Even the butcher must have been baffled for he sprinkled fresh sawdust beneath both exhibitions, and those of us who had been sneaking over the hill to buy meat in Monterey began to trade at home.

Few were so lucky as to have had previous training with a paint brush, but everyone could use words. And many did. We had flare-ups of free verse. We had engaging life histories of ladies who didn't usually reveal the secrets of their trade. Even Eighty Acres produced an author overnight by the sheer force of propinquity. He drove into the wooded section to put up a tent so that his wife might have the baby she momentarily expected.

The young son of Jimmie Hopper happened by. He was a sympathetic lad, and all Carmel children were versatile. Also he might have had the first stirring of enthusiasm for the medical profession which he adopted later. He stopped to help in the domestic emergency and when mother and child were doing nicely, he remained to talk.

"How does your father make a living in a town like this?" the stranger asked.

The boy said his father wrote stories and sold them to magazines.

The next day when Jimmie Hopper walked through the woods on his way to the postoffice the stranger hailed him.

"Just finished a story," he said. "Tell me what you think about it."

Jimmie, a painstaking stylist, pronounced the story very bad, and being zealous in the cause of good writing, he went on to tell the author why. That was Jimmie's mistake. The stranger took up writing in earnest, turned out a story a day and each afternoon rushed out to report to his mentor how well the job of authoring was coming.

At that time Jimmie's own job of authoring wasn't coming on at all and he began to brood over "this mad tramp." No matter how bad the stories, the sheer bulk of them embittered Jimmie. And then the two authors heard from editors on the same day. Jimmie got his yarn back. The stranger rushed from his tent jubilantly.

"Sold that first story!" he shouted. "For one hundred and fifty dollars."

Bobs made good her boast about liking to read. Practically overnight she jumped from a primer to novels. When I found her poring over a book of Conrad's, I said she couldn't possibly understand half the words. She explained that she guessed at them and liked his stories. Within six months she read anything in print, preferring McFee and Conrad, liking any author who told a story, and filling in the chinks with fairy tales and Oz books. Had none of these been available, she would have undoubtedly read almanacs or labels with the same absorbed interest.

She'd read an amazing number of books when the annual Forest Theater excitement began in mid-winter. Then plays were selected, committees appointed, producers engaged and actors chosen. From then until the plays were produced in summer, the battles raged. Feuds always stopped short of bloodshed, although the children's play often threatened carnage.

This had to be a phantasy or fairy story with a large cast, and it was always written by a Carmelite. Bobs had heard the matter discussed whenever we had guests. One evening someone said a new children's play was impossible, that all the changes had been rung and all the fairies used up.

"One hasn't," Bobs said.

"Who was she?" we asked.

"Fairy-Never-Written," Bobs said.

Bobs knew all about her. She was a familiar of hers, a fairy held in an evil spell by a fearful witch from whose power she could escape only by being written in a book. All the Mother Goose and fairy characters were working to effect a rescue. It was an ideal plot—a new fairy tale demanding a cast large enough to include every child in town.

Bobs was overwhelmed with praise and I grew misty-eyed with pride. Our fair-haired child had shown a creative spark! Several of us seized the idea and began to make suggestions. I had no desire to write a children's

play but was willing to do anything to help budding genius. The idea was bruited about town, given much publicity and, to our horror, was accepted for the children's play before a word was down on paper. Then it *had* to be written. The aiders and abettors rolled up their sleeves. We didn't have the faintest notion of the nature of the evil spell or the details of the rescue. I consulted Bobs, but she didn't even try to help.

"You've got to think up the rest!" I said. "The idea was yours!"

"But I only wanted to *act* the Fairy-Never-Written," she said. "And I couldn't unless somebody wrote the play."

Indignant as I was, her direct methods commanded my respect, especially when we discovered that she'd already made sure of the role by telling the producer she'd thought up the fairy. But I wasn't so lyrically minded about her creative spark and I grew less so as a group of us struggled with the misadventures of that fairy. Had Bobs muffed her part, I'd have felt justified in taking measures. But she knew more about that fairy than we, and her portrayal was so assured that my attitude switched again as I received congratulations on being her mother. Bobs always knew when she must make good.

We returned home from an Easter breakfast party to find Grace Drew and her trunk, fresh from Denver, on our front porch. She'd suddenly decided to remake her life.

"So I came to you Pinks," she said. "For six months."

We never plunged more happily into a remaking job. When we'd spoken those regretful farewells in Denver, none of us could have guessed this next meeting. Now she'd proved my statement that good friends always re-find each other, somewhere, sometime.

Life was taken up just where we'd left off. It was that kind of friendship. Two years, five, ten—we'd never have any loose ends to gather. It was good to have someone with whom to cook and sew, and remake hats and refurbish dresses. And, as in Denver, we began to talk about writing plays. Only this time it was a movie scenario. Our technique was unchanged. I sat at the typewriter while she acted. We wrote the scenario in a day and laughed so hard at our own humor that Fred Bechdolt, who was trying to do a bit of writing himself, came over to say that no two women could possibly be writing anything so funny.

We put it into the mail and went back to our sewing, only to be yanked out by a telegram saying that the scenario had been bought for Bebe Daniels.

Some time was required for us to recover from that shock and life was only beginning to seem normal when Grace and I were summoned to Hollywood. A subsidiary company of Paramount was going into production of our movie.

Those were the maddest three weeks I've ever spent. Elmer Harris said he'd take a story a month for Bebe Daniels and Mary Miles Minter. That we might understand their types and studio methods, we were given free run of the movie lot. When we weren't dogging the footsteps of Bebe and Mary, we were in conference with directors, scenarists and title writers.

When Robert and I had spent a winter in southern California we'd not gone near a studio. Now I was on the inside. I was learning about movies, life and a wholly new monetary system. Each sum I heard mentioned was staggering, except the modest price of our scenario. In Carmel, Grace and I had been elated by this paltry figure, but after three weeks in Hollywood we didn't dare speak of it even to each other. In that opulent atmosphere I, who had never been able to get past three ciphers, began to throw dollars around by the hundreds of thousands.

When Grace and I reached home with news of orders for future work, Robert was tremendously impressed.

"Twelve scenarios a year!" he exclaimed. "You girls certainly put it over."

"But we didn't!" we wailed. "They're paying only a thousand dollars each!"

Robert looked at us curiously.

"For Pete's sake! What's happened to you? A thousand dollars for a day's work. Twelve thousand a year for the fun you and Grace get out of writing those fool things!"

I laughed. Three weeks of publicity sums had completely destroyed my sense of values. I laughed myself back to normalcy, and it was a good thing that I had. Before we could even put a second scenario into the mails, word arrived that the subsidiary company had folded and all agreements were off. But Grace and I could, and did, spend that thousand dollars, and we'd had three weeks of Alice in Wonderland adventures. Robert wouldn't believe a word of them, even doubted the existence of our movie until at last it was

shown in Monterey. Our names on the screen and our title were the only familiar features of the picture.

Carmel often did odd things to people. We'd seen them so changed by a brief sojourn old associates wouldn't have recognized them. Even staid Sammo had thrown off all inhibitions and adopted a creed of self-expression. His metamorphosis was complete. He killed chickens and cats, annoyed the cattle of a rancher, finally gave up domestic game for wild and chased deer in Del Monte Forest. We were warned he would be shot, and we warned Sammo. We even chained him. But he'd escape and swagger home to tell us he had a right to live his own life and he could only live it once. He lived it briefly. When he failed to return, we knew what had happened. Bobs grieved and watched for him day after day. Finally even she gave up hope, but she still forgave him.

"Maybe Carmel was bad for him," she said.

Having witnessed this incredible transformation of staid Sammo into a reckless roisterer, I wondered what Carmel might have done to Bobs when I received a message asking me to call at school without letting Bobs know of my visit. I questioned Bobs discreetly but her conscience apparently was clear. I remembered those buttons and armored myself by listing books Bobs had read and collecting a few of her paintings, which artists said showed ability.

Miss Williams' manner was non-committal. She introduced me to a young woman, a psychologist, who was visiting Carmel. The girl led me to a corner and pulled two chairs sociably close.

"I've been giving all the children intelligence tests," she said.

I tried not to flinch, but I felt my jaw tense.

"Intelligent parents can do so much to help," she said.

History seemed to be repeating itself. I listened while she told me of the Binet test, which had just been introduced in schools, and when she told me Bobs' intelligence quotient, I had no idea whether she was breaking good news or bad.

"Should we do something about that?" I asked tentatively.

"Of course!" And she caught fire. "Give her a chance to live up to her possibilities."

This sounded hopeful. She went on to tell of a system of individual instruction in which a child was not held back by others. It was a new era in education. At last the superior children were being given as much attention as the stupid. It began to appear that the world was Bobs' oyster. "You could have that child through college at sixteen," she finished.

I blinked. This sounded more alarming than the button incident. I was pleased, of course, but frightened. And when I took this astounding news home to Robert, he was inclined to feel outraged.

"Why can't we have just a plain child?" he demanded. "One school tells you she's subnormal. This one says she's too bright. And both say she must have special training."

The path of parenthood was becoming hard. I liked Bobs as she was, interested in playing with other children and making sand villages on the beach, getting into her share of trouble, not liking arithmetic and devoting many hours to reading.

"But she'll soon be seven years old," I said. "We can't always take schools for granted."

Robert's proposal, to let well enough alone for a while, sounded reasonable. So happy and occupied a youngster as Bobs couldn't be considered a real problem.

Postponement of any question was easy in Carmel. It was a day by day existence, always offering new and delightful people. Monterey, with its fishermen, historic Presidio and famous resort hotel, lay just over the hill. Pebble Beach, at the opposite social pole from Carmel, was just around the point. Sharp lines divided the three communities but the inhabitants strayed across the boundaries, and always some celebrity or other was visiting Monterey peninsula. Playwrights, novelists, newspapermen, artists and sculptors streamed through, and usually dropped in to look over Carmel.

With three communities to range in and a constant stream of visitors, we were beginning to know a great many people. Some we regretted not knowing earlier, especially Samuel G. Blythe and Martha Newcome. They were Pebble Beachers, and we'd just missed meeting them a dozen times. My first impression of Sam was that he had a genius for friend-making, and then I realized it wasn't genius at all, but sweetness and that rare combination, a trigger mind and a great charity for the less nimble minds of others. Perhaps that is genius.

When we called at Sunset Hill I hadn't spent a half hour with Martha Newcome before I knew why peoples' voices always warmed when they said "Marty." I was hoping she'd ask me to come again, for there are people to whom one's heart goes out instinctively. When we left she said, "I hope you like me as well as I like you." We'd traveled years in one meeting.

As Robert and I drove home I proclaimed jubilantly I'd found a friend. "The real kind," I said. "You know the sort—always there, as surely as the sun comes up each morning."

Robert understood. He knew I wasn't suffering from friend hunger. But, naturally a thrifty person, I'm elated to add to life's savings bank, and deep down friendships are real savings. I wondered why it had taken us so long to find those two people. And then I remembered what an old prospector on the Mohave had told me.

"A feller has to pan a hell of a lot of gravel to get a few specks of gold."

Carmel was changing fast. The old redwood houses were giving way to rock and stucco homes of affluent newcomers. Real estate offices and gift shops sprang up. The battle over paving the main street became a deadly feud. A theater was promised, a library promoted. A Spanish atmosphere pervaded, as though a simple forest maiden had suddenly donned a serape and gone into a castanet dance. The baseball league had six teams, uniforms and bleacher seats for fans. *Commedia dell'arte* moved to the Arts and Crafts hall to accommodate an audience and completely lost its spontaneity. A hotel put colored smocks on workmen who sang as they painted the lobby.

This last feature was to entertain tourists and Robert and I chuckled over that bit of eccentricity, never recognizing a symptom. Then one morning I looked up from the breakfast table into the eyes of a strange woman peering through the window. When I stepped to the front porch she faced me belligerently.

"I trust I'm not intruding," she said.

I fell back on facts and remarked that she was standing on our front porch and looking in our windows. She stalked down the path, but turned for a parting threat.

"I'll certainly never come to Eighty Acres again!" she cried. "And at the hotel they told me how you writers *want* to be looked at."

We could write for the rest of our lives and see if she cared! I didn't know a writer who wanted to be looked at but I began to wonder if "nuts" were to become a marketable commodity.

We were going "nearly broke" with increasing frequency. Once we'd been elated when we'd averted a first-of-the-month crisis with a fiction sale, but now the novelty of it had worn off. Instead of "when we sell this story," we'd begun to say "if." We'd written stories too sour to be submitted. We'd had rejections. And we'd had sales. We were more successful than some other writers and our chronic state was no worse than average. We had hopes, but so did everyone in Carmel. Any story might go over big, might sell to the movies, and one of those delightful accidents in a writing life might be just around the corner.

But we'd slipped backward both in the quality and quantity of our work since our arrival in Carmel almost two and a half years before. Each had theories to explain this and was willing to test them, but they couldn't be tested in the same story. That, or the separate writers' shacks, started me off on a novel of my own. We were still in-and-out collaborators when we agreed well enough to work together on the same yarn, although we spent more time and energy convincing each other than in getting words on paper. Definitely something was happening to our work. It had been a long time since we'd sold yarns on their first trip out, but I still looked back wistfully.

"Perhaps we just ran into a streak of luck in those four and a half years," Robert said.

I wasn't sure whether people "ran into" or made their luck, but whichever it was we no longer were hitting the current.

I resented this, and because one of the duties of a collaborator is to supply a personal object for rage, I took out some of my resentment on Robert. The rest I vented on the constant irritation of our hand-to-mouth existence and on the dreary monotony of the job of authoring. Once we'd been able to alternate periods of hard work with adventure. We'd knocked off to go places and to see things.

"At this rate we'll never get enough money together to go anywhere," I said. "We're letting life go by."

We missed many things in that third winter in Carmel. We missed old Sing, who'd cleaned and bossed and fed Carmel for years. He'd taken charge of our family and treated me with indulgence. To him I was a

childlike creature, a bit of property strangely precious in the eyes of the boss. If he ordered me around and tyrannized in personal matters, it was only for my own good. I was scolded in terrifying Cantonese if I neglected to see that “the baby” had clean socks, but the worst crime I could commit was to buy a pound of food. No matter how canny I had been, that astute marketer could prove that I’d been robbed. It might take him a half hour to handle and appraise every egg in a store, but when Sing had finished sorting he knew he’d garnered the twelve largest, finest specimens available that morning.

Sing watched everything. Most of all he watched our poker fortunes.

“You win?” he’d ask hopefully the morning after a session.

If I showed him gambling earnings he smiled and gave me an extra cup of coffee, but when I had nothing cheerful to report I braced myself for his next question.

“How much you lose?”

The prospect of facing Sing and torrents of shrill rebuke ruined my poker game and I knew why hen-pecked husbands don’t make good gamblers. Any two pairs could send me scurrying to cover. Craven fear killed all curiosity until I adopted good marital technique. I lied brazenly to Sing and wasn’t above robbing my own purse to produce evidence of a well-spent evening. I didn’t even blush as I accepted a third cup of coffee.

No one knew Sing’s age. For years he’d been sending money to China to buy wives for his sons, and if the cost of rice advanced a cent Sing was terribly depressed. Although he explained volubly, I never understood what rice had to do with the price of wives. Nor did I know why one afternoon he asked for an old blanket. Never before had he asked for a gift.

That evening Sing came into the living room.

“Tomorrow I go China,” he said.

The blanket was his ship’s bedding. We’d been proud of our celerity in making changes but here we’d met an expert. He’d not overlooked a detail. “My cousin come here,” he said. Moreover the cousin had been fully instructed regarding our idiosyncrasies and we were told what we should pay him. The cousin’s name was Sang, a bit of unconscious humor on Sing’s part. He had one misgiving. His cousin was a young Chinaman.

“Maybe not much good,” Sing said.

Sang wasn't, but we would gladly have overlooked inadequacy had he scolded us. Sang didn't care if we spent our substance in riotous living, lost our shirts in poker and ate midget eggs for the rest of our days. We weren't his family and keeping face for us was not his duty. And so our lives were suddenly poorer because one more of those strangely sweet and incredibly devoted old houseboys had gone home to China.

Each spring and fall when we'd renewed our lease we discussed sending for those possessions stored in Wisconsin. These semi-annual arguments enhanced my impression of their value, and when Robert received a letter from his mother reporting that the Mississippi River had staged a flood and our precious boxes were a sodden mess, I yelped in horror. She softened the blow by suggesting that we telegraph at once what things we prized most highly. She would attempt to salvage them.

"Books," I said.

"They're surely ruined," Robert said. "And we can replace them. What else was in the boxes?"

I began a list. It was so sketchy I consulted Robert, but he couldn't think of as many things as I had. Then we recalled our careful directions about that sacred trust and began to laugh. We couldn't pretend to mourn objects we couldn't even name.

"There's an idea there," Robert said. "Probation for belongings."

It was an idea. It developed into an excellent system which has since baffled storage companies. Hospitable friends with large basements and attics have not understood why we so tenderly stored possessions, only to return months, even years, later and call in the services of a rummage shop. At the time we do not realize we're putting our things on probation, for we believe nothing short of death will part us from these priceless mementoes. We always play the game through and, stupid as this seems, it has some wisdom, for life would be as dull as a completed jigsaw puzzle if one grew too skilled in the sport of living. We're never robbed of the joyful discovery that all those odd cartons and brown paper packages contain only clutter. And that was all we felt now as we wired Robert's mother to forget our precious boxes.

Hunches are often decisions which have been hot-housed in the subconscious until ready to go off with a bang. A combination of events shot

our hunch to the surface. An anxious period had been relieved by a sale, not large, though enough to give us a breathing space in which to write another quick yarn. But as we sat before the fireplace that evening we talked instead of a novel. Robert lamented that he dared not take time to write it.

“We used to get grubstakes so we could afford a long job of writing,” I said bitterly.

“And we used to feel we were making headway,” Robert said. “Before we got trapped in this dead end.”

He’d named it, but “trapped” is a frightening word. It’s an admission, generally of defeat, and we avoided it and discussed the “dead end.” Robert confessed that for a long time Carmel had seemed just that. He hadn’t been satisfied with the manner of our work and less so with our product. He’d been as resentful as I, but manlike he’d let me do the talking.

“I wouldn’t mind going broke to get somewhere!” he burst out. “We’re just floating in the current.”

We’d made efforts to retrieve lost momentum in those temporary periods of reform. I said they’d been futile.

“We didn’t go at it right,” he said. “The only sure cure for a wrong way of living is to scrap the whole set-up. Let’s get out.”

Once a great general, his center crushed and his wings crumpling, decided to attack. The strategy is sound, if it works. At least it was worth trying. If we couldn’t advance in easy going Carmel, where public estimation was charitably tempered to the unlucky writer, we’d tackle San Francisco. There demands were greater, expenses higher and people were expected to make good. And we’d go immediately while our bank balance would get us there. In the city we’d have to swim or sink, for we couldn’t float.

“Dead end!” I exulted. “Nothing’s a dead end that makes you stretch your muscles to get out.”

15. Staying Put

ROBERT and I had landed in San Francisco, each gripping an end of the old shoestring. It had grown thicker through the years and the last few dollars in the bank formed one of its least important strands. Every time we'd hit tough going together we had added something until now that shoestring gave us a firm handhold. We didn't talk about the new sturdy strands. One doesn't talk about deep down feelings. But we recognized their existence and caught their strength and steadiness, just as in the old days our canoe had transmitted the confidence of two paddlers in each other. Then a stretch of white water had brought us exultation and joyous challenge. San Francisco presented an adventure in which swift currents demanded united effort.

We'd cleared decks for action. Bobs was in a camp in the Marin hills. We'd hoped sunshine and the companionship of children would compensate for the absence of devoted parents, but on my weekly visits I was disconcerted to discover Bobs found that "doing everything with twelve other children" offered a completely satisfying existence. Our egos hadn't demanded that she suffer, but we'd not been prepared for the sufficiency of the world of the young.

To make our writing affairs more shipshape, we'd acquired a literary agent. We'd expected only a business representative, but by sheer luck we'd stumbled on Carl Brandt. With Carl, writing and writers are a passion. He devotes to them a natural kindliness, a sympathetic understanding and a vast patience with those maddening complexities inherent in the writing craft. And so wisely does he mix praise and criticism, the writer is always left with an awareness of unfailing friendship and with confidence that he can make the next story much better. We needed Carl when we found him and that need and his response to it have grown ever since.

When we began work in San Francisco Carl did not believe our affairs had reached so dreadful a pass as did we, but he agreed we'd have to work. His sanguine view helped enormously.

For ten years we'd been earning a living by writing, yet Robert knew very little of the real job of producing fiction and I knew even less. Newspaper training had given him facility and speed in getting words on paper. An interest in all people quickened my story sense. I saw stories

everywhere, often where they didn't exist. But out of dozens of ideas, a few were bound to click.

Both had a romantic attitude toward the countries of which we wrote. In Carmel we'd begun to acquire ideas about writing and quite naturally our slants were as different as were we as people. We'd not gone far enough to know just where our differences lay. We knew only that we differed.

That these differences had thrown a monkey wrench into the machinery of collaboration was not surprising. Even clear cut opinions are apt to become distorted in the process of translation into words, since words can never be as flexible as thoughts. One is constantly finding he's said things he didn't mean and must defend a strange creed which, in some mysterious way, has become his own. When Robert and I tried the more impossible task of stating what were only vague convictions, the arguments had ended as all such arguments do. Each had closed his mind. Robert dismissed my theories as "high-brow," and I'd retaliated by calling his "the Nick Carter manner."

But when tight places came in the trail we pulled together. Whichever could make an idea function was given applause, not criticism.

Authoring was intensive in San Francisco, but it was no longer dreary, as it had been for a year. We enjoyed our work. We didn't put in so many more hours at the typewriter, but typewriter hours aren't the only ones which count. A writer writes in the evening. He writes on his day off, while walking, while talking, even when he appears to be only caroling gaily in his bath. To do this he must be able to capture a sense of aloneness and, oddly enough, both a wilderness and a large city lend themselves to good working habits. Each permits individual intactness.

San Francisco as a city heaped up good measure. On previous visits we'd been caught by its spell, as is everyone who sees it, but now we had opportunity really to know it. We prowled the waterfront, where ships from every port of the world were gathered. We explored small shops in Chinatown and made friends with old Chinese merchants. We boarded fishing craft at Fishermen's Wharf and spent hours chatting with gay-hearted fishermen whose fathers had fished in the Mediterranean. We discovered favorite hilltops from which to watch the exciting play of color on the city and outspread bay. We found out-of-the-way restaurants in the Italian quarter where a friendly people excelled in serving dinners. Good food and red wine were the least of their offerings. A joyous family spirit and laughter were ours for the sharing.

A city, like a person, takes knowing. All that summer we gave many late afternoons and evenings to San Francisco, and she gave us beauty, color, adventure and an intoxicating stimulation.

Our working spree was no dreary grind. Time had slipped by so fast I was surprised one evening when Robert emptied his billfold and found we had eating money for two more weeks. This should have aroused me to action. Retrenchment would be common sense. Now was the time to retire to some garret and live on crackers and cheese, or to adopt any of those rigorous regimes by which truly gifted authors had won through to success. Then I remembered we had decided to attack.

“Bet you two dollars to one,” I said, “we eat well the rest of the summer.”

That was one wager Robert was glad to lose, even though it took one of his few last dollars when Carl wired that *Everybody's* was buying a yarn. The sale was more than a bone with which to distract the pursuing wolf. This was the first time we'd broken into an illustrated magazine.

Of itself, that fact was heady news, but we'd not come down to earth before a story of mine sold to *Metropolitan Magazine*. Robert was prouder of this than I. He wouldn't admit the story had a flaw.

I began to hope that a novel on which I had spent a year in Carmel might sell. It didn't. One editor said it had some high spots, and some low. Two years later he remembered the high spots and sent for it again, only to discover that the low spots were so much lower than he had recalled. So I was destined to become one of those people who always have a novel in the house.

Fall found us still eating well. Also schools were opening. Bobs came from camp and we rented a house for the winter. Fortunately for the landlord's peace of mind, he didn't know we were still employing the attacking technique. We weren't worried, but he might have been. We knew we'd sold to new markets at more than doubled prices, and that a long serial, the work of months, was in the mails. We also knew there might be a slight hiatus in regular eating, but we'd gone nearly broke in far less worthy causes.

The serial sale was one of those thrilling last minute rescues. The wolf was tearing down the door when he heard the galloping hoofbeats of the check. It was big enough to live on for a year and the wolf gave a disconsolate yelp and went off to seek other prey.

None of this established a world's record in success stories, nor was it important to anyone except ourselves. But we'd made our grubstake. Once again we'd swung two paddles across a windswept traverse and reached shelter.

Bobs' special requirements in education settled themselves. A teachers' college was forming a group of twenty children for a demonstration in the possibilities of superior children. A high I.Q. was required and the twentieth place was still open. Bobs was tested and enrolled. When I heard that progress in arithmetic was to be the measuring stick for advancement, my heart sank. Robert, more practical, offered Bobs a five dollar bonus for each grade. She reported that promotion was by half grades.

"Then I'll pay two dollars and fifty cents whenever you move up," he said.

He paid the first bonus six weeks later and remarked that domestic problems required the male mind. He was convinced of this just before Christmas when he paid the second bonus. I began to worry lest the grades wouldn't last through childhood. Bobs was threatening to become so wealthy we didn't protest when she spent the entire five dollars on our Christmas presents. Robert admired his slippers extravagantly and I displayed my cigarette case on all occasions.

Robert was so smirky about his solution that he failed to notice that Bobs didn't demand another bonus that winter. But one day at school a supervisor reported that Bobs had scarcely glanced at arithmetic for weeks. I took that little problem home to the male mind. Robert investigated.

"But, Dad!" Bobs said. "I only needed money for Christmas."

Despite Robert's exhortations, her manner remained complacently virtuous. She'd seen her duty and she'd done it. I tried not to look superior and didn't laugh, at least not until Bobs left the room.

"The male mind!" I said.

Robert grinned. "Anyhow, she didn't button buttons," he said.

Bobs earned no more bonuses that spring. This distressed Robert but troubled Bobs not at all. The last day of a term had always been official time for promotion and who was she to depart from custom? Her home hours were occupied. She roller-skated and scooted and took an active part in the

warfare waged continuously between her gang on the hilltop and youngsters who lived at the foot.

Indoor hours were spent in batiking. That craft had become our latest household hazard. A stage designer had taught her the technique, intending it as a friendly gesture, but the house reeked of boiling wax, dye pots threatened rugs, and silk lingerie showing the slightest flaw was sure to be converted into highly colored drapery. I longed for the old simple days of water colors and crayons.

Bobs' ecstatic accounts of the diverting activities of the select group of twenty aroused our sympathy for the school staff. A note asking me to call at the college didn't surprise us. I was more curious than troubled as I entered the dean's office. I'd concluded I knew nothing about education of the young and was prepared to be open-minded. But the dean's proposal was simple. The select group of twenty was to be disbanded. He hoped I'd forget I'd ever heard of an intelligence quotient.

"Twenty individualists, set apart, destroy the normal balance of society," he said.

That was an educational formula I could understand. I thanked him from the bottom of my heart and he seemed grateful that I was willing to relax and take Bobs, as we always had, merely as one of us. The dean and I found we both believed that emotional adjustment was more important than a trained mind. His faith in individual instruction was still unshaken and he suggested a private day school which carried out that system. He arranged for Bobs' enrollment over the telephone.

I went home jubilantly.

"You've got your wish," I said to Robert. "A plain child. We don't have to establish any records as parents."

The scooter problem couldn't be shed so lightly. We lived on a hilltop because we wanted the marvelous view of a city stretching to the Embarcadero and the berthed ships. Also hilltops were considered desirable neighborhoods with nice children for playmates. But we'd overlooked the hazards of San Francisco's hills. They provided natural scooter speedways. I learned this the afternoon I walked up the steep incline and Bobs whizzed by me. Her hair was flying and she wore the grim look of a race driver. Before I could call she had banked a curve around the park and disappeared. I hurried home to say that something must be done about that scooter.

“You can’t make a sissy of her,” Robert said. “You’ve got to let her take chances.”

I spoke of fractured bones and a cracked skull while Robert argued that it would be unfair to forbid Bobs an unbroken three-block curve around a hill. I compromised on his promise to give her a scooter lesson. For a heroic outdoor man, he looked distinctly shaken when he came home a half hour later.

“I wouldn’t ride one of those things down that grade for fifty dollars,” he said. “Show her how to manage a scooter! She showed me.”

It’s odd how the mind flashes backward. Suddenly, for no reason at all, I remembered my mother’s outbursts about the perils of the Canadian wilderness and the dangers of lonely canoe journeys. And then I knew I’d been stepped up a generation.

We’d made no heroic decisions to stay put but by our second winter in San Francisco we’d slipped so naturally into our groove it seemed we’d always lived there. Plans were made not by the month but by the year. This changed my life even more than Bobs’ and Robert’s. I bought symphony tickets for the season. I could, and did, collect all sorts of gadgets and paraphernalia. For the first time in years I could buy clothes with an eye to future usefulness instead of wondering where I might be the next spring or fall. I lunched downtown, played bridge, dropped in for tea at friends’ homes, and no longer pretended to keep work hours.

Robert was working hard on the novel we’d thought of so long before by the Carmel fireside. We talked it over, and occasionally I wrote a brief sequence which he usually rewrote. My top-of-the-mind efforts didn’t always click, but he forgave them in his pleasure over my new regimen for he’d always worried lest I yearned for the life of an average woman with house, friends and daytime engagements.

But all that left little time for writing. My conscience troubled me but somehow my best resolutions got scattered by imperative interruptions. At least they seemed imperative—a concert or play I didn’t want to miss, an interesting visitor in San Francisco who would be at a luncheon or tea, or we might be having dinner guests or going out and I must have my hair and nails done.

I rushed in late for dinner one evening, all pepped up from a tea given for a well-known singer. San Francisco ran as heavily to visiting celebrities

in the arts as had the Monterey peninsula.

“You like this sort of life?” Robert asked.

His tone was so serious, I knew this was no idle question about my contentment.

“Certainly,” I said. “But why?”

He handed me a letter. A publisher wished to bring out the novel. He offered a generous advance, a contract for five books, guaranteed rising sales and a large promotion backing; all providing the book appeared under a single name. He had no aversion to women authors, but the mortality of married collaborators, by death and divorce, forbade his taking chances.

“I’d rather turn it down than drop your name,” Robert said.

“Don’t be silly!” I cried. “My name in print means nothing!”

“That’s the way we started out,” he said, “and you’ve had a lot to do with this novel.”

“Just about as much as real wives often have to do with their husband’s job,” I said.

Which was the truth. We knew that. So we drank a toast to the end of the old firm name and made all sorts of promises that writing would always be a collaboration. We meant those promises, and to show we did, each became lyrically enthusiastic over the ideas of the other fellow. Of course we overdid it. Any poor hunch received applause.

And then, as time went on, the single name did make a difference. It wasn’t so petty a matter as credit but rather a feeling that a story was the personal expression of the fellow who signed it.

The single name on fiction freed my conscience and I gave up even trying to explain to myself what happens to all the hours in a woman’s day. For me it will always be one of life’s mysteries how a few household tasks, the jobs of purchasing agent for a family of three and companion for a daughter, plus a few of my own engagements, could eat up days, weeks, months, a winter. But they did. I was so occupied that Robert took up golf. He looked a bit shamefaced the day he brought home a bag of clubs.

“You gals are always gallivanting,” he said.

Bobs and I spent a great deal of time together. Dancing school, French class, the weekly orthodontia and odd visits to doctors’ offices demanded frequent convoy duty and on other afternoons we often went out together.

We went swimming in the big pool at the beach. We went on downtown sprees, a concert, a matinee, an art show or only to tea at Bobs' favorite Nob Hill hotel. I enjoyed all these expeditions as much as Bobs.

It was so much fun to be with her I never had a sense of being bound by a maternal task. I know now that I was making an instinctive investment for future years. Friendships, even within a family, demand intensive cultivation. Firm bonds are not welded in odd half hours snatched from a busy day.

As a social companion, a nine-year-old is a vastly different person than that same youngster when being exhorted to brush teeth or not to dally on the way to school. Bobs and I talked over all sorts of subjects on our jaunts. She was interested in everything and I found her not only stimulating but even instructive. For instance, she taught me how to look at modern art. Children instinctively understand it because their approach is unhampered by traditional beliefs.

My first lesson in art appreciation was costly. A gallery had offered twenty-five dollars to anyone who correctly titled a large abstraction. I stared at the swirling confusion and was definitely baffled.

Bobs looked at it a moment and then said, "Its name is anesthetic."

"But, dear," I said. "It's nothing so simple as that."

"Why not?" she demanded. "That picture looks like I felt when I had my tonsils out. You know — when everything starts to whirl."

I explained as well as I could that the abstraction undoubtedly had some deep and cosmic meaning, but I didn't convince Bobs. She still wanted to enter her choice but I led her quickly by the desk where others were hopefully scribbling titles.

A few days later a newspaper announced that the prize was awarded for the title "Impressions of an Anesthetic." For a moment I considered burning that newspaper. My better self put up quite a struggle to make me give Bobs the clipping and a check for twenty-five dollars.

It was our third spring in San Francisco. The year's lease was waiting to be signed, and had been for a week. The rental agent assured me that anything I didn't like about the house would be remedied at once, but the only flaw I could find in the arrangements was a detail he was powerless to change. It was "twelve months." They sounded like eternity.

We'd struggled to get our existence on a yearly basis and now this symbol of success had turned and bitten us. Our life was pleasant, more pleasant than the average, and yet neither of us could face another year of doing the same things. The zest was gone. It was some sort of vicious circle. The job of making a living prevented our really living. It was that old question of living versus working. We never could seem to drive those horses as a pair.

"Or can't we?" Robert asked. "A new outdoor game would help both. A boat, for instance."

We were back to that old idea, "a home afloat." That complex had lain dormant for seven years. I'd not heard a boat mentioned since he'd paced off its length on a Wisconsin lawn. But now I didn't ask captious questions. I'd learned that a home is not a matter of dimensions but is a dwelling of the spirit. And my sluggish adventure muscles stirred to that word "afloat."

"We've been staring at this Pacific for five years," I said. "And we've never used it except to swim in."

"And north of here is the finest cruising country in the world," Robert added. "The British Columbia coast and the inside passage to Alaska. Pines and high mountains and long inlets, so many islands they look like pin pricks on the chart."

He brought out maps and with our forefingers we traced where a boat might take us. We'd become sea-minded in half an hour. And then suddenly I became practical.

"Do you know anything about navigating?" I asked.

I thought I'd plumbed his repertoire, and I was willing to be surprised. But I wasn't. He'd learned something of marine motors from our launch in the Canadian wilderness. He'd read motorboat magazines and sea stories and once he'd done some sailing at Newport.

"But it'll be fun to learn a game together," he said. "I'll be as green as you."

He couldn't be that green, but his words were comforting. I'd started as a kindergartner in woodcraft when he was a graduate, and long before, when touring, I'd admitted that all mechanical contrivances must remain vast mysteries. Now navigation, fog, currents, hidden reefs and rocks and all sea disasters were as unfamiliar to him as to me. We could learn, or be shipwrecked, together.

So I reasoned that first evening, but I had yet to discover the skipper complex. Merely treading the boards of his own vessel does something to the male and the mildest-mannered individual is instantly enveloped in the awesome mantle of command.

The committee of ways and means went into action. We couldn't learn to navigate a boat until we owned one. Boats cost money. Though the novel was listed among the ten best sellers, our income didn't run to "yachts." Used boats were always sacrificed but, even counting on a sale extremely painful to a former owner, we'd have to invest two thousand dollars. Expenses for the season would bring it up to three. I grew rather thoughtful. On the only voyages I'd taken I'd been a bit "qualmish" on occasions and I suspected that a small cruising boat would be even more restive than a ship. I was about to begin a guarded inquiry when Robert looked out from a page of figures.

"Cut loose from all this town stuff and we could swing a boat," he said. "Quickest way to buy one is to go to Seattle."

He departed the next morning. A few days later he wired that we owned a thirty-six foot cabin cruiser. The telegram arrived as the storage company was departing with the last of our trunks and boxes. Bobs and I took the next train for Seattle.

There's a great advantage in starting a new experience at scratch. Then one has no set conditions by which to measure. So I looked with awed wonder at the compactness and versatility of the *Yakima's* arrangements. The small cabin was transformed into a dining room by merely letting down a hinged table from a bulkhead, and converted into sleeping quarters at night by lifting up the backs of the transom berths. Lockers held the bedding, also ship's stores and clothes and equipment. The motor and I companionably shared the galley. A bowl, toilet and medicine cabinet were installed in the smallest bathroom I'd ever seen. Aft of what I insisted on calling downstairs was a canopied cockpit with semi-enclosed wheelhouse.

Not until later in the summer did I realize that no amount of agility and system could quite eliminate that early morning hour of confusion when three people dressed, made up berths and got the cabin shipshape for breakfast, and that it was almost beyond human foresight to avoid needing some article stowed under the berths after the dining table was down and set for a meal. And while the galley was officially known as such because it held a stove, sink, dresser and lockers, it was really the motor's domicile and I was the interloper.

The scheme to learn seamanship by doing it had other compensations. While outfitting, each hour was so full of fresh discoveries we had no time for apprehensions about the future. Collecting three months' supplies and finding places in which to put them occupied us so completely for a couple of days I'd almost forgotten we were going to sea. But the sinking feeling in the pit of my stomach caused by the skipper's announcement that it was time to sail was over almost as quickly as a tooth is extracted, for as the *Yakima* nosed into the ship canal I had to give all attention to my duties as mate when we passed through the Lake Washington canal locks. My excitement over that ordeal shut out all other thoughts.

Thus, to me it was a matter of some surprise to find ourselves suddenly upon salt water. The days of preparation and planning were over. There was something final in the opening of the great gate of the locks. We had gone to sea.

16. *Pledged to Neptune*

OUR self-taught seamanship did not go forward entirely without mishap but every lesson was cheap at the price. Getting lost in a fog when barely out of Seattle convinced us that a compass was more than a seagoing gadget that lent a nautical air to a boat. Ours didn't point north and we set about at once to work out a card of corrections.

Likewise our knowledge increased the night we sat on shore and strained our eyes in the breaking dawn to see if the *Yakima*, aground on a shelving reef, was going to slip off into deep water before she righted. The threat of losing our boat before we'd cruised 200 miles was an unforgettable demonstration in how suddenly a carefree voyage can change into disaster. Robert learned what a tidal range of from eight to twenty feet can uncover in the way of hidden rocks and I had a lesson in stowing which lasted through seven years. When the *Yakima* heeled over, everything in the boat except the motor and cookstove went adrift.

Two windbound days in harbor did not teach me patience but did give me some inkling of the inexorability of the sea. And an unwise crossing of the Gulf of Georgia, into which I prodded the skipper before a westerly had died down, convinced me that on a family-crewed voyage the mate must learn to handle the wheel even when great hissing combers are throwing a boat around. A two-man craft has no room for a fair-weather mate.

Our lessons were not all rigorous. Reasons behind ship's discipline dawned on us slowly. The sea, rather than the skipper, was the martinet and fulfillment of ship's duties not only smoothed routine but added to the comfort and happiness aboard. Keeping shipshape wasn't merely indulgence of a seagoing male's passion for order but a matter of always being ready for emergencies.

It paid other bonuses. With tasks done, we were free to enjoy the new life which absorbed us and were an ecstatic trio in the wheelhouse as we voyaged through a sunlit sea with great snow-capped mountains in the distance. We rode at anchor in quiet harbors and watched shadows lengthen as the sun slipped behind a peak and the peace and beauty of an evening on the "salt chuck" took possession. Waterfowl carried on their fussy little concerns and talked soft chit-chat. A seal might swim close to inspect us,

and when a fish broke water the splash only blended with the twilight sounds.

As our sea legs stiffened a communal interest bound us closely. We did everything together, dinghy trips ashore, exploration of harbors, long days of cruising which brought fresh sights and sounds and smells. It had been years since we shared an experience so completely.

We'd set out to see the inlet region, a spectacularly beautiful coast line lovelier, some maintained, than even the fiords of Norway. An ancient conflict between the sea and the mountains had provided a cruising paradise. For a thousand miles north of Puget Sound, the continental coast had once extended farther into the Pacific with an outer range of mountains, a deep valley cut by ancient rivers and an inner range of stupendous heights. Then, before the last glacial period, the whole coast tilted seaward. The outer range became an archipelago extending through Southeastern Alaska. The great land valley is now the famous Inside Passage through which ships travel to Alaska, and the mainland range, partly submerged and partly victorious over the sea's invasion, has become a vast, intricate network of straits, channels, sounds, bays and arms. Former foothills are hidden reefs, higher peaks are islands, mountain shoulders are points and headlands. Steep-walled canyons of ancient rivers are long winding ribbons of salt water which penetrate to the very heart of a great range, and mountains now rise straight from salt water.

We'd known these geological facts, but there can be no intellectual approach to the stunning effect of one's first American fiord. As the *Yakima* made her way up the narrow, twisting reaches of Jervis Inlet into that great gash in the lofty mountains known as Princess Louise, we were silenced. For a million years those mountains had stood far from the sea and then the sea had come among them. It carried us now beneath great peaks. It seemed that we looked straight up past unbroken forest mantles to glittering snowfields. We were on the sea, and we were in the mountains. And everywhere tiny streams crept out from beneath the snow, danced to the edges of the precipices and leaped out into the sea.

That night we anchored so close to a mountain we could have cast a dry fly on its base. That mountain lifted eighty-four hundred feet above the sea on which we lay. And that night we knew what we wanted. We wanted a boat large enough to live on, to work on, a craft that would be a real home afloat. We didn't know how we would get it, but the beauty of Princess Louise had decided us.

It was mid-August when we turned south from the head of Knight Inlet, longest of the fiords and one of the most remote, and began a daylong run to where it joined the Pacific. Knight was a grand finale. Its peaks were higher and more precipitous and, set at the end of a long reach like a clear blue jewel, glittered our first glacier.

We couldn't have turned back without visiting Knight Inlet, and now that we had done so we weren't satisfied. We thought of the bigger inlets to the north, of higher mountains and greater glaciers. We had cruised for weeks and only scratched the surface. Now we must start homeward.

Our days, our weeks, our months had been crammed with living. There'd not been a moment in which we could not look out at beauty. We'd been afloat so long the sounds, smells and movement of the sea were a part of life. We'd anchored in lonely harbors and near homes of the dwellers in that amazing sea country. We'd moored at a float town, a village on the sea nestling at the foot of a mountain. We'd met fishermen. We'd watched that one-man logging crew, a handlogger, drop a 200-foot fir so cunningly it shot down a steep mountainside like a projectile and did not stop until it was a log in the sea. We'd begun to learn sea ways. We'd taken our craft through the Yucluetaws, one of the two great bottlenecks through which flows the tidal water necessary to serve a great complicated region.

In the Yucletaws the magnitude and inexorability of this tidal movement builds to a climactic burst of power. Twice each lunar day the level of an elaborate network of straits, inlets, arms, bays and coves, down to the very last tiny indentation, rises and falls from eight to twenty feet. All the water for this great surge and ebb in that region must flow through a restricted twisting channel four miles long. The turn of the tide, when the current ceases to run in one direction and begins its sweep in the other, is known as slack, and is the only period in which the rapids are navigable. As the tide gathers force, its first low mutter grows into a sullen roar, and the surface of the water is no longer a smooth straight sweep but a broken angry passage. Huge whirlpools form. Masses of water, deflected by hidden ledges, break the surface in great upsurging boils an acre in extent. As the push of the tide increases, the roar intensifies. The channel is a welter of turbulence and confusion. Its threat is terrifying.

When at last the tidal law has been fulfilled to its last drop, the clamor begins to lessen and at last halts for a momentary peace before the mad surge begins in the opposite direction.

To me the Yucluetaws was as stirring as any symphonic poem. We spent a week just inside the entrance to the rapids, safely moored to a fisherman's float, and it was for me a week of emotional excitement. I'd wait for the build-up of the tide as expectantly as I ever waited for that moment when all the instruments of an orchestra blend and join in one great triumphant strain.

The summer had held many great moments. We were carrying home memories of mountains, of peace and contentment in quiet anchorages, of sparkling days, of the joy of waking to see sun reflected from the water on the white ceiling of the cabin. But we'd begun to talk about these things in retrospect. And that was sad. It was like talking over a party we hadn't wanted to leave.

And always there'd been booty days. My love of wresting booty from the country was a family joke and even Bobs teased me about my clam-digging grin. Clam beaches, crab flats, trout streams, salmon runs, rocky ledges where cod lingered and berry bushes ashore, each gave me a field day.

That booty meant so much to me was not due to my attitude toward food but to my sex. Women haven't come far since food and a comfortable cave were the main considerations in life and earth's bounty quickly stirs their racial memories. I'd noticed this often. A man may hunt or fish for love of the sport but the first question his wife asks is, "Did you get anything, darling?" When we'd hunted or fished with others I'd seen a lustful gleam in women's eyes as they brought in their trophies. The atavistic streak in women is very wide. Game, to them, means a replenishment of the larder.

I admitted all this readily.

"If I didn't have a primitive instinct, this outdoor game wouldn't be so real," I said. "And I'd have missed a lot of fun this summer."

"None of us missed any fun this summer," Robert said. "Best we've ever had."

His voice trailed off wistfully and we were back again on that mournful theme of farewell. We'd not thought of a way to get that larger boat, though we'd learned its requirements in comfort and safety. It was no longer a matter of how little we could manage with but of those factors we weren't willing to go without. Anything short of a home afloat in which we could carry on the job would be only a sorry makeshift. The novel would bring mid-winter royalties, but that check was already budgeted as the beginning

of our savings, security for our future. It was high time we made investments.

“And perhaps some day they’ll grow into a yacht,” I said.

“When you and I are so old the smell of salt water makes us sneeze,” Robert said. “We’ve seen a grand country. Let’s forget it.”

He steered in silence while I reviewed chats I’d had with bankers on the dazzling rewards of providence and foresight. Royalties from a best seller would give us the first opportunity to make real preparations for those later years.

“We’ve *got* to invest that money where it’s safe!” I burst forth.

“Sure,” Robert said. “We’ve got no right to fritter away or gamble a stake like that.”

And then we looked at each other.

“*Lo bailado nadie me lo quita*,” I said.

Long ago an old Spaniard had said this and had given us the translation. “That which has been danced no one can take from me.” I’d thought we understood its wisdom and now suddenly I knew how little it had taught us. In mistaken frugality we were actually planning to be spendthrifts with the years.

“No one’s ever lost a moment that’s been lived or a memory that’s been hoarded,” I said. “Let’s invest that money where it’s really safe and buy a ship.”

We invested more than money in the *Triton*.

We bought her in mid-winter when her former owner, who’d built her as his last and perfect craft, decided he couldn’t afford her, and from the moment of ownership we regretted every day spent in San Francisco while Bobs finished the school year and I had a bout with surgery. Nurses, hospital bills and surgeon’s fees are always painful, but these defrauded the *Triton*.

Like all boat owners, we intended to make alterations, but not until we’d cruised in her and checked our plans. We’d bought her for her possibilities. She was a deep draught boat, designed for the motor cruiser race to Bermuda, and her deep lines gave us a lot of interior to play with.

“She’s a grand ship!” Robert said the morning we took possession. “We can make her into a real home, and still keep her a ship.”

He intended to comfort me but I was glad we’d have the fun of rebuilding. Already I was seeing her as she’d be some day, with owner’s stateroom, convenient galley, a deckhouse, all the canny changes we could make for comfort. When we’d finished, that home afloat would be really ours, for it would have come out of ourselves.

Even in the beginning she met our irreducible demands, a sturdy sea boat, separate quarters for the motor, room for living and for working, and a quiet retreat for the typewriter. And she gave us much more. As we voyaged north and she showed she had a gallant heart in taking weather from which we would have had to run in the *Yakima*, she became the object of our devotion. All three were proud of her. Cleaning ship was not a task. Bobs polished brass of her own volition because she liked to see the *Triton* gleaming.

And as our love and pride grew, we knew we’d made emotional investments. It is so with a ship. It was even more so with this ship because it was our home. We’d chosen to establish one which would make demands of eternal vigilance against hazard, and as we served her and she served us, the bond deepened.

It was an enchanted summer. We visited favorite harbors and old friends and discovered new. We were voyaging, yet we were at home. Robert did his fiction stint in the morning. Bobs spent hours rowing in her own dinghy. I was something between mate, housewife and a carefree adventurer. We went for day’s explorations up small rivers in a kicker-propelled dinghy. We fished. We berried. Bobs and I went swimming. The days weren’t long enough. And the evenings, when all three lay on the foredeck to watch the colors of sunset fade and the twilight hush envelop our small world, were hours of delight.

When we pulled up the hook to seek a new harbor it was never because the one we left had lost its charm but only because many others were equally lovely. We penetrated new sea country. We visited Queen Charlotte Sound and looked at the jumping-off place for Alaska. We made an intensive study of loggers and logging in three inlets where old time handloggers had gathered. To reach them we had to negotiate Nakwakto Rapids, which is possibly the fastest water in the world. The ebb tide pours through a restricted passage at twenty-two knots and slack is merely a word in the current tables. We were the second pleasure craft to visit that region and we

spent three weeks at friend making. I listened so many hours to tales of handlogging and donkey logging that I believe even I could have seized an ax and hurled a mighty cedar down the mountainside. I spent hours writing notes for future fiction. We'd solved the living-working question at last.

When we finally turned south we did so with no regrets. All that coast line to the north and the Inside Passage to Alaska would be ours in future years. We were ready to rebuild the *Triton*. Like any remodeling plan, it had grown more elaborate. We'd spent the summer discarding and devising. Rebuilding was to be a major operation. Six feet added to the stern would give us a full fifty feet of boat, an afterdeck and a stateroom for Bobs. A deckhouse would afford lounging quarters and comfort while cruising. Below decks were a large main cabin, a bathroom with real bathtub, a convenient galley and our own stateroom and bathroom.

"No one could ask for a better seagoing home than that," I said.

Paying for it would require a lot of words, but we were ready to produce those words. Carl had good news waiting in our two months' mail at the Yucluetaws. He'd sold three stories written on board the *Triton*. In September Carl wrote he liked a handlogger story better than anything Robert had done. The letter reached us the same day that we received a wire saying *The Saturday Evening Post* had bought the story. A new market seemed a good omen for a wholehearted leap into a life afloat.

The winter had sped so quickly I could recall its passage only by major events. There was the day we had decided to cruise through October and Robert had begged Bobs off from a term at school. And another day when we had rented a log cabin in a harbor on the Gulf of Georgia and settled down to a half-and-half existence, partly on the sea and partly on the land. And the day when at last we departed for Seattle to leave the *Triton* for its rebuilding. More than anything else we wanted to hover about and see her safely through her ordeal, but we knew that with the *Triton* within visiting distance we wouldn't write a word of fiction. And there was the day when we were back in the log cabin and received a photograph of the *Triton*, denuded of stern and ripped out from the forepeak to engine room, and at the same time got the news that the royalty statement failed to fulfill the publisher's encouraging reports. We looked from the check to the photograph and wondered how they could be reconciled.

Then I laughed.

“Lucky we didn’t get this blow while the rebuilding job could still be called off,” I said.

And there was the day Bobs had acute appendicitis when the Gulf of Georgia was smoking with a howling southeaster and there was no steamer for forty-eight hours. To try to reach a surgeon was as dangerous as not to seek one, but a slim chance was better than none. How slim it was I didn’t guess until we’d left the protection of a point and started on a five-hour run before a North Pacific winter gale. Our chartered 36-footer was captained by its fisherman owner who had risked self and craft because “a kid was sick.” Robert and I had a compelling motive for the hazard. Frank scarcely knew the kid or the kid’s parents. Yet without a moment’s hesitation he had agreed to go, and for five hours he stood straining at the wheel, never daring to relax his vigilance lest we would broach to or be pooped by the mountains of green water coming up astern.

Never before had I known how the sea can assault a man-made thing. The boat shuddered. Seams opened and water trickled down inside the planking. Each crest rushed upon us as a separate crisis. I knew the life preservers Bobs and I wore were only a futile gesture.

Bobs’ operation, peritonitis and a two months’ critical illness drove all thoughts of the *Triton* from my mind. During Bobs’ spring convalescence I began to weigh the assets and liabilities of isolation. We’d barely missed paying a terrible price. Robert too had been shaken by that experience.

“But where can you escape all hazard?” he asked.

That was true. Most risks are created by situation rather than choice. But we had chosen isolation, and now responsibility for a third person troubled me more than the danger.

“Everyone’s got to learn to take care of himself, anywhere,” Robert said. “A city taxicab would pick you off in a hurry if you didn’t keep your eyes open. And how about Bobs’ scooter?”

We’d never wrapped ourselves in cotton wool, nor could we wrap Bobs in it for life. We’d lived in out-of-the-way places enough to learn that competence is developed only in an existence that makes demands. And competence is a defense for the future.

Perhaps we were rationalizing. It’s a subject no mother can settle to her inner satisfaction. There’d been the scooter, and now Bobs had her own dinghy, and a half day’s prowling along a distant shore might lead to trouble.

Still we refused to demand that she remain near the *Triton* for we didn't have the right to destroy her courage.

We'd met the problem by trying to instruct her in the management of small craft rather than instilling fear by too many cautions, for fear is a negative emotion and, fostered, it becomes a dread of tackling the unknown. The courageous person is often only an experienced person who has seen life work out satisfactorily in so many different ways and places he does not hesitate to experiment with something new. And what better viewpoint can one give a child?

The rebuilt *Triton* fulfilled our hopes. What had been merely lines on paper were now lounging, living and working quarters with lockers everywhere. We could stow supplies for a five months' cruise. We had a year-round home. Not since the wilderness cabin days had we plunged into home settling with such fervor.

Bobs spent hours getting her stateroom accoutered for the varied occupations of an eleven-year-old. Clothes rated lower than paints, crayons, charcoal, drawing pads, marine collections, odds and ends of tinfoil, modeling clay, books and cutting tools. I wondered where the new dog would sleep, until I saw his blanket spread at the foot of her berth.

The Irish terrier, Lua, had been Bobs' convalescent present. Neither Robert nor I believed the promise of the kennel man that Lua would adjust himself to a seagoing existence, but we'd not argued any wish of Bobs' that spring. I ordered an elaborate canine comfort station, a sand box on the foredeck, and hoped for the best. The skipper didn't even hope, and thus his apologies were the more profuse when Lua became at once a good sailor dog. To him shore leave was exciting but never necessary. On six day runs to Alaska, when the small boats were not put overside, he hid his biscuits in a coil of rope on the forepeak and baited porpoises for entertainment. When we cruised leisurely he regarded being rowed about a harbor in Bobs' dinghy as delightful exercise, and he embarked and disembarked by way of the accommodation ladder more sedately than many of our boat guests. When we remained at anchorage he and Bobs spent hours ashore in those mutual projects which engage a child and a dog.

Gaiety, a sense of humor, complete devotion, a sensitive sharing of our lives, and the fastidiousness of a gentleman, made Lua tops of the many dogs we have loved. I've never dared fill his place. Some companionships are so perfect they must be left to stand.

The voyage north in our new boat was an exhibition cruise and we'd go out of our way to hunt up old friends to show them what we'd made of the *Triton*. The year's delay had only added to the joy of our possession. Even the final bill on the *Triton* couldn't spoil that. We'd found that "estimated cost" meant nothing to a boat builder, nor to an owner, once the fervor of boat building was on.

"We'll have to work like hell to square all this," Robert said. "But it was worth doing right."

He spoke of the *Triton* as a completed ship. Then we didn't know that a ship is never finished. And because that is so, a ship endears herself to her masters. To those who truly love her, a ship is never a mere possession, an inanimate thing of steel and timber. We had built more than a home afloat. We'd created an object of passionate devotion.

Alaska was impossible that year and we lived a summer home existence. We even voyaged in a summer colony. Betty and Stewart White, whom we'd met two years before, had again put their fifty-footer, *Dawn*, into commission and the two boats cruised together. As both crafts were crewless, our schedules tallied. The skippers worked in the morning. Afternoons were spent swimming, fishing, cruising or in land expeditions. While the men were at their fiction stint, Betty, Bobs and I engaged in seagoing women's affairs, and there was never a more spirited companion for any sort of affairs, sea or otherwise, than Betty White.

September sent us on our separate ways. The Whites departed for California after ordering a new boat to cruise Alaska the next summer. Alaska would be as new to them as to us and all looked forward to that convoy cruise.

The *Triton* lay in her Seattle Yacht Club slip while Bobs and I bought boarding school equipment. She was eager for her new adventure, and we were eager for her, but when I left her, a third former, in an English school a few miles from Victoria, the *Triton* seemed terribly empty. We pulled out, a crew of two and a bewildered Irish terrier, to go fall and winter cruising. This would be a real test of a home.

"Youngsters will slip away," Robert said. "We might as well start training ourselves."

We'd chosen to begin this parental training under ideal conditions. The sea may be a man's domain, but there is room alongside for a woman. Robert had a boat to skipper. I had a home afloat to manage. And somewhere in between these distinct fields our other outlets merged. We shared cruising. We shared walks when we lay at anchor. We shared coastwise neighboring. And what I'd feared might be a lonely voyage, compared to the sociability of the summer, was complete and satisfying. A boat was the place for a man and a woman. I was beginning to wonder if there were any place that wasn't.

When the animals were led, two by two, into the Ark, perhaps continuation of the species wasn't the only consideration. Nature worked out a cunning pattern, which may occasionally get out of order, but the home wouldn't be so enduring a unit if male and female collaboration weren't basically sound.

One friend, head of a large mercantile company, admitted frankly that he availed himself of the dividends of this partnership. He never placed a man in a responsible position without first learning what sort of wife he had.

"I employ the man," he explained, "and get the advantage of his collaboration with the wife. A woman often has more vision and is a better gambler, and she possesses intuitive reasoning which may or may not be sound. But she's the spark plug of the combination."

"You mean you've got a lot of hen-pecked employees working for you?" I asked.

"Not at all," he said. "If a man says he's *got* to talk things over with his wife, I don't want him. But if I'm sure he will, without mentioning it, I'm glad to have that man on the pay roll. I want to be sure my unpaid women employees aren't diverting a lot of energy to the satisfaction of their own egos."

In the outdoors this man and woman collaboration can be even more complete, but it takes doing on both sides. We'd thought a good deal about it for it was always being called to our attention by men who wrote plaintively of their envy because Robert had a woman who would go adventuring with him. Men have always tugged at their moorings, but I suspect that not more than two per cent would really go adventuring if left untrammelled. And perhaps these dead weight wives would have jumped at the chance to climb the Himalayas, trek through darkest Africa or penetrate whichever lonely land had called.

We'd watched family experiments in outdoor adventuring go on the rocks, and they were always the same rocks. No woman enjoys being carried

as a claue to give applause. She likes to have the fun of being a fellow adventurer, and this is difficult when the man is still playing the little boy's game of going out single-handed to slay the Indians in his backyard or, alone, all, all alone, is in competition with a big bad environment.

Sometimes when these men couldn't find enough environment to fight in camp, cabin or boat, they'd invented it. They'd decreed that boots were pillows, planks were boat's berths, or ship's water stores, which could be replenished anywhere, were as precious as on an old sailing voyage to the Indies. Or some had chosen to go primitive in a cabin cunningly set a mile beyond water-pipes and electric wires. Just what noble virtue was developed by this procedure I've never understood, although I've had this sort of pioneering grandeur explained to me many times.

Always my sympathy was with the woman. Realist that she is, she broods over hardships not inherent in the situation. Women cannot play at pioneering. It is so close to their real passion they cannot be satisfied with make-believe. They haven't gotten far from their first job, that of making a dwelling livable. They undoubtedly achieved some fine arrangements of leaves and boughs in their cave homes, and they've been doing much that same thing ever since.

Racial memories still drive women to try to make their surroundings more livable. They want results and they can't understand why they shouldn't get them. They don't care how it's done so long as it is done. I've no doubt that the early caveman wouldn't fix the bed until he'd gathered just the right sort of leaves and sticks, but that his wife rushed out for an armful of something or other to sleep on. And nowadays a curtain may droop or a door stick for days while a man assembles exactly the right tools, nails and screws. But let him relinquish his responsibility and a woman will assemble an odd piece of wire, a bent hairpin, a bit of adhesive tape, or a wad of chewing gum, and get the thing to working.

Once I'd thought this was merely a difference between Robert and me, but after witnessing the same phenomena in many homes I have decided it is something far deeper.

17. *Home-loving Woman*

FOR three years we had talked of the day when we would jump off for Alaska, talked until it didn't seem possible that any country could meet our anticipation. But we hadn't been in those northern waters a week before we knew we had come to a new and exciting cruising ground.

Southeastern Alaska is a robust, roistering, untamed land. The mountains rise to new heights and blaze with color in rock and foliage. Waterways are not an hour's but a day's cruise, and the prodigality of this sea country draws eager fingers across charts. Rivers, mountains, glaciers, reaches, island mazes, snug anchorages in coves and precarious holdings in glacier winds, all these fill days with adventure and loveliness.

Animals are everywhere, seals and sea lions, whales and porpoises in the sea, deer and Alaskan brown bear ashore. Trout carpet the river beds and salmon choke the streams in spawning time. More eagles than we'd ever seen choose tall spruces for thrones, and always there are geese, ducks, gulls, divers, sea parrots, birds not in flocks but in clouds.

Blues and pinks and yellows of wild flowers cover the banks of rivers. The streams themselves belie the gentle colors by rushing always, except for brief pauses to rest in pools that give the deer a chance to wade and the trout to rest.

Sharing the excitement of discovery with Betty and Stewart White only added to our breathless state. But after a few days we realized that Southeastern Alaska was a Gargantuan feast. We couldn't gulp it down in one summer and we decided to make a wide survey so that the next year we could narrow down our choices.

The cruise took every moment and every ounce of energy, and always was worth the cost. The Whites' new fifty-eight footer was crewed with engineer and cook, which put the *Triton's* family crew at a disadvantage in keeping up with schedule. Our cruising fell into a regular pattern, one day to explore a river, the next day to reach another, and small boats departed immediately after breakfast for these daylong expeditions upstream. But nothing would have made us miss a river. They were too exciting, too varied and too lovely.

Such intensive sightseeing demanded system on the *Triton*. To be free at anchorage, we must do boat work when under way, and as we voyaged we cleaned ship, polished brass, attended to odd jobs, cooked and even laundered. Bobs' rating was changed from bo'sun to quartermaster.

We'd not expected boarding school to train a seaman, but the self-reliant twelve-year-old who returned to us could stand a trick at the wheel, take charge of her quarters and pinch-hit forward. I began to understand the importance English people attach to their public school system. It doesn't make adults of children but it does encourage them to be persons. Our educational experiment had worked out happily. Bobs' progress in studies had not been spectacular, but she was well started on the job of growing into a real woman. And she loved the school.

Our two months in Alaska were crammed. We saw its cities and explored its rivers. We visited its glaciers and watched great bergs, the size of office buildings, break from the face and take to sea. We skirted the three big islands on which the brown bears live and watched the great grizzlies fish for salmon. We marveled at streams where trout lay so densely packed the bottom of the stream was darkly mottled. We traveled rivers filled with salmon fighting their way to the spawning ground. We saw Alaska bathed in sunlight and ravishing in color, and we did not try to find words to express the bold grandeur of its snow-capped mountains. We saw Alaska in rain and discovered that it is as prodigal with rainfall as with all other things. We marked off our favorite regions and knew which rivers we would always visit and which great stretches of sea-invaded ranges we must always see.

We declared the summer a complete success. That meant more to Robert and me than to the others, for we'd had our private joke. We'd gambled on the Alaskan cruise. The second book's royalties had been disappointing. Whether this was due to a poorer product or to the loss of the publishing firm's most astute merchandiser, who had promoted the first book's sale, wasn't important. The slim check was all that mattered. It wouldn't buy a non-working summer or an expensive cruise, but we hadn't been willing to give up Alaska. Our bank balance would outfit us and buy a summer's gas and we decided to take a chance on getting back. By working hard, we had put two novelettes in the mails in the last postoffice before jumping off for Alaska, but we couldn't get a report on them until we reached Ketchikan at the end of the summer.

"If those two yarns sell we can get out of Alaska," Robert said.

“If they don’t?” I asked.

“We’ll tie up somewhere and write our way out.”

We hadn’t shared this joke. It was much too precious and we weren’t sure it would pass as humor. But as we neared Ketchikan in August, Robert and I exchanged knowing grins when plans were made for the long run south. At the last hot crab feast beside our last Alaskan river, I was tempted to tell Betty when she lamented that the Alaskan days were almost over. I started to say that perhaps ours weren’t, and then I didn’t. Our news might spoil a lovely party. The summer had been perfect and I couldn’t bear to bring even a shadow over those grand memories of beauty and adventure.

The summer’s mail for the two boats came aboard before Betty, Bobs and I had changed into city clothes for Ketchikan. As Robert carried two fat mail sacks down the float the set of his shoulders told me we’d made a sale. We’d made two. We told the news at the cocktail hour, for now the jest had a point. Betty listened with gleaming eyes.

“You Pinks!” she laughed. “Who else would take that chance? But that’s why you’ll always have a good time.”

I apologized for my selfishness about our joke.

“I’m glad you didn’t tell me,” she said. “The suspense would have spoiled my summer.”

Discovery of Southeastern Alaska extended the *Triton’s* radius and the northern thrust became the exciting cruise of the year. Never again did we cover quite so much territory in a season, but we saw the country more intensively.

The knowledge that this two months’ adventure awaited us didn’t detract from our normal life afloat. Each season had its own particular flavor, was spent in a different region and in different activities. Spring overhaul was a time of anticipation. There was always a rush to get the *Triton* groomed and ready for Easter holidays, when Bobs brought friends aboard. In September after Bobs had departed for school, Robert and I turned the bow of the *Triton* toward our fall cruising grounds and took up our regular home life again. We weren’t summer people. We were dwellers in a sea country.

Gradually we spent more and more time aboard until our nine months’ home became our year-round home and a stop ashore was like making a journey.

When an apartment taken for mid-winter began to cramp us, we'd hurry aboard the *Triton*. And there, with plans for spring overhaul afoot, I'd grin ecstatically and confess to Robert that I was one of those dull people, a home-loving woman.

We no longer tried to convince ourselves that life aboard a boat was ideal for a single-purposed writer. We admitted that the *Triton* made inroads both on writing time and on writing absorption. It was more than a mere hobby and the balance of living versus working was not always maintained. Sometimes writing suffered and we'd be reminded of this by a crisis. Then we'd hole up and work together until the southerly weather was behind us.

Southerly weather was the only lash which could prod me into toil, which proves that I'm not a born writer. There were always so many delightful things to do, and I never had any conscience about leaving Robert pounding at the typewriter while I went for a long walk ashore with Lua, called on friends or embarked upon magnificent projects of boat refurbishing. But at least I did a lot of living.

We'd thought we'd planned the *Triton* carefully and completely, but we'd never considered it as a convalescent home until one of my bouts with surgery threatened a summer cruise. Alaska was out. The surgeon said even the *Triton* was out. Ropes, tricks at the wheel and dashes up and down companionways couldn't fit into my life. Bobs would be home from school in another week. We three had counted on that summer.

"We'll pay no attention to those doctors," I said. "They don't know how restful is a life at sea."

But Robert, having a great respect for doctors, broke the news to Bobs. She looked serious. We were being exiled from home.

"I can take the mate's job," she said.

"If an eighteen-year-old kid could skipper the old Clipper ships, the *Triton* can use a fourteen-year-old mate," Robert said.

I spoke of cooking.

"Give me a cookbook and leave me alone in the galley," Bobs said.

She'd never distinguished herself as a cook, but I felt that a summer aboard the *Triton* was worth even semistarvation. Robert and I secretly expected it would be that and then discovered the girl could cook when she had the fun of complete responsibility.

Our convalescent cruise was so happy a summer we didn't even mourn Alaska. We made a circuit of the yacht clubs, attended regattas, dropped the hook near Bobs' school friends, entertained at teas, gave swimming parties and had the *Triton* filled with young. Lua enjoyed it thoroughly. The skipper would sneak out after dark to wash the diving spray from the bright work. He was much more sparing of his new mate's feelings than he'd been of her predecessor's.

But I loved to watch those two bending over charts and conferring gravely on boat matters. They got as much thrill as I did, that summer when they "took care of mother."

Southeastern Alaska is only the vestibule to the real Alaska, and Alaskans are firm on this matter. A glance at the map will show Southeastern Alaska to be a long tail hanging from a vast land. It is a region of magnificent mountains, breath-taking beauty and startling contrasts, for glaciers neighbor with growth that is tropical in luxuriance, but this lovely corridor is not the land of the midnight sun. Nor is it to be confused with "out to the westward," the Alaskans' term for the long peninsula extending to the Aleutian Islands.

"Out to the westward" were higher mountains, larger glaciers and waters famous in whaling and sealing history. But the six-hundred-mile open crossing of the Gulf of Alaska was not possible for our family crew. We could only envy every boat we saw outfitting for that cruise.

We had become conscious of how little of the real Alaska we had penetrated and this awareness proved we needed new waters across our bows. For years we had been running the same old courses and repeating the same experiences. Yet in a boat which did not permit crew's quarters we couldn't extend our radius.

A home afloat must be ever moving. We did not think this out. It was a conviction that grew slowly within us. Perhaps the fact that Bobs would matriculate in June and must return to the United States to continue her education may have increased our awareness that once again we had outgrown a home. A boat had fitted prep school days and our own explorations of an exciting sea country. Now it failed to meet our needs.

It was a shock to us to admit this. But we could not deny its truth. Cutting free must always bring regret and even sorrow, but remaining past the moment of farewell brings disillusionment. Memories are too precious to

be despoiled, and if one must leave a ship, a home or a woman, leave should be taken while one is still in love.

The *Triton* had never seemed more desirable or more lovely than the day when we stood on a yacht club pier and watched her disappear down the fairway. The bill of sale declared that she now belonged to another but we knew she was ours and always would be. Nothing could rob us of the *Triton*, nor of those seven years.

Our friends sympathized because of the financial sacrifice, but we thought the *Triton* had been a wonderful lady to win a buyer in those first depression years when ships of other owners were eating their heads off at moorings. And the *Triton* had repaid a thousandfold our expenditure of money, energy and love.

One day in July Robert and I stood on the deck of a steamship as she drew up to a wharf in Victoria. Bobs was to come aboard and join us for the voyage to San Francisco. Our last Seattle task had been completed when Robert mailed the manuscript of a history of the Hudson's Bay Company on which he had worked for fifteen months. Now he was eager to be settled and get back to fiction. Bobs had completed her school year, written her matriculation and was "an old girl" of the school.

When we saw Bobs on the pier I was struck by a new maturity in her brisk walk. We rushed down the gang-plank and as she kissed us and said, "Hello, Dad, and hello, Mother," I knew we were being greeted by a grown young woman.

Robert didn't realize this change so quickly. Out of habit, he made motions to collect her multitudinous school belongings and then found that everything had been attended to. A line of stewards was bringing up the rear. But before Bobs was settled in her stateroom I noticed Robert's manner changing. To him she was no longer a child he must convoy but a young woman he wished to please. Bobs' growing up process had always proceeded in spurts but this had been a stride.

Our attitude changed too. We dropped the school vacation manner. We three were facing life together. There was a new warm eager sharing as we talked of future plans. There had always been a sense of fellowship in the trio but now it had deepened. As we dropped off to sleep that night, Robert put my thoughts into words.

“Some grand times ahead,” he said.

“Better than going to the westward?” I asked.

His chuckle suggested that he’d never heard of the place.

“Smart, doing our cruising when Bobs was young,” he said. “Now we’re all set for some swell years.”

18. Knots in the Shoestring

OCCASIONALLY in the next three years we laughed at how blithely we'd landed in San Francisco, leased a floor of a community apartment house and set about organizing existence on the presumption that the depression was only a temporary affair. As yet it had not touched us and we didn't think it could, for our investments were secure. Robert had only to meet present needs with fiction.

Bobs re-established old ties, attended the Junior Assembly parties and enrolled in a tutoring school to prepare to write off College Entrance examinations. After her quiet boarding school days, the sixteen-year-old world of San Francisco fascinated her. She threw herself into an existence of school, teas, Saturday luncheons and matinees and dancing parties for which "the boy" and "the dress" were apparently of equal importance. I enjoyed her excitements too. It was fun to shop with a grown-up daughter.

Even Robert, who pretended male boredom as Bobs and I conferred on women's clothes, always applauded and admired when the conference finally produced results. A large part of the zest of female loot lies in that triumphant evening when the things "are shown to Dad."

It was a rude awakening when Robert sold a story and learned that fiction prices had been cut in half. It was an even greater blow, later in the winter, to discover that the history of the Hudson's Bay Company had been published in the worst possible year for any book. No one needed a treatise on an ancient trading company. Readers wanted something timely on how to make one dollar do the work of three or an exciting yarn to take minds off troubles.

Gradually it dawned upon us that our next adventure would be that of everyone we knew—the adventure of making a living in depression days. It provided all the excitement that Robert needed.

My mood was affected by the financial tragedies all around us. Hardly a week passed that I didn't hear of some woman in her forties suddenly confronted by the need of earning a living. Even women who had previous professional training were discovering that it had lost its usefulness after twenty years. The parade had gone ahead.

I examined my own capacities. Despite my pet theory that every woman should be able to support herself, I had gone on comfortably, relying on early welfare training and experience in writing. Now I wondered if I could do either. I had not written a story by myself for three years and doubted if I ever could again. I knew I'd hate to try. I began to look at the business world. People might be able to get along without written words but no one had ever solved the problem of how to do without things.

My first job was a happy combination of business and welfare and even permitted me to use what I had learned of cabinet work and painting during our boat years. Five of my friends started a shop for unemployed men and women in an effort to meet the immediate emergencies of the depression. I was made manager. It was an absorbing project and a practical expression of my convictions. Also it gave me a splendid education.

We tackled anything which gave a man or woman a job. Products of the shop ranged from furniture built by skilled cabinet workers to crude toys turned out by house carpenters, from lingerie and satin luxuries sewn by skilled needlewomen to woolen blankets for racing greyhounds made by machine operators.

No one dared think of secret desires in the presence of the directors lest the next moment he discover the unemployed were running it up for him.

As general manager I bought supplies, devised new models, kept cost sheets, sold products in retail and wholesale markets and took charge of cabinet shop and sewing room. There were times when my family became extremely bored by shop talk and there must have been times when the five directors found my intensity trying. But they never said so. They cheered achievements, ignored errors and gave me a shop to play with. Luckily they were not committee addicts. In the fourteen months of the shop's existence we held two meetings. The first installed me. I called the second to propose the closing of the shop.

We'd done our job in those first days of emergency and had released more than ten thousand dollars in pay roll. We'd made no profit, had not tried to, and the project had paid its way. As the government had now organized relief, our efforts were a duplication. Business conditions were improving, workers were being reabsorbed and I felt that to sell articles manufactured on a non-profit basis was only contributing to depression. Merchants also have rights.

I had noticed, too, a changing attitude on the part of the unemployed as government funds gushed forth more and more freely. Pride in

craftsmanship had waned, and so had a spirit of independence. Workmen once competent and self-reliant no longer demanded that their jobs be significant or even useful. Relief work had become a trade. The idea that the world owed everyone a living, and that this living flowed from some beneficent outside source, was growing fast.

I had been the real beneficiary of that shop for my first tottering steps in merchandising were made under friendly eyes. I'd gotten over my first scare and my life was adjusted to being on the job each morning and fitting personal affairs into non-business hours. Wong, like all Chinese cooks, preferred a mistress who stayed out of the kitchen, and sometimes I suspected Robert liked his peaceful worktime.

Bobs was completely occupied with college work. She and Robert had explained to the dean that Bobs wanted an education, not a degree, and they had sold the idea that, despite her seventeen years, she should be entered as an adult special student. This permitted courses in which she had real intellectual curiosity. Interest and hard work put her on the honor roll, and she still seemed to have plenty of time and energy for fraternity parties and dancing in San Francisco hotels. She now spoke of "men," not boys, and anything less than an upper classman was a mere child to her. This was the next phase of growing up.

Thus I was free for my personal experiment to determine whether a woman past forty-five could enter a new field. I embarked upon promotion work in the advertising department of a store, acting in a liaison capacity between store and customers and selling the store's services rather than its products. As I believed in the store, it was easy to talk to other women about it.

If that job accomplished nothing else, it has made me a more reasonable and understanding customer. I had been buying in stores for years and had known nothing of the vast machinery necessary to bring wares before the public.

But the most exciting discovery of all was of the friendliness of people. In my calls in homes I was astonished to discover how ready, even eager, women were to discuss their jobs as purchasing agents and to give reasons for patronizing some stores and avoiding others. I'd expected to dwell on feats in merchandising and I found myself talking instead of business transactions in human terms. The women were far more interested in a store's good faith, honesty and friendliness.

Also I'd expected to encounter suspicion, and perhaps resentment. I'd found both in the old welfare days when I'd made health surveys among people who were not nearly so vigilant about privacy. But none of the store's potential customers regarded my call as an invasion. Frequently they asked me to thank the store for the courtesy of a personal visit.

I liked the work enormously but as spring came I found myself looking enviously at these women in their own homes. I thought of our garden and of how charming was our house. And suddenly I knew I wasn't a business woman at all. I would always be one of those Jacks who would tackle any trade and never stay long enough to master one. And no matter what the potentialities of the past forty-five year period, a home loving woman of that age was too deeply channeled to be changed. It was a relief when the dull summer season ended promotion work. We talked of another experiment in the fall, but in my heart I knew I wouldn't be there.

Business was just another closed adventure.

The summer had flown by. I was still enjoying that luxurious feeling of waking in the morning to know that I wouldn't catch a suburban train to San Francisco. I could garden, take an interest in Robert's fiction, chat with Bobs, or just do nothing. I was more tired than I'd realized.

Bobs had devoted the previous six months to an exhaustive and earnest exploration of aesthetics. She had always been interested in form and had an emotional reaction to color. Among her friends were many artists. Her old interest had been stimulated by the house we occupied during its owner's absence as art adviser to the Persian government. His wife was a leading authority on medieval textiles and their home was filled with the gleanings of years of travel. I loved the charm and beauty of it, although the custody of priceless antiques was somewhat wearing. The library, the most complete collection on art in the West, was consulted frequently by professors from both nearby universities. Bobs spent six months among those books. It was quite a job, but as with all youthful experiments she carried on with enthusiasm.

Now she was taking special courses at Stanford where she'd found an English professor who had aroused a zeal to write. I was glad that her interest had switched to writing. It is an ideal profession for a woman. Writers may be trying people to live with, but at least they live at home and working hours can be flexible. Despite my firm conviction that the young should never be influenced in the choice of a profession, I threw my weight

heavily toward an experiment in writing. Robert, remembering that his doctor father was responsible for his premed college course, tried to be less urgent. His effort at moderation only added weight.

If Bobs wished, after finishing her Stanford course, to try writing we could all leave the peninsula suburb of San Mateo. I was no longer a commuter with a job. Robert was tired of streets and trains and proposed that we go to the peace and loveliness of the Carmel Highlands on the Monterey peninsula. I wanted to go. Pines, sea and gorgeous coastal mountains promised to heal my complete exhaustion. Of course we expected Bobs to go with us.

“The only way to learn to write,” I told her, “is to sit down at the typewriter day after day and put words on paper.”

Bobs said nothing, but the next evening she returned from a day in San Francisco to report that she had a job. Her methods had been direct. She’d called on a friend, president of a large department store, and asked for a job. She got it. She was to be in charge of a new department called the “smoke shop” and already she looked extremely businesslike as she described her duties of not only selling smoking accessories, but learning how to buy them.

“Fine!” Robert said. “Best experience in the world for writing.”

I knew that a store was a wonderful laboratory in which to learn how to get on in life and with one’s fellows, and my protest was only that Bobs would be left alone in San Francisco.

“But I’m nineteen, Mother!” she said. “If I can’t manage by myself now there isn’t much hope for me.”

It didn’t seem possible that three San Francisco years had passed and that the sixteen-year-old we’d brought home to reinduct into American ways now had her own interests, friends and activities. She also had a definite bent for independence and a desire to see for herself how the world went around.

“Why not?” Robert asked. “I’ll never forget the kick I got out of being on my own for the first time.”

That speech brought me a glow of pride. At least I hadn’t changed him into a stodgy male who couldn’t grant a woman the emotions he’d discovered in himself. And then I dodged my own theories by thinking with content that Bobs’ flight would be a short one. She could spend week ends in the Highlands and we’d drive often to the city.

We rented a house in the Highlands for the winter, a rambling old farmhouse which had been rehabilitated by an eastern banker who believed in comfort. We fell in love with the place as we drove by and dashed to the telegraph office. The owner's telegraphed terms revealed the east coast complex. I wired, "Don't be silly. We'll pay a fair price and be good to your house." We settled on that understanding.

The house was one of the best of a succession of our charming homes which owners temporarily couldn't occupy. The once lovely garden showed the effects of two years of absentee ownership. Only the pelargoniums had thrived on neglect, and marvelous varieties of them had grown into great bushes. The grounds stretched into surprising odd nooks and corners. Calla lilies had taken possession of our private ravine. I'd never cared for these flowers until I saw them standing straight and tall in splashes of sunlight against dark green pine. The garden cried out for love and my hands ached to begin. I'd made all sorts of virtuous resolutions to write, but as soon as I saw that garden I knew where my hours would be spent.

Robert pre-empted the guest house for a workshop and looked as pleased with it as I with my garden.

"A winter of work here," he said, "and we'll forget there ever was a depression."

Going to the Highlands was, in a sense, back-tracking. Carmel lay five miles away, a Carmel we didn't know and rarely entered. But we picked up old friendship threads. Harry Leon Wilson was our neighbor and once a week Robert, H. L. and I dined together and played dominoes. Sam Blythe and Marty Newcome, at Pebble Beach, were within a half hour's drive and we spent many evenings before each other's firesides and learned that back-tracking has its rewards. While real friendships carry through the years, it is good to go back occasionally and renew one's joy.

Even the separation of our family was not new. Once again Bobs had left us, but I could be more philosophical about her absence than when she had departed for boarding school. Now I was sure we'd never get far apart. Sharing those "growing-up years" in San Francisco had built a sturdy friendship. And this is the closest tie of all.

I'd been bouncing in and out of hospitals for years. Robert had begun to believe my boast that I was made of India rubber, but things caught up with me at last. I didn't bounce.

There isn't much to tell about hyperthyroidism, yet there is a great deal which should be said. If laymen had a better understanding of the far-reaching effects of ductless glands and their deep involvement in body economy, much unhappiness might be avoided. I'd learned little in the fifteen years I'd been consulting gland specialists. The wisest were those who admitted that endocrinology was still in its infancy. They had, however, taught me how much can be accomplished by emotional self-control. It isn't an easy dose to take. It limits self-expression to discover you are one of those people who cannot afford fear, anger, rebellion or any other of the good robust emotions.

Physical symptoms are interesting only to the patient. Hyperthyroid symptoms are least interesting of all, since there is no way to describe the agony of hypertension to anyone who has not endured it. Most diseases have definite, describable pains, but you can't explain to sympathetic friends and family that you are millions and millions of tiny, disassociated pieces, held together by a thin membrane which is threatening to give way and distribute you over the landscape. If you did explain it, an alienist would be called, not a doctor. Yet that state of mind needs a lot of understanding.

In my own case there came a time when self-control no longer turned the trick. I needed a surgeon and a second thyroid operation. The months needed to convince me, the ultimate surgery and final recovery took three years out of my life. Until that experience I'd been impatient with people who didn't "rise above things." Now I feel differently.

I began to come out of the fog a year after my bout with surgery and I wanted to leave the Highlands. Even the sea reminded me of the hours I'd sat staring at it and feeling wretched. Robert wanted a new country too. Writing had been going badly, which was not surprising. One of the handicaps of the writing profession is that the writer must have a free subconscious mind. The little fellows below are unintelligent and will sort over the same old anxieties day after day if that's all the material they're given to work on. They'd been wallowing in grief and anxiety and had gotten into bad habits.

Writers have unproductive periods. Sometimes it's merely a matter of lying fallow, and again it may be the difficulty of getting the imagination away from the starting post. A business or professional man can more easily work under mental stress for in his office outside things clutch at him and

demand attention. A writer must pull his work out of himself. His intensity and concentration must lift themselves by their own boot straps.

Robert's boot straps had weakened. Stories written out of a heavy spirit don't always sell, and a rejected story brings a heavier spirit. So around and around the mulberry bush the vicious circle goes. Maintaining solvency had become our main preoccupation. We'd forgotten how to be carefree. For a long time we'd had no moment of high adventure. Our way of living had gone sour.

"Because it isn't our way," Robert said. "Always before when things went wrong we tore out the whole mess and started over again. Here we're only trying to bolster."

A broken-down way of living cannot be patched. When the underpinning is unsound, a complete change of living habits is indicated, and a change in location renews people as well as habits.

We knew the technique and had boasted that a writer is one up on other professions since he can move his office as easily as he moves himself. And yet for months it hadn't occurred to us to put our knowledge to account.

"There's no excuse for two people being as dumb as this," I said. "I may not have been thinking well, but what's been the matter with your mind?"

"Are we holding a post mortem or making plans?" Robert asked.

We made plans. We needed financial reorganization to get peace for the writing job. We needed a locale where simplicity was inherent. My thoughts traveled inland to sun and mountain air which would make even a cripple want to do things. I spoke of altitude. Robert seized on that.

"I want to know the mining country," he said.

"And I want to build a house," I added.

"We'll be lucky to pay rent," Robert said.

"We'll do both," I said. "If we rent one of those fine old houses in the Mother Lode, we'll have to rebuild it."

I'd never forgotten the charm of those houses built in the fifties and sixties by easterners who transplanted New England villages to a gold mining district. I'd remembered abandoned gardens gone wild with old-fashioned flowers, shady tree-lined streets and tiny hamlets with white church and steeple. Exotic is a strange word to use in speaking of the New

England atmosphere, but in the Mother Lode it had seemed just that. We'd always intended to return to that country.

"And aren't you glad we saved it until we needed it?" I said.

Robert feared we may have saved it too long. Thirty-five dollar gold had reopened the Mother Lode, but hydraulic mining was still forbidden and as he mentioned the land of the monitors his eyes lighted.

"Those are the places to hit for," he said.

He brought out the roll of maps, an act which had always marked the birth of an idea. Just seeing them energized me, and once again we knelt on a living room floor and began the eager search for a new home.

19. Love 'Em and Leave 'Em

IT was long past dark when we emerged from the foothill country to find ourselves in the mountains. We stopped at an old hotel which hadn't been changed in seventy years, except for Spartan plumbing. A wood enclosed tin tub and a toilet with a long dangling chain took me back to childhood. I was enchanted.

The hotel, famous in the first robust days, dozed through its tranquil years. The bedrooms had matting-covered floors, shuttered windows and walnut furniture brought around the Horn. As there were no other guests, we had a wide choice of rooms and I spent so long hesitating between one with a beautiful four poster bed and another with ornate gold-decorated commode china that Robert reminded me we were only spending the night.

We wakened in fresh mountain air and began our circuit of the Mother Lode. The old gold towns had become bustling centers of activity with every dwelling occupied, but we found some almost deserted villages and even ghost towns.

One of the last had a half dozen empty houses. The owner led us through the best. It had been a fine home when built seventy years before. Now it had lost most of its shingles and I stood in the living room and looked up at the sky.

"Don't pay any attention to the roof," the woman said. "It won't rain for six months."

Robert paved a tactful exit when he said he needed an isolated room for a work shop. The woman brightened.

"I'll throw the hotel in with the house," she said.

She led us to it. Robert could have all thirty rooms, which were, if possible, in worse repair than the house. We said we'd think it over and write. We didn't. We couldn't bear to admit there was one house which even we couldn't reclaim.

But my homemaking instinct had been aroused. This passion for rebuilding houses must be an expression of the creative spirit. There must be some compelling reason for our having been busier home builders than any

pair of birds. Spring and stirring energy now demanded a few bits of string and the odd twig.

The house we eventually rented in Dutch Flat satisfied this instinct, although we didn't choose it on these grounds. It was the only house in town for rent. University professors had discovered Dutch Flat and made their selections for the summer. We'd thought we'd been forehanded in making a first quick foray, but the academic mind was more so.

The owner of our house had despaired of a summer tenant and promised renovations while we returned to pick up Bobs and our typewriters. Not trusting to his promise, we decided to prepare Bobs by telling her only that the house had possibilities. It was well we did.

It had been a charming dwelling in 1860. Now its graciousness was buried. A slanting porch, shutters hanging by their eyelids, patched panes in the bay windows and sagging wall paper in all the rooms made me long to set it straight. But even as I longed I wondered if we could.

Dutch Flat had been an important mining town. Millions of yards of gravel had been washed by hydraulic monitors into Bear River. In those days the population was eleven thousand and names famous in gold mining days were on the old hotel registers. Now the town's census was ninety-nine. Many of the gracious homes had burned but pinks planted by the early New Englanders still marked the gardens. Of the intensive hydraulic machinery, only rusting flumes remained. But the scars which had been ripped across the land were still there. Once they must have been as ugly as they were stupendous. Whole mountains had fallen to the power of those monitors. But when we came, after eighty years, these man-made canyons had softened and mellowed. Manzanita and young pine had sprung up just as they do on the higher ranges, straggling in lines, gathering in clumps. The color of the great floor of the diggings was a warm and ever-changing gray and the water-torn walls became rosy minarets at sunset.

The main digging was a hundred yards from our house and became our private desert. We visited it every evening. I marveled that we had so lovely a place to ourselves, and then learned that we didn't. It was the home of all the rattlesnakes of the district. After that we listened as intently as we looked.

The snowy summit of the Sierra Nevada range was a half hour away by motor, and just beyond was Donner Lake. In an hour we covered a route over which the Argonauts toiled for many days. On ridges across our valley

their trail dipped to an easier way, and not far above us was Emigrant Gap. It is called a gap in the mountains, but the only way through is down a high straight-sided cliff over which those early Americans lowered their wagons by ropes. Scarred trees still standing on the brink had furnished anchorage for that precarious descent.

I find a deep significance in such places and thrill to the fortitude and courage demanded in that great western thrust of our people. I find it good to stand where their homely basic heroism was put to tests of which we today can know so little. I know then that we have a heritage of simple but valiant deeds, and I wonder that we can have forgotten.

Up and down the Mother Lode were a score of old mining towns named in the spirit of the gold rush—Red Dog, Gold Run, Rough and Ready, Brandy City, Chip's Flat, Town Talk, Alpha and its neighbor Omega, Jackass Hill, Whisky Slide, Esmeralda, Shirttail Canyon, Yankee Jim's. We visited most of them and to do so our car often climbed steep canyon walls in a series of such sharp hairpin turns I wouldn't have been surprised if we had collided with ourselves. I looked overside only because the beauty of the silver rivers below took my mind off hazards.

Mountain rivers have changeable natures. A stream which has roistered its way with violence and turmoil may suddenly widen and flow serenely over a graveled bottom or it may turn and sweep around a lush green meadow.

Beside these quiet reaches were the camps and even settlements of "snipers," those who seek minute bits of gold on or near the surface. Most of them were men who were meeting the depression by panning the river bars.

It was the third time this gravel had been worked over, first by the early miners, then by Chinamen and now by refugees from cities. Rewards of the third combing were pitifully meager. Except for the lucky find of a nugget, a sniper could not earn more than a dollar a day and many only half of that.

"But it's better than being on relief," a man said. "And a fellow can sleep nights!"

In aged cars the snipers drove into the mountains, put up tents and small shacks and began a revival of the first placer mining. It was not an easy job. They shoveled sand and gravel into sluice boxes and panned the deposit in the riffles. Hours of back-breaking toil would yield only a few flecks of color. This had none of the romance and glamor of '49 days when men often made hundreds of dollars a day, but there was a gallantry about the third invasion which made visits to snipers' communities absorbing. They toiled.

They were independent. The beauty of the mountains relieved the sorrow of their makeshift homes, the river sparkled before their doors, the canyon walls were clothed with green, and snow peaks towered overhead.

Often we found a whole family sniping. We spent an afternoon with one. The man had been a salesman in a city until he lost his job. The boy and girl were of upper grade school age and the wife probably never had handled anything heavier than a vacuum cleaner. But there was intensity in her slender jean-clad figure.

"Lots of people spend money to move their families into this red earth belt for the climate," she said. "We did it the other way around."

In answer to my question as to whether they'd made a grubstake, she showed me a small vial full of gold. They wouldn't become wealthy, but they earned more than they spent. The children were bursting with health and the husband said that shoveling gravel had been good for his white collar body.

"A city man likes to know he's still got muscle," he said.

But his wife wanted me to know their gains had not been wholly physical.

"Toughing it out hasn't hurt us," she said. "Perhaps it's a good thing for Americans to find out what they can do without. We'd had it very easy."

I thought of this on the way home. We too were conducting an experiment. We had come to find footing, to tone up living muscles and, like the sniper's family, we were having a good time in discovering what we could do without.

I'd always kept books on homemaking, but now I was amazed to find how small a part of the income is spent on necessities. A really Spartan existence would have cut our expenses further. We ate foods we liked, had daily cocktails, drove a car and bought simple clothes and household equipment. But all those extras which in past years I'd grouped under incidentals were missing, and that usually large item had shrunk to almost nothing. I exhibited the cost sheets to Robert and Bobs.

"Shows what we can do if we have to," Robert said. "And you girls seem to get a kick out of trying."

"Certainly," I said, "because we know we are accomplishing something."

Without intending to, we'd summed up the whole theory of going without. So long as we had a goal, a mark to shoot at, a purpose to be achieved, even retreat was progress. Without a goal we would have seemed to be crawling off into the byways of the defeated. And suddenly I thought of that coffee shop conversation so many years before when I had tried to explain to Robert that not owning things did something to people.

"It's not a matter of not owning things, or even not wanting to!" I cried. "What I was trying to say was that one shouldn't aim too low."

Robert is accustomed to my mental detours, but he looked baffled. So I explained, although in all those years he should have discovered how important a corner stone that conversation had been.

"I get you," he said at last. "You're telling me that so long as I'm shooting at something, you and Bobs are glad to do without."

"And maybe I'm warning you," I said. "If you don't keep your sights up, we'll lie awake nights to think of things we need."

Three typewriters clicked in our house each day. Bobs experimented in the use of words. She admitted it might be a useful knowledge, although she went to an extreme in making it plain to wishful parents that she was in no way to be considered a budding author. We asked if the job of authoring didn't stand in good repute.

She laughed and looked embarrassed.

"Ever since I was a little girl, the first question everyone has asked me is, 'Are you going to write, too?'" she said. "I'm pounding this typewriter just as some people take up knitting and others take up languages."

In the typewriters lay our work, in the house our avocation. Its owner, one of the first settlers, still lived in those early days and he saw the house in its former grandeur. Encroachments of the years did not exist for him. Neither did an accumulation of grime and filth.

We'd been wise to tell Bobs only of the possibilities, for they were still just possibilities when we three arrived. After one aghast look, we demanded a cleaning woman. The owner offered to get one—the tenant who had just moved out. The proverb of the cobbler's children failed to cover this crisis and we imported an energetic housecleaner from a nearby town. All of us scrubbed and beat and swept and dusted for two days and that activity

galvanized the owner into producing from his barn pieces of walnut furniture which had come to California around the Horn.

We'd christened the house Haywire Mansion because doors, windows, cupboards, locks, furniture, everything, was held together with baling wire. Life in the Mother Lode couldn't carry on without that useful article and I suspected that the mail order companies used it on new furniture to make Mother Loders feel at home.

Robert had intended to tie things together with bigger and better bowknots of baling wire, but once we'd visioned what the house could be, he got out tools and really went to work. When he'd finished, shutters looked like new, windows no longer came out in the hand from the window casings, and every cupboard and closet was intact. Bobs did a fancy job of wall papering and dyed muslin for drapes and bed covers. I swung a paint brush.

Making that sweet old house live again was the most productive of many such experiments. We had needed that home to work on far more than it had needed us. We rushed to complete its transformation for itinerant homemaking had taught us to love 'em and to leave 'em.

When we attacked the garden townspeople were aghast at our defiance of local custom. Here one carried a discarded stove only outside the door, and if a car stopped running the driver went off and left it. Personal prestige demanded at least one aged car rusting on the doorstep. Apparently all the tired old machinery of the town had crawled into our garden to die. We carted away defunct stoves, motor blocks, mining machinery, barrels, cans, leaky kettles, rusty pans and discards from seventy years of living. We achieved a dump of heroic proportions and were as proud of it as we were of the cleared garden.

All this physical toil remodeled my sleeping habits. For many months I'd required sedatives and had not enjoyed my troubled slumber or the mornings after. But now when I leaped into overalls each morning, scrubbed, painted and grappled with a junk pile until sundown, I didn't need drugs. Instead of reading a book a night as had been my habit, I never got beyond the first paragraph, seldom past the second sentence. My mind wasn't being improved but I began to feel like a different woman.

My sitting room was a corner of the garden under a great chestnut tree, its walls of burlap dyed a forest green. I loved my retreat and it was a contribution to the zest of neighborhood life. For I and the clatter of my

typewriter became a fascinating mystery to the dear eighty-year-old ladies next door.

Their surveillance was rewarded the afternoon I saw my first and only Dutch Flat rattlesnake. After constant alertness in the diggings for a warning rattle, the only snake I encountered came from our own basement and crawled into my sitting room. Busy with a letter, I paid no attention to a rustling in the dry leaves until I looked up to see a rattler not three feet away. His head was up and weaving back and forth and I didn't like the expression of his eyes. My screech must have added five years to the old ladies' eighty. I erupted from behind the burlap curtain and climbed a six foot picket fence with an agility which astonished me but not the snake. He merely lay and stared until Robert came to kill him. His skin made Bobs a belt and my screech made the whole neighborhood friends. After that I pulled back the curtain.

Our job in the Mother Lode was over in early spring. We had seen that fascinating country through all its seasons, not as "summer visitors," but as members of the community. There's a great difference, as anyone knows who's ever stayed past "the season" and found his status changed overnight from an outlander to a neighbor who belonged.

The Mother Lode had been a successful experiment both in living and in working. It had carried Robert past the fiction doldrums. He was selling short stories and novelettes. *Liberty* had bought a series of fishing stories and wanted more. All this hadn't made us affluent but it had lifted our chins.

We departed for San Francisco and had no more than settled when Carl began to urge that we come East. For years he'd been suggesting this but that fall he suddenly appeared in town and made demands. He said we had given enough years to living and had better go to work. There was logic in that, for we had turned life around.

To Carl the move to New York appeared so ridiculously simple we hated to admit how large the prospect loomed to us. We'd both made short visits to New York, but we had spent fourteen of our married years in the out-of-doors and the rest in communities where life's demands were flexible. And New York would not be flexible for two people past fifty who'd just finished proving they could make a go of it in the Mother Lode.

"That's a big jump," I said.

"We used to take 'em," Robert said.

I fell back on other excuses. Bobs was one. She had a job as assistant editor of a magazine and we should stay in San Francisco and make a home for her. But Bobs failed me by reversing the usual procedure. She rented a small apartment and began to purchase furniture. It was the parents who were kicked out into the world when she said, “Just because I’m settled, there’s no reason you and Dad must be.”

I sought other excuses, but at last broke down and admitted I was plain scared. Pride made me bolster this. For years I’d done no real writing. Perhaps I never could again. I was still an undischarged patient. Perhaps I shouldn’t go too far from my physician. I suggested that Robert go East without me.

“I’ll stay here and root for you,” I said.

“Root across three thousand miles, hell!” Robert said. “I’m no mystic. Grab onto your end of the shoestring.”

I grabbed. We climbed into a three-year-old car and started East. It was winter and we took the southern route. Nine days later we dipped into the Holland Tunnel. As we emerged with New York hitting us squarely between the eyes, I giggled. Robert looked at me in astonishment.

“We’re just another couple of young folks,” I said. “Starting life in the big city.”

20. *Home Is Here*

IT was sixteen months before we saw that car again. We were much too busy to go touring. We had never worked so hard, nor through so long a stretch. And the longer we associated with our jobs, the better we liked them.

We had not known whether fifty-year-old habits could be altered. That old-dog-new-tricks proverb bothered us and we'd met middle-aged men and women who had waited too long to play and had been only mocked by leisure. Perhaps it is not so disastrous to wait too long to work, for the working instinct is channeled deeply enough to resist frustration. Ours was still alive and eager.

New York was partly responsible for our working debauch. When I'm eighty and need energizing I shall get it there. Our New York was not the play spot known to visitors. Our city was a place of work and intense stimulation.

Outdoor friends had warned that I would droop in a large city, would miss mountains and sea and open spaces and, with nothing to renew me, I'd run down like an unwound clock. I didn't believe this. I doubt if any place exists with no sources for high moments. People have found them in the most monotonous existence, but the finding of them depends upon the will to ardency. In some it is as vital as the will to live.

In New York the laziest adventure muscle should find exercise. For me low times meant only that I needed to visit an art gallery where I could see beauty, or to hear a concert which sent me home ecstatic, or to climb on top of a Fifth Avenue bus, or to walk on Park Avenue at sunset, or to prowl an out-of-the-way neighborhood which opened a strange new world. Any of these recharged me for I'm a believer in subjectivity. It makes little difference—magnificent scenery, the sky line of a city, music, painting or fresh encounters—it is the emotional sieving which gives import. Music must reach the ears of men, painting be drawn through the eyes, beauty touch the sensibilities and human beings must be felt. True intellectuals will quarrel with this. But I live on lower levels.

It was exactly a year and a week from the day of our arrival when my first book was published and Robert sold a serial to *The Saturday Evening Post*. The events were simultaneous and we held a joint celebration.

The fifty-three weeks had been crammed. I'd not intended to write a book. It had begun as a two part article at the suggestion of an editor but as I relived those five wilderness years, the story stretched.

Nor had Robert plunged at once into a serial. Our New York life was a pay-as-you-go affair, and took words to swing. There had been lean times, hopeful times, even crises when an editorial check was a last minute rescue. But all that was only the usual history of any young couple who start life in a big city. The tense moments exercised our chin muscles.

Our writing was no longer a direct collaboration, and yet it was more so. Two separate jobs, two separate names and a tremendous interest in the other's job brought a far greater sharing than in the early days when we'd signed together. We had all the joy of a common project and none of the irritation of having to convince the other fellow. It was real co-labor and probably what we'd been instinctively driving toward through the years.

Even our timing clicked. I wrote the last word of a second book one evening in Maine five minutes before Robert finished a serial. For months it had been touch and go between us. And now it is so again as I near the end of a fourth book. This time the serial may nose me out, but it will be a photo finish, and we'll have a common celebration. We don't plan it that way. It just happens. Perhaps thirty years of common projects have set our speedometers.

After a year in New York I crossed the country for a visit with Bobs. She'd been busy too, had seen a magazine through the excitements of its first year of life and untimely demise, and then had turned to the field of advertising, promotion and publicity. Those were old absorptions. At seventeen she'd knocked at the doors of advertising agencies and been advised to finish school, but a Scotchman's child can't forget a complex. I found her busy on one promotion job and on the trail of another which would necessitate a move to Los Angeles.

"But, Bobs!" I exclaimed. "You'll have to move your furniture."

Bobs looked around her apartment as casually as a snail might regard his shell.

"That's simple," she said. "You and Dad have always acted as though there weren't such things as moving vans."

Robert, held in New York by a job of writing, envied me my visit with Bobs and my letters only deepened his envy. I wrote that the six weeks' visit was a blooming of what he and I had tried to build. Bobs and I seemed not a mother and a daughter, nor even two women friends. We were something more, something I'd always hoped would be.

Part of the pleasure of the association lay in the fact that each was occupied and didn't have to find outlets in the other's life, for self-reliance in day by day living is a basic need in any friendship. Unchanneled energies can become a family menace. That mine was directed was a matter of luck rather than plan. It mortifies me to admit this for I'd always known of that inevitable slack time which lies ahead for most women. Men can go on working so long as they are fit, but a woman suddenly receives her pink slip. It has nothing to do with age or fitness or even energy. Her children have grown up.

I'd always intended to take out occupational insurance but good intentions don't write policies and I'd let the years slip by. It was only a happy accident, New York, editorial suggestion and vigorous prodding by Carl Brandt and Robert, which had kicked me into busy post-middle years.

But Bobs was as proud of me as though I'd shown real acumen.

"How smart you were to go back to writing," she said one evening as we sat before the fireplace.

I looked up a bit startled.

"So many girls worry about mothers who are unhappy or lonely or trying to live everybody's lives except their own."

I'd never considered this problem of unemployed parents from the standpoint of the young. I was tempted to look smirky and very sage and then I broke down and told the truth. I couldn't point with any pride to an undeviating course. I'd made a lot of detours.

"I can name any number of places where I took the wrong turn," I said.

"Really!" Bobs laughed. "Maybe you just kept bearing in the right direction."

If that were true, it too had been wholly a matter of instinct and not intelligence. But I didn't say so. Every parent should retain a few shreds of his mantle of wisdom.

Bobs and I departed from San Francisco simultaneously, she to Los Angeles, I to New York, and for the first time in my married life I watched

moving men depart with intimate possessions. But the dismantled rooms in no way marked the disruption of a home. Those rooms were merely shelter.

Home was something quite different. Even the physical matters on which for years I had exercised homemaking muscles had been only an outward expression of something deep within. Our real home was a feeling, a dwelling of the spirit. It was a merging of all those places where we had been happy, where we had found peace, where we had shared life and where we had tried to gather about us those things which really counted. And so that home could never have any empty rooms. It was filled to overflowing with memories of the past and promises for the future. Each of us would carry it with us. For we possessed it, and would always.

Events, like waves, always came in series. I finished a book. Robert completed a serial. We were about to drive to California. Bobs intended to be married. I'd met Mac and I liked him, but that wasn't half so important as my feeling that Bobs and Mac would find happiness together.

The same old car was in storage, waiting for us. For two years it hadn't earned its keep. It had lived so retired a life that I was afraid it would be skittish in traffic.

"Remember how you and I used to plan that some day we'd buy a roadster?" Robert asked.

I thought of a mountain meadow and Bobs' small blonde head bending over Sammo. It was only yesterday that I'd laughed at Robert's earnest plans for that far away future when Bobs was grown.

"We need only a seat for two from now on," he said.

The open road idea was as young and green as ever although the roadster must be modernized into a coupé. We went shopping that afternoon. The salesman was baffled by our intense interest in luggage space. Robert crawled into a cavernous hole and measured and we talked glibly of twenty bags.

"But no one owns that many!" the salesman protested.

"We will," I assured him, "when we get everything we own aboard."

He gave up any further sales talk and treated us as harmless lunatics who might or might not buy a car. Robert crawled out from a rear compartment which looked almost as large as the main cabin on that first *Yakima*, in which we'd lived a whole summer.

“Some grand years of living can be done in that,” he said.

I nodded. The salesman stared. He couldn't know how long our plan had been in the making and we didn't have time to explain. We thrust a check into his hand and hurried to a luggage store where we baffled clerks as we measured luggage and argued over so small a matter as an extra half inch in length.

We held a luggage rehearsal at the entrance of our hotel in the quiet of a Sunday morning in Manhattan. As the boys carried out the bags they stared at the car and then looked queerly at us. The betting odds among the cohorts of spectators and assistants were against us. But at last every bag had been swallowed by the car with not an inch to spare. Typewriters, folding typewriter tables, office supplies, clothes and the odds and ends of living—all our possessions could travel with us. There'd be no bringing up the rear. A coupé with twenty pieces of luggage was vastly different from the old sedan with camping outfit, but highways too had changed in twenty years. Shelter lay wherever night might find us. I'd rolled that wayfarer phrase on my tongue ever since childhood. It gave me a free, wide and handsome feeling.

When the twenty pieces of luggage had been deposited in our rooms again, I turned jubilantly to Robert.

“Where we please, and when we please!” I fairly chanted. “A day, a week, a month, or a year.”

But Robert was still absorbed by technique.

“Small bags out for overnight stops,” he said. “More bags out for longer stays. Typewriters out when we've struck a place where we want to go to work. We've got the world by the tail!”

The equipment wasn't quite as perfect as we imagined. No first effort is. And just as we evolved improvements in our old wilderness camping outfit, and later jumped from a small boat to a larger, so we exchanged that car for another with interior remodeling to give larger luggage space. The pieces of luggage grew to twenty-two, enough to give leeway in clothing but still so few that every garment had to pay its passage.

And having made that change we checked ambition. We've never considered trailers, land yachts or homes on trucks. The open road was made for movement. A home should have close touch with earth. We weren't seeking a vagabond existence but a living, working scheme. It had taken us

almost thirty years, but finally we'd managed to drive those two horses as a pair.

All through the years we've been asked, "Where is your home?" The query always startled me for the answer seemed so obvious. Usually our home lay in plain sight of the asker and I'd glance around defensively at the cabin, camp, boat, house, apartment or hotel suite in which we happened to be living and wonder in what way it failed to meet the requirements of home.

Always we'd performed the rites of homemaking. We'd taken complete possession, or allowed the place to take possession of us, which is perhaps a more accurate description of homemaking. Sometimes we'd made constructive changes and then the home had met us more than halfway and taken on the impress of our living habits.

Even in the early years I was baffled as to how to answer that home question and at the same time spare the asker an autobiography or a philosophical discourse. But in the coupé era the question was asked so frequently that, in self-defense, I had to find an answer. "Our home is here," seldom satisfied, but it was at least the truth.

Wherever we are is home. It may be a house, hotel suite, apartment, cottage by the sea or cabin in the pines. Work usually determines where we go and how long we remain. The next consideration is climate, friends near whom we wish to live, or a sudden yearning to see Bobs and Mac. They, at least, are settled. A house on a hill, a cottage on a beach, a passion for skiing week ends and two jobs fill their lives. But they always find time for us and look regretful when we depart. We plan to be in New York each spring and fall and may be anywhere in the other months. We can and do cross the continent in six days.

In one period of fourteen months we lived in Maine, New York, Hollywood, Santa Barbara, Lake Tahoe, San Francisco, Seattle, Florida and returned to New York. And in every one of those places we brought out the typewriters and went to work. Covers have been off the typewriters within two hours of our arrival and we've never spent more than half a day in settling. Sometimes we have no destination and leave it to the chance of suddenly seeing a place where we want to live. Occasionally we surprise ourselves. One Sunday morning we dropped into Santa Barbara for a breakfast party and rented a going concern—house, garden and Chinese

houseboy—from a fellow guest. She wanted two months to go flying in her airplane. I needed a house in which to write a book.

If our years were given over to aimless wanderings they would be dreary. But there's nothing boring about home or work, and always we have them with us. And we like to motor. Robert is happiest behind a wheel and I'm one of those people who can sit in a car all day, day after day, and never suffer from a satiated landscape appetite.

Not all country is beautiful or even interesting but I find the dull spots useful. They give me time to remember. The flat prairies of the mid-continent are marvelously situated for this purpose, for they lie between the charm and serenity of eastern countrysides with their old, old trees and gracious homes, and the exciting panorama of the Far West with its mountains, color and endless vistas. On the prairies I can digest one lovely experience before I am plunged into another.

One hot day in Nebraska Robert asked indignantly what I had found so pleasant.

"I was enjoying Crater Lake," I said.

And I was. As a child I'd often toyed with the idea, when I'd been badly treated, of returning to my original abode in the sky and wearing again those mantles of rosy clouds. But that evening when we swept around the shoulder of a mountain and found ourselves surrounded by snow peaks, and with that indescribable indigo of Crater Lake below, I felt I'd done more than achieve my childish wish. I'd gone touring in the clouds.

"Lot more of this heat today," Robert said. "Better try Mount Lassen and those ten foot snowbanks in July."

"I will," I said. "Remember the lavenders and grays when the early sun struck the lava slopes? And those mountain meadows near by and how I wanted a tent so we could camp in the pines beside those laughing streams?"

It is a good game to play, and I got Robert to remember with me, just picking at random. I spoke of the flaming foliage of an October afternoon in Maine when we had driven for hours under a canopy of color. Robert countered with a sunrise departure from Death Valley when we'd watched the Nevada ranges change from brooding shadows into golden shapes.

We'd collected so many things to remember. Sunsets and sunrises. Desert nights. Alaskan rivers. The feel of solitude in so many places. Chocolate purples of the Mexican range across the Rio Grande. Glistening snow peaks of the Olympics. The wide-flown draperies of the Cascades.

Mountains of the sea country, their heads in the clouds and their feet in salt water. The bold grandeur of the ramparts on Baranof Island.

It wasn't always the big things. Splashes of dogwood blossoms against the tender green of a spring in Virginia. The red blotch of maple against the gold of birch on a Canadian lake in the fall. The endless acres of solid color when California wild flowers are in bloom. The solid early American feel of New England's elm-lined streets. The beauty of a winding road, a solitary Joshua tree, a brook, a hillside, the four-strand necklace of surf on the Oregon coast, an old dwelling—small scenes caught once and briefly, and yet for some strange reason etched in my memory.

And I like the feel of roads. For me there is keen delight in an early morning start in strange terrain. As we travel in the darkness our world is like a Christmas package. We have no idea what kind of country daylight will open for us.

I like dawn in settled districts, like to watch a countryside waken. Blinds are raised, smoke ascends from chimneys. Later men depart for work and children stand at gates awaiting school buses. Women sweep the front porches and go to the rural mail boxes. If they find a letter I look back to see if it is the one they wanted, for, though I do not stop, I have a sense of neighboring.

Travel late at night on deserted roads brings a different magic. Then we rush through blackness with a beam of light leading the way. The emptiness around us enhances the warm coziness of our small world and the sharp contrast between light and blackness brings an odd sense of complete detachment. I feel it most keenly when we drive all night through the desert, for night driving in the Far West offers perhaps one of the few opportunities for people in a modern world to feel the spell of isolation. We knew and loved the solitude of the Canadian forest and of the empty reaches of the Northwest coast, and we have glimpsed it again on cement highways.

It is inevitable, as so many thousands of miles slipped beneath our wheels, that some very special spots have gone into my constantly growing collection of sites for that dream house I'm always building.

That quest has never ended. I've grown adept at designing imaginary houses. In the time it takes to drive past a place where I think we may live some day, I have decided just what sort of dwelling would mellow and blend into those surroundings and how it should be faced and what would be the outlook from the windows. And for me that house exists until I've begun another.

This passion for building houses isn't the result of frustration. It is an outlet. I've scattered scores of houses across the continent. I know many regions where I could stop tomorrow, build a house and be content because already my spirit has put its roots down. Undoubtedly we will add many more to this list in the years ahead. This is difficult to explain to people who set great store on their unswerving loyalty to one particular acre in all the vast billions of acres in our land.

These people think, and often say, that we must be fickle or weak minded. After dissipating years, money and energy, we should have more to show than a motor car and twenty-two pieces of luggage, and we agree that these are not imposing properties.

If our critic is a person who likes to clip coupons, I always speak of our least intangible asset, material for writing. We will not live long enough to write ourselves out, although we've almost never deliberately gone anywhere in search of material. Knowledge of a locale or of a people is a sly sort of jade who comes more readily when not pursued. We've made our richest gleanings when we were absorbed in living, for then we most truly became part of the country and could understand its people.

Except for this writing material and the usual insurance the average American carries, we haven't collected tangible assets. This is not a boast or a defense. Those who make a great virtue of not possessing money give money undue emphasis by their very protestations. Often their basic attitude toward money is much the same as that of the man who cares for money of itself.

Naturally Robert and I worked out our philosophy on money. I can't imagine a husband and wife living successfully together unless they have reached some sort of agreement on this question, since money touches practically all their decisions. But the technique of handling money and the evaluation of money are two entirely different matters. Many people don't know exactly how they appraise the value of money per se, since this can be worked out only in the laboratory of life and through experiences embracing the sharp contrasts and opposing perspectives of both ups and downs.

We have carried out many such experiments and they have clarified my own evaluations. Often we've gone without things because we didn't have money, but we've still been happy in the slim times. We've had a lot of fun and pleasure whenever our bank balance was fat, but it was the experiences money brought us, and not money of itself, which gave us pleasure. And we know, because we've often proved it, that if we haven't money to buy good

times we'll still find them by other means. So money is important to us only as a tool.

People often say that money isn't everything. We go farther. We have many things we rank above money, and our appraisals have been arrived at by reactions to situations. Like everyone else, we've seen friendships shattered, trusts betrayed and integrities thrown overboard for money, per se. And oddly enough my sympathy has always been with the fellow who sold out his real securities for money. He is the one who was defrauded, and the pity seems the greater since he defrauded himself.

Our philosophy toward money has been thirty years in forming. I will never be one who regards money lightly. In the early years when we so often had to make something else do for money, I often told myself that money didn't count, knowing all the time that, in a way, it counted very much. Now I knew just how it counted. It is equipment for the journey. It is the grub, cook kit and blanket in a woodsman's pack. He's got to have it, but if his mind becomes fixed on equipment he is apt to miss worth-while things along the trail.

It may have been that we'd come to that time of life when people are apt to cast up accounts. I'd noticed all evening that Robert seemed low but I thought it was because he had torn up an entire chapter of a story.

"Have we been damn fools all our lives?" he burst forth.

I looked up.

"Perhaps not more than other people," I said. "What's on your mind?"

"The fool mistake I made in this yarn," he said. "If I'd worked half as hard at writing as I've worked at other things for thirty years, I'd have seen where I was going wrong."

"And you wouldn't be having half the fun in your job that you're having now," I said.

He considered that for a while.

"You're right," he said. "And we've probably got a lot more mistakes to make. Do you suppose, after all this time, we're just getting started?"

I hoped so. I wondered what it would be like, not getting started for somewhere, or something. And I hoped we'd make mistakes. Perhaps that is when people stop living, when they no longer err.

For thirty years we had tried life in so many ways and in so many places I wondered for a moment if we had been merely opening and closing doors. And then suddenly the whole thing fell into an understandable pattern. The pieces fitted together.

“We aren’t starting,” I said. “We started long ago. We’ve just kept on going.”

The car has been groomed and the twenty-two pieces of luggage packed. We are crossing the continent by a new route through regions we’ve always planned to visit.

Somewhere along the trail we’ll see a spot we like and, as so many times before, Robert will remark that it might be a good place to live. We will never have heard of the place before and won’t know anyone who lives there. It’s just the two of us looking the country over and finding it fair.

“We might hunt up a house,” I will say. “Looks like a place where nice people live.”

If the people are delightful, and if they think we are, it will be all the more jolly, and if they are not, or don’t think we are, we’ll still carry on. For we’ve got our jobs, our home and each other. These three have sought adventure in many places, and they will carry their own adventure into many more.

And we still have the old shoestring. Years have not frayed it. Rather it has been strengthened by pooled resources until now it gives a firm handhold. So many strands have been woven in through thirty years of living.

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 *Two Ends to Our Shoestring*, by Kathrene Pinkerton.]