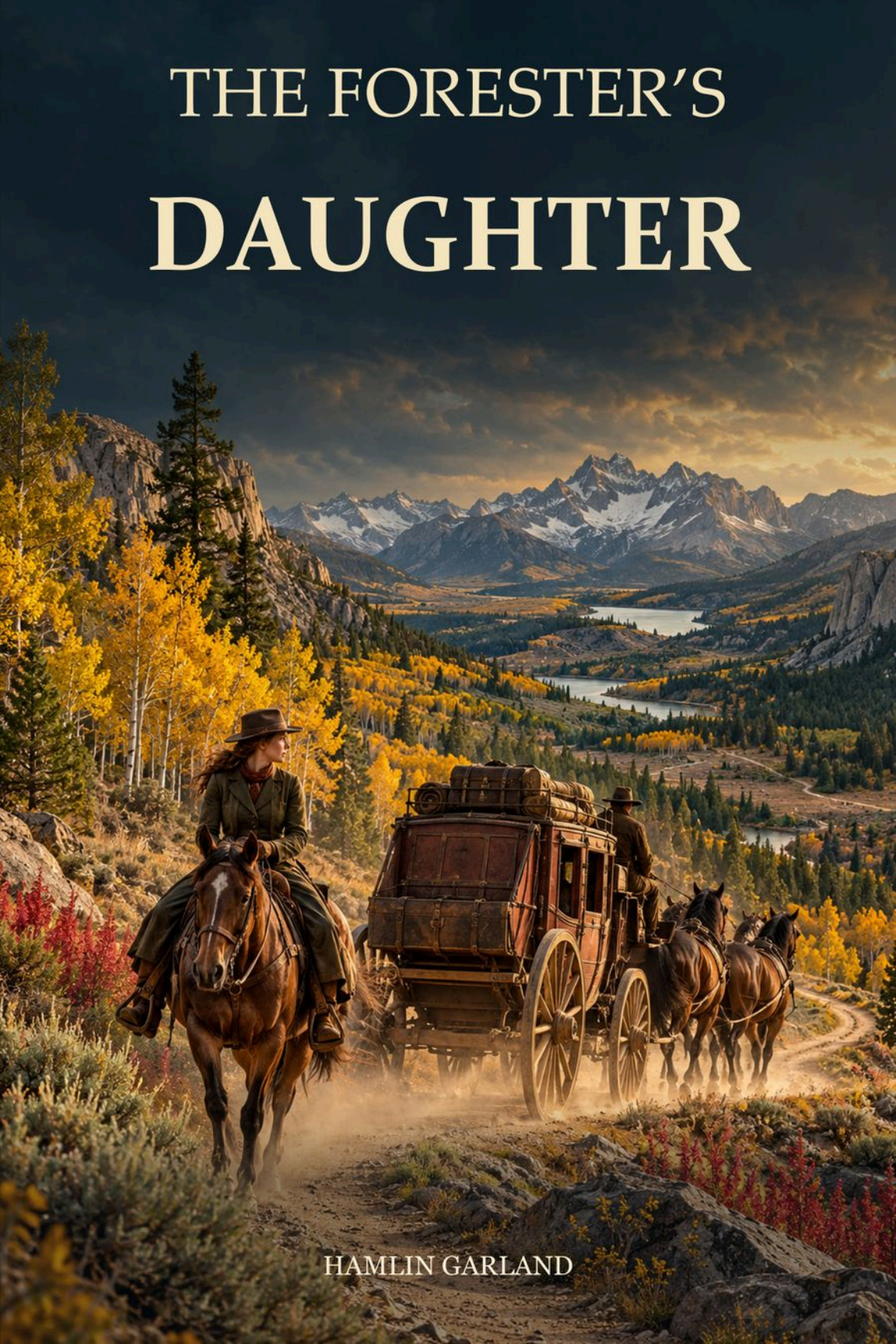
THE FORESTER'S DAUGHTER

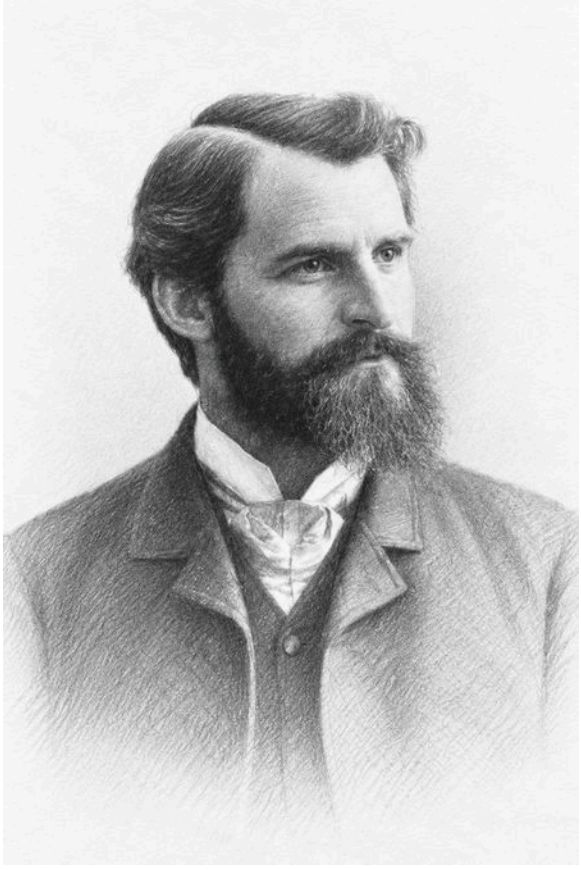


HAMLIN GARLAND

The Forester's Daughter: A Romance of the Bear-Tooth Range

Hamlin Garland

THE AUTHOR



Hamlin Garland

1860 - 1940

AI-created interpretation after portrait published in The Writer, October 1891.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Hamlin Garland

Hamlin Garland was an American writer, born in Wisconsin in 1860. His experiences in the rural Midwest became central to his fiction and autobiographical work. He wrote about farming communities with an attention to labour and material conditions that challenged more comfortable pictures of country life.

His story collection *Main-Travelled Roads*, published in 1891, established his reputation. Its characters face limits imposed by exhausting work, poverty and restricted opportunity. The physical setting is consequently more than scenery: weather, distance and the demands of the land influence what a person can hope to do.

Garland also revisited his experiences in autobiographical writing. *A Son of the Middle Border* appeared in 1917, followed by *A Daughter of the Middle Border* in 1921. The latter received the Pulitzer Prize for biography in 1922. Memory and social observation remained closely connected in this part of his career.

He died in 1940. His work invites readers to consider the cost of a way of life as well as its familiar attractions. A landscape can be beautiful while the people working within it endure severe hardship. Attending to that tension helps reveal how Garland uses concrete details of daily effort to make individual disappointment part of a larger account of American experience.

Biographical references: University of Iowa Libraries. Portrait source: portrait published in The Writer, October 1891. Full source records retained in the edition archive.

I

THE HAPPY GIRL

The stage line which ran from Williams to Bear Tooth (one of the most authentic then to be found in all the West) possessed at least one genuine Concord coach, so faded, so saddened, so cracked, and so splintered that its passengers entered it under protest, and alighted from it with thanksgiving, and yet it must have been built by honorable men, for in 190- it still made the run of one hundred and twenty miles twice each week without loss of wheel or even so much as moulting a scrap of paint.

And yet, whatever it may have been in its youth, it was in its age no longer a gay dash of color in the landscape. On the contrary, it fitted into the dust-brown and sage-green plain as defensively as a beetle in a dusty path. Nevertheless, it was an indispensable part of a very moving picture as it crept, creaking and groaning (or it may be it was the suffering passenger creaking and groaning), along the hillside.

After leaving the Grande River the road winds up a pretty high divide before plunging down into Ute Park, as they call all that region lying between the Continental Range on the east and the Bear Tooth plateau on the west. It was a big spread of land, and very far from an Eastern man's conception of a park. From Dome Peak it seems a plain; but, in fact, when clouds shut off the high summits to the west, this "valley" becomes a veritable mountain land, a tumbled, lonely country, over which an occasional horseman crawls, a minute but persistent insect. It is, to be exact, a succession of ridges and ravines, sculptured (in some far-off, post-glacial time) by floods of water, covered now, rather sparsely, with pinons, cedars, and aspens, a dry, forbidding, but majestic landscape.

In late August the hills become iridescent, opaline with the translucent yellow of the aspen, the coral and crimson of the fire-weed, the blood-red of huckleberry beds, and the royal purple of the asters, while flowing round all, as solvent and neutral setting, lies the gray-green of the ever-present and ever-enduring sage-brush. On the loftier heights these colors are arranged in most intricate and

cunning patterns, with nothing hard, nothing flaring in the prospect. All is harmonious and restful. It is, moreover, silent, silent as a dream world, and so flooded with light that the senses ache with the stress of it.

Through this gorgeous land of mist, of stillness, and of death, a few years ago a pale young man (seated beside the driver) rode one summer day in a voiceless rapture which made Bill McCoy weary.

"If you'd had as much of this as I have you'd talk of something else," he growled, after a half dozen attempts at conversation. Bill wasn't much to look at, but he was a good driver and the stranger respected him for it.

Eventually this simple-minded horseman became curious about the slim young fellow sitting beside him.

"What you doing out here, anyhow—fishing or just rebuilding a lung?"

"Rebuilding two lungs," answered the tourist.

"Well, this climate will just about put lungs into a coffee-can," retorted Bill, with official loyalty to his country.

To his discerning eye "the tourist" now became "a lunger." "Where do you live when you're to home?"

"Connecticut."

"I knew it."

"How did you know it?" The youth seemed really interested to know.

"I drove another fellow up here last fall that dealt out the same kind of brogue you do."

This amused the tourist. "You think I have a 'brogue,' do you?"

"I don't think it—I know it!" Bill replied, shortly.

He was prevented at the moment from pursuing this line of inquiry by the discovery of a couple of horsemen racing from a distant ranch toward the road. It was plain, even to the stranger, that they intended to intercept the stage, and Bill plied the lash with sudden vigor.

"I'll give 'em a chase," said he, grimly.

The other appeared a little alarmed, "What are they—bandits?"

"Bandits!" sneered Bill. "Your eyesight is piercing. Them's *girls*."

The traveler apologized. “My eyes aren’t very good,” he said, hurriedly.

He was, however, quite justified in his mistake, for both riders wore wide-rimmed sombreros and rode astride at a furious pace, bandanas fluttering, skirts streaming, and one was calling in shrill command, “Oh, Bill!”

As they neared the gate the driver drew up with a word of surprise. “Why, howdy, girls, howdy!” he said, with an assumption of innocence. “Were you wishin’ fer to speak to me?”

“Oh, shut up!” commanded one of the girls, a round-faced, freckled romp. “You know perfectly well that Berrie is going home to-day—we told you all about it yesterday.”

“Sure thing!” exclaimed Bill. “I’d forgot all about it.”

“Like nothin’!” exclaimed the maid. “You’ve been countin’ the hours till you got here—I know you.”

Meanwhile her companion had slipped from her horse. “Well, good-by, Molly, wish I could stay longer.”

“Good-by. Run down again.”

“I will. You come up.”

The young passenger sprang to the ground and politely said: “May I help you in?”

Bill stared, the girl smiled, and her companion called: “Be careful, Berrie, don’t hurt yourself, the wagon might pitch.”

The youth, perceiving that he had made another mistake, stammered an apology.

The girl perceived his embarrassment and sweetly accepted his hand. “I am much obliged, all the same.”

Bill shook with malicious laughter. “Out in this country girls are warranted to jump clean over a measly little hack like this,” he explained.

The girl took a seat in the back corner of the dusty vehicle, and Bill opened conversation with her by asking what kind of a time she had been having “in the East.”

“Fine,” said she.

“Did ye get as far back as my old town?”

“What town is that, Bill?”

"Oh, come off! You know I'm from Omaha."

"No, I only got as far as South Bend."

The picture which the girl had made as she dashed up to the pasture gate (her hat-rim blown away from her brown face and sparkling eyes), united with the kindliness in her voice as she accepted his gallant aid, entered a deep impression on the tourist's mind; but he did not turn his head to look at her—perhaps he feared Bill's elbow quite as much as his guffaw—but he listened closely, and by listening learned that she had been "East" for several weeks, and also that she was known, and favorably known, all along the line, for whenever they met a team or passed a ranch some one called out, "Hello, Berrie!" in cordial salute, and the men, old and young, were especially pleased to see her.

Meanwhile the stage rose and fell over the gigantic swells like a tiny boat on a monster sea, while the sun blazed ever more fervently from the splendid sky, and the hills glowed with ever-increasing tumult of color. Through this land of color, of repose, of romance, the young traveler rode, drinking deep of the germless air, feeling that the girl behind him was a wondrous part of this wild and unaccountable country.

He had no chance to study her face again till the coach rolled down the hill to "Yancy's," where they were to take dinner and change horses.

Yancy's ranch-house stood on the bank of a fine stream which purled—in keen defiance of the hot sun—over a gravel bed, so near to the mountain snows that their coolness still lingered in the ripples. The house, a long, low, log hut, was fenced with antlers of the elk, adorned with morning-glory vines, and shaded by lofty cottonwood-trees, and its green grass-plat—after the sun-smit hills of the long morning's ride—was very grateful to the Eastern man's eyes.

With intent to show Bill that he did not greatly fear his smiles, the youth sprang down and offered a hand to assist his charming fellow-passenger to alight; and she, with kindly understanding, again accepted his aid—to Bill's chagrin—and they walked up the path side by side.

"This is all very new and wonderful to me," the young man said in explanation; "but I suppose it's quite commonplace to you—and Bill."

"Oh no—it's home!"

"You were born here?"

"No, I was born in the East; but I've lived here ever since I was three years old."

"By East you mean Kansas?"

"No, Missouri," she laughed back at him.

She was taller than most women, and gave out an air of fine unconscious health which made her good to see, although her face was too broad to be pretty. She smiled easily, and her teeth were white and even. Her hand he noticed was as strong as steel and brown as leather. Her neck rose from her shoulders like that of an acrobat, and she walked with the sense of security which comes from self-reliant strength.

She was met at the door by old lady Yancy, who pumped her hand up and down, exclaiming: "My stars, I'm glad to see ye back! 'Pears like the country is just naturally goin' to the dogs without you. The dance last Saturday was a frost, so I hear, no snap to the fiddlin', no gimp to the jiggin'. It shorely was pitiful."

Yancy himself, tall, grizzled, succinct, shook her hand in his turn. "Ma's right, girl, the country needs ye. I'm scared every time ye go away fer fear some feller will snap ye up."

She laughed. "No danger. Well, how are ye all, anyway?" she asked.

"All well, 'ceptin' me," said the little old woman. "I'm just about able to pick at my vittles."

"She does her share o' the work, and half the cook's besides," volunteered Yancy.

"I know her," retorted Berrie, as she laid off her hat. "It's me for a dip. Gee, but it's dusty on the road!"

The young tourist—he signed W. W. Norcross in Yancy's register—watched her closely and listened to every word she spoke with an intensity of interest which led Mrs. Yancy to say, privately:

"'Pears like that young 'lunger' ain't goin' to forgit you if he can help it."

"What makes you think he's a 'lunger'?"

"Don't haf to think. One look at him is enough."

Thereafter a softer light—the light of pity—shone in the eyes of the girl. "Poor fellow, he does look kind o' peaked; but this climate will bring him up to the scratch," she added, with optimistic faith in her beloved hills.

A moment later the down-coming stage pulled in, loaded to the side-lines, and everybody on it seemed to know Berea McFarlane. It was hello here and hello there, and how are ye between, with smacks from the women and open cries of "pass it around" on the part of the men, till Norcross marveled at the display.

"She seems a great favorite," he observed to Yancy.

"Who—Berrie? She's the whole works up at Bear Tooth. Good thing she don't want to go to Congress—she'd lay Jim Worthy on the shelf."

Berea's popularity was not so remarkable as her manner of receiving it. She took it all as a sort of joke—a good, kindly joke. She shook hands with her male admirers, and smacked the cheeks of her female friends with an air of modest deprecation. "Oh, you don't mean it," was one of her phrases. She enjoyed this display of affection, but it seemed not to touch her deeply, and her impartial, humorous acceptance of the courtship of the men was equally charming, though this was due, according to remark, to the claims of some rancher up the line.

She continued to be the theme of conversation at the dinner-table and yet remained unembarrassed, and gave back quite as good as she received.

"If I was Cliff," declared one lanky admirer, "I'd be shot if I let you out of my sight. It ain't safe."

She smiled broadly. "I don't feel scared."

"Oh, *you're* all right! It's the other feller—like me—that gets hurt."

"Don't worry, you're old enough and tough enough to turn a steel-jacketed bullet."

This raised a laugh, and Mrs. Yancy, who was waiting on the table, put in a word: “I’ll board ye free, Berrie, if you’ll jest naturally turn up here regular at meal-time. You do take the fellers’ appetites. It’s the only time I make a cent.”

To the Eastern man this was all very unrestrained and deeply diverting. The people seemed to know all about one another notwithstanding the fact that they came from ranches scattered up and down the stage line twenty, thirty miles apart—to be neighbors in this country means to be anywhere within a sixty-mile ride—and they gossiped of the countryside as minutely as the residents of a village in Wisconsin discuss their kind. News was scarce.

The north-bound coach got away first, and as the girl came out to take her place, Norcross said: “Won’t you have my seat with the driver?”

She dropped her voice humorously. “No, thank you, I can’t stand for Bill’s clack.”

Norcross understood. She didn’t relish the notion of being so close to the frankly amorous driver, who neglected no opportunity to be personal; therefore, he helped her to her seat inside and resumed his place in front.

Bill, now broadly communicative, minutely detailed his tastes in food, horses, liquors, and saddles in a long monologue which would have been tiresome to any one but an imaginative young Eastern student. Bill had a vast knowledge of the West, but a distressing habit of repetition. He was self-conscious, too, for the reason that he was really talking for the benefit of the girl sitting in critical silence behind him, who, though he frequently turned to her for confirmation of some of the more startling of his statements, refused to be drawn into controversy.

In this informing way some ten miles were traversed, the road climbing ever higher, and the mountains to right and left increasing in grandeur each hour, till of a sudden and in a deep valley on the bank of another swift stream, they came upon a squalid saloon and a minute post-office. This was the town of Moskow.

Bill, lumbering down over the wheel, took a bag of mail from the boot and dragged it into the cabin. The girl rose, stretched herself,

and said: “This stagin’ is slow business. I’m cramped. I’m going to walk on ahead.”

“May I go with you?” asked Norcross.

“Sure thing! Come along.”

As they crossed the little pole bridge which spanned the flood, the tourist exclaimed: “What exquisite water! It’s like melted opals.”

“Comes right down from the snow,” she answered, impressed by the poetry of his simile.

He would gladly have lingered, listening to the song of the water, but as she passed on, he followed. The opposite hill was sharp and the road stony, but as they reached the top the young Easterner called out, “See the savins!”

Before them stood a grove of cedars, old, gray, and drear, as weirdly impressive as the cacti in a Mexican desert. Torn by winds, scarred by lightnings, deeply rooted, tenacious as tradition, unlovely as Egyptian mummies, fantastic, dwarfed and blackened, these unaccountable creatures clung to the ledges. The dead mingled horribly with the living, and when the wind arose—the wind that was robustly cheerful on the high hills—these hags cried out with low moans of infinite despair. It was as if they pleaded for water or for deliverance from a life that was a kind of death.

The pale young man shuddered. “What a ghostly place!” he exclaimed, in a low voice. “It seems the burial-place of a vanished race.”

Something in his face, some note in his voice profoundly moved the girl. For the first time her face showed something other than childish good nature and a sense of humor. “I don’t like these trees myself,” she answered. “They look too much like poor old squaws.”

For a few moments the man and the maid studied the forest of immemorial, gaunt, and withered trees—bright, impermanent youth confronting time-defaced and wind-torn age. Then the girl spoke: “Let’s get out of here. I shall cry if we don’t.”

In a few moments the dolorous voices were left behind, and the cheerful light of the plain reasserted itself. Norcross, looking back down upon the cedars, which at a distance resembled a tufted, bronze-green carpet, musingly asked: “What do you suppose planted those trees there?”

The girl was deeply impressed by the novelty of this query. “I never thought to ask. I reckon they just grew.”

“No, there’s a reason for all these plantings,” he insisted.

“We don’t worry ourselves much about such things out here,” she replied, with charming humor. “We don’t even worry about the weather. We just take things as they come.”

They walked on talking with new intimacy. “Where is your home?” he asked.

“A few miles out of Bear Tooth. You’re from the East, Bill says—‘the far East,’ we call it.”

“From New Haven. I’ve just finished at Yale. Have you ever been to New York?”

“Oh, good Lord, no!” she answered, as though he had named the ends of the earth. “My mother came from the South—she was born in Kentucky—that accounts for my name, and my father is a Missourian. Let’s see, Yale is in the state of Connecticut, isn’t it?”

“Connecticut is no longer a state; it is only a suburb of New York City.”

“Is that so? My geography calls it ‘The Nutmeg State.’”

“Your geography is behind the times. New York has absorbed all of Connecticut and part of Jersey.”

“Well, it’s all the same to us out here. Your whole country looks like the small end of a slice of pie to us.”

“Have you ever been in a city?”

“Oh yes, I go to Denver once in a while, and I saw St. Louis once; but I was only a yearling, and don’t remember much about it. What are you doing out here, if it’s a fair question?”

He looked away at the mountains. “I got rather used up last spring, and my doctor said I’d better come out here for a while and build up. I’m going up to Meeker’s Mill. Do you know where that is?”

“I know every stove-pipe in this park,” she answered. “Joe Meeker is kind o’ related to me—uncle by marriage. He lives about fifteen miles over the hill from Bear Tooth.”

This fact seemed to bring them still closer together. “I’m glad of that,” he said, pointedly. “Perhaps I shall be permitted to see you now and again? I’m going to be lonesome for a while, I’m afraid.”

“Don’t you believe it! Joe Meeker’s boys will keep you interested,” she assured him.

The stage overtook them at this point, and Bill surlily remarked: “If you’d been alone, young feller, I’d ‘a’ give you a chase.” His resentment of the outsider’s growing favor with the girl was ludicrously evident.

As they rose into the higher levels the aspen shook its yellowish leaves in the breeze, and the purple foot-hills gained in majesty. Great new peaks came into view on the right, and the lofty cliffs of the Bear Tooth range loomed in naked grandeur high above the blue-green of the pines which clothed their sloping eastern sides.

At intervals the road passed small log ranches crouching low on the banks of creeks; but aside from these—and the sparse animal life around them—no sign of settlement could be seen. The valley lay as it had lain for thousands of years, repeating its forests as the meadows of the lower levels send forth their annual grasses. Norcross said to himself: “I have circled the track of progress and have re-entered the border America, where the stage-coach is still the one stirring thing beneath the sun.”

At last the driver, with a note of exultation, called out: “Grab a root, everybody, it’s all the way down-hill and time to feed.”

And so, as the dusk came over the mighty spread of the hills to the east, and the peaks to the west darkened from violet to purple-black, the stage rumbled and rattled and rushed down the winding road through thickening signs of civilization, and just at nightfall rolled into the little town of Bear Tooth, which is the eastern gateway of the Ute Plateau.

Norcross had given a great deal of thought to the young girl behind him, and thought had deepened her charm. Her frankness, her humor, her superb physical strength and her calm self-reliance appealed to him, and the more dangerously, because he was so well aware of his own weakness and loneliness, and as the stage drew up before the hotel, he fervently said: “I hope I shall see you again?”

Before she could reply a man’s voice called: “Hello, there!” and a tall fellow stepped up to her with confident mien.

Norcross awkwardly shrank away. This was her cowboy lover, of course. It was impossible that so attractive a girl should be

unattached, and the knowledge produced in him a faint but very definite pang of envy and regret.

The happy girl, even in the excitement of meeting her lover, did not forget the stranger. She gave him her hand in parting, and again he thrilled to its amazing power. It was small, but it was like a steel clamp. “Stop in on your way to Meeker’s,” she said, as a kindly man would have done. “You pass our gate. My father is Joseph McFarlane, the Forest Supervisor. Good night.”

“Good night,” he returned, with sincere liking.

“Who is that?” Norcross heard her companion ask.

She replied in a low voice, but he overheard her answer, “A poor ‘lunger,’ bound for Meeker’s—and Kingdom Come, I’m afraid. He seems a nice young feller, too.”

“They always wait till the last minute,” remarked the rancher, with indifferent tone.

II

A RIDE IN THE RAIN

There are two Colorados within the boundaries of the state of that name, distinct, almost irreconcilable. One is a plain (smooth, dry, monotonous), gently declining to the east, a land of sage-brush, wheat-fields, and alfalfa meadows—a rather commonplace region now, given over to humdrum folk intent on digging a living from the soil; but the other is an army of peaks, a region of storms, a spread of dark and tangled forests. In the one, shallow rivers trickle on their sandy way to the Gulf of Mexico; from the other, the waters rush, uniting to make the mighty stream whose silt-laden floods are slowly filling the Gulf of California.

If you stand on one of the great naked crests which form the dividing wall, the rampart of the plains, you can see the Colorado of tradition to the west, still rolling in wave after wave of stupendous altitudes, each range cutting into the sky with a purple saw-tooth edge. The landscape seems to contain nothing but rocks and towering crags, a treasure-house for those who mine. But this is illusive. Between these purple heights charming valleys wind and meadows lie in which rich grasses grow and cattle feed.

On certain slopes—where the devastating miners have not yet played their relentless game—dark forests rise to the high, bold summits of the chiefest mountains, and it is to guard these timbered tracts, growing each year more valuable, that the government has established its Forest Service to protect and develop the wealth-producing power of the watersheds.

Chief among the wooded areas of this mighty inland empire of crag and stream is the Bear Tooth Forest, containing nearly eight hundred thousand acres of rock and trees, whose seat of administration is Bear Tooth Springs, the small town in which our young traveler found himself.

He carefully explained to the landlord of the Cottage Hotel that he had never been in this valley before, and that he was filled with astonishment and delight of the scenery.

“Scenery! Yes, too much scenery. What we want is settlers,” retorted the landlord, who was shabby and sour and rather contemptuous, for the reason that he considered Norcross a poor consumptive, and a fool to boot—“one of those chaps who wait till they are nearly dead, then come out here expecting to live on climate.”

The hotel was hardly larger than the log shanty of a railway-grading camp; but the meat was edible, and just outside the door roared Bear Creek, which came down directly from Dome Mountain, and the young Easterner went to sleep beneath its singing that night. He should have dreamed of the happy mountain girl, but he did not; on the contrary, he imagined himself back at college in the midst of innumerable freshmen, yelling, “Bill McCoy, Bill McCoy!”

He woke a little bewildered by his strange surroundings, and when he became aware of the cheap bed, the flimsy wash-stand, the ugly wallpaper, and thought how far he was from home and friends, he not only sighed, he shivered. The room was chill, the pitcher of water cold almost to the freezing-point, and his joints were stiff and painful from his ride. What folly to come so far into the wilderness at this time.

As he crawled from his bed and looked from the window he was still further disheartened. In the foreground stood a half dozen frame buildings, graceless and cheap, without tree or shrub to give shadow or charm of line—all was bare, bleak, sere; but under his window the stream was singing its glorious mountain song, and away to the west rose the aspiring peaks from which it came. Romance brooded in that shadow, and on the lower foot-hills the frost-touched foliage glowed like a mosaic of jewels.

Dressing hurriedly he went down to the small bar-room, whose litter of duffle-bags, guns, saddles, and camp utensils gave evidence of the presence of many hunters and fishermen. The slovenly landlord was poring over a newspaper, while a discouraged half-grown youth was sludging the floor with a mop; but a cheerful clamor from an open door at the back of the hall told that breakfast was on.

Venturing over the threshold, Norcross found himself seated at table with some five or six men in corduroy jackets and laced boots,

who were, in fact, merchants and professional men from Denver and Pueblo out for fish and such game as the law allowed, and all in holiday mood. They joked the waiter-girls, and joshed one another in noisy good-fellowship, ignoring the slim youth in English riding-suit, who came in with an air of mingled melancholy and timidity and took a seat at the lower corner of the long table.

The landlady, tall, thin, worried, and inquisitive, was New England—Norcross recognized her type even before she came to him with a question on her lips. "So you're from the East, are you?"

"I've been at school there."

"Well, I'm glad to see you. My folks came from York State. I don't often get any one from the *real* East. Come out to fish, I s'pose?"

"Yes," he replied, thinking this the easiest way out.

"Well, they's plenty of fishing—and they's plenty of air, not much of anything else."

As he looked about the room, the tourist's eye was attracted by four young fellows seated at a small table to his right. They wore rough shirts of an olive-green shade, and their faces were wind-scorched; but their voices held a pleasant tone, and something in the manner of the landlady toward them made them noticeable. Norcross asked her who they were.

"They're forestry boys."

"Forestry boys?"

"Yes; the Supervisor's office is here, and these are his help."

This information added to Norcross's interest and cheered him a little. He knew something of the Forest Service, and had been told that many of the rangers were college men. He resolved to make their acquaintance. "If I'm to stay here they will help me endure the exile," he said.

After breakfast he went forth to find the post-office, expecting a letter of instructions from Meeker. He found nothing of the sort, and this quite disconcerted him.

"The stage is gone," the postmistress told him, "and you can't get up till day after to-morrow. You might reach Meeker by using the government 'phone, however."

"Where will I find the government 'phone?"

"Down in the Supervisor's office. They're very accommodating; they'll let you use it, if you tell them who you want to reach."

It was impossible to miss the forestry building for the reason that a handsome flag fluttered above it. The door being open, Norcross perceived from the threshold a young clerk at work on a typewriter, while in a corner close by the window another and older man was working intently on a map.

"Is this the office of the Forest Supervisor?" asked the youth.

The man at the machine looked up, and pleasantly answered: "It is, but the Supervisor is not in yet. Is there anything I can do for you?"

"It may be you can. I am on my way to Meeker's Mill for a little outing. Perhaps you could tell me where Meeker's Mill is, and how I can best get there."

The man at the map meditated. "It's not far, some eighteen or twenty miles; but it's over a pretty rough trail."

"What kind of a place is it?"

"Very charming. You'll like it. Real mountain country."

This officer was a plain-featured man of about thirty-five, with keen and clear eyes. His voice, though strongly nasal, possessed a note of manly sincerity. As he studied his visitor, he smiled.

"You look brand-new—haven't had time to season-check, have you?"

"No; I'm a stranger in a strange land."

"Out for your health?"

"Yes. My name is Norcross. I'm just getting over a severe illness, and I'm up here to lay around and fish and recuperate—if I can."

"You can—you will. You can't help it," the other assured him. "Join one of our surveying crews for a week and I'll mellow that suit of yours and make a real mountaineer of you. I see you wear a *Sigma Chi* pin. What was your school?"

"I am a 'Son of Eli.' Last year's class."

The other man displayed his fob. "I'm ten classes ahead of you. My name is Nash. I'm what they call an 'expert.' I'm up here doing some estimating and surveying for a big ditch they're putting in. I was

rather in hopes you had come to join our ranks. We sons of Eli are holding the conservation fort these days, and we need help."

"My knowledge of your work is rather vague," admitted Norcross. "My father is in the lumber business; but his point of view isn't exactly yours."

"He slays 'em, does he?"

"He did. He helped devastate Michigan."

"After me the deluge! I know the kind. Why not make yourself a sort of vicarious atonement?"

Norcross smiled. "I had not thought of that. It would help some, wouldn't it?"

"It certainly would. There's no great money in the work; but it's about the most enlightened of all the governmental bureaus."

Norcross was strongly drawn to this forester, whose tone was that of a highly trained specialist. "I rode up on the stage yesterday with Miss Berrie McFarlane."

"The Supervisor's daughter?"

"She seemed a fine Western type."

"She's not a type; she's an individual. She hasn't her like anywhere I've gone. She cuts a wide swath up here. Being an only child she's both son and daughter to McFarlane. She knows more about forestry than her father. In fact, half the time he depends on her judgment."

Norcross was interested, but did not want to take up valuable time. He said: "Will you let me use your telephone to Meeker's?"

"Very sorry, but our line is out of order. You'll have to wait a day or so—or use the mails. You're too late for to-day's stage, but it's only a short ride across. Come outside and I'll show you."

Norcross followed him to the walk, and stood in silence while his guide indicated the pass over the range. It all looked very formidable to the Eastern youth. Thunderous clouds hung low upon the peaks, and the great crags to left and right of the notch were stern and barren. "I think I'll wait for the stage," he said, with candid weakness. "I couldn't make that trip alone."

"You'll have to take many such a ride over that range in the *night*—if you join the service," Nash warningly replied.

As they were standing there a girl came galloping up to the hitching-post and slid from her horse. It was Berea McFarlane. "Good morning, Emery," she called to the surveyor. "Good morning," she nodded at Norcross. "How do you find yourself this morning?"

"Homesick," he replied, smilingly.

"Why so?"

"I'm disappointed in the town."

"What's the matter with the town?"

"It's so commonplace. I expected it to be—well, different. It's just like any other plains town."

Berrie looked round at the forlorn shops, the irregular sidewalks, the grassless yards. "It isn't very pretty, that's a fact; but you can always forget it by just looking up at the high country. When you going up to the mill?"

"I don't know. I haven't had any word from Meeker, and I can't reach him by telephone."

"I know, the line is short-circuited somewhere; but they've sent a man out. He may close it any minute."

"Where's the Supervisor?" asked Nash.

"He's gone over to Moore's cutting. How are you getting on with those plats?"

"Very well. I'll have 'em all in shape by Saturday."

"Come in and make yourself at home," said the girl to Norcross. "You'll find the papers two or three days old," she smiled. "We never know about anything here till other people have forgotten it."

Norcross followed her into the office, curious to know more about her. She was so changed from his previous conception of her that he was puzzled. She had the directness and the brevity of phrase of a business man, as she opened letters and discussed their contents with the men.

"Truly she *is* different," thought Norcross, and yet she lost something by reason of the display of her proficiency as a clerk. "I wish she would leave business to some one else," he inwardly grumbled as he rose to go.

She looked up from her desk. “Come in again later. We may be able to reach the mill.”

He thanked her and went back to his hotel, where he overhauled his outfit and wrote some letters. His disgust of the town was lessened by the presence of that handsome girl, and the hope that he might see her at luncheon made him impatient of the clock.

She did not appear in the dining-room, and when Norcross inquired of Nash whether she took her meals at the hotel or not, the expert replied: “No, she goes home. The ranch is only a few miles down the valley. Occasionally we invite her, but she don’t think much of the cooking.”

One of the young surveyors put in a word: “I shouldn’t think she would. I’d ride ten miles any time to eat one of Mrs. McFarlane’s dinners.”

“Yes,” agreed Nash with a reflective look in his eyes. “She’s a mighty fine girl, and I join the boys in wishing her better luck than marrying Cliff Belden.”

“Is it settled that way?” asked Norcross.

“Yes; the Supervisor warned us all, but even he never has any good words for Belden. He’s a surly cuss, and violently opposed to the service. His brother is one of the proprietors of the Meeker mill, and they have all tried to bulldoze Landon, our ranger over there. By the way, you’ll like Landon. He’s a Harvard man, and a good ranger. His shack is only a half-mile from Meeker’s house. It’s a pretty well-known fact that Alec Belden is part proprietor of a saloon over there that worries the Supervisor worse than anything. Cliff swears he’s not connected with it; but he’s more or less sympathetic with the crowd.”

Norcross, already deeply interested in the present and future of a girl whom he had met for the first time only the day before, was quite ready to give up his trip to Meeker. After the men went back to work he wandered about the town for an hour or two, and then dropped in at the office to inquire if the telephone line had been repaired.

“No, it’s still dead.”

“Did Miss McFarlane return?”

“No. She said she had work to do at home. This is ironing-day, I believe.”

"She plays all the parts, don't she?"

"She sure does; and she plays one part as well as another. She can rope and tie a steer or bake a cake as well as play the piano."

"Don't tell me she plays the piano!"

Nash laughed. "She does; but it's one of those you operate with your feet."

"I'm relieved to hear that. She seems almost weirdly gifted as it is." After a moment he broke in with: "What can a man do in this town?"

"Work, nothing else."

"What do you do for amusement?"

"Once in a while there is a dance in the hall over the drug-store, and on Sunday you can listen to a wretched sermon in the log church. The rest of the time you work or loaf in the saloons—or read. Old Nature has done her part here. But man—! Ever been in the Tyrol?"

"Yes."

"Well, some day the people of the plains will have sense enough to use these mountains, these streams, the way they do over there."

It required only a few hours for Norcross to size up the valley and its people. Aside from Nash and his associates, and one or two families connected with the mill to the north, the villagers were poor, thriftless, and uninteresting. They were lacking in the picturesque quality of ranchers and miners, and had not yet the grace of town-dwellers. They were, indeed, depressingly nondescript.

Early on the second morning he went to the post-office—which was also the telephone station—to get a letter or message from Meeker. He found neither; but as he was standing in the door undecided about taking the stage, Berea came into town riding a fine bay pony, and leading a blaze-face buckskin behind her.

Her face shone cordially, as she called out: "Well, how do you stack up this morning?"

"Tip-top," he answered, in an attempt to match her cheery greeting.

"Do you like our town better?"

"Not a bit! But the hills are magnificent."

"Anybody turned up from the mill?"

"No, I haven't heard a word from there. The telephone is still out of commission."

"They can't locate the break. Uncle Joe sent word by the stage-driver asking us to keep an eye out for you and send you over. I've come to take you over myself."

"That's mighty good of you; but it's a good deal to ask."

"I want to see Uncle Joe on business, anyhow, and you'll like the ride better than the journey by stage."

Leaving the horses standing with their bridle-reins hanging on the ground, she led the way to the office.

"When father comes in, tell him where I've gone, and send Mr. Norcross's packs by the first wagon. Is your outfit ready?" she asked.

"Not quite. I can get it ready soon."

He hurried away in pleasant excitement, and in twenty minutes was at the door ready to ride.

"You'd better take my bay," said Berea. "Old Paint-face there is a little notional."

Norcross approached his mount with a caution which indicated that he had at least been instructed in range-horse psychology, and as he gathered his reins together to mount, Berrie remarked:

"I hope you're saddle-wise."

"I had a few lessons in a riding-school," he replied, modestly.

Young Downing approached the girl with a low-voiced protest: "You oughtn't to ride old Paint. He nearly pitched the Supervisor the other day."

"I'm not worried," she said, and swung to her saddle.

The ugly beast made off in a tearing sidewise rush, but she smilingly called back: "All set." And Norcross followed her in high admiration.

Eventually she brought her bronco to subjection, and they trotted off together along the wagon-road quite comfortably. By this time the youth had forgotten his depression, his homesickness of the morning. The valley was again enchanted ground. Its vistas led to lofty heights. The air was regenerative, and though a part of this

elation was due, no doubt, to the power of his singularly attractive guide, he laid it discreetly to the climate.

After shacking along between some rather sorry fields of grain for a mile or two, Berea swung into a side-trail. “I want you to meet my mother,” she said.

The grassy road led to a long, one-story, half-log, half-slab house, which stood on the bank of a small, swift, willow-bordered stream.

“This is our ranch,” she explained. “All the meadow in sight belongs to us.”

The young Easterner looked about in astonishment. Not a tree bigger than his thumb gave shade. The gate of the cattle corral stood but a few feet from the kitchen door, and rusty beef-bones, bleaching skulls, and scraps of sun-dried hides littered the ground or hung upon the fence. Exteriorly the low cabin made a drab, depressing picture; but as he alighted—upon Berea’s invitation—and entered the house, he was met by a sweet-faced, brown-haired little woman in a neat gown, whose bearing was not in the least awkward or embarrassed.

“This is Mr. Norcross, the tourist I told you about,” explained Berrie.

Mrs. McFarlane extended her small hand with friendly impulse. “I’m very glad to meet you, sir. Are you going to spend some time at the Mill?”

“I don’t know. I have a letter to Mr. Meeker from a friend of mine who hunted with him last year—a Mr. Sutler.”

“Mr. Sutler! Oh, we know him very well. Won’t you sit down?”

The interior of the house was not only well kept, but presented many evidences of refinement. A mechanical piano stood against the log wall, and books and magazines, dog-eared with use, littered the table; and Norcross, feeling the force of Nash’s half-expressed criticism of his “superior,” listened intently to Mrs. McFarlane’s apologies for the condition of the farmyard.

“Well,” said Berea, sharply, “if we’re to reach Uncle Joe’s for dinner we’d better be scratching the hills.” And to her mother she added: “I’ll pull in about dark.”

The mother offered no objection to her daughter's plan, and the young people rode off together directly toward the high peaks to the east.

"I'm going by way of the cut-off," Berrie explained; and Norcross, content and unafraid, nodded in acquiescence. "Here is the line," she called a few minutes later, pointing at a sign nailed to a tree at the foot of the first wooded hill.

The notice, printed in black ink on a white square of cloth, proclaimed this to be the boundary of the Bear Tooth National Forest, and pleaded with all men to be watchful of fires. Its tone was not at all that of a strong government; it was deprecatory.

The trail, hardly more than a wood road, grew wilder and lonelier as they climbed. Cattle fed on the hillsides in scattered bands like elk. Here and there a small cabin stood on the bank of a stream; but, for the most part, the trail mounted the high slopes in perfect solitude.

The girl talked easily and leisurely, reading the brands of the ranchers, revealing the number of cattle they owned, quite as a young farmer would have done. She seemed not to be embarrassed in the slightest degree by the fact that she was guiding a strange man over a lonely road, and gave no outward sign of special interest in him till she suddenly turned to ask: "What kind of a slicker—I mean a raincoat—did you bring?"

He looked blank. "I don't believe I brought any. I've a leather shooting-jacket, however."

She shrugged her shoulders and looked up at the sky. "We're in for a storm. You'd ought 'o have a slicker, no fancy 'raincoat,' but a real old-fashioned cow-puncher's oilskin. They make a business of shedding rain. Leather's no good, neither is canvas; I've tried 'em all."

She rode on for a few minutes in silence, as if disgusted with his folly, but she was really worrying about him. "Poor chap," she said to herself. "He can't stand a chill. I ought to have thought of his slicker myself. He's helpless as a baby."

They were climbing fast now, winding upward along the bank of a stream, and the sky had grown suddenly gray, and the woodland path was dark and chill. The mountains were not less beautiful; but

they were decidedly less amiable, and the youth shivered, casting an apprehensive eye at the thickening clouds.

Berea perceived something of his dismay, and, drawing rein, dismounted. Behind her saddle was a tightly rolled bundle which, being untied and shaken out, proved to be a horseman's rainproof oilskin coat. "Put this on!" she commanded.

"Oh no," he protested, "I can't take your coat."

"Yes you can! You must! Don't you worry about me, I'm used to weather. Put this on over your jacket and all. You'll need it. Rain won't hurt *me*; but it will just about finish you."

The worst of this lay in its truth, and Norcross lost all his pride of sex for the moment. A wetting would not dim this girl's splendid color, nor reduce her vitality one degree, while to him it might be a death-warrant. "You could throw me over my own horse," he admitted, in a kind of bitter admiration, and slipped the coat on, shivering with cold as he did so.

"You think me a poor excuse of a trailer, don't you?" he said, ruefully, as the thunder began to roll.

"You've got to be all made over new," she replied, tolerantly. "Stay here a year and you'll be able to stand anything."

Remounting, she again led the way with cheery cry. The rain came dashing down in fitful, misty streams; but she merely pulled the rim of her sombrero closer over her eyes, and rode steadily on, while he followed, plunged in gloom as cold and gray as the storm. The splitting crashes of thunder echoed from the high peaks like the voices of siege-guns, and the lightning stabbed here and there as though blindly seeking some hidden foe. Long veils of falling water twisted and trailed through the valleys with swishing roar.

"These mountain showers don't last long," the girl called back, her face shining like a rose. "We'll get the sun in a few minutes."

And so it turned out. In less than an hour they rode into the warm light again, and in spite of himself Norcross returned her smile, though he said: "I feel like a selfish fool. You are soaked."

"Hardly wet through," she reassured him. "My jacket and skirt turn water pretty well. I'll be dry in a jiffy. It does a body good to be wet once in a while."

The shame of his action remained; but a closer friendship was established, and as he took off the coat and handed it back to her, he again apologized. “I feel like a pig. I don’t see how I came to do it. The thunder and the chill scared me, that’s the truth of it. You hypnotized me into taking it. How wet you *are*!” he exclaimed, remorsefully. “You’ll surely take cold.”

“I never take cold,” she returned. “I’m used to all kinds of weather. Don’t you bother about me.”

Topping a low divide the youth caught a glimpse of the range to the southeast, which took his breath. “Isn’t that superb!” he exclaimed. “It’s like the shining roof of the world!”

“Yes, that’s the Continental Divide,” she confirmed, casually; but the lyrical note which he struck again reached her heart. The men she knew had so few words for the beautiful in life. She wondered whether this man’s illness had given him this refinement or whether it was native to his kind. “I’m glad he took my coat,” was her thought.

She pushed on down the slope, riding hard, but it was nearly two o’clock when they drew up at Meeker’s house, which was a long, low, stone structure built along the north side of the road. The place was distinguished not merely by its masonry, but also by its picket fence, which had once been whitewashed. Farm-wagons of various degrees of decay stood by the gate, and in the barn-yard plows and harrows—deeply buried by the weeds—were rusting forlornly away. A little farther up the stream the tall pipe of a sawmill rose above the firs.

A pack of dogs of all sizes and signs came clamoring to the fence, followed by a big, slovenly dressed, red-bearded man of sixty or thereabouts.

“Hello, Uncle Joe,” called the girl, in offhand boyish fashion. “How are you *to-day*?”

“Howdy, girl,” answered Meeker, gravely. “What brings you up here this time?”

She laughed. “Here’s a boarder who wants to learn how to raise cattle.”

Meeker's face lightened. "I reckon you're Mr. Norcross? I'm glad to see ye. Light off and make yourself to home. Turn your horses into the corral, the boys will feed 'em."

"Am I in America?" Norcross asked himself, as he followed the slouchy old rancher into the unkempt yard. "This certainly is a long way from New Haven."

Without ceremony Meeker led his guests directly into the dining-room, a long and rather narrow room, wherein a woman and six or seven roughly dressed young men were sitting at a rudely appointed table.

"Earth and seas!" exclaimed Mrs. Meeker. "Here's Berrie, and I'll bet that's Sutler's friend, our boarder."

"That's what, mother," admitted her husband. "Berrie brought him up."

"You'd ought 'o gone for him yourself, you big lump," she retorted.

Mrs. Meeker, who was as big as her husband, greeted Norcross warmly, and made a place for him beside her own chair.

"Highst along there, boys, and give the company a chance," she commanded, sharply. "Our dinner's turrible late to-day."

The boys—they were in reality full-grown cubs of eighteen or twenty—did as they were bid with much noise, chaffing Berrie with blunt humor. The table was covered with a red oil-cloth, and set with heavy blue-and-white china. The forks were two-tined, steel-pronged, and not very polished, and the food was of the simplest sort; but the girl seemed at home there—as she did everywhere—and was soon deep in a discussion of the price of beef, and whether it was advisable to ship now or wait a month.

Meeker read Sutler's letter, which Norcross had handed him, and, after deliberation, remarked: "All right, we'll do the best we can for you, Mr. Norcross; but we haven't any fancy accommodations."

"He don't expect any," replied Berrie. "What he needs is a little roughing it."

"There's plinty of that to be had," said one of the herders, who sat below the salt. "'is the soft life I'm nadin'."

"Pat's strong on soft jobs," said another; and Berea joined the laugh which followed this pointless joke. She appeared to be one of them, and it troubled Norcross a little. She had so little the sex

feeling and demanded so few of the rights and privileges of a girl. The men all admired her, that was evident, almost too evident, and one or two of the older men felt the charm of her young womanhood too deeply even to meet her eyes; but of this Norcross was happily ignorant. Already in these two days he had acquired a distinct sense of proprietorship in her, a feeling which made him jealous of her good name.

Meeker, it turned out, was an Englishman by way of Canada, and this was his second American wife. His first had been a sister to Mrs. McFarlane. He was a man of much reading—of the periodical sort—and the big sitting-room was littered with magazines both English and American, and his talk abounded in radical and rather foolish utterances. Norcross considered it the most disorderly home he had ever seen, and yet it was not without a certain dignity. The rooms were large and amply provided with furniture of a very mixed and gaudy sort, and the table was spread with abundance.

One of the lads, Frank Meeker, a dark, intense youth of about twenty, was Berea's full cousin. The others were merely hired hands, but they all eyed the new-comer with disfavor. The fact that Berrie had brought him and that she seemed interested in him added to the effect of the smart riding-suit which he wore. "I'd like to roll him in the creek," muttered one of them to his neighbor.

This dislike Berrie perceived—in some degree—and to Frank she privately said: "Now you fellows have got to treat Mr. Norcross right. He's been very sick."

Frank maliciously grinned. "Oh, we'll treat him *right*. We won't do a thing to him!"

"Now, Frank," she warned, "if you try any of your tricks on him you'll hear from me."

"Why all this worry on your part?" he asked, keenly. "How long since you found him?"

"We rode up on the stage day before yesterday, and he seemed so kind o' blue and lonesome I couldn't help trying to chirk him up."

"How will Cliff take all this chirking business?"

"Cliff ain't my guardian—yet," she laughingly responded. "Mr. Norcross is a college man, and not used to our ways—"

"*Mister* Norcross—what's his front name?"

"Wayland."

He snorted. "Wayland! If he gets past us without being called 'pasty' he's in luck. He's a 'lunger' if there ever was one."

The girl was shrewd enough to see that the more she sought to soften the wind to her Eastern tenderfoot the more surely he was to be shorn, so she gave over her effort in that direction, and turned to the old folks. To Mrs. Meeker she privately said: "Mr. Norcross ain't used to rough ways, and he's not very rugged, you ought 'o kind o' favor him for a while."

The girl herself did not understand the vital and almost painful interest which this young man had roused in her. He was both child and poet to her, and as she watched him trying to make friends with the men, her indignation rose against their clownish offishness. She understood fully that his neat speech, his Eastern accent, together with his tailor-cut clothing and the delicacy of his table manners, would surely mark him for slaughter among the cow-hands, and the wish to shield him made her face graver than anybody had ever seen it.

"I don't feel right in leaving you here," she said, at last; "but I must be ridin'." And while Meeker ordered her horse brought out, she walked to the gate with Norcross at her side.

"I'm tremendously obliged to you," he said, and his voice was vibrant. "You have been most kind. How can I repay you?"

"Oh, that's all right," she replied, in true Western fashion. "I wanted to see the folks up here, anyhow. This is no jaunt at all for me." And, looking at her powerful figure, and feeling the trap-like grip of her cinch hand, he knew she spoke the truth.

Frank had saddled his own horse, and was planning to ride over the hill with her; but to this she objected. "I'm going to leave Pete here for Mr. Norcross to ride," she said, "and there's no need of your going."

Frank's face soured, and with instant perception of the effect her refusal might have on the fortunes of the stranger, she reconsidered.

"Oh, come along! I reckon you want to get shut of some mean job."

And so she rode away, leaving her ward to adjust himself to his new and strange surroundings as best he could, and with her going the whole valley darkened for the convalescent.

III

WAYLAND RECEIVES A WARNING

Distance is no barrier to gossip. It amazed young Norcross to observe how minutely the ranchers of the valley followed one another's most intimate domestic affairs. Not merely was each man in full possession of the color and number of every calf in his neighbor's herd, it seemed that nothing could happen in the most remote cabin and remain concealed. Any event which broke the monotony of their life loomed large, and in all matters of courtship curiosity was something more than keen, it was remorseless.

Living miles apart, and riding the roads but seldom, these lonely gossips tore to tatters every scrap of rumor. No citizen came or went without being studied, characterized, accounted for, and every woman was scrutinized as closely as a stray horse, and if there was within her, the slightest wayward impulse some lawless centaur came to know it, to exult over it, to make test of it. Her every word, her minutest expression of a natural coquetry was enlarged upon as a sign of weakness, of yielding. Every personable female was the focus of a natural desire, intensified by lonely brooding on the part of the men.

It was soon apparent to the Eastern observer that the entire male population for thirty miles around not only knew McFarlane's girl; but that every unmarried man—and some who were both husbands and fathers—kept a deeply interested eye upon her daily motion, and certain shameless ones openly boasted among their fellows of their intention to win her favor, while the shy ones reveled in secret exultation over every chance meeting with her. She was the topic of every lumber-camp, and the shining lure of every dance to which the ranch hands often rode over long and lonely trails.

Part of this intense interest was due, naturally, to the scarcity of desirable women, but a larger part was called out by Berea's frank freedom of manner. Her ready camaraderie was taken for carelessness, and the candid grip of her hand was often misunderstood; and yet most of the men respected her, and some feared her. After her avowed choice of Clifford Belden they all kept

aloof, for he was hot-tempered and formidably swift to avenge an insult.

At the end of a week Norcross found himself restless and discontented with the Meekers. He was tired of fishing, tired of the old man's endless arguments, and tired of the obscene cow-hands. The men around the mill did not interest him, and their Saturday night spree at the saloon disgusted him. The one person who piqued his curiosity was Landon, the ranger who was stationed not far away, and who could be seen occasionally riding by on a handsome black horse. There was something in his bearing, in his neat and serviceable drab uniform, which attracted the convalescent, and on Sunday morning he decided to venture a call, although Frank Meeker had said the ranger was a "grouch."

His cabin, a neat log structure, stood just above the road on a huge natural terrace of grassy boulders, and the flag which fluttered from a tall staff before it could be seen for several miles—the bright sign of federal control, the symbol of law and order, just as the saloon and the mill were signs of lawless vice and destructive greed. Around the door flowers bloomed and kittens played; while at the door of the dive broken bottles, swarms of flies, and heaps of refuse menaced every corner, and the mill immured itself in its own debris like a foul beast.

It was strangely moving to come upon this flower-like place and this garden in the wilderness. A spring, which crept from the high wall back of "the station" (as these ranger headquarters are called), gave its delicious water into several winding ditches, trickled musically down the other side of the terrace in little life-giving cascades, and so finally, reunited in a single current, fell away into the creek. It was plain that loving care, and much of it, had been given to this tiny system of irrigation.

The cabin's interior pleased Wayland almost as much as the garden. It was built of pine logs neatly matched and hewed on one side. There were but two rooms—one which served as sleeping-chamber and office, and one which was at once kitchen and dining-room. In the larger room a quaint fireplace with a flat arch, a bunk, a table supporting a typewriter, and several shelves full of books made up the furnishing. On the walls hung a rifle, a revolver in its belt, a couple of uniforms, and a yellow oilskin raincoat.

The ranger, spurred and belted, with his cuffs turned back, was pounding the typewriter when Wayland appeared at the open door; but he rose with grave courtesy. “Come in,” he said, and his voice had a pleasant inflection.

“I’m interrupting.”

“Nothing serious, just a letter. There’s no hurry. I’m always glad of an excuse to rest from this job.” He was at once keenly interested in his visitor, for he perceived in him the gentleman and, of course, the alien.

Wayland, with something of the feeling of a civilian reporting to an officer, explained his presence in the neighborhood.

“I’ve heard of you,” responded the ranger, “and I’ve been hoping you’d look in on me. The Supervisor’s daughter has just written me to look after you. She said you were not very well.”

Again Wayland protested that he was not a consumptive, only a student who needed mountain air; but he added: “It is very kind of Miss McFarlane to think of me.”

“Oh, she thinks of everybody,” the young fellow declared. “She’s one of the most unselfish creatures in the world.”

Something in the music of this speech, and something in the look of the ranger’s eyes, caused Wayland to wonder if here were not still another of Berrie’s subjects. He became certain of it as the young officer went on, with pleasing frankness, and it was not long before he had conveyed to Wayland his cause for sadness. “She’s engaged to a man that is not her equal. In a certain sense no man is her equal; but Belden is a pretty hard type, and I believe, although I can’t prove it, that he is part owner of the saloon over there.”

“How does that saloon happen to be here?”

“It’s on patented land—a so-called ‘placer claim’—experts have reported against it. McFarlane has protested against it, but nothing is done. The mill is also on deeded land, and together they are a plague spot. I’m their enemy, and they know it; and they’ve threatened to burn me out. Of course they won’t do that, but they’re ready to play any kind of trick on me.”

“I can well believe that, for I am getting my share of practical jokes at Meeker’s.”

"They're not a bad lot over there—only just rowdy. I suppose they're initiating you," said Landon.

"I didn't come out here to be a cowboy," responded Norcross. "But Frank Meeker seems to be anxious to show me all the good old cowboy courtesies. On Monday he slipped a burr under my horse's saddle, and I came near to having my neck broken. Then he or some one else concealed a frog in my bed, and fouled my hair-brushes. In fact, I go to sleep each night in expectation of some new attack; but the air and the riding are doing me a great deal of good, and so I stay."

"Come and bunk with me," urged Landon. "I'll be glad to have you. I get terribly lonesome here sometimes, although I'm supposed to have the best station in the forest. Bring your outfit and stay as long as you like."

This offer touched Norcross deeply. "That's very kind of you; but I guess I'll stick it out. I hate to let those hoodlums drive me out."

"All right, but come and see me often. I get so blue some days I wonder what's the use of it all. There's one fatal condition about this ranger business—it's a solitary job, it cuts out marriage for most of us. Many of the stations are fifteen or twenty miles from a post-office; then, too, the lines of promotion are few. I guess I'll have to get out, although I like the work. Come in any time and take a snack with me."

Thereafter Wayland spent nearly every day with the ranger, either in his cabin or riding the trail, and during these hours confidence grew until at last Landon confessed that his unrest arose from his rejection by Berrie.

"She was not to blame. She's so kind and free with every one, I thought I had a chance. I was conceited enough to feel sorry for the other fellows, and now I can't even feel sorry for myself. I'm just dazed and hanging to the ropes. She was mighty gentle about it—you know how sunny her face is—well, she just got grave and kind o' faint-voiced, and said—Oh, you know what she said! She let me know there was another man. I didn't ask her who, and when I found out, I lost my grip entirely. At first I thought I'd resign and get out of the country; but I couldn't do it—I can't yet. The chance of seeing her—of hearing from her once in a while—she never writes except on

business for her father; but—you'll laugh—I can't see her signature without a tremor." He smiled, but his eyes were desperately sad. "I ought to resign, because I can't do my work as well as I ought to. As I ride the trail I'm thinking of her. I sit here half the night writing imaginary letters to her. And when I see her, and she takes my hand in hers—you know what a hand she has—my mind goes blank. Oh, I'm crazy! I admit it. I didn't know such a thing could happen to me; but it has."

"I suppose it's being alone so much," Wayland started to argue, but the other would not have it so.

"No, it's the girl herself. She's not only beautiful in body, she's all sweetness and sincerity in mind. There isn't a petty thing about her. And her happy smile—do you know, I have times when I resent that smile? How can she be so happy without me? That's crazy, too, but I think it, sometimes. Then I think of the time when she will not smile—when that brute Belden will begin to treat her as he does his sisters—then I get murderous."

As Wayland listened to this outpouring he wondered at the intensity of the forester's passion. He marveled, too, at Berrie's choice, for there was something fine and high in Landon's worship. A college man with a mining engineer's training, he should go high in the service. "He made the mistake of being too precipitate as a lover," concluded Wayland. "His forthright courtship repelled her."

Meanwhile his own troubles increased. Frank's dislike had grown to an impish vindictiveness, and if the old man Meeker had any knowledge of his son's deviltries, he gave no sign. Mrs. Meeker, however, openly reproved the scamp.

"You ought to be ashamed of worrying a sick man," she protested, indignantly.

"He ain't so sick as all that; and, besides, he needs the starch taken out of him," was the boy's pitiless answer.

"I don't know why I stay," Wayland wrote to Berea. "I'm disgusted with the men up here—they're all tiresome except Landon—but I hate to slink away, and besides, the country is glorious. I'd like to come down and see you this week. May I do so? Please send word that I may."

She did not reply, and wondering whether she had received his letter or not, he mounted his horse one beautiful morning and rode away up the trail with a sense of elation, of eager joy, with intent to call upon her at the ranch as he went by.

Hardly had he vanished among the pines when Clifford Belden rode in from his ranch on Hat Creek, and called at Meeker's for his mail.

Frank Meeker was in the office, and as he both feared and disliked this big contemptuous young cattleman, he set to work to make him jealous.

"You want to watch this one-lung boarder of ours," he warned, with a grin. "He's been writing to Berrie, and he's just gone down to see her. His highfalutin ways, and his fine white hands, have put her on the slant."

Belden fixed a pair of cold, gray-blue eyes on his tormentor, and said: "You be careful of your tongue or I'll put *you* on the slant."

"I'm her own cousin," retorted Frank. "I reckon I can say what I please about her. I don't want that dude Easterner to cut you out. She guided him over here, and gave him her slicker to keep him dry, and I can see she's terribly taken with him. She's headstrong as a mule, once she gets started, and if she takes a notion to Norcross it's all up with you."

"I'm not worrying," retorted Belden.

"You'd better be. I was down there the other day, and it 'peared like she couldn't talk of anything else but Mister Norcross, Mister Norcross, till I was sick of his name."

An hour later Belden left the mill and set off up the trail behind Norcross, his face fallen into stern lines. Frank writhed in delight. "There goes Cliff, hot under the collar, chasing Norcross. If he finds out that Berrie is interested in him, he'll just about wring that dude's neck."

Meanwhile Wayland was riding through the pass with lightening heart, his thought dwelling on the girl at the end of his journey. Aside from Landon and Nash, she was the one soul in all this mountain world in whom he took the slightest interest. Her pity still hurt him, but he hoped to show her such change of color, such gain in horsemanship, that she could no longer consider him an invalid.

His mind kept so closely to these interior matters that he hardly saw the path, but his horse led him safely back with precise knowledge and eager haste.

As he reached the McFarlane ranch it seemed deserted of men, but a faint column of smoke rising from the roof of the kitchen gave evidence of a cook, and at his knock Berrie came to the door with a boyish word of frank surprise and pleasure. She was dressed in a blue-and-white calico gown with the collar turned in and the sleeves rolled up; but she seemed quite unembarrassed, and her pleasure in his coming quite repaid him for his long and tiresome ride.

"I've been wondering about you," she said. "I'm mighty glad to see you. How do you stand it?"

"You got my letter?"

"I did—and I was going to write and tell you to come down, but I've had some special work to do at the office."

She took the horse's rein from him, and together they started toward the stables. As she stepped over and around the old hoofs and meat-bones—which littered the way—without comment, Wayland again wondered at her apparent failure to realize the disgusting disorder of the yard. "Why don't she urge the men to clean it up?" he thought.

This action of stabling the horses—a perfectly innocent and natural one for her—led one of the hands, a coarse-minded sneak, to watch them from a corral. "I wonder how Cliff would like that?" he evilly remarked.

Berea was frankly pleased to see Wayland, and spoke of the improvement which had taken place in him. "You're looking fine," she said, as they were returning to the house. "But how do you get on with the boys?"

"Not very well," he admitted. "They seem to have it in for me. It's a constant fight."

"How about Frank?"

"He's the worst of them all. He never speaks to me that he doesn't insult me. I don't know why. I've tried my best to get into his good graces, but I can't. Your uncle I like, and Mrs. Meeker is very kind; but all the others seem to be sworn enemies. I don't think I could

stand it if it weren't for Landon. I spend a good deal of time with him."

Her face grew grave. "I reckon you got started wrong," she said at last. "They'll like you better when you get browned up, and your clothes get dirty—you're a little too fancy for them just now."

"But you see," he said, "I'm not trying for their admiration. I haven't the slightest ambition to shine as a cow-puncher, and if those fellows are fair samples I don't want anybody to mistake me for one."

"Don't let that get around," she smilingly replied. "They'd run you out if they knew you despised them."

"I've come down here to confer with you," he declared, as they reached the door. "I don't believe I want any more of their company. What's the use? As you say, I've started wrong with them, and I don't see any prospect of getting right; and, besides, I like the rangers better. Landon thinks I might work into the service. I wonder if I could? It would give me something to do."

She considered a moment. "We'll think about that. Come into the kitchen. I'm cook to-day, mother's gone to town."

The kitchen was clean and ample, and the delicious odor of new-made bread filled it with cheer. As the girl resumed her apron, Wayland settled into a chair with a sigh of content. "I like this," he said aloud. "There's nothing cowgirl about you now, you're the Anglo-Saxon housewife. You might be a Michigan or Connecticut girl at this moment."

Her cheeks were ruddy with the heat, and her eyes intent on her work; but she caught enough of his meaning to be pleased with it. "Oh, I have to take a hand at the pots and pans now and then. I can't give all my time to the service; but I'd like to."

He boldly announced his errand. "I wish you'd take me to board? I'm sure your cooking would build up my shattered system a good deal quicker than your aunt's."

She laughed, but shook her head. "You ought to be on the hills riding hard every day. What you need is the high country and the air of the pines."

"I'm not feeling any lack of scenery or pine-tree air," he retorted. "I'm perfectly satisfied right here. Civilized bread and the sight of

you will do me more good than boiled beans and camp bread. I hate to say it, but the Meeker menu runs largely to beef. Moreover, just seeing you would help my recovery."

She became self-conscious at this, and he hastened to add:

"Not that I'm really sick. Mrs. Meeker, like yourself, persists in treating me as if I were. I'm feeling fine—perfectly well, only I'm not as rugged as I want to be."

She had read that victims of the white plague always talk in this cheerful way about themselves, and she worked on without replying, and this gave him an excellent opportunity to study her closely. She was taller than most women and lithely powerful. There was nothing delicate about her—nothing spirituelle—on the contrary, she was markedly full-veined, cheerful and humorous, and yet she had responded several times to an allusive phrase with surprising quickness. She did so now as he remarked: "Somebody, I think it was Lowell, has said 'Nature is all very well for a vacation, but a poor substitute for the society of good men and women.' It's beautiful up at the mill, but I want some one to enjoy it with, and there is no one to turn to, except Landon, and he's rather sad and self-absorbed—you know why. If I were here—in the valley—you and I could ride together now and then, and you could show me all the trails. Why not let me come here and board? I'm going to ask your mother, if I may not do so?"

Quite naturally he grew more and more personal. He told her of his father, the busy director of a lumber company, and of his mother, sickly and inert.

"She ought never to have married," he said, with darkened brow. "Not one of her children has even a decent constitution. I'm the most robust of them all, and I must seem a pretty poor lot to you. However, I wasn't always like this, and if that young devil, Frank Meeker, hadn't tormented me out of my sleep, I would have shown you still greater improvement. Don't you see that it is your duty to let me stay here where I can build up on your cooking?"

She turned this aside. "Mother don't think much of my cooking. She says I can handle a brandin'-iron a heap better than I can a rollin'-pin."

"You certainly can ride," he replied, with admiring accent. "I shall never forget the picture you made that first time I saw you racing to intercept the stage. Do you *know* how fine you are physically? You're a wonder." She uttered some protest, but he went on: "When I think of my mother and sisters in comparison with you, they seem like caricatures of women. I know I oughtn't to say such things of my mother—she really is an exceptional person—but a woman should be something more than mind. My sisters could no more do what you do than a lame duck can lead a ballet. I suppose it is because I have had to live with a lot of ailing women all my life that I feel as I do toward you. I worship your health and strength. I really do. Your care of me on that trip was very sweet—and yet it stung."

"I didn't mean to hurt you."

"I know you didn't, and I'm not complaining. I'm only wishing I could come here and be 'bossed' by you until I could hold my own against any weather. You make me feel just as I used to do when I went to a circus and watched the athletes, men and women, file past me in the sawdust. They seemed like demigods. As I sit here now I have a fierce desire to be as well, as strong, as full of life as you are. I hate being thin and timid. You have the physical perfection that queens ought to have."

Her face was flushed with inward heat as she listened to his strange words, which sprang, she feared, from the heart of a man hopelessly ill; but she again protested. "It's all right to be able to throw a rope and ride a mean horse, but you have got something else—something I can never get. Learning is a thousand times finer than muscle."

"Learning does not compensate for nine-inch shoulders and spindle legs," he answered. "But I'm going to get well. Knowing you has given me renewed desire to be a man. I'm going to ride and rough it, and sleep out of doors till I can follow you anywhere. You'll be proud of me before the month is out. But I'm going to cut the Meeker outfit. I won't subject myself to their vulgarities another day. Why should I? It's false pride in me to hang on up there any longer."

"Of course you can come here," she said. "Mother will be glad to have you, although our ranch isn't a bit pretty. Perhaps father will send you out with one of the rangers as a fire-guard. I'll ask him to-night."

"I wish you would. I like these foresters. What I've seen of them. I wouldn't mind serving under a man like Landon. He's fine."

Upon this pleasant conference Cliff Belden unexpectedly burst. Pushing the door open with a slam, he confronted Berrie with dark and angry face.

"Why, Cliff, where did you come from?" she asked, rising in some confusion. "I didn't hear you ride up."

"Apparently not," he sneeringly answered. "I reckon you were too much occupied."

She tried to laugh away his black mood. "That's right, I was. I'm chief cook to-day. Come in and sit down. Mother's gone to town, and I'm playing her part," she explained, ignoring his sullen displeasure. "Cliff, this is Mr. Norcross, who is visiting Uncle Joe. Mr. Norcross, shake hands with Mr. Belden." She made this introduction with some awkwardness, for her lover's failure to even say, "Howdy," informed her that his jealous heart was aflame, and she went on, quickly: "Mr. Norcross dropped in on his way to the post-office, and I'm collecting a snack for him."

Recognizing Belden's claims upon the girl, Wayland rose. "I must be going. It's a long ride over the hill."

"Come again soon," urged Berrie; "father wants to see you."

"Thank you. I will look in very shortly," he replied, and went out with such dignity as he could command, feeling, however, very much like a dog that has been kicked over the threshold.

Closing the door behind him, Belden turned upon the girl. "What's that consumptive 'dogie' doing here? He 'peared to be very much at home with you—too dern much at home!"

She was prepared for his displeasure, but not for words like these. She answered, quietly: "He just dropped in on his way to town, and he's not a dogie!" She resented his tone as well as his words.

"I've heard about you taking him over to Meeker's and lending him your only slicker," he went on; "but I didn't expect to find him sittin' here like he owned you and the place. You're taking altogether too much pains with him. Can't he put his own horse out? Do you have to go to the stable with him? You never did have any sense about your actions with men. You've all along been too free of your

reputation, and now I'm going to take care of it for you. I won't have you nursin' this runt any longer!"

She perceived now the full measure of his base rage, and her face grew pale and set. "You're making a perfect fool of yourself, Cliff," she said, with portentous calmness.

"Am I?" he asked.

"You sure are, and you'll see it yourself by and by. You've no call to get wire-edged about Mr. Norcross. He's not very strong. He's just getting well of a long sickness. I knew a chill would finish him, that's why I gave him my slicker. It didn't hurt me, and maybe it saved his life. I'd do it again if necessary."

"Since when did you start a hospital for Eastern tenderfeet?" he sneered; then his tone changed to one of downright command. "You want to cut this all out, I tell you! I won't have any more of it! The boys up at the mill are all talkin' about your interest in this little whelp, and I'm getting the branding-iron from every one I meet. Sam saw you go into the barn with that dude, and *that* would have been all over the country to-morrow, if I hadn't told him I'd sew his mouth up if he said a word about it. Of course, I don't think you mean anything by this coddlin'."

"Oh, thank you," she interrupted, with flaming, quick, indignant fury. "That's mighty nice of you. I went to the barn to show Mr. Norcross where to stall his horse. I didn't know Sam was here."

He sneered: "No, I bet you didn't."

She fired at this. "Come now! Spit it out! Something nasty is in your mind. Go on! What have I done? What makes you so hot?"

He began to weaken. "I don't accuse you of anything. I—but I—"

"Yes you do—in your heart you distrust me—you just as much as said so!"

He was losing his high air of command. "Never mind what I said, Berrie, I—"

She was blazing now. "But I *do* mind—I mind a whole lot—I didn't think it of you," she added, as she realized his cheapness, his coarseness. "I didn't suppose you could even *think* such things of me. I don't like it," she repeated, and her tone hardened, "and I guess you'd better pull out of here—for good. If you've no more faith in me than that, I want you to go and never come back."

“You don’t mean that!”

“Yes, I do! You’ve shown this yellow streak before, and I’m tired of it. This is the limit. I’m done with you.”

She stood between tears and benumbing anger now, and he was scared. “Don’t say that, Berrie!” he pleaded, trying to put his arm about her.

“Keep away from me!” She dashed his hands aside. “I hate you. I never want to see you again!” She ran into her own room and slammed the door behind her.

Belden stood for a long time with his back against the wall, the heat of his resentment utterly gone, an empty, aching place in his heart. He called her twice, but she made no answer, and so, at last, he mounted his horse and rode away.

IV

THE SUPERVISOR OF THE FOREST

Young Norcross, much as he admired Berrie, was not seeking to exchange her favor for her lover's enmity, and he rode away with an uneasy feeling of having innocently made trouble for himself, as well as for a fine, true-hearted girl. "What a good friendly talk we were having," he said, regretfully, "and to think she is to marry that big, scowling brute. How could she turn Landon down for a savage like that?"

He was just leaving the outer gate when Belden came clattering up and reined his horse across the path and called out: "See here, you young skunk, you're a poor, white-livered tenderfoot, and I can't bust you as I would a full-grown man, but I reckon you better not ride this trail any more."

"Why not?" inquired Wayland.

Belden glared. "Because I tell you so. Your sympathy-hunting game has just about run into the ground. You've worked this baby dodge about long enough. You're not so almighty sick as you put up to be, and you'd better hunt some other cure for lonesomeness, or I'll just about cave your chest in."

All this was shockingly plain talk for a slender young scholar to listen to, but Norcross remained calm. "I think you're unnecessarily excited," he remarked. "I have no desire to make trouble. I'm considering Miss Berea, who is too fine to be worried by us."

His tone was conciliating, and the cowman, in spite of himself, responded to it. "That's why I advise you to go. She was all right till you came. Colorado's a big place, and there are plenty other fine ranges for men of your complaint—why not try Routt County? This is certain, you can't stay in the same valley with my girl. I serve notice of that."

"You're making a prodigious ass of yourself," observed Wayland, with calm contempt.

"You think so—do you? Well, I'll make a jack-rabbit out of you if I find you on this ranch again. You've worked on my girl in some way

till she's jest about quit me. I don't see how you did it, you measly little pup, but you surely have turned her against me!" His rage burst into flame as he thought of her last words. "If you were so much as half a man I'd break you in two pieces right now; but you're not, you're nothing but a dead-on-the-hoof lunger, and there's nothing to do but run you out. So take this as your final notice. You straddle a horse and head east and keep a-ridin', and if I catch you with my girl again, I'll deal you a whole hatful of misery—now that's right!"

Thereupon, with a final glance of hate in his face, he whirled his horse and galloped away, leaving Norcross dumb with resentment, intermingled with wonder.

"Truly the West is a dramatic country! Here I am, involved in a lover's wrath, and under sentence of banishment, all within a month! Well, I suppose there's nothing to do but carry out Belden's orders. He's the boss," he said as he rode on. "I wonder just what happened after I left? Something stormy, evidently. She must have given him a sharp rebuff, or he wouldn't have been so furious with me. Perhaps she even broke her engagement with him. I sincerely hope she did. She's too good for him. That's the truth."

And so, from point to point, he progressed till with fine indignation he reached a resolution to stay and meet whatever came. "I certainly would be a timorous animal if I let myself be scared into flight by that big bonehead," he said at last. "I have as much right here as he has, and the law must protect me. It can't be that this country is entirely barbaric."

Nevertheless, he felt very weak and very much depressed as he rode up the street of the little town and dismounted at the hotel. The sidewalks were littered with loafing cowboys and lumber-jacks, and some of them quite openly ridiculed his riding-breeches and his thin legs. Others merely grinned, but in their grins lay something more insulting than words. "To them I am a poor thing," he admitted; but as he lifted his eyes to the mighty semicircular wall of the Bear Tooth Range, over which the daily storm was playing, he forgot his small worries. What gorgeous pageantry! What life-giving air! "If only civilized men and women possessed this glorious valley, what a place it would be!" he exclaimed, and in the heat of his indignant contempt he would have swept the valley clean.

As his eyes caught the flutter of the flag on its staff above the Forest Service building, his heart went out to the men who unselfishly wrought beneath that symbol of federal unity for the good of the future. “That is civilized,” he said; “that is prophetic,” and alighted at the door in a glow of confidence.

Nash, who was alone in the office, looked up from his work. “Come in,” he called, heartily. “Come in and report.”

“Thank you. I’d like to do so; and may I use your desk? I have a letter to write.”

“Make yourself at home. Take any desk you like. The men are all out on duty.”

“You’re very kind,” replied Wayland, gratefully. There was something reassuring in this greeting, and in the many signs of skill and scientific reading which the place displayed. It was like a bit of Washington in the midst of a careless, slovenly, lawless mountain town, and Norcross took his seat and wrote his letter with a sense of proprietorship.

“I’m getting up an enthusiasm for the Service just from hearing Alec Belden rave against it,” he said a few minutes later, as he looked up from his letter.

Nash grinned. “How did you like Meeker?”

“He’s a good man, but he has his peculiarities. Belden is your real enemy. He is blue with malignity—so are most of the cowmen I met up there. I wish I could do something for the Service. I’m a thoroughly up-to-date analytical chemist and a passable mining engineer, and my doctor says that for a year at least I must work in the open air. *Is* there anything in this Forest Service for a weakling like me?”

Nash considered. “The Supervisor might put you on as a temporary guard. I’ll speak to him if you like?”

“I wish you would. Tell him to forget the pay. I’m not in need of money, but I do require some incentive—something to do—something to give me direction. It bores me stiff to fish, and I’m sick of loafing. If McFarlane can employ me I shall be happy. The country is glorious, but I can’t live on scenery.”

“I think we can employ you, but you’ll have to go on as fire-guard or something like that for the first year. You see, the work is getting

to be more and more technical each year. As a matter of fact"—here he lowered his voice a little—"McFarlane is one of the old guard, and will have to give way. He don't know a thing about forestry, and is too old to learn. His girl knows more about it than he does. She helps him out on office work, too."

Wayland wondered a little at the freedom of expression on the part of Nash; but said: "If he runs his office as he runs his ranch he surely is condemned to go."

"There's where the girl comes in. She keeps the boys in the office lined up and maintains things in pretty fair shape. She knows the old man is in danger of losing his job, and she's doing her best to hold him to it. She's like a son to him and he relies on her judgment when a close decision comes up. But it's only a matter of time when he and all he represents must drift by. This is a big movement we're mixed with."

"I begin to feel that that's why I'd like to take it up. It's the only thing out here that interests me—and I've got to do something. I can't loaf."

"Well, you get Berrie to take up your case and you're all right. She has the say about who goes on the force in this forest."

It was late in the afternoon before Wayland started back to Meeker's with intent to repack his belongings and leave the ranch for good. He had decided not to call at McFarlane's, a decision which came not so much from fear of Clifford Belden as from a desire to shield Berea from further trouble, but as he was passing the gate, the girl rose from behind a clump of willows and called to him: "Oh, Mr. Norcross! Wait a moment."

He drew rein, and, slipping from his horse, approached her. "What is it, Miss Berrie?" he asked, with wondering politeness.

She confronted him with gravity. "It's too late for you to cross the ridge. It'll be dark long before you reach the cut-off. You'd better not try to make it."

"I think I can find my way," he answered, touched by her consideration. "I'm not so helpless as I was when I came."

"Just the same you mustn't go on," she insisted. "Father told me to ask you to come in and stay all night. He wants to meet you. I was afraid you might ride by after what happened to-day, and so I came

up here to head you off." She took his horse by the rein, and flashed a smiling glance up at him. "Come now, do as the Supervisor tells you."

"Wait a moment," he pleaded. "On second thought, I don't believe it's a good thing for me to go home with you. It will only make further trouble for—for us both."

She was almost as direct as Belden had been. "I know what you mean. I saw Cliff follow you. He jumped you, didn't he?"

"He overtook me—yes."

"What did he say?"

He hesitated. "He was pretty hot, and said things he'll be sorry for when he cools off."

"He told you not to come here any more—advised you to hit the out-going trail—didn't he?"

He flushed with returning shame of it all, but quietly answered: "Yes, he said something about riding east."

"Are you going to do it?"

"Not to-day; but I guess I'd better keep away from here."

She looked at him steadily. "Why?"

"Because you've been very kind to me, and I wouldn't for the world do anything to hurt or embarrass you."

"Don't you mind about me," she responded, bluntly. "What happened this morning wasn't your fault nor mine. Cliff made a mighty coarse play, something he'll have to pay for. He knows that right now. He'll be back in a day or two begging my pardon, and he won't get it. Don't you worry about me, not for a minute—I can take care of myself—I grew up that way, and don't you be chased out of the country by anybody. Come, father will be looking for you."

With a feeling that he was involving both the girl and himself in still darker storms, the young fellow yielded to her command, and together they walked along the weed-bordered path, while she continued:

"This isn't the first time Cliff has started in to discipline me; but it's obliged to be the last. He's the kind that think they own a girl just as soon as they get her to wear an engagement ring; but Cliff don't

own me. I told him I wouldn't stand for his coarse ways, and I won't!"

Wayland tried to bring her back to humor. "You're a kind of 'new woman.'"

She turned a stern look on him. "You bet I am! I was raised a free citizen. No man can make a slave of me. I thought he understood that; but it seems he didn't. He's all right in many ways—one of the best riders in the country—but he's pretty tolerable domineering—I've always known that—still, I never expected him to talk to me like he did to-day. It certainly was raw." She broke off abruptly. "You mustn't let Frank Meeker get the best of you, either," she advised. "He's a mean little weasel if he gets started. I'll bet he put Cliff up to this business."

"Do you think so?"

"Yes, he just as good as told me he'd do it. I know Frank, he's my own cousin, and someways I like him; but he's the limit when he gets going. You see, he wanted to get even with Cliff and took that way of doing it. I'll ride up there and give him a little good advice some Saturday."

He was no longer amused by her blunt speech, and her dark look saddened him. She seemed so unlike the happy girl he met that first day, and the change in her subtended a big, rough, and pitiless world of men against which she was forced to contend all her life.

Mrs. McFarlane greeted Norcross with cordial word and earnest hand-clasp. "I'm glad to see you looking so well," she said, with charming sincerity.

"I'm browner, anyway," he answered, and turned to meet McFarlane, a short, black-bearded man, with fine dark eyes and shapely hands—hands that had never done anything more toilsome than to lift a bridle rein or to clutch the handle of a gun. He was the horseman in all his training, and though he owned hundreds of acres of land, he had never so much as held a plow or plied a spade. His manner was that of the cow-boss, the lord of great herds, the claimant of empires of government grass-land. Poor as his house looked, he was in reality rich. Narrow-minded in respect to his own interests, he was well in advance of his neighbors on matters relating to the general welfare, a curious mixture of greed and generosity, as

most men are, and though he had been made Supervisor at a time when political pull still crippled the Service, he was loyal to the flag. "I'm mighty glad to see you," he heartily began. "We don't often get a man from the sea-level, and when we do we squeeze him dry."

His voice, low, languid, and soft, was most insinuating, and for hours he kept his guest talking of the East and its industries and prejudices; and Berrie and her mother listened with deep admiration, for the youngster had seen a good deal of the old world, and was unusually well read on historical lines of inquiry. He talked well, too, inspired by his attentive audience.

Berrie's eyes, wide and eager, were fixed upon him unwaveringly. He felt her wonder, her admiration, and was inspired to do his best. Something in her absorbed attention led him to speak of things so personal that he wondered at himself for uttering them.

"I've been dilettante all my life," was one of his confessions. "I've traveled; I've studied in a tepid sort of fashion; I went through college without any idea of doing anything with what I got; I had a sort of pride in keeping up with my fellows; and I had no idea of preparing for any work in the world. Then came my breakdown, and my doctor ordered me out here. I came intending to fish and loaf around, but I can't do that. I've got to do something or go back home. I expected to have a chum of mine with me, but his father was injured in an automobile accident, so he went into the office to help out."

As he talked the girl discovered new graces, new allurements in him. His smile, so subtly self-derisive, and his voice so flexible and so quietly eloquent, completed her subjugation. She had no further care concerning Clifford—indeed, she had forgotten him—for the time at least. The other part of her—the highly civilized latent power drawn from her mother—was in action. She lost her air of command, her sense of chieftainship, and sat humbly at the feet of this shining visitor from the East.

At last Mrs. McFarlane rose, and Berea, reluctantly, like a child loath to miss a fairy story, held out her hand to say good night, and the young man saw on her face that look of adoration which marks the birth of sudden love; but his voice was frank and his glance kindly as he said:

"Here I've done all the talking when I wanted you to tell *me* all sorts of things."

"I can't tell you anything."

"Oh yes, you can; and, besides, I want you to intercede for me with your father and get me into the Service. But we'll talk about that to-morrow. Good night."

After the women left the room Norcross said:

"I really am in earnest about entering the Forest Service. Landon filled me with enthusiasm about it. Never mind the pay. I'm not in immediate need of money; but I do need an interest in life."

McFarlane stared at him with kindly perplexity. "I don't know exactly what you can do, but I'll work you in somehow. You ought to work under a man like Settle, one that could put you through a training in the rudiments of the game. I'll see what can be done."

"Thank you for that half promise," said Wayland, and he went to his bed happier than at any moment since leaving home.

Berrie, on her part, did not analyze her feeling for Wayland, she only knew that he was as different from the men she knew as a hawk from a sage-hen, and that he appealed to her in a higher way than any other had done. His talk filled her with visions of great cities, and with thoughts of books, for though she was profoundly loyal to her mountain valley, she held other, more secret admirations. She was, in fact, compounded of two opposing tendencies. Her quiet little mother longing—in secret—for the placid, refined life of her native Kentucky town, had dowered her daughter with some part of her desire. She had always hated the slovenly, wasteful, and purposeless life of the cattle-rancher, and though she still patiently bore with her husband's shortcomings, she covertly hoped that Berea might find some other and more civilized lover than Clifford Belden. She understood her daughter too well to attempt to dictate her action; she merely said to her, as they were alone for a few moments: "I don't wonder your father is interested in Mr. Norcross, he's very intelligent—and very considerate."

"Too considerate," said Berrie, shortly; "he makes other men seem like bears or pigs."

Mrs. McFarlane said no more, but she knew that Cliff was, for the time, among the bears.

V

THE GOLDEN PATHWAY

Young Norcross soon became vitally engaged with the problems which confronted McFarlane, and his possible enrolment as a guard filled him with a sense of proprietorship in the forest, which made him quite content with Bear Tooth. He set to work at once to acquire a better knowledge of the extent and boundaries of the reservation. It was, indeed, a noble possession. Containing nearly eight hundred thousand acres of woodland, and reaching to the summits of the snow-lined peaks to the east, south, and west, it appealed to him with silent majesty. It drew upon his patriotism. Remembering how the timber of his own state had been slashed and burned, he began to feel a sense of personal responsibility. He had but to ride into it a few miles in order to appreciate in some degree its grandeur, considered merely as the source of a hundred swift streams, whose waters enriched the valleys lying below.

He bought a horse of his own—although Berrie insisted upon his retaining Pete—and sent for a saddle of the army type, and from sheer desire to keep entirely clear of the cowboy equipment procured puttees like those worn by cavalry officers, and when he presented himself completely uniformed, he looked not unlike a slender, young lieutenant of the cavalry on field duty, and in Berrie's eyes was wondrous alluring.

He took quarters at the hotel, but spent a larger part of each day in Berrie's company—a fact which was duly reported to Clifford Belden. Hardly a day passed without his taking at least one meal at the Supervisor's home.

As he met the rangers one by one, he perceived by their outfits, as well as by their speech, that they were sharply divided upon old lines and new. The experts, the men of college training, were quite ready to be known as Uncle Sam's men. They held a pride in their duties, a respect for their superiors, and an understanding of the governmental policy which gave them dignity and a quiet authority. They were less policemen than trusted agents of a federal department. Nevertheless, there was much to admire in the older

men, who possessed a self-reliance, a knowledge of nature, and a certain rough grace which made them interesting companions, and rendered them effective teachers of camping and trailing, and while they were secretly a little contemptuous of the "schoolboys"; they were all quite ready to ask for expert aid when knotty problems arose. It was no longer a question of grazing, it was a question of lumbering and reforestration.

Nash, who took an almost brotherly interest in his apprentice, warningly said: "You want to go well clothed and well shod. You'll have to meet all kinds of weather. Every man in the service, I don't care what his technical job is, should be schooled in taking care of himself in the forest and on the trail. I often meet surveyors and civil engineers—experts—who are helpless as children in camp, and when I want them to go into the hills and do field work, they are almost useless. The old-style ranger has his virtues. Settle is just the kind of instructor you young fellows need."

Berrie also had keen eyes for his outfit and his training, and under her direction he learned to pack a horse, set a tent, build a fire in the rain, and other duties.

"You want to remember that you carry your bed and board with you," she said, "and you must be prepared to camp anywhere and at any time."

The girl's skill in these particulars was marvelous to him, and added to the admiration he already felt for her. Her hand was as deft, as sure, as the best of them, and her knowledge of cayuse psychology more profound than any of the men excepting her father.

One day, toward the end of his second week in the village, the Supervisor said: "Well, now, if you're ready to experiment I'll send you over to Settle, the ranger, on the Horseshoe. He's a little lame on his pen-hand side, and you may be able to help him out. Maybe I'll ride over there with you. I want to line out some timber sales on the west side of Ptarmigan."

This commission delighted Norcross greatly. "I'm ready, sir, this moment," he answered, saluting soldier-wise.

That night, as he sat in the saddle-littered, boot-haunted front room of Nash's little shack, his host said, quaintly: "Don't think you are inheriting a soft snap, son. The ranger's job was a man's job in

the old days when it was a mere matter of patrolling; but it's worse and more of it to-day. A ranger must be ready and willing to build bridges, fight fire, scale logs, chop a hole through a windfall, use a pick in a ditch, build his own house, cook, launder, and do any other old trick that comes along. But you'll know more about all this at the end of ten days than I can tell you in a year."

"I'm eager for duty," replied Wayland.

The next morning, as he rode down to the office to meet the Supervisor, he was surprised and delighted to find Berea there. "I'm riding, too," she announced, delightedly. "I've never been over that new trail, and father has agreed to let me go along." Then she added, earnestly: "I think it's fine you're going in for the Service; but it's hard work, and you must be careful till you're hardened to it. It's a long way to a doctor from Settle's station."

He was annoyed as well as touched by her warning, for it proclaimed that he was still far from looking the brave forester he felt himself to be. He replied: "I'm not going to try anything wild, but I do intend to master the trailer's craft."

"I'll teach you how to camp, if you'll let me," she continued. "I've been on lots of surveys with father, and I always take my share of the work. I threw that hitch alone." She nodded toward the pack-horse, whose neat load gave evidence of her skill. "I told father this was to be a real camping expedition, and as the grouse season is on we'll live on the country. Can you fish?"

"Just about that," he laughed. "Good thing you didn't ask me if I could *catch* fish?" He was recovering his spirits. "It will be great fun to have you as instructor in camp science. I seem to be in for all kinds of good luck."

They both grew uneasy as time passed, for fear something or some one would intervene to prevent this trip, which grew in interest each moment; but at last the Supervisor came out and mounted his horse, the pack-ponies fell in behind, Berrie followed, and the student of woodcraft brought up to rear.

"I hope it won't rain," the girl called back at him, "at least not till we get over the divide. It's a fine ride up the hill, and the foliage is at its best."

It seemed to him the most glorious morning of his life. A few large white clouds were drifting like snow-laden war-vessels from west to east, silent and solemn, and on the highest peaks a gray vapor was lightly clinging. The near-by hills, still transcendently beautiful with the flaming gold of the aspen, burned against the dark green of the farther forest, and far beyond the deep purple of the shadowed slopes rose to smoky blue and tawny yellow. It was a season, an hour, to create raptures in a poet, so radiant, so wide-reaching, so tumultuous was the landscape. Nothing sad, nothing discouraging, showed itself. The wind was brisk, the air cool and clear, and jewel-like small, frost-painted vines and ripened shrubberies blazed upward from the ground. As he rode the youth silently repeated: "Beautiful! Beautiful!"

For several miles they rode upward through golden forests of aspens. On either hand rose thick walls of snow-white boles, and in the mystic glow of their gilded leaves the face of the girl shone with unearthly beauty. It was as if the very air had become auriferous. Magic coins dangled from the branches. Filmy shadows fell over her hair and down her strong young arms like priceless lace. Gold, gold! Everywhere gold, gold and fire!

Twice she stopped to gaze into Wayland's face to say, with hushed intensity: "Isn't it wonderful! Don't you wish it would last forever?"

Her words were poor, ineffectual; but her look, her breathless voice made up for their lack of originality. Once she said: "I never saw it so lovely before; it is an enchanted land!" with no suspicion that the larger part of her ecstasy arose from the presence of her young and sympathetic companion. He, too, responded to the beauty of the day, of the golden forest as one who had taken new hold on life after long illness.

Meanwhile the Supervisor was calmly leading the way upward, vaguely conscious of the magical air and mystic landscape in which his young folk floated as if on wings, thinking busily of the improvements which were still necessary in the trail, and weighing with care the clouds which still lingered upon the tallest summits, as if debating whether to go or to stay. He had never been an imaginative soul, and now that age had somewhat dimmed his eyes and blunted his senses he was placidly content with his path. The rapture of the lover, the song of the poet, had long since abandoned

his heart. And yet he was not completely oblivious. To him it was a nice day, but a "weather breeder."

"I wonder if I shall ever ride through this mountain world as unmoved as he seems to be?" Norcross asked himself, after some jarring prosaic remark from his chief. "I am glad Berrie responds to it."

At last they left these lower, wondrous forest aisles and entered the unbroken cloak of firs whose dark and silent deeps had a stern beauty all their own; but the young people looked back upon the glowing world below with wistful hearts. Back and forth across a long, down-sweeping ridge they wove their toilsome way toward the clouds, which grew each hour more formidable, awesome with their weight, ponderous as continents in their majesty of movement. The horses began to labor with roaring breath, and Wayland, dismounting to lighten his pony's burden, was dismayed to discover how thin the air had become. Even to walk unburdened gave him a smothering pain in his breast.

"Better stay on," called the girl. "My rule is to ride the hill going up and walk it going down. Down hill is harder on a horse than going up."

Nevertheless he persisted in clambering up some of the steepest parts of the trail, and was increasingly dismayed by the endless upward reaches of the foot-hills. A dozen times he thought, "We must be nearly at the top," and then other and far higher ridges suddenly developed. Occasionally the Supervisor was forced to unsling an ax and chop his way through a fallen tree, and each time the student hurried to the spot, ready to aid, but was quite useless. He admired the ease and skill with which the older man put his shining blade through the largest bole, and wondered if he could ever learn to do as well.

"One of the first essentials of a ranger's training is to learn to swing an ax," remarked McFarlane, "and you never want to be without a real tool. *I* won't stand for a hatchet ranger."

Berrie called attention to the marks on the trees. "This is the government sign—a long blaze with two notches above it. You can trust these trails; they lead somewhere."

"As you ride a trail study how to improve it," added the Supervisor, sheathing his ax. "They can all be improved."

Wayland was sure of this a few steps farther on, when the Supervisor's horse went down in a small bog-hole, and Berrie's pony escaped only by the most desperate plunging. The girl laughed, but Wayland was appalled and stood transfixed watching McFarlane as he calmly extricated himself from the saddle of the fallen horse and chirped for him to rise.

"You act as if this were a regular part of the journey," Wayland said to Berrie.

"It's all in the day's work," she replied; "but I despise a bog worse than anything else on the trail. I'll show you how to go round this one." Thereupon she slid from her horse and came tiptoeing back along the edge of the mud-hole.

McFarlane cut a stake and plunged it vertically in the mud. "That means 'no bottom,'" he explained. "We must cut a new trail."

Wayland was dismounting when Berrie said: "Stay on. Now put your horse right through where those rocks are. It's hard bottom there."

He felt like a child; but he did as she bid, and so came safely through, while McFarlane set to work to blaze a new route which should avoid the slough which was already a bottomless horror to the city man.

This mishap delayed them nearly half an hour, and the air grew dark and chill as they stood there, and the amateur ranger began to understand how serious a lone night journey might sometimes be. "What would I do if when riding in the dark my horse should go down like that and pin me in the mud?" he asked himself. "Eternal watchfulness is certainly one of the forester's first principles."

The sky was overshadowed now, and a thin drizzle of rain filled the air. The novice hastened to throw his raincoat over his shoulders; but McFarlane rode steadily on, clad only in his shirtsleeves, unmindful of the wet. Berrie, however, approved Wayland's caution. "That's right; keep dry," she called back. "Don't pay attention to father, he'd rather get soaked any day than unroll his slicker. You mustn't take him for model yet awhile."

He no longer resented her sweet solicitude, although he considered himself unentitled to it, and he rejoiced under the shelter of his fine new coat. He began to perceive that one could be defended against a storm.

After passing two depressing marshes, they came to a hillside so steep, so slippery, so dark, so forbidding, that one of the pack-horses balked, shook his head, and reared furiously, as if to say "I can't do it, and I won't try." And Wayland sympathized with him. The forest was gloomy and cold, and apparently endless.

After coaxing him for a time with admirable gentleness, the Supervisor, at Berrie's suggestion, shifted part of the load to her own saddle-horse, and they went on.

Wayland, though incapable of comment—so great was the demand upon his lungs—was not too tired to admire the power and resolution of the girl, who seemed not to suffer any special inconvenience from the rarefied air. The dryness of his open mouth, the throbbing of his troubled pulse, the roaring of his breath, brought to him with increasing dismay the fact that he had overlooked another phase of the ranger's job. "I couldn't chop a hole through one of these windfalls in a week," he admitted, as McFarlane's blade again liberated them from a fallen tree. "To do office work at six thousand feet is quite different from swinging an ax up here at timber-line," he said to the girl. "I guess my chest is too narrow for high altitudes."

"Oh, you'll get used to it," she replied, cheerily. "I always feel it a little at first; but I really think it's good for a body, kind o' stretches the lungs." Nevertheless, she eyed him with furtive anxiety.

He was beginning to be hungry also—he had eaten a very early breakfast—and he fell to wondering just where and when they were to camp; but he endured in silence. "So long as Berrie makes no complaint my mouth is shut," he told himself. "Surely I can stand it if she can." And so struggled on.

Up and up the pathway looped, crossing minute little boggy meadows, on whose bottomless ooze the grass shook like a blanket, descending steep ravines and climbing back to dark and muddy slopes. The forest was dripping, green, and silent now, a mysterious menacing jungle. All the warmth and magic of the golden forest

below was lost as though it belonged to another and sunnier world. Nothing could be seen of the high, snow-flecked peaks which had allured them from the valley. All about them drifted the clouds, and yet through the mist the flushed face of the girl glowed like a dew-wet rose, and the imperturbable Supervisor jogged his remorseless, unhesitating way toward the dense, ascending night.

"I'm glad I'm not riding this pass alone," Wayland said, as they paused again for breath.

"So am I," she answered; but her thought was not his. She was happy at the prospect of teaching him how to camp.

At last they reached the ragged edge of timber-line, and there, rolling away under the mist, lay the bare, grassy, upward-climbing, naked neck of the great peak. The wind had grown keener moment by moment, and when they left the storm-twisted pines below, its breath had a wintry nip. The rain had ceased to fall, but the clouds still hung densely to the loftiest summits. It was a sinister yet beautiful world—a world as silent as a dream, and through the short, thick grass the slender trail ran like a timid serpent. The hour seemed to have neither daytime nor season. All was obscure, mysterious, engulfing, and hostile. Had he been alone the youth would have been appalled by the prospect.

"Now we're on the divide," called Berea; and as she spoke they seemed to enter upon a boundless Alpine plain of velvet-russet grass. "This is the Bear Tooth plateau." Low monuments of loose rock stood on small ledges, as though to mark the course, and in the hollows dark ponds of icy water lay, half surrounded by masses of compact snow.

"This is a stormy place in winter," McFarlane explained. "These piles of stone are mighty valuable in a blizzard. I've crossed this divide in August in snow so thick I could not see a rod."

Half an hour later they began to descend. Wind-twisted, storm-bleached dwarf pines were first to show, then the firs, then the blue-green spruces, and then the sheltering deeps of the undespoiled forest opened, and the roar of a splendid stream was heard; but still the Supervisor kept his resolute way, making no promises as to dinner, though his daughter called: "We'd better go into camp at Beaver Lake. I hope you're not starved," she called to Wayland.

“But I am,” he replied, so frankly that she never knew how faint he really was. His knees were trembling with weakness, and he stumbled dangerously as he trod the loose rocks in the path.

They were all afoot now descending swiftly, and the horses ramped down the trail with expectant haste, so that in less than an hour from timber-line they were back into the sunshine of the lower valley, and at three o’clock or thereabouts they came out upon the bank of an exquisite lake, and with a cheery shout McFarlane called out: “Here we are, out of the wilderness!” Then to Wayland: “Well, boy, how did you stand it?”

“Just middling,” replied Wayland, reticent from weariness and with joy of their camping-place. The lake, dark as topaz and smooth as steel, lay in a frame of golden willows—as a jewel is filigreed with gold—and above it the cliffs rose three thousand feet in sheer majesty, their upper slopes glowing with autumnal grasses. A swift stream roared down a low ledge and fell into the pond near their feet. Grassy, pine-shadowed knolls afforded pasture for the horses, and two giant firs, at the edge of a little glade, made a natural shelter for their tent.

With businesslike certitude Berrie unsaddled her horse, turned him loose, and lent a skilful hand at removing the panniers from the pack-animals, while Wayland, willing but a little uncertain, stood awkwardly about. Under her instruction he collected dead branches of a standing fir, and from these and a few cones kindled a blaze, while the Supervisor hobbled the horses and set the tent.

“If the work of a forester were all like this it wouldn’t be so bad,” he remarked, wanly. “I think I know several fellows who would be glad to do it without a cent of pay.”

“Wait till you get to heaving a pick,” she retorted, “or scaling lumber in a rain, or building a corduroy bridge.”

“I don’t want to think of anything so dreadful. I want to enjoy this moment. I never was hungrier or happier in my life.”

“Do ye good,” interjected McFarlane, who had paused to straighten up the coffee-pot. “Most people don’t know what hunger means. There’s nothing finer in the world than good old-fashioned hunger, provided you’ve got something to throw into yourself when

you come into camp. This is a great place for fish. I think I'll see if I can't jerk a few out."

"Better wait till night," said his daughter. "Mr. Norcross is starving, and so am I. Plain bacon will do me."

The coffee came to a boil, the skillet gave off a wondrous savor, and when the corn and beans began to sizzle, the trailers sat down to their feast in hearty content, with one of the panniers for a table, and the fir-tree for roof. "This is one of the most perfectly appointed dining-rooms in the world," exclaimed the alien.

The girl met his look with a tender smile. "I'm glad you like it, for perhaps we'll stay a week."

"It looks stormy," the Supervisor announced, after a glance at the crests. "I'd like to see a soaking rain—it would end all our worry about fires. The country's very dry on this side the range, and your duty for the present will be to help Tony patrol."

While he talked on, telling the youth how to beat out a small blaze and how to head off a large one, Wayland listened, but heard his instructions only as he sensed the brook, as an accompaniment to Berea's voice, for as she busied herself clearing away the dishes and putting the camp to rights, she sang.

"You're to have the tent," said her father, "and we two huskies will sleep under the shade of this big fir. If you're ever caught out," he remarked to Wayland, "hunt for one of these balsam firs; there's always a dry spot under them. See here!" And he showed him the sheltered circle beneath the tree. "You can always get twigs for kindling from their inner branches," he added, "or you can hew into one of these dead trees and get some pitchy splinters. There's material for everything you want if you know where to find it. Shelter, food, fire are all here for us as they were for the Indians. A ranger who needs a roof all the time is not worth his bacon."

So, one by one, the principles of camping were taught by the kindly old rancher; but the hints which the girl gave were quite as valuable, for Wayland was eager to show her that he could be, and intended to be, a forester of the first class or perish in the attempt.

McFarlane went farther and talked freely of the forest and what it meant to the government. "We're all green at the work," he said,

“and we old chaps are only holding the fort against the thieves till you youngsters learn how to make the best use of the domain.”

“I can see that it takes more than technical training to enable a man to be Supervisor of a forest,” conceded Wayland.

McFarlane was pleased with this remark. “That’s true, too. It’s a big responsibility. When I first came on, it was mainly patrolling; but now, with a half dozen sawmills, and these ‘June Eleventh Homesteads,’ and the new ways of marking timber, and the grazing and free-use permits, the office work has doubled. And this is only the beginning. Wait till Colorado has two millions of people, and all these lower valleys are clamoring for water. Then you’ll see a new party spring up—right here in our state.”

Berrie was glowing with happiness. “Let’s stay here till the end of the week,” she suggested. “I’ve always wanted to camp on this lake, and now I’m here I want time to enjoy it.”

“We’ll stay a day or two,” said her father; “but I must get over to that ditch survey which is being made at the head of Poplar, and then Moore is coming over to look at some timber on Porcupine.”

The young people cut willow rods and went angling at the outlet of the lake with prodigious success. The water rippled with trout, and in half an hour they had all they could use for supper and breakfast, and, behold, even as they were returning with their spoil they met a covey of grouse strolling leisurely down to the lake’s edge. “Isn’t it a wonderful place!” exclaimed the happy girl. “I wish we could stay a month.”

“It’s like being on the Swiss Family Robinson’s Island. I never was more content,” he said, fervently. “I wouldn’t mind staying here all winter.”

“I would!” she laughed. “The snow falls four feet deep up here. It’s likely there’s snow on the divide this minute, and camping in the snow isn’t so funny. Some people got snowed in over at Deep Lake last year and nearly all their horses starved before they could get them out. This is a fierce old place in winter-time.”

“I can’t imagine it,” he said, indicating the glowing amphitheater which inclosed the lake. “See how warmly the sun falls into that high basin! It’s all as beautiful as the Tyrol.”

The air at the moment was golden October, and the dark clouds which lay to the east seemed the wings of a departing rather than an approaching storm; and even as they looked, a rainbow sprang into being, arching the lake as if in assurance of peace and plenty, and the young people, as they turned to face it, stood so close together that each felt the glow of the other's shoulder. The beauty of the scene seemed to bring them together in body as in spirit, and they fell silent.

McFarlane seemed quite unconscious of any necromancy at work upon his daughter. He smoked his pipe, made notes in his field-book, directing an occasional remark toward his apprentice, enjoying in his tranquil, middle-age way the beauty and serenity of the hour.

"This is the kind of thing that makes up for a hard day's ride," he said, jocosely.

As the sunset came on, the young people again loitered down to the water's edge, and there, seated side by side, on a rocky knoll, watched the phantom gold lift from the willows and climb slowly to the cliffs above, while the water deepened in shadow, and busy muskrats marked its glossy surface with long silvery lines. Mischievous camp-birds peered at the couple from the branches of the pines uttering satirical comment, while squirrels, frankly insolent, dropped cones upon their heads and barked in saucy glee.

Wayland forgot all the outside world, forgot that he was studying to be a forest ranger, and was alive only to the fact that in this most bewitching place, in this most entrancing hour, he had the companionship of a girl whose eyes sought his with every new phase of the silent and wonderful scene which shifted swiftly before their eyes like a noiseless yet prodigious drama. The blood in his thin body warmed. He forgot his fatigue, his weakness. He was the poet and the forest lover, and this the heart of the range.

Lightly the golden glory rose till only the highest peaks retained its flame; then it leapt to the clouds behind the peaks, and gorgeously lit their somber sulphurous masses. The edges of the pool grew black as night; the voice of the stream grew stern; and a cold wind began to fall from the heights, sliding like an invisible but palpable icy cataract.

At last the girl rose. “It is getting dark. I must go back and get supper.”

“We don’t need any supper,” he protested.

“Father does, and you’ll be hungry before morning,” she retorted, with sure knowledge of men.

He turned from the scene reluctantly; but once at the camp-fire cheerfully gave his best efforts to the work in hand, seconding Berrie’s skill as best he could.

The trout, deliciously crisp, and some potatoes and batter-cakes made a meal that tempted even his faint appetite, and when the dishes were washed and the towels hung out to dry, deep night possessed even the high summit of stately Ptarmigan.

McFarlane then said: “I’ll just take a little turn to see that the horses are all right, and then I think we’d better close in for the night.”

When they were alone in the light of the fire, Wayland turned to Berrie: “I’m glad you’re here. It must be awesome to camp alone in a wilderness; and yet, I suppose, I must learn to do it.”

“Yes, the ranger often has to camp alone, ride alone, and work alone for weeks at a time,” she assured him. “A good trailer don’t mind a night trip any more than he does a day trip, or if he does he never admits it. Rain, snow, darkness, is all the same to him. Most of the boys are fifteen to forty miles from the post-office.”

He smiled ruefully. “I begin to have new doubts about this ranger business. It’s a little more vigorous than I thought it was. Suppose a fellow breaks a leg on one of those high trails?”

“He mustn’t!” she hastened to say. “He can’t afford really to take reckless chances; but then father won’t expect as much of you as he does of the old-stagers. You’ll have plenty of time to get used to it.”

“I may be like the old man’s cow and the green shavings, just as I’m getting used to it I’ll die.”

She didn’t laugh at this. “You mustn’t be rash; don’t jump into any hard jobs for the present; let the other fellow do it.”

“But that’s not very manly. If I go into the work I ought to be able to take my share of any task that turns up.”

"You'd better go slow," she argued. "Wait till you get hardened to it. You need something over your shoulders now," she added; and rose and laid a blanket over him. "You're tired; you'll take a chill if you're not careful."

"You're very considerate," he said, looking up at her gratefully. "But it makes me feel like a child to think I need such care. If honestly trying, if going up against these hills and winds with Spartan courage will do me good, I'm for it. I'm resolved to show to you and your good father that I can learn to ride and pack and cut trail, and do all the rest of it—there's some honor in qualifying as a forester, and I'm going to do it."

"Of course there isn't much in it for you. The pay, even of a full ranger, isn't much, after you count out his outlay for horses and saddles and their feed, and his own feed. It don't leave so very much of his ninety dollars a month."

"I'm not thinking of that," he retorted. "If you had once seen a doctor shake his head over you, as I have, you'd think just being here in this glorious spot, as I am to-night, would be compensation enough. It's a joy to be in the world, and a delight to have you for my teacher."

She was silent under the pleasure of his praise, and he went on: "I *know* I'm better, and, I'm perfectly certain I can regain my strength. The very odor of these pines and the power of these winds will bring it back to me. See me now, and think how I looked when I came here six weeks ago."

She looked at him with fond agreement. "You *are* better. When I saw you first I surely thought you were—"

"I know what you thought—and forget it, *please*! Think of me as one who has touched mother earth again and is on the way to being made a giant. You can't imagine how marvelous, how life-giving all this is to me. It is poetry, it is prophecy, it is fulfilment. I am fully alive again."

McFarlane, upon his return, gave some advice relating to the care of horses. "All this stock which is accustomed to a barn or a pasture will quit you," he warned. "Watch your broncos. Put them on the outward side of your camp when you bed down, and pitch your tent near the trail, then you will hear the brutes if they start back. Some

men tie their stock all up; but I usually picket my saddle-horse and hobble the rest."

It was a delightful hour for schooling, and Wayland would have been content to sit there till morning listening; but the air bit, and at last the Supervisor asked: "Have you made your bed? If you have, turn in. I shall get you out early to-morrow." As he saw the bed, he added: "I see you've laid out a bed of boughs. That shows how Eastern you are. We don't do that out here. It's too cold in this climate, and it's too much work. You want to hug the ground—if it's dry."

The weary youth went to his couch with a sense of timorous elation, for he had never before slept beneath the open sky. Over him the giant fir—tall as a steeple—dropped protecting shadow, and looking up he could see the firelight flickering on the wide-spread branches. His bed seemed to promise all the dreams and restful drowse which the books on outdoor life had described, and close by in her tiny little canvas house he could hear the girl in low-voiced conversation with her sire. All conditions seemed right for slumber, and yet slumber refused to come!

After the Supervisor had rolled himself in the blanket, long after all sounds had ceased in the tent, there still remained for the youth a score of manifold excitations to wakefulness. Down on the lake the muskrats and beavers were at their work. Nocturnal birds uttered uncanny, disturbing cries. Some animal with stealthy crackling tread was ranging the hillside, and the roar of the little fall, so far from lulling him to sleep—as he had imagined it would—stimulated his imagination till he could discern in it the beat of scurrying wings and the patter of pernicious padded feet. "If I am appalled by the wilderness now, what would it seem to me were I alone!" he whispered.

Then, too, his bed of boughs discovered unforeseen humps and knobs, and by the time he had adjusted himself to their discomfort, it became evident that his blankets were both too thin and too short. And the gelid air sweeping down from the high places submerged him as if with a flood of icy water. In vain he turned and twisted within his robes. No sooner were his shoulders covered and comfortable than his hip-bones began to ache. Later on the blood of his feet congealed, and in the effort to wrap them more closely, he

uncovered his neck and shoulders. The frost became a wolf, the night an oppressor. “I must have a different outfit,” he decided. And then thinking that this was but early autumn, he added: “What will it be a month later?” He began to doubt his ability to measure up to the heroic standard of a forest patrol.

The firelight flickered low, and a prowling animal daringly sniffed about the camp, pawing at the castaway fragments of the evening meal. The youth was rigid with fear. “Is it a bear? Shall I call the Supervisor?” he asked himself.

He felt sadly unprotected, and wished McFarlane nearer at hand. “It may be a lion, but probably it is only a coyote, or a porcupine,” he concluded, and lay still for what seemed like hours waiting for the beast to gorge himself and go away.

He longed for morning with intense desire, and watched an amazingly luminous star which hung above the eastern cliff, hoping to see it pale and die in dawn light, but it did not; and the wind bit even sharper. His legs ached almost to the cramping-point, and his hip-bones protruded like knots on a log. “I didn’t know I had door-knobs on my hips,” he remarked, with painful humor, and, looking down at his feet, he saw that a thick rime was gathering on his blanket. “This sleeping out at night isn’t what the books crack it up to be,” he groaned again, drawing his feet up to the middle of his bed to warm them. “Shall I resign to-morrow? No, I’ll stay with it; but I’ll have more clothing. I’ll have blankets six inches thick. Heaps of blankets—the fleecy kind—I’ll have an air-mattress.” His mind luxuriated in these details till he fell into an uneasy drowse.

VI

STORM-BOUND

Wayland was awakened by the mellow voice of his chief calling: "*All out! All out! Daylight down the creek!*" Breathing a prayer of thankfulness, the boy sat up and looked about him. "The long night is over at last, and I am alive!" he said, and congratulated himself.

He drew on his shoes and, stiff and shivering, stood about in helpless misery, while McFarlane kicked the scattered, charred logs together, and fanned the embers into a blaze with his hat. It was heartening to see the flames leap up, flinging wide their gorgeous banners of heat and light, and in their glow the tenderfoot ranger rapidly recovered his courage, though his teeth still chattered and the forest was dark.

"How did you sleep?" asked the Supervisor.

"First rate—at least during the latter part of the night," Wayland briskly lied.

"That's good. I was afraid that Adirondack bed of yours might let the white wolf in."

"My blankets did seem a trifle thin," confessed Norcross.

"It don't pay to sleep cold," the Supervisor went on. "A man wants to wake up refreshed, not tired out with fighting the night wind and frost. I always carry a good bed."

It was instructive to see how quietly and methodically the old mountaineer went about his task of getting the breakfast. First he cut and laid a couple of eight-inch logs on either side of the fire, so that the wind drew through them properly, then placing his dutch-oven cover on the fire, he laid the bottom part where the flames touched it. Next he filled his coffee-pot with water, and set it on the coals. From his pannier he took his dishes and the flour and salt and pepper, arranging them all within reach, and at last laid some slices of bacon in the skillet.

At this stage of the work a smothered cry, half yawn, half complaint, came from the tent. "Oh, hum! Is it morning?" inquired Berrie.

"Morning!" replied her father. "It's going toward noon. You get up or you'll have no breakfast."

Thereupon Wayland called: "Can I get you anything, Miss Berrie? Would you like some warm water?"

"What for?" interposed McFarlane, before the girl could reply.

"To bathe in," replied the youth.

"To bathe in! If a daughter of mine should ask for warm water to wash with I'd throw her in the creek."

Berrie chuckled. "Sometimes I think daddy has no feeling for me. I reckon he thinks I'm a boy."

"Hot water is debilitating, and very bad for the complexion," retorted her father. "Ice-cold water is what you need. And if you don't get out o' there in five minutes I'll dowse you with a dipperful."

This reminded Wayland that he had not yet made his own toilet, and, seizing soap, towel, and brushes, he hurried away down to the beach where he came face to face with the dawn. The splendor of it smote him full in the eyes. From the waveless surface of the water a spectral mist was rising, a light veil, through which the stupendous cliffs loomed three thousand feet in height, darkly shadowed, dim and far. The willows along the western marge burned as if dipped in liquid gold, and on the lofty crags the sun's coming created keen-edged shadows, violet as ink. Truly this forestry business was not so bad after all. It had its compensations.

Back at the camp-fire he found Berrie at work, glowing, vigorous, laughing. Her comradeship with her father was very charming, and at the moment she was rallying him on his method of bread-mixing. "You should rub the lard into the flour," she said. "Don't be afraid to get your hands into it—after they are clean. You can't mix bread with a spoon."

"Sis, I made camp bread for twenty years afore you were born."

"It's a wonder you lived to tell of it," she retorted, and took the pan away from him. "That's another thing *you* must learn," she said to Wayland. "You must know how to make bread. You can't expect to find bake-shops or ranchers along the way."

In the heat of the fire, in the charm of the girl's presence, the young man forgot the discomforts of the night, and as they sat at breakfast, and the sun rising over the high summits flooded them

with warmth and good cheer, and the frost melted like magic from the tent, the experience had all the satisfying elements of a picnic. It seemed that nothing remained to do; but McFarlane said: "Well, now, you youngsters wash up and pack whilst I reconnoiter the stock." And with his saddle and bridle on his shoulder he went away down the trail.

Under Berrie's direction Wayland worked busily putting the camp equipment in proper parcels, taking no special thought of time till the tent was down and folded, the panniers filled and closed, and the fire carefully covered. Then the girl said: "I hope the horses haven't been stampeded. There are bears in this valley, and horses are afraid of bears. Father ought to have been back before this. I hope they haven't quit us."

"Shall I go and see?"

"No, he'll bring 'em—if they're in the land of the living. He picketed his saddle-horse, so he's not afoot. Nobody can teach him anything about trailing horses, and, besides, you might get lost. You'd better keep close to camp."

Thereupon Wayland put aside all responsibility. "Let's see if we can catch some more fish," he urged.

To this she agreed, and together they went again to the outlet of the lake—where the trout could be seen darting to and fro on the clear, dark flood—and there cast their flies till they had secured ten good-sized fish.

"We'll stop now," declared the girl. "I don't believe in being wasteful."

Once more at the camp they prepared the fish for the pan. The sun suddenly burned hot and the lake was still as brass, but great, splendid, leisurely, gleaming clouds were sailing in from the west, all centering about Chief Audobon, and the experienced girl looked often at the sky. "I don't like the feel of the air. See that gray cloud spreading out over the summits of the range, that means something more than a shower. I do hope daddy will overtake the horses before they cross the divide. It's going to pour up there."

"What can I do?"

"Nothing. We'll stay right here and get dinner for him. He'll be hungry when he gets back."

As they were unpacking the panniers and getting out the dishes, thunder broke from the high crags above the lake, and the girl called out:

"Quick! It's going to rain! We must reset the tent and get things under cover."

Once more he was put to shame by the decision, the skill, and the strength with which she went about re-establishing the camp. She led, he followed in every action. In ten minutes the canvas was up, the beds rolled, the panniers protected, the food stored safely; but they were none too soon, for the thick gray veil of rain, which had clothed the loftiest crags for half an hour, swung out over the water—leaden-gray under its folds—and with a roar which began in the tall pines—a roar which deepened, hushed only when the thunder crashed resoundingly from crag to crest—the tempest fell upon the camp and the world of sun and odorous pine vanished almost instantly, and a dark, threatening, and forbidding world took its place.

But the young people—huddled close together beneath the tent—would have enjoyed the change had it not been for the thought of the Supervisor. "I hope he took his slicker," the girl said, between the tearing, ripping flashes of the lightning. "It's raining hard up there."

"How quickly it came. Who would have thought it could rain like this after so beautiful a morning?"

"It storms when it storms—in the mountains," she responded, with the sententious air of her father. "You never can tell what the sky is going to do up here. It is probably snowing on the high divide. Looks now as though those cayuses pulled out sometime in the night and have hit the trail for home. That's the trouble with stall-fed stock. They'll quit you any time they feel cold and hungry. Here comes the hail!" she shouted, as a sharper, more spiteful roar sounded far away and approaching. "Now keep from under!"

"What will your father do?" he called.

"Don't worry about him. He's at home any place there's a tree. He's probably under a balsam somewhere, waiting for this ice to spill out. The only point is, they may get over the divide, and if they do it will be slippery coming back."

For the first time the thought that the Supervisor might not be able to return entered Wayland's mind; but he said nothing of his fear.

The hail soon changed to snow, great, clinging, drowsy, soft, slow-moving flakes, and with their coming the roar died away and the forest became as silent as a grave of bronze. Nothing moved, save the thick-falling, feathery, frozen vapor, and the world was again very beautiful and very mysterious.

"We must keep the fire going," warned the girl. "It will be hard to start after this soaking."

He threw upon the fire all of the wood which lay near, and Berrie, taking the ax, went to the big fir and began to chop off the dry branches which hung beneath, working almost as effectively as a man. Wayland insisted on taking a turn with the tool; but his efforts were so awkward that she laughed and took it away again. "You'll have to take lessons in swinging an ax," she said. "That's part of the job."

Gradually the storm lightened, the snow changed back into rain, and finally to mist; but up on the heights the clouds still rolled wildly, and through their openings the white drifts bleakly shone.

"It's all in the trip," said Berrie. "You have to take the weather as it comes on the trail." As the storm lessened she resumed the business of cooking the midday meal, and at two o'clock they were able to eat in comparative comfort, though the unmelted snow still covered the trees, and water dripped from the branches.

"Isn't it beautiful!" exclaimed Wayland, with glowing boyish face. "The landscape is like a Christmas card. In its way it's quite as beautiful as that golden forest we rode through."

"It wouldn't be so beautiful if you had to wallow through ten miles of it," she sagely responded. "Daddy will be wet to the skin, for I found he didn't take his slicker. However, the sun may be out before night. That's the way the thing goes in the hills."

To the youth, though the peaks were storm-hid, the afternoon was joyous. Berrie was a sweet companion. Under her supervision he practised at chopping wood and took a hand at cooking. At her suggestion he stripped the tarpaulin from her father's bed and stretched it over a rope before the tent, thus providing a

commodious kitchen and dining-room. Under this roof they sat and talked of everything except what they should do if the father did not return, and as they talked they grew to even closer understanding.

Though quite unlearned of books, she had something which was much more piquant than anything which theaters and novels could give—she possessed a marvelous understanding of the natural world in which she lived. As the companion of her father on many of his trips, she had absorbed from him, as well as from the forest, a thousand observations of plant and animal life. Seemingly she had nothing of the woman's fear of the wilderness, she scarcely acknowledged any awe of it. Of the bears, and other predatory beasts, she spoke carelessly.

"Bears are harmless if you let 'em alone," she said, "and the mountain-lion is a great big bluff. He won't fight, you can't make him fight; but the mother lion will. She's dangerous when she has cubs—most animals are. I was out hunting grouse one day with a little twenty-two rifle, when all at once, as I looked up along a rocky point I was crossing, I saw a mountain-lion looking at me. First I thought I'd let drive at him; but the chances were against my getting him from there, so I climbed up above him—or where I thought he was—and while I was looking for him I happened to glance to my right, and there he was about fifty feet away looking at me pleasant as you please. Didn't seem to be mad at all—'peared like he was just wondering what I'd do next. I jerked my gun into place, but he faded away. I crawled around to get behind him, and just when I reached the ledge on which he had been standing a few minutes before, I saw him just where I'd been. He had traded places with me. I began to have that creepy feeling. He was so silent and so kind of pleasant-looking I got leery of him. It just seemed like as though I'd dreamed him. He didn't seem real."

Wayland shuddered. "You foolish girl! Why didn't you run?"

"I did. I began to figure then that this was a mother lion, and that her cubs were close by, and that she could just as well sneak up and drop on me from above as not. So I got down and left her alone. It was her popping up now here and now there like a ghost that locoed me. I was sure scared."

Wayland did not enjoy this tale. "I never heard of such folly. Did your father learn of that adventure?"

"Yes, I told him."

"Didn't he forbid your hunting any more?"

"No, indeed! Why should he? He just said it probably was a lioness, and that it was just as well to let her alone. He knows I'm no chicken."

"How about your mother—does she approve of such expeditions?"

"No, mother worries more or less when I'm away; but then she knows it don't do any good. I'm taking all kinds of chances every day, anyhow."

He had to admit that she was better able to care for herself in the wilderness than most men—even Western men—and though he had not yet witnessed a display of her skill with a rifle, he was ready to believe that she could shoot as well as her sire. Nevertheless, he liked her better when engaged in purely feminine duties, and he led the talk back to subjects concerning which her speech was less blunt and manlike.

He liked her when she was joking, for delicious little curves of laughter played about her lips. She became very amusing, as she told of her "visits East," and of her embarrassments in the homes of city friends. "I just have to own up that about all the schooling I've got is from the magazines. Sometimes I wish I had pulled out for town when I was about fourteen; but, you see, I didn't feel like leaving mother, and she didn't feel like letting me go—and so I just got what I could at Bear Tooth." She sprang up. "There's a patch of blue sky. Let's go see if we can't get a grouse."

The snow had nearly all sunk into the ground on their level; but it still lay deep on the heights above, and the torn masses of vapor still clouded the range. "Father has surely had to go over the divide," she said, as they walked down the path along the lake shore. "He'll be late getting back, and a plate of hot chicken will seem good to him."

Together they strolled along the edge of the willows. "The grouse come down to feed about this time," she said. "We'll put up a covey soon."

It seemed to him as though he were re-living the experiences of his ancestors—the pioneers of Michigan—as he walked this wilderness with this intrepid huntress whose alert eyes took note of

every moving thing. She was delightfully unconscious of self, of sex, of any doubt or fear. A lovely Diana—strong and true and sweet.

Within a quarter of a mile they found their birds, and she killed four with five shots. “This is all we need,” she said, “and I don’t believe in killing for the sake of killing. Rangers should set good examples in way of game preservation. They are deputy game-wardens in most states, and good ones, too.”

They stopped for a time on a high bank above the lake, while the sunset turned the storm-clouds into mountains of brass and iron, with sulphurous caves and molten glowing ledges. This grandiose picture lasted but a few minutes, and then the Western gates closed and all was again gray and forbidding. “Open and shut is a sign of wet,” quoted Berrie, cheerily.

The night rose formidably from the valley while they ate their supper; but Berrie remained tranquil. “Those horses probably went clean back to the ranch. If they did, daddy can’t possibly get back before eight o’clock, and he may not get back till to-morrow.”

VII

THE WALK IN THE RAIN

Norcross, with his city training, was acutely conscious of the delicacy of the situation. In his sister's circle a girl left alone in this way with a man would have been very seriously embarrassed; but it was evident that Berrie took it all joyously, innocently. Their being together was something which had happened in the natural course of weather, a condition for which they were in no way responsible. Therefore she permitted herself to be frankly happy in the charm of their enforced intimacy.

She had never known a youth of his quality. He was so considerate, so refined, so quick of understanding, and so swift to serve. He filled her mind to the exclusion of unimportant matters like the snow, which was beginning again; indeed, her only anxiety concerned his health, and as he toiled amid the falling flakes, intent upon heaping up wood enough to last out the night, she became solicitous.

"You will be soaked," she warningly cried. "Don't stay out any more. Come to the fire. I'll bring in the wood."

Something primeval, some strength he did not know he possessed sustained him, and he toiled on. "Suppose this snow keeps falling?" he retorted. "The Supervisor will not be able to get back to-night—perhaps not for a couple of nights. We will need a lot of fuel."

He did not voice the fear of the storm which filled his thought; but the girl understood it. "It won't be very cold," she calmly replied. "It never is during these early blizzards; and, besides, all we need to do is to drop down the trail ten miles and we'll be entirely out of it."

"I'll feel safer with plenty of wood," he argued; but soon found it necessary to rest from his labors. Coming in to camp, he seated himself beside her on a roll of blankets, and so together they tended the fire and watched the darkness roll over the lake till the shining crystals seemed to drop from a measureless black arch, soundless and oppressive. The wind died away, and the trees stood as if turned into bronze, moveless, save when a small branch gave way and

dropped its rimy burden, or a squirrel leaped from one top to another. Even the voice of the waterfall seemed muffled and remote.

"I'm a long way from home and mother," Wayland said, with a smile; "but—I like it."

"Isn't it fun?" she responded. "In a way it's nicer on account of the storm. But you are not dressed right; you should have waterproof boots. You never can tell when you may be set afoot. You should always go prepared for rain and snow, and, above all, have an extra pair of thick stockings. Your feet are soaked now, aren't they?"

"They are; but your father told me to always dry my boots on my feet, otherwise they'd shrink out of shape."

"That's right, too; but you'd better take 'em off and wring out your socks or else put on dry ones."

"You insist on my playing the invalid," he complained, "and that makes me angry. When I've been over here a month you'll find me a glutton for hardship. I shall be a bear, a grizzly, fearful to contemplate. My roar will affright you."

She laughed like a child at his ferocity. "You'll have to change a whole lot," she said, and drew the blanket closer about his shoulders. "Just now your job is to keep warm and dry. I hope you won't get lonesome over here."

"I'm not going to open a book or read a newspaper. I'm not going to write to a single soul except you. I'll be obliged to report to you, won't I?"

"I'm not the Supervisor."

"You're the next thing to it," he quickly retorted. "You've been my board of health from the very first. I should have fled for home long ago had it not been for you."

Her eyes fell under his glance. "You'll get pretty tired of things over here. It's one of the lonesomest stations in the forest."

"I'll get lonesome for you; but not for the East." This remark, or rather the tone in which it was uttered, brought another flush of consciousness to the girl's face.

"What time is it now?" she asked, abruptly.

He looked at his watch. "Half after eight."

"If father isn't on this side of the divide now he won't try to cross. If he's coming down the slope he'll be here in an hour, although that trail is a tolerably tough proposition this minute. A patch of dead timber on a dark night is sure a nuisance, even to a good man. He may not make it."

"Shall I fire my gun?"

"What for?"

"As a signal to him."

This amused her. "Daddy don't need any hint about direction—what he needs is a light to see the twist of the trail through those fallen logs."

"Couldn't I rig up a torch and go to meet him?"

She put her hand on his arm. "You stay right here!" she commanded. "You couldn't follow that trail five minutes."

"You have a very poor opinion of my skill."

"No, I haven't; but I know how hard it is to keep direction on a night like this and I don't want you wandering around in the timber. Father can take care of himself. He's probably sitting under a big tree smoking his pipe before his fire—or else he's at home. He knows we're all right, and we are. We have wood and grub, and plenty of blankets, and a roof over us. You can make your bed under this fly," she said, looking up at the canvas. "It beats the old balsam as a roof. You mustn't sleep cold again."

"I think I'd better sit up and keep the fire going," he replied, heroically. "There's a big log out there that I'm going to bring in to roll up on the windward side."

"It'll be cold and wet early in the morning, and I don't like to hunt kindling in the snow," she said. "I always get everything ready the night before. I wish you had a better bed. It seems selfish of me to have the tent while you are cold."

One by one—under her supervision—he made preparations for morning. He cut some shavings from a dead, dry branch of fir and put them under the fly, and brought a bucket of water from the creek, and then together they dragged up the dead tree.

Had the young man been other than he was, the girl's purity, candor, and self-reliance would have conquered him, and when she withdrew to the little tent and let fall the frail barrier between them,

she was as safe from intrusion as if she had taken refuge behind gates of triple brass. Nothing in all his life had moved him so deeply as her solicitude, her sweet trust in his honor, and he sat long in profound meditation. Any man would be rich in the ownership of her love, he admitted. That he possessed her pity and her friendship he knew, and he began to wonder if he had made a deeper appeal to her than this.

"Can it be that I am really a man to her," he thought, "I who am only a poor weakling whom the rain and snow can appall?"

Then he thought of the effect of this night upon her life. What would Clifford Belden do now? To what deeps would his rage descend if he should come to know of it?

Berrie was serene. Twice she spoke from her couch to say: "You'd better go to bed. Daddy can't get here till to-morrow now."

"I'll stay up awhile yet. My boots aren't entirely dried out."

As the flame sank low the cold bit, and he built up the half-burned logs so that they blazed again. He worked as silently as he could; but the girl again spoke, with sweet authority: "Haven't you gone to bed yet?"

"Oh yes, I've been asleep. I only got up to rebuild the fire."

"I'm afraid you're cold."

"I'm as comfortable as I deserve; it's all schooling, you know. Please go to sleep again." His teeth were chattering as he spoke, but he added: "I'm all right."

After a silence she said: "You must not get chilled. Bring your bed into the tent. There is room for you."

"Oh no, that isn't necessary. I'm standing it very well."

"You'll be sick!" she urged, in a voice of alarm. "Please drag your bed inside the door. What would I do if you should have pneumonia to-morrow? You must not take any risk of a fever."

The thought of a sheltered spot, of something to break the remorseless wind, overcame his scruples, and he drew his bed inside the tent and rearranged it there.

"You're half frozen," she said. "Your teeth are chattering."

"It isn't so much the cold," he stammered. "I'm tired."

“You poor boy!” she exclaimed, and rose in her bed. “I’ll get up and heat some water for you.”

“I’ll be all right, in a few moments,” he said. “Please go to sleep. I shall be snug as a bug in a moment.”

She watched his shadowy motions from her bed, and when at last he had nestled into his blankets, she said: “If you don’t lose your chill I’ll heat a rock and put at your feet.”

He was ready to cry out in shame of his weakness; but he lay silent till he could command his voice, then he said: “That would drive me from the country in disgrace. Think of what the fellows down below will say when they know of my cold feet.”

“They won’t hear of it; and, besides, it is better to carry a hot-water bag than to be laid up with a fever.”

Her anxiety lessened as his voice resumed its pleasant tenor flow. “Dear girl,” he said, “no one could have been sweeter—more like a guardian angel to me. Don’t place me under any greater obligation. Go to sleep. I am better—much better now.”

She did not speak for a few moments, then in a voice that conveyed to him a knowledge that his words of endearment had deeply moved her, she softly said: “Good night.”

He heard her sigh drowsily thereafter once or twice, and then she slept, and her slumber redoubled in him his sense of guardianship, of responsibility. Lying there in the shelter of her tent, the whole situation seemed simple, innocent, and poetic; but looked at from the standpoint of Clifford Belden it held an accusation.

“It cannot be helped,” he said. “The only thing we can do is to conceal the fact that we spent the night beneath this tent alone.”

In the belief that the way would clear with the dawn, he, too, fell asleep, while the fire sputtered and smudged in the fitful mountain wind.

The second dawn came slowly, as though crippled by the storm and walled back by the clouds. Gradually, austerely, the bleak, white peaks began to define themselves above the firs. The camp-birds called cheerily from the wet branches which overhung the smoldering embers of the fire, and so at last day was abroad in the sky.

With a dull ache in his bones, Wayland crept out to the fire and set to work fanning the coals with his hat, as he had seen the Supervisor do. He worked desperately till one of the embers began to angrily sparkle and to smoke. Then slipping away out of earshot he broke an armful of dry fir branches to heap above the wet, charred logs. Soon these twigs broke into flame, and Berrie, awakened by the crackle of the pine branches, called out: "Is it daylight?"

"Yes, but it's a very *dark* daylight. Don't leave your warm bed for the dampness and cold out here; stay where you are; I'll get breakfast."

"How are you this morning? Did you sleep?"

"Fine!"

"I'm afraid you had a bad night," she insisted, in a tone which indicated her knowledge of his suffering.

"Camp life has its disadvantages," he admitted, as he put the coffee-pot on the fire. "But I'm feeling better now. I never fried a bird in my life, but I'm going to try it this morning. I have some water heating for your bath." He put the soap, towel, and basin of hot water just inside the tent flap. "Here it is. I'm going to bathe in the lake. I must show my hardihood."

He heard her protesting as he went off down the bank, but his heart was resolute. "I'm not dead yet," he said, grimly. "An invalid who can spend two such nights as these, and still face a cold wind, has some vitality in his bones after all."

When he returned he found the girl full dressed, alert, and glowing; but she greeted him with a touch of shyness and self-consciousness new to her, and her eyes veiled themselves before his glance.

"*Now*, where do you suppose the Supervisor is?" he asked.

"I hope he's at home," she replied, quite seriously. "I'd hate to think of him camped in the high country without bedding or tent."

"Oughtn't I to take a turn up the trail and see? I feel guilty somehow—I must do something!"

"You can't help matters any by hoofing about in the mud. No, we'll just hold the fort till he comes, that's what he'll expect us to do."

He submitted once more to the force of her argument, and they ate breakfast in such intimacy and good cheer that the night's

discomforts and anxieties counted for little. As the sun broke through the clouds Berrie hung out the bedding in order that its dampness might be warmed away.

"We may have to camp here again to-night," she explained, demurely.

"Worse things could happen than that," he gallantly answered. "I wouldn't mind a month of it, only I shouldn't want it to rain or snow all the time."

"Poor boy! You did suffer, didn't you? I was afraid you would. Did you sleep at all?" she asked, tenderly.

"Oh yes, after I came inside; but, of course, I was more or less restless expecting your father to ride up, and then it's all rather exciting business to a novice. I could hear all sorts of birds and beasts stepping and fluttering about. I was scared in spite of my best resolution."

"That's funny; I never feel that way. I slept like a log after I knew you were comfortable. You must have a better bed and more blankets. It's always cold up here."

The sunlight was short-lived. The clouds settled over the peaks, and ragged wisps of gray vapor dropped down the timbered slopes of the prodigious amphitheater in which the lake lay. Again Berrie made everything snug while her young woodsman toiled at bringing logs for the fire.

In truth, he was more elated than he had been since leaving school, for he was not only doing a man's work in the world, he was serving a woman in the immemorial way of the hewer of wood and the carrier of water. His fatigue and the chill of the morning wore away, and he took vast pride in dragging long poles down the hillside, forcing Berrie to acknowledge that he was astonishingly strong. "But don't overdo it," she warned.

At last fully provided for, they sat contentedly side by side under the awning and watched the falling rain as it splashed and sizzled on the sturdy fire. "It's a little like being shipwrecked on a desert island, isn't it?" he said. "As if our boats had drifted away."

At noon she again prepared an elaborate meal. She served potatoes and grouse, hot biscuit with sugar syrup, and canned peaches, and coffee done to just the right color and aroma. He

declared it wonderful, and they ate with repeated wishes that the Supervisor might turn up in time to share their feast; but he did not. Then Berrie said, firmly: "Now you must take a snooze, you look tired."

He was, in truth, not only drowsy but lame and tired. Therefore, he yielded to her suggestion.

She covered him with blankets and put him away like a child. "Now you have a good sleep," she said, tenderly. "I'll call you when daddy comes."

With a delicious sense of her protecting care he lay for a few moments listening to the drip of the water on the tent, then drifted away into peace and silence.

When he woke the ground was again covered with snow, and the girl was feeding the fire with wood which her own hands had supplied.

Hearing him stir, she turned and fixed her eyes upon him with clear, soft gaze. "How do you feel by now?" she asked.

"Quite made over," he replied, rising alertly.

His cheer, however, was only pretense. He was greatly worried. "Something has happened to your father," he said. "His horse has thrown him, or he has slipped and fallen." His peace and exultation were gone. "How far is it down to the ranger station?"

"About twelve miles."

"Don't you think we'd better close camp and go down there? It is now three o'clock; we can walk it in five hours."

She shook her head. "No, I think we'd better stay right here. It's a long, hard walk, and the trail is muddy."

"But, dear girl," he began, desperately, "it won't do for us to camp here—alone—in this way another night. What will Cliff say?"

She flamed red, then whitened. "I don't care what Cliff thinks—I'm done with him—and no one that I really care about would blame us." She was fully aware of his anxiety now. "It isn't our fault."

"It will be *my* fault if I keep you here longer!" he answered. "We must reach a telephone and send word out. Something may have happened to your father."

"I'm not worried a bit about him. It may be that there's been a big snowfall up above us—or else a windstorm. The trail may be blocked; but don't worry. He may have to go round by Lost Lake pass." She pondered a moment. "I reckon you're right. We'd better pack up and rack down the trail to the ranger's cabin. Not on my account, but on yours. I'm afraid you've taken cold."

"I'm all right, except I'm very lame; but I am anxious to go on. By the way, is this ranger Settle married?"

"No, his station is one of the lonesomest cabins on the forest. No woman will stay there."

This made Wayland ponder. "Nevertheless," he decided, "we'll go. After all, the man is a forest officer, and you are the Supervisor's daughter."

She made no further protest, but busied herself closing the panniers and putting away the camp utensils. She seemed to recognize that his judgment was sound.

It was after three when they left the tent and started down the trail, carrying nothing but a few toilet articles.

He stopped at the edge of the clearing. "Should we have left a note for the Supervisor?"

She pointed to their footprints. "There's all the writing he needs," she assured him, leading the way at a pace which made him ache. She plashed plumply into the first puddle in the path. "No use dodging 'em," she called over her shoulder, and he soon saw that she was right.

The trees were dripping, the willows heavy with water, and the mud ankle-deep—in places—but she pushed on steadily, and he, following in her tracks, could only marvel at her strength and sturdy self-reliance. The swing of her shoulders, the poise of her head, and the lithe movement of her waist, made his own body seem a poor thing.

For two hours they zigzagged down a narrow cañon heavily timbered with fir and spruce—a dark, stern avenue, crossed by roaring streams, and filled with frequent boggy meadows whereon the water lay mid-leg deep.

"We'll get out of this very soon," she called, cheerily.

By degrees the gorge widened, grew more open, more genial. Aspen thickets of pale-gold flashed upon their eyes like sunlight, and grassy bunches afforded firmer footing, but on the slopes their feet slipped and slid painfully. Still Berea kept her stride. “We must get to the middle fork before dark,” she stopped to explain, “for I don’t know the trail down there, and there’s a lot of down timber just above the station. Now that we’re cut loose from our camp I feel nervous. As long as I have a tent I am all right; but now we are in the open I worry. How are you standing it?” She studied him with keen and anxious glance, her hand upon his arm.

“Fine as a fiddle,” he replied, assuming a spirit he did not possess, “but you are marvelous. I thought cowgirls couldn’t walk?”

“I can do anything when I have to,” she replied. “We’ve got three hours more of it.” And she warningly exclaimed: “Look back there!”

They had reached a point from which the range could be seen, and behold it was covered deep with a seamless robe of new snow.

“That’s why dad didn’t get back last night. He’s probably wallowing along up there this minute.” And she set off again with resolute stride. Wayland’s pale face and labored breath alarmed her. She was filled with love and pity, but she pressed forward desperately.

As he grew tired, Wayland’s boots, loaded with mud, became fetters, and every slope greasy with mire seemed an almost insurmountable barricade. He fell several times, but made no outcry. “I will not add to her anxiety,” he said to himself.

At last they came to the valley floor, over which a devastating fire had run some years before, and which was still covered with fallen trees in desolate confusion. Here the girl made her first mistake. She kept on toward the river, although Wayland called attention to a trail leading to the right up over the low grassy hills. For a mile the path was clear, but she soon found herself confronted by an endless maze of blackened tree-trunks, and at last the path ended abruptly.

Dismayed and halting, she said: “We’ve got to go back to that trail which branched off to the right. I reckon that was the highland trail which Settle made to keep out of the swamp. I thought it was a trail from Cameron Peak, but it wasn’t. Back we go.”

She was suffering keenly now, not on her own account, but on his, for she could see that he was very tired, and to climb up that hill again was like punishing him a second time.

When she picked up the blazed trail it was so dark that she could scarcely follow it; but she felt her way onward, turning often to be sure that he was following. Once she saw him fall, and cried out: "It's a shame to make you climb this hill again. It's all my fault. I ought to have known that that lower road led down into the timber."

Standing close beside him in the darkness, knowing that he was weary, wet, and ill, she permitted herself the expression of her love and pity. Putting her arm about him, she drew his cheek against her own, saying: "Poor boy, your hands are cold as ice." She took them in her own warm clasp. "Oh, I wish we had never left the camp! What does it matter what people say?" Then she broke down and wailed. "I shall never forgive myself if you—" Her voice failed her.

He bravely reassured her: "I'm not defeated, I'm just tired. That's all. I can go on."

"But you are shaking."

"That is merely a nervous chill. I'm good for another hour. It's better to keep moving, anyhow."

She thrust her hand under his coat and laid it over his heart. "You are tired out," she said, and there was anguish in her voice. "Your heart is pounding terribly. You mustn't do any more climbing. And, hark, there's a wolf!"

He listened. "I hear him; but we are both armed. There's no danger from wild animals."

"Come!" she said, instantly recovering her natural resolution. "We can't stand here. The station can't be far away. We must go on."

VIII

THE OTHER GIRL

The girl's voice stirred the benumbed youth into action again, and he followed her mechanically. His slender stock of physical strength was almost gone, but his will remained unbroken. At every rough place she came back to him to support him, to hearten him, and so he crept on through the darkness, falling often, stumbling against the trees, slipping and sliding, till at last his guide, pitching down a sharp slope, came directly upon a wire fence.

"Glory be!" she called. "Here is a fence, and the cabin should be near, although I see no light. Hello! Tony!"

No voice replied, and, keeping Wayland's hand, she felt her way along the fence till it revealed a gate; then she turned toward the roaring of the stream, which grew louder as they advanced. "The cabin is near the falls, that much I know," she assured him. Then a moment later she joyfully cried out: "Here it is!"

Out of the darkness a blacker, sharper shadow rose. Again she called, but no one answered. "The ranger is away," she exclaimed, in a voice of indignant alarm. "I do hope he left the door unlocked."

Too numb with fatigue, and too dazed by the darkness to offer any aid, Wayland waited—swaying unsteadily on his feet—while she tried the door. It was bolted, and with but a moment's hesitation, she said: "It looks like a case of breaking and entering. I'll try a window." The windows, too, were securely fastened. After trying them all, she came back to where Wayland stood. "Tony didn't intend to have anybody pushing in," she decided. "But if the windows will not raise they will smash."

A crash of glass followed, and with a feeling that it was all part of a dream, Wayland waited while the girl made way through the broken sash into the dark interior. Her next utterance was a cry of joy: "Oh, but it's nice and warm in here! I can't open the door. You'll have to come in the same way I did."

He was too weak and too irresolute to respond immediately, and, reaching out, she took him by the arms and dragged him across the sill. Her strength seemed prodigious. A delicious warmth, a grateful

dryness, a sense of shelter enfolded him like a garment. The place smelled deliciously of food, of fire, of tobacco.

Leading him toward the middle of the room, Berrie said: “Stand here till I strike a light.”

As her match flamed up Norcross found himself in a rough-walled cabin, in which stood a square cook-stove, a rude table littered with dishes, and three stools made of slabs. It was all very rude; but it had all the value of a palace at the moment.

The girl’s quick eye saw much else. She located an oil-lamp, some pine-wood, and a corner cupboard. In a few moments the lamp was lit, the stove refilled with fuel, and she was stripping Wayland’s wet coat from his back, cheerily discoursing as she did so. “Here’s one of Tony’s old jackets, put that on while I see if I can’t find some dry stockings for you. Sit right down here by the stove; put your feet in the oven. I’ll have a fire in a jiffy. There, that’s right. Now I’ll start the coffee-pot.” She soon found the coffee, but it was unground. “Wonder, where he keeps his coffee-mill.” She rummaged about for a few minutes, then gave up the search. “Well, no matter, here’s the coffee, and here’s a hammer. One of the laws of the trail is this: If you can’t do a thing one way, do it another.”

She poured the coffee beans into an empty tomato-can and began to pound them with the end of the hammer handle, laughing at Wayland’s look of wonder and admiration. “Necessity sure is the mother of invention out here. How do you feel by now? Isn’t it nice to own a roof and four walls? I’m going to close up that window as soon as I get the coffee started. Are you warming up?”

“Oh yes, I’m all right now,” he replied; but he didn’t look it, and her own cheer was rather forced. He was in the grasp of a nervous chill, and she was deeply apprehensive of what the result of his exposure might be. It seemed as if the coffee would never come to a boil.

“I depend on that to brace you up,” she said.

After hanging a blanket over the broken window, she set out some cold meat and a half dozen baking-powder biscuits, which she found in the cupboard, and as soon as the coffee was ready she poured it for him; but she would not let him leave the fire. She brought his supper to him and sat beside him while he ate and drank.

"You must go right to bed," she urged, as she studied his weary eyes. "You ought to sleep for twenty-four hours."

The hot, strong coffee revived him physically and brought back a little of his courage, and he said: "I'm ashamed to be such a weakling."

"Now hush," she commanded. "It's not your fault that you are weak. Now, while I am eating my supper you slip off your wet clothes and creep into Tony's bunk, and I'll fill one of these syrup-cans with hot water to put at your feet."

It was of no use for him to protest against her further care. She insisted, and while she ate he meekly carried out her instructions, and from the delicious warmth and security of his bed watched her moving about the stove till the shadows of the room became one with the dusky figures of his sleep.

A moment later something falling on the floor woke him with a start, and, looking up, he found the sun shining, and Berrie confronting him with anxious face. "Did I waken you?" she asked. "I'm awfully sorry. I'm trying to be extra quiet. I dropped a pan. How do you feel this *morning*?"

He pondered this question a moment. "Is it to-morrow or the next week?"

She laughed happily. "It's only the next day. Just keep where you are till the sun gets a little higher." She drew near and put a hand on his brow. "You don't feel feverish. Oh, I hope this trip hasn't set you back."

He laid his hands together, and then felt of his pulse. "I don't seem to have a temperature. I just feel lazy, limp and lazy; but I'm going to get up, if you'll just leave the room for a moment—"

"Don't try it now. Wait till you have had your breakfast. You'll feel stronger then."

He yielded again to the force of her will, and fell back into a luxurious drowse hearing the stove roar and the bacon sizzle in the pan. There was something primitive and broadly poetic in the girl's actions. Through the haze of the kitchen smoke she enlarged till she became the typical frontier wife, the goddess of the skillet and the coffee-pot, the consort of the pioneer, equally skilled with the rifle and the rolling-pin. How many millions of times had this scene been

enacted on the long march of the borderman from the Susquehanna to the Bear Tooth Range?

Into his epic vision the pitiful absurdity of his own part in the play broke like a sad discord. “Of course, it is not my fault that I am a weakling,” he argued. “Only it was foolish for me to thrust myself into this stern world. If I come safely out of this adventure I will go back to the sheltered places where I belong.”

At this point came again the disturbing realization that this night of struggle, and the ministrations of his brave companion had involved him deeper in a mesh from which honorable escape was almost impossible. The ranger’s cabin, so far from being an end of their compromising intimacy, had added and was still adding to the weight of evidence against them both. The presence of the ranger or the Supervisor himself could not now save Berea from the gossips.

She brought his breakfast to him, and sat beside him while he ate, chatting the while of their good fortune. “It is glorious outside, and I am sure daddy will get across to-day, and Tony is certain to turn up before noon. He probably went down to Coal City to get his mail.”

“I must get up at once,” he said, in a panic of fear and shame. “The Supervisor must not find me laid out on my back. Please leave me alone for a moment.”

She went out, closing the door behind her, and as he crawled from his bed every muscle in his body seemed to cry out against being moved. Nevertheless, he persisted, and at last succeeded in putting on his clothes, even his shoes—though he found tying the laces the hardest task of all—and he was at the wash-basin bathing his face and hands when Berrie hurriedly re-entered. “Some tourists are coming,” she announced, in an excited tone. “A party of five or six people, a woman among them, is just coming down the slope. Now, who do you suppose it can be? It would be just our luck if it should turn out to be some one from the Mill.”

He divined at once the reason for her dismay. The visit of a woman at this moment would not merely embarrass them both, it would torture Berrie. “What is to be done?” he asked, roused to alertness.

“Nothing; all we can do is to stand pat and act as if we belonged here.”

"Very well," he replied, moving stiffly toward the door. "Here's where I can be of some service. I am an excellent white liar."

As our hero crawled out into the brilliant sunshine some part of his courage came back to him. Though lame in every muscle, he was not ill. That was the surprising thing. His head was clear, and his breath full and deep. "My lungs are all right," he said to himself. "I'm not going to collapse." And he looked round him with a new-born admiration of the wooded hills which rose in somber majesty on either side the roaring stream. "How different it all looks this morning," he said, remembering the deep blackness of the night.

The beat of hoofs upon the bridge drew his attention to the cavalcade, which the keen eyes of the girl had detected as it came over the ridge to the east. The party consisted of two men and two women and three pack-horses completely outfitted for the trail.

One of the women, spurring her horse to the front, rode serenely up to where Wayland stood, and called out: "Good morning. Are you the ranger?"

"No, I'm only the guard. The ranger has gone down the trail."

He perceived at once that the speaker was an alien like himself, for she wore tan-colored riding-boots, a divided skirt of expensive cloth, and a jaunty, wide-rimmed sombrero. She looked, indeed, precisely like the heroine of the prevalent Western drama. Her sleeves, rolled to the elbow, disclosed shapely brown arms, and her neck, bare to her bosom, was equally sun-smit; but she was so round-cheeked, so childishly charming, that the most critical observer could find no fault with her make-up.

One of the men rode up. "Hello, Norcross. What are you doing over here?"

The youth smiled blandly. "Good morning, Mr. Belden. I'm serving my apprenticeship. I'm in the service now."

"The mischief you are!" exclaimed the other. "Where's Tony?"

"Gone for his mail. He'll return soon. What are *you* doing over here, may I ask?"

"I'm here as guide to Mr. Moore. Mr. Moore, this is Norcross, one of McFarlane's men. Mr. Moore is connected with the tie-camp operations of the railway."

Moore was a tall, thin man with a gray beard and keen blue eyes. “Where’s McFarlane? We were to meet him here. Didn’t he come over with you?”

“We started together, but the horses got away, and he was obliged to go back after them. He also is likely to turn up soon.”

“I am frightfully hungry,” interrupted the girl. “Can’t you hand me out a hunk of bread and meat? We’ve been riding since daylight.”

Berrie suddenly appeared at the door. “Sure thing,” she called out. “Slide down and come in.”

Moore removed his hat and bowed. “Good morning, Miss McFarlane, I didn’t know you were here. You know my daughter Siona?”

Berrie nodded coldly. “I’ve met her.”

He indicated the other woman. “And Mrs. Belden, of course, you know.”

Mrs. Belden, the fourth member of the party, a middle-aged, rather flabby person, just being eased down from her horse, turned on Berrie with a battery of questions. “Good Lord! Berrie McFarlane, what are you doing over in this forsaken hole? Where’s your dad? And where is Tony? If Cliff had known you was over here he’d have come, too.”

Berrie retained her self-possession. “Come in and get some coffee, and we’ll straighten things out.”

Apparently Mrs. Belden did not know that Cliff and Berrie had quarreled, for she treated the girl with maternal familiarity. She was a good-natured, well-intentioned old sloven, but a most renowned tattler, and the girl feared her more than she feared any other woman in the valley. She had always avoided her, but she showed nothing of this dislike at the moment.

Wayland drew the younger woman’s attention by saying: “It’s plain that you, like myself, do not belong to these parts, Miss Moore.”

“What makes you think so?” she brightly queried.

“Your costume is too appropriate. Haven’t you noticed that the women who live out here carefully avoid convenient and artistic dress? Now your outfit is precisely what they should wear and don’t.”

This amused her. “I know, but they all say they have to wear out their Sunday go-to-meeting clothes, whereas I can ‘rag out proper.’ I’m glad you like my ‘rig.’”

“When I look at you,” he said, “I’m back on old Broadway at the Herald Square Theater. The play is ‘Little Blossom, or the Cowgirl’s Revenge.’ The heroine has just come into the miner’s cabin—”

“Oh, go ’long,” she replied, seizing her cue and speaking in character, “you’re stringin’ me.”

“Not on your life! Your outfit is a peacherino,” he declared. “I am glad you rode by.”

At the moment he was bent on drawing the girl’s attention from Berrie, but as she went on he came to like her. She said: “No, I don’t belong here; but I come out every year during vacation with my father. I love this country. It’s so big and wide and wild. Father has built a little bungalow down at the lower mill, and we enjoy every day of our stay.”

“You’re a Smith girl,” he abruptly asserted.

“What makes you think so?”

“Oh, there’s something about you Smith girls that gives you dead away.”

“Gives us away! I like that!”

“My phrase was unfortunate. I like Smith girls,” he hastened to say; and in five minutes they were on the friendliest terms—talking of mutual acquaintances—a fact which both puzzled and hurt Berea. Their laughter angered her, and whenever she glanced at them and detected Siona looking into Wayland’s face with coquettish simper, she was embittered. She was glad when Moore came in and interrupted the dialogue.

Norcross did not relax, though he considered the dangers of cross-examination almost entirely passed. In this he was mistaken, for no sooner was the keen edge of Mrs. Belden’s hunger dulled than her curiosity sharpened.

“Where did you say the Supervisor was?” she repeated.

“The horses got away, and he had to go back after them,” again responded Berrie, who found the scrutiny of the other girl deeply disconcerting.

"When do you expect him back?"

"Any minute now," she replied, and in this she was not deceiving them, although she did not intend to volunteer any information which might embarrass either Wayland or herself.

Norcross tried to create a diversion. "Isn't this a charming valley?"

Siona took up the cue. "Isn't it! It's romantic enough to be the back-drop in a Bret Harte play. I love it!"

Moore turned to Wayland. "I know a Norcross, a Michigan lumberman, Vice-President of the Association. Is he, by any chance, a relative?"

"Only a father," retorted Wayland, with a smile. "But don't hold me responsible for anything he has done. We seldom agree."

Moore's manner changed abruptly. "Indeed! And what is the son of W. W. Norcross doing out here in the Forest Service?"

The change in her father's tone was not lost upon Siona, who ceased her banter and studied the young man with deeper interest, while Mrs. Belden, detecting some restraint in Berrie's tone, renewed her questioning: "Where did you camp last night?"

"Right here."

"I don't see how the horses got away. There's a pasture here, for we rode right through it."

Berrie was aware that each moment of delay in explaining the situation looked like evasion, and deepened the significance of her predicament, and yet she could not bring herself to the task of minutely accounting for her time during the last two days.

Belden came to her relief. "Well, well! We'll have to be moving on. We're going into camp at the mouth of the West Fork," he said, as he rose. "Tell Tony and the Supervisor that we want to line out that timber at the earliest possible moment."

Siona, who was now distinctly coquetting with Wayland, held out her hand. "I hope you'll find time to come up and see us. I know we have other mutual friends, if we had time to get at them."

His answer was humorous. "I am a soldier. I am on duty. I'm not at all sure that I shall have a moment's leave; but I will call if I can possibly do so."

They started off at last without having learned in detail anything of the intimate relationship into which the Supervisor's daughter and young Norcross had been thrown, and Mrs. Belden was still so much in the dark that she called to Berrie: "I'm going to send word to Cliff that you are over here. He'll be crazy to come the minute he finds it out."

"Don't do that!" protested Berrie.

Wayland turned to Berrie. "That would be pleasant," he said, smilingly.

But she did not return his smile. On the contrary, she remained very grave. "I wish that old tale-bearer had kept away. She's going to make trouble for us all. And that girl, isn't she a spectacle? I never could bear her."

"Why, what's wrong with her? She seems a very nice, sprightly person."

"She's a regular play actor. I don't like made-up people. Why does she go around with her sleeves rolled up that way, and—and her dress open at the throat?"

"Oh, those are the affectations of the moment. She wants to look tough and boisterous. That's the fad with all the girls, just now. It's only a harmless piece of foolishness."

She could not tell him how deeply she resented his ready tone of camaraderie with the other girl; but she was secretly suffering. It hurt her to think that he could forget his aches and be so free and easy with a stranger at a moment's notice. Under the influence of that girl's smile he seemed to have quite forgotten his exhaustion and his pain. It was wonderful how cheerful he had been while she was in sight.

In all this Berrie did him an injustice. He had been keenly conscious, during every moment of the time, not only of his bodily ills, but of Berrie, and he had kept a brave face in order that he might prevent further questioning on the part of a malicious girl. It was his only way of being heroic. Now that the crisis was passed he was quite as much of a wreck as ever.

A new anxiety beset her. "I hope they won't happen to meet father on the trail."

"Perhaps I should go with them and warn him."

“Oh, it doesn’t matter,” she wearily answered. “Old Mrs. Belden will never rest till she finds out just where we’ve been, and just what we’ve done. She’s that kind. She knows everything that goes on.”

He understood her fear, and yet he was unable to comfort her in the only way she could be comforted. That brief encounter with Siona Moore—a girl of his own world—had made all thought of marriage with Berea suddenly absurd. Without losing in any degree the sense of gratitude he felt for her protecting care, and with full acknowledgment of her heroic support of his faltering feet, he revolted from putting into words a proposal of marriage. “I love her,” he confessed to himself, “and she is a dear, brave girl; but I do not love her as a man should love the woman he is to marry.”

A gray shadow had plainly fallen between them. Berea sensed the change in his attitude, and traced it to the influence of the coquette whose smiling eyes and bared arms had openly challenged admiration. It saddened her to think that one so fine as he had seemed could yield even momentary tribute to an open and silly coquette.

IX

FURTHER PERPLEXITIES

Wayland, for his part, was not deceived by Siona Moore. He knew her kind, and understood her method of attack. He liked her pert ways, for they brought back his days at college, when dozens of just such misses lent grace and humor and romance to the tennis court and to the football field. She carried with her the aroma of care-free, athletic girlhood. Flirtation was in her as charming and almost as meaningless as the preening of birds on the bank of a pool in the meadow.

Speaking aloud, he said: "Miss Moore travels the trail with all known accessories, and I've no doubt she thinks she is a grand campaigner; but I am wondering how she would stand such a trip as that you took last night. I don't believe she could have done as well as I. She's the imitation—you're the real thing."

The praise involved in this speech brought back a little of Berrie's humor. "I reckon those brown boots of hers would have melted," she said, with quaint smile.

He became very grave. "If it had not been for you, dear girl, I would be lying up there in the forest this minute. Nothing but your indomitable spirit kept me moving. I shall be deeply hurt if any harm comes to you on account of me."

"If it hadn't been for me you wouldn't have started on that trip last night. It was perfectly useless. It would have been better for us both if we had stayed in camp, for we wouldn't have met these people."

"That's true," he replied; "but we didn't know that at the time. We acted for the best, and we must not blame ourselves, no matter what comes of it."

They fell silent at this point, for each was again conscious of their new relationship. She, vaguely suffering, waited for him to resume the lover's tone, while he, oppressed by the sense of his own shortcomings and weakness, was planning an escape. "It's all nonsense, my remaining in the forest. I'm not fitted for it. It's too severe. I'll tell McFarlane so and get out."

Perceiving his returning weakness and depression, Berea insisted on his lying down again while she set to work preparing dinner. “There is no telling when father will get here,” she said. “And Tony will be hungry when he comes. Lie down and rest.”

He obeyed her silently, and, going to the bunk, at once fell asleep. How long he slept he could not tell, but he was awakened by the voice of the ranger, who was standing in the doorway and regarding Berrie with a round-eyed stare.

He was a tall, awkward fellow of about thirty-five, plainly of the frontier type; but a man of intelligence. At the end of a brief explanation Berrie said, with an air of authority: “Now you’d better ride up the trail and bring our camp outfit down. We can’t go back that way, anyhow.”

The ranger glanced toward Wayland. “All right, Miss Berrie, but perhaps your tenderfoot needs a doctor.”

Wayland rose painfully but resolutely. “Oh no, I am not sick. I’m a little lame, that’s all. I’ll go along with you.”

“No,” said Berrie, decisively. “You’re not well enough for that. Get up your horses, Tony, and by that time I’ll have some dinner ready.”

“All right, Miss Berrie,” replied the man, and turned away.

Hardly had he crossed the bridge on his way to the pasture, when Berrie cried out: “There comes daddy.”

Wayland joined her at the door, and stood beside her watching the Supervisor, as he came zigzagging down the steep hill to the east, with all his horses trailing behind him roped together head-to-tail.

“He’s had to come round by Lost Lake,” she exclaimed. “He’ll be tired out, and absolutely starved. Wahoo!” she shouted in greeting, and the Supervisor waved his hand.

There was something superb in the calm seat of the veteran as he slid down the slope. He kept his place in the saddle with the air of the rider to whom hunger, fatigue, windfalls, and snowslides were all a part of the day’s work; and when he reined in before the door and dropped from his horse, he put his arm about his daughter’s neck with quiet word: “I thought I’d find you here. How is everything?”

“All right, daddy; but what about you? Where have you been?”

“Clean back to Mill Park. The blamed cayuses kept just ahead of me all the way.”

"Poor old dad! And on top of that came the snow."

"Yes, and a whole hatful. I couldn't get back over the high pass. Had to go round by Lost Lake, and to cap all, Old Baldy took a notion not to lead. Oh, I've had a peach of a time; but here I am. Have you seen Moore and his party?"

"Yes, they're in camp up the trail. He and Alec Belden and two women. Are you hungry?"

He turned a comical glance upon her. "Am I hungry? Sister, I am a wolf. Norcross, take my horses down to the pasture."

She hastened to interpose. "Let me do that, daddy, Mr. Norcross is badly used up. You see, we started down here late yesterday afternoon. It was raining and horribly muddy, and I took the wrong trail. The darkness caught us and we didn't reach the station till nearly midnight."

Wayland acknowledged his weakness. "I guess I made a mistake, Supervisor; I'm not fitted for this strenuous life."

McFarlane was quick to understand. "I didn't intend to pitchfork you into the forest life quite so suddenly," he said. "Don't give up yet awhile. You'll harden to it."

"Here comes Tony," said Berrie. "He'll look after the ponies."

Nevertheless Wayland went out, believing that Berrie wished to be alone with her father for a short time.

As he took his seat McFarlane said: "You stayed in camp till yesterday afternoon, did you?"

"Yes, we were expecting you every moment."

He saw nothing in this to remark upon. "Did it snow at the lake?"

"Yes, a little; it mostly rained."

"It stormed up on the divide like a January blizzard. When did Moore and his party arrive?"

"About ten o'clock this morning."

"I'll ride right up and see them. What about the outfit? That's at the lake, I reckon?"

"Yes, I was just sending Tony after it. But, father, if you go up to Moore's camp, don't say too much about what has happened. Don't tell them just when you took the back-trail, and just how long Wayland and I were in camp."

"Why not?"

She reddened with confusion. "Because—You know what an old gossip Mrs. Belden is. I don't want her to know. She's an awful talker, and our being together up there all that time will give her a chance."

A light broke in on the Supervisor's brain. In the midst of his preoccupation as a forester he suddenly became the father. His eyes narrowed and his face darkened. "That's so. The old rip could make a whole lot of capital out of your being left in camp that way. At the same time I don't believe in dodging. The worst thing we could do would be to try to blind the trail. Was Tony here last night when you came?"

"No, he was down the valley after his mail."

His face darkened again. "That's another piece of bad luck, too. How much does the old woman know at present?"

"Nothing at all."

"Didn't she cross-examine you?"

"Sure she did; but Wayland side-tracked her. Of course it only delays things. She'll know all about it sooner or later. She's great at putting two and two together. Two and two with her always make five."

McFarlane mused. "Cliff will be plumb crazy if she gets his ear first."

"I don't care anything about Cliff, daddy. I don't care what he thinks or does, if he will only let Wayland alone."

"See here, daughter, you do seem to be terribly interested in this tourist."

"He's the finest man I ever knew, father."

He looked at her with tender, trusting glance. "He isn't your kind, daughter. He's a nice clean boy, but he's different. He don't belong in our world. He's only just stopping here. Don't forget that."

"I'm not forgetting that, daddy. I know he's different, that's why I like him." After a pause she added: "Nobody could have been nicer all through these days than he has been. He was like a brother."

McFarlane fixed a keen glance upon her. "Has he said anything to you? Did you come to an understanding?"

Her eyes fell. “Not the way you mean, daddy; but I think he—likes me. But do you know who he is? He’s the son of W. W. Norcross, that big Michigan lumberman.”

McFarlane started. “How do you know that?”

“Mr. Moore asked him if he was any relation to W.W. Norcross, and he said, ‘Yes, a son.’ You should have seen how that Moore girl changed her tune the moment he admitted that. She’d been very free with him up to that time; but when she found out he was a rich man’s son she became as quiet and innocent as a kitten. I hate her; she’s a deceitful snip.”

“Well, now, daughter, that being the case, it’s all the more certain that he don’t belong to our world, and you mustn’t fix your mind on keeping him here.”

“A girl can’t help fixing her mind, daddy.”

“Or changing it.” He smiled a little. “You used to like Cliff. You liked him well enough to promise to marry him.”

“I know I did; but I despise him now.”

“Poor Cliff! He isn’t so much to blame after all. Any man is likely to flare out when he finds another fellow cutting in ahead of him. Why, here you are wanting to kill Siona Moore just for making up to your young tourist.”

“But that’s different.”

He laughed. “Of course it is. But the thing we’ve got to guard against is old lady Belden’s tongue. She and that Belden gang have it in for me, and all that has kept them from open war has been Cliff’s relationship to you. They’ll take a keen delight in making the worst of all this camping business.” McFarlane was now very grave. “I wish your mother was here this minute. I guess we had better cut out this timber cruise and go right back.”

“No, you mustn’t do that; that would only make more talk. Go on with your plans. I’ll stay here with you. It won’t take you but a couple of days to do the work, and Wayland needs the rest.”

“But suppose Cliff hears of this business between you and Norcross and comes galloping over the ridge?”

“Well, let him, he has no claim on me.”

He rose uneasily. “It’s all mighty risky business, and it’s my fault. I should never have permitted you to start on this trip.”

“Don’t you worry about me, daddy, I’ll pull through somehow. Anybody that knows me will understand how little there is in—in old lady Belden’s gab. I’ve had a beautiful trip, and I won’t let her nor anybody else spoil it for me.”

McFarlane was not merely troubled. He was distracted. He was afraid to meet the Beldens. He dreaded their questions, their innuendoes. He had perfect faith in his daughter’s purity and honesty, and he liked and trusted Norcross, and yet he knew that should Belden find it to his advantage to slander these young people, and to read into their action the lawlessness of his own youth, Berea’s reputation, high as it was, would suffer, and her mother’s heart be rent with anxiety. In his growing pain and perplexity he decided to speak frankly to young Norcross himself. “He’s a gentleman, and knows the way of the world. Perhaps he’ll have some suggestion to offer.” In his heart he hoped to learn that Wayland loved his daughter and wished to marry her.

Wayland was down on the bridge leaning over the rail, listening to the song of the water.

McFarlane approached gravely, but when he spoke it was in his usual soft monotone. “Mr. Norcross,” he began, with candid inflection, “I am very sorry to say it; but I wish you and my daughter had never started on this trip.”

“I know what you mean, Supervisor, and I feel as you do about it. Of course, none of us foresaw any such complication as this, but now that we are snarled up in it we’ll have to make the best of it. No one of us is to blame. It was all accidental.”

The youth’s frank words and his sympathetic voice disarmed McFarlane completely. Even the slight resentment he felt melted away. “It’s no use saying *if*,” he remarked, at length. “What we’ve got to meet is Seth Belden’s report—Berrie has cut loose from Cliff, and he’s red-headed already. When he drops onto this story, when he learns that I had to chase back after the horses, and that you and Berrie were alone together for three days, he’ll have a fine club to swing, and he’ll swing it; and Alec will help him. They’re all waiting a

chance to get me, and they're mean enough to get me through my girl."

"What can I do?" asked Wayland.

McFarlane pondered. "I'll try to head off Marm Belden, and I'll have a talk with Moore. He's a pretty reasonable chap."

"But you forget there's another tale-bearer. Moore's daughter is with them."

"That's so. I'd forgotten her. Good Lord! we are in for it. There's no use trying to cover anything up."

Here was the place for Norcross to speak up and say: "Never mind, I'm going to ask Berrie to be my wife." But he couldn't do it. Something rose in his throat which prevented speech. A strange repugnance, a kind of sullen resentment at being forced into a declaration, kept him silent, and McFarlane, disappointed, wondering and hurt, kept silence also.

Norcross was the first to speak. "Of course those who know your daughter will not listen for an instant to the story of an unclean old thing like Mrs. Belden."

"I'm not so sure about that," replied the father, gloomily. "People always listen to such stories, and a girl always gets the worst of a situation like this. Berrie's been brought up to take care of herself, and she's kept clear of criticism so far; but with Cliff on edge and this old rip snooping around—" His mind suddenly changed. "Your being the son of a rich man won't help any. Why didn't you tell me who you were?"

"I didn't think it necessary. What difference does it make? I have nothing to do with my father's business. His notions of forest speculation are not mine."

"It would have made a difference with me, and it might have made a difference with Berrie. She mightn't have been so free with you at the start, if she'd known who you were. You looked sick and kind of lonesome, and that worked on her sympathy."

"I *was* sick and I was lonesome, and she has been very sweet and lovely to me, and it breaks my heart to think that her kindness and your friendship should bring all this trouble and suspicion upon her. Let's go up to the Moore camp and have it out with them. I'll make any statement you think best."

“I reckon the less said about it the better,” responded the older man. “I’m going up to the camp, but not to talk about my daughter.”

“How can you help it? They’ll force the topic.”

“If they do, I’ll force them to let it alone,” retorted McFarlane; but he went away disappointed and sorrowful. The young man’s evident avoidance of the subject of marriage hurt him. He did not perceive, as Norcross did, that to make an announcement of his daughter’s engagement at this moment would be taken as a confession of shameful need. It is probable that Berrie herself would not have seen this further complication.

Each hour added to Wayland’s sense of helplessness and bitterness. “I am in a trap. I can neither help Berrie nor help myself. Nothing remains for me but flight, and flight will also be a confession of guilt.”

Once again, and in far more definite terms, he perceived the injustice of the world toward women. Here with Berrie, as in ages upon ages of other times, the maiden must bear the burden of reproach. “In me it will be considered a joke, a romantic episode, in her a degrading misdemeanor. And yet what can I do?”

When he re-entered the cabin the Supervisor had returned from the camp, and something in his manner, as well as in Berrie’s, revealed the fact that the situation had not improved.

“They forced me into a corner,” McFarlane said to Wayland, peevishly. “I lied out of one night; but they know that you were here last night. Of course, they were respectful enough so long as I had an eye on them, but their tongues are wagging now.”

The rest of the evening was spent in talk on the forest, and in going over the ranger’s books, for the Supervisor continued to plan for Wayland’s stay at this station, and the young fellow thought it best not to refuse at the moment.

As bedtime drew near Settle took a blanket and went to the corral, and Berrie insisted that her father and Wayland occupy the bunk.

Norcross protested; but the Supervisor said: “Let her alone. She’s better able to sleep on the floor than either of us.”

This was perfectly true; but, in spite of his bruised and aching body, the youth would gladly have taken her place beside the stove.

It seemed pitifully unjust that she should have this physical hardship in addition to her uneasiness of mind.

X

THE CAMP ON THE PASS

Berea suffered a restless night, the most painful and broken she had known in all her life. She acknowledged that Siona Moore was prettier, and that she stood more nearly on Wayland's plane than herself; but the realization of this fact did not bring surrender—she was not of that temper. All her life she had been called upon to combat the elements, to hold her own amidst rude men and inconsiderate women, and she had no intention of yielding her place to a pert coquette, no matter what the gossips might say. She had seen this girl many times, but had refused to visit her house. She had held her in contempt, now she quite cordially hated her.

"She shall not have her way with Wayland," she decided. "I know what she wants—she wants him at her side to-morrow; but I will not have it so. She is trying to get him away from me."

The more she dwelt on this the hotter her jealous fever burned. The floor on which she lay was full of knots. She could not lose herself in sleep, tired as she was. The planks no longer turned their soft spots to her flesh, and she rolled from side to side in torment. She would have arisen and dressed only she did not care to disturb the men. The night seemed interminable.

Her plan of action was simple. "I shall go home the morrow and take Wayland with me. I will not have him going with that girl—that's settled!" The very thought of his taking Siona's hand in greeting angered her beyond reason.

She had put Cliff Belden completely out of her mind, and this was characteristic of her. She had no divided interests, no subtleties, no subterfuges. Forthright, hot-blooded, frank and simple, she had centered all her care, all her desires, on this pale youth whose appeal was at once mystic and maternal; but her pity was changing to something deeper, for she was convinced that he was gaining in strength, that he was in no danger of relapse. The hard trip of the day before had seemingly done him no permanent injury; on the contrary, a few hours' rest had almost restored him to his normal self. "To-morrow he will be able to ride again." And this thought

reconciled her to her hard bed. She did not look beyond the long, delicious day which they must spend in returning to the Springs.

She fell asleep at last, and was awakened only by her father tinkering about the stove.

She rose alertly, signing to the Supervisor not to disturb her patient.

However, Norcross also heard the rattle of the poker, opened his eyes and regarded Berrie with sleepy smile. "Good morning, if it *is* morning," he said, slowly.

She laughed back at him. "It's almost sunup."

"You don't tell me! How could I have overslept like this? Makes me think of the Irishman who, upon being awakened to an early breakfast like this, ate it, then said to his employer, an extra thrifty farmer, 'Two suppers in wan night—and hurrah for bed again.'"

This amused her greatly. "It's too bad. I hope you got some sleep?"

"All there was time for." His voice changed. "I feel like a hound-pup, to be snoring on a downy couch like this while you were roughing it on the floor. How did I come to do it? It's shameful!"

"Don't worry about me. How are you feeling this morning?"

He stretched and yawned. "Fine! That is, I'm sore here and there, but I'm feeling wonderfully well. Do you know, I begin to hope that I can finally dominate the wilderness. Wouldn't it be wonderful if I got so I could ride and walk as you do, for instance? The fact that I'm not dead this morning is encouraging." He drew on his shoes as he talked, while she went about her toilet, which was quite as simple as his own. She had spent two nights in her day dress with almost no bathing facilities; but that didn't trouble her. It was a part of the game. She washed her face and hands in Settle's tin basin, but drew the line at his rubber comb.

There was a distinct charm in seeing her thus adapting herself to the cabin, a charm quite as powerful as that which emanated from Siona Moore's dainty and theatrical personality. What it was he could not define, but the forester's daughter had something primeval about her, something close to the soil, something which aureoles the old Saxon words—*wife* and *home* and *fireplace*. Seeing her through the savory steam of the bacon she was frying, he forgot her marvelous skill as horsewoman and pathfinder, and thought of her

only as the housewife. She belonged here, in this cabin. She was fitted to this landscape, whereas the other woman was alien and dissonant.

He moved his arms about and shook his legs with comical effect of trying to see if they were still properly hinged. “It’s miraculous! I’m not lame at all. No one can accuse me of being a ‘lunger’ now. Last night’s sleep has made a new man of me. I’ve met the forest and it is mine.”

She beamed upon him with happy pride. “I’m mighty glad to hear you say that. I was terribly afraid that long, hard walk in the rain had been too much for you. I reckon you’re all right for the work now.”

He recalled, as she spoke, her anguish of pity while they stood in the darkness of the trail, and it seemed that he could go no farther, and he said, soberly: “It must have seemed to you one while as if I were all in. I felt that way myself. I was numb from head to heel. I couldn’t have gone another mile.”

Her face clouded with retrospective pain. “You mustn’t try any more such stunts—not for a few weeks, anyway. But get ready for breakfast.”

He went out into the morning exultantly, and ran down to the river to bathe his face and hands, allured by its splendid voice. The world seemed very bright and beautiful and health-giving once more.

As soon as she was alone with her father, Berrie said: “I’m going home to-day, dad.”

“Going home! What for?”

“I’ve had enough of it.”

He glanced at her bed on the floor. “I can’t say I blame you any. This has been a rough trip; but we’ll go up and bring down the outfit, and then we men can sleep in the tent and let you have the bunk—you’ll be comfortable to-night.”

“Oh, I don’t mind sleeping on the floor,” she replied; “but I want to get back. I don’t want to meet those women. Another thing, you’d better use Mr. Norcross at the Springs instead of leaving him here with Tony.”

“Why so?”

"Well, he isn't quite well enough to run the risk. It's a long way from here to a doctor."

"He 'pears to be on deck this morning. Besides, I haven't anything in the office to offer him."

"Then send him up to Meeker. Landon needs help, and he's a better forester than Tony, anyway."

"How about Cliff? He may make trouble."

Her face darkened. "Cliff will reach him if he wants to—no matter where he is. And then, too, Landon likes Mr. Norcross and will see that he is not abused."

McFarlane ruminated over her suggestion, well knowing that she was planning this change in order that she might have Norcross a little nearer, a little more accessible.

"I don't know but you're right. Landon is almost as good a hustler as Tony, and a much better forester. I thought of sending Norcross up there at first, but he told me that Frank and his gang had it in for him. Of course, he's only nominally in the service; but I want him to begin right."

Berrie went further. "I want him to ride back with me to-day."

He looked at her with grave inquiry. "Do you think that a wise thing to do? Won't that make more talk?"

"We'll start early and ride straight through."

"You'll have to go by Lost Lake, and that means a long, hard hike. Can he stand it?"

"Oh yes. He rides well. It's the walking at a high altitude that does him up. Furthermore, Cliff may turn up here, and I don't want another mix-up."

McFarlane was troubled. "I ought to go back with you; but Moore is over here to line out a cutting, and I must stay on for a couple of days. Suppose I send Tony along?"

"No, Tony would be a nuisance and would do no good. Another day on the trail won't add to Mrs. Belden's story. If she wants to be mean she's got all the material for it already."

In the end she had her way. McFarlane, perceiving that she had set her heart on this ride, and having perfect faith in her skill and judgment on the trail, finally said: "Well, if you do so, the quicker

you start the better. With the best of luck you can't pull in before eight o'clock, and you'll have to ride hard to do that."

"If I find we can't make it I'll pull into a ranch. But I'm sure we can."

When Wayland came in the Supervisor inquired: "Do you feel able to ride back over the hill to-day?"

"Entirely so. It isn't the riding that uses me up; it is the walking; and, besides, as candidate for promotion I must obey orders—especially orders to march."

They breakfasted hurriedly, and while McFarlane and Tony were bringing in the horses Wayland and Berrie set the cabin to rights. Working thus side by side, she recovered her dominion over him, and at the same time regained her own cheerful self-confidence.

"You're a wonder!" he exclaimed, as he watched her deft adjustment of the dishes and furniture. "You're ambidextrous."

"I have to be to hold my job," she laughingly replied. "A feller must play all the parts when he's up here."

It was still early morning as they mounted and set off up the trail; but Moore's camp was astir, and as McFarlane turned in—much against Berrie's will—the lumberman and his daughter both came out to meet them. "Come in and have some breakfast," said Siona, with cordial inclusiveness, while her eyes met Wayland's glance with mocking glee.

"Thank you," said McFarlane, "we can't stop. I'm going to set my daughter over the divide. She has had enough camping, and Norcross is pretty well battered up, so I'm going to help them across. I'll be back to-night, and we'll take our turn up the valley to-morrow. Nash will be here then."

Berrie did not mind her father's explanation; on the contrary, she took a distinct pleasure in letting the other girl know of the long and intimate day she was about to spend with her young lover.

Siona, too adroit to display her disappointment, expressed polite regret. "I hope you won't get storm-bound," she said, showing her white teeth in a meaning smile.

"If there is any sign of a storm we won't cross," declared McFarlane. "We're going round by the lower pass, anyhow. If I'm not here by dark, you may know I've stayed to set 'em down at the Mill."

There was charm in Siona's alert poise, and in the neatness of her camp dress. Her dainty tent, with its stools and rugs, made the wilderness seem but a park. She reminded Norcross of the troops of tourists of the Tyrol, and her tent was of a kind to harmonize with the tea-houses on the path to the summit of the Matterhorn. Then, too, something triumphantly feminine shone in her bright eyes and glowed in her softly rounded cheeks. Her hand was little and pointed, not fitted like Berrie's for tightening a cinch or wielding an ax, and as he said "Good-by," he added: "I hope I shall see you again soon," and at the moment he meant it.

"We'll return to the Springs in a few days," she replied. "Come and see us. Our bungalow is on the other side of the river—and you, too," she addressed Berrie; but her tone was so conventionally polite that the ranch-girl, burning with jealous heat, made no reply.

McFarlane led the way to the lake rapidly and in silence. The splendors of the foliage, subdued by the rains, the grandeur of the peaks, the song of the glorious stream—all were lost on Berrie, for she now felt herself to be nothing but a big, clumsy, coarse-handed tomboy. Her worn gloves, her faded skirt, and her man's shoes had been made hateful to her by that smug, graceful, play-acting tourist with the cool, keen eyes and smirking lips. "She pretends to be a kitten; but she isn't; she's a sly grown-up cat," she bitterly accused, but she could not deny the charm of her personality.

Wayland was forced to acknowledge that Berrie in this dark mood was not the delightful companion she had hitherto been. Something sweet and confiding had gone out of their relationship, and he was too keen-witted not to know what it was. He estimated precisely the value of the malicious parting words of Siona Moore. "She's a natural tease, the kind of woman who loves to torment other and less fortunate women. She cares nothing for me, of course, it's just her way of paying off old scores. It would seem that Berrie has not encouraged her advances in times past."

That Berrie was suffering, and that her jealousy touchingly proved the depth of her love for him, brought no elation, only perplexity. He was not seeking such devotion. As a companion on the trail she had been a joy—as a jealous sweetheart she was less admirable. He realized perfectly that this return journey was of her arrangement, not McFarlane's, and while he was not resentful of her care, he was

in doubt of the outcome. It hurried him into a further intimacy which might prove embarrassing.

At the camp by the lake the Supervisor became sharply commanding. “Now let’s throw these packs on lively. It will be slippery on the high trail, and you’ll just naturally have to hit leather hard and keep jouncing if you reach the wagon-road before dark. But you’ll make it.”

“Make it!” said Berrie. “Of course we’ll make it. Don’t you worry about that for a minute. Once I get out of the green timber the dark won’t worry me. We’ll push right through.”

In packing the camp stuff on the saddles, Berrie, almost as swift and powerful as her father, acted with perfect understanding of every task, and Wayland’s admiration of her skill increased mightily.

She insisted on her father’s turning back. “We don’t need you,” she said. “I can find the pass.”

McFarlane’s faith in his daughter had been tested many times, and yet he was a little loath to have her start off on a trail new to her. He argued against it briefly, but she laughed at his fears. “I can go anywhere you can,” she said. “Stand clear!” With final admonition he stood clear.

“You’ll have to keep off the boggy meadows,” he warned; “these rains will have softened all those muck-holes on the other side; they’ll be bottomless pits; watch out for ’em. Good-by! If you meet Nash hurry him along. Moore is anxious to run those lines. Keep in touch with Landon, and if anybody turns up from the district office say I’ll be back on Friday. Good luck.”

“Same to you. So long.”

Berea led the way, and Norcross fell in behind the pack-horses, feeling as unimportant as a small boy at the heels of a circus parade. His girl captain was so competent, so self-reliant, and so sure that nothing he could say or do assisted in the slightest degree. Her leadership was a curiously close reproduction of her father’s unhurried and graceful action. Her seat in the saddle was as easy as Landon’s, and her eyes were alert to every rock and stream in the road. She was at home here, where the other girl would have been a bewildered child, and his words of praise lifted the shadow from her face.

The sky was cloudy, and a delicious feeling of autumn was in the air—autumn that might turn to winter with a passing cloud, and the forest was dankly gloomy and grimly silent, save from the roaring stream which ran at times foam-white with speed. The high peaks, gray and streaked with new-fallen snow, shone grandly, bleakly through the firs. The radiant beauty of the road from the Springs, the golden glow of four days before was utterly gone, and yet there was exultation in this ride. A distinct pleasure, a delight of another sort, lay in thus daring the majesty of an unknown wind-swept pass.

Wayland called out: "The air feels like Thanksgiving morning, doesn't it?"

"It *is* Thanksgiving for me, and I'm going to get a grouse for dinner," she replied; and in less than an hour the snap of her rifle made good her promise.

After leaving the upper lake she turned to the right and followed the course of a swift and splendid stream, which came churning through a cheerless, mossy swamp of spruce-trees. Inexperienced as he was, Wayland knew that this was not a well-marked trail; but his confidence in his guide was too great to permit of any worry over the pass, and he amused himself by watching the water-robins as they flitted from stone to stone in the torrent, and in calculating just where he would drop a line for trout if he had time to do so, and in recovered serenity enjoyed his ride. Gradually he put aside his perplexities concerning the future, permitting his mind to prefigure nothing but his duties with Landon at Meeker's Mill.

He was rather glad of the decision to send him there, for it promised absorbing sport. "I shall see how Landon and Belden work out their problem," he said. He had no fear of Frank Meeker now. "As a forest guard with official duties to perform I can meet that young savage on other and more nearly equal terms," he assured himself.

The trail grew slippery and in places ran full of water. "But there's a bottom, somewhere," Berrie confidently declared, and pushed ahead with resolute mien. It was noon when they rose above timber and entered upon the wide, smooth slopes of the pass. Snow filled the grass here, and the wind, keen, cutting, unhindered, came out of the desolate west with savage fury; but the sun occasionally shone through the clouds with vivid splendor. "It is December now,"

shouted Wayland, as he put on his slicker and cowered low to his saddle. “It will be January soon.”

“We will make it Christmas dinner,” she laughed, and her glowing good humor warmed his heart. She was entirely her cheerful self again.

As they rose, the view became magnificent, wintry, sparkling. The great clouds, drifting like ancient warships heavy with armament, sent down chill showers of hail over the frosted gold of the grassy slopes; but when the shadows passed the sunlight descended in silent cataracts deliriously spring-like. The conies squeaked from the rocky ridges, and a brace of eagles circling about a lone crag, as if exulting in their sovereign mastery of the air, screamed in shrill ecstatic duo. The sheer cliffs, on their shadowed sides, were violently purple. Everywhere the landscape exhibited crashing contrasts of primary pigments which bit into consciousness like the flare of a martial band.

The youth would have lingered in spite of the cold; but the girl kept steadily on, knowing well that the hardest part of their journey was still before them, and he, though longing to ride by her side, and to enjoy the views with her, was forced to remain in the rear in order to hurry the reluctant pack-animals forward. They had now reached a point twelve thousand feet above the sea, and range beyond range, to the west and south, rose into sight like stupendous waves of a purple-green sea. To the east the park lay level as a floor and carpeted in tawny velvet.

It was nearly two o’clock when they began to drop down behind the rocky ridges of the eastern slope, and soon, in the bottom of a warm and sheltered hollow just at timber-line, Berrie drew her horse to a stand and slipped from the saddle. “We’ll rest here an hour,” she said, “and cook our grouse; or are you too hungry to wait?”

“I can wait,” he answered, dramatically. “But it seems as if I had never eaten.”

“Well, then, we’ll save the grouse till to-morrow; but I’ll make some coffee. You bring some water while I start a fire.”

And so, while the tired horses cropped the russet grass, she boiled some coffee and laid out some bread and meat, while he sat by watching her and absorbing the beauty of the scene, the charm of the

hour. “It is exactly like a warm afternoon in April,” he said, “and here are some of the spring flowers.”

“There now, sit by and eat,” she said, with humor; and in perfectly restored tranquillity they ate and drank, with no thought of critics or of rivals. They were alone, and content to be so.

It was deliciously sweet and restful there in that sunny hollow on the breast of the mountain. The wind swept through the worn branches of the dwarfed spruce with immemorial wistfulness; but these young souls heard it only as a far-off song. Side by side on the soft Alpine clover they rested and talked, looking away at the shining peaks, and down over the dark-green billows of fir beneath them. Half the forest was under their eyes at the moment, and the man said: “Is it not magnificent! It makes me proud of my country. Just think, all this glorious spread of hill and valley is under your father’s direction. I may say under *your* direction, for I notice he does just about what you tell him to do.”

“You’ve noticed that?” she laughed. “If I were a man I’d rather be Supervisor of this forest than Congressman.”

“So would I,” he agreed. “Nash says you *are* the Supervisor. I wonder if your father realizes how efficient you are? Does he ever sorrow over your not being a boy?”

Her eyes shone with mirth. “Not that I can notice. He ’pears contented.”

“You’re a good deal like a son to him, I imagine. You can do about all that a boy can do, anyhow—more than I could ever do. Does he realize how much you have to do with the management of his forest? I’ve never seen your like. I really believe you *could* carry on the work as well as he.”

She flushed with pleasure. “You seem to think I’m a district forester in disguise.”

“I have eyes, Miss Supervisor, and also ears—which leads me to ask: Why don’t you clean out that saloon gang? Landon is sure there’s crooked work going on at that mill—certainly that open bar is a disgraceful and corrupting thing.”

Her face clouded. “We’ve tried to cut out that saloon, but it can’t be done. You see, it’s on a patented claim—the claim was bogus, of

course, and we've made complaint, but the matter is hung up, and that gives 'em a chance to go on."

"Well, let's not talk of that. It's too delicious an hour for any question of business. It is a moment for poetry. I wish I could write what I feel this moment. Why don't we camp here and watch the sun go down and the moon rise? From our lofty vantage-ground the coming of dawn would be an epic."

"We mustn't think of that," she protested. "We must be going."

"Not yet. The hour is too perfect. It may never come again. The wind in the pines, the sunshine, the conies crying from their rocks, the butterflies on the clover—my heart aches with the beauty of it. It's been a wonderful trip. Even that staggering walk in the rain had its splendid quality. I couldn't see the poetry in it then; but I do now. These few days have made us comrades, haven't they—comrades of the trail? You have been very considerate of me." He took her hand. "I've never seen such hands. They are like steel, and yet they are feminine."

She drew her hands away. "I'm ashamed of my hands—they are so big and rough and dingy."

"They're brown, of course, and calloused—a little—but they are not big, and they are beautifully modeled." He looked at her speculatively. "I am wondering how you would look in conventional dress."

"Do you mean—" She hesitated. "I'd look like a gawk in one of those low-necked outfits. I'd never dare—and those tight skirts would sure cripple me."

"Oh no, they wouldn't. You'd have to modify your stride a little; but you'd negotiate it. You're equal to anything."

"You're making fun of me!"

"No, I'm not. I'm in earnest. You're the kind of American girl that can go anywhere and do anything. My sisters would mortgage their share of the golden streets for your abounding health—and so would I."

"You are all right now," she smiled. "You don't look or talk as you did."

"It's this sunlight." He lifted a spread hand as if to clutch and hold something. "I feel it soaking into me like some magical oil. No more

moping and whining for me. I've proved that hardship is good for me."

"Don't crow till you're out of the woods. It's a long ride down the hill, and going down is harder on the tenderfoot than going up."

"I'm no longer a tenderfoot. All I need is another trip like this with you and I shall be a master trailer."

All this was very sweet to her, and though she knew they should be going, she lingered. Childishly reckless of the sinking sun, she played with the wild flowers at her side and listened to his voice in complete content. He was right. The hour was too beautiful to be shortened, although she saw no reason why others equally delightful might not come to them both. He was more of the lover than he had ever been before, that she knew, and in the light of his eyes all that was not girlish and charming melted away. She forgot her heavy shoes, her rough hands and sun-tanned face, and listened with wondering joy and pride to his words, which were of a fineness such as she had never heard spoken—only books contained such unusual and exquisite phrases.

A cloud passing across the sun flung down a shadow of portentous chill and darkness. She started to her feet with startled recollection of the place and the hour.

"We *must* be going—at once!" she commanded.

"Not yet," he pleaded. "It's only a cloud. The sun is coming out again. I have perfect confidence in your woodcraft. Why not spend another night on the trail? It may be our last trip together."

He tempted her strongly, so frank and boyish and lovable were his glances and his words. But she was vaguely afraid of herself, and though the long ride at the moment seemed hard and dull, the thought of her mother waiting decided her action.

"No, no!" she responded, firmly. "We've wasted too much time already. We must ride."

He looked up at her with challenging glance. "Suppose I refuse—suppose I decide to stay here?"

Upon her, as he talked, a sweet hesitation fell, a dream which held more of happiness than she had ever known. "It is a long, hard ride," she thought, "and another night on the trail will not matter." And so

the moments passed on velvet feet, and still she lingered, reluctant to break the spell.

Suddenly, into their idyllic drowse of content, so sweet, so youthful, and so pure of heart, broke the sound of a horse's hurrying, clashing, steel-shod feet, and looking up Berrie saw a mounted man coming down the mountainside with furious, reckless haste.

"It is Cliff!" she cried out. "He's on our trail!" And into her face came a look of alarm. Her lips paled, her eyes widened. "He's mad—he's dangerous! Leave him to me," she added, in a low, tense voice.

XI

THE DEATH-GRAPPLE

There was something so sinister in the rider's disregard of stone and tree and pace, something so menacing in the forward thrust of his body, that Berrie was able to divine his wrath, and was smitten into irresolution—all her hardy, boyish self-reliance swallowed up in the weakness of the woman. She forgot the pistol at her belt, and awaited the assault with rigid pose.

As Belden neared them Norcross also perceived that the rider's face was distorted with passion, and that his glance was not directed upon Berrie, but upon himself, and he braced himself for the attack.

Leaving his saddle with one flying leap, which the cowboy practises at play, Belden hurled himself upon his rival with the fury of a panther.

The slender youth went down before the big rancher as though struck by a catapult; and the force of his fall against the stony earth stunned him so that he lay beneath his enemy as helpless as a child.

Belden snarled between his teeth: "I told you I'd kill you, and I will."

But this was not to be. Berea suddenly recovered her native force. With a cry of pain, of anger, she flung herself on the maddened man's back. Her hands encircled his neck like a collar of bronze. Hardened by incessant use of the cinch and the rope, her fingers sank into the sinews of his great throat, shutting off both blood and breath.

"Let go!" she commanded, with deadly intensity. "Let go, or I'll choke the life out of you! Let go, I say!"

He raised a hand to beat her off, but she was too strong, too desperate to be driven away. She was as blind to pain as a mother eagle, and bent above him so closely that he could not bring the full weight of his fist to bear. With one determined hand still clutching his throat, she ran the fingers of her other hand into his hair and twisted his head upward with a power which he could not resist. And

so, looking into his upturned, ferocious eyes, she repeated with remorseless fury: "*Let go*, I say!"

His swollen face grew rigid, his mouth gaped, his tongue protruded, and at last, releasing his hold on his victim, he rose, flinging Berrie off with a final desperate effort. "I'll kill you, too!" he gasped.

Up to this moment the girl had felt no fear of herself; but now she resorted to other weapons. Snatching her pistol from its holster, she leveled it at his forehead. "Stop!" she said; and something in her voice froze him into calm. He was not a fiend; he was not a deliberate assassin; he was only a jealous, despairing, insane lover, and as he looked into the face he knew so well, and realized that nothing but hate and deadly resolution lit the eyes he had so often kissed, his heart gave way, and, dropping his head, he said: "Kill me if you want to. I've nothing left to live for."

There was something unreal, appalling in this sudden reversion to weakness, and Berrie could not credit his remorse. "Give me your gun," she said.

He surrendered it to her and she threw it aside; then turned to Wayland, who was lying white and still with face upturned to the sky. With a moan of anguish she bent above him and called upon his name. He did not stir, and when she lifted his head to her lap his hair, streaming with blood, stained her dress. She kissed him and called again to him, then turned with accusing frenzy to Belden: "You've killed him! Do you hear? You've killed him!"

The agony, the fury of hate in her voice reached the heart of the conquered man. He raised his head and stared at her with mingled fear and remorse. And so across that limp body these two souls, so lately lovers, looked into each other's eyes as though nothing but words of hate and loathing had ever passed between them. The girl saw in him only a savage, vengeful, bloodthirsty beast; the man confronted in her an accusing angel.

"I didn't mean to kill him," he muttered.

"Yes, you did! You meant it. You crushed his life out with your big hands—and now I'm going to kill you for it!"

A fierce calm had come upon her. Some far-off ancestral deep of passion called for blood revenge. She lifted the weapon with steady hand and pointed it at his heart.

His fear passed as his wrath had passed. His head drooped, his glance wavered. “Shoot!” he commanded, sullenly. “I’d sooner die than live—now.”

His words, his tone, brought back to her a vision of the man he had seemed when she first met and admired him. Her hand fell, the woman in her reasserted itself. A wave of weakness, of indecision, of passionate grief overwhelmed her. “Oh, Cliff!” she moaned. “Why did you do it? He was so gentle and sweet.”

He did not answer. His glance wandered to his horse, serenely cropping the grass in utter disregard of this tumultuous human drama; but the wind, less insensate than the brute, swept through the grove of dwarfed, distorted pines with a desolate, sympathetic moan which filled the man’s heart with a new and exalted sorrow. “You’re right,” he said. “I was crazy. I deserve killing.”

But Berrie was now too deep in her own desolation to care what he said or did. She kissed the cold lips of the still youth, murmuring passionately: “I don’t care to live without you—I shall go with you!”

Belden’s hand was on her wrist before she could raise her weapon. “Don’t, for God’s sake, don’t do that! He may not be dead.”

She responded but dully to the suggestion. “No, no. He’s gone. His breath is gone.”

“Maybe not. Let me see.”

Again she bent to the quiet face on which the sunlight fell with mocking splendor. It seemed all a dream till she felt once more the stain of his blood upon her hands. It was all so incredibly sudden. Only just now he was exulting over the warmth and beauty of the day—and now—

How beautiful he was. He seemed asleep. The conies crying from their runways suddenly took on poignant pathos. They appeared to be grieving with her; but the eagles spoke of revenge.

A sharp cry, a note of joy sprang from her lips. “He *is* alive! I saw his eyelids quiver—quick! Bring some water.”

The man leaped to his feet, and, running down to the pool, filled his sombrero with icy water. He was as eager now to save his rival as

he had been mad to destroy him. “Let me help,” he pleaded. But she would not permit him to touch the body.

Again, while splashing the water upon his face, the girl called upon her love to return. “He hears me!” she exulted to her enemy. “He is breathing now. He is opening his eyes.”

The wounded man did, indeed, open his eyes, but his look was a blank, uncomprehending stare, which plunged her back into despair. “He don’t know me!” she said, with piteous accent. She now perceived the source of the blood upon her arm. It came from a wound in the boy’s head which had been dashed upon a stone.

The sight of this wound brought back the blaze of accusing anger to her eyes. “See what you did!” she said, with cold malignity. Then by sudden shift she bent to the sweet face in her arms and kissed it passionately. “Open your eyes, darling. You must not die! I won’t let you die! Can’t you hear me? Don’t you know where you are?”

He opened his eyes once more, quietly, and looked up into her face with a faint, drowsy smile. He could not yet locate himself in space and time, but he knew her and was comforted. He wondered why he should be looking up into a sunny sky. He heard the wind and the sound of a horse cropping grass, and the voice of the girl penetratingly sweet as that of a young mother calling her baby back to life, and slowly his benumbed brain began to resolve the mystery.

Belden, forgotten, ignored as completely as the conies, sat with choking throat and smarting eyes. For him the world was only dust and ashes—a ruin which his own barbaric spirit had brought upon itself.

Slowly the youth’s eyes took on expression. “Are we still on the hill?” he asked.

“Yes, dearest,” she assured him. Then to Belden, “He knows where he is!”

Wayland again struggled with reality. “What has happened to me?”

“You fell and hurt your head.”

He turned slightly and observed the other man looking down at her with dark and tragic glance. “Hello, Belden,” he said, feebly. “How came you here?” Then noting Berrie’s look, he added: “I

remember. He tried to kill me." He again searched his antagonist's face. "Why didn't you finish the job?"

The girl tried to turn his thought aside. "It's all right now, darling. He won't make any more trouble. Don't mind him. I don't care for anybody now you are coming back to me."

Wayland wonderingly regarded the face of the girl. "And you—are you hurt?"

"No, I'm not hurt. I am perfectly happy now." She turned to Belden with quick, authoritative command. "Unsaddle the horses and set up the tent. We won't be able to leave here to-night."

He rose with instant obedience, glad of a chance to serve her, and soon had the tent pegged to its place and the bedding unrolled. Together they lifted the wounded youth and laid him upon his blankets beneath the low canvas roof which seemed heavenly helpful to Berea.

"There!" she said, caressingly. "Now you are safe, no matter whether it rains or not."

He smiled. "It seems I'm to have my way after all. I hope I shall be able to see the sun rise. I've sort of lost my interest in the sunset."

"Now, Cliff," she said, as soon as the camp was in order and a fire started, "I reckon you'd better ride on. I haven't any further use for you."

"Don't say that, Berrie," he pleaded. "I can't leave you here alone with a sick man. Let me stay and help."

She looked at him for a long time before she replied. "I shall never be able to look at you again without hating you," she said. "I shall always remember you as you looked when you were killing that boy. So you'd better ride on and keep a-riding. I'm going to forget all this just as soon as I can, and it don't help me any to have you around. I never want to see you or hear your name again."

"You don't mean that, Berrie!"

"Yes, I do," she asserted, bitterly. "I mean just that. So saddle up and pull out. All I ask of you is to say nothing about what has happened here. You'd better leave the state. If Wayland should get worse it might go hard with you."

He accepted his banishment. “All right. If you feel that way I’ll ride. But I’d like to do something for you before I go. I’ll pile up some wood—”

“No. I’ll take care of that.” And without another word of farewell she turned away and re-entered the tent.

Mounting his horse with painful slowness, as though suddenly grown old, the reprieved assassin rode away up the mountain, his head low, his eyes upon the ground.

XII

BERRIE'S VIGIL

The situation in which Berea now found herself would have disheartened most women of mature age, but she remained not only composed, she was filled with an irrational delight. The nurse that is in every woman was aroused in her, and she looked forward with joy to a night of vigil, confident that Wayland was not seriously injured and that he would soon be able to ride. She had no fear of the forest or of the night. Nature held no menace now that her tent was set and her fire alight.

Wayland, without really knowing anything about it, suspected that he owed his life to her intervention, and this belief deepened the feeling of admiration which he had hitherto felt toward her. He listened to her at work around the fire with a deepening sense of his indebtedness to her, and when she looked in to ask if she could do anything for him, his throat filled with an emotion which rendered his answer difficult.

As his mind cleared he became very curious to know precisely what had taken place, but he did not feel free to ask her. "She will tell me if she wishes me to know." That she had vanquished Belden and sent him on his way was evident, although he had not been able to hear what she had said to him at the last. What lay between the enemy's furious onslaught and the aid he lent in making the camp could only be surmised. "I wonder if she used her pistol?" Wayland asked himself. "Something like death must have stared him in the face."

"Strange how everything seems to throw me ever deeper into her debt," he thought, a little later. But he did not quite dare put into words the resentment which mingled with his gratitude. He hated to be put so constantly into the position of the one protected, defended. And yet it was his own fault. He had put himself among people and conditions where she was the stronger. Having ventured out of his world into hers he must take the consequences.

That she loved him with the complete passion of her powerful and simple nature he knew, for her voice had reached through the daze

of his semi-unconsciousness with thrilling power. The touch of her lips to his, the close clasp of her strong arms were of ever greater convincing quality. And yet he wished the revelation had come in some other way. His pride was abraded. His manhood seemed somehow lessened. It was a disconcerting reversal of the ordinary relations between hero and heroine, and he saw no way of re-establishing the normal attitude of the male.

Entirely unaware of what was passing in the mind of her patient, Berrie went about her duties with a cheerfulness which astonished the sufferer in the tent. She seemed about to hum a song as she set the skillet on the fire, but a moment later she called out, in a tone of irritation: "Here comes Nash!"

"I'm glad of that," answered Wayland, although he perceived something of her displeasure.

Nash, on his way to join the Supervisor, raised a friendly greeting as he saw the girl, and drew rein. "I expected to meet you farther down the hill," he said. "Tony 'phoned that you had started. Where did you leave the Supervisor?"

"Over at the station waiting for you. Where's your outfit?"

"Camped down the trail a mile or so. I thought I'd better push through to-night. What about Norcross? Isn't he with you?"

She hesitated an instant. "He's in the tent. He fell and struck his head on a rock, and I had to go into camp here."

Nash was deeply concerned. "Is that so? Well, that's hard luck. Is he badly hurt?"

"Well, he had a terrible fall. But he's easier now. I think he's asleep."

"May I look in on him?"

"I don't think you'd better take the time. It's a long, hard ride from here to the station. It will be deep night before you can make it—"

"Don't you think the Supervisor would want me to camp here to-night and do what I could for you? If Norcross is badly injured you will need me."

She liked Nash, and she knew he was right, and yet she was reluctant to give up the pleasure of her lone vigil. "He's not in any danger, and we'll be able to ride on in the morning."

Nash, thinking of her as Clifford Belden's promised wife, had no suspicion of her feeling toward Norcross. Therefore he gently urged that to go on was quite out of order. "I *can't* think of leaving you here alone—certainly not till I see Norcross and find out how badly he is hurt."

She yielded. "I reckon you're right," she said. "I'll go see if he is awake."

He followed her to the door of the tent, apprehending something new and inexplicable in her attitude. In the music of her voice as she spoke to the sick man was the love-note of the mate. "You may come in," she called back, and Nash, stooping, entered the small tent.

"Hello, old man, what you been doing with yourself? Hitting the high spots?"

Norcross smiled feebly. "No, the hill flew up and bumped *me*."

"How did it all happen?"

"I don't exactly know. It all came of a sudden. I had no share in it—I didn't go for to do it."

"Whether you did or not, you seem to have made a good job of it."

Nash examined the wounded man carefully, and his skill and strength in handling Norcross pleased Berrie, though she was jealous of the warm friendship which seemed to exist between the men.

She had always liked Nash, but she resented him now, especially as he insisted on taking charge of the case; but she gave way finally, and went back to her pots and pans with pensive countenance.

A little later, when Nash came out to make report, she was not very gracious in her manner. "He's pretty badly hurt," he said. "There's an ugly gash in his scalp, and the shock has produced a good deal of pain and confusion in his head; but he's going to be all right in a day or two. For a man seeking rest and recuperation he certainly has had a tough run of weather."

Though a serious-minded, honorable forester, determined to keep sternly in mind that he was in the presence of the daughter of his chief, and that she was engaged to marry another, Nash was, after all, a man, and the witchery of the hour, the charm of the girl's graceful figure, asserted their power over him. His eyes grew tender, and his voice eloquent in spite of himself. His words he could guard,

but it was hard to keep from his speech the song of the lover. The thought that he was to camp in her company, to help her about the fire, to see her from moment to moment, with full liberty to speak to her, to meet her glance, pleased him. It was the most romantic and moving episode in his life, and though of a rather dry and analytic temperament he had a sense of poesy.

The night, black, oppressive, and silent, brought a closer bond of mutual help and understanding between them. He built a fire of dry branches close to the tent door, and there sat, side by side with the girl, in the glow of embers, so close to the injured youth that they could talk together, and as he spoke freely, yet modestly, of his experiences Berrie found him more deeply interesting than she had hitherto believed him to be. True, he saw things less poetically than Wayland, but he was finely observant, and a man of studious and refined habits.

She grew friendlier, and asked him about his work, and especially about his ambitions and plans for the future. They discussed the forest and its enemies, and he wondered at her freedom in speaking of the Mill and saloon. He said: "Of course you know that Alec Belden is a partner in that business, and I'm told—of course I don't know this—that Clifford Belden is also interested."

She offered no defense of young Belden, and this unconcern puzzled him. He had expected indignant protest, but she merely replied: "I don't care who owns it. It should be rooted out. I hate that kind of thing. It's just another way of robbing those poor tie-jacks."

"Clifford should get out of it. Can't you persuade him to do so?"

"I don't think I can."

"His relationship to you—"

"He is not related to me."

Her tone amazed him. "You know what I mean."

"Of course I do, but you're mistaken. We're not related that way any longer."

This silenced him for a few moments, then he said: "I'm rather glad of that. He isn't anything like the man you thought he was—I couldn't say these things before—but he is as greedy as Alec, only not so open about it."

All this comment, which moved the forester so deeply to utter, seemed not to interest Berea. She sat staring at the fire with the calm brow of an Indian. Clifford Belden had passed out of her life as completely as he had vanished out of the landscape. She felt an immense relief at being rid of him, and resented his being brought back even as a subject of conversation.

Wayland, listening, fancied he understood her desire, and said nothing that might arouse Nash's curiosity.

Nash, on his part, knowing that she had broken with Belden, began to understand the tenderness, the anxious care of her face and voice, as she bent above young Norcross. As the night deepened and the cold air stung, he asked: "Have you plenty of blankets for a bed?"

"Oh yes," she answered, "but I don't intend to sleep."

"Oh, you must!" he declared. "Go to bed. I will keep the fire going."

At last she consented. "I will make my bed right here at the mouth of the tent close to the fire," she said, "and you can call me if you need me."

"Why not put your bed in the tent? It's going to be cold up here."

"I am all right outside," she protested.

"Put your bed inside, Miss Berrie. We can't let conventions count above timber-line. I shall rest better if I know you are properly sheltered."

And so it happened that for the third time she shared the same roof with her lover; but the nurse was uppermost in her now. At eleven thousand feet above the sea—with a cold drizzle of fine rain in the air—one does not consider the course of gossip as carefully as in a village, and Berrie slept unbrokenly till daylight.

Nash was the first to arise in the dusk of dawn, and Berrie, awakened by the crackle of his fire, soon joined him. There is no sweeter sound than the voice of the flame at such a time, in such a place. It endows the bleak mountainside with comfort, makes the ledge a hearthstone. It holds the promise of savory meats and fragrant liquor, and robs the frosty air of its terrors.

Wayland, hearing their voices, called out, with feeble humor: "Will some one please turn on the steam in my room?"

Berrie uttered a happy word. “How do you feel this morning?” she asked.

“Not precisely like a pugilist—well, yes, I believe I do—like the fellow who got second money.”

“How is the bump?” inquired Nash, thrusting his head inside the door.

“Reduced to the size of a golf-ball as near as I can judge of it. I doubt if I can wear a hat; but I’m feeling fine. I’m going to get up.”

Berrie was greatly relieved. “I’m so glad! Do you feel like riding down the hill?”

“Sure thing! I’m hungry, and as soon as I am fed I’m ready to start.”

Berrie joined the surveyor at the fire.

“If you’ll round up our horses, Mr. Nash, I’ll rustle breakfast and we’ll get going,” she said.

Nash, enthralled, lingered while she twisted her hair into place, then went out to bring in the ponies.

Wayland came out a little uncertainly, but looking very well. “I think I shall discourage my friends from coming to this region for their health,” he said, ruefully. “If I were a novelist now all this would be grist for my mill.”

Beneath his joking he was profoundly chagrined. He had hoped by this time to be as sinewy, as alert as Nash, instead of which here he sat, shivering over the fire like a sick girl, his head swollen, his blood sluggish; but this discouragement only increased Berea’s tenderness—a tenderness which melted all his reserve.

“I’m not worth all your care,” he said to her, with poignant glance.

The sun rose clear and warm, and the fire, the coffee, put new courage into him as well as into the others, and while the morning was yet early and the forest chill and damp with rain, the surveyor brought up the horses and started packing the outfit.

In this Berrie again took part, doing her half of the work quite as dextrously as Nash himself. Indeed, the forester was noticeably confused and not quite up to his usual level of adroit ease.

At last both packs were on, and as they stood together for a moment, Nash said: “This has been a great experience—one I shall remember as long as I live.”

She stirred uneasily under his frank admiration. “I’m mightily obliged to you,” she replied, as heartily as she could command.

“Don’t thank me, I’m indebted to you. There is so little in my life of such companionship as you and Norcross give me.”

“You’ll find it lonesome over at the station, I’m afraid,” said she. “But Moore intends to put a crew of tie-cutters in over there—that will help some.” She smiled.

“I’m not partial to the society of tie-jacks.”

“If you ride hard you may find that Moore girl in camp. She was there when we left.” There was a sparkle of mischief in her glance.

“I’m not interested in the Moore girl,” he retorted.

“Do you know her?”

“I’ve seen her at the post-office once or twice; *she* is not my kind.”

She gave him her hand. “Well, good-by. I’m all right now that Wayland can ride.”

He held her hand an instant. “I believe I’ll ride back with you as far as the camp.”

“You’d better go on. Father is waiting for you. I’ll send the men along.” There was dismissal in her voice, and yet she recognized as never before the fine qualities that were his. “Please don’t say anything of this to others, and tell my father not to worry about us. We’ll pull in all right.”

He helped Norcross mount his horse, and as he put the lead rope into Berrie’s hand, he said: with much feeling: “Good luck to you. I shall remember this night all the rest of my life.”

“I hate to be going to the rear,” called Wayland, whose bare, bandaged head made him look like a wounded young officer. “But I guess it’s better for me to lay off for a week or two and recover my tone.”

And so they parted, the surveyor riding his determined way up the naked mountainside toward the clouds, while Berrie and her ward plunged at once into the dark and dripping forest below. “If you can stand the grief,” she said, “we’ll go clear through.”

Wayland had his misgivings, but did not say so. His confidence in his guide was complete. She would do her part, that was certain. Several times she was forced to dismount and blaze out a new path in order to avoid some bog; but she sternly refused his aid. “You must not get off,” she warned; “stay where you are. I can do this work better alone.”

They were again in that green, gloomy, and silent zone of the range, where giant spruces grow, and springs, oozing from the rocks, trickle over the trail. It was very beautiful, but menacing, by reason of its apparently endless thickets cut by stony ridges. It was here she met the two young men, Downing and Travis, bringing forward the surveying outfit, but she paused only to say: “Push along steadily. You are needed on the other side.”

After leaving the men, and with a knowledge that the remaining leagues of the trail were solitary, Norcross grew fearful. “The fall of a horse, an accident to that brave girl, and we would be helpless,” he thought. “I wish Nash had returned with us.” Once his blood chilled with horror as he watched his guide striking out across the marge of a grassy lake. This meadow, as he divined, was really a carpet of sod floating above a bottomless pool of muck, for it shook beneath her horse’s feet.

“Come on, it’s all right,” she called back, cheerily. “We’ll soon pick up the other trail.”

He wondered how she knew, for to him each hill was precisely like another, each thicket a maze.

Her caution was all for him. She tried each dangerous slough first, and thus was able to advise him which way was safest. His head throbbed with pain and his knees were weary, but he rode on, manifesting such cheer as he could, resolving not to complain at any cost; but his self-respect ebbed steadily, leaving him in bitter, silent dejection.

At last they came into open ground on a high ridge, and were gladdened by the valley outspread below them, for it was still radiant with color, though not as brilliant as before the rain. It had been dimmed, but not darkened. And yet it seemed that a month had passed since their ecstatic ride upward through the golden forest,

and Wayland said as much while they stood for a moment surveying the majestic park with its wall of guardian peaks.

But Berrie replied: “It seems only a few hours to me.”

From this point the traveling was good, and they descended rapidly, zigzagging from side to side of a long, sweeping ridge. By noon they were once more down amid the aspens, basking in a world of sad gold leaves and delicious September sunshine.

At one o’clock, on the bank of a clear stream, the girl halted. “I reckon we’d better camp awhile. You look tired, and I am hungry.”

He gratefully acquiesced in this stop, for his knees were trembling with the strain of the stirrups; but he would not permit her to ease him down from his saddle. Turning a wan glance upon her, he bitterly asked: “Must I always play the weakling before you? I am ashamed of myself. Ride on and leave me to rot here in the grass. I’m not worth keeping alive.”

“You must not talk like that,” she gently admonished him. “You’re not to blame.”

“Yes, I am. I should never have ventured into this man’s country.”

“I’m glad you did,” she answered, as if she were comforting a child. “For if you hadn’t I should never have known you.”

“That would have been no loss—to you,” he bitterly responded.

She unsaddled one pack-animal and spread some blankets on the grass. “Lie down and rest while I boil some coffee,” she commanded; and he obeyed, too tired to make pretension toward assisting.

Lying so, feeling the magic of the sun, hearing the music of the water, and watching the girl, he regained a serener mood, and when she came back with his food he thanked her for it with a glance before which her eyes fell. “I don’t see why you are so kind to me, I really believe you *like* to do things for me.” Her head drooped to hide her face, and he went on: “Why do you care for me? Tell me!”

“I don’t know,” she murmured. Then she added, with a flash of bravery: “But I do.”

“What a mystery it all is! You turn from a splendid fellow like Landon to a ‘skate’ like me. Landon worships you—you know that—don’t you?”

“I know—he—” she ended, vaguely distressed.

"Did he ask you to marry him?"

"Yes."

"Why didn't you? He's just the mate for you. He's a man of high character and education." She made no answer to this, and he went on: "Dear girl, I'm not worth your care—truly I'm not. I resented your engagement to Belden, for he was a brute; but Landon is different. He thinks the world of you. He'll go high in the service. I've never done anything in the world—I never shall. It will be better for you if I go—to-morrow."

She took his hand and pressed it to her cheek, then, putting her arm about his neck, drew him to her bosom and kissed him passionately. "You break my heart when you talk like that," she protested, with tears. "You mustn't say such gloomy things—I won't let you give up. You shall come right home with me, and I will nurse you till you are well. It was all my fault. If we had only stayed in camp at the lake daddy would have joined us that night, and if I had not loitered on the mountain yesterday Cliff would not have overtaken us. It's all my fault."

"I will not have it go that way," he said. "I've brought you only care and unhappiness thus far. I'm an alien—my ways are not your ways."

"I can change," she answered. "I hate my ways, and I like yours."

As they argued she felt no shame, and he voiced no resentment. She knew his mood. She understood his doubt, his depression. She pleaded as a man might have done, ready to prove her love, eager to restore his self-respect, while he remained both bitter and sadly contemptuous.

A cow-hand riding up the trail greeted Berrie respectfully, but a cynical smile broke out on his lips as he passed on. Another witness—another gossip.

She did not care. She had no further concern of the valley's comment. Her life's happiness hung on the drooping eyelashes of this wounded boy, and to win him back to cheerful acceptance of life was her only concern.

"I've never had any motives," he confessed. "I've always done what pleased me at the moment—or because it was easier to do as others were doing. I went to college that way. Truth is, I never had any surplus vitality, and my father never demanded anything of me. I

haven't any motives now. A few days ago I was interested in forestry. At this time it all seems futile. What's the use of my trying to live?"

Part of all this despairing cry arose from weariness, and part from a luxurious desire to be comforted, for it was sweet to feel her sympathy. He even took a morbid pleasure in the distress of her eyes and lips while her rich voice murmured in soothing protest.

She, on her part, was frightened for him, and as she thought of the long ride still before them she wrung her hands. "Oh, what shall I do? What shall I do?" she moaned.

Instantly smitten into shame, into manlier mood, he said: "Don't worry about me, please don't. I can ride. I'm feeling better. You must not weaken. Please forgive my selfish complaints. I'm done! You'll never hear it again. Come, let us go on. I can ride."

"If we can reach Miller's ranch—"

"I can ride to *your* ranch," he declared, and rose with such new-found resolution that she stared at him in wonder.

He was able to smile. "I've had my little crying spell. I've relieved my heart of its load. I didn't mean to agonize you. It was only a slump." He put his hand to his head. "I must be a comical figure. Wonder what that cowboy thought of me?"

His sudden reversal to cheer was a little alarming to her, but at length she perceived that he had in truth mastered his depression, and bringing up the horses she saddled them, and helped him to mount. "If you get tired or feel worse, tell me, and we'll go into camp," she urged as they were about to start.

"You keep going till I give the sign," he replied; and his voice was so firm and clear that her own sunny smile came back. "I don't know what to make of you," she said. "I reckon you must be a poet."

XIII

THE GOSSIPS AWAKE

It was dark when they reached the village, but Wayland declared his ability to go on, although his wounded head was throbbing with fever and he was clinging to the pommel of his saddle; so Berrie rode on.

Mrs. McFarlane, hearing the horses on the bridge, was at the door and received her daughter with wondering question, while the stable-hands, quick to detect an injured man, hurried to lift Norcross down from his saddle.

"What's the matter?" repeated Mrs. McFarlane.

"He fell and struck his head on a stone," Berea hastily explained. "Take the horses, boys, mother and I will look out for Mr. Norcross."

The men obeyed her and fell back, but they were consumed with curiosity, and their glances irritated the girl. "Slip the packs at once," she insisted.

With instant sympathy her mother came to her aid in supporting the wounded, weary youth indoors, and as he stretched out on the couch in the sitting-room, he remarked, with a faint, ironic smile: "This beats any bed of balsam boughs."

"Where's your father?" asked Mrs. McFarlane of her daughter.

"He's over on the Ptarmigan. I've a powerful lot to tell you, mother; but not now; we must look after Wayland. He's nearly done up, and so am I."

Mrs. McFarlane winced a little at her daughter's use of Norcross's first name, but she said nothing further at the moment, although she watched Berrie closely while she took off Wayland's shoes and stockings and rubbed his icy feet. "Get him something hot as quick as you can!" she commanded; and Mrs. McFarlane obeyed without a word.

Gradually the tremor passed out of his limbs and a delicious sense of warmth, of safety, stole over him, and he closed his eyes in the comfort of her presence and care. "Rigorous business this life of the

pioneer," he said, with mocking inflection. "I think I prefer a place in the lumber trust."

"Don't talk," she said. Then, with a rush of tender remorse: "Why didn't you tell me to stop? I didn't realize that you were so tired. We could have stopped at the Springs."

"I didn't know how tired I was till I got here. Gee," he said, boyishly, "that door-knob at the back of my head is red-hot! You're good to me," he added, humbly.

She hated to have him resume that tone of self-depreciation, and, kneeling to him, she kissed his cheek, and laid her head beside his. "You're splendid," she insisted. "Nobody could be braver; but you should have told me you were exhausted. You fooled me with your cheerful answers."

He accepted her loving praise, her clasping arms, as a part of the rescue from the darkness and pain of the long ride, careless of what it might bring to him in the future. He ate his toast and drank his coffee, and permitted the women to lead him to his room, and then being alone he crept into his bed and fell instantly asleep.

Berrie and her mother went back to the sitting-room, and Mrs. McFarlane closed the door behind them. "Now tell me all about it," she said, in the tone of one not to be denied.

The story went along very smoothly till the girl came to the second night in camp beside the lake; there her voice faltered, and the reflective look in the mother's eyes deepened as she learned that her daughter had shared her tent with the young man. "It was the only thing to do, mother," Berrie bravely said. "It was cold and wet outside, and you know he isn't very strong, and his teeth were chattering, he was so chilled. I know it sounds strange down here; but up there in the woods in the storm what I did seemed right and natural. You know what I mean, don't you?"

"Yes, I understand. I don't blame you—only—if others should hear of it—"

"But they won't. No one knows of our being alone there except Tony and father."

"Are you sure? Doesn't Mrs. Belden know?"

"I don't think so—not yet."

Mrs. McFarlane's nervousness grew. "I wish you hadn't gone on this trip. If the Beldens find out you were alone with Mr. Norcross they'll make much of it. It will give them a chance at your father." Her mind turned upon another point. "When did Mr. Norcross get his fall?"

"On the way back." Here Berrie hesitated again. "I don't like to tell you, mother, but he didn't fall, Cliff jumped him and tried to kill him."

The mother doubted her ears. "Cliff did? How did he happen to meet you?"

Berrie was quick to answer. "I don't know how he found out we were on the trail. I suppose the old lady 'phoned him. Anyhow, while we were camped for noon yesterday"—her face flamed again at thought of that tender, beautiful moment when they were resting on the grass—"while we were at our lunch he came tearing down the hill on that big bay horse of his and took a flying jump at Wayland. As Wayland went down he struck his head on a stone. I thought he was dead, and I was paralyzed for a second. Then I flew at Cliff and just about choked the life out of him. I'd have ended him right there if he hadn't let go."

Mrs. McFarlane, looking upon her daughter in amazement, saw on her face the shadow of the deadly rage which had burned in her heart as she clenched young Belden's throat.

"What then? What happened then?"

"He let go, you bet." Her smile came back. "And when he realized what he'd done—*he* thought Wayland was dead—he began to weaken. Then I took my gun and was all for putting an end to him right there, when I saw Wayland's eyelids move. After that I didn't care what became of Cliff. I told him to ride on and keep a-ridin', and I reckon he's clear out of the state by this time. If he ever shows up I'll put him where he'll have all night to be sorry in."

"When did this take place?"

"Yesterday about two. Of course Wayland couldn't ride, he was so dizzy and kind o' confused, and so I went into camp right there at timber-line. Along about sunset Nash came riding up from this side, and insisted on staying to help me—so I let him."

Mrs. McFarlane's tense attitude relaxed. "Nash is not the kind that tattles. I'm glad he turned up."

"And this morning I saddled and came down."

"Did Nash go on?"

"Yes, daddy was waiting for him, so I sent him along."

"It's all sad business," groaned Mrs. McFarlane, "and I can see you're keeping something back. How did Cliff happen to know just where you were? And what started you back without your father?"

For the first time Berrie showed signs of weakness and distress. "Why, you see, Alec Belden and Mr. Moore were over there to look at some timber, and old Marm Belden and that Moore girl went along. I suppose they sent word to Cliff, and I presume that Moore girl put him on our trail. Leastwise that's the way I figure it out. That's the worst of the whole business." She admitted this with darkened brow. "Mrs. Belden's tongue is hung in the middle and loose at both ends—and that Moore girl is spiteful mean." She could not keep the contempt out of her voice. "She saw us start off, and she is sure to follow it up and find out what happened on the way home; even if they don't see Cliff they'll *talk*."

"Oh, I *wish* you hadn't gone!" exclaimed the worried mother.

"It can't be helped now, and it hasn't done me any real harm. It's all in the day's work, anyhow. I've always gone with daddy before, and this trip isn't going to spoil me. The boys all know me, and they will treat me fair."

"Yes, but Mr. Norcross is an outsider—a city man. They will all think evil of him on that account."

"I know; that's what troubles me. No one will know how fine and considerate he was. Mother, I've never known any one like him. He's a poet! He's taught me to see things I never saw before. Everything interests him—the birds, the clouds, the voices in the fire. I never was so happy in my life as I was during those first two days, and that night in camp before he began to worry—it was just wonderful." Words failed her, but her shining face and the forward straining pose of her body enlightened the mother. "I don't care what people say of me if only they will be just to him. They've *got* to treat him right," she added, firmly.

"Did he speak to you—are you engaged?"

Her head drooped. “Not really engaged, mother; but he told me how much he liked me—and—it’s all right, mother, I *know* it is. I’m not fine enough for him, but I’m going to try to change my ways so he won’t be ashamed of me.”

Mrs. McFarlane’s face cleared. “He surely is a fine young fellow, and can be trusted to do the right thing. Well, we might as well go to bed. We can’t settle anything till your father gets home,” she said.

Wayland rose next morning free from dizziness and almost free from pain, and when he came out of his room his expression was cheerful. “I feel as if I’d slept a week, and I’m hungry. I don’t know why I should be, but I am.”

Mrs. McFarlane met him with something very intimate, something almost maternal in her look; but her words were as few and as restrained as ever. He divined that she had been talking with Berrie, and that a fairly clear understanding of the situation had been reached. That this understanding involved him closely he was aware; but nothing in his manner acknowledged it.

She did not ask any questions, believing that sooner or later the whole story must come out. The fact that Siona Moore and Mrs. Belden knew that Berrie had started back on Thursday with young Norcross made it easy for the villagers to discover that she had not reached the ranch till Saturday. “What could Joe have been thinking of to allow them to go?” she said. “Mr. Nash’s presence in the camp must be made known; but then there is Clifford’s assault upon Mr. Norcross, can that be kept secret, too?” And so while the young people chatted, the troubled mother waited in fear, knowing that in a day or two the countryside would be aflame with accusation.

In a landscape like this, as she well knew, nothing moves unobserved. The native—man or woman—is able to perceive and name objects scarcely discernible to the eye of the alien. A minute speck is discovered on the hillside. “Hello, there’s Jim Sanders on his roan,” says one, or “Here comes Kit Jenkins with her flea-bit gray. I wonder who’s on the bay alongside of her,” remarks another, and each of these observations is taken quite as a matter of course. With a wide and empty field of vision, and with trained, unspoiled optic nerves, the plainsman is marvelously penetrating of glance. Hence, Mrs. McFarlane was perfectly certain that not one but several of her neighbors had seen and recognized Berrie and young Norcross as

they came down the hill. In a day or two every man would know just where they camped, and what had taken place in camp. Mrs. Belden would not rest till she had ferreted out every crook and turn of that trail, and her speech was quite as coarse as that of any of her male associates.

Easy-going with regard to many things, these citizens were abnormally alive to all matters relating to courtship, and popular as she believed Berrie to be, Mrs. McFarlane could not hope that her daughter would be spared—especially by the Beldens, who would naturally feel that Clifford had been cheated. She sighed deeply. "Well, nothing can be done till Joe returns," she repeated.

A long day's rest, a second night's sleep, set Wayland on his feet. He came to breakfast quite gay. "Barring the hickory-nut on the back of my head," he explained, "I'm feeling fine, almost ready for another expedition. I may make a ranger yet."

Berrie, though equally gay, was not so sure of his ability to return to work. "I reckon you'd better go easy till daddy gets back; but if you feel like it we'll ride up to the post-office this afternoon."

"I want to start right in to learn to throw that hitch, and I'm going to practise with an ax till I can strike twice in the same place. This trip was an eye-opener. Great man I'd be in a windfall—wouldn't I?"

He was persuaded to remain very quiet for another day, and part of it was spent in conversation with Mrs. McFarlane—whom he liked very much—and an hour or more in writing a long letter wherein he announced to his father his intention of going into the Forest Service. "I've got to build up a constitution," he said, "and I don't know of a better place to do it in. Besides, I'm beginning to be interested in the scheme. I like the Supervisor. I'm living in his house at the present time, and I'm feeling contented and happy, so don't worry about me."

He was indeed quite comfortable, save when he realized that Mrs. McFarlane was taking altogether too much for granted in their relationship. It was delightful to be so watched over, so waited upon, so instructed. "But where is it all leading me?" he continued to ask himself—and still that wall of reserve troubled and saddened Berrie.

They expected McFarlane that night, and waited supper for him, but he did not come, and so they ate without him, and afterward

Wayland helped Berrie do up the dishes while the mother bent above her sewing by the kitchen lamp.

There was something very sweet and gentle about Mrs. McFarlane, and the exile took almost as much pleasure in talking with her as with her daughter. He led her to tell of her early experiences in the valley, and of the strange types of men and women with whom she had crossed the range.

"Some of them are here yet," she said. "In fact the most violent of all the opponents to the Service are these old adventurers. I don't think they deserve to be called pioneers. They never did any work in clearing the land or in building homes. Some of them, who own big herds of cattle, still live in dug-outs. They raged at Mr. McFarlane for going into the Service—called him a traitor. Old Jake Proudfoot was especially furious—"

"You should see where old Jake lives," interrupted Berrie. "He sleeps on the floor in one corner of his cabin, and never changes his shirt."

"Hush!" warned Mrs. McFarlane.

"That's what the men all say. Daddy declares if they were to scrape Jake they'd find at least five layers of shirts. His wife left him fifteen years ago, couldn't stand his habits, and he's got worse ever since. Naturally he is opposed to the Service."

"Of course," her mother explained, "those who oppose the Supervisor aren't all like Jake; but it makes me angry to have the papers all quoting Jake as 'one of the leading ranchers of the valley.'"

She could not bring herself to take up the most vital subject of all—the question of her daughter's future. "I'll wait till father gets home," she decided.

On the fourth morning the 'phone rang, and the squawking voice of Mrs. Belden came over the wire. "I wanted to know if Berrie and her feller got home all right?"

"Yes, they arrived safely."

The old woman chuckled. "Last I see of Cliff he was hot on their trail—looked like he expected to take a hand in that expedition. Did he overtake 'em?"

"I don't hear very well—where are you?"

"I'm at the Scott ranch—we're coming round 'the horn' to-day."

"Where is the Supervisor?"

"He headed across yesterday. Say, Cliff was mad as a hornet when he started. I'd like to know what happened—"

Mrs. McFarlane hung up the receiver. The old woman's nasty chuckle was intolerable; but in silencing the 'phone Mrs. McFarlane was perfectly aware that she was not silencing the gossip; on the contrary, she was certain that the Beldens would leave a trail of poisonous comment from the Ptarmigan to Bear Tooth. It was all sweet material for them.

Berrie wanted to know who was speaking, and Mrs. McFarlane replied: "Mrs. Belden wanted to know if you got through all right."

"She said something else, something to heat you up," persisted the girl, who perceived her mother's agitation. "What did she say—something about me—and Cliff?"

The mother did not answer, for Wayland entered the room at the moment; but Berrie knew that traducers were already busy with her affairs. "I don't care anything about old lady Belden," she said, later; "but I hate to have that Moore girl telling lies about me."

As for Wayland, the nights in the camp by the lake, and, indeed, all the experiences of his trip in the high places were becoming each moment more remote, more unreal. Camp life at timber-line did not seem to him subject to ordinary conventional laws of human conduct, and the fact that he and Berrie had shared the same tent under the stress of cold and snow, now seemed so far away as to be only a complication in a splendid mountain drama. Surely no blame could attach to the frank and generous girl, even though the jealous assault of Cliff Belden should throw the valley into a fever of chatter. "Furthermore, I don't believe he will be in haste to speak of his share in the play," he added. "It was too nearly criminal."

It was almost noon of the fourth day when the Supervisor called up to say that he was at the office, and would reach the ranch at six o'clock.

"I wish you would come home at once," his wife argued; and something in her voice convinced him that he was more needed at home, than in the town.

"All right, mother. Hold the fort an hour and I'll be there."

Mrs. McFarlane met him at the hitching-bar, and it required but a glance for him to read in her face a troubled state of mind.

"This has been a disastrous trip for Berrie," she said, after one of the hands had relieved the Supervisor of his horse.

"In what way?"

She was a bit impatient. "Mrs. Belden is filling the valley with the story of Berrie's stay in camp with Mr. Norcross."

His face showed a graver line. "It couldn't be helped. The horses had to be followed, and that youngster couldn't do it—and, besides, I expected to get back that night. Nobody but an old snoop like Seth Belden would think evil of our girl. And, besides, Norcross is a man to be trusted."

"Of course he is, but the Beldens are ready to think evil of any one connected with us. And Cliff's assault on Wayland—"

He looked up quickly. "Assault? Did he make trouble?"

"Yes, he overtook them on the trail, and would have killed Norcross if Berrie hadn't interfered. He was crazy with jealousy."

"Nash didn't say anything about any assault."

"He didn't know it. Berrie told him that Norcross fell from his horse."

McFarlane was deeply stirred. "I saw Cliff leave camp, but I didn't think anything of it. Why should he jump Norcross?"

"I suppose Mrs. Belden filled him with distrust of Berrie. He was already jealous, and when he came up with them and found them lunching together, he lost his head and rushed at Wayland like a wild beast. Of course he couldn't stand against a big man like Cliff, and his head struck on a stone; and if Berrie hadn't throttled the brute he would have murdered the poor boy right there before her eyes."

"Good God! I never suspected a word of this. I didn't think he'd do that."

The Supervisor was now very grave. These domestic matters at once threw his work as forester into the region of vague and unimportant abstractions. He began to understand the danger into which Berea had fallen, and step by step he took up the trails which had brought them all to this pass.

He fixed another penetrating look upon her face, and his voice was vibrant with anxiety as he said: "You don't think there's anything—wrong?"

"No, nothing wrong; but she's profoundly in love with him. I never have seen her so wrapped up in any one. She thinks of nothing else. It scares me to see it, for I've studied him closely and I can't believe he feels the same toward her. His world is so different from ours. I don't know what to do or say. I fear she is in for a period of great unhappiness."

She was at the beginning of tears, and he sought to comfort her. "Don't worry, honey, she's got too much horse sense to do anything foolish. She's grown up. I suppose it's his being so different from the other boys that catches her. We've always been good chums—let me talk with her. She mustn't make a mistake."

The return of the crew from the corral cut short this conference, and when McFarlane went in Berrie greeted him with such frank and joyous expression that all his fears vanished.

"Did you come over the high trail?" she asked.

"No, I came your way. I didn't want to take any chances on getting mired. It's still raining up there," he answered, then turned to Wayland: "Here's your mail, Norcross, a whole hatful of it—and one telegram in the bunch. Hope it isn't serious."

Wayland took the bundle of letters and retired to his room, glad to escape the persistent stare of the cow-hands. The despatch was from his father, and was curt and specific as a command: "Shall be in Denver on the 23d, meet me at the Palmer House. Am on my way to California. Come prepared to join me on the trip."

With the letters unopened in his lap he sat in silent thought, profoundly troubled by the instant decision which this message demanded of him. At first glance nothing was simpler than to pack up and go. He was only a tourist in the valley with no intention of staying; but there was Berea! To go meant a violent end of their pleasant romance. To think of flight saddened him, and yet his better judgment was clearly on the side of going. "Much as I like her, much as I admire her, I cannot marry her. The simplest way is to frankly tell her so and go. It seems cowardly, but in the end she will be happier."

His letters carried him back into his own world. One was from Will Halliday, who was going with Professor Holsman on an exploring trip up the Nile. "You must join us. Holsman has promised to take you on." Another classmate wrote to know if he did not want to go into a land deal on the Gulf of Mexico. A girl asked: "Are you to be in New York this winter? I am. I've decided to go into this Suffrage Movement." And so, one by one, the threads which bound him to Eastern city life re-spun their filaments. After all, this Colorado outing, even though it should last two years, would only be a vacation—his real life was in the cities of the East. Charming as Berea was, potent as she seemed, she was after all a fixed part of the mountain land, and not to be taken from it. At the moment marriage with her appeared absurd.

A knock at his door and the Supervisor's voice gave him a keen shock. "Come in," he called, springing to his feet with a thrill of dread, of alarm.

McFarlane entered slowly and shut the door behind him. His manner was serious, and his voice gravely gentle as he said: "I hope that telegram does not call you away?"

"It is from my father, asking me to meet him in Denver," answered Norcross, with faltering breath. "He's on his way to California. Won't you sit down?"

The older man took a seat with quiet dignity. "Seems like a mighty fine chance, don't it? I've always wanted to see the Coast. When do you plan for to pull out?"

Wayland was not deceived by the Supervisor's casual tone; there was something ominously calm in his manner, something which expressed an almost dangerous interest in the subject.

"I haven't decided to go at all. I'm still dazed by the suddenness of it. I didn't know my father was planning this trip."

"I see. Well, before you decide to go I'd like to have a little talk with you. My daughter has told me part of what happened to you on the trail. I want to know *all* of it. You're young, but you've been out in the world, and you know what people can say about you and my girl." His voice became level and menacing, as he added: "And I don't intend to have her put in wrong on account of you."

Norcross was quick to reply. “Nobody will dare accuse her of wrongdoing. She’s a noble girl. No one will dare to criticize her for what she could not prevent.”

“You don’t know the Beldens. My girl’s character will be on trial in every house in the county to-morrow. The Belden side of it will appear in the city papers. Sympathy will be with Clifford. Berrie will be made an issue by my enemies. They’ll get me through her.”

“Good Lord!” exclaimed Norcross, in sudden realization of the gravity of the case. “What beasts they are!”

“Moore’s gang will seize upon it and work it hard,” McFarlane went on, with calm insistence. “They want to bring the district forester down on me. This is a fine chance to badger me. They will make a great deal of my putting you on the roll. Our little camping trip is likely to prove a serious matter to us all.”

“Surely you don’t consider me at fault?”

Worried as he was, the father was just. “No, you’re not to blame—no one is to blame. It all dates back to the horses quitting camp; but you’ve got to stand pat now—for Berrie’s sake.”

“But what can I do? I’m at your service. What rôle shall I play? Tell me what to do, and I will do it.”

McFarlane was staggered, but he answered: “You can at least stay on the ground and help fight. This is no time to stampede.”

“You’re right. I’ll stay, and I’ll make any statement you see fit. I’ll do anything that will protect Berrie.”

McFarlane again looked him squarely in the eyes. “Is there a—an agreement between you?”

“Nothing formal—that is—I mean I admire her, and I told her—” He stopped, feeling himself on the verge of the irrevocable. “She’s a splendid girl,” he went on. “I like her exceedingly, but I’ve known her only a few weeks.”

McFarlane interrupted. “Girls are flighty critters,” he said, sadly. “I don’t know why she’s taken to you so terrible strong; but she has. She don’t seem to care what people say so long as they do not blame you; but if you should pull out you might just as well cut her heart to pieces—” His voice broke, and it was a long time before he could finish. “You’re not at fault, I know that, but if you *can* stay on a little

while and make it an ounce or two easier for her and for her mother, I wish you'd do it."

Wayland extended his hand impulsively. "Of course I'll stay. I never really thought of leaving." In the grip of McFarlane's hand was something warm and tender.

He rose. "I'm terribly obliged," he said; "but we mustn't let her suspect for a minute that we've been discussing her. She hates being pitied or helped."

"She shall not experience a moment's uneasiness that I can prevent," replied the youth; and at the moment he meant it.

Berrie could not be entirely deceived. She read in her father's face a subtle change of line which she related to something Wayland had said. "Did he tell you what was in the telegram? Has he got to go away?" she asked, anxiously.

"Yes, he said it was from his father."

"What does his father want of him?"

"He's on his way to California and wants Wayland to go with him; but Wayland says he's not going."

A pang shot through Berrie's heart. "He mustn't go—he isn't able to go," she exclaimed, and her pain, her fear, came out in her sharpened, constricted tone. "I won't let him go—till he's well."

Mrs. McFarlane gently interposed. "He'll have to go, honey, if his father needs him."

"Let his father come here." She rose, and, going to his door, decisively knocked. "May I come in?" she demanded, rather than asked, before her mother could protest. "I must see you."

Wayland opened the door, and she entered, leaving her parents facing each other in mute helplessness.

Mrs. McFarlane turned toward her husband with a face of despair. "She's ours no longer, Joe. Our time of bereavement has come."

He took her in his arms. "There, there, mother. Don't cry. It can't be helped. You cut loose from your parents and came to me in just the same way. Our daughter's a grown woman, and must have her own life. All we can do is to defend her against the coyotes who are busy with her name."

“But what of *him*, Joe; he don’t care for her as she does for him—can’t you see that?”

“He’ll do the right thing, mother; he told me he would. He knows how much depends on his staying here now, and he intends to do it.”

“But in the end, Joe, after this scandal is lived down, can he—will he—marry her? And if he marries her can they live together and be happy? His way of life is so different. He can’t content himself here, and she can’t fit in where he belongs. It all seems hopeless to me. Wouldn’t it be better for her to suffer for a little while now than to make a mistake that may last a lifetime?”

“Mebbe it would, mother, but the decision is not ours. She’s too strong for us to control. She’s of age, and if she comes to a full understanding of the situation, she can decide the question a whole lot better than either of us.”

“That’s true,” she sighed. “In some ways she’s bigger and stronger than both of us. Sometimes I wish she were not so self-reliant.”

“Well, that’s the way life is, sometimes, and I reckon there’s nothin’ left for you an’ me but to draw closer together and try to fill up the empty place she’s going to leave between us.”

XIV

THE SUMMONS

When Wayland caught the startled look on Berrie's face he knew that she had learned from her father the contents of his telegram, and that she would require an explanation.

"Are you going away?" she asked.

"Yes. At least, I must go down to Denver to see my father. I shall be gone only over night."

"And will you tell him about our trip?" she pursued, with unflinching directness. "And about—me?"

He gave her a chair, and took a seat himself before replying. "Yes, I shall tell him all about it, and about you and your father and mother. He shall know how kind you've all been to me."

He said this bravely, and at the moment he meant it; but as his father's big, impassive face and cold, keen eyes came back to him his courage sank, and in spite of his firm resolution some part of his secret anxiety communicated itself to the girl, who asked many questions, with intent to find out more particularly what kind of man the elder Norcross was.

Wayland's replies did not entirely reassure her. He admitted that his father was harsh and domineering in character, and that he was ambitious to have his son take up and carry forward his work. "He was willing enough to have me go to college till he found I was specializing on wrong lines. Then I had to fight in order to keep my place. He's glad I'm out here, for he thinks I'm regaining my strength. But just as soon as I'm well enough he expects me to go to Chicago and take charge of the Western office. Of course, I don't want to do that. I'd rather work out some problem in chemistry that interests me; but I may have to give in, for a time at least."

"Will your mother and sisters be with your father?"

"No, indeed! You couldn't get any one of them west of the Hudson River with a log-chain. My sisters were both born in Michigan, but they want to forget it—they pretend they have forgotten it. They both have New-Yorkitis. Nothing but the Plaza will do them now."

"I suppose they think we're all 'Injuns' out here?"

"Oh no, not so bad as that; but they wouldn't comprehend anything about you except your muscle. That would catch 'em. They'd worship your splendid health, just as I do. It's pitiful the way they both try to put on weight. They're always testing some new food, some new tonic—they'll do anything except exercise regularly and go to bed at ten o'clock."

All that he said of his family deepened her dismay. Their interests were so alien to her own.

"I'm afraid to have you go even for a day," she admitted, with simple honesty, which moved him deeply. "I don't know what I should do if you went away. I think of nothing but you now."

Her face was pitiful, and he put his arm about her neck as if she were a child. "You mustn't do that. You must go on with your life just as if I'd never been. Think of your father's job—of the forest and the ranch."

"I can't do it. I've lost interest in the service. I never want to go into the high country again, and I don't want you to go, either. It's too savage and cruel."

"That is only a mood," he said, confidently. "It is splendid up there. I shall certainly go back some time."

He could not divine, and she could not tell him, how poignantly she had sensed the menace of the cold and darkness during his illness. For the first time in her life she had realized to the full the unrelenting enmity of the clouds, the wind, the night; and during that interminable ride toward home, when she saw him bending lower and lower over his saddle-bow, her allegiance to the trail, her devotion to the stirrup was broken. His weariness and pain had changed the universe for her. Never again would she look upon the range with the eyes of the care-free girl. The other, the civilized, the domestic, side of her was now dominant. A new desire, a bigger aspiration, had taken possession of her.

Little by little he realized this change in her, and was touched with the wonder of it. He had never had any great self-love either as man or scholar, and the thought of this fine, self-sufficient womanly soul centering all its interests on him was humbling. Each moment his

responsibility deepened, and he heard her voice but dimly as she went on.

"Of course we are not rich; but we are not poor, and my mother's family is one of the oldest in Kentucky." She uttered this with a touch of her mother's quiet dignity. "Your father need not despise us."

"So far as my father is concerned, family don't count, and neither does money. But he confidently expects me to take up his business in Chicago, and I suppose it is my duty to do so. If he finds me looking fit he may order me into the ranks at once."

"I'll go there—I'll do anything you want me to do," she urged. "You can tell your father that I'll help you in the office. I can learn. I'm ready to use a typewriter—anything."

He was silent in the face of her naïve expression of self-sacrificing love, and after a moment she added, hesitatingly: "I wish I could meet your father. Perhaps he'd come up here if you asked him to do so?"

He seized upon the suggestion. "By George! I believe he would. I don't want to go to town. I just believe I'll wire him that I'm laid up here and can't come." Then a shade of new trouble came over his face. How would the stern, methodical old business man regard this slovenly ranch and its primitive ways? She felt the question in his face.

"You're afraid to have him come," she said, with the same disconcerting penetration which had marked every moment of her interview thus far. "You're afraid he wouldn't like me?"

With almost equal frankness he replied: "No. I think he'd like *you*, but this town and the people up here would gall him. Order is a religion with him. Then he's got a vicious slant against all this conservation business—calls it tommy-rot. He and your father might lock horns first crack out of the box. But I'll risk it. I'll wire him at once."

A knock at the door interrupted him, and Mrs. McFarlane's voice, filled with new excitement, called out: "Berrie, the District office is on the wire."

Berrie opened the door and confronted her mother, who said: "Mr. Evingham 'phones that the afternoon papers contain an account of a fight at Coal City between Settle and one of Alec

Belden's men, and that the District Forester is coming down to investigate it."

"Let him come," answered Berrie, defiantly. "He can't do us any harm. What was the row about?"

"I didn't hear much of it. Your father was at the 'phone."

McFarlane, with the receiver to his ear, was saying: "Don't know a thing about it, Mr. Evingham. Settle was at the station when I left. I didn't know he was going down to Coal City. No, that's a mistake. My daughter was never engaged to Alec Belden. Alec Belden is the older of the brothers, and is married. I can't go into that just now. If you come down I'll explain fully."

He hung up the receiver and slowly turned toward his wife and daughter. "This sure is our day of trouble," he said, with dejected countenance.

"What is it all about?" asked Berrie.

"Why, it seems that after I left yesterday Settle rode down the valley with Belden's outfit, and they all got to drinking, ending in a row, and Tony beat one of Belden's men almost to death. The sheriff has gone over to get Tony, and the Beldens declare they're going to railroad him. That means we'll all be brought into it. Belden has seized the moment to prefer charges against me for keeping Settle in the service and for putting a non-resident on the roll as guard. The whelp will dig up everything he can to queer me with the office. All that kept him from doing it before was Cliff's interest in you."

"He can't make any of his charges stick," declared Berrie.

"Of course he can't. He knows that. But he can bring us all into court. You and Mr. Norcross will both be called as witnesses, for it seems that Tony was defending your name. The papers call it 'a fight for a girl.' Oh, it's a sweet mess."

For the first time Berrie betrayed alarm. "What shall we do? I can't go on the stand! They can't make me do that, can they?" She turned to Wayland. "Now you *must* go away. It is a shame to have you mixed up in such a trial."

"I shall not run away and leave you and the Supervisor to bear all the burden of this fight."

He anticipated in imagination—as they all did—some of the consequences of this trial. The entire story of the camping trip would

be dragged in, distorted into a scandal, and flashed over the country as a disgraceful episode. The country would ring with laughter and coarse jest. Berrie's testimony would be a feast for court-room loafers.

"There's only one thing to do," said McFarlane, after a few moments of thought. "You and Berrie and Mrs. McFarlane must get out of here before you are subpoenaed."

"And leave you to fight it out alone?" exclaimed his wife. "I shall do nothing of the kind. Berrie and Mr. Norcross can go."

"That won't do," retorted McFarlane, quickly. "That won't do at all. You must go with them. I can take care of myself. I will not have you dragged into this muck-hole. We've got to think quick and act quick. There won't be any delay about their side of the game. I don't think they'll do anything to-day; but you've got to fade out of the valley. You all get ready and I'll have one of the boys hook up the surrey as if for a little drive, and you can pull out over the old stage-road to Flume and catch the narrow-gage morning train for Denver. You've been wanting for some time to go down the line. Now here's a good time to start."

Berrie now argued against running away. Her blood was up. She joined her mother. "We won't leave you to inherit all this trouble. Who will look after the ranch? Who will keep house for you?"

McFarlane remained firm. "I'll manage. Don't worry about me. Just get out of reach. The more I consider this thing, the more worrisome it gets. Suppose Cliff should come back to testify?"

"He won't. If he does I'll have him arrested for trying to kill Wayland," retorted Berrie.

"And make the whole thing worse! No. You are all going to cross the range. You can start out as if for a little turn round the valley, and just naturally keep going. It can't do any harm, and it may save a nasty time in court."

"One would think we were a lot of criminals," remarked Wayland.

"That's the way you'll be treated," retorted McFarlane. "Belden has retained old Whitby, the foulest old brute in the business, and he'll bring you all into it if he can."

"But running away from it will not prevent talk," argued his wife.

"Not entirely; but talk and testimony are two different things. Suppose they call daughter to the stand? Do you want her cross-examined as to what basis there was for this gossip? They know something of Cliff's being let out, and that will inflame them. He may be at the mill this minute."

"I guess you're right," said Norcross, sadly. "Our delightful excursion into the forest has led us into a predicament from which there is only one way of escape, and that is flight."

Back of all this talk, this argument, there remained still unanswered the most vital, most important question: "Shall I speak of marriage at this time? Would it be a source of comfort to them as well as a joy to her?" At the moment he was ready to speak, for he felt himself to be the direct cause of all their embarrassment. But closer thought made it clear that a hasty ceremony would only be considered a cloak to cover something illicit. "I'll leave it to the future," he decided.

McFarlane was again called to the telephone. Landon, with characteristic brevity, conveyed to him the fact that Mrs. Belden was at home and busily 'phoning scandalous stories about the country. "If you don't stop her she's going to poison every ear in the valley," ended the ranger.

"You'd think they'd all know my daughter well enough not to believe anything Mrs. Belden says," responded McFarlane, bitterly.

"All the boys are ready to do what Tony did. But nobody can stop this old fool's mouth but you. Cliff has disappeared, and that adds to the excitement."

"Thank the boys for me," said McFarlane, "and tell them not to fight. Tell 'em to keep cool. It will all be cleared up soon."

As McFarlane went out to order the horses hooked up, Wayland followed him as far as the bars. "I'm conscience-smitten over this thing, Supervisor, for I am aware that I am the cause of all your trouble."

"Don't let that worry you," responded the older man. But he spoke with effort. "It can't be helped. It was all unavoidable."

"The most appalling thing to me is the fact that not even your daughter's popularity can neutralize the gossip of a woman like Mrs. Belden. My being an outsider counts against Berrie, and I'm ready to

do anything—anything," he repeated, earnestly. "I love your daughter, Mr. McFarlane, and I'm ready to marry her at once if you think best. She's a noble girl, and I cannot bear to be the cause of her calumniation."

There was mist in the Supervisor's eyes as he turned them on the young man. "I'm right glad to hear you say that, my boy." He reached out his hand, and Wayland took it. "I knew you'd say the word when the time came. I didn't know how strongly she felt toward you till to-day. I knew she liked you, of course, for she said so, but I didn't know that she had plum set her heart on you. I didn't expect her to marry a city man; but—I like you and—well, she's the doctor! What suits her suits me. Don't you be afraid of her not meeting all comers." He went on after a pause, "She's never seen much of city life, but she'll hold her own anywhere, you can gamble on that."

"She has wonderful adaptability, I know," answered Wayland, slowly. "But I don't like to take her away from here—from you."

"If you hadn't come she would have married Cliff—and what kind of a life would she have led with him?" demanded McFarlane. "I knew Cliff was rough, but I couldn't convince her that he was cheap. I live only for her happiness, my boy, and, though I know you will take her away from me, I believe you can make her happy, and so—I give her over to you. As to time and place, arrange that—with—her mother." He turned and walked away, unable to utter another word.

Wayland's throat was aching also, and he went back into the house with a sense of responsibility which exalted him into sturdier manhood.

Berea met him in a pretty gown, a dress he had never seen her wear, a costume which transformed her into something entirely feminine.

She seemed to have put away the self-reliant manner of the trail, and in its stead presented the lambent gaze, the tremulous lips of the bride. As he looked at her thus transfigured his heart cast out its hesitancy and he entered upon his new adventure without further question or regret.

XV

A MATTER OF MILLINERY

It was three o'clock of a fine, clear, golden afternoon as they said good-by to McFarlane and started eastward, as if for a little drive. Berrie held the reins in spite of Wayland's protestations. "These bronchos are only about half busted," she said. "They need watching. I know them better than you do." Therefore he submitted, well knowing that she was entirely competent and fully informed.

Mrs. McFarlane, while looking back at her husband, sadly exclaimed: "I feel like a coward running away like this."

"Forget it, mother," commanded her daughter, cheerily. "Just imagine we're off for a short vacation. I'm for going clear through to Chicago. So long as we *must* go, let's go whooping. Father's better off without us."

Her voice was gay, her eyes shining, and Wayland saw her as she had been that first day in the coach—the care-free, laughing girl. The trouble they were fleeing from was less real to her than the happiness toward which she rode.

Her hand on the reins, her foot on the brake, brought back her confidence; but Wayland did not feel so sure of his part in the adventure. She seemed so unalterably a part of this life, so fitted to this landscape, that the thought of transplanting her to the East brought uneasiness and question. Could such a creature of the open air be content with the walls of a city?

For several miles the road ran over the level floor of the valley, and she urged the team to full speed. "I don't want to meet anybody if I can help it. Once we reach the old stage route the chances of being scouted are few. Nobody uses that road since the broad-gauge reached Cragg's."

Mrs. McFarlane could not rid herself of the resentment with which she suffered this enforced departure; but she had small opportunity to protest, for the wagon bumped and clattered over the stony stretches with a motion which confused as well as silenced her. It was all so humiliating, so unlike the position which she had imagined herself to have attained in the eyes of her neighbors.

Furthermore, she was going away without a trunk, with only one small bag for herself and Berrie—running away like a criminal from an intangible foe. However, she was somewhat comforted by the gaiety of the young people before her. They were indeed jocund as jaybirds. With the resiliency of youth they had accepted the situation, and were making the best of it.

"Here comes somebody," called Berrie, pulling her ponies to a walk. "Throw a blanket over that valise." She was chuckling as if it were all a good joke. "It's old Jake Proudfoot. I can smell him. Now hang on. I'm going to pass him on the jump."

Wayland, who was riding with his hat in his hand because he could not make it cover his bump, held it up as if to keep the wind from his face, and so defeated the round-eyed, owl-like stare of the inquisitive rancher, who brought his team to a full stop in order to peer after them, muttering in a stupor of resentment and surprise.

"He'll worry himself sick over us," predicted Berrie. "He'll wonder where we're going and what was under that blanket till the end of summer. He is as curious as a fool hen."

A few minutes more and they were at the fork in the way, and, leaving the trail to Cragg's, the girl pulled into the grass-grown, less-traveled trail to the south, which entered the timber at this point and began to climb with steady grade. Letting the reins fall slack, she turned to her mother with reassuring words. "There! Now we're safe. We won't meet anybody on this road except possibly a mover's outfit. We're in the forest again," she added.

For two hours they crawled slowly upward, with a roaring stream on one side and the pine-covered slopes on the other. Jays and camp-birds called from the trees. Water-robins fluttered from rock to rock in the foaming flood. Squirrels and minute chipmunks raced across the fallen tree-trunks or clattered from great boulders, and in the peace and order and beauty of the forest they all recovered a serener outlook on the noisome tumult they were leaving behind them. Invisible as well as inaudible, the serpent of slander lost its terror.

Once, as they paused to rest the horses, Wayland said: "It is hard to realize that down in that ethereal valley people like old Jake and Mrs. Belden have their dwelling-place."

This moved Mrs. McFarlane to admit that it might all turn out a blessing in disguise. “Mr. McFarlane may resign and move to Denver, as I’ve long wanted him to do.”

“I wish he would,” exclaimed Berrie, fervently. “It’s time you had a rest. Daddy will hate to quit under fire, but he’d better do it.”

Peak by peak the Bear Tooth Range rose behind them, while before them the smooth, grassy slopes of the pass told that they were nearing timber-line. The air was chill, the sun was hidden by old Solidor, and the stream had diminished to a silent rill winding among sear grass and yellowed willows. The valley behind them was vague with mist. The southern boundary of the forest was in sight.

At last the topmost looming crags of the Continental Divide cut the sky-line, and then in the smooth hollow between two rounded grassy summits Berrie halted, and they all silently contemplated the two worlds. To the west and north lay an endless spread of mountains, wave on wave, snow-lined, savage, sullen in the dying light; while to the east and southeast the foot-hills faded into the plain, whose dim cities, insubstantial as flecks in a veil of violet mist, were hardly distinguishable without the aid of glasses.

To the girl there was something splendid, something heroical in that majestic, menacing landscape to the west. In one of its folds she had begun her life. In another she had grown to womanhood and self-confident power. The rough men, the coarse, ungainly women of that land seemed less hateful now that she was leaving them, perhaps forever, and a confused memory of the many splendid dawns and purple sunsets she had loved filled her thought.

Wayland, divining some part of what was moving in her mind, cheerily remarked, “Yes, it’s a splendid place for a summer vacation, but a stern place in winter-time, and for a lifelong residence it is not inspiring.”

Mrs. McFarlane agreed with him in this estimate. “It *is* terribly lonesome in there at times. I’ve had enough of it. I’m ready for the comforts of civilization.”

Berrie turned in her seat, and was about to take up the reins when Wayland asserted himself. “Wait a moment. Here’s where my dominion begins. Here’s where you change seats with me. I am the driver now.”

She looked at him with questioning, smiling glance. “Can you drive? It’s all the way down-hill—and steep?”

“If I can’t I’ll ask your aid. I’m old enough to remember the family carriage. I’ve even driven a four-in-hand.”

She surrendered her seat doubtfully, and smiled to see him take up the reins as if he were starting a four-horse coach. He proved adequate and careful, and she was proud of him as, with foot on the brake and the bronchos well in hand, he swung down the long looping road to the railway. She was pleased, too, by his care of the weary animals, easing them down the steepest slopes and sending them along on the comparatively level spots.

Their descent was rapid, but it was long after dark before they reached Flume, which lay up the valley to the right. It was a poor little decaying mining-town set against the hillside, and had but one hotel, a sun-warped and sagging pine building just above the station.

“Not much like the Profile House,” said Wayland, as he drew up to the porch. “But I see no choice.”

“There isn’t any,” Berrie assured him.

“Well, now,” he went on, “I am in command of this expedition. From this on I lead this outfit. When it comes to hotels, railways, and the like o’ that, I’m head ranger.”

Mrs. McFarlane, tired, hungry, and a little dismayed, accepted his control gladly; but Berrie could not at once slip aside her responsibility. “Tell the hostler—”

“Not a word!” commanded Norcross; and the girl with a smile submitted to his guidance, and thereafter his efficiency, his self-possession, his tact delighted her. He persuaded the sullen landlady to get them supper. He secured the best rooms in the house, and arranged for the care of the team, and when they were all seated around the dim, fly-specked oil-lamp at the end of the crumby dining-room table he discovered such a gay and confident mien that the women looked at each other in surprise.

Berrie was correspondingly less masculine. In drawing off her buckskin driving-gloves she had put away the cowgirl, and was silent, a little sad even, in the midst of her enjoyment of his dictatorship. And when he said, “If my father reaches Denver in time I want you to meet him,” she looked the dismay she felt.

"I'll do it—but I'm scared of him."

"You needn't be. I'll see him first and draw his fire."

Mrs. McFarlane interposed. "We must do a little shopping first. We can't meet your father as we are."

"Very well. I'll go with you if you'll let me. I'm a great little shopper. I have infallible taste, so my sisters say. If it's a case of buying new hats, for instance, I'm the final authority with them." This amused Berrie, but her mother took it seriously.

"Of course, I'm anxious to have my daughter make the best possible impression."

"Very well. It is arranged. We get in, I find, about noon. We'll go straight to the biggest shop in town. If we work with speed we'll be able to lunch with my father. He'll be at the Palmer House at one."

Berrie said nothing, either in acceptance or rejection of his plan. Her mind was concerned with new conceptions, new relationships, and when in the hall he took her face between his hands and said, "Cheer up! All is not lost," she put her arms about his neck and laid her cheek against his breast to hide her tears. "Oh, Wayland! I'm such an idiot in the city. I'm afraid your father will despise me."

What he said was not very cogent, and not in the least literary, but it was reassuring and lover-like, and when he turned her over to her mother she was composed, though unwontedly grave.

She woke to a new life next morning—a life of compliance, of following, of dependence upon the judgment of another. She stood in silence while her lover paid the bills, bought the tickets, and telegraphed their coming to his father. She acquiesced when he prevented her mother from telephoning to the ranch. She complied when he countermanded her order to have the team sent back at once. His judgment ruled, and she enjoyed her sudden freedom from responsibility. It was novel, and it was very sweet to think that she was being cared for as she had cared for and shielded him in the world of the trail.

In the little railway-coach, which held a score of passengers, she found herself among some Eastern travelers who had taken the trip up the Valley of the Flume in the full belief that they were piercing the heart of the Rocky Mountains! It amused Wayland almost as much as it amused Berrie when one man said to his wife:

"Well, I'm glad we've seen the Rockies."

"He really believes it!" exclaimed Norcross.

After an hour's ride Wayland tactfully withdrew, leaving mother and daughter to discuss clothes undisturbed by his presence.

"We must look our best, honey," said Mrs. McFarlane. "We will go right to Mme. Crosby at Battle's, and she'll fit us out. I wish we had more time; but we haven't, so we must do the best we can."

"I want Wayland to choose my hat and traveling-suit," replied Berrie.

"Of course. But you've got to have a lot of other things besides." And they bent to the joyous work of making out a list of goods to be purchased as soon as they reached Chicago.

Wayland came back with a Denver paper in his hand and a look of disgust on his face. "It's all in here—at least, the outlines of it."

Berrie took the journal, and there read the details of Settle's assault upon the foreman. "The fight arose from a remark concerning the Forest Supervisor's daughter. Ranger Settle resented the gossip, and fell upon the other man, beating him with the butt of his revolver. Friends of the foreman claim that the ranger is a drunken bully, and should have been discharged long ago. The Supervisor for some mysterious reason retains this man, although he is an incompetent. It is also claimed that McFarlane put a man on the roll without examination." The Supervisor was the protagonist of the play, which was plainly political. The attack upon him was bitter and unjust, and Mrs. McFarlane again declared her intention of returning to help him in his fight. However, Wayland again proved to her that her presence would only embarrass the Supervisor. "You would not aid him in the slightest degree. Nash and Landon are with him, and will refute all these charges."

This newspaper story took the light out of their day and the smile from Berrie's lips, and the women entered the city silent and distressed in spite of the efforts of their young guide. The nearer the girl came to the ordeal of facing the elder Norcross, the more she feared the outcome; but Wayland kept his air of easy confidence, and drove them directly to the shopping center, believing that under the influence of hats and gloves they would regain their customary cheer.

In this he was largely justified. They had a delightful hour trying on millinery and coats and gloves. The forewoman, who knew Mrs. McFarlane, gladly accepted her commission, and, while suspecting the tender relationship between the girl and the man, she was tactful enough to conceal her suspicion. “The gentleman is right; you carry simple things best,” she remarked to Berrie, thus showing her own good judgment. “Smartly tailored gray or blue suits are your style.”

Silent, blushing, tousled by the hands of her decorators, Berrie permitted hats to be perched on her head and jackets buttoned and unbuttoned about her shoulders till she felt like a worn clothes-horse. Wayland beamed with delight, but she was far less satisfied than he; and when at last selection was made, she still had her doubts, not of the clothes, but of her ability to wear them. They seemed so alien to her, so restrictive and enslaving.

“You’re an easy fitter,” said the saleswoman. “But”—here she lowered her voice—“you need a new corset. This old one is out of date. Nobody is wearing hips now.”

Thereupon Berrie meekly permitted herself to be led away to a torture-room. Wayland waited patiently, and when she reappeared all traces of Bear Tooth Forest had vanished. In a neat tailored suit and a very “chic” hat, with shoes, gloves, and stockings to match, she was so transformed, so charmingly girlish in her self-conscious glory, that he was tempted to embrace her in the presence of the saleswoman. But he didn’t. He merely said: “I see the governor’s finish! Let’s go to lunch. You are stunning!”

“I don’t know myself,” responded Berrie. “The only thing that feels natural is my hand. They cinched me so tight I can’t eat a thing, and my shoes hurt.” She laughed as she said this, for her use of the vernacular was conscious. “I’m a fraud. Your father will spot my brand first shot. Look at my face—red as a saddle!”

“Don’t let that trouble you. This is the time of year when tan is fashionable. Don’t you be afraid of the governor. Just smile at him, give him your grip, and he’ll melt.”

“I’m the one to melt. I’m beginning now.”

“I know how you feel, but you’ll get used to the conventional boiler-plate and all the rest of it. We all groan and growl when we

come back to it each autumn; but it's a part of being civilized, and we submit."

Notwithstanding his confident advice, Wayland led the two silent and inwardly dismayed women into the showy café of the hotel with some degree of personal apprehension concerning the approaching interview with his father. Of course, he did not permit this to appear in the slightest degree. On the contrary, he gaily ordered a choice lunch, and did his best to keep his companions from sinking into deeper depression.

It pleased him to observe the admiring glances which were turned upon Berrie, whose hat became her mightily, and, leaning over, he said in a low voice to Mrs. McFarlane: "Who is the lovely young lady opposite? Won't you introduce me?"

This rejoiced the mother almost as much as it pleased the daughter, and she answered, "She looks like one of the Radburns of Lexington, but I think she's from Louisville."

This little play being over, he said, "Now, while our order is coming I'll run out to the desk and see if the governor has come in or not."

XVI

THE PRIVATE CAR

After he went away Berrie turned to her mother with a look in which humor and awe were blent. “Am I dreaming, mother, or am I actually sitting here in the city? My head is dizzy with it all.” Then, without waiting for an answer, she fervently added: “Isn’t he fine! I’m the tenderfoot now. I hope his father won’t despise me.”

With justifiable pride in her child, the mother replied: “He can’t help liking you, honey. You look exactly like your grandmother at this moment. Meet Mr. Norcross in her spirit.”

“I’ll try; but I feel like a woodchuck out of his hole.”

Mrs. McFarlane continued: “I’m glad we were forced out of the valley. You might have been shut in there all your life as I have been with your father.”

“You don’t blame father, do you?”

“Not entirely. And yet he always was rather easy-going, and you know how untidy the ranch is. He’s always been kindness and sympathy itself; but his lack of order is a cross. Perhaps now he will resign, rent the ranch, and move over here. I should like to live in the city for a while, and I’d like to travel a little.”

“Wouldn’t it be fine if you could! You could live at this hotel if you wanted to. Yes, you’re right. You need a rest from the ranch and dish-washing.”

Wayland returned with an increase of tension in his face.

“He’s here! I’ve sent word saying, ‘I am lunching in the café with ladies.’ I think he’ll come round. But don’t be afraid of him. He’s a good deal rougher on the outside than he is at heart. Of course, he’s a bluff old business man, and not at all pretty, and he’ll transfix you with a kind of estimating glare as if you were a tree; but he’s actually very easy to manage if you know how to handle him. Now, I’m not going to try to explain everything to him at the beginning. I’m going to introduce him to you in a casual kind of way and give him time to take to you both. He forms his likes and dislikes very quickly.”

“What if he don’t like us?” inquired Berrie, with troubled brow.

“He can’t help it.” His tone was so positive that her eyes misted with happiness. “But here comes our food. I hope you aren’t too nervous to eat. Here is where I shine as provider. This is the kind of camp fare I can recommend.”

Berrie’s healthy appetite rose above her apprehension, and she ate with the keen enjoyment of a child, and her mother said, “It surely is a treat to get a chance at somebody else’s cooking.”

“Don’t you slander your home fare,” warned Wayland. “It’s as good as this, only different.”

He sat where he could watch the door, and despite his jocund pose his eyes expressed growing impatience and some anxiety. They were all well into their dessert before he called out: “Here he is!”

Mrs. McFarlane could not see the new-comer from where she sat, but Berrie rose in great excitement as a heavy-set, full-faced man with short, gray mustache and high, smooth brow entered the room. He did not smile as he greeted his son, and his penetrating glance questioned even before he spoke. He seemed to silently ask: “Well, what’s all this? How do you happen to be here? Who are these women?”

Wayland said: “Mrs. McFarlane, this is my father. Father, this is Miss Berea McFarlane, of Bear Tooth Springs.”

The elder Norcross shook hands with Mrs. McFarlane politely, coldly; but he betrayed surprise as Berea took his fingers in her grip. At his son’s solicitation he accepted a seat opposite Berea, but refused dessert.

Wayland explained: “Mrs. McFarlane and her daughter quite saved my life over in the valley. Their ranch is the best health resort in Colorado.”

“Your complexion indicates that,” his father responded, dryly. “You look something the way a man of your age ought to look. I needn’t ask how you’re feeling.”

“You needn’t, but you may. I’m feeling like a new fiddle—barring a bruise at the back of my head, which makes a ‘hard hat’ a burden. I may as well tell you first off that Mrs. McFarlane is the wife of the Forest Supervisor at Bear Tooth, and Miss Berea is the able assistant of her father. We are all rank conservationists.”

Norcross, Senior, examined Berrie precisely as if his eyes were a couple of X-ray tubes, and as she flushed under his slow scrutiny he said: "I was not expecting to find the Forest Service in such hands."

Wayland laughed.

"I hope you didn't mash his fingers, Berrie."

She smiled guiltily. "I'm afraid I did. I hope I didn't hurt you—sometimes I forget."

Norcross, Senior, was waking up. "You have a most extraordinary grip. What did it? Piano practice?"

Wayland grinned. "Piano! No—the cinch."

"The what?"

Wayland explained. "Miss McFarlane was brought up on a ranch. She can rope and tie a steer, saddle her own horse, pack an outfit, and all the rest of it."

"Oh! Kind of cowgirl, eh?"

Mrs. McFarlane, eager to put Berrie's better part forward, explained: "She's our only child, Mr. Norcross, and as such has been a constant companion to her father. She's not all cow-hand. She's been to school, and she can cook and sew as well."

He looked from one to the other. "Neither of you correspond exactly to my notions of a forester's wife and daughter."

"Mrs. McFarlane comes from an old Kentucky family, father. Her grandfather helped to found a college down there."

Wayland's anxious desire to create a favorable impression of the women did not escape the lumberman, but his face remained quite expressionless as he replied:

"If the life of a cow-hand would give you the vigor this young lady appears to possess, I'm not sure but you'd better stick to it."

Wayland and the two women exchanged glances of relief.

"Why not tell him now?" they seemed to ask. But he said: "There's a long story to tell before we decide on my career. Let's finish our lunch. How is mother, and how are the girls?"

Once, in the midst of a lame pursuit of other topics, the elder Norcross again fixed his eyes on Berea, saying: "I wish my girls had your weight and color." He paused a moment, then resumed with weary infliction: "Mrs. Norcross has always been delicate, and all her

children—even her son—take after her. I've maintained a private and very expensive hospital for nearly thirty years."

This regretful note in his father's voice gave Wayland confidence. His spirits rose.

"Come, let's adjourn to the parlor and talk things over at our ease."

They all followed him, and after showing the mother and daughter to their seats near a window he drew his father into a corner, and in rapid undertone related the story of his first meeting with Berrie, of his trouble with young Belden, of his camping trip, minutely describing the encounter on the mountainside, and ended by saying, with manly directness: "I would be up there in the mountains in a box if Berrie had not intervened. She's a noble girl, father, and is foolish enough to like me, and I'm going to marry her and try to make her happy."

The old lumberman, who had listened intently all through this impassioned story, displayed no sign of surprise at its closing declaration; but his eyes explored his son's soul with calm abstraction. "Send her over to me," he said, at last. "Marriage is a serious matter. I want to talk with her—alone."

Wayland went back to the women with an air of victory. "He wants to see you, Berrie. He's mellowing. Don't be afraid of him."

She might have resented the father's lack of gallantry; but she did not. On the contrary, she rose and walked resolutely over to where he sat, quite ready to defend herself. He did not rise to meet her, but she did not count that against him, for there was nothing essentially rude in his manner. He was merely her elder, and inert.

"Sit down," he said, not unkindly. "I want to have *you* tell me about my son. He has been telling me all about you. Now let's have your side of the story."

She took a seat and faced him with eyes as steady as his own. "Where shall I begin?" she bluntly challenged.

"He wants to marry you. Now, it seems to me that seven weeks is very short acquaintance for a decision like that. Are you sure you want him?"

"Yes, sir; I am." Her answer was most decided.

His voice was slightly cynical as he went on. “But you were tolerably sure about that other fellow—that rancher with the fancy name—weren’t you?” She flushed at this, but waited for him to go on. “Don’t you think it possible that your fancy for Wayland is also temporary?”

“No, sir!” she bravely declared. “I never felt toward any one the way I do toward Wayland. He’s different. I shall *never* change toward him.”

Her tone, her expression of eyes stopped this line of inquiry. He took up another. “Now, my dear young lady, I am a business man as well as a father, and the marriage of my son is a weighty matter. He is my main dependence. I am hoping to have him take up and carry on my business. To be quite candid, I didn’t expect him to select his wife from a Colorado ranch. I considered him out of the danger-zone. I have always understood that women were scarce in the mountains. Now don’t misunderstand me. I’m not one of those fools who are always trying to marry their sons and daughters into the ranks of the idle rich. I don’t care a hang about social position, and I’ve got money enough for my son and my son’s wife. But he’s all the boy I have, and I don’t want him to make a mistake.”

“Neither do I,” she answered, simply, her eyes suffused with tears. “If I thought he would be sorry—”

He interrupted again. “Oh, you can’t tell that now. Any marriage is a risk. I don’t say he’s making a mistake in selecting you. You may be just the woman he needs. Only I want to be consulted. I want to know more about you. He tells me you have taken an active part in the management of the ranch and the forest. Is that true?”

“I’ve always worked with my father—yes, sir.”

“You like that kind of life?”

“I don’t know much about any other kind. Yes, I like it. But I’ve had enough of it. I’m willing to change.”

“Well, how about city life—housekeeping and all that?”

“So long as I am with Wayland I sha‘n’t mind what I do or where I live.”

“At the same time you figure he’s going to have a large income, I suppose? He’s told you of his rich father, hasn’t he?”

Berrie's tone was a shade resentful of his insinuation. "He has never said much about his family one way or another. He only said you wanted him to go into business in Chicago, and that he wanted to do something else. Of course, I could see by his ways and the clothes he wore that he'd been brought up in what we'd call luxury, but we never inquired into his affairs."

"And you didn't care?"

"Well, not that, exactly. But money don't count for as much with us in the valley as it does in the East. Wayland seemed so kind of sick and lonesome, and I felt sorry for him the first time I saw him. I felt like mothering him. And then his way of talking, of looking at things was so new and beautiful to me I couldn't help caring for him. I had never met any one like him. I thought he was a 'lunger'—"

"A what?"

"A consumptive; that is, I did at first. And it bothered me. It seemed terrible that any one so fine should be condemned like that—and so—I did all I could to help him, to make him happy. I thought he hadn't long to live. Everything he said and did was wonderful to me, like poetry and music. And then when he began to grow stronger and I saw that he was going to get well, and Cliff went on the rampage and showed the yellow streak, and I gave him back his ring—I didn't know even then how much Wayland meant to me. But on our trip over the Range I understood. He meant everything to me. He made Cliff seem like a savage, and I wanted him to know it. I'm not ashamed of loving him. I want to make him happy, and if he wishes me to be his wife I'll go anywhere he says—only I think he should stay out here till he gets entirely well."

The old man's eyes softened during her plea, and at its close a slight smile moved the corners of his mouth. "You've thought it all out, I see. Your mind is clear and your conscience easy. Well, I like your spirit. I guess he's right. The decision is up to you. But if he takes you and stays in Colorado he can't expect me to share the profits of my business with him, can he? He'll have to make his own way." He rose and held out his hand. "However, I'm persuaded he's in good hands."

She took his hand, not knowing just what to reply. He examined her fingers with intent gaze.

"I didn't know any woman could have such a grip." He thoughtfully took her biceps in his left hand. "You are magnificent." Then, in ironical protest, he added: "Good God, no! I can't have you come into my family. You'd make caricatures of my wife and daughters. Are all the girls out in the valley like you?"

She laughed. "No. Most of them pride themselves on *not* being horsewomen. Mighty few of 'em ever ride a horse. I'm a kind of a tomboy to them."

"I'm sorry to hear that. It's the same old story. I suppose they'd all like to live in the city and wear low-necked gowns and high-heeled shoes. No, I can't consent to your marriage with my son. I must save you from corruption. Go back to the ranch. I can see already signs of your deterioration. Except for your color and that grip you already look like upper Broadway. The next thing will be a slit skirt and a diamond garter."

She flushed redly, conscious of her new corset, her silk stockings, and her pinching shoes. "It's all on the outside," she declared. "Under this toggery I'm the same old trailer. It don't take long to get rid of these things. I'm just playing a part to-day—for you."

He smiled and dropped her hand. "No, no. You've said good-by to the cinch, I can see that. You're on the road to opera boxes and limousines. What is your plan? What would you advise Wayland to do if you knew I was hard against his marrying you? Come, now, I can see you're a clear-sighted individual. What can he do to earn a living? How will you live without my aid? Have you figured on these things?"

"Yes; I'm going to ask my father to buy a ranch near here, where mother can have more of the comforts of life, and where we can all live together till Wayland is able to stand city life again. Then, if you want him to go East, I will go with him."

They had moved slowly back toward the others, and as Wayland came to meet them Norcross said, with dry humor: "I admire your lady of the cinch hand. She seems to be a person of singular good nature and most uncommon shrewd—"

Wayland, interrupting, caught at his father's hand and wrung it frenziedly. "I'm glad—"

“Here! Here!” A look of pain covered the father’s face. “That’s the fist she put in the press.”

They all laughed at his joke, and then he gravely resumed. “I say I admire her, but it’s a shame to ask such a girl to marry an invalid like you. Furthermore, I won’t have her taken East. She’d bleach out and lose that grip in a year. I won’t have her contaminated by the city.” He mused deeply while looking at his son. “Would life on a wheat-ranch accessible to this hotel by motor-car be endurable to you?”

“You mean with Berea?”

“If she’ll go. Mind you, I don’t advise her to do it!” he added, interrupting his son’s outcry. “I think she’s taking all the chances.” He turned to Mrs. McFarlane. “I’m old-fashioned in my notions of marriage, Mrs. McFarlane. I grew up when women were helpmates, such as, I judge, you’ve been. Of course, it’s all guesswork to me at the moment; but I have an impression that my son has fallen into an unusual run of luck. As I understand it, you’re all out for a pleasure trip. Now, my private car is over in the yards, and I suggest you all come along with me to California—”

“Governor, you’re a wonder!” exclaimed Wayland.

“That’ll give us time to get better acquainted, and if we all like one another just as well when we get back—well, we’ll buy the best farm in the North Platte and—”

“It’s a cinch we get that ranch,” interrupted Wayland, with a triumphant glance at Berea.

“Don’t be so sure of it!” replied the lumberman. “A private car, like a yacht, is a terrible test of friendship.” But his warning held no terrors for the young lovers. They had entered upon certainties.

THE END

THE END

The Forester's Daughter: A Romance of the Bear-Tooth Range

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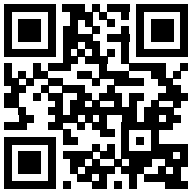

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