The Silver Horde

Rex Beach

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[Illustration: THE GIRL STOOD BAREHEADED UNDER THE WINTRY SKY]

CHAPTER I. WHEREIN A SPIRITLESS MAN AND A ROGUE APPEAR

The trail to Kalvik leads down from the northward mountains over the tundra which flanks the tide flats, then creeps out upon the salt ice of the river and across to the village. It boasts no travel in summer, but by winter an occasional toil−worn traveller may be seen issuing forth from the Great Country beyond, bound for the open water; while once in thirty days the mail−team whirls out of the forest to the south, pauses one night to leave word of the world, and then is swallowed up in the silent hills. Kalvik, to be sure, is not much of a place, being hidden away from the main−travelled routes to the interior and wholly unknown except to those interested in the fisheries.

A Greek church, a Russian school with a cassocked priest presiding, and, about a hundred houses, beside the cannery buildings, make up the village. At first glance these canneries might convey the impression of a considerable city, for there are ten plants, in all, scattered along several miles of the river−bank; but in winter they stand empty and still, their great roofs drummed upon by the fierce Arctic storms, their high stacks pointing skyward like long, frozen fingers black with frost. There are the natives, of course, but they do not count, concealed as they are in burrows. No one knows their number, not even the priest who gathers toll from them.

Early one December afternoon there entered upon this trail from the timberless hills far away to the northward a weary team of six dogs, driven by two men. It had been snowing since dawn, and the dim sled−tracks were hidden beneath a six−inch fluff which rendered progress difficult and called the whip into cruel service. A gray smother sifted down sluggishly, shutting out hill and horizon, blending sky and landscape into a blurred monotone, playing strange pranks with the eye that grew tired trying to pierce it.

The travellers had been plodding sullenly, hour after hour, dispirited by the weight of the storm, which bore them down like some impalpable, resistless burden. There was no reality in earth, air, or sky. Their vision was rested by no spot of color save themselves, apparently swimming through an endless, formless atmosphere of gray.

“Fingerless” Fraser broke trail, but to Boyd Emerson, who drove, he seemed to be a sort of dancing doll, bobbing and swaying grotesquely, as if suspended by invisible wires. At times, it seemed to the driver's whimsical fancy as if each of them trod a measure in the centre of a colorless universe, something after the fashion of goldfish floating in a globe.

Fraser pulled up without warning and instantly the dogs stopped, straightway beginning to soothe their trail−worn pads and to strip the ice−pellets from between their toes. But the “wheelers” were too tired to make the effort, so Emerson went forward and performed the task for them, while Fraser floundered back and sank to a sitting posture on the sled.

“Whew!” he exclaimed, “this is sure tough. If I don't see a tree or something with enough color to bust this monotony I'll go dotty.”

“Another day like this and we'd both be snow−blind,” observed Emerson grimly, as he bent to his task. “But it can't be far to the river now.”

“This fall has covered the trail till I have to feel it out with my feet,” grumbled Fraser. “When I step off to one side I go in up to my hips. It's like walking a plank a foot deep in feathers, and I feel like I was a mile above the earth in a heavy fog.” After a moment he continued: “Speaking of feathers, how'd you like to have a fried chicken *a la* Maryland?”

“Shut up!” said the man at the dogs, crossly.

“Well, it don't do any harm to think about it,” growled Fraser, good− naturedly. He felt out a pipe from his pocket and endeavored unsuccessfully to blow through it, then complained:

“The damn thing is froze. It seems like a man can't practice no vices whatever in this country. I'm glad I'm getting out of it.”

“So am I,” agreed the younger man. Having completed his task, he came back to the sled and seated himself beside the other.

“As I was saying a mile back yonder,” Fraser resumed, “whatever made you snatch me away from them

blue−coated minions of the law, I don't know. You says it's for company, to be sure, but we visit with one another about like two deef−mutes. Why did you do it, Bo?”

“Well, you talk enough for both of us.”

“Yes, but that ain't no reason why you should lay yourself liable to the 'square−toes.' You ain't the kind to take a chance just because you're lonesome.”

“I picked you up because of your moth−eaten morals, I dare say. I was tired of myself, and you interested me. Besides,” Emerson added, reflectively, “I have no particular cause to love the law, either.”

“That's how I sized it,” said Fraser, wagging his head with animation, “I knew you'd had some kind of a run−in. What was it? This is low down, see, and confidential, as between two crooks. I'll never snitch.”

“Hold on there! I'm not a crook. I'm not sufficiently ingenious to be a member of your honorable profession.”

“Well, I guess my profession is as honorable as most. I've tried all of them, and they're all alike. It's simply a question of how the other fellow will separate easiest.” He stopped and tightened his snow−shoe thong, then rising, gazed curiously at the listless countenance of his travelling companion, feeling anew the curiosity that had fretted him for the past three weeks; finally he observed, with a trace of impatience:

“Well, if you ain't one of us, you'd ought to be. You've got the best poker face I ever see; it's as blind as a plastered wall. You ain't had a real expression on it since you hauled me off that ice−floe in Norton Sound.”

He swung ahead of the dogs; they rose reluctantly, and with a crack of the whip the little caravan crawled noiselessly into the gray twilight.

An hour later they dropped from the plain, down through a gutter−like gully to the river, where they found a trail, glass−hard beneath its downy covering. A cold breath sucked up from the sea; ahead they saw the ragged ice up−ended by the tide, but their course was well marked now, so they swung themselves upon the sled, while the dogs shook off their lethargy and broke into their pattering, tireless wolf−trot.

At length they came to a point where the trail divided, one branch leading off at right angles from the shore and penetrating the hummocks that marked the tide limit. Evidently it led to the village which they knew lay somewhere on the farther side, hidden by a mile or more of sifting snow, so they altered their course and bore out upon the river.

The going here was so rough that both men leaped from their seats and ran beside the sled, one at the front, the other guiding it from the rear. Up and down over the ridges the trail led, winding through the frozen inequalities, the dogs never breaking their tireless trot. They mounted a swelling ridge and rushed down to the level river ice beyond, but as they did so they felt their footing sag beneath them, heard a shivering creak on every side, and, before they could do more than cry out warningly, saw water rising about the sled−runners. The momentum of the heavy sledge, together with the speed of the racing dogs, forced them out upon the treacherous ice before they could check their speed. Emerson shouted, the dogs leaped, but with a crash the ice gave way, and for a moment the water closed over him.

Clinging to the sled to save himself, his weight slowed it down, and the dogs stopped. “Fingerless” Fraser broke through in turn, gasping as the icy water rose to his armpits. Slowly at first the sled sank, till it floated half submerged, and this spot which a moment before had seemed so safe and solid became now a churning tangle of broken fragments, men and dogs struggling in a liquid that seemed dark as syrup contrasted with the surrounding whiteness. The lead animals, under whose feet the ice was still firm, turned inquiringly, then settled on their haunches with lolling tongues. The pair next ahead of the sledge paddled frantically, straining to reach the solid sheet beyond, but were held back by their harness. Emerson used the sled for a footing and endeavored to gain the ice at one side, but it broke beneath him and he lunged in up to his shoulders. Again he tried, but again the ice broke under his hand, more easily now.

Fraser struggled to get out in the opposite direction, each man aiming to secure an independent footing, but their efforts only enlarged the pool. The chill went through them like thin blades, and they chattered gaspingly, fighting with desperation, while the wheel dogs, involved in the harness, began to whine and cough, at which Emerson shouted:

“Cut the team loose, quick!” But the other spat out a mouthful of salt water and spluttered:

“I—I can't swim!”

Whereupon the first speaker half swam half dragged himself through the slush and broken debris to the forward end of the sled, and seeking out the sheath−knife from beneath his parka, cut the harness of the two

distressed animals. Once free, they scrambled to safety, shook themselves, and rolled in the dry snow.

Emerson next attempted to lift the nose of the sled up on the ice, shouting at the remainder of the team to pull, but they only wagged their tails and whined excitedly at this unusual form of entertainment. Each time he tried to lift the sled he crashed through fresh ice, finally bearing the next pair of dogs with him, and then the two animals in the lead. All of them became hopelessly entangled.

He could have won his way back to the permanent ice as Fraser was doing, but there was no way of getting his team there and he would not sacrifice those dumb brutes now growing frantic. One of them pawed the sheath−knife from his hand. He had become almost numb with cold and despair when he heard the jingle of many small bells, and a sharp command uttered in a new voice.

Out of the snow fog from the direction in which they were headed broke a team running full and free. At a word they veered to the right and came to a pause, avoiding the danger−spot. Even from his hasty glance Emerson marvelled at the outfit, having never seen the like in all his travels through the North, for each animal of the twelve stood hip−high to a tall man, and they were like wolves of one pack, gray and gaunt and wicked. The basket−sled behind them was long and light, and of a design that was new to him, while the furs in it were of white fox.

The figure wrapped up in them spoke again sharply, whereupon a tall Indian runner left the team and headed swiftly for the scene of the accident. As he approached, Emerson noted the fellow's flowing parka of ground−squirrel skins, from which a score of fluffy tails fell free, and he saw that this was no Indian, but a half−breed of peculiar coppery lightness. The man ran forward till he neared the edge of the opening where the tide had caused the floes to separate and the cold had not had time as yet to heal it; then flattening his body to its full length on the ice, he crawled out cautiously and seized the lead dog. Carefully he wormed his way backward to security, then leaned his weight upon the tugline.

It had been a ticklish operation, requiring nice skill and dexterity, but now that his footing was sure the runner exerted his whole strength, and as the dogs scratched and tore for firm foothold, the sled came crunching closer and closer through the half−inch skin of ice. Then he reached down and dragged Emerson out, dripping and nerveless from his immersion. Together they rescued the outfit.

The person in the sledge had watched them silently, but now spoke in a strange patois, and the breed gave voice to her words, for it was a woman.

“One mile you go—white man house. Go quick—you freeze.” He pointed back whence the two men had come, indicating the other branch of the trail.

Fraser had emerged meanwhile and circled the water−hole, but even this brief exposure to the open air had served to harden his wet garments into a crackling armor. With rattling teeth, he asked:

“Ain't you got no dry clothes? Our stuff is soaked.”

Again the Indian translated some words from the girl.

“No! You hurry and no stop here. We go quick over yonder. No can stop at all.”

He hurried back to his mistress, cried once to the pack of gray dogs, “Oonah!” and they were off as if in chase. They left the trail and circled toward the shore, the driver standing erect upon the heels of the runners, guiding his team with wide−flung gestures and sharp cries, the rush of air fluttering the many squirrel−tails of his parka like fairy streamers.

As they dashed past, both white men had one fleeting glimpse of a woman's face beneath a furred hood, and then it was gone. For a moment they stood and stared after the fast−dwindling team, while the breath of the Arctic sea stiffened their garments and froze their boot−soles to the ice.

“Did you see?” Fraser ejaculated. “Good Lord, it's a *woman!* A *blonde* woman!”

Emerson stirred himself. “Nonsense! She must be a breed,” said he.

“Breeds don't have yellow hair!” declared the other.

Swiftly they bent in the free dogs and lashed the team to a run. They felt the chill of death in their bones, and instead of riding they ran with the sled till their blood beat painfully. Their outer coverings were like shells, their underclothes were soaked, and although their going was difficult and clumsy, they dared not stop, for this is the extremest peril of the North.

Ten minutes later they swung over the river−bank and into the midst of great rambling frame buildings, seen dimly through the falling snow. Their trail led them to a high−banked cabin, from the stovepipe of which they saw

heat−waves pouring. The dogs broke into cry, and were answered by many others conjured from their hiding−places. Both men were greatly distressed by now, and could handle themselves only with difficulty. Another mile would have meant disaster.

“Rout out the owner and tell him we're wet,” said Emerson; “I'll free the dogs.”

As Fraser disappeared, the young man ran forward to slip the harness from his animals, but found it frozen into their fur, the knots and buckles transformed into unmanageable lumps of ice, so he wrenched the camp axe from the sled and cut the thongs, then hacked loose the stiff sled− lashings, seized the sodden sleeping−bags, and made for the house. A traveller's first concern is for his dogs, then for his bedding.

Before he could reach the cabin the door opened and Fraser appeared, a strange, dazed look on his face. He was followed by a large man of coarse and sullen countenance, who paused on the threshold.

“Don't bother with the rest of the stuff,” Emerson chattered.

“It's no use,” Fraser replied; “we can't go in.”

The former paused, forgetting the cold in his amazement.

“What's wrong? Somebody sick?”

“I don't know what's the matter. This man just says 'nix,' that's all.”

The fellow, evidently a watchman, nodded his head, and growled, “Yaas! Ay got no room.”

“But you don't understand,” said Emerson. “We're wet. We broke through the ice. Never mind the room, we'll get along somehow.” He advanced with the tight−rolled sleeping−bags under his arm, but the man stood immovable, blocking the entrance.

“You can't come in har! You find anoder house t'ree mile furder.”

The traveller, however, paid no heed to these words, but pushed forward, shifting the bundle to his shoulder and holding it so that it was thrust into the Swede's face. Involuntarily the watchman drew back, whereupon the unwelcome visitor crowded past, jostling his inhospitable host roughly, laughing the while, although in his laughter there rang a dangerous metallic note. Emerson's quick action gained him entrance and Fraser followed behind into the living−room, where a flat−nosed squaw withdrew before them. The young man flung down his burden, and addressed her peremptorily.

“Punch up that fire, and get us something to eat, quick!” Turning to the owner of the house, who lumbered in after them, he disregarded the fellow's scowl, and said:

“Why, you've got lots of room, old man! We'll pay our way. Now get some more firewood, will you? I'm chilled to the bone. That's a good fellow.” His forceful heartiness forbade dispute, and the man obeyed, sourly.

The two new−comers stripped off their outer clothing, and in a trice the small room became littered and hung with steaming garments. They took possession of the house, and ordered the Swede and his squaw about with firm good nature, until the couple slunk into an inner room and began to talk in low tones.

Fraser had been watching the fellow, and now remarked to his companion:

“Say, what ails that ginney?”

The assumption of good−nature fell away from Boyd Emerson as he replied:

“I never knew anybody to refuse shelter to freezing men before. There's something back of this—he's got some reason for his refusal. I don't want any trouble, but—”

The inner door opened, and the watchman reappeared. Evidently his sluggish resolution had finally set itself.

“You can't stop har!” he said. “Ay got orders.”

Emerson was at the fire, busy rubbing the cramps from his arms, and did not answer. When Fraser likewise ignored the Swede, he repeated his command, louder this time.

“Get out of may house, quick!”

Both men kept their backs turned and continued to ignore him, at which the fellow advanced heavily, and threatened them in a big, raucous voice, trembling with rage:

“By Yingo, Ay trow you out!”

He stooped and gathered up the garments nearest him, then stepped toward the outer door; but before he could make good his threat, Emerson whirled like a cat, his deep−set eyes dark with sudden fury, and seized his host by the nape of the neck. He jerked him back so roughly that the wet clothes flapped to the floor in four directions, whereat the Scandinavian let forth a bellow; but Emerson struck him heavily on the jaw with his open hand, then hurled him backward into the room so violently that he reeled, and his legs colliding with a bench, he fell against

the wall. Before he could recover, his assailant stepped in between his wide−flung hands and throttled him, beating his head violently against the logs. The fellow undertook to grapple with him, at which Emerson wrenched himself free, and, stepping back, spoke in a quivering voice which Fraser had never heard before:

“I'm just playing with you now—I don't want to hurt you.”

“Get out of my house! Ay got orders!” cried the watchman wildly, and made for him again. It was evident that the man was not lacking in stupid courage, but Emerson, driven to it, stepped aside, and swung heavily. The squaw in the doorway screamed, and the Swede fell full length. Again Boyd was upon him, the restraint of the past long weeks now unbridled, his temper unchecked. He dragged his victim through the store−room, grinding his face into the floor at every effort to rise. He forced him to his own door−sill, jerked the door open, and kicked him out into the snow; then barred the entrance, and returned to the warmth of the logs, his face convulsed and his lips working.

“Fingerless” Fraser gazed at him queerly, as if at some utterly strange phenomenon, then drawled, with a sly chuckle:

“Well, well, you're bloody gentle, I must say. I didn't think it was in you.”

When the other vouchsafed no answer, he took his pipe from a pocket of his steaming mackinaw, and filled it from a tobacco−box on the window−sill; then, leaning back in his chair, he propped his feet up on the table and sighed luxuriously, as he murmured:

“These scenes of violence just upset me something dreadful!”

CHAPTER II. IN WHICH THEY BREAK BREAD WITH A LONELY WOMAN

It was perhaps two hours later that Fraser went to the window for the twentieth time, and, breathing against the pane, cleared a peep−hole, announcing:

“He's gone!”

Emerson, absorbed in a book, made no answer. After his encounter with the householder he had said little, and upon finding this coverless, brown− stained volume—a tattered copy of Don Quixote—he had relapsed into utter silence.

“I say, he's gone!” reiterated the man at the window.

Still no reply was forthcoming, and, seating himself near the stove, Fraser spread his hands before him in the shape of a book, and began whimsically, in a dry monotone, as if reading to himself:

“At which startling news, Mr. Emerson, with his customary vivacity, smiled engagingly, and answered back:

“'Why do you reckon he has departed, Mr. Fraser?”

“'Because he's lost his voice cussing us,' I replied, graciously.

“'Oh no!' exclaimed the genial Mr. Emerson, more for the sake of conversation than argument; 'he has got cold feet!' Evidently unwilling to let the conversation lag, the garrulous Mr. Emerson continued, 'It's a dark night without, and I fear some mischief is afoot.'

“'Yes; but what of yonder beautchous gel?' said I, at which he burst into wild laughter.”

Emerson laid down his book.

“What are you muttering about?” he asked.

“I merely remarked that our scandalized Scandalusian has got tired of singin' Won't You Open that Door and Let Me In? and has ducked.”

“Where has he gone?”

“I ain't no mind−reader; maybe he's loped off to Seattle after a policeman and a writ of *ne plus ultra.* Maybe he has gone after a clump of his countrymen—this is herding−season for Swedes.”

Without answering, Emerson rose, and, going to the inner door, called through to the squaw:

“Get us a cup of coffee.”

“Coffee!” interjected Fraser; “why not have a real feed? I'm hungry enough to eat anything except salt−risin' bread and Roquefort cheese.”

“No,” said the other; “I don't want to cause any more trouble than necessary.”

“Well, there's a lot of grub in the cache. Let's load up the sled.”

“I'm hardly a thief.”

“Oh, but—”

“No!”

“Fingerless” Fraser fell back into sour silence.

When the slatternly woman had slunk forth and was busied at the stove, Emerson observed, musingly:

“I wonder what possessed that fellow to act as he did.”

“He said he had orders,” Fraser offered. “If I had a warm cabin, a lot of grub—and a squaw—I'd like to see somebody give *me* orders.”

Their clothing was dry now, and they proceeded to dress leisurely. As Emerson roped up the sleeping−bags, Fraser suddenly suspended operations on his attire, and asked, querulously:

“What's the matter? We ain't goin' to move, are we?”

“Yes. We'll make for one of the other canneries,” answered Emerson, without looking up.

“But I've got sore feet,” complained the adventurer.

“What! again?” Emerson laughed skeptically. “Better walk on your hands for a while.”

“And it's getting dark, too.”

“Never mind. It can't be far. Come now.”

He urged the fellow as he had repeatedly urged him before, for Fraser seemed to have the blood of a tramp in

his veins; then he tried to question the woman, but she maintained a frightened silence. When they had finished their coffee, Emerson laid two silver dollars on the table, and they left the house to search out the river−trail again.

The early darkness, hastened by the storm, was upon them when they crept up the opposite bank an hour later, and through the gloom beheld a group of great shadowy buildings. Approaching the solitary gleam of light shining from the window of the watchman's house, they applied to him for shelter.

“We are just off a long trip, and our dogs are played out,” Emerson explained. “We'll pay well for a place to rest.”

“You can't stop here,” said the fellow, gruffly.

“Why not?”

“I've got no room.”

“Is there a road−house near by?”

“I don't know.”

“You'd better find out mighty quick,” retorted the young man, with rising temper at the other's discourtesy.

“Try the next place below,” said the watchman, hurriedly, slamming the door in their faces and bolting it. Once secure behind his barricade, he added: “If he won't let you in, maybe the priest can take care of you at the Mission.”

“This here town of Kalvik is certainly overjoyed at our arrival,” said Fraser, “ain't it?”

But his irate companion made no comment, whereat, sensing the anger behind his silence, the speaker, for once, failed to extemporize an answer to his own remark.

At the next stop they encountered the same gruff show of inhospitality, and all they could elicit from the shock−headed proprietor was another direction, in broken English, to try the Russian priest.

“I'll make one more try,” said Emerson, between his teeth, gratingly, as they swung out into the darkness a second time. “If that doesn't succeed, then I'll take possession again. I won't be passed on all night this way.”

“The 'buck' will certainly show us to the straw,” said “Fingerless” Fraser.

“The what?”

“The 'buck'—the sky−dog—oh, the priest!”

But when, a mile farther on, they drew up before a white pile surmounted by a dimly discerned Greek cross, no sign of life was to be seen, and their signals awakened no response.

“Gone!—and they knew it.”

The vicious manner in which Emerson handled his whip as he said the words betrayed his state of mind. Three weeks of unvarying hardship and toilsome travel had worn out both men, and rendered them well−nigh desperate. Hence they wasted no words when, for the fourth time, their eyes caught the welcome sight of a shining radiance in the gloom of the gathering night. The trail−weary team stopped of its own accord.

“Unhitch!” ordered Emerson, doggedly, as he began to untie the ropes of the sled. He shouldered the sleeping−bags, and made toward the light that filtered through the crusted windows, followed by Fraser similarly burdened. But as they approached they saw at once that this was no cannery; it looked more like a road−house or trading−post, for the structure was low and it was built of logs. Behind and connected with it by a covered hall or passageway crouched another squat building of the same character, its roof piled thick with a mass of snow, its windows glowing. Those warm squares of light, set into the black walls and overhung by white−burdened eaves, gave the place the appearance of a Christmas−card, it was so snug and cozy. Even the glitter was there, caused by the rays refracted from the facets of the myriad frost−crystals.

They mounted the steps of the nigh building, and, without knocking, flung the door open, entered, then tossed their bundles to the floor. With a sharp exclamation at this unceremonious intrusion, an Indian woman, whom they had surprised, dropped her task and regarded them, round−eyed.

“We're all right this time,” observed Emerson, as he swept the place with his eyes. “It's a store.” Then to the woman he said, briefly: “We want a bed and something to eat.”

On every side the walls were shelved with merchandise, while the counter carried a supply of clothing, skins, and what not; a cylindrical stove in the centre of the room emanated a hot, red glow.

“This looks like the Waldorf to me,” said “Fingerless” Fraser, starting to remove his parka, the fox fringe on the hood of which was white from his breath.

“What you want?” demanded the squaw, coming forward.

Boyd, likewise divesting himself of his furs, noticed that she was little more than a girl—a native, undoubtedly; but she was neatly dressed, her skin was light, and her hair twisted into a smooth black knot at the back of her head.

“Food! Sleep!” he replied to her question.

“You can't stop here,” the girl asserted, firmly.

“Oh yes, we can,” said Emerson. “You have plenty of room, and there's lots of food”—he indicated the shelves of canned goods.

The squaw, without moving, raised her voice and called: “Constantine! Constantine!”

A door in the farther shadows opened, and the tall figure of a man emerged, advancing swiftly, his soft soles noiseless beneath him.

“Well, well! It's old Squirrel−Tail,” cried Fraser. “Good−evening, Constantine.”

It was the copper−hued native who had rescued them from the river earlier in the day; but although he must have recognized them, his demeanor had no welcome in it. The Indian girl broke into a torrent of excited volubility, unintelligible to the white men.

“You no stop here,” said Constantine, finally; and, making toward the outer door, he flung it open, pointing out into the night.

“We've come a long way, and we're tired,” Emerson argued, pacifically. “We'll pay you well.”

Constantine only replied with added firmness, “No,” to which the other retorted with a flash of rising anger, “*Yes!*”

He faced the Indian with his back to the stove, his voice taking on a determined note. “We won't leave here until we are ready. We're tired, and we're going to stay here—do you understand? Now tell your 'klootch' to get us some supper. Quick!”

The breed's face blazed. Without closing the door, he moved directly upon the interloper, his design recognizable in his threatening attitude; but before he could put his plan into execution, a soft voice from the rear of the room halted him.

“Constantine,” it said.

The travellers whirled to see, standing out in relief against the darkness of the passage whence the Indian had just come a few seconds before, the golden−haired girl of the storm, to whom they had been indebted for their rescue. She advanced, smiling pleasantly, enjoying their surprise.

“What is the trouble?”

“These men no stop here!” cried Constantine violently. “You speak! I make them go.”

“I—I—beg pardon,” began Emerson. “We didn't intend to take forcible possession, but we're played out—we've been denied shelter everywhere—we felt desperate—”

“You tried the canneries above?” interrupted the girl.

“Yes.”

“And they referred you to the priest? Quite so.” She laughed softly, her voice a mellow contralto. “The Father has been gone for a month; he wouldn't have let you in if he'd been there.”

She addressed the Indian girl in Aleut and signalled to Constantine, at which the two natives retired—Constantine reluctantly, like a watch−dog whose suspicions are not fully allayed.

“We're glad of an opportunity to thank you for your timely service this afternoon,” said Emerson. “Had we known you lived here, we certainly should not have intruded in this manner.” He found himself growing hotly uncomfortable as he began to realize the nature of his position, but the young woman spared him further apologies by answering, carelessly:

“Oh, that was nothing. I've been expecting you hourly. You see, Constantine's little brother has the measles, and I had to get to him before the natives could give the poor little fellow a Russian bath and then stand him out in the snow. They have only one treatment for all diseases. That's why I didn't stop and give you more explicit directions this morning.”

“If your—er—father—“ The girl shook her head.

“Then your husband—I should like to arrange with him to hire lodgings for a few days. The matter of money—”

Again she came to his rescue.

“I am the man of the house. I'm boss here. This splendor is all mine.” She waved a slender white hand majestically at the rough surroundings, laughing in a way that put Boyd Emerson more at his ease. “You are quite welcome to stay as long as you wish. Constantine objects to my hospitality, and treats all strangers alike, fearing they may be Company men. When you didn't arrive at dark, I thought perhaps he was right this time, and that you had been taken in by one of the watchmen.”

“We throwed a Swede out on his neck,” declared Fraser, swelling with conscious importance, “and I guess he's 'crabbed' us with the other squareheads.”

“Oh, no! They have instructions not to harbor any travellers. It's as much as his job is worth for any of them to entertain you. Now, won't you make yourselves at home while Constantine attends to your dogs? Dinner will soon be ready, and I hope you will do me the honor of dining with me,” she finished, with a graciousness that threw Emerson into fresh confusion.

He murmured “Gladly,” and then lost himself in wonder at this well−gowned girl living amid such surroundings. Undeniably pretty, graceful in her movements, bearing herself with certainty and poise—who was she? Where did she come from? And what in the world was she doing here?

He became aware that “Fingerless” Fraser was making the introductions. “This is Mr. Emerson; my name is French. I'm one of the Virginia Frenches, you know; perhaps you have heard of them. No? Well, they're the real thing.”

The girl bowed, but Emerson forestalled her acknowledgment by breaking in roughly, with a threatening scowl at the adventurer:

“His name isn't French at all, Madam; it's Fraser—'Fingerless' Fraser. He's an utterly worthless rogue, and absolutely unreliable so far as I can learn. I picked him up on the ice in Norton Sound, with a marshal at his heels.”

“That marshal wasn't after me,” stoutly denied Fraser, quite unabashed. “Why, he's a friend of mine—we're regular chums—everybody knows that. He wanted to give me some papers to take outside, that's all.”

Boyd shrugged his shoulders indifferently:

“Warrants!”

“Not at all! Not at all!” airily.

Their hostess, greatly amused at this remarkable turn of the ceremony, prevented any further argument by saying:

“Well, French or Fraser, whichever it is, you are both welcome. However, I should prefer to think of you as a runaway rather than as an intimate friend of the marshal at Nome; I happen to know him.”

“Well, we ain't what you'd exactly call pals,” Fraser hastily disclaimed. “I just sort of bow to him”—he gave an imitation of a slight, indifferent headshake—“that way!”

“I see,” commented their hostess, quizzically; then recalling herself, she continued: “I should have made myself known before; I am Miss Malotte.”

“Ch—“ began the crook, then shut his lips abruptly, darting a shrewd glance at the girl. Emerson saw their eyes meet, and fancied that the woman's smile sat a trifle unnaturally on her lips, while the delicate coloring of her face changed imperceptibly. As the fellow mumbled some acknowledgment, she turned to the younger man, inquiring impersonally:

“I suppose you are bound for the States?”

“Yes; we intend to catch the mail−boat at Katmai. I am taking Fraser along for company; it's hard travelling alone in a strange country. He's a nuisance, but he's rather amusing at times.”

“I certainly am,” agreed that cheerful person, now fully at his ease. “I've a bad memory for names!”—he looked queerly at his hostess—“but I'm very amusing, very!”

“Not 'very,'“ corrected Emerson.

Then they talked of the trail, the possibilities of securing supplies, and of hiring a guide. By−and−by the girl rose, and after showing them to a room, she excused herself on the score of having to see to the dinner. When she had withdrawn, “Fingerless” Fraser pursed his thin lips into a noiseless whistle, then observed:

“Well, I'll—be—cussed!”

“Who is she?” asked Emerson, in a low, eager tone. “Do you know?”

"You heard, didn't you? She's Miss Malotte, and she's certainly some considerable lady."

The same look that Emerson had noted when their hostess introduced herself to them flitted again into the crook's unsteady eyes.

"Yes, but *who* is she? What does this mean?" Emerson pointed to the provisions and fittings about them. "What is she doing here alone?"

"Maybe you'd better ask her yourself," said Fraser.

For the first time in their brief acquaintance, Emerson detected a strange note in the rogue's voice, but it was too slight to provoke reply, so he brushed it aside and prepared himself for dinner.

The Indian girl summoned them, and they followed her through the long passageway into the other house, where, to their utter astonishment, they seemed to step out of the frontier and into the heart of civilization. They found a tiny dining−room, perfectly appointed, in the centre of which, wonder of wonders, was a round table gleaming like a deep mahogany pool, upon the surface of which floated gauzy hand−worked napery, glinting silver, and sparkling crystal, the dark polish of the wood reflecting the light from shaded candles. It held a delicately figured service of blue and gold, while the selection of thin−stemmed glasses all in rows indicated the character of the entertainment that awaited them. The men's eyes were too busy with the unaccustomed sight to note details carefully, but they felt soft carpet beneath their feet and observed that the walls were smooth and harmoniously papered.

When one has lived long in the rough where things come with the husk on, he fancies himself weaned away from the dainty, the beautiful, and the artistic; after years of a skillet−and−sheath−knife existence he grows to feel a scorn for the finer, softer, inconsequent trifles of the past, only to find, of a sudden, that, unknown to him perhaps, his soul has been hungering for them all the while. The feel of cool linen comes like the caress of a forgotten sweetheart, the tinkle of glass and silver are so many chiming fairy bells inviting him back into the foretime days. And so these two unkempt men, toughened and browned to the texture of leather by wind and snow, brought by trail and campfire to disregard ceremony and look upon mealtime as an unsatisfying, irksome period, stood speechless, affording the girl the feminine pleasure of enjoying their discomfiture.

"This is m—marvelous," murmured Emerson, suddenly conscious of his rough clothing, his fur boots, and his hands cracked by frost. "I'm afraid we're not in keeping."

"Indeed you are," said the girl, "and I am delighted to have somebody to talk to. It's very lonesome here, month after month."

"This is certainly a swell tepee," Fraser remarked, staring about in open admiration. "How did you do it?"

"I brought my things with me from Nome."

"Nome!" ejaculated Emerson, quickly.

"Yes."

"Why, I've been in Nome ever since the camp was discovered. It's strange we never met."

"I didn't stay there very long. I went back to Dawson."

Again he fancied the girl's eyes held a vague challenge, but he could not be sure; for she seated him, and then gave some instructions to the Aleut girl, who had entered noiselessly. It was the strangest meal Boyd Emerson had ever eaten, for here, in a forgotten corner of an unknown land, hidden behind high−banked log walls, he partook of a perfect dinner, well served, and presided over by a gracious, richly gowned young woman who talked interestingly on many subjects, For a second time he lost himself in a maze of conjecture. Who was she? What was her mission here? Why was she alone? But not for long; he was too heavily burdened by the responsibility and care of his own affairs to waste much time by the way on those of other people; and becoming absorbed in his own thoughts, he grew more silent as the signs of refinement and civilization about him revived memories long stifled. Fraser, on the contrary, warmed by the wine, blossomed like the rose, and talked garrulously, recounting marvellous stories, as improbable as they were egotistical. He monopolized his hostess' attention, the while his companion became more preoccupied, more self−contained, almost sullen.

This was not the effect for which the girl had striven; her younger guest's taciturnity, which grew as the dinner progressed, piqued her, so at the first opportunity she bent her efforts toward rallying him. He answered politely, but she was powerless to shake off his mood. It was not abashment, as she realized when, from the corner of her eye, she observed him covertly stroke the linen and finger the silver as if to renew a sense of touch long unused. Being unaccustomed to any sort of indifference in men, his spiritless demeanor put her on her mettle, yet all to no

avail; she could not find a seam in that mask of listless abstraction. At last he spoke of his own accord:

"You said those watchmen have instructions not to harbor travellers. Why is that?"

"It is the policy of the Companies. They are afraid somebody will discover gold around here."

"Yes?"

"You see, this is the greatest salmon river in the world; the 'run' is tremendous, and seems to be unfailing; hence the cannery people wish to keep it all to themselves."

"I don't quite understand—"

"It is simple enough. Kalvik is so isolated and the fishing season is so short that the Companies have to send their crews in from the States and take them out again every summer. Now, if gold were discovered hereabouts, the fishermen would all quit and follow the 'strike,' which would mean the ruin of the year's catch and the loss of many hundreds of thousands of dollars, for there is no way of importing new help during the short summer months. Why, this village would become a city in no time if such a thing were to happen; the whole region would fill up with miners, and not only would labor conditions be entirely upset for years, but the eyes of the world, being turned this way, other people might go into the fishing business and create a competition which would both influence prices, and deplete the supply of fish in the Kalvik River. So you see there are many reasons why this region is forbidden to miners."

"I see."

"You couldn't buy a pound of food nor get a night's lodging here for a king's ransom. The watchmen's jobs depend upon their unbroken bond of inhospitality, and the Indians dare not sell you anything, not even a dogfish, under penalty of starvation, for they are dependent upon the Companies' stores."

"So that is why you have established a trading−post of your own?"

"Oh dear, no. This isn't a store. This food is for my men."

"Your men?"

"Yes, I have a crew out in the hills on a grub−stake. This is our cache. While they prospect for gold, I stand guard over the provisions."

Fraser chuckled softly. "Then you are bucking the Salmon Trust?"

"After a fashion, yes. I knew this country had never been gone over, so I staked six men, chartered a schooner, and came down here from Nome in the early spring. We stood off the watchmen, and when the supply−ships arrived, we had these houses completed, and my men were out in the hills where it was hard to follow them. I stayed behind, and stood the brunt of things."

"But surely they didn't undertake to injure you?" said Emerson, now thoroughly interested in this extraordinary young woman.

"Oh, didn't they!" she answered, with a peculiar laugh. "You don't appreciate the character of these people. When a man fights for money, just plain, sordid money, he loses all sense of honor, chivalry, and decency, he employs any means that come handy. There is no real code of financial morality, and the battle for dollars is the bitterest of all contests. Of course, being a woman, they couldn't very well attack me personally, but they tried everything except physical violence, and I don't know how long they will refrain from that. These plants are owned separately, but they operate under an agreement, with one man at the head. His name is Marsh—Willis Marsh, and, of course, he's not my friend."

"Sort of 'United we stand, divided we fall.'"

"Exactly. That spreads the responsibility, and seems to leave nobody guilty for their evil deeds. The first thing they did was to sink my schooner—in the morning you will see her spars sticking up through the ice out in front there. One of their tugs 'accidentally' ran her down, although she was at anchor fully three hundred feet inside the channel line. Then Marsh actually had the effrontery to come here personally and demand damages for the injury to his towboat, claiming there were no lights on the schooner."

Cherry Malotte's eyes grew dark with indignation as she continued: "Nobody thinks of hanging lanterns to little crafts like her at anchor under such conditions. Having allowed me to taste his power, that man first threatened me covertly, and then proceeded to persecute me in a more open manner. When I still remained obdurate, he—he"—she paused. "You may have heard of it. He killed one of my men."

"Impossible!" ejaculated Boyd.

"Oh, but it isn't impossible. Anything is possible with unscrupulous men where there is no law; they halt at

nothing when in chase of money. They are different from women in that. I never heard of a woman doing murder for money."

"Was it really murder?"

"Judge for yourself. My man came down for supplies, and they got him drunk—he was a drinking man—then they stabbed him. They said a Chinaman did it in a brawl, but Willis Marsh was to blame. They brought the poor fellow here, and laid him on my steps, as if I had been the cause of it. Oh, it was horrible, horrible!" Her eyes suddenly dimmed over and her white hands clenched.

"And you still stuck to your post?" said Emerson, curiously.

"Certainly! This adventure means a great deal to me, and, besides, *I will not be beaten*"—the stem of the glass with which she had been toying snapped suddenly—"at anything."

She appeared, all in a breath, to have become prematurely hard and worldly, after the fashion of those who have subsisted by their wits. To Emerson she seemed to have grown at least ten years older. Yet it was unbelievable that this slip of a woman should be possessed of the determination, the courage, and the administrative ability to conduct so desperate an enterprise. He could understand the feminine rashness that might have led her to embark upon it in the first place, but to continue in the face of such opposition—why, that was a man's work and required a man's powers, and yet she was utterly unmasculine. Indeed, it seemed to him that he had never met a more womanly woman. Everything about her was distinctly feminine.

"Fortunately, the fishing season is short," she added, while a pucker of perplexity came between her dainty brows; "but I don't know what will happen next summer."

"I'd like to meet this Marsh−hen party," observed Fraser, his usually colorless eyes a bright sea−green.

"Do you fear further—er—violence?" asked Emerson.

Cherry shrugged her rounded shoulders. "I anticipate it, but I don't fear it. I have Constantine to protect me, and you will admit he is a capable bodyguard." She smiled slightly, recalling the scene she had interrupted before dinner. "Then, too, Chakawana, his sister, is just as devoted. Rather a musical name, don't you think so, Chakawana? It means 'The Snowbird' in Aleut, but when she's aroused she's more like a hawk. It's the Russian in her, I dare say."

The girl became conscious that her guests were studying her with undisguised amazement now, and therefore arose, saying, "You may smoke in the other room if you wish."

Lost in wonder at this unconventional creature, and dazed by the strangeness of the whole affair, Emerson gained his feet and followed her, with "Fingerless" Fraser at his heels.

CHAPTER III. IN WHICH CHERRY MALOTTE DISPLAYS A TEMPER

The unsuspected luxury of the dining−room, and the excellence of the dinner itself had in a measure prepared Emerson for what he found in the living−room. One thing only staggered him—a piano. The bear−skins on the floor, the big, sleepy chairs, the reading−table littered with magazines, the shelves of books, even the basket of fancy−work—all these he could accept without further parleying; but a piano! in Kalvik! Observing his look, the girl said:

“I am dreadfully extravagant, am I not? But I love it, and I have so little to do. I read and play and drive my dog−team—that's about all.”

“And rescue drowning men in time for dinner,” added Boyd Emerson, not knowing whether he liked this young woman or not. He knew this north country from bitter experience, knew that none but the strong can survive, and recognizing himself as a failure, her calm assurance and self− certainty offended him vaguely. It seemed as if she were succeeding where he had failed, which rather jarred his sense of the fitness of things. Then, too, conventionality is a very agreeable social bond, the true value of which is not often recognized until it is found missing, and this girl was anything but conventional.

Again he withdrew into that silent mood from which no effort on the part of his hostess could arouse him, and it soon became apparent from the listless hang of his hands and the distant light in his eyes that he had even become unconscious of her presence in the room. Observing the cause of her impatience, Fraser interrupted his interminable monologue to say, without change of intonation:

“Don't get sore on him; he's that way half the time. I rode herd one night on a feller that was going to hang for murder at dawn, and he set just like that for hours.” She raised her brows inquiringly, at which he continued: “But you can't always tell; when my brother got married he acted the same way.”

After an hour, during which Emerson barely spoke, she tired of the other man's anecdotes, which had long ceased to be amusing, and, going to the piano, shuffled the sheet music idly, inquiring:

“Do you care for music?” Her remark was aimed at Emerson, but the other answered:

“I'm a nut on it.”

She ignored the speaker, and cast another question over her shoulder:

“What kind do you prefer?” Again the adventurer outran his companion to the reply:

“My favorite hymn is the *Maple Leaf Rag*. Let her go, professor.”

Cherry settled herself obligingly and played ragtime, although she fancied that Emerson stirred uneasily as if the musical interruption disturbed him; but when she swung about on her seat at the conclusion, he was still lax and indifferent.

“That certainly has some class to it,” “Fingerless” Fraser said, admiringly. “Just go through the reperchure from soda to hock, will you? I'm certainly fond of that coon clatter.” And realizing that his pleasure was genuine, she played on and on for him, to the muffled thump of his feet, now and then feeding her curiosity with a stolen glance at the other. She was in the midst of some syncopated measure when Boyd spoke abruptly: “Please play something.”

She understood what he meant and began really to play, realizing very soon that at least one of her guests knew and loved music. Under her deft fingers the instrument became a medium for musical speech. Gay roundelays, swift, passionate Hungarian dances, bold Wagnerian strains followed in quick succession, and the more utter her abandon the more certainly she felt the younger man respond.

Strange to say, the warped soul of “Fingerless” Fraser likewise felt the spell of real music, and he stilled his loose−hinged tongue. By−and−by she began to sing, more for her own amusement than for theirs, and after awhile her fingers strayed upon the sweet chords of Bartlett's *A Dream*, a half−forgotten thing, the tenderness of which had lived with her from girlhood. She heard Emerson rise, then knew he was standing at her shoulder. Could he sing, she wondered, as he began to take up the words of the song? Then her dream−filled eyes widened as she listened to his voice breathing life into the beautiful words. He sang with the ease and flexibility of an artist, his powerful baritone blending perfectly with her contralto.

For the first time she felt the man's personality, his magnetism, as if he had dropped his cloak and stood at her side in his true semblance. As they finished the song she wheeled abruptly, her face flushed, her ripe lips smiling, her eyes moist, and looked up to find him marvelously transformed. His even teeth gleamed forth from a brown face that had become the mirror of a soul as spirited as her own, for the blending of their voices had brought them into a similar harmony of understanding.

"Oh, *thank* you," she breathed.

"Thank *you*," he said. "I—I—that's the first time in ages that I've had the heart to sing. I was hungry for music, I was starving for it. I've sat in my cabin at night longing for it until my soul fairly ached with the silence. I've frozen beneath the Northern Lights straining my ears for the melody that ought to go with them—they must have an accompaniment somewhere, don't you think so?"

"Yes, yes," she breathed.

"They *must* have; they are too gloriously, terribly beautiful to be silent. I've stood in the whispering spruce groves and tried to sing contentment back into my heart, but I couldn't do it. This is the first real taste I've had in three years. Three years!"

He was talking rapidly, his blue eyes dancing. Cherry remembered thinking at dinner that those eyes were of too light and hard a blue for tenderness. She now observed that they were singularly deep and passionate.

"Why, I've gone about with a comb and a piece of tissue−paper at my lips like any kid. I once made a banjo out of a cigar−box and bale wire, and while I was in the Kougarok I walked ten miles to hear a nigger play a harmonica. I did all sorts of things to coax music into this country, but it is silent and unresponsive, absolutely dead and discordant." He made a gesture which in a woman would have ended in a shudder.

He took a seat near the girl, and continued to talk feverishly, unable to give voice to his thoughts rapidly enough. His reserve vanished, his silence gave way to a confidential warmth which suffused his listener and drew her to him. The overpowering force of his strong nature swept her out of herself, while her ready sympathy took fire and caught at his half− expressed ideas and stumbling words, stimulating him with her warm understanding. Her quick wit rallied him and awoke echoes of his past youth, until they began to laugh and jest with the *camaraderie* of boy and girl. With their better acquaintance her assumption of masculinity fell from her, and she became the "womanly woman"—dainty, vivacious, captivating.

Fraser, whom both had forgotten, looked on at first in gaping, silent awe, staring and blinking at his travelling companion, who had undergone such a metamorphosis. But restraint and silence were impossible to him for long, and in time he ambled clumsily into the conversation. It jarred, of course, but he could not be ignored, and gradually he claimed more and more of the talk until the young couple yielded to the monologue, smiling at each other in mutual understanding.

Emerson listened tolerantly, idly running through the magazines at his hand, his hostess watching him covertly, albeit her ears were drummed by the other's monotone. How much better this mood became the young man! Suddenly the smile of amusement that lurked about his lip corners and gave him a pleasing look hardened in a queer fashion—he started, then stared at one of the pages while the color died out of his brown cheeks. Cherry saw the hand that held the magazine tremble. He looked up at her, and, disregarding Fraser, broke in, harshly:

"Have you read this magazine?"

"Not entirely. It came in the last mail."

"I'd like to take one page out of it," he said. "May I?"

"Why, certainly," she replied. "You may have the whole thing if you like." He produced a knife, and with one quick stroke cut a single leaf out of the magazine, which he folded and thrust into the breast of his coat.

"Thank you," he muttered; then fell to staring ahead of him, again heedless of his surroundings. This abrupt relapse into his former state of sullen and defiant silence tantalized the girl to the verge of anger, especially now that she had seen something of his true self. She was painfully conscious of a sense of betrayal at having yielded so easily to his pleasant mood, only to be shut out on an instant's whim, while a girlish curiosity to know the cause of the change overpowered her. He offered no explanation, however, and took no further part in the conversation until, noting the lateness of the hour, he rose and thanked her for her hospitality in the same deadly indifferent manner.

"The music was a great treat," he said, looking beyond her and holding aloof—"a very great treat. I enjoyed it immensely. Good−night."

Cherry Malotte had experienced a new sensation, and she didn't like it. She vowed angrily that she disliked men who looked past her; indeed, she could not recall any other who had ever done so. Her chief concern had always been to check their ardor. She resolved viciously that before she was through with this young man he would make her a less listless adieu. She assured herself that he was a selfish, sullen boor, who needed to be taught a lesson in manners for his own good if for nothing else; that a woman's curiosity had aught to do with her exasperation she would have denied. She abhorred curiosity. As a matter of fact, she told herself that he did not interest her in the least, except as a discourteous fellow who ought to be shocked into a consciousness of his bad manners, and therefore the moment the two men were well out of the room she darted to the table, snatched up the magazine, and skimmed through it feverishly. Ah! here was the place!

A woman's face with some meaningless name beneath filled each page. Along the top ran the heading, “Famous American Beauties.” So it was a woman! She skipped backward and forward among the pages for further possible enlightenment, but there was no article accompanying the pictures. It was merely an illustrated section devoted to the photographs of prominent actresses and society women, most of whom she had never heard of, though here and there she saw a name that was familiar. In the centre was that tantalizingly clean−cut edge which had subtracted a face from the gallery —a face which she wanted very much to see. She paused and racked her brain, her brows furrowed with the effort at recollection, but she had only glanced at the pages when the magazine came, and had paid no attention to this part of it. Her anger at her failure to recall this particular face aroused her to the fact that she was acting very foolishly, at which she laughed aloud.

“Well, what of it?” she demanded of the empty room. “He's in love with some society ninny, and I don't care what she looks like.” She shrugged her shoulders carelessly; then, in a sudden access of fury, she flung the mutilated magazine viciously into a far corner of the room.

The travellers slept late on the following morning, for the weariness of weeks was upon them, and the little bunk−room they occupied adjoined the main building and was dark. When they came forth they found Chakawana in the store, and a few moments later were called to breakfast.

“Where is your mistress?” inquired Boyd.

“She go see my sick broder,” said the Indian girl, recalling Cherry's mention of the child ill with measles. “She all the time give medicine to Aleut babies,” Chakawana continued. “All the time give, give, give something. Indian people love her.”

“She's sort of a Lady Bountiful to these bums,” remarked Fraser.

“Does she let them trade in yonder?” Boyd asked, indicating the store.

“Oh yes! Everything cheap to Indian people. Indian got no money, all the same.” Then, as if realizing that her hasty tongue had betrayed some secret of moment, the Aleut girl paused, and, eying them sharply, demanded, “What for you ask?”

“No reason in particular.”

“What for you ask?” she insisted. “Maybe you b'long Company, eh?” Emerson laughed, but she was not to be put off easily, and, with characteristic guile, announced boldly: “I lie to you. She no trade with Aleut people. No; Chakawana lie!”

“She's afraid we'll tell this fellow Marsh,” Fraser remarked to Emerson; then, as if that name had some powerful effect upon their informant, Chakawana advanced to the table, and, leaning over it, said:

“You know Willis Marsh?” Her pretty wooden face held a mingled expression of fear, malice, and curiosity.

“Ouch!” said Fraser, shoving back from his plate. “Don't look at me like that before I've had my coffee.”

“Maybe you know him in San Flancisco, eh?”

“No, no! We never heard of him until last night.”

“I guess you lie!” She smiled at them wheedlingly, but Boyd reassured her.

“No! We don't know him at all.”

“Then what for you speak his name?”

“Miss Malotte told us about him at dinner.”

“Oh!”

“By−the−way, what kind of a looking feller is he?” asked Fraser.

“He's fine, han'some man,” said Chakawana. “Nice fat man. Him got hair like—like fire.”

“He's fat and red−headed, eh? He must be a picture.”

“Yes,” agreed the girl, rather vaguely.

“Is he married?”

“I don't know. Maybe he lie. Maybe he got woman.”

“The masculine sex seems to stand like a band of horse−thieves with this dame,” Fraser remarked to his companion. “She thinks we're all liars.”

After a moment, Chakawana continued, “Where you go now?”

“To the States; to the 'outside,'“ Boyd answered.

“Then you see Willis Marsh, sure thing. He lives there. Maybe you speak, eh?”

“Well, Mr. Marsh may be a big fellow around Kalvik, but I don't think he occupies so much space in the United States that we will meet him,” laughed Emerson; but even yet the girl seemed unconvinced, and went on rather fearfully: “Maybe you see him all the same.”

“Perhaps. What then?”

“You speak my name?”

“Why, no, certainly not.”

“If I see him, I'll give him your love,” offered “Fingerless” Fraser, banteringly; but Chakawana's light−hued cheeks blanched perceptibly, and she cried, quickly:

“No! No! Willis Marsh bad, bad man. You no speak, please! Chakawana poor Aleut girl. Please?”

Her alarm was so genuine that they reassured her; and having completed their meal, they rose and left the room. Outside, Fraser said: “This cannery guy has certainly buffaloed these savages. He must be a slave− driver.” Then as they filled their pipes, he added: “She was plumb scared to death of him, wasn't she?”

“Think so?” listlessly.

“Sure. Didn't she show it?”

“Um−m, I suppose so.”

They were still talking when they heard the jingle of many bells, then a sharp command from Constantine, and the next instant the door burst open to admit Cherry, who came with a rush of youth and health as fresh as the bracing air that followed her. The cold had reddened her cheeks and quickened her eyes; she was the very embodiment of the day itself, radiantly bright and tinglingly alive.

“Good−morning, gentlemen!” she cried, removing the white fur hood which gave a setting to her sparkling eyes and teeth. “Oh, but it's a glorious morning! If you want to feel your blood leap and your lungs tingle, just let Constantine take you for a spin behind that team. We did the five miles from the village in seventeen minutes.”

“And how is your measley patient?” asked Fraser.

“He's doing well, thank you.” She stepped to the door to admit Chakawana, who had evidently hurried around from the other house, and now came in, bareheaded and heedless of the cold, bearing a bundle clasped to her breast. “I brought the little fellow home with me. See!”

The Indian girl bore her burden to the stove, where she knelt to lift the covering from the child's face.

“Hey there! Look out!” ejaculated Fraser, retreating in alarm. “I never had no measles.” But Chakawana went on cuddling the infant in a motherly fashion while Cherry reassured her guests.

“Is that an Indian child?” asked Emerson, curiously, noting the little fellow's flushed fair skin. The kneeling girl turned upward a pair of tearful, defiant eyes, answering quickly:

“Yes, him Aleut baby.”

“Him our little broder,” came the deep voice of Constantine, who had entered unnoticed; and a moment later, in obedience to an order from Cherry, they bore their charge to their own quarters at the rear.

CHAPTER IV. IN WHICH SHE GIVES HEART TO A HOPELESS MAN

“I dare say Kalvik is rather lively during the summer season,” Emerson remarked to Cherry, later in the day.

“Yes; the ships arrive in May, and the fish begin to run in July. After that nobody sleeps.”

She had come upon him staring dispiritedly at the fire, and his dejection softened her and drew out her womanly sympathy. She had renewed her efforts to cheer him up, seeking to stir him out of the gloom that imprisoned him. With the healthy optimism and exuberance of her normal youth she could not but deplore the mischance that had changed him into the sullen, silent brute he seemed.

“It must be rather interesting,” he observed, indifferently.

“It is more than that; it is inspiring. Why, the story of the salmon is an epic in itself. You know they live a cycle of four years, no more, always returning to the waters of their nativity to die; and I have heard it said that during one of those four years they disappear, no one knows where, reappearing out of the mysterious depths of the sea as if at a signal. They come by the legion, in countless scores of thousands; and when once they have tasted the waters of their birth they never touch food again, never cease their onward rush until they become bruised and battered wrecks, drifting down from the spawning−beds. When the call of nature is answered and the spawn is laid they die. They never seek the salt sea again, but carpet the rivers with their bones. When they feel the homing impulse they come from the remotest depths, heading unerringly for the particular parent stream whence they originated. If sand−bars should block their course in dry seasons or obstacles intercept them, they will hurl themselves out of the water in an endeavor to get across. They may disregard a thousand rivers, one by one; but when they finally taste the sweet currents which flow from their birthplaces their whole nature changes, and even their physical features alter: they grow thin, and the head takes on the sinister curve of the preying bird.”

“I had no idea they acted that way,” said Boyd. “You paint a vivid picture.”

“That's because they interest me. As a matter of fact, these fisheries are more fascinating than any place I've ever seen. Why, you just ought to witness the 'run.' These empty waters become suddenly crowded, and the fish come in a great silver horde, which races up, up, up toward death and obliteration. They come with the violence of a summer storm; like a prodigious gleaming army they swarm and bend forward, eager, undeviating, one−purposed. It's quite impossible to describe it—this great silver horde. They are entirely defenceless, of course, and almost every living thing preys upon them. The birds congregate in millions, the four−footed beasts come down from the hills, the Apaches of the sea harry them in dense droves, and even man appears from distant coasts to take his toll; but still they press bravely on. The clank of machinery makes the hills rumble, the hiss of steam and the sighs of the soldering−furnaces are like the complaint of some giant overgorging himself. The river swarms with the fleets of fish−boats, which skim outward with the dawn to flit homeward again at twilight and settle like a vast brood of white−winged gulls. Men let the hours go by unheeded, and forget to sleep.”

“What sort of men do they hire?”

“Chinese, Japs, and Italians, mainly. It's like a foreign country here, only there are no women. The bunk−rooms are filled with opium fumes and noisy with clacking tongues. On one side of the village streets the Orientals burn incense to their Joss, across the way the Latins worship the Virgin. They work side by side all day until they are ready to drop, then mass in the street and knife each other over their rival gods.”

“How long does it all last?”

“Only about six weeks; then the furnace fires die out, the ships are loaded, the men go to sleep, and the breezes waft them out into the August haze, after which Kalvik sags back into its ten months' coma, becoming, as you see it now, a dead, deserted village, shunned by man.”

“Jove! you have a graphic tongue,” said Boyd, appreciatively. “But I don't see how those huge plants can pay for their upkeep with such a short run.”

“Well, they do; and, what's more, they pay tremendously; sometimes a hundred per cent. a year or more.”

“Impossible!” Emerson was now thoroughly aroused, and Cherry continued:

“Two years ago a ship sailed into port in early May loaded with an army of men, with machinery, lumber, coal, and so forth. They landed, built the plant, and had it ready to operate by the time the run started. They made

their catch, and sailed away again in August with enough salmon in the hold to pay twice over for the whole thing. Willis Marsh did even better than that the year before, but of course the price of fish was high then. Next season will be another big year."

"How is that?"

"Every fourth season the run is large; nobody knows why. Every time there is a Presidential election the fish are shy and very scarce; that lifts prices. Every year in which a President of the United States is inaugurated they are plentiful."

Boyd laughed. "The Alaska salmon takes more interest in politics than I do. I wonder if he is a Republican or a Democrat?"

"Inasmuch as he is a red salmon, I dare say you'd call him a Socialist," laughed Cherry.

Emerson rose, and began to pace back and forth. "And you mean to say the history of the other canneries is the same?"

"Certainly."

"I had no idea there were such profits in the fisheries up here."

"Nobody knows it outside of those interested. The Kalvik River is the most wonderful salmon river in the world, for it has never failed once; that's why the Companies guard it so jealously; that's why they denied you shelter. You see, it is set away off here in one corner of Behring Sea without means of communication or access, and they intend to keep it so."

It was evident that the young man was vitally interested now. Was it the prospective vision of almighty dollars that was needed to release the hidden spring that had baffled the girl? With this clue in mind, she watched him closely and fed his eagerness.

"These figures you mention are on record?" he inquired.

"I believe they are available."

"What does it cost to install and operate a cannery for the first season?"

"About two hundred thousand dollars, I am told. But I believe one can mortgage his catch or borrow money on it from the banks, and so not have to carry the full burden."

The man stared at his companion with unseeing eyes for a moment, then asked: "What's to prevent me from going into the business?"

"Several things. Have you the money?"

"Possibly. What else?"

"A site."

"That ought to be easy."

Cherry laughed. "On the contrary, a suitable cannery site is very hard to get, because there are natural conditions necessary, fresh flowing water for one; and, furthermore, because the companies have taken them all up."

"Ah! I see." The light died out of Emerson's eyes, the eagerness left his voice. He flung himself dejectedly into a chair by the fire, moodily watching the flames licking the burning logs. All at once he gripped the arms of his chair, and muttered through set jaws: "God, I'd like to take one more chance!" The girl darted a swift look at him, but he fell to brooding again, evidently insensible to her presence. At length he stirred himself to ask: "Can I hire a guide hereabout? We'll have to be going on in a day or so."

"Constantine will get you one. I suppose, of course, you will avoid the Katmai Pass?"

"Avoid it? Why?"

"It's dangerous, and nobody travels it except in the direst emergency. It's much the shortest route to the coast, but it has a record of some thirty deaths. I should advise you to cross the range farther east, where the divide is lower. The mail−boat touches at both places."

He nodded agreement. "There's no use taking chances. I'm in no hurry. I wish there was some way of repaying you for your kindness. We were pretty nearly played out when we got here."

"Oh, I'm quite selfish," she disclaimed. "If you endured a few months of this monotony, you'd understand."

During the rest of that day Boyd was conscious several times of being regarded with scrutinizing eyes by Cherry. At dinner, and afterward in the living−room while Fraser talked, he surprised the same questioning look on her face. Again she played for him, but he refused to sing, maintaining an unbroken taciturnity. After they

retired she sat long alone, her brows furrowed as if wrestling with some knotty problem. “I wonder if he would do it!” she said, at last. “I wonder if he *could* do it!” She rose, and began to pace the floor; then added, as if in desperation: “Well, I must do *something* , for this can't last. Who knows—perhaps this is my chance; perhaps he has been sent.”

There are times when momentous decisions are influenced by the most trivial circumstances; times when affairs of the greatest importance are made or marred by the lift of an eyebrow or the tone of a voice; times when life−long associations are severed and new ties contracted purely upon intuition, and this woman felt instinctively that such an hour had now struck for her. It was late before she finally came to peace with the conflict in her mind and lay herself down to rest.

On the following morning she told Constantine to hitch up her team and have it waiting when breakfast was finished. Then she turned to Emerson, who came into the room, and said, quietly:

“I have something to show you if you will take a short ride with me.”

The young man, impressed by the gravity of her manner, readily consented. Half an hour later he wrapped her up in the sledge−robe and took station at the rear, whip in hand. Constantine freed the leader, and they went off at a mad run, whisking out from the buildings and swooping down the steep bank to the main−travelled trail. When they had gained the level and the dogs were straightened into their gait, they skimmed over the snow with the flight of a bird.

“That's a wonderful team you have,” Boyd observed, as he glanced over the double row of undulating gray backs and waving plume−like tails.

“The best in the country,” she smiled back at him. “They are good for a hundred miles a day.”

The young man gave himself up to the unique and rather delightful experience of being transported through an unknown country to an unknown destination by a charming girl of whom he also knew nothing. He watched her in silence; but when he forebore to question her, she turned, exposing a rounded, ravishing cheek, glowing against the white fur of her hood.

“Have you no curiosity, sir?”

“None! Nothing but satisfaction,” he observed.

It was his first attempt at gallantry, and she flashed him a bright, approving glance. Then, as if suddenly checked by second thought, she frowned slightly and turned away. She had mapped out a course of action during the night in which it was her purpose to use this man if he proved amenable, but the success of her plan would depend largely on a continuance of their present friendly relations. In order, therefore, to forestall any possible change of base, she began to unfold her scheme in a business−like tone:

“Yesterday you seemed to be taken by the fishing business.”

“I certainly was until you told me there were no cannery sites left.”

“There is one. When I came here a year ago the whole river was open, so on an outside chance I located a site, the best one available. When Willis Marsh learned of it, he took up all of the remaining places, and, although at the time I had no idea what I was going to do with my property, I have hung on to it.”

“Is that where we are going?”

“Yes. You seemed eager yesterday to get in on a new chance, so I am taking you out to look over the ground.”

“What's the use? I can't buy your site.”

“Nobody asked you to,” she smiled. “I wouldn't sell it to you if you had the money; but if you will build a cannery on it, I'll turn in the ground for an interest.”

Emerson meditated a moment, then replied: “I can't say yes or no. It's a pretty big proposition—two hundred thousand dollars, you said?”

“Yes. It's a big opportunity. You can clean up a hundred per cent. in a year. Do you think you could raise the money to build a plant?”

“I might. I have some wealthy friends,” he said, cautiously. “But I am not sure.”

“At least you can try? That's all anybody can do.”

“But I don't know anything about the business. I couldn't make it succeed.”

“I've thought of all that, and there's a way to make success certain. I believe you have executive ability and can handle men.”

“Oh yes; I've done that sort of thing.” His broad shoulders went up as he drew a long breath. “What's your

plan?”

“There's a man down the coast, George Balt, who knows more about the business than any four people in Kalvik. He's been a fisherman all his life. He discovered the Kalvik River, built the first cannery here, and was its foreman until he quarrelled with Marsh, who proceeded to discipline him. Balt isn't the kind of man to be disciplined; so, not having enough money to build a cannery, he took his scanty capital and started a saltery on his own account. That suited Marsh exactly; he broke George in a year, absolutely ruined him, utterly wiped him out, just as he intends to wipe out insignificant me! Thinking to bide his time and recoup his fallen fortunes George came back into camp; but he owns a valuable trap site which Marsh and his colleagues want; and before they would give him work, they tried to make him assign it to them, and contract never to go in business on his own account. Naturally George refused, so they disciplined him some more. He's been starving now for two years. Marsh and his companions rule this region just as the Hudson's Bay Company used to govern its concessions: by controlling the natives and preventing independent white men from gaining a foothold.

“No man dares to furnish food to George Balt; no man dares to give him a bed, no cannery will let him work. He has to take a dory to Dutch Harbor to get food. He doesn't dare leave the country and abandon the meagre thousands he has invested in buildings, so he has stayed on living off the country like a Siwash. He's a simple, big−hearted sort of fellow, but his life is centred in this business; it's all he knows. He considers himself the father of this section; and when he sees others rounding up the task that he began, it breaks his poor heart. Why, every summer when the run starts he comes across the marshes and slinks about the Kalvik thickets like a wraith, watching from afar just in order to be near it all. He stands alone and forsaken, harking to the clank of the machinery, every bolt of which he placed; watching his enemies enrich themselves from that gleaming silver army, which he considers his very own. He is shunned like a leper. No man is allowed to speak to him or render him any sort of fellowship, and it has made the man half mad, it has turned him into a vengeful, hate−filled fanatic, living only for retaliation. Some time I believe he will kill Marsh.”

“Hm−m! One seems to be forever crossing the trail of this Marsh,” said Boyd, who had listened intently.

“Yes. His aim is to gain control of this whole region, and if you decide to go into the enterprise you must expect to find him the most unscrupulous and vindictive enemy ever man had; make no mistake about that. It's only fair to warn you that this will be no child's play; but, on the other hand, the man who beats Marsh will have done something.” She paused as if weighing her next words, then said, deliberately: “And I believe you are the one to do it.”

But Emerson was not concerned about his destiny just then, nor for the dangerous enmity of Marsh. He was following another train of thought.

“And so Balt knows this business from the inside out?” he said.

“Thoroughly; every dip, angle, and spur of it, so to speak. He's practical and he's honest, in addition to which his trap−site is the key to the whole situation. You see, the salmon run in regular definite courses, year after year, just as if they were following a beaten track. At certain places these courses come close to the shore where conditions make it possible to drive piling and build traps which intercept them by the million. One trap will do the work of an army of fishermen with nets in deep water. It is to get this property for himself that Marsh has persecuted George so unflaggingly.”

“Would he join us in such an enterprise, with five chances to one against success?”

“Would he!” Cherry laughed. “Wait and see.”

They had reached their destination—the mouth of a deep creek, up which Cherry turned her dogs. Emerson leaped from the sled, and, running forward, seized the leader, guiding it into a clump of spruce, among the boles of which he tangled the harness, for this team was like a pack of wolves, ravenous for travel and intolerant of the leash.

Together they ascended the bank and surveyed the surroundings, Cherry expatiating upon every feature with the fervor of a land agent bent on weaving his spell about a prospective buyer. And in truth she had chosen well, for the conditions seemed ideal.

“It all sounds wonderfully attractive and feasible,” said Boyd, at last; “but we must weigh the overwhelming odds against success. First, of course, is the question of capital. I have a little property of my own which I can convert. But two hundred thousand dollars! That's a tremendous sum to raise, even for a fellow with a circle of wealthy friends. Second, there's the question of time. It's now early December, and I'd have to be back here by the

first of May. Third, could I run the plant and make it succeed? It must be a wonderfully technical business, and I am utterly ignorant of every phase of it. Then, too, there are a thousand other difficulties, such as getting machinery out here in time, hiring Chinese labor, chartering a ship, placing the output—”

“George Balt has done all that many times, and knows everything about it,” Cherry interrupted, with decision. “Every difficulty can be met when the time comes. What other people have done, you ought to be able to do.”

But he was not to be won by flattery. Youth that he was, he already knew the vanity of human hopes, and it was his nature to look at all sides of a question before answering it finally.

“The slightest error of judgment would mean failure and ruin,” he reflected, “for this country isn't like any other. It is cut off from the rest of the world, and there's no time to go back and pick up.”

“The odds are great, of course,” she acquiesced, “but the winnings are in proportion. It isn't casino, by any means. This is worth while. Every man who has done anything in this world believes in a goddess of luck, and it's the element of chance that makes life worth living.”

“That's all right in theory,” he answered her, somewhat cynically, “but in practice you'll find that luck is largely the result of previous judgment. For every obstacle I have mentioned, a thousand unsuspected difficulties will arise, any one of which—“ The girl interrupted him sharply for a second time, looking him squarely in the eyes, her own flushed face alight with determination.

“There's only one person in the whole world who can defeat you, and that person is yourself; and no man can finish a task before he begins it. We'll grant there's a chance for failure—a million chances; but don't try to count them. Count the chances for success. Don't be faint−hearted, for there's no such thing as fear. It doesn't exist. It's merely an absence of courage, just as indecision is merely a lack of decision. I never saw anything yet of which I was afraid—and you're a *man*. The deity of success is a woman, and she insists on being won, not courted. You've got to seize her and bear her off, instead of standing under her window with a mandolin. You need to be rough and masterful with her. Nobody ever reasoned himself out of a street fight. He had to act. If a man thinks over a proposition long enough it will whip him, no matter how simple it is. It's the lightning flash that guides a man. You must lay your course in the blue dazzle, then follow it in the dark; and when you come to the end, it always lightens again. Don't stand still, staring through the gloom, and then try to walk while the lightning lasts, because you won't get anywhere.”

Her words were charged with an electric force that communicated itself to the young man and galvanized him into action. He would have spoken, but she stayed him, and went on:

“Wait; I'm not through yet. I've watched you, and I know you are down on your luck for some reason. You've been miscast somehow and you've had the heart taken out of you; but I'm sure it's in you to succeed, for you're young and intelligent, cool and determined. I am giving you this chance to play the biggest game of your life, and erase in eight short months every trace of failure. I'm not doing it altogether unselfishly, for I believe you've been sent to Kalvik to work out your own salvation and mine, and that of poor George Balt, whom you've never seen. You're going to do this thing, and you're going to make it win.”

Emerson reached out impulsively and caught her tiny, mittened hand. His eyes were shining, his face had lost the settled look of dejection, and was all aglow with a new dawn of hope. Even his shoulders were lifted and thrown back as if from some sudden access of vigor that lightened his burden.

“You're right!” he said, firmly. “We'll send for Balt to−night.”

CHAPTER V. IN WHICH A COMPACT IS FORMED

Now that he had committed himself to action, Boyd Emerson became a different being. He was no longer the dispirited cynic of yesterday, but an eager, voluble optimist athirst for knowledge and afire with impatience. On the homeward drive he had bombarded Cherry with a running fusillade of questions, so that by the time they had arrived at her house she was mentally and physically fatigued. He seemed insatiable, drawing from her every atom of information she possessed, and although he was still hard, incisive, and aloof, it was in quite a different way. The intensity of his concentration had gathered all feeling into one definite passion, and had sucked him dry of ordinary emotions.

In the days that followed she was at his elbow constantly, aiding him at every turn in his zeal to acquire a knowledge of the cannery system. The odd conviction grew upon her that he was working against time, that there was a limit to his period of action, for he seemed obsessed by an ever− growing passion to accomplish some end within a given time, and had no thought for anything beyond the engrossing issue into which he had plunged. She was dumfounded by his sudden transformation, and delighted at first, but later, when she saw that he regarded her only as a means to an end, his cool assumption of leadership piqued her and she felt hurt.

Constantine had been sent for Balt, with instructions to keep on until he found the fisherman, even if the quest carried him over the range. During the days of impatient waiting they occupied their time largely in reconnoitring the nearest cannery, permission to go over which Cherry had secured from the watchman, who was indebted to her. The man was timid at first, but Emerson won him over, then proceeded to pump him dry of information, as he had done with his hostess. He covered the plant like a ferret; he showed such powers of adaptability and assimilation as to excite the girl's wonder; his grasp of detail was instant; his retentive faculty tenacious; he never seemed to rest.

“Why, you already know more about a cannery than a superintendent does,” she remarked, after nearly a week of this. “I believe you could build one yourself.”

He smiled. “I'm an engineer by education, and this is really in my line. It's the other part that has me guessing.”

“Balt can handle that.”

“But why doesn't he come?” he questioned, crossly. A score of times he had voiced his impatience, and Cherry was hard pushed to soothe him.

Nor was she the only one to note the change in him; Fraser followed him about and looked on in bewilderment.

“What have you done to 'Frozen Annie'?” he asked Cherry on one occasion. “You must have fed him a speed−ball, for I never saw a guy gear up so fast. Why, he was the darndest crape−hanger I ever met till you got him gingered up; he didn't have no more spirit than a sick kitten. Of course, he ain't what you'd call genial and expansive yet, but he's developed a remarkable burst of speed, and seems downright hopeful at times.”

“Hopeful of what?”

“Ah! that's where I wander; he's a puzzle to me. Hopeful of making money, I suppose.”

“That isn't it. I can see he doesn't care for the money itself,” the girl declared, emphatically. She would have liked to ask Fraser if he knew anything about the mysterious beauty of the magazine, but refrained.

“I don't think so, either,” said the man. “He acts more like somebody was going to ring the gong on him if this fish thing don't let him out. It seems to be a case bet with him.”

“It's a case bet with me, too,” said the girl. “My men are ready to quit, and—well, Willis Marsh will see that I am financially ruined!”

“Oho! So this is your only 'out,'“ grinned “Fingerless” Fraser. “Now, I had a different idea as to why you got Emerson started.” He was observing her shrewdly.

“What idea, pray?”

“Well, talking straight and side−stepping subterfuge, this is a lonely place for a woman like you, and our mutual friend ain't altogether unattractive.”

Cherry's cheeks flamed, but her tone was icy. “This is entirely a business matter.”

“Hm—m—! I ain't never heard you touted none as a business woman,” said the adventurer.

“Have you ever heard me”—the color faded from the girl's face, and it was a trifle drawn—“discussed in *any* way?”

“You know, Emerson makes me uncomfortable sometimes, he is so damn moral,” Fraser replied, indirectly. “He won't stand for anything off color. He's a real square guy, he is, the kind you read about.”

“You didn't answer my question,” insisted Cherry.

Again Fraser evaded the issue. “Now, if this Marsh is going after you in earnest this summer, why don't you let me stick around here till spring and look−out your game? I'll drop a monkey−wrench in his gear−case or put a spider in his dumpling; and it's more than an even shot that if him and I got to know each other right well, I'd own his cannery before fall.”

“Thank you, I can take care of myself!” said the girl, in a tone that closed the conversation.

Late one stormy night—Constantine had been gone a week—the two men whom they were expecting blew in through the blinding smother, half frozen and well−nigh exhausted, with the marks of hard travel showing in their sunken cheeks and in the bleeding pads of their dog−team. But although a hundred miles of impassable trails lay behind them, Balt refused rest or nourishment until he had learned why Cherry had sent for him.

“What's wrong?” he demanded of her, staring with suspicious eyes at the strangers.

As briefly as possible she outlined the situation the while Boyd Emerson took his measure, for no person quite like this fisherman had ever crossed the miner's path. He saw a huge, barrel−chested creature whose tremendous muscles bulged beneath his nondescript garments, whose red, upstanding bristle of hair topped a leather countenance from which gleamed a pair of the most violent eyes Emerson had ever beheld, the dominant expression of which was rage. His jaw was long, and the seams from nostril and lip, half hidden behind a stiff stubble, gave it the set of granite. His hands were gnarled and cracked from an age−long immersion in brine, his voice was hoarse with the echo of drumming ratlines. He might have lived forty, sixty years, but every year had been given to the sea, for its breath was in his lungs, its foaming violence was in his blood.

As the significance of Cherry's words sank into his mind, the signs of an unholy joy overspread the fisherman's visage; his thick lips writhed into an evil grin, and his hairy paws continued to open and close hungrily.

“Do you mean business?” he bellowed at Emerson.

“I do.”

“Can you fight?”

“Yes.”

“Will you do what I tell you, or have you got a lot of sick notions?”

“No,” the young man declared, stoutly, “I have no scruples; but I won't do what you or anybody else tells me. I'll do what I please. I intend to run this enterprise absolutely, and run it my way.”

“This gang won't stop at anything,” warned Balt.

“Neither will I,” affirmed the other, with a scowl and a dangerous down− drawing of his lip corners. “I've *got* to win, so don't waste time wondering how far I'll go. What I want to know is if you will join my enterprise.”

The giant uttered a mirthless chuckle. “I'll give my life to it.”

“I knew you would,” flashed Cherry, her eyes beaming.

“And if we don't beat Willis Marsh, by God, I'll kill him!” Balt shouted, fully capable of carrying out his threat, for his bloodshot eyes were lit with bitter hatred and the memory of his wrongs was like gall in his mouth. Turning to the girl, he said:

“Now give me something to eat. I've been living on dog fish till my belly is full of bones.”

He ripped the ragged parka from his back and flung it in a sodden heap beside the stove; then strode after her, with the others following.

She seated him at her table and spread food before him—great quantities of food, which he devoured ravenously, humped over in his seat like a bear, his jaw hanging close to his plate. His appetite was as ungoverned as his temper; he did not taste his meal nor note its character, but demolished whatever fell first to his hand, staring curiously up from under his thatched brows at Emerson, now and then grunting some interruption to the other's rapid talk. Of Cherry and of “Fingerless” Fraser, who regarded him with awe, he took not the slightest

heed. He gorged himself with sufficient provender for four people; then observing that the board was empty, swept the crumbs and remnants from his lips, and rose, saying:

"Now, let's go out by the stove. I've been cold for three days."

Cherry left the two of them there, and long after she had gone to bed she heard the murmur of their voices.

"It's all arranged," they advised her at the breakfast−table. "We leave to−morrow."

"To−morrow?" she echoed, blankly.

"To−morrow?" likewise questioned Fraser, in alarm. "Oh, say! You can't do that. My feet are too sore to travel. I've certainly got a bad pair of 'dogs.'"

"We start in the morning. We have no time to waste."

Cherry turned to the fisherman. "You can't get ready so soon, George."

"I'm ready now," answered the big fellow.

She felt a sudden dread at her heart. What if they failed and did not return? What if some untoward peril should overtake them on the outward trip? It was a hazardous journey, and George Balt was the most reckless man on the Behring coast. She cast a frightened glance at Emerson, but none of the men noticed it. Even if they had observed the light that had come into those clear eyes, they would not have known it for the dawn of a new love any more than she herself realized what her reasonless fears betokened. She had little time to ponder, however, for Emerson's next words added to her alarm:

"We'll catch the mail−boat at Katmai."

"Katmai!" she broke in, sharply. "You said you were going by the Iliamna route."

"The other is shorter."

She turned on Balt, angrily. "You know better than to suggest such a thing."

"I didn't suggest it," said Balt. "It's Mr. Emerson's own idea; he insists."

"I'm for the long, safe proposition every time," Fraser announced, as if settling the matter definitely, languidly filling his pipe.

Boyd's voice broke in curtly upon his revery. "You're not going with us."

"The hell I ain't!" exploded the other. "Why not?"

"There won't be room. You understand—it's hard travelling with three."

"Oh, see here, now, pal! You promised to take me to the States," the adventurer demurred. "You wouldn't slough me at this gravel−pit, after you *promised?"* He was visibly alarmed.

"Very well," said Emerson, resignedly, "If you feel that way about it, come along; but I won't take you east of Seattle."

"Seattle ain't so bad," Fraser replied. "I guess I can pick up a pinch of change there, all right. But Kalvik—Wow!"

"Why do you have to go so soon?" Cherry asked Emerson, when the two others had left them.

"Because every day counts."

"But why the Katmai route? It's the stormy season, and you may have to wait two weeks for the mail−boat after you reach the coast."

"Yes; but, on the other hand, if we should miss it by one day, it would mean a month's delay. She ought to be due in about ten days, so we can't take any chances."

"I shall be dreadfully worried until I know you are safely over," said the girl, a new note of wistful tenderness in her voice.

"Nonsense! We've all taken bigger risks before."

"Do you know," she began, hesitatingly, "I've been thinking that perhaps you'd better not take up this enterprise, after all."

"Why not?" he asked, with an incredulous stare. "I thought you were enthusiastic on the subject."

"I am—I—believe in the proposition thoroughly," Cherry limped on, "but— well, I was entirely selfish in getting you started, for it possibly means my own salvation, but—"

"It's my last chance also," Boyd broke in. "That's only another reason for you to continue, however. Why have you suddenly weakened?"

"Because I see you don't realize what you are going into," she said, desperately. "Because you don't appreciate the character of the men you will clash with. There is actual physical peril attached to this undertaking, and Marsh

won't hesitate to—to do anything under the sun to balk you. It isn't worth while risking your life for a few dollars."

"Oh, isn't it!" Emerson laughed a trifle harshly. "My dear girl, you don't know what I am willing to risk for those 'few dollars'; you don't know what success means to me. Why, if I don't make this thing win, I'll be perfectly willing to let Marsh wreak his vengeance upon me—I might even help him."

"Oh no!"

"You may rest assured of one thing: if he is unscrupulous, so shall I be. If he undertakes to check me, I'll—well, I'll fight fire with fire."

His face was not pleasant to look at now, and the girl felt an access of that vague alarm which had been troubling her of late. She saw again that old light of sullen desperation in the man's eye, and marked with it a new, dogged, dangerous gleam as of one possessed, which proclaimed his extreme necessity.

"But what has occurred to make you change your mind?" he asked, causing the faintest flush to rise in her cheeks.

"A few days ago you were a stranger, now you are a friend," she replied, steadily. "One's likes and dislikes grow rapidly when they are not choked by convention. I like you too well to see you do this. You are too good a man to become the prey of those people. Remember George Balt."

"Balt hasn't started yet. For the first time he is a real menace to Willis Marsh."

"Won't you take my advice and reconsider?" urged the girl.

"Listen!" said the young man. "I came to this country with a definite purpose in mind, and I had three years in which to work it out. I needed money—God, how I needed money! They may talk about the emptiness of riches, and tell you that men labor not for the 'kill' but for the pursuit, not for the score but for the contest. Maybe some of them do; but with me it was gold I needed, gold I had to have, and I didn't care much how I got it, so long as I got it honestly. I didn't crave the pleasure of earning it nor the thrill of finding it; I just wanted the thing itself, and came up here because I thought the opportunities were greater here than elsewhere. I'd have gone to the Sahara or into Thibet just as willingly. I left behind a good many things to which I had been raised, and forsook opportunities which to most fellows of my age would seem golden; but I did it eagerly, because I had only three years of grace and knew I must win in that time. Well, I went at it. No chance was too desperate, no peril was too great, no hardship too intense for me. I bent every effort to my task, until mind and body became sleepless, unresting implements for the working out of my purpose. I lost all sensibility to effort, to fatigue, to physical suffering; I forgot all things in the world except my one idea. I focussed every power upon my desire, but a curse was on me. A curse! Nothing less.

"At first I took misfortune philosophically; but when it came and slept with me, I began to rage at it. Month after month, year by year, it rose with me at dawn and lay down by me at night. Misfortune beleaguered me and dogged my heels, until it became a thing of amusement to every one except myself. To me it was terrifying, because my time was shortening, and the last day of grace was rushing toward me.

"Just to show you what luck I played in:—at Dawson I found a prospect that would have made most men rich, and although such a thing had never happened in that particular locality before, it pinched out. I tried again and again and again, and finally found another mine, only to be robbed of it by the Canadian laws in such a manner that there wasn't the faintest hope of my recovering the property. Men told me about opportunities they couldn't avail themselves of, and, although I did what they themselves would have done, these chances proved to be ghastly jokes. I finally shifted from mining to other ventures, and the town burned. I awoke in a midnight blizzard to see my chance for a fortune licked up by flames, while the hiss of the water from the firemen's hose seemed directed at me and the voice of the crowd sounded like jeers.

"I was among the first at Nome and staked alongside the discoverers, who undertook to put me in right for once; but although the fellows around me made fortunes in a day, my ground was barren and my bed−rock swept clean by that unseen hand which I always felt but could never avoid. I leased proven properties, only to find that the pay ceased without reason. I did this so frequently that owners began to refuse me and came to consider me a thing of evil omen. Once a broken snow−shoe in a race to the recorder's office lost me a fortune; at another time a corrupt judge plunged me from certainty to despair, and all the while my time was growing shorter and I was growing poorer.

"Two hours after the Topkuk strike was made I drove past the shaft, but the one partner known to me had

gone to the cabin to build a fire, and the other one lied to me, thinking I was a stranger. I heard afterward that just as I drove away my friend came to the door and called after me, but the day was bitter, and my ears were muffled with fur, while the dry snow beneath the runners shrieked so that it drowned his cries. Me chased me for half a mile to make me rich, but the hand of fate lashed my dogs faster and faster, while that hellish screeching outdinned his voice. Six hours later Topkuk was history. You've seen stampedes—you understand.

"My name became a by−word and caused people to laugh, though they shrank from me, for miners and sailors are equally superstitious. No man ever had more opportunities than I, and no man was ever so miserably unfortunate in missing them. In time I became whipped, utterly without hope. Yet almost from habit I fought on and on, with my ears deaf to the voices that mocked me.

"Three years isn't very long as you measure time, but the death−watch drags, and the priest's prayers are an eternity when the hangman waits outside. But the time came and passed at length, and I saw my beautiful breathing dream become a rotting corpse. Still, I struggled along, until one day something snapped and I gave up—for all time. I realized, as you said, that I was 'miscast,' that I had never been of this land, so I was headed for home. Home!" Emerson smiled bitterly. "The word doesn't mean anything to me now, but anyhow I was headed for God's country, an utter failure, in a worse plight than when I came here, when you put this last chance in front of me. It may be another *ignis fatuus*, such as the others I have pursued, for I have been chasing rainbows now for three years, and I suppose I shall go on chasing them; but as long as there is a chance left, I can't quit—I *can't*. And something tells me that I have left that ill−omened thing behind at last, and I am going to win!"

Cherry had listened eagerly to this bitter tirade, and was deeply touched by the pathos of the youth's sense of failure. His poignant pessimism, however, only seemed to throw into relief the stubborn fixedness of his dominant purpose. The moving cause of it all, whatever it was—and it could only be a woman—aroused a burning curiosity in her, and she said:

"But you're too late. You say your time was up some time ago."

"Perhaps," he returned, staring into the distances. "That's what I was going out to ascertain. I thought I might have a few days of grace allowed me." He turned his eyes directly upon her, and concluded, in a matter−of− fact tone: "That's why I can't quit, now that you've set me in motion again, now that you've given me another chance. That's why we leave to− morrow and go by way of the Katmai Pass."

CHAPTER VI. WHEREIN BOREAS TAKES A HAND

All that day the men busied themselves in preparation for the start. Balt was ferociously exultant, Emerson was boiling with impatience, while Fraser, whose calm nothing disturbed, slept most of the time, observing that this was his last good bed for a while, and therefore he wished to make it work.

Beneath her quiet cheerfulness, Cherry nursed a forlorn heart; for when these men were gone she would be left alone and friendless again, buried in the heart of an inaccessible wilderness, given over to her fears and the intrigues of her enemies. She had eyes mainly for Emerson, and although in her glance there was good−fellowship, in her heart was hot resentment—first at him because he had awakened in her the warm interest she felt for him, and, second, at herself for harboring any such interest. Why should this self−centred youth, wrapped up in his own affairs to her own utter exclusion, give her cause to worry? Why should she allow him to step into her quiet life and upset her well−ordered existence?

“How do you like him?” she asked Balt, once.

“He's my style, all right,” said the big man. “He's desp'rate, and he'll fight; that's what I want—somebody that won't blench at anything when the time comes.” He ground his teeth, and his red eyes flamed, reflecting the sense of injury that seared his brain. “What he don't know about the business, I do, and we'll make it win. But, say, ain't he awful at asking questions? My head aches and my back is lame from answering him. Seems like he remembers it all, too.”

Goaded by the wrong he had suffered, and almost maniacal in his eagerness for the coming struggle, the giant's frenzy told Cherry that the fight would be an unrelenting one, and again a vague tremor of regret at having drawn this youth into the affair crept over her and sharpened the growing pain at her heart.

During the evening Emerson left the two other men in the store, and, seeking her out in the little parlor, asked her to play for him. She consented gladly, and, as on their first evening together, he sang with her. Again the blending of their voices brought them closer, his aloofness wore off, and he became an agreeable, accomplished companion whose merry wit and boyish sympathy stirred emotions in the girl that threatened her peace of mind. This had been the only companionship with her own kind she had enjoyed for months, and with his melting mood came a softening of her own nature, in which she appeared before him gracious and irresistible. Banteringly, and rising out of his elation, he tried to please her, and, in the same spirit that calls the bird to its mate, she responded. It was their last hour together before embarking on his perilous journey in search of the Golden Fleece, and his starved affections clamored for sympathy, while the iron in his blood felt the magnetic propinquity of sex. When he said good−night it was with a wholly new conception of his hostess, and of her power to charm as well as manage men and affairs; but he could well have dispensed with an uncomfortable feeling that came over him as he reviewed the events of the evening over a last pipe, that he had been playing with fire. For her part, she lay awake far into the morning hours, now blissfully floating on the current of half−formed desires, now vaguely fearing some dread that clutched her.

The good−byes were brief and commonplace; there was time for nothing more, for the dogs were straining to be off and the December air bit fiercely. But Cherry called Emerson aside, and in a rather tremulous voice begged him again to consider well this enterprise before finally committing himself to it. “If this were any other country, if there were any law up here or any certainty of getting a square deal, I'd never say a word, I'd urge you to go the limit. But—”

He was about to laugh off her fears as he had done before, when the plaintive wrinkle between her brows and the forlorn droop of her lips stayed him. Without thought of consequences, and prompted largely by his leaping spirits, he stooped and, before she could divine his purpose, kissed her.

“Good−bye!” he laughed, with dancing eyes. “That's my answer!” and the next second was at the sled. The dogs leaped at his shout, and the cavalcade was in motion.

The others had not observed his leave−taking, and now cried a final farewell; but the girl stood without sound or gesture, bareheaded under the wintry sky, a startled, wondering light in her eyes which did not fade until the men were lost to view far up the river trail. Then she breathed deeply and turned into the house, oblivious to

Constantine and the young squaw, who held the sick baby up for her inspection.

The hazards of winter travel in the North are manifold at best, but the country which Emerson and his companions had to traverse was particularly perilous, owing to the fact that their course led them over the backbone of the great Alaskan Range, that desolate, skyscraping rampart which interposes itself between the hate of the Arctic seas and the tossing wilderness of the North Pacific. This range forms a giant, ice−armored tusk thrust out to the westward and curved like the horn of an African rhino, its tip pointed eight hundred miles toward the Asiatic coast, its soaring peaks veiled in perpetual mist and volcanic fumes, its slopes agleam with lonely ice−fields. It is a saw−toothed ridge, for the most part narrow, unbroken, and cruel, and the rival winter gales roar over it in a never−ceasing war. On the north lies the Forgotten Land, to the south are the tempered reaches of the Pacific. In summer the stern sweep of rock and tundra is soaked with weeping rains, and given over to the herding caribou or the great grass−eating bear; but when from the polar regions the white hand of winter stretches forth, the grieving seas lift themselves, the rain turns to bitter, hail−burdened hurricanes that charge and retreat in a death−dealing conflict, sheathing the barrier anew, and confounding the hearts of men on land and sea. The coast is unlighted and badly mapped, hence the shore is a graveyard for ships, while through the guts, which at intervals penetrate the range, the blizzards screech until travellers burrow into drifts to avoid their fury or lie out in stiff sleeping−bags exposed to their anger. It is a region of sudden storms, a battle−ground of the elements, which have swept it naked of cover in ages past, and it is peopled scantily by handfuls of coughing natives, whose igloos are hidden in hollows or chained to the ground with cables and ship's gear.

It was thither the travellers were bound, headed toward Katmai Pass, which is no more than a gap between peaks, through which the hibernal gales suck and swirl. This pass is even balder than the surrounding barrens, for it forms a funnel at each end, confining the winds and affording them freer course. Notwithstanding the fact that it had an appalling death−list and was religiously shunned, Emerson would hearken to no argument for a safer route, insisting that they could spare no time for detours. Nothing dampened his spirits, no hardship daunted him; he was tireless, ferocious in his haste.

A week of hard travel found them camped in the last fringe of cottonwood that fronted the glacial slopes, their number augmented now by a native from a Russian village with an unpronounceable name, who, at the price of an extortionate bribe, had agreed to pilot them through. For three days they lay idle, the taut walls of their tent thrumming to an incessant fusillade of ice particles that whirled down ahead of the blast, while Emerson fumed to be gone.

The fourth morning broke still and quiet; but, after a careful scrutiny of the peaks, the Indian shook his head and spoke to Balt, who nodded in agreement.

“What's the matter?” growled Emerson. “Why don't we get under way?” But the other replied:

“Not to−day. Them tips are smoking, see!” He indicated certain gauzy streamers that floated like vapor from the highest pinnacles. “That's snow, dry snow, and it shows that the wind is blowing up there. We dassent tackle it.”

“Do you mean we must lie here waiting for an absolutely calm day?”

“Exactly.”

“Why, it may be a week!”

“It may be two of them; then, again, it may be all right to−morrow.”

“Nonsense! That breeze won't hurt anybody.”

“Breeze!” Balt laughed. “It's more like a tornado up yonder. No, we've just got to take it easy till the right moment comes, and then make a dash. It's thirty miles to the nearest stick of timber; and once you get into the Pass, you can't stop till you're through.”

Still unconvinced, and surly at the delay, Emerson resigned himself, while Bait saw to their sled, tended the dogs, and made final preparations. “Fingerless” Fraser lay flat on his back and nursed a pair of swollen tendons that had been galled by his snowshoe thongs, reviling at the fortune that had cast him into such inhospitable surroundings, heaping anathemas upon the head of him who had invented snowshoes, complaining of everything in general, from the indigestible quality of baking−powder bread to the odor of the guide who crouched stolidly beside the stove, feeding it with green willows and twisted withes.

The next dawn showed the mountain peaks limned like clean−cut ivory against the steel−blue sky, and as they crept up through the defiles the air was so motionless that the smoke of their pipes hung about their heads, while

the creak of their soles upon the dry surface of the snow roused echoes from the walls on either side. At first their progress was rapid, but in time the drifts grew deeper, and they came to bluffs where they were forced to notch footholds, unpack their load and relay it to the top, then free the dogs, and haul the sled up with a rope, hand over hand. These labors, besides being intensely fatiguing, delayed them considerably, added to which the higher altitudes were covered with a soft eider−down that reached nearly to their knees and shoved ahead of the sled in great masses. Thus they dragged their burden through instead of over it.

By mid−day they had gained the summit, and found themselves in the heart of a huge desolation, hedged in by a chaos of peaks and pinnacles, the snows unbroken by twig or bush, untracked by living sign. Here and there the dark face of some white−cowled rock or cliff scowled at them, and although they were drenched with sweat and parched from thirst, nowhere was there the faintest tinkle of running water, while the dry powder under foot scratched their throats like iron filings when they turned to it for relief. All were jaded and silent, save Emerson, who urged them on incessantly.

It was early in the afternoon when the Indian stopped and began testing the air; Balt also seemed suddenly to scent a change in the atmospheric conditions.

“What's wrong now?” Emerson asked, gruffly.

“Feels like wind,” answered the big man, with a shake of his head. The native began to chatter excitedly, and as they stood there a chill draught fanned their cheeks. Glancing upward at the hillsides, they saw that the air was now thickened as if by smoke, and, dropping their eyes, they saw the fluff beneath their feet stir lazily. Little wisps of snow−vapor began to dance upon the ridges, whisking out of sight as suddenly as they appeared. They became conscious of a sudden fall in the temperature, and they knew that the cold of interstellar space dwelt in that ghostly breath which smote them. Before they were well aware of the ominous significance of these signs the storm was upon them, sweeping through the chute wherein they stood with rapidly increasing violence. The terrible, unseen hand of the Frozen North had unleashed its brood of furies, and the air rang with their hideous cries. It was Dante's third circle of hell let loose— Cerberus baying through his wide, threefold throat, and the voices of tormented souls shrilling through the infernal shades. It came from behind them, lifting the fur on the backs of the wolf−dogs and filling it with powder, pelting their hides with sharp particles until they refused to stand before it, and turned and crouched with flattened ears in the shelter of the sled. In an instant the wet faces of the men were dried and their steaming garments hardened to shells, while their blood began to move more sluggishly.

Fraser shouted something, but Emerson's whipping garments drowned the words, and without waiting to ascertain what the adventurer had said the young man ran forward and cut the dogs loose, while Balt and the guide fell to unlashing the sled, the tails of their parkas meanwhile snapping like boat sails, their cap strings streaming. As they freed the last knot the hurricane ripped the edge of the tarpaulin from their clumsy fingers, and, seizing a loosely folded blanket belonging to the native, snatched it away. The fellow clutched wildly at it, but the cloth sailed ahead of the blast as if on wings, then, dropping to the surface of the snow, opened out, whereupon some twisting current bore it aloft again, and it swooped down the hill like a great bat, followed by a wail of despair from the owner. Other loose articles on the top of the load were picked up like chaff—coffee pot, frying pan, and dishes—then hurtled away like charges of canister, rolling, leaping, skipping down into the swale ahead, then up over the next ridge and out of sight. But the men were too fiercely beset by the confusion to notice their loss. There was no question of facing the wind, for it was more cruel than the fierce breath of an open furnace, searing the naked flesh like a flame.

All the morning the air had hung in perfect poise, but some change of temperature away out over one of the rival oceans had upset the aerostatic balance, and the wind tore through this gap like the torrent below a broken reservoir.

The contour of the surrounding hills altered, the whole country took on a different aspect, due to the rapid charging of the atmosphere, the limits of vision grew shorter and strangely distorted. Although as yet the snows were barely beginning to move, the men knew they would shortly be forced to grope their way through dense clouds that would blot out every landmark, and the touch of which would be like the stroke of a red−hot rasp.

Balt came close to Emerson, and bellowed into his ear:

“What shall we do? Roll up in the bedding or run for it?”

“How far is it to timber?”

“Twelve or fifteen miles.”

“Let's run for it! We're out of grub, anyhow, and this may last for days.”

There was no use of trying to secure additional clothing from the supply in the sled, so they abandoned their outfit and allowed themselves to be driven ahead of the storm, trusting to the native's sense of direction and keeping close together. The dogs were already well drifted over, and refused to stir.

Once they were gone a stone's throw from the sled there was no turning back, and although the wind was behind them progress was difficult, for they came upon chasms which they had to avoid; they crossed slippery slopes, where the storm had bared the hard crust and which their feet refused to grip. In such places they had to creep on hands and knees, calling to one another for guidance. They were numbed, blinded, choked by the rage of the blizzard; their faces grew stiff, and their lungs froze. At times they fell, and were skidded along ahead of the blasts. This forced them to crawl back again, for they dared not lose their course. At one place they followed a hog−back, where the rocks came to a sharp ridge like the summit of a roof, this they bestrode, inching along a foot at a time, wearing through the palms of their mittens and chafing their garments. No cloth could withstand the roughened surfaces, and in time the bare flesh of their hands became exposed, but there was little sensation, and no time for rest or means of relief. Soon they began to leave blood stains behind them.

All four men were old in the ways of the North, and, knowing their present extremity, they steeled themselves to suffering, but their tortures were intense, not the least of which was thirst. Exhaustion comes quickly under such conditions.

Much has been written concerning the red man's physical powers of endurance, but as a rule no Indian is the equal of his white brother, due as much perhaps to lack of mental force as to generations of insufficient clothing and inanition, so it was not surprising that as the long afternoon dragged to a close the Aleut guide began to weaken. He paused with more frequency, and it required more effort to start him; he fell oftener and rose with more difficulty, but the others were dependent upon his knowledge of the trail, and could not take the lead.

Darkness found them staggering on, supporting him wherever possible. At length he became unable to guide them farther, and Balt, who had once made the trip, took his place, while the others dragged the poor creature along at the cost of their precious strength.

At one time he begged them to leave him, and both Balt and “Fingerless” Fraser agreed, but Emerson would have none of it.

“He'll die, anyhow,” argued the fisherman.

“He's as good as dead now,” supplemented Fraser, “and we may be ten miles from timber.”

“I made him come, and I'll take him through,” said Emerson, stubbornly; and so they crawled their weary way, sore beset with their dragging burden. Slow at best, their advance now became snail−like, for darkness had fallen, and threatened to blot them out. It betrayed them down declivities, up and out of which they had to dig their way. In such descents they were forced to let go the helpless man, whose body rolled ahead of them like a boneless sack; but these very mishaps helped to keep the spark of life in him, for at every disheartening pause the others rubbed and pounded him, though they knew that their efforts were hopeless, and would have been better spent upon themselves.

Fraser, never a strong man, gave out in time, and it looked as if he might overtax the powers of the other two, but Balt's strength was that of a bull, while Emerson subsisted on his nerve, fairly consuming his soul.

They grew faint and sick, and knew themselves to be badly frozen; but their leader spurred them on, draining himself in the effort. For the first time Emerson realized that the adventurer had been a drag on him ever since their meeting.

They had long since lost all track of time and place, trusting blindly to a downward course. The hurricane still harried them with unabated fury, when all at once they came to another bluff where the ground fell away abruptly. Without waiting to investigate whether the slope terminated in a drift or a precipice, they flung themselves over. Down they floundered, the two half−insensible men tangled together as if in a race for total oblivion, only to plunge through a thicket of willow tops that whipped and stung them. On they went, now vastly heartened, over another ridge, down another declivity, and then into a grove of spruce timber, where the air suddenly stilled, and only the tree−tops told of the rushing wind above.

It was well−nigh an hour before Balt and Emerson succeeded in starting a fire, for it was desperate work groping for dry branches, and they themselves were on the verge of collapse before the timid blaze finally showed

the two more unfortunate ones huddled together.

Cherry had given Emerson a flask of liquor before starting, and this he now divided between Fraser and the guide, having wisely refused it to them until shelter was secured. Then he melted snow in Balt's tin cup and poured pints of hot water into the pair until the adventurer began to rally; but the Aleut was too far gone, and an hour before the laggard dawn came he died.

They walked Fraser around the fire all night, threshing his tortured body and fighting off their own deadly weariness, meanwhile absorbing the insufficient heat of the flames.

When daylight came they tried hard to lash the corpse into a spruce−top, but their strength was unequal to the task, and they were forced to leave the body to the mercy of the wolves as they turned their faces expectantly down the valley toward the village.

The day was well spent when they struggled into Katmai and plodded up to a half−rotted log store, the roof of which was protected from the winter gales by two anchor chains passed over the ridge and made fast to posts well buried in the ground. A globular, quarter−breed Russian trader, with eyes so crossed that he could distinguish nothing at a yard's distance, took them in and administered to their most crying needs, then dispatched an outfit for the guide's body.

The initial stage of the journey, Emerson realized with thanksgiving, was over. As soon as he was able to talk he inquired straightway concerning the mail−boat.

“She called here three days ago, bound west,” said the trader.

“That's all right. She'll be back in about a week, eh?”

“No; she won't stop here coming back. Her contract don't call for it.”

“What!” Emerson felt himself sickening.

“No, she won't call here till next month; and then if it's storming she'll go on to the westward, and land on her way back.”

“How long will that be?”

“Maybe seven or eight weeks.”

In his weakened condition the young man groped for the counter to support himself. So the storm's delay at the foot of the Pass had undone him! Fate, in the guise of Winter, had unfurled those floating snow−banners from the mountain peaks to thwart him once more! Instead of losing the accursed thing that had hung over him these past three years, it had merely redoubled its hold; that mocking power had held the bait of Tantalus before his eyes, only to hurl him back into hopeless despair; for, figuring with the utmost nicety, he had reckoned that there was just time to execute his mission, and even a month's delay would mean certain failure. He turned hopelessly toward his two companions, but Fraser had relapsed into a state of coma, while Big George was asleep beside the stove.

For a long time he stood silent and musing, while the fat storekeeper regarded him stupidly; then he fumbled with clumsy fingers at his breast, and produced the folded page of a magazine. He held it for a time without opening it; then crushed it slowly in his fist, and flung the crumpled ball into the open coals.

He sighed heavily, and turned upon the trader a frost−blackened countenance, out of which all the light had gone.

“Give us beds,” he said; “we want to sleep.”

CHAPTER VII. AND NEPTUNE TAKES ANOTHER

Out of consideration for his companions, Emerson did not acquaint them with the evil tidings until the next morning; moreover, he was swallowed up in black despair, and had no heart left in him for any further exertion. He had allowed the Russian to show him to a bed, upon which he flung himself, half dressed, while the others followed suit. But he was too tired to sleep. His nerves had been filed to such a fine edge that slumber became a process which required long hours of coaxing, during which he tossed restlessly, a prey to those hideous nightmares that lurk on the border−land of dreams. His distorted imagination flung him again and again into the agonizing maelstrom of the last thirty−six hours, and in his waking moments the gaunt spectre of failure haunted him. This was no new apparition, but never before had it appeared so horrible as now. He was too worn out to rave, his strength was spent, and his mind wandered hither and thither like a rudderless ship. So he lay staring into the dark with dull, tragic eyes, utterly inert, his body racked by a thousand pains.

Nor did “Fingerless” Fraser meet with better fortune. He found little rest or sleep, and burdened the night with his groanings. His condition called for the frequent attendance of the trader, who ministered to his needs with the ease and certainty of long practice, rousing him now and then to give him nourishment, and redressing his frozen members when necessary. As for Balt, he slept like an Eskimo dog, wrapped in the senseless trance of complete physical relaxation. Being a creature of no imagination, he had taxed nothing beyond his body, which was capable of tremendous resistance, wherefore he escaped the nerve−racking torment and mental distress of the others.

As warmth and repose gradually adjusted the balance between mind and body, Emerson fell into a deep sleep, and it was late in the day when he awoke, every muscle aching, every joint stiff, every step attended with pain. He found his companions up and already breakfasted, Big George none the worse for his ordeal, while Fraser, bandaged and smarting, was his old shrewd self. Emerson's first inquiry was for the body of the guide.

“They brought him in this morning,” answered the fisherman. “He's in cold storage at the church. When the priest comes over next month they'll bury him.”

“He was a right nice feller,” said Fraser, “but I'm glad I ain't in his mukluks. If you two hadn't stuck to me—well, him and me would have done a brother act at this church festival.”

“How are your frost−bites?” Emerson asked, seating himself with painful care.

“Fine—all but the bum hook.” He held up his crippled hand, which was well bandaged. “However, I guess I can save my gun−finger, so all is not lost.”

“Have you heard about the mail−boat?”

“No.”

“We've missed her.”

“What d'you mean?” demanded Big George, blankly.

“I mean that the storm delayed us just long enough to ruin us.”

“Why—er—let's wait till the next trip,” offered the fisherman.

Emerson shook his head. “She may not be back here for eight weeks. No! We're done for.”

Balt was like a big boy in distress. His face wrinkled as if he were about to burst into loud lamentations; then a thought seized him.

“I'll tell you what we'll do!” he cried, with a heavy attempt at meeting the problem. “We'll put off the scheme for a year. We'll take plenty of time, and open up a year from next spring.”

“No,” said Emerson, with a dejected shake of the head. “If I can't put it through on the flash, I can't do it at all. My time is up. I'm down and out. All our pretty plans have gone to smash. You'd better go back to Kalvik, George.”

At this suggestion, Balt rose ponderously and began to rave. To see his vengeance slip from his grasp enraged him. He cursed shockingly, clinching his great fists above his head, and grinding forth imprecations which caused Fraser to quail and cry out aghast:

“Hey, you! Quit that! D'you want to hang a Jonah onto us?”

But the fisherman only goaded himself into a greater passion, during which Petellin, the storekeeper, entered,

and forthwith began to cross himself devoutly. Observing this fervent pantomime, Balt turned upon the trader and directed his outburst at him:

"Where in hell is this steamer?"

"Out to the westward somewhere."

"Well, she's a mail−boat, ain't she? Then why don't she stop here coming back? Answer me!"

The rotund man shrugged his fat shoulders. "She's got to call at Uyak Bay going east."

Emerson looked up quickly, "Where is Uyak Bay?"

"Over on Kodiak Island," Big George answered; then turned again to vent his spleen on the trader.

"What right have them steamboat people got to cut out this place for an empty cannery? Why, there ain't nobody at Uyak. It's more of that damned Company business. They own this whole country, and run it to suit themselves."

"She ain't my boat," said Petellin. "You'd ought to have got here a few days sooner."

"My God! I'm sorry we waited at the Pass," said Emerson. "The weather couldn't have been any worse that first day than it was when we came across."

Detecting in this remark a criticism of his caution, Big George turned about and faced the speaker; but as he met Emerson's eye he checked the explosion, and, seizing his cap, bolted out into the cold to walk off his mad rage.

"When is the boat due at Uyak?" Emerson asked.

"'Most any time inside of a week."

"How far is that from here?"

"It ain't so far—only about fifty miles." Then, catching the light that flamed into the miner's eyes, Petellin hastened to observe: "But you can't get there. It's across the Straits—Shelikof Straits."

"What of that! We can hire a sail−boat, and—"

"I ain't got any sail−boat. I lost my sloop last year hunting sea−otter."

"We can hire a small boat of *some* sort, can't we, and get the natives to put us across? There must be plenty of boats here."

"Nothing but skin boats, kyaks, and bidarkas—you know. Anyhow, you couldn't cross at this time of year—it's too stormy; these Straits is the worst piece of water on the coast. No, you'll have to wait."

Emerson sank back into his chair, and stared hopelessly at the fire.

"Better have some breakfast," the trader continued; but the other only shook his head. And after a farewell squint of curiosity, the fat man rolled out again in pursuit of his duties.

"I've heard tell of these Shelikof Straits," Fraser remarked. "I bunked with a bear−hunter from Kodiak once, and he said they was certainly some hell in winter." When Emerson made no reply, the fellow's colorless eyes settled upon him with a trace of solicitude, and he resumed: "I'm doggone sorry you lost out, pal, but mebbe something'll turn up yet." Then, seeing that the young man was deaf to his condolence, he muttered: "So, you've got 'em again, eh? Um!" As usual on such occasions, he fell into his old habit of reading aloud, as it were, an imaginary scene to himself:

"'Yes, I've got 'em again,' says Mr. Emerson, always eager to give entertainment with the English language. 'I am indeed blue this afternoon. Won't you talk to me? I feel that the sound of a dear friend's voice will drive dull care away.'

"'Gladly,' says I; 'I am a silent man by birth and training, and my thoughts is jewels, but for you, I'll scatter them at large, and you can take your pick. Now, this salmon business ain't what it's cracked up to be, after all. It's a smelly proposition, no matter how you take it, and a fisherman ain't much better than a Reub; ask any wise guy. I'd rather see you in some profesh that don't stink so, like selling scented soap. There was a feller at Dyea who done well at it. What think you?'

"'It's a dark night without,' says Mr. Emerson, 'and I fear some mischief is afoot!'

"'But what of yonder beauteous—'"

Unheeding this chatter, the disheartened man got up at this juncture, as if a sudden thought impelled him, and followed Balt out into the cold. He turned down the bank to the creek, however, and made a careful examination of all the canoes that went with the village. Fifteen minutes later he had searched out the disgruntled fisherman, and cried, excitedly:

“I've got it! We'll catch that boat yet!”

“How?” growled the big man, sourly.

“There's a large open skin−boat, an oomiak, down on the beach. We'll hire a crew of Indians to put us across to Uyak.”

“Can't be done,” said Big George, still gruffly. “It's the wrong season. You know the Shelikof Straits is a bad place even for steamships at this time of year. They're like that Pass up yonder, only worse.”

“But it's only fifty miles across.”

“Fifty miles of that kind of water in an open canoe may be just as bad as five hundred—unless you're lucky. And I ain't noticed anything so damned lucky about us.”

“Well, it's that or nothing. It's our only chance. Are you game?”

“Come on,” cried Big George, “let's find Petellin!”

When that worthy heard their desire, he uttered a shriek of denial.

“In summer, yes, but now—you can't do it. It has been tried too often. The Straits is always rough, and the weather is too cold to sit all day in an oomiak, you'd freeze.”

“We'll chance it.”

“No, *no*, NO! If it comes on to storm, you'll go to sea. The tides are strong; you can't see your course, and—”

“We'll use a compass. Now, you get me enough men to handle that oomiak, that's a good fellow. I'll attend to the rest.”

“But they won't go,” declared the little fat man. “They know what it means. Why—”

“Call them in. I'll do the talking.” And accordingly the storekeeper went in search of the village chief, shaking his head and muttering at the madness of these people.

“Fingerless” Fraser, noticing the change in Balt and Emerson when they re− entered the store, questioned them as to what had happened; and in reply to his inquiry, Big George said:

“We're going to tackle the Straits in a small boat.”

“What! Not on your life! Why, that's the craziest stunt I ever heard of. Don't you know—”

“Yes, we know,” Emerson shut him up, brusquely. “You don't have to go with us.”

“Well, I should say not. Hunh! Do I look like I'd do a thing like that? If I do, it's because I'm sick. I just got this far by a gnat's eyelash, and hereinafter I take the best of it every time.”

“You can wait for the mail−boat.”

“I certainly can, and, what's more, I will. And I'll register myself, too. There ain't goin' to be any accidents to me whatever.”

Although the two men were pleased at the remote chance of catching the steamer, their ardor received a serious set−back when the trader came in with the head man of the village and a handful of hunters, for Emerson found that money was quite powerless to tempt them. Using the Russian as interpreter, he coaxed and wheedled, increasing his offer out of all proportion to the exigencies of the occasion; and still finding them obdurate, in despair he piled every coin he owned upon the counter. But the men only shook their heads and palavered among themselves.

“They say it's too cold,” translated Petellin. “They will freeze, and money is no good to dead men.” Another native spoke: “'It is very stormy this month,' they say. 'The waves would sink an open boat.'”

“Then they can put us across in bidarkas,” insisted Emerson, who had noted the presence of several of these smaller crafts, which are nothing more than long walrus−hide canoes completely decked over, save for tiny cockpits wherein the paddlers sit. “They don't have to come back that way; they can wait at Uyak for the next trip of the steamer. Why, I'm offering them more pay than they can make in ten years.”

“Better get them to do it,” urged Big George. “You'll get the coin all back from them; they'll have to trade here.” But Petellin's arguments were as ineffective as Emerson's, and after an hour's futile haggling the natives were about to leave when Emerson said:

“Ask them what they'll take to sell me a bidarka.”

“One hundred dollars,” Petellin told him, after an instant's parley.

Emerson turned to George. “Will you tackle it alone with me?”

The fisherman hesitated. “Two of us couldn't make it. Get a third man, and I'll go you.” Accordingly Emerson resumed the subject with the Indians, but now their answer was short and decisive. Not one of them would

venture forth unless accompanied by one of his own kind, in whose endurance and skill with a paddle he had confidence. It seemed as if fate had laid one final insurmountable obstacle in the path of the two white men, when "Fingerless" Fraser, who had been a silent witness of the whole scene, spoke up, in his voice a bitter complaint:

"Well, that puts it up to me, I suppose. I'm always the fall guy, damn it!"

"*You!* You go!" cried Emerson, astounded beyond measure at this offer, and still doubting. The fellow had so consistently shirked every hardship, and so systematically refused every hazard, no matter how slight!

"Well, I don't *want* to," Fraser flared up, "you can just lay a bet on that. But these Siwashes won't stand the gaff, they're too wise; so I've *got* to, ain't I?" He glared belligerently from one to the other.

"Can you handle a boat?" demanded Big George.

"Can I handle a—Hunh!" sniffed the fellow. "Say, just because you've got corns on your palms as big as pancakes, you needn't think you're the only human that ever pulled an oar. I was the first man through Miles Canon. During the big rush in '98 I ran the rapids for a living. I got fifty dollars a trip, and it only took me three minutes by the watch. That was the only easy money I ever picked up. Why, them tenderfeet used to cry like babies when they got a peek at them rapids. Can I handle a b——Yes, and I wish I was back there right now instead of hitched up with a pair of yaps that don't know when they're well off."

"But, look here, Fraser," Emerson spoke up, "I don't think you are strong enough for this trip. It may take us forty−eight hours of constant paddling against wind and tide to make Uyak. George and I are fit enough, but you know you aren't—"

"Fingerless" Fraser turned violently upon the speaker.

"Now, for Heaven's sake, cut that out, will you? Just because you happened to give me a little lift on this cussed Katmai Pass, I s'pose you'll never get done throwing it up to me. My feet were sore; that's why I petered out. If it hadn't been for my bum 'dogs' I'd have walked both of you down; but they were sore. Can't you understand? *My feet were sore.*"

He was whining now, and this unexpected angle of the man's disposition completely confused the others and left them rather at a loss what to say. But before they could make any comment, he rose stiffly and blazed forth:

"But I won't start to−day. I hurt too much, and my mits is froze. If you want to wait till I'm healed up so I can die in comfort, why, go ahead and buy that fool−killer boat, and we'll all commit suicide together." He stumped indignantly out of the room, his friends too greatly dumfounded even to smile.

For the next two days the men rested, replenishing their strength; but Fraser developed a wolfish temper which turned him into a veritable chestnut burr. There was no handling him. His scars were not deep nor his hurts serious, however, so by the afternoon of the second day he announced, with surly distemper, that he would be ready to leave on the following morning, and the others accordingly made preparation for an early start. They selected the most seaworthy canoe, which at best was a treacherous craft, and stocked it well with water, cooked food, and stimulants.

Since their arrival at Katmai the weather had continued calm; and although the view they had through the frowning headlands showed the Straits black and angry, they prayed that the wind would hold off for another twenty− four hours. Again Petellin importuned them to forego this journey, and again they turned deaf ears to his entreaties and retired early, to awaken with the rickety log store straining at its cables under the force of a blizzard that had blotted out the mountains and was rousing the sea to fury. Fraser openly rejoiced, and Balt's heavy brows, which had carried a weight of trouble, cleared; but Emerson was plunged into as black a mood as that of the storm which had swallowed up the landscape. For three days the tempest held them prisoners, then died as suddenly as it had arisen; but the surf continued to thunder upon the beach for many hours, while Emerson looked on with hopeless, sullen eyes. When at last they did set out—a week, to a day, from their arrival at Katmai—it was to find such a heavy sea running outside the capes that they had hard shift to make it back to the village, drenched, dispirited, and well−nigh dead from the cold and fatigue. Although Fraser had fully recovered from his collapse, he nevertheless complained upon every occasion, and whined loudly at every ache. He voiced his tortures eloquently, and bewailed the fate that had brought his fortunes to such an ebb, burdening the air so heavily with his complaints that Big George broke out, in exasperation:

"Shut up! You don't have to go with us! I'd rather tackle it alone than listen to you!"

"That's right," agreed Emerson, whose patience was also worn out by the rogue's unceasing jeremiad. "We'll try it without him to−morrow."

“Oh, you will, will you?” snorted Fraser, indignantly. “So, after me getting well on purpose to make this trip, you want to dump me here with this fat man. I'll stand as much as anybody, but I won't stand for no deal like that. No, sir! You said I could go, and I'm going. Why, I'd rather drown than stick in this burgh with that greasy Russian porpoise. Gee! this is a shine village.”

“Then take your medicine like a man, and quit kicking.”

“If you prefer to swallow your groans, you do it. I like to make a fuss when I suffer. I enjoy it more that way.”

Again Petellin called them at daylight, and they were off; this time with better success, for the waves had abated sufficiently for them to venture beyond the partial shelter of the bay. All three knew the desperate chance they were taking, and they spoke little as they made their way out into the Straits. Their craft was strange to them, and the positions they were forced to occupy soon brought on cramped muscles. The bidarka is a frail, narrow framework over which is stretched walrus skin, and it is so fashioned that the crew sits, one behind the other, in circular openings with legs straight out in front. To keep themselves dry each man had donned a native water garment—a loose, hooded shirt manufactured from the bladders of seals. These shirts—or kamlikas, as they are called—are provided with draw−strings at wrists, face, and bottom, so that when the skirt is stretched over the rim of the cockpit and corded tight, it renders the canoe well−nigh waterproof, even though the decks are awash.

The whole contrivance is peculiarly aboriginal and unsuited to the uses of white men; and, while unusually seaworthy, the bidarka requires more skill in the handling than does a Canadian birch bark, hence the wits of the three travellers were taxed to the utmost.

Out across the lonesome waste they journeyed, steadily creeping farther from the village, which of a sudden seemed a very safe and desirable place, with its snug store, its blazing fires, and its warm beds. The sea tossed them like a cork, coating their paddles and the decks of the canoe with ice, which they were at great pains to break off. It wet them in spite of their precautions, and its salt breath searched out their marrow, regardless of their unceasing labors; and these labors were in truth unceasing, for fifty miles of open water lay before them; fifty miles, which meant twelve hours of steady paddling. Gradually, imperceptibly, the mountain shores behind them shrank down upon the gray horizon. It seemed that for once the weather was going to be kind to them, and their spirits rose in consequence. They ate frequently, food being the great fuel of the North, and midday found them well out upon the heaving bosom of the Straits with the Kodiak shores plainly visible. Then, as if tired of toying with them, the wind rose. It did not blow up a gale—merely a frigid breath that cut them like steel and halted their progress. Had it sprung from the north it would have wafted them on their way, but it drew in from the Pacific, straight into their teeth, forcing them to redouble their exertions. It was not of sufficient violence to overcome their efforts, but it held them back and stirred up a nasty cross sea into which the canoe plunged and wallowed. In the hope that it would die down with the darkness, the boatmen held on their course, and night closed over them still paddling silently.

It was nearly noon on the following day when the watchman at the Uyak cannery beheld a native canoe creeping slowly up the bay, and was astonished to find it manned by three white men in the last stages of exhaustion—so stiff and cramped and numb that he was forced to help them from their places when at last they effected a landing. One of them, in fact, was unconscious and had to be carried to the house, which did not surprise the watchman when he learned whence they had come. He did marvel, however, that another of the travellers should begin to cry weakly when told that the mail boat had sailed for Kodiak the previous evening. He gave them stimulants, then prepared hot food for them, for both Bait and Emerson were like sleep−walkers; and Fraser, when he was restored to consciousness, was too weak to stand.

“Too bad you didn't get in last night,” said the care−taker, sympathetically. “She won't be back now for a month or more.”

“How long will she lie in Kodiak?” Big George asked.

“The captain told me he was going to spend Christmas there. Lefs see—to− day is the 22nd—she'll pull out for Juneau on the morning of the 26th; that's three days.”

“We must catch her,” cried Emerson, quickly. “If you'll land us in Kodiak on time I'll pay you anything you ask.”

“I'd like to, but I can't,” the man replied. “You see, I'm here all alone, except for Johnson. He's the watchman for the other plant.”

“Then for God's sake get us some natives. I don't care what it costs.”

“There ain't any natives here. This ain't no village. There's nothing here but these two plants, and Johnson or me dassent leave.”

Emerson turned his eyes upon the haggard man who sprawled weakly in a chair; and Fraser, noting the appeal, answered, gamely, with a forced smile on his lips, though they were drawn and bloodless:

“Sure! I'll be ready to leave in the morning, pal!”

The old Russian village of Kodiak lies on the opposite side of the island from the canneries, a bleak, wind−swept relic of the country's first occupation, and although peopled largely by natives and breeds, there is also a considerable white population, to whom Christmas is a season of thanksgiving and celebration. Hence it was that the crew of the Dora were well content to pass the Yuletide there, where the girls are pretty and a hearty welcome is accorded to every one. There were drinking and dancing and music behind the square−hewn log walls, and the big red stoves made havoc with the salt wind. The town was well filled and the merrymaking vigorous, and inasmuch as winter is a time of rest, during which none but the most foolhardy trust themselves to the perils of the sea, it caused much comment when late on Christmas afternoon an ice−burdened canoe, bearing three strange white men, landed on the beach beside the dock—or were they white men, after all? Their faces were so blackened and split from the frost they seemed to be raw bleeding masks, their hands were cracked and stiff beneath their mittens. They were hollow−eyed and gaunt, their cheeks sunken away as if from a wasting illness, and they could not walk, but crept across the snow−covered shingle on hands and knees, then reaching the street hobbled painfully, while their limbs gave way as if paralyzed. One of them lacked strength even to leave the canoe, and when two sailors ran down and lifted him out, he gabbled strangely in the jargon of the mining camp and the gambling table. Of the other two, one, a great awkward shambling giant of a creature, stumbled out along the dock toward the ship, his head hung low and swinging from side to side, his shoulders drooping, his arms loose−hinged, his knees bending.

[Illustration: OUT ACROSS THE LONESOME WASTE THEY JOURNEYED]

But the third voyager, who had with difficulty won his way up to the level of the street, presented the strangest appearance. There was something uncanny about him. As he gained the street, he waved back all proffered assistance, then paused, with his swaying body propped upon widespread legs, staring malignantly into the north. From their deep sockets his eyes glittered like live coals, while his blackened, swollen lips split in a grimace that bared his teeth. He raised his arms slowly and shook his clenched fists defiantly at the Polar skies, muttering unintelligible things, then staggered after his companions.

CHAPTER VIII. WHEREIN BOYD ADMITS HIS FAILURE

A week later Boyd and George were watching the lights of Port Townsend blink out in the gloom astern. A quick change of boats at Juneau had raised their spirits, enabling them to complete the second stage of their journey in less than the expected time, and the southward run, out from the breath of the Arctics into a balmier climate, had removed nearly the last trace of their suffering from the frost.

A sort of meditative silence which had fallen upon the two men was broken at last by George, who for some time had been showing signs of uneasiness.

“How long are we going to stay in Seattle?” he inquired.

“Only long enough,” Boyd replied, “for me to arrange a connection with some bank. That will require a day, perhaps.”

“I suppose a feller has got to dress pretty swell back there in Chicago,” George ventured.

“Some people do.”

“Full−dress suits of clothes, eh?”

“Yes.”

“Did you ever wear one?”

“Certainly.”

“Well, I'll be—“ The fisherman checked himself and gazed at his companion as if he saw him suddenly in a new light; in fact, he had discovered many strange phases of this young man's character during the past fortnight. “Right along?” he questioned, incredulously.

“Why, yes. Pretty steadily.”

“All day, at a time?”

Boyd laughed. “I haven't worn one in the daytime since I left college. They are used only at night.”

George pondered this for some time, while Emerson stared out into the velvet darkness, to be roused again a moment later.

“A feller told me a funny thing once. He said them rich men back East had women come around and clean their finger−nails, and shine 'em up. Is that right?”

“Quite right!”

Another pause, then Balt cleared his throat and said, with an assumption of carelessness:

“Well, I don't suppose—you ever had 'em—shine your finger−nails, did you?”

“Yes.”

The big man opened his mouth to speak; then, evidently changing his mind, observed, “Seems to me I'd better stay here on the coast and wait for you.”

“No, indeed!” the other answered, quickly. “I will need you in raising that money. You know the practical side of the fishing business, and I don't.”

“All right, I'll go. If you can stand for me, I'll stand for the full− dress suits of clothes and the finger−nail women. Anyhow, it won't last long.”

“When were you outside last?”

“Four years ago.”

“Ever been East?”

“Sure! I've got a sister in Spokane Falls. But I don't like it back there.”

“You will have a good time in Chicago.” Boyd smiled.

“Fingerless” Fraser came to them from the lighted regions amidship, greeting them cheerfully.

“Well, we're pretty near there, ain't we? I'm glad of it; I've about cleaned up this ship.”

The adventurer had left his companions alone much of the time during the trip—greatly to Boyd's relief, for the fellow was an unconscionable bore —and had thus allowed them time to perfect their plans and thresh out numberless details.

“I grabbed another farmer's son at supper—just got through with him. He was good for three−fifty.”

"Three hundred and fifty *dollars?*" questioned Balt.

"Yep! I opened a little stud game for him. Beats all how these suckers fall for the old stuff."

"Where did you get money to gamble with?" inquired Boyd.

"Oh! I won a pinch of change last night in a bridge game with that Dawson Bunch."

"But it must have required a bank−roll to sit in a game with them. They seem to be heavy spenders. How did you manage that?"

"I sold some mining property the day before. I got the captain of the ship." Fraser chuckled.

"Did you swindle that old fellow?" Emerson cried, angrily. "See here! I won't allow—"

"Swindle! Who said I 'swindled' anybody? I wouldn't trim my worst enemy."

"You have no mining claims."

"What makes you think I haven't? Alaska is a big country."

"You told me so."

"Well, I didn't have any claims at that time, but since we came aboard of this wagon at Juneau I have improved each shining hour. While you and George was building canneries I was rustling. And I did pretty well, if I do say it as shouldn't."

Emerson shrugged his broad shoulders. "You will get into trouble! If you do, I won't come to your rescue. I have helped you all I can."

"Not me!" denied the self−satisfied Fraser. "There ain't a chance. Why? Because I'm on the level, I am. That's why. But say, getting money from these Reubs is a joke. It's like kicking a lamb in the face." He clinked some gold coins in his pocket and began to whistle noiselessly. "When do we pull out for Chi?" he next inquired.

"We?" said Emerson. "I told you I would take you as far as Seattle. I can't stand for your 'work.' I think you had better stop here, don't you?"

"Perhaps it *is* for the best," Fraser observed, carelessly. "Time alone can tell." He bade them good−night and disappeared to snatch a few hours' sleep, but upon their arrival at the dock on the following morning, without waiting for an invitation he bundled himself into their carriage and rode to the hotel, registering immediately beneath them. They soon lost sight of him, however, for their next move was in the direction of a clothier's, where they were outfitted from sole to crown. The garments they stood up in showed whence they had come; yet the strangeness of their apparel excited little comment, for Seattle is the gateway to the great North Country, and hither the Northmen foregather, going and coming. But to them the city was very strange and exciting. The noises deafened them, the odors of civilization now tantalized, now offended their nostrils; the crowding streams of humanity confused them, fresh from their long sojourn in the silences and solitudes. Every clatter and crash, every brazen clang of gong, caused George to start; he watched his chance and took street− crossings as if pursued.

"If one of them bells rings behind me," he declared, "I'll jump through a plate−glass window." When his roving eyes first lighted upon a fruit stand he bolted for it and filled his pockets with tomatoes.

"I've dreamed about these things for four years," he declared, "and I can't stand it any longer." He bit into one voraciously, and thereafter followed his companion about munching tomatoes at every step, refilling his pockets as his supply diminished. To show his willingness for any sacrifice, he volunteered to wear a dress suit if Emerson would buy it for him, and it required considerable argument to convince him that the garb was unnecessary.

"You better train me up before we get East," he warned, "or I'll make your swell friends sore and spoil the deal. I could wear it on the cars and get easy in it."

"My dear fellow, it takes more than a week to 'get easy' in a dress suit." Boyd smiled, amused at his earnestness, for the big fellow was merely a boy out on a wonderful vacation.

"Well, if there is a Down−East manicure woman in Seattle, show her to me and I'll practice on her," he insisted. "She can halter−break me, at least."

"Yes, it might not hurt to get that off your hands," Emerson acknowledged, at which the clothier's clerk, who had noted the condition of the fisherman's huge paws, snickered audibly.

It was a labor of several hours to fit Big George's bulky frame, and when the two returned to the hotel Emerson found the representative of an afternoon newspaper anxiously awaiting him at the desk.

"We noticed your arrival from the North," began the reporter, "and Mr. Athens sent me down to get a story."

"Athens! Billy Athens?"

"Yes! He is the editor. I believe you two were college mates. He wanted to know if you are the Boyd Emerson

of the Michigan football team."

"Well, well!" Boyd mused. "Billy Athens was a good tackle."

"He thought you might have something interesting to tell about Alaska," the newspaper man went on. "However, I won't need to take much of your time, for your partner has been telling me all about you and your trip and your great success."

"My partner?"

"Yes. Mr. Frobisher. He heard me inquire about you and volunteered to give me an interview in your name."

"Frobisher!" said Emerson, now thoroughly mystified.

"Sure, that's him, over yonder." The reporter indicated "Fingerless" Fraser, who, having watched the interview from a distance, now solemnly closed one eye and stuck his tongue into his cheek.

"Oh, yes, yes! *Frobisher!*" Boyd stammered. "Certainly!"

"He is a character, isn't he? He told me how you rescued that girl when she broke through the ice at Kalvik."

"He did?"

"Quite a romance, wasn't it? It is a good newspaper story and I'll play it up. He is going to let me in on that hydraulic proposition of yours, too. Of course I haven't much money, but it sounds great, and—"

"How far along did you get with your negotiations about this hydraulic proposition?" Boyd asked, curiously.

"Just far enough so I'm all on edge for it. I'll make up a little pool among the boys at the office and have the money down here before you leave to−night."

"I am sorry, but Mr. Frobisher and I will have to talk it over first," said Emerson, grimly. "I think we will keep that 'hydraulic proposition' in the family, so to speak."

"Then you won't let me in?"

"Not just at present."

"I'm sorry! I should like to take a chance with somebody who is really successful at mining. When a fellow drones along on a salary month after month it makes him envious to see you Klondikers hit town with satchels full of coin. Perhaps you will give me a chance later on?"

"Perhaps," acceded Boyd; but when the young man had gone he strode quickly over to Fraser, who was lolling back comfortably, smoking a ridiculously long cigar with an elaborate gold band.

"Look here, Mr. 'Frobisher,'" he said, in a low tone, "what do you mean by mixing me up in your petty−larceny frauds?"

Fraser grinned. "'Frobisher' is hot monaker, ain't it? It sounds like the money. I believe I'll stick to 'Frobisher.'"

"I spiked your miserable little scheme, and if you try anything more like that, I'll have to cut you out altogether."

"Pshaw!" said the adventurer, mildly. "Did you say that hydraulic mine was no good? Too bad! That reporter agreed to take some stock right away, and promised to get his editor in on it, too."

"His editor!" Emerson cried, aghast. "Why, his editor happens to be a friend of mine, whose assistance I may need very badly when I get back from Chicago."

"Oh, well! That's different, of course."

"Now see here, Fraser, I want you to leave me out of your machinations, absolutely. You've been very decent to me in many ways, but if I hear of anything more like this I shall hand you over to the police."

"Don't be a sucker all your life," admonished the rogue. "You stick to me, and I'll make you a lot of money. I like you—"

Emerson, now seriously angry, wheeled and left him, realizing that the fellow was morally atrophied. He could not forget, however, that except for this impossible creature he himself would be lying at Petellin's store at Katmai with no faintest hope of completing his mission, wherefore he did his best to swallow his indignation.

"Hey! What time do we leave?" Fraser called after him, but the young man would not answer, proceeding instead to his room, there to renew his touch with the world through strange clean garments, the feel of which awakened memories and spurred him on to feverish haste. When he had dressed he hurried to a telegraph office and dispatched two messages to Chicago, one addressed to his own tailor, the other to a number on Lake Shore Drive. Over the latter he pondered long, tearing up several drafts which did not suit him, finally giving one to the operator with an odd mingling of timidity and defiance. This done, he hastened to one of the leading banks, and two hours later returned to the hotel, jubilant.

He found Big George in the lobby staring with fascinated eyes at his finger−nails, which were strangely purified and glossy.

“Look at 'em!” the fisherman broke out, admiringly. “They're as clean as a hound's tooth. They shine so I dassent take hold of anything.”

“I have made my deal with the bank,” Boyd exulted. “All I need to raise now is one hundred thousand dollars. The bank will advance the rest.”

“That's great,” said Balt, without interrupting the contemplation of his digits. “That's certainly immense. Say! Don't they glisten?”

“They look very nice—”

“Stylish! I think.”

“That one hundred thousand dollars makes all the difference in the world. The task is easy, now. We will make it go, sure. These bankers know what that salmon business is. Why, I had no trouble at all. They say we can't lose if we have a good site on the Kalvik River.”

“They're wise, all right. I guess that girl took me for a Klondiker,” George observed. “She charged me double. But she was a nice girl, though. I was kind of rattled when I walked in and sat down, and I couldn't think of nothing to talk about. I never opened my head all the time, but she didn't notice it. When I left she asked me to come back again and have another nice long visit. She's an *awful* fine girl.”

“Look out!” laughed his companion. “Every Alaskan falls in love with a manicurist at some time or other. It seems to be in the blood. We are going to have no matrimony, mind you.”

“Lord! She wouldn't look at me,” said the fisherman, suddenly, assuming a lobster pink.

That evening they dined as befits men just out from a long incarceration in the North, first having tried unsuccessfully to locate Fraser; for the rogue was bound to them by the intangible ties of hardship and trail life, and they could not bear to part from him without some expression of gratitude for the sacrifices he had made. But he was nowhere to be found, not even at train time.

“That seems hardly decent,” Boyd remarked. “He might at least have said good−bye and wished us well.”

“When he's around he makes me sore, and when he's away I miss him,” said George. “He's probably out organizing something—or somebody.”

At the station they waited until the last warning had sounded, vainly hoping that Fraser would put in an appearance, then sought their Pullman more piqued than they cared to admit. When the train pulled out, they went forward to the smoking compartment, still meditating upon this unexpected defection; but as they lighted their cigars, a familiar voice greeted them:

“Hello, you!”—and there was Fraser grinning at their astonishment.

“What are you doing here?” they cried, together.

“Me? Oh, I'm on my way East.”

“Whereabouts East?”

“Chicago, ain't it? I thought that was what you said.” He seated himself and lighted another long cigar.

“Are you going to Chicago?” George asked.

“Sure! We've got to put this cannery deal over.” The crook sighed luxuriously and began to blow smoke rings. “Pretty nice train, ain't it?”

“Yes,” ejaculated Emerson, undecided whether to be pleased or angered at the fellow's presence. “Which is your car?”

“This one—same as yours. I've got the drawing−room.”

“What are you going to do in Chicago?”

“Oh, I ain't fully decided yet, but I might do a little promoting. Seattle is too full of Alaskan snares.”

Emerson reflected for a moment before remarking: “I dare say you will tangle me up in some new enterprise that will land us both in jail, so for my own protection I'll tell you what I'll do. I have noticed that you are a good salesman, and if you will take up something legitimate—”

“Legitimate!” Fraser interrupted, with indignation. “Why, all my schemes are legitimate. Anybody can examine them. If he don't like them, he needn't go in. If he weakens on one proposition, I'll get something that suits him better. You've got me wrong.”

“If you want to handle something honest, I'll let you place some of this cannery stock on a commission.”

“I don't see nothing attractive in that when I can sell stock of my own and keep *all* the money. Maybe I'll organize a cannery company of my own in Chicago—”

“If you do—“ Boyd exploded.

“Very well! Don't get sore. I only just suggested the possibility. If that is your graft, I'll think up something better.”

The younger man shook his head. “You are impossible,” said he, “and yet I can't help liking you.”

Late into the night they talked, Emerson oscillating between extreme volubility and deep abstraction. At one moment he was as gay as a prospective bridegroom, at the next he was more dejected than a man under sentence. And instead of growing calmer his spirits became more and more variable with the near approach of the journey's end.

In Chicago, as in Seattle, Fraser accompanied his fellow−travellers to their hotel, and would have registered himself under some high−sounding alias except for a whispered threat from Boyd. That young gentleman, after seeing his companions comfortably ensconced, left them to their own devices while he drove to the tailor to whom he had telegraphed, returning in a short time garbed in new clothes. He found Fraser sipping a solitary cocktail and visiting with the bartender on the closest terms of intimacy.

“George?” said that one, in answer to his inquiry. “Oh, George has gone on a still−hunt for a manicure parlor. Ain't that a rave? He's gone finger− mad. He'd ought to have them front feet shod. He don't need a manicurist; what he wants is a blacksmith.”

“He is rather out of his latitude, so I wish you would keep an eye on him,” Boyd said.

“All right! I'll take him out in the park on a leash, but if he tries to bite anybody I'll have to muzzle him. He ain't safe in the heart of a great city; he's a menace to the life and limb of every manicure woman who crosses his path. You gave him an awful push on the downward path when you laid him against this finger stuff.”

Promptly at four o'clock Emerson called a cab and was driven toward the North Side. As the vehicle rolled up Lake Shore Drive the excitement under which he had been laboring for days increased until he tapped his feet nervously, clenched his gloved fingers, and patted the cushions as if to accelerate the horse's footfalls. Would he never arrive! The animal appeared to crawl more slowly every moment, the rubber−rimmed wheels to turn more sluggishly with each revolution. He called to the driver to hurry, then found himself of a sudden gripped by an overpowering hesitation, and grew frightened at his own haste. The close atmosphere of the cab seemed to stifle him: he jerked the window open, flung back the lapels of his great coat, and inhaled the sharp Lake air in deep breaths. Why did that driver lash a willing steed? They were nearly there, and he was not ready yet. He leaned out to check their speed, then closed his lips and settled back in his seat, staring at the houses slipping past. How well he remembered every one of them!

The dark stone frowned at him, the leaded windows stared at him through a blind film of unrecognition, the carven gargoyles grinned mockingly at him.

It all oppressed him heavily and crushed whatever hope had lain at his heart when he left the hotel. Never before had his goal seemed so unattainable; never before had he felt so bitterly the cruelty of riches, the hopelessness of poverty.

The vehicle drew up at last before one of the most pretentious residences, a massive pile of stone and brick fronting the Lake with what seemed to him a singularly proud and chilling aspect. His hand shook as he paid the driver, and it was a very pale though very erect young man who mounted the stone steps to the bell. Despite the stiffness with which he held himself, he felt the muscles at his knees trembling weakly, while his lungs did not seem to fill, even when he inhaled deeply. During the moments that he waited he found his body pulsating to the slow, heavy thumping of his heart; then a familiar face greeted him.

“How do you do, Hawkins,” he heard himself saying, as a liveried old man ushered him in and took his coat. “Don't you remember me?”

“Yes, sir! Mr. Emerson. You have been away for a long time, sir.”

“Is Miss Wayland in?”

“Yes, sir; she is expecting you. This way, please.”

Boyd followed, thankful for the subdued light which might conceal his agitation. He knew where they were going: she had always awaited him in the library, so it seemed. And how well he remembered that wonderful book walled room! It was like her to welcome him on the spot where she had bade him good−bye three years ago.

Hawkins held the portieres aside and Boyd heard their velvet swish at his back, yet for the briefest instant he did not see her, so motionless did she stand. Then he cried, softly:

“My Lady!” and strode forward.

“Boyd! Boyd!” she answered and came to meet him, yielding herself to his arms. She felt his heart pounding against hers like the heart of a runner who has spent himself at the tape, felt his arms quivering as if from great fatigue. For a long time neither spoke.

CHAPTER IX. AND IS GRANTED A YEAR OF GRACE

“And so all your privations and hardships went for nothing,” said Mildred Wayland, when Boyd had recounted the history of his pilgrimage into the North.

“Yes,” he replied; “as a miner, I am a very wretched failure.”

She shrugged her shoulders in disapproval.

“Don't use that term!” she cried. “There is no word so hateful to me as 'failure'—I suppose, because father has never failed in anything. Let us say that your success has been delayed.”

“Very well. That suits me better, also, but you see I've forgotten how to choose nice words.”

They were seated in the library, where for two hours they had remained undisturbed, Emerson talking rapidly, almost incoherently, as if this were a sort of confessional, the girl hanging eagerly upon his every word, following his narrative with breathless interest. The story had been substantially the same as that which, once before, he had related to Cherry Malotte; but now the facts were deeply, intimately colored with all the young man's natural enthusiasm and inmost personal feeling. To his listener it was like some wonderful, far−off romance, having to do with strange people whose motives she could scarcely grasp and pitched amid wild scenes that she could not fully picture.

“And you did all that for me,” she mused, after a time.

“It was the only way.”

“I wonder if any other man I know would take those risks just for—me.”

“Of course. Why, the risk, I mean the physical peril and hardship and discomfort, don't amount to—that.” He snapped his fingers. “It was only the unending desolation that hurt; it was the separation from you that punished me—the thought that some luckier fellow might—”

“Nonsense!” Mildred was really indignant. “I told you to fix your own time and I promised to wait. Even if I had not—cared for you, I would have kept my word. That is a Wayland principle. As it is, it was—comparatively easy.”

“Then you do love me, my Lady?” He leaned eagerly toward her.

“Do you need to ask?” she whispered from the shelter of his arms. “It is the same old fascination of our girl and boy days. Do you remember how completely I lost my head about you?” She laughed softly. “I used to think you wore a football suit better than anybody in the world! Sometimes I suspect that it is merely that same girlish hero−worship and can't last. But it *has* lasted—so far. Three years is a long time for a girl like me to wait, isn't it?”

“I know! I know!” he returned, jealously. “But I have lived that time with nothing but a memory, while you have had other things to occupy you. You are flattered and courted by men, scores of men—”

“Oh!”

“Legions of men! Oh, I know. Haven't I devoured society columns by the yard? The papers were six months old, to be sure, when I got them, but every mention of you was like a knife stab to me. Jealousy drove me to memorize the name of every man with whom you were seen in public, and I called down all sorts of curses upon their heads. I used to torture my lonely soul with hideous pictures of you—”

“Hideous pictures of me?” The girl perked her head to one side and glanced at him bewitchingly, “You're very flattering!”

“Yes, pictures of you with a caravan of suitors at your heels.”

“You foolish boy! Suitors don't come in caravans they come in cabs.”

“Well, my simile isn't far wrong in other respects,” he replied, with a flash of her spirit. “But anyhow I pictured you surrounded by all the beautiful things of your life here, forever in the scent of flowers, in the lights of drawing−rooms, in the soft music of hidden instruments. God! how I tortured myself! You were never out of mind for an hour. My days were given to you, and I used to pray that my dreams might hold nothing but you. You have been my fetish from the first day I met you, and my worship has grown blinder every hour, Mildred. You were always out of my reach, but I have kept my eyes raised toward you just the same, and I have never looked

aside, never faltered." He paused to feast his eyes upon her, and then in a half−whisper finished, "Oh, my Lady, how beautiful you are!"

And indeed she was; for her face, ordinarily so imperious, was now softly alight; her eyes, which other men found cold, were kindled with a rare warmth of understanding; her smile was almost wistfully sweet. To her lover she seemed to bend beneath the burden of her brown hair, yet her slim figure had the strength and poise which come of fine physical inheritance and high spirit. Every gesture, every unstudied attitude, revealed the grace of the well born woman.

It was this "air" of hers, in fact, which had originally attracted him. He recalled how excited he had been in that far−away time when he had first learned her identity—for the name of Wayland was spoken soundingly in the middle West. In the early stages of their acquaintance he had looked upon her aloofness as an affectation, but a close intimacy had compelled a recognition of it as something wholly natural; he found her as truly a patrician as Wayne Wayland, her father, could wish. The old man's domain was greater than that of many princes, and his power more absolute. His only daughter he spoiled as thoroughly as he ruled his part of the financial world, and wilful Mildred, once she had taken an interest in the young college man so evidently ready to be numbered among her lovers, did not pause half way, but made her preference patent to all, and opened to him a realm of dazzling possibilities. He well remembered the perplexities of those first delirious days when her regard was beginning to make itself apparent. She was so different, so wonderfully far removed from all he knew, that he doubted his own senses.

His friends, indeed, lost no opportunity of informing him that he was a tremendously favored young man, but this phase of the affair had caused him little thought, simply because the girl herself had come so swiftly to overshadow, in his regard, every other consideration—even her own wealth and position. At the same time he could not but be aware that his standing in his little world was subtly altered as soon as he became known as the favored suitor of Wayne Wayland's daughter. He began to receive favors from comparative strangers; unexpected social privileges were granted him; his way was made easier in a hundred particulars. From every quarter delicately gratifying distinctions came to him. Without his volition he found that he had risen to an entirely different position from that which he had formerly occupied; the mere coupling of his name with Mildred Wayland's had lifted him into a calcium glare. It affected him not at all, he only knew that he was truly enslaved to the girl, that he idolized her, that he regarded her as something priceless, sacred. She, in turn, frankly capitulated to him, in proud disregard of what her world might say, as complete in her surrender to this new lover as she had been inaccessible in her reserve toward all the rest.

And when he had graduated, how proud of her he had been! How little he had realized the gulf that separated them, and how quick had been his awakening!

It was Wayne Wayland who had shown him his folly. He had talked to the young engineer kindly, if firmly, being too shrewd an old diplomat to fan the flame of a headstrong love with vigorous opposition.

"Mildred is a rich girl," the old financier had told Boyd, "a very rich girl; one of the richest girls in this part of the world; while you, my boy—what have you to offer?"

"Nothing! But you were not always what you are now," Emerson had replied. "Every man has to make a start. When you married, you were as poor as I am."

"Granted! But I married a poor girl, from my own station in life. Fortunately she had the latent power to develop with me as I grew; so that we kept even and I never outdistanced her. But Mildred is spoiled to begin with. I spoiled her purposely, to prevent just this sort of thing. She is bred to luxury, her friends are rich, and she doesn't know any other kind of life. Her tastes and habits and inclinations are extravagant, to put it plainly—yes, worse than extravagant; they are positively scandalous. She is about the richest girl in the country, and by virtue of wealth as well as breeding she is one of the American aristocracy. Oh! people may say what they please, but we have an aristocracy all the same which is just as well marked and just as exclusive as if it rested upon birth instead of bank accounts."

"You wouldn't object to our marriage if I were rich and Mildred were poor," Emerson had said, rather cynically.

"Perhaps not. A poor girl can marry a rich man and get along all right if she has brains; but a very rich girl can't marry a very poor man and be happy unless she is peculiarly constituted. I happen to know that my girl isn't so constituted. She is utterly impossible as a poor man's wife. She can't *do* anything: she can't economize, she

can't amuse herself, she can't be happy without the things she is accustomed to; it is in her blood and training and disposition. She would try, bless you! she would try all right—for a while—but I know her better than she knows herself. You see, I have the advantage of knowing myself and of having known her mother before her. She is a hothouse flower, and adversity would wither her. Mind you, I don't say that her husband must be a millionaire, but he will need a running start on the road to make her happy, and—well, the fellow who gets my girl will make her happy or I'll make him damned miserable!" The old fellow had squared his jaws belligerently at this statement.

"You have nothing against me—personally, I mean?"

"Nothing."

"She loves me."

"She seems to. But both of you are young and may get over it before you reach the last hurdle."

"Then you forbid it?" Boyd had queried, his own glance challenging that of her father.

"By no means. I neither forbid nor consent. I merely ask you to stand still and use your eyes for a little while. You have intelligence. Don't be hasty. I am going to tell her just what I have told you, and I think she is sensible enough to realize the truth of my remarks. No! instead of forbidding you Mildred's society, I am going to give you all you want of it. I am going to make you free at our house. I am going to see that you meet her friends and go where she goes. I want you to do the things that she does and see how she lives. The more you see of us, the better it will suit me. I have been studying you for some time, Mr. Emerson, and I think I have read you correctly. After you have spent a few months with us, come to me again and we will talk it over. I may say yes by that time, or you may not wish me to. Perhaps Mildred will decide for both of us."

"That is satisfactory to me."

"Very well! We dine at seven to−night; and we shall expect you."

That Mr. Wayland had made no mistake in his judgment, Emerson had soon been forced to admit; for the more he saw of Mildred's life, the more plainly he perceived the barriers that lay between them. Those months had been an education to him. He had become an integral part of Chicago's richer social world. The younger set had accepted him readily enough on the score of his natural good parts, while the name of Wayne Wayland had acted like magic upon the elders. Yet it had been a cruel time of probation for the young lover, who continually felt the searching eyes of the old man reading him; and despite the fact that Mildred took no pains to conceal her preference for him, there had been no lack of other suitors, all of whom Boyd hated with a perfect hate.

They had never discussed the matter, yet both the lovers had been conscious that the old man's words were pregnant with truth, and after a few months, during which Emerson had made little progress in his profession, Mildred had gone to her father and frankly begged his aid. But he had remained like adamant.

"I have been pretty lenient so far. He will have to make his own way without my help. You know he isn't my candidate."

Recognizing the despair which was possessing her lover, and jealous for her own happiness, Mildred had arranged that both of them, together, should have a talk with her father. The result had been the same. Mr. Wayland listened grimly, then said:

"This request for assistance shows that both of you are beginning to realize the wisdom of my remarks of a year ago."

"I'm not asking aid from you," Emerson had blazed forth. "I can take care of myself and of Mildred."

"Permit me to show you that you can't. Your life and training have not fitted you for the position of Mildred's husband. Have you any idea how many millions she is going to own?"

No, and I don't care to know."

"I don't care to tell you either, but the Wayland fortune will carry such a tremendous responsibility with it that my successor will have to be a stronger man than I am to hold it together. I merely gathered it; he must keep it. You haven't qualified in either respect yet."

Mildred had interrupted petulantly. "Oh, this endless chatter of money! It is disgusting. I only wish we were poor. Instead of a blessing, our wealth is an unmitigated curse—a terrible, exhausting burden. I hear of nothing else from morning till night. It gives us no pleasure, nothing but care and worry and—wrinkles. I can do without horses and motors and maids, and all that. I want to live, really to *live*." She had arisen and gone over to Boyd, laying her hand upon his shoulder. "I will give it all up. Let us try to be happy without it."

It had been a tense moment for both men. Their eyes had met defiantly, but, reading in the father's face the

contempt that waited upon an unmanly decision, Boyd's pride stood up stiffly.

"No," he replied, "I can't let you do that. Not yet, anyhow. Mr. Wayland is right, in a way. If he had not been so decent I would have married you anyhow, but I am indebted to him. He has shown me a lot more of your life than I knew before, and he has made his word good. I am going to ask you to wait, however; for quite a while, it may be. I am going to take a gambler's chance."

"What is it?"

"A gold strike has been made in Alaska—"

"Alaska!"

"Yes! The Klondike. You have read of it? I am told that the chances there are like those in the days of '49, and I am going."

So it was that he had made his choice, fixing his own time for returning, and so it was that Mildred Wayland had awaited him.

If to−day, after three years of deprivation, she seemed to him more beautiful than ever—the interval having served merely to enhance her charm and strengthen the yearning of his heart—she seemed in the same view still further removed from his sphere. More reserved, more dignified, in the reserve of developed womanhood, her cession was the more gracious and wonderful.

His story finished, Boyd went on to tell her vaguely of his future plans, and at the last he asked her, with something less than an accepted lover's confidence:

"Will you wait another year?"

She laughed lightly. "You dear boy, I am not up for auction. This is not the 'third and last call.' I am not sure I could induce anybody to take me, even if I desired."

"I read the rumor of your engagement in a back number of a San Francisco paper. Is your retinue as large as ever?"

She smiled indifferently. "It alters with the season, but I believe the general average is about the same. You know most of them." She mentioned a number of names, counting them off on her finger−tips. "Then, of course, there are the old standbys, Mr. Macklin, Tommy Turner, the Lawton boys—"

"And Alton Clyde!"

"To be sure; little Alton, like the brook, runs on forever. He still worships you, Boyd, by the way."

"And there are others?"

"A few."

"Who?"

"Nobody you know."

"Any one in particular?" Boyd demanded, with a lover's insistence.

Miss Wayland's hesitation was so brief as almost to escape his notice. "Nobody who counts. Of course, father has his predilections and insists upon engineering my affairs in the same way he would float a railroad enterprise, but you can imagine how romantic the result is."

"Who is the favored party?" the young man asked, darkly. But she arose to push back the heavy draperies and gaze for a moment out into the deepening twilight. When she answered, it was in a tone of ordinary indifference.

"Really it isn't worth discussing. I shall not marry until I am ready, and the subject bores me." An instant later she turned to regard him with direct eyes.

"Do you remember when I offered to give it all up and go with you, Boyd?"

"I have never forgotten for an instant,"

"You refused to allow it."

"Certainly! I had seen too much of your life, and my pride figured a bit, also."

"Do you still feel the same way?" Her eyes searched his face rather anxiously.

"I do! It is even more impossible now than then. I am utterly out of touch with this environment. My work will take me back where you could not go— into a land you would dislike, among a people you could not understand. No; we did quite the sensible thing."

She sighed gratefully and settled upon the window−seat, her back to the light. "I am glad you feel that way. I—I—think I am growing more sensible too. I have begun to understand how practical father was, and how ridiculous I was. Perhaps I am not so impulsive—you see, I am years older now—perhaps I am more selfish. I

don't know which it is and—I can't express my feelings, but I have had sufficient time since you went away to think and to look into my own soul. Really I have become quite introspective. Of course, my feeling for you is just the same as it was, dear, but I—I can't—“ She waved a graceful hand to indicate her surroundings. “Well, this is my world, and I am a part of it. You understand, don't you? The thought of giving it up makes me really afraid. I don't like rough things.” She shook herself and gave voice to a delicious, bubbling little laugh. “I am frightfully spoiled.” Emerson drew her to him tenderly.

“My darling, I understand perfectly, and I love you too well to take you away from it all; but you will wait for me, won't you?”

“Of course,” she replied, quickly. “As long as you wish.”

“But I am going to have you!” he cried, insistently. “You are going to be my wife,” He repeated the words softly, reverently: “My wife.”

She gazed up at him with a puzzled little frown. “What bothers me is that you understand me and my life so well, while I scarcely understand you or yours at all. That seems to tell me that I am unsuited to you in some way. Why, when you told me that story of your hardships and all that, I listened as if it were a play or a book, but really it didn't *mean* anything to me or stir me as it should. I can't understand my own failure to understand. That awful country, those barbarous people, the suffering, the cold, the snow, the angry sea; I don't grasp what they mean. I was never cold, or hungry, or exhausted. I—well, it is fascinating to hear about, because you went through it, but *why* you did it, how you *felt*”—she made a gesture as if at a loss for words. “Do you see what I am trying to convey?”

“Perfectly,” he answered, releasing her with a little unadmitted sense of disappointment at his heart. “I suppose it is only natural.”

“I do hope you succeed this time,” she continued. “I am growing deadly tired of things. Not tired of waiting for you, but I am getting to be old; I am, indeed. Why, at times I actually have an inclination to do fancy−work—the unfailing symptom. Do you realize that I am *twenty−five years old!*”

“Age of decrepitude! And more glorious than any woman in the world!” he cried.

There was a click outside the library door, and the room, which unnoticed by them had become nearly dark, was suddenly flooded with light. The portieres parted, and Wayne Wayland stood in the opening.

“Ah, here you are, my boy! Hawkins told me you had returned.”

He advanced to shake the young man's hand, his demeanor gracious and hearty. “Welcome home. You have been having quite a vacation, haven't you? Let's see, it's two years, isn't it?”

“Three years!” Emerson replied.

“Impossible! Dear, dear, how time flies when one is busy.”

“Boyd has been telling me of his adventures,” said Mildred. “He is going to dine with us.”

“Indeed.” Mr. Wayland displayed no great degree of enthusiasm. “And have you returned, like Pizarro, laden with all the gold of the Incas? Or did Pizarro return? It seems to me that he settled somewhere on the Coast.” The old man laughed at his own conceit.

“I judge Pizarro was a better miner than I,” Boyd smiled. “There were plenty of Esquimau princes whom I might have held for ransom, but if I had done so, all the rest of the tribe would have come to board with them.”

“Have you come home to stay?”

“No, sir; I shall return in a few weeks.”

Mr. Wayland's cordiality seemed to increase in some subtle manner.

“Well, I am sorry you didn't make a fortune, my boy. But, rich or poor, your friends are delighted to see you, and we shall certainly keep you for dinner. I am interested in that Northwestern country myself, and I want to ask some questions about it.”

CHAPTER X. IN WHICH BIG GEORGE MEETS HIS ENEMY

It was well on toward midnight when Emerson reached his hotel, and being too full of his visit with Mildred to sleep, he strolled through the lobby and into the Pompeian Room. The theatre crowds had not dispersed, and the place was a−glitter; for it was the grand−opera season. The room was so well filled that he had difficulty in finding a seat, and he made his way slowly, meditating gloomily upon the fact that out of all this concourse in which he had once figured not a single familiar face greeted him. Finding no unoccupied table, he was about to retreat when he heard his name spoken and felt a vigorous slap upon the back.

“Boyd Emerson! By Jove, I'm glad to see you!” He turned to face an anaemic youth whose colorless, gas−bleached face was wrinkled into an expansive grin.

“Hello, Alton!”

They shook hands like old friends, while Alton Clyde continued to express his delight.

“So you've been roughing it out in Nebraska, eh?”

“Alaska.”

“So it was. I always get those places mixed. Come over and have a drink. I want to talk to you. Funny thing, I just met a Klondiker myself this evening. Great chap, too! I want you to know him: he's immense. Only watch out he don't get you full. He's an awful spender. I'm half kippered myself. His name is Froelich, but he isn't a Dutchman. Ever meet him up there?”

“I think not.”

“Come on, you'll like him.”

Clyde led his companion toward a table, chattering as they went. “Y' know, I'm democratic myself, and I'm fond of these rough fellows. I'd like to go out to Nebraska—”

“Alaska.”

“—and punch cows and shoot a pistol and yell. I'm really tremendously rough. Here he is! Mr. Froelich, my old friend Mr. Emerson. We played football together—or, at least, he played; I was too light.”

Mr. Froelich shoved back his chair and turned, exposing the face of “Fingerless” Fraser, quite expressionless save for the left eyelid, which drooped meaningly.

“'Froelich'!” said Boyd, angrily; “good heavens, Fraser, have you picked another? I thought you were going to stick to 'Frobisher.'“ Turning to Clyde, he observed: “This man's name is Fraser. One of his peculiarities is a dislike of proper names. He has never found one that suited him.”

“I like 'Froelich' pretty well,” observed the imperturbable Fraser. “It sounds distanguay, and—”

“Don't believe anything he tells you,” Boyd broke in, seating himself. “He is the most circumstantial liar in the Northwest, and if you don't watch him every minute he will sell you a hydraulic mine, or a rubber plantation, or a sponge fishery. Underneath his eccentricities, however, he is really a pretty decent fellow, and I am indebted to him for my presence here to−night.”

Alton Clyde made his astonishment evident by inquiring incredulously of Fraser, “Then that scheme of yours to establish a gas plant at Nome was all—”

“Certainly!” Emerson laughed. “The incandescent lamp travels about as fast as the prospector. Nome is lighted by electricity, and has been for years.”

“*Is* it?” demanded Fraser, with an assumption of the supremest surprise.

“You know as well as I do.”

“H'm! I'd forgotten. Just the same, my plan was a good one. Gas is cheaper.” He reached for his glass, at which Clyde's eye fell upon his missing fingers, and the young clubman exploded:

“Well! If that's the kind of pill you are, maybe you didn't lose your mit in the Boer War either.”

Emerson answered for the adventurer: “Hardly! He got blood−poisoning from a hangnail.”

Clyde began to laugh uncontrollably. “Really! That's great! Oh, that's lovely! Here I've been gobbling fairy tales like a black bass at sunset. He! he! he! I must introduce Mr. Froel—Mr. Fra—Mr. What's−his−name to the boys. He! he! he!”

It was evident that Fraser was not accustomed to this sort of treatment; his injured pride took refuge in a haughty silence, which further stirred the risibilities of Clyde until that young man's thin shoulders shook, and he doubled up, his hollow chest touching his knees. He pounded the tiles with his cane, stamped his patent−leather boots, and wept tears of joy.

"What's the joke?" demanded the rogue. "Anybody would think *I* was the sucker."

"Where is George?" questioned Boyd, to change the subject.

"In his trundle−bed, I suppose," said Fraser, stiffly.

"Along about nine o'clock he begins to yawn like a trained seal. That's how I came to fall in with—this." He indicated the giggling Clyde. "I didn't have anything better to do."

"Did you show George around, as I asked?"

"Sure! After that fairy—*farrier*, I should say—finished his front feet, I took him out and let him look at the elevated railroad. Then he came back and hunted up the janitor of the building. He spent the evening in the basement with the engineer. Oh, he's had a splendid day!"

"I say, Boyd, have you got another one like—like this?" Clyde asked, nodding at Fraser, who snorted indignantly.

"Not exactly. Balt is quite the antithesis of Mr. Fraser. He is a fisherman, and he has never been East before."

"He's learning the manicure business," sniffed the adventurer. "He has his nails curried every day. Says it tickles."

"Oh, glory be!" ejaculated the clubman. "I must meet him, too. Let me show him the town, will you? I'll foot the bills; I'll make it something historic. Please do! I'm bored to death."

"We can't spare the time; we are here on business," said Emerson.

"Business!" Clyde remarked. "That sounds interesting. I haven't seen anybody for years who was really busy at anything that was worth being busy at. It must be a great sensation to really do something."

"Don't you do anything?"

"Oh yes; I'm as busy as a one−legged sword−dancer, but I don't *do* anything. It's the same old thing: leases to sign, rents to collect, and that sort of rot. My agent does most of it, however. I wish I were like you, Boyd; you always were a lucky chap." Emerson smiled rather grimly at thought of the earlier part of the evening and of his present fortune.

"Oh, I mean it!" said Clyde. "Look how lucky you were at the university. Everything came your way. Even M—" He checked himself and jerked his head in the direction of the North Side. "You know! She's never been able to see any of us fellows with a spy−glass since you left, and I have proposed regularly every full moon." He wagged his curly head solemnly and sighed. "Well, there is only one man I'd rather see get her than you, and that's me—or I—whichever is proper."

"I'm not sure it's proper for either of us to get her," smiled Boyd.

"Well, I'm glad you've returned anyhow; for there's an added starter."

"Who is he?"

"He's some primitive Western fellow like yourself! I don't know his name— never met him, in fact. But while we Chicago fellows were cantering along in a bunch, watching each other, he got the rail."

"From the way her father spoke and acted I judged he had somebody in sight." Boyd's eyes were keenly alight, and Clyde continued.

"We've just *got* to keep her in Chicago, and you're the one to do it. I tell you, old man, she has missed you. Yes, sir, she has missed you a blamed sight more than the rest of us have. Oh, you don't know how lucky you are."

"I lucky! H'm! You fellows are rich—"

"Bah! *I'm* not. I've gone through most of what I had. All that is left are the rents; they keep me going, after a fashion. Now that it is too late, I'm beginning to wake up; I'm getting tired of loafing. I'd like to get out and do something, but I can't; I'm too well known in Chicago, and besides, as a business man I'm certainly a nickel−plated rotter."

"I'll give you a chance to recoup," said Boyd. "I am here to raise some money on a good proposition."

The younger man leaned forward eagerly. "If you say it's good, that's all I want to know. I'll take a chance. I'm in for anything from pitch−and− toss to manslaughter."

“I'll tell you what it is, and you can use your own judgment.”

“I haven't a particle,” Clyde confessed. “If I had, I wouldn't need to invest. Go ahead, however; I'm all ears.” He pulled his chair closer and listened intently while the other outlined the plan, his weak gray eyes reflecting the old hero−worship of his college days. To him, Boyd Emerson had ever represented the ultimate type of all that was most desirable, and time had not lessened his admiration.

“It looks as if there might be a jolly rumpus, doesn't it?” he questioned, when the speaker had finished.

“It does.”

“Then I've got to see it. I'll put in my share if you'll let me go along.”

“You go! Why, you wouldn't like that sort of thing,” said Emerson, considerably nonplussed.

“Oh, wouldn't I? I'd *eat* it! It's just what I need. I'd revel in that out−door life.” He threw back his narrow shoulders. “I'm a regular scout when it comes to roughing it. Why, I camped in the Thousand Islands all one summer, and I've been deer−hunting in the Adirondacks. We didn't get any—they were too far from the hotel; but I know all about mountain life.”

“This is totally different,” Boyd objected; but Clyde ran on, his enthusiasm growing as he tinted the mental picture to suit himself.

“I'm a splendid fisherman, too, and I've plenty of tackle.”

“We shall use nets.”

“Don't do it! It isn't sportsmanlike. I'll take a book of flies and whip that stream to a froth.” Emerson interrupted him to explain briefly the process of salmon−catching, but the young man was not to be discouraged.

“You give me something to do—something where I don't have to lift heavy weights or carry boxes—and watch me work! I tell you, it's what I've been looking for, and I didn't know it; I'll get as husky as you are and all sunburnt. Tell me the sort of furs and the kind of pistols to buy, and I'll put ten thousand dollars in the scheme. That's all I can spare.”

“You won't need either furs or firearms,” laughed Boyd. “When we get back to Kalvik the days will be long and hot, and the whole country will be a blaze of wild flowers.”

“That's fine! I love flowers. If I can't catch fish for the cannery, I'll make up for it in some other way.”

“Can you keep books?”

“No; but I can play a mandolin,” Clyde offered, optimistically. “I guess a little music would sound pretty good up there in the wilderness.”

“Can you play a mandolin?” inquired “Fingerless” Fraser, observing the young fellow with grave curiosity.

“Sure; I'm out of practice, but—”

“Take him!” said Fraser, turning upon Emerson.

“He can set on the front porch of the cannery with wild flowers in his hair and play *La Paloma*. It will make those other fish−houses mad with jealousy. Get a window−box and a hammock, and maybe Willis Marsh will run in and spend his evenings with you.”

“Don't josh!” insisted Clyde, seriously. “I want to go—”

“Me josh?” Fraser's face was like wood.

“I'll think it over,” Emerson said, guardedly.

Without warning, the adventurer burst into shrill laughter.

“Are you laughing at me?” angrily demanded the city youth.

Fraser composed his features, which seemed to have suddenly disrupted. “Certainly not! I just thought of something that happened to my father when I was a little child.” Again he began to shake, at which Clyde regarded him narrowly; but his merriment was so impersonal as to allay suspicion, and the young fellow went on with undiminished enthusiasm:

“You think it over, and in the mean time I'll get a bunch of the fellows together. We'll all have lunch at the University Club to−morrow, and you can tell them about the affair.”

Fraser abruptly ended his laughter as Boyd's heel came heavily in contact with his instep under the table. Clyde was again lost in an exposition of his fitness as a fisherman when Fraser burst out:

“Hello! There's George. He's walking in his sleep, and thinks this is a manicure stable.”

Emerson turned to behold Balt's huge figure all but blocking the distant door. It was evident that he had been vainly trying to attract their attention for some time, but lacked the courage to enter the crowded room, for, upon

catching Boyd's eye, he beckoned vigorously.

"Call him in," said Clyde, quickly. "I want to meet him. He looks just my sort." And accordingly Emerson motioned to the fisherman. Seeing there was no help for it, Big George composed himself and ventured timidly across the portal, steering a tortuous course toward his friends; but in these unaccustomed waters his bulk became unmanageable and his way beset with perils. Deeming himself in danger of being run down by a waiter, he sheered to starboard, and collided with a table at which there was a theatre party. Endeavoring to apologize, he backed into a great pottery vase, which rocked at the impact and threatened to topple from its foundation.

"I'd rather take an ox−team through this room than him," said Fraser. "He'll wreck something, sure."

Conscious of the attention he was attracting on all sides, Big George became seized with an excess of awkwardness; his face blazed, and the perspiration started from his forehead.

"I hope the head waiter doesn't speak to him," Boyd observed. "He is mad enough to rend him limb from limb." But the words were barely spoken when they saw a steward hasten toward George and address him, following which the big fellow's voice rumbled angrily:

"No, I ain't made any mistake! I'm a boarder here, and you get out of my way or I'll step on you." He strode forward threateningly, at which the waiter hopped over the train of an evening dress and bowed obsequiously. The noise of laughter and many voices ceased. In the silence George pursued his way regardless of personal injury or property damage, breaking trail, as it were, to his destination, where he sank limply into a chair which creaked beneath his weight.

"Gimme a lemonade, quick; I'm all het up," he ordered. "I can't get no footholt on these fancy floors, they're so dang slick."

After a half−dazed acknowledgment of his introduction to Alton Clyde, he continued: "I've been trying to flag you for ten minutes." He mopped his brow feebly.

"What is wrong?"

"Everything! It's too noisy for me in this hotel. I've been trying to sleep for three hours, but this band keeps playing, and that elevated railroad breaks down every few minutes right under my window. There's whistles blowing, bells ringing, and—can't we find some quiet road−house where I can get an hour's rest? Put me in a boiler−shop or a round−house, where I can go to sleep."

"The hotels are all alike," Boyd answered. "You will soon get used to it."

"Who, me? Never! I want to get back to God's country."

"Hurrah for you!" ejaculated Clyde. "Same here. And I'm going with you."

"How's that?" questioned George.

"Mr. Clyde offers to put ten thousand dollars into the deal if he can go to Kalvik with us and help run the cannery," explained Emerson.

George looked over the clubman carefully from his curly crown to his slender, high−heeled shoes, then smiled broadly.

"It's up to Mr. Emerson. I'm willing if he is." Whereupon, vastly encouraged, Clyde proceeded to expatiate upon his own surpassing qualifications. While he was speaking, a party of three men approached, and seated themselves at an adjoining table. As they pulled out their chairs, Big George chanced to glance in their direction; then he put down his lemonade glass carefully.

"What's the matter?" Boyd demanded, in a low tone, for the big fellow's face had suddenly gone livid, while his eyes had widened like those of an enraged animal.

"That's him!" George growled, "That's the dirty hound!"

"Sit still!" commanded Fraser; for the fisherman had shoved back from the table and was rising, his hands working hungrily, the cords in his neck standing out rigidly. Seeing the murder−light in his companion's eyes, the speaker leaned forward and thrust the big fellow back into the chair from which he had half lifted himself.

"Don't make a fool of yourself," he cautioned.

Clyde, who had likewise witnessed the giant's remarkable metamorphosis, now inquired its meaning.

"That's him!" repeated George, his eyes glaring redly. "That's Willis Marsh."

"Where?" Emerson whirled curiously; but there was no need for George to point out his enemy, for one of the strangers stood as if frozen, with his hand upon the back of his chair, an expression of the utmost astonishment upon his face. A smile was dying from his lips.

Boyd beheld a plump, thick−set man of thirty−eight in evening dress. There was nothing distinctive about him except, perhaps, his hair, which was of a decided reddish hue. He was light of complexion; his mouth was small and of a rather womanish appearance, due to the full red lips. He was well groomed, well fed, in all ways he was a typical city−bred man. He might have been a broker, though he did not carry the air of any particular profession.

That he was, at all events, master of his emotions he soon gave evidence. Raising his brows in recognition, he nodded pleasantly to Balt; then, as if on second thought, excused himself to his companions and stepped toward the other group. The legs of George's chair scraped noisily on the tiles as he rose; the sound covered Fraser's quick admonition:

“Take it easy, pal; let him talk.”

“How do you do, George? What in the name of goodness are you doing here? I hardly recognized you.” Marsh's voice was round and musical, his accent Eastern. With an assumption of heartiness, he extended a white−gloved hand, which the big, uncouth man who faced him refused to take. The other three had risen. George seemed to be groping for a retort. Finally he blurted out, hoarsely:

“Don't offer me your hand. It's dirty! It's got blood on it!”

“Nonsense!” Marsh smiled. “Let's be friends again, George. Bygones are bygones. I came over to make up with you and ask about affairs at Kalvik. If you are here on business and I can help—”

“You dirty rat!” breathed the fisherman.

“Very well; if you wish to be obstinate—“ Willis Marsh shrugged his shoulders carelessly, although in his voice there was a metallic note. “I have nothing to say.” He turned a very bright and very curious pair of eyes upon George's companions, as if seeking from them some hint as to his victim's presence there. It was but a momentary flash of inquiry, however, and then his gaze, passing quickly over Clyde and Fraser, settled upon Emerson.

“Mr. Balt and I had a business misunderstanding,” he said, smoothly, “which I hoped was forgotten. It didn't amount to much—”

At this Balt uttered a choking snarl and stepped forward, only to meet Boyd, who intercepted him.

“Behave yourself!” he ordered. “Don't make a scene,” and before the big fellow could prevent it he had linked arms with him, and swung him around. The movement was executed so naturally that none of the patrons of the cafe noticed it, except, perhaps, as a preparation for departure. Marsh bowed civilly and returned to his seat, while Boyd sauntered toward the exit, his arm which controlled George tense as iron beneath his sleeve. He felt the fisherman's great frame quivering against him and heard the excited breath halting in his lungs; but possessed with the sole idea of getting him away without disorder, he smiled back at Clyde and Fraser, who were following, and chatted agreeably with his prisoner until they had reached the foyer. Then he released his hold and said, quietly:

“You'd better go up to your room and cool off. You came near spoiling everything.”

“He tried to shake hands,” George mumbled, “*with me!* That thieving whelp tried to shake—“ He trailed off into an unintelligible jargon of curses and threats which did not end until he had reached the elevator. Here Alton Clyde clamored for enlightenment as to the reason for this eruption.

“That is the fellow we will have to fight, “Boyd explained. “He is the head of the cannery combination at Kalvik, and a bitter enemy of George's. If he suspects our motives or gets wind of our plans, we're done for.”

Clyde spoke more earnestly than at any time during the evening. “Well, that absolutely settles it as far as I am concerned. This is bound to end in a row.”

“You mean you don't want to join us?”

“*Don't want to!* Why, I've just *got* to, that's all. The ten thousand is yours, but if you don't take me along I'll stow away.”

CHAPTER XI. WHEREIN BOYD EMERSON IS TWICE AMAZED

Nearly a month had elapsed when Emerson at last expressed to George the discouragement that for several days had lain silently in both men's minds.

“It looks like failure, doesn't it?”

“Sure does! You've played your string out, eh?”

“Absolutely. I've done everything except burglary, but I can't raise that hundred thousand dollars. From the way we started off it looked easy, but times are hard and I've bled my friends of every dollar they can spare. In fact, some of them have put in more than they can afford.”

“It's an awful big piece of money,” Balt admitted, with a sigh.

“I never fully realized before how very large,” Boyd said. “And yet, without that amount the Seattle bank won't back us for the remainder.”

“Oh, it's no use to tackle the business on a small scale.” Big George pondered for a moment. “We can't wait much longer. We'd ought to be on the coast now. We're shy twenty−five thousand dollars, eh?”

“Yes, and I can't see any possible way of raising it. I've done the best I could, and so has Clyde, but it's no use.”

The strain of the past month was evident in Emerson's face, which was worn and tired, as if from sleepless nights. Of late he had lapsed again into that despondent mood which Fraser had observed in Alaska, his moments of depression growing more frequent as the precious days slipped past. Every waking hour he had devoted to the promotion of his enterprise. He had laughed at rebuffs and refused discouragement; he had solicited every man who seemed in any way likely to be interested. He had gone from office to office, his hours regulated by watch and note−book, always retailing the same facts, always convincingly lucid and calmly enthusiastic. But a scarcity of money seemed prevalent. Those who sought investment either had better opportunities or refused to finance an undertaking so far from home, and apparently so hazardous.

During those three years in the North, Boyd had worked with feverish haste and suffered many disappointments; but never before had he used such a vast amount of nervous force as in this short month, never had fortune seemed so maddeningly stubborn. But he had hung on with bulldog tenacity, not knowing how to give up, until at last he had placed his stock to the extent of seventy−five thousand dollars, only to realize that he had exhausted his vital force as well as his list of acquaintances. In public he maintained a sanguine front, but in private he let go, and only his two Alaskan friends had sounded the depths of his disappointment.

One other, to be sure, had some inkling of what troubled him, yet to Mildred he had never explained the precise nature of his difficulties. She did not even know his plans. He spent many evenings with her, and she would have given him more of her society had he consented to go out with her, for the demands upon her time were numerous; but this he could never bring himself to do, being too wearied in mind and body, and wishing to spare himself any additional mental disquiet.

Neither Mildred nor her father ever spoke of that unknown suitor in his presence, and their very silence invested the mysterious man with menacing possibilities which did not tend to soothe Boyd's troubled mind. In fact, Mr. Wayland, despite his genial manner, inspired him with a vague sense of hostility, and, as if he were not sufficiently distracted by all this, Fraser and George kept him in a constant state of worry from other causes. The former was continually involving him in some wildly impossible enterprise which seemed ever in danger of police interference. He could not get rid of the fellow, for Fraser calmly included him in all his machinations, dragging him in willy−nilly, until in Boyd's ears there sounded the distant clank of chains and the echo of the warden's tread. A dozen times he had exposed the rogue and established his own position, only to find himself the next day wallowing in some new complication more difficult than that from which he had escaped. Ordinarily it would have been laughable, but at this crisis it was tragic.

As for George, he had been very quiet since the night of his encounter with Marsh, and he spent much of his time by himself. This was a relief to Boyd, until he happened several times to meet the big fellow in strange places at unexpected hours, surprising in his eyes a look of expectant watchfulness, the meaning of which at first

puzzled him. It took but little observation, however, to learn that the fisherman spent his days in hotel lobbies, always walking about through the crowd, and that by night he patrolled the theatre district, slinking about as if to avoid observation. Emerson finally realized with a shock that George was in search of his enemy; but no amount of argument could alter the fellow's mind, and he continued to hunt with the silence of a lone wolf. What the result of his meeting Marsh would be Boyd hesitated to think, but neither George nor he discovered any trace of that gentleman.

These various cares, added to the consequences of his inability to finance the cannery project, had reduced Emerson to a state bordering upon collapse. Balt had entered his room that morning for his daily report of progress, and after his partner's confession of failure had fetched a deep sigh.

"Well, it's tough, after all we've went through," he said. Then, after a pause, "Cherry will be broken−hearted."

"I hadn't thought of her," confessed the other.

"You see, it's her last chance, too."

"So she told me. I'm sorry I brought you all these thousands of miles on a wild−goose chase, but—"

"I don't care for myself. I'll get back somehow and live in the brush, like I used to, and some day I'll get my chance. But she's a woman, and she can't fight Marsh like I can."

"Just who or what is she?" Boyd inquired, curiously, glad of anything to divert his thoughts from their present channel.

"She's just a big−hearted girl, and the only person, red, white, or yellow, who gave me a kind word or a bite to eat till you came along. That's all I know about her. I'd have gone crazy only for her." The big man ground his teeth as the memory of his injuries came uppermost.

Before Boyd could follow the subject further, Alton Clyde strolled in upon them, arrayed immaculately, with gloves, tie, spats, and a derby to match, a striped waistcoast, and a gold−headed walking−stick.

"Salutations, fellow−fishermen!" he began. "I just ran in to settle the details of our trip. I want my tailor to get busy on my wardrobe to− morrow." Boyd shook his head.

"Ain't going to be no wardrobe," said Balt.

"Why? Has something happened to scare the fish?"

"I can't raise the money," Emerson confessed.

"Still shy that twenty−five thou?" questioned the clubman.

"Yes! I'm done."

"That's a shame! I had some ripping clothes planned—English whip−cord—"

"That stuff won't rip," George declared. "But over−alls is plenty good."

Clyde tapped the narrow points of his shoes with his walking−stick, frowning in meditation. "I'm all in, and so are the rest of the fellows. By Jove, this will be a disappointment to Mildred! Have you told her?"

"No. She doesn't know anything about the plan, and I didn't want to tell her until I had the money. Now I can't go to her and acknowledge another failure."

"I'm terribly disappointed," said Clyde. There was a moment's silence; then he went to the telephone and called the hotel office: "Get me a cab at once—Mr. Clyde. I'll be right down."

Turning to the others, he remarked: "I'll see what I can do; but as a promoter, I'm a joke. However, the trip will do me good, and I am hungry for the fray; the smell of battle is in my nostrils, and I am champing at my bit. Woof! Leave it to me." He smote the air with his slender cane, and made for the door with an appearance of fierce determination upon his colorless face. "You'll hear from me in the morning. So long!"

His martial air amused the two, but Boyd soon dismissed him from his mind and spent that evening in such moody silence that, in desperation, Big George forsook him and sought out the manicure parlor. Fraser was busied on some enterprise of his own.

The thought of Alton Clyde's raising twenty−five thousand dollars where he had failed was ridiculous to Emerson. He was utterly astounded when that radiantly attired youth strolled into his room on the following morning and tossed a thick roll of bills upon the table, saying, carelessly:

"There it is; count it."

"What?"

"Twenty−five one−thousand−dollar notes. Anyhow, I think there are twenty− five of them, but I'm not sure. I counted them twice: once I made twenty− four and the next time twenty−six, but I had my gloves on; so I struck

an averages and took the paying teller's word for it."

Emerson leaped to his feet, staring at the dandy as if not comprehending this sudden turn of fortune.

"Did you rustle this money without any help?" he demanded.

"Abso−blooming−lutely!"

"Is it your own?"

"Well, hardly! It is so far from it that I was sorely tempted to spread my wings and soar to foreign parts. It wouldn't have taken much of a nudge to butt me clear over into Canada this morning."

"Where in the world did you get it, Al?"

"What difference does that make? I *got* it, didn't I?" He slapped his trousers leg daintily with his stick. "You can issue the stock in my name."

Boyd seized the little fellow and whirled him around the room, laughing gleefully, lifted in one moment from the pit of despair to the height of optimism.

"Stop it! I'm all rumpled!" gasped Clyde, finally, sinking into a chair "When I get rumpled in the morning I stay rumpled all day. Don't you touch me!"

"Whose money is this? What good angel took pity on us?"

Clyde's faded eyes dropped. "Well, I turned a trick, and to all intents and purposes it is mine. There it is. I didn't steal it, and—you don't have to know *everything,* do you? That is why I got the check cashed."

"I beg your pardon," Boyd apologized; "I didn't mean to pry into your affairs, and it is none of my business, anyhow. I'm glad enough to get the money, no matter where it came from. I'd forgive you if you had stolen it." He began to dress hurriedly. "You are the fairy prince of this enterprise, Alton, and you can go to Kalvik and pick flowers or play the mandolin or do anything you wish. Now for a telegram to the bank at Seattle. We leave to−morrow."

"Oh, here, now! I can't get my wardrobe ready."

"Ward—nothing! You don't need any clothes! You can get all that stuff in Seattle."

"Must have wardrobe," firmly maintained Clyde. "No can do without."

"George and I will be in Seattle for several weeks, so you can come on later."

"No, sir! I'm going to trail my bet with yours. I might change my mind if I hung around here alone. I'll make my tailor work all night to−night; it will do him good. But it upsets me to be hurried; it upsets me worse than being rumpled in the morning."

That was a busy day for Boyd Emerson, but he was too elated to notice fatigue, even while dressing for the Waylands'. He had arranged to come an hour before dinner, that Mildred and he might have a little time to themselves, and his haste to acquaint her with the news of his success brought him to the Lake Shore house ahead of time. She did not keep him waiting, however, and when she appeared, gowned for dinner, he fairly swept her off her feet with his abruptness.

"It's a go, my Lady; I have succeeded."

"I knew it by your smile. I am so glad!"

"Yes. I have all the money I need, and I am off for the Coast to−morrow."

"Oh!" She drew back from him. "To−morrow! Why, you wretch! You seem actually glad of it!"

"I am."

"Confusion! Of all the discourteous lovers—!" She simulated such an expression of injury that his dancing eyes became grave. "My poor heart!"

"Are you sorry?"

"Sorry? Indeed! La, la!" She gave a dainty French shrug of her bare shoulders and tossed her head. "I summon my pride. My spirit is aroused. I rejoice; I laugh; I sing! Sorry? Pooh!" Then she melted with an impulsiveness rare in her, saying, "Tell me all about it, please; tell me everything."

He held her slender hand. "This morning I was bluer than a tatooed man, but to−night I am in the clouds, for I have overcome the greatest obstacle that stands between us. It is only a question of months now until I can come to your father with sufficient means to satisfy him. Of course, there are chances of failure, but I don't admit them. I have such a superabundance of courage now that I can't imagine defeat."

"Do you know," she said, hesitatingly, "you have never told me anything about this plan of yours? You have never takes me into your confidence in the slightest degree."

“I didn't think you would care to know the details, dear. This is so entirely a business matter. It is so sordidly commonplace, and you are so very far removed from sordid things that I didn't think you would care to hear of it. My mind won't associate you with commercialism. I have always burned incense to you; I have always seen you in shaded light and through the smoke of altar fires, so to speak.”

“I realize that I don't appreciate the things that you have done,” said the girl, “but I should like to know more about this new adventure.”

“I warn you, it is not romantic,” he smiled, “although to me anything which brings me closer to you is invested with the very essence of romance.” He told her briefly of his enterprise and the difficulties he had conquered. “It looks like plain sailing now,” he concluded. “I will have to work hard, but that just suits me, for it will occupy the time while I am away from you. There will be no mail or communication with the outside world after we sail, except at long intervals. But I am sure you will feel the messages I shall send you every hour.”

“And so you are going to put fish into little tin cans?” said Mildred.

“Very prosy, isn't it?”

“Of course, you will have men to do it. You won't do that sort of thing yourself?”

“Assuredly not. There will be some hundreds of Chinese.”

“Will you have to catch the fish? Will you pull on a long fish−line? I should think that would be rather nice.”

“No,” he laughed.

“At any rate, you will wear oilskins and a 'sou'wester,' won't you?”

“Yes, just like the pictures you see on bill−boards.”

She meditated for an instant. “Why don't you build a railroad or do something such as father does? He makes a great deal of money out of railroads.”

“He is also a director in the largest packing concern at the Stock Yards,” Boyd reminded her. “This is much the same sort of thing.”

“To be sure! Do you know, he has become greatly interested in your country of late. I have heard him speak of Alaska frequently. In fact, I think that is one reason why he has been so nice to you; he wants to learn all he can about it.”

“Why?”

“Oh, dear, I never know why he does anything.”

“Tell me, does he still legislate in favor of this mysterious suitor whose identity you have never revealed to me?”

“Nonsense!” said the girl. “There is no mysterious suitor, and father does not legislate for or against any one. He isn't that sort.”

“And yet I never seem to meet this stranger.”

“Indeed!” she observed, a trifle indifferently. “It is your own fault. You never go out any more. However, you won't have long to wait. Father telephoned that he is to dine with us.”

“To−night?”

“Yes.”

“But, Mildred, this is our last evening together,” said Emerson, seriously. “Can't we have it alone?”

“I am afraid not. I had nothing to say in the matter. It is some business affair.”

So the fellow was a business associate of the magnate, thought Boyd. “Who is he?”

“He is merely—“ Mildred paused to listen. “Here they are now. Please don't look so tragic, Othello.”

Hearing voices outside the library, the young man asked, hurriedly: “Give me some time alone with you, my Lady. I must leave early.”

“We will come in here while they are smoking,” she said.

There was time for no more, for Wayne Wayland entered, followed by another gentleman, at the first sight of whom Emerson started, while his mind raced off into a dizzy whirl of incredulity. It could not be! It was too grotesque—too ridiculous! What prank of malicious fate was this? He turned his eyes to the door again, to see if by any chance there were a third visitor, but there was not, and he was forced to respond to Mr. Wayland's greeting. The other man had meanwhile stepped directly to Mildred, as if he had eyes for no one else, and was bowing over her hand when her father spoke.

“Mr. Emerson, let me present you to Mr. Marsh. I believe you have never happened to meet here.” Marsh

turned as if reluctant to release the girl's hand, and not until his own was outstretched did he recognize the other. Even then he betrayed his recognition only by a slight lift of the eyebrows and an intensification of his glance.

The two mumbled the customary salutations while their eyes met. At their first encounter Boyd had considered Marsh rather indistinct in type, but with a lover's jealousy he now beheld a rival endowed with many disquieting attributes.

"You two will get along famously," said Mr. Wayland. "Mr. Marsh is acquainted with your country, Boyd."

"Ah!" Marsh exclaimed, quickly. "Are you an Alaskan, Mr. Emerson?"

"Indeed, he is so wedded to the country that he is going back to−morrow," Mildred offered.

Marsh's first look of challenge now changed to one of the liveliest interest, and Boyd imagined the fellow endeavoring to link him, through the affair at the restaurant, with the presence of Big George in Chicago. Although the full significance of the meeting had not struck the young lover yet, upon the heels of his first surprise came the realization that this man was to be not only his rival in love, but the greatest menace to the success of his venture—that venture which meant the world to him.

"Yes," he answered, cautiously, "I am a typical Alaskan—disappointed, but not discouraged."

"What business?"

"Mining!"

"Oh!" indifferently. Marsh addressed himself to Mr. Wayland: "I told you the commercial opportunities in that country were far greater than those in the mining business. All miners have the same story." Sensing the slight in his tone, rather than in his words, Mildred hastened to the defence of her fiance, nearly causing disaster thereby.

"Boyd has something far better than mining now. He was telling me about it as—"

"You interrupted us," interjected Emerson, panic stricken. "I didn't have time to explain the nature of my enterprise."

The girl was about to put in a disclaimer, when he flashed a look at her which she could not help but heed. "I am very stupid about such things," she offered, easily. "I would not have understood it, I am sure." To her father, she continued, leaving what she felt to be dangerous ground: "I didn't look for you so early."

"We finished sooner than I expected," Mr. Wayland answered, "so I drove Willis to his hotel and waited for him to dress. I was afraid he might disappoint us if I let him out of my sight. I couldn't allow that—not to− night of all nights, eh?" The magnate laughed knowingly at Marsh.

"I have never yet disappointed Miss Wayland, and I never shall," the new− comer replied, eying the girl in such a way that Boyd felt a sudden desire to choke him until his smooth, expressionless face matched the color of his evening coat. "I can imagine your daughter's feminine guests staying away, Mr. Wayland, but her masculine friends, never!"

"What rot!" thought Emerson.

"Well, I couldn't take any chances to−night," the father reasserted, "for this is a celebration. I will tell Hawkins to open a bottle of that Private Cuvee, '86."

"What machinations have you precious conspirators been at now?" queried Mildred.

"My dear, I have effected a wonderful deal to−day," said her father. "With the help of Mr. Marsh, I closed the last details of a consolidation which has occupied me for many months."

"Another trust, I suppose."

"Certain people might call it that," chuckled the old man. "Willis was the inspiring genius, and did most of the work; the credit is his."

"Not at all! Not at all!" disclaimed the modest Marsh. "I was but a child in your father's hands, Miss Wayland. He has given me a liberal education in finance."

"It was a beautiful affair, eh?" questioned the magnate.

"Wonderful."

"May I inquire the nature of this merger?" Emerson ventured, amazed at this disclosure of the intimate relations existing between the two.

"Certainly," replied Wayne Wayland. "There is no longer any secret about it, and the papers will be full of the story in the morning. I have combined the packing industries of the Pacific Coast under the name of the North American Packers' Association."

Boyd felt himself growing numb.

“What do you mean by 'packing industries'?” asked Mildred.

“Canneries—salmon fisheries! We own sixty per cent. of the plants of the entire Coast, including Alaska. That's why I've been so keen about that north country, Boyd. You never guessed it, eh?”

“No, sir,” Boyd stammered.

“Well, we control the supply, and we will regulate the market. We will allow only what competition we desire. Oh, it is all in our hands. It was a beautiful transaction, and one of the largest I ever effected.”

Was he dreaming? Boyd wondered. His mouth was dry, but he managed to inquire:

“What about the independent canneries?”

Marsh laughed. “There is no sentiment in business! There are about forty per cent. too many plants to suit us. I believe I am capable of attending to them.”

“Mr. Marsh is the General Manager,” Wayland explained. “With the market in our own hands, and sufficient capital to operate at a loss for a year, or two years, if necessary, I don't think the independent plants will cost us much.”

Emerson found his sweetheart's eyes fixed upon him oddly. She turned to her father and said: “I consider that positively criminal.”

“Tut, tut, my dear! It sounds cruel, of course, but it is business, and it is being done every day; isn't it, Boyd?”

Boyd made no answer, but Marsh hastened to add:

“You see, Miss Wayland, business, in the last analysis, is merely a survival of the fittest; only the strong and merciless can hold their own.”

“Exactly,” confirmed her fatner. “One can't allow sentiment to affect one. It isn't business. But you don't understand such things. Now, if you young people will excuse me, I shall remove the grime of toil, and return like a giant refreshed.” He chuckled to himself and left the room, highly pleased with the events of the day.

CHAPTER XII. IN WHICH MISS WAYLAND IS OF TWO MINDS

That Willis Marsh still retained some curiosity regarding Emerson's presence at the Annex on that night four weeks before, and that the young man's non−committal reply to his inquiry about the new enterprise mentioned by Mildred had not entirely satisfied him, was proved by the remark which he addressed to the girl the moment her father's departure afforded him an opportunity.

“You said Mr. Emerson's new proposition was better than mining, did you not?” He was the embodiment of friendly interest, showing just the proper degree of complaisant expectancy. “I am decidedly curious to know what undertaking is sufficiently momentous to draw a young man away from beauty's side up into such a wilderness, particularly in the dead of winter.”

Miss Wayland's guarded reply gave Emerson a moment in which to collect his thoughts. He was still too much confused by the recent disclosures to adjust himself fully to the situation. The one idea uppermost in his mind was to enlighten Marsh as little as possible; for if this new train of events was really to prove his undoing, as already he half believed, he would at any rate save himself from the humiliation of acknowledging defeat. If, on the other hand, he should decide to go ahead and wage war against the trust as an independent packer, then secrecy for the present was doubly imperative.

Once Marsh gained an inkling that he and Big George were equipping themselves to go back to Kalvik—to Kalvik, Marsh's own stronghold, of all places!—he could and would thwart them without doubt. These thoughts flashed through Boyd's mind with bewildering rapidity, yet he managed to equal the other's show of polite indifference as he remarked:

“I am not far enough along with my plans to discuss them.”

“Perhaps if I knew their nature I might—”

Boyd laughed. “I am afraid a hydraulic proposition would not interest such a hard−headed business man as you.” To himself he added: “Good heavens! I am worse than Fraser with his nebulous schemes!”

“Oh, hydraulic mining? Well, hardly!” the other replied. “I understood Miss Wayland to say that this was something better than a mine.”

“Is a hydraulic a mine?” inquired Mildred; “I thought it was a water−power of some sort!”

“Once a miner always a miner,” the younger man quoted, lightly.

As if with a shadow of doubt, Marsh next inquired:

“Didn't I meet you the other evening at the Annex?”

Boyd admitted the fact, with the air of one who exaggerates his interest in a trifling topic for the sake of conversation. He was beginning to be surprised at his own powers of dissimulation.

“And you were with George Balt?”

“Exactly. I picked him up on my way out from Nome; he was so thoroughly disgusted with Alaska that I helped him get back to the States.”

Marsh's eyes gleamed at this welcome intelligence for certain misgivings had preyed upon him since that night of the encounter. He turned to the girl with the explanation:

“This fellow we speak of is a queer, unbalanced savage who nurses an insane hatred for me. I employed him once, but had to discharge him for incompetence, and he has threatened my life repeatedly. You may imagine the start it gave me to stroll into a cafe, at this distance from Kalvik, and find him seated at a near−by table.”

“How strange!” Miss Wayland observed. “What did he do?”

“Mr. Emerson prevented him from making a scene. Only for his interference I might have been forced to—protect myself.”

In spite of himself Boyd could not but wonder if Marsh were really the sort of man he had been painted; or if, as might appear sufficiently credible, he had been maligned through Cherry's prejudice and George Balt's hatred. To−night he seemed the most kindly and courteous of men.

Under Mildred's skilful direction the conversation had drifted into other channels by the time Mr. Wayland returned. Now, all at once, Boyd beheld the magnate in a new guise. Until to−night he had seen in him nothing

more than a prospective father−in−law, a stubborn, dominant old fellow whose half−contemptuous toleration, unpleasant enough at times, never really amounted to active enmity. Now, however, he recognized in Wayne Wayland a commercial foe, and his knowledge of the man's character gave sufficient assurance that he might expect no mercy or consideration from him one moment after it transpired that their financial interests were in conflict.

So far the two had never seriously clashed, but sooner or later the capitalist must learn the truth; and when he did, when that iron−jawed, iron−willed autocrat once discovered that this youth whom he had taken into his home with so little thought of possible harm had actually dared to oppose him, his indignation would pass all bounds.

And then, for the first time, Emerson realized the impropriety of his own present position. He was here under false pretences; they had bared to him secrets not rightly his, with which he might arm himself. When this, too, became known to the financier, he would regard him not only as a presumptuous enemy, but as a traitor. Boyd knew the old tyrant too well to doubt his course of action; thenceforth there would be war to the hilt.

The enterprise which an hour ago had seemed so certain of success, the enterprise which he had fathered at such cost of labor and suffering, now seemed entirely hopeless. The futility of trying to oppose these men, equipped as they were with limitless means and experience, struck him with such force as to make him almost physically faint and sick. Even had his canning plant been open and running, he knew that they would never take him in; Wayne Wayland's consistent attitude toward him showed that plainly enough. And with nothing more tangible to offer than a half−born dream, they would laugh him to scorn. Furthermore, they had proclaimed their determination to choke all rivalry.

A sort of panic seized Boyd. If his present scheme fell through, what else could he do? Whither could he turn, even for his own livelihood, except back to the hateful isolation of a miner's life? That would mean other years as black as those just ended. There had been a time when he could boldly have taken the bit in his teeth and forced Mr. Wayland to reckon with him, but since his return Mildred herself had withdrawn her consent to a marriage that would mean immediate separation from the life that she loved. That course, therefore, was closed to him. If ever he was to win her, he must play this game of desperate chances to the end.

The announcement of dinner interrupted his dismayed reflections, and he walked out in company with Mr. Wayland, who linked arms with him as if to afford Willis Marsh every advantage, fleeting though it might prove.

“He is a wonderful fellow,” the old gentleman observed, *sotto voce*, indicating Marsh—“one of the keenest business men I ever met.”

“Yes?”

“Indeed, he is. He is a money−maker, too; his associates swear by him. If I were you, my boy, I would study him; he is a good man to imitate.”

At the dinner−table the talk at first was general, and of a character appropriate for the hour, but Miss Wayland, oddly enough, seemed bent upon leading the discussion back into its former course, and displayed such an unusual thirst for information regarding the North American Packers' Association that her father was moved to remark upon it.

“What in the world has come over you, Mildred?” he said. “You never cared to hear about my doings before.”

“Please don't discourage me,” she urged. “I am really in earnest; I should like to know all about this new trust of yours. Perhaps my little universe is growing a bit tiresome to me.”

“Miss Mildred is truly your daughter,” Marsh observed, admiringly. “But I fear the matter doesn't interest Mr. Emerson?”

“Oh, indeed it does,” Mildred smilingly responded. “Doesn't it, Boyd?”

He flushed uncomfortably as he acquiesced.

“Now, please tell me more about it,” the girl went on. “You know you are both full of the thing, and there are only we four here, so let's be natural; I am dreadfully tired of being conventional.”

“Tut, tut!” exclaimed her father. “That comes of association with these untamed Westerners.” Yet he plainly showed that he was flattered by her unexpected enthusiasm and more than ready to humor her.

Both men, in truth, were jubilant, and so thoroughly in tune with the subject which had obsessed them these past months that it took little urging to set them talking in harmony with the girl's wishes. Readily accepting the cue of informality, they grew communicative, and told of the troubles they had encountered in launching the gigantic combination, joking over the obstacles that had threatened to wreck it, and complimenting each other

upon their persistence and sagacity.

Meanwhile, Emerson's discomfort steadily increased. He wondered if this were a deliberate effort on Mildred's part, or if she really had any idea of what bearing it all had upon his plans. The further it went, however, the more clearly he perceived the formidable nature of the new barrier between himself and Mildred which her father had unwittingly raised.

"So far it has been all hard work," Wayne Wayland at length announced, "but in the future I propose to derive some pleasure from this affair. I am tired out. For a long time I have been planning a trip somewhere, and now I think I shall make a tour of inspection in the spring and visit the various holdings of the North American Packers' Association. In that way I can combine recreation and business."

"But you detest travel as much as I do," said Mildred.

"This would be entirely different from ordinary travel. The first vice− president has his yacht on the Pacific Coast, and offers her to the board of directors for a summer's cruise."

"How far will you go?" questioned Boyd.

"Clear up to Mr. Marsh's station."

"Kalvik?"

"Yes; that is the plan," Marsh chimed in. "The scenery is more marvellous than that of Norway, the weather is delightful. Moreover, *The Grande Dame* is the best−equipped yacht on the Pacific, so the board of directors can take their families with them, and enjoy a wonderful outing among the fjords and glaciers beneath the midnight sun. You see, I am selfish in urging it, Miss Wayland. I expect you to join the party."

"I am sure you would like it, Mildred," the magnate added.

Boyd could scarcely believe his ears. Would they come to Kalvik? Would they all assemble there in that unmapped nook? And suppose they should— had he the courage to continue his mad enterprise? It was all so unreal! He was torn between the desire to have Mildred agree, and fear of the influence Marsh might gain during such a trip. But Miss Wayland evidently had an eye to her own comfort, for she replied:

"No, indeed! The one thing I abhor above land travel is a sea voyage; I am a wretched sailor."

"But this trip would be worth while," urged her father. "Why, it will be a regular voyage of discovery; I am as excited over it as a country boy on circus day."

Marsh seconded him with all his powers of persuasion, but the girl, greatly to Emerson's surprise, merely reaffirmed her determination.

"Oh, I dare say I should enjoy the scenery," she observed, with a glance at Boyd; "but, on the other hand, I don't care for rough things, and I prefer hearing about canneries to visiting them. They must be very smelly. Above all, I simply refuse to be seasick." In her eyes was a half−defiant look which Emerson had never seen there before.

"I am sorry," Marsh acknowledged, frankly. "You see, there are no women in our country; and six months without a word or a smile from your gentle sex makes a man ready to hate himself and his fellow−creatures."

"Are there no women in Alaska?" questioned the girl.

"In the mining−camps, yes, but we fishermen live lonely lives."

"But the coy, shrinking Indian maidens? I have read about them."

"They are terrible affairs," Marsh declared. "They are flat of nose, their lips are pierced, and they are very—well, dirty."

"Not always!" Boyd gave voice to his general annoyance and growing dislike for Marsh in an abrupt denial, "I have seen some very attractive squaws, particularly breeds."

"Where?" demanded the other, sceptically.

"Well, at Kalvik, for instance,"

"Kalvik!" ejaculated Marsh.

"Yes; your home. You must know Chakawana, the girl they call 'The Snowbird'?"

"No."

"Come, come! She knows you very well."

"Ah, a mystery! He is concealing something!" cried Miss Wayland.

Marsh directed a sharp glance at Boyd before answering. "I presume you refer to Constantine's sister; I was speaking generally—of course, there are exceptions. As a matter of fact, I wasn't exactly right when I said we had

no white women whatever at Kalvik. Mr. Emerson doubtless has met Cherry Malotte?"

"I have," acknowledged Boyd. "She was very kind to us."

"More damning disclosures," chuckled Mr. Wayland. "Pray, who is she?"

"I should like very much to know," Emerson answered.

"Oh, delightful!" exclaimed Mildred. "First, a beautiful Indian girl; now, a mysterious white woman! Why, Kalvik is decidedly interesting."

"There is nothing mysterious about the white woman," said Marsh. "She is quite typical—just a plain mining camp hanger−on who drifted down our way."

"Not at all," Boyd disclaimed, angrily. "Miss Malotte is a fine woman;" then, at Marsh's short laugh, "and her conduct bears favorable comparison with that of the other white people at Kalvik."

Marsh allowed his eyes to waver at this, but to Mildred he apologized. "She is not the sort one cares to discuss."

"How do you know?" demanded Cherry's champion. "Do you know anything against her character?"

"I know she is a disturbing element at Kalviks and has caused us a great deal of trouble."

It was Boyd's turn to laugh. "But surely that has nothing to do with her character."

"My dear fellow"—Marsh shrugged his shoulders apologetically—"if I had dreamed she was a friend of yours, I never would have spoken."

"She is a friend," Emerson persisted doggedly, "and I admire her because she is a girl of spirit. If she had not been possessed of enough courage to disregard your instructions, I might have been forced to eject your watchman and take possession of one of your canneries."

"We can't entertain all comers. We leave that to Miss Malotte."

"And George Balt, eh?"

"Dear! dear!" laughed Miss Wayland. "I feel as if I were at a meeting of the Woman's Guild."

"In our business we must adhere to a definite policy," Marsh explained to the others. "Sometimes we are misjudged by travellers who consider us heartless, but we can't take care of every one."

"Not even your sick natives. Well, but for Miss Malotte some of your fishermen would have starved this winter, and you might have been short− handed next year."

"We give them work. Why should we support them?"

"I don't know of any legal reason, and ethics don't count for much up there. Nevertheless, Cherry Malotte has seen to it that the children, at least, haven't suffered. She saved a little brother of this Constantine you mention."

"Constantine has no brother," Marsh answered. "I happen to know, because he worked for me."

"This was a little red−headed youngster."

"Ah!" Marsh's ejaculation was sharp. "What was the matter with it?"

"Measles."

"Did it get well?"

"It was getting along all right when I left."

The other fell silent, while Miss Wayland inquired, curiously: "What is this mysterious woman like?"

"She is young, refined—thoroughly nice in every way."

"Good−looking also, I dare say?"

"Very."

She was about to pursue her inquiries further, but the dinner was finished and Mr. Wayland had asked for his favorite cigars, so she rose and Boyd accompanied her, leaving the others to smoke. But, strangely enough, Marsh remained in such a state of preoccupation, even after their departure, that Mr. Wayland's attempts at conversation elicited only the vaguest and shortest of answers.

In the music−room Mildred turned upon Boyd. "Why didn't you tell me about this woman before?"

"I didn't think of her."

"And yet she is young, beautiful, refined, lives a romantic sort of existence, and entertained you—" She tossed her head.

"Are you jealous?" he inquired, with a smile.

"Of such a person? Certainly not."

"I wish you were," he confessed, truthfully. "If you would only get really jealous, I should be delighted. I

should begin to feel a little sure of you."

She seated herself at the piano and struck a few idle notes, inquiring, casually: "Kalvik is the name of the place where you are going, isn't it?"

"It is."

"I suppose you will see a great deal of this—Cherry Malotte?"

"Undoubtedly, inasmuch as we are partners."

"Partners!" Mildred ceased playing and swung about. "What do you mean?"

"She is interested in this enterprise; the cannery site is hers."

"I see!" After a moment, "Does this new affair of father's have any particular effect on your plans?"

"Yes and no," he answered, feeling again the weight of this last complication, forgotten for the moment.

"What do you wish me to do?"

"Nothing; only for the present please don't mention my scheme either to him or to Mr. Marsh. I am a bit uncertain as to my course. You see, it means so much to me that I can't bear to give it up, and yet it may lead to great—unpleasantness."

She nodded, comprehendingly.

The others joined them, and Boyd made his adieus; but in leaving he bore with him a weight of doubt and uneasiness in strange contrast with the buoyancy he had felt upon his arrival.

Willis Marsh, on the contrary, lost no time in emerging from his taciturn mood upon Boyd's departure, and seemed filled with even more than his accustomed optimism. Whatever had been the cause of his transitory depression, he could not fail to reflect that his fortunes had been singularly fair of late; and now that the other man was out of the way, Miss Wayland, for the first time in his acquaintance, began to display a lively interest in his affairs, which made his satisfaction complete. She questioned him closely regarding his work and habits in the North, letting down her reserve to such an unparalleled extent that when Mr. Wayland at last excused himself and retired to the library, Marsh felt that the psychological moment had arrived.

[Illustration: MILDRED CEASED PLAYING AND SWUNG ABOUT—"WHAT DO YOU MEAN?"]

"This has been a day of triumphs for me," he stated, "and I am anxious to crown it with even a greater good−fortune."

"Don't be greedy," the girl cautioned.

"That is man's nature."

She laughed lightly. "Having used my poor, yielding parent for your own needs, you now wish to employ his innocent child in the same manner. Is there no limit to your ambition?"

"There is, and I can reach it with your help."

"Please don't count on me; I am the most disappointing of creatures."

But he disregarded her words. "I hope not; at any rate, I must know."

"I warn you," she said.

"Nevertheless, I insist; and yet—I don't quite know how to begin. It isn't a new story to you perhaps—what I am trying to say—but it is to me, I can assure you—and it means everything to me. I don't even have to tell you what it is—you must have seen it in my eyes. I—I have never cared much for women—I am a man's man, but—"

"Please don't," she interrupted, quietly. But he continued, unheeding:

"You must know that I love you. Every man must love you, but no man could love you more than I do. I—I could make a lot of romantic avowals, Miss— Mildred, but I am not an adept at such things. You can make me very happy if—"

"I am sorry—"

"I know. What I have said is trite, but my whole heart is in it. Your father approves, I am quite sure, and so it all rests with you."

For the first time the girl realized the deadly earnestness of the man and felt the unusual force of his personality, which made it seem no light matter to refuse him. He took his disappointment quietly, however, and raised himself immensely in her estimation by his graceful acceptance of the inevitable.

"It is pretty hard on a fellow," he smiled, "but please don't let it make any difference in our relations. I hope to remain a welcome visitor and to see as much of you as before."

"More, if you wish."

“I begin to understand that Mr. Emerson is a lucky chap.” He still smiled.

She ignored his meaning, and replied: “Boyd and I have been the closest of friends for many years.”

“So I have been told,” and he smiled at her again, in the same manner. Somehow the smile annoyed her—it seemed to savor of self−confidence. When he bade her good−bye an hour later he was still smiling.

Mr. Wayland was busy over some rare first edition, recently received from his English collector, when she sought him out in the library. He looked up to inquire:

“Has Willis gone?”

“Yes. He sent you his adieus by me.” A moment later she added: “He asked me to marry him.”

“Of course,” nodded the magnate, “they all do that. What did you say?”

“What I always say.”

“H'm!” He tapped his eyeglasses meditatively upon the bridge of his high− arched nose. “You might do worse. He suits me.”

“I have no doubt he could hold the millions together. In fact, he is the first one I have seen of whose ability in that line I am quite certain. However—“ She made a slight gesture of dismissal.

“I hope you didn't offend him?”

She raised her brows.

“Forgive me. I might have known—“ He stared at the page before him for a moment. “You have a certain finality about you that is almost masculine. They never return to the charge—”

“Oh yes,” she demurred. “There is Alton Clyde, for instance—”

Mr. Wayland dismissed Clyde with an inarticulate grunt of contempt which measured that young man's claim to consideration more comprehensively than could a wealth of words.

“I would think it over if I were you,” he advised. Then he pondered. “If you would only change your mind, occasionally, like other girls—”

“I have changed my mind to−night—since Mr. Marsh left.”

“Good!” he declared, heartily.

“Yes. I have decided to go to Kalvik with you.”

On that very night, in a little, snow−smothered cabin crouching close against the Kalvik bluffs, another girl was seated at a piano. Her slim, white fingers had strayed upon the notes of a song which Boyd Emerson had sung. In her dream−filled eyes was the picture of a rough−garbed, silent man at her shoulder, and in her ears was the sound of his voice. Clear to the last melting note she played the air, and then a pitiful sob shook her. She bowed her golden head and hid her face in her arms, for a memory was upon her, a forgotten kiss was hot upon her lips, and she was very lonely.

CHAPTER XIII. IN WHICH CHERRY MALOTTE BECOMES SUSPICIOUS

At the hotel Emerson found Clyde and Fraser in Balt's room awaiting him. They were noisy and excited at the success of the enterprise and at the prospect of immediate action.

Quoth “Fingerless” Fraser: “It has certainly lifted a load off my mind to put this deal through.”

Emerson was forced to smile. “Now that you have succeeded,” said he, “what next?”

“Back to the Coast. This town is a bum.”

“Are you going west with us?”

“Sure! Why not? This game ain't opened yet.”

“How long are we to be favored with your assistance?”

“Hard telling. I want to see you get off on the right foot; I'd feel bad if you fell down.”

“Well, of all—”

“Let him rave,” advised George. “He can't sell us nothing.”

“I did *my* share, anyhow,” Alton Clyde declared, curling up comfortably in his chair, with a smile of such beatitude that Fraser cried:

“Now purr! Nice kitty! Seems like I can see a canary feather sticking to your mustache.”

“It is my debut in business,” Clyde explained. “It's my commercial coming− out party. I never did anything useful before in my whole life, so, naturally, I'm all swelled up.”

“It ain't necessary for me to itemize *my* statement,” Fraser observed. “A moment's consecutive thought will show anybody who's capable of bearing the strain of that much brain effort where I came in.” Gazing upon them with prophetic eye, he announced: “And mark what I say, gents: I'll be even a bigger help to you before you get through. You do the rough work; I'll be there with the bottle of oil and the hand−polish. Yes, sir! When the time comes I'll go down in the little bag of tricks and dig up anything you need, from a jig dance to a jimmy and a bottle of soup.”

“I know what you call 'soup'!” exclaimed Alton, with lively interest. “Did you ever crack a safe? By Jove, that's immense!”

“I've worked in banks, considerable,” “Fingerless” Fraser admitted, with admirable caution. “What I mean to say is, I'm a general handy man, and I may be useful, so you better let me stick around.”

Boyd told them little of the news that had startled him earlier in the evening, beyond the bare fact that Marsh had floated a packers' trust, and that secrecy, for the present, was now doubly necessary to the success of their undertaking. The full significance of the merger, therefore, did not strike his associates, even when, on the train, the next day, they read the announcement of its formation in the newspapers. Balt alone took notice of it, and fell into a furious rage at his enemy's success.

Alton Clyde, on the other hand, was more than ever elated over his share in a conspiracy threatened by so formidable a foe; and when Emerson constituted him a sort of secretary, with duties mainly of sending and receiving telegrams, his delight was beyond measure. He grew, in fact, insufferably conceited, and his overweening sense of his own importance became a severe trial to Fraser, who was roused to his most elaborate efforts of sarcasm. The adventurer wasted hours in a search for fitting similes by which to measure the clubman's general and comprehensive ineptitude, all of which rebounded from his victim's armor of complacency.

No sooner were they fairly under way for the West than Emerson began the definite shaping of his plans. He and George carefully went over the many details of their coming work and sent many messages, with the result that outfitters in a dozen lines were awaiting them when they arrived in Seattle. Without loss of time Boyd installed himself and his friends at a hotel, secured a competent and close−mouthed stenographer, and then sought out the banker with whom he had made a tentative agreement before going to Chicago. Mr. Hilliard greeted him cordially.

“I see you have carried out your part of the programme,” said he; “but before we definitely commit ourselves, we should like to know what effect this new trust is going to have on the canning business.”

“You mean the N. A. P. A.?”

"Precisely. Our Chicago correspondent can't tell us any more than we have learned from the press—namely, that a combination has been formed. We are naturally somewhat cautious about financing a competitive plant until we know what policy the trust will pursue."

Here was exactly the complication Boyd had feared; therefore, it was with some trepidation that he argued:

"The trust is in business for the money, and its very formation ought to be conclusive evidence of your good judgment. However, you have backed so many plants such as mine that you know, as well as I do, the big profits to be taken."

"That isn't the point. Ordinarily we would not waver an instant, but the Wayland−Marsh outfit is apt to upset conditions. If we only knew—"

"I know!" boldly declared Boyd. "Mr. Wayland outlined his policy to me before the public knew anything about the trust."

"Indeed? Are you acquainted with Wayne Wayland?" asked Mr. Hilliard, with a new light of curiosity in his eyes.

"I know him well."

"Ah! I congratulate you. Perhaps this is—er, Wayland money behind you?"

"That I am not at liberty to discuss," the younger man replied, evasively. "However, just to make your loan absolutely sure, I have taken steps to sell my season's output in advance. The commission men will be in town shortly, and I shall contract for the entire catch at a stipulated price. Is that satisfactory?"

"Entirely so," declared Mr. Hilliard, heartily. "Go ahead and order your machinery and supplies." As Boyd rose to go, he added, "By the way, what do you know about the mineral possibilities of the region back of Kalvik?"

"Not much; the country is new. There is a—woman at Kalvik who has some men out prospecting."

"Cherry Malotte?"

"Do you know her?" asked Boyd, with astonishment.

"Very well, indeed. I have had some correspondence with her quite recently." Then, noting Boyd's evident curiosity, he went on: "You see, I have made a number of mining investments in the North—entirely on my own account," he hastened to explain. "Of course, the bank could not do such a thing. My operations have turned out so well that I keep several men just to follow new strikes."

"Has Miss Malotte made a strike?"

"Not exactly, but she has uncovered some promising copper prospects."

"H'm! That is news to me. It is rather a small country, after all, isn't it?" He would have liked to ask the banker certain further questions, but resisted the temptation, and shortly after plunged into his work so vigorously that the subject faded wholly from his mind.

Now it was that George Balt made his importance felt. In the days which followed he and Boyd toiled early and late, for a thousand things needed doing at once. Promptness was, above all things, the essence of this enterprise, and the lumber merchants, coal dealers, machinery salesmen, and ship chandlers with whom they dealt vowed they never had met men who reached their decisions so quickly and labored not only with such consuming haste, but with such unerring certainty. There was no haggling over prices, no loss of time in seeking competitive bids; and because George always knew precisely what he wanted, their task of selection became comparatively easy. With every detail of the business he was familiar, from long experience. There was no piece of machinery that he did not know better than its makers. There was never any hesitancy as between rival types or loading down with superfluous gear. His main concern was for dates of delivery.

Three weeks passed quickly in strenuous effort, and then one morning the partners awoke to the realization that there was little more for them to do. Orders were in, shipments had started. They had well−nigh completed the charter of a ship, and a sailing date had been set. There were numerous details yet to be arranged, but the enterprise was in motion, and what remained was simple. Despite their desperate hurry they had made no mistakes, and for this the credit lay largely with Big George.

Through it all Clyde had lent them enthusiastic if feeble assistance; and now that the strain was off, he gave fitting expression to his delight by getting drunk. Being temperamental to a degree, he craved company; and, knowing full well the opposition he would encounter from his friends, he annexed a bibulous following of loafers whose time hung heavy and who were at all times eager to applaud a loose tongue so long as it was accompanied

by a loose purse. Toward midnight “Fingerless” Fraser, cruising in a nocturnal search for adventure and profit, found him in a semi−maudlin state, descanting vaporously to his train; and, upon catching mention of the Kalvik fisheries, snatched him homeward and put him to bed, after which he locked him into his room, threw the key over the transom, and stood guard outside until assured that he slept.

At an early hour the adventurer was peremptorily roused, to find Emerson hammering at his door in a fine fury.

“What is this?” demanded Boyd, through white lips, thrusting a morning paper before Fraser's sleepy eyes.

“It's a newspaper,” yawned the other—“a regular newspaper.”

“Where did this story come from?” With menacing finger Boyd indicated a front column, headed:

NEW ENEMY OF THE SALMON TRUST!
FIRST GUN FIRED IN BATTLE FOR FISHERIES!
N. A. P. A. PROMISED BITTER FIGHT FOR SUPREMACY OF
ALASKAN WATERS!

“I don't know.”

“You don't know?”

“No; I never read anything but the 'Past Performances' and the funny page. What does it say?”

“It is the whole story of our enterprise, but ridiculously garbled and exaggerated. It says I have headed a new canning company to buck the trust. It tells about George's feud with Marsh, and says we have both been secretly preparing to down him. Good Lord! It's liable to queer us with the bank and upset the whole deal.”

“I didn't give it out.”

“It is all done in your particularly picturesque style,” declared Emerson, angrily. “Alton swears he knows nothing about it, so you must have done it. It is too nearly correct to have come from a stranger.”

“Well?” inquired Fraser, quietly.

“The harm is done, but I want to know who is to blame.” When the other made no answer except to stare at him curiously, he flamed up, “Why don't you confess?”

For the first time during their acquaintance, “Fingerless” Fraser seemed at a loss for words; but whether for shame or some other motive, his companion was unable to tell. His nature was so warped that his emotions expressed themselves in ways not always easy to follow, and now he merely remarked, with apparent sullenness:

“I'm certainly a hot favorite with you.” He clambered stiffly back into bed and turned his defiant face to the wall, nor would he meet his accuser's eyes or open his lips, even when Boyd flung out of the room, convinced that he was the culprit.

All that day Emerson waited fearfully for some word from Hilliard, but night came without it; and when several days in succession had passed without a sign from the banker, he breathed more easily. He had already begun to assure himself that, after all, the exposure would have no effect, when one evening the call he dreaded came. A telephone message summoned him to the bank at eleven o'clock the following morning.

“That means trouble,” he grimly told George.

“Maybe not,” the big fisherman replied. “If Hilliard took any stock in the story, it seems like he'd have jumped you the next day.”

“Our machinery is ordered. You realize what it will mean if he backs water now?”

“Sure! We'll have to go to some other bank.”

“Humph! I'll wring Fraser's neck,” muttered Emerson. “We have troubles enough without any new ones.”

It was with no little anxiety that he asked for the banker at the appointed hour, and was shown into an anteroom, with the announcement:

“Mr. Hilliard is busy; he wishes you to wait.”

Inside the glass partition Boyd heard a woman's voice and Hilliard's laughter. He took some comfort in the thought that the banker was in a good−humor, at least; but, being too nervous to sit still, he stood at the window, gazing with vacant eyes at the busy street crowds. Facing him, across the way, was a bulletin−board in front of a newspaper office; and, after a time, he noted idly among its various items of information the announcement that the mail steamer *Queen* had arrived at midnight from Skagway. He wondered why Cherry had not written. Surely she must be anxious to know his progress. He should have advised her of his whereabouts.

The door to Hilliard's office opened, and he heard the rustle of a woman's dress; then his own name

spoken—“Come in, Mr. Emerson.”

His attention centred on the approaching interview, he did not glance toward the departing visitor until she stopped suddenly at the outer door, and came straight toward him with outstretched hands.

“Boyd!”

He checked himself, and turned to face Cherry Malotte.

“Why, Cherry,” he ejaculated, “what in the world—“ He took her two hands in his, and she laughed up into his face. “In the name of Heaven, where did you come from?”

“I arrived last night on the *Queen*,” she said. “Oh, I'm glad to see you!”

“But what brings you to the States? I thought you were in Kal—”

“Sh−h!” She laid a finger on her lips, with a glance over her shoulder at the door to the inner office. “I'll tell you about it later.”

“Mr. Hilliard will see you now, sir,” the attendant announced to Emerson.

“I must talk to you right away!” Boyd exclaimed, hurriedly. “I won't be long. Can you wait?”

“Certainly; I'll wait right here. Only hurry, hurry!”

The pleasure of seeing her was so genuine that he squeezed her hands heartily, and entered Hilliard's sanctum with a smile on his lips. It was gone, however, when he reappeared a half−hour later, and in its place an expression which caused her to inquire, quickly, “What is the matter? Is something wrong?”

He nodded, but it was not until they had reached the outer office that he said: “Yes, something is decidedly wrong.” Then, in answer to her further question: “Wait a while; I'm too angry to talk. I'll have to tell you all about it before you'll understand.” He began to mutter harshly under his breath: “Come along. We'll have lunch, and I'll explain. First, however, tell me why you came out at this season.”

“I have a big mining deal on with Mr. Hilliard. He sent for me, and I came. Oh, I hardly know where to begin! But you remember when you were in Kalvik I told you that I had several men out prospecting?”

“Yes.”

“Well, last summer, long before you came through, one of them located a ledge of copper.”

“You never told me.”

“There wasn't anything to tell at that time—I hadn't received any assay reports, and I didn't know whether the thing was worth telling; but shortly after you left the returns came in, and they showed remarkable values. Now here is the wonderful part of the story. Unknown to me, my man had sent out other samples and a letter to a friend of his here in Seattle. That man had assays made on his own account, and came to Mr. Hilliard with the result. The very next boat brought him and Hilliard's expert to Katmai. They came over with the mail−carrier. We had opened up the ore body somewhat in the mean time, and it didn't take those men long to see what we had. They were back at my place in no time with a proposition. When I refused to tie up the ground, they made me come out with them—foxy Mr. Halliard had foreseen what would happen, and instructed them to bring me to him if they had to kidnap me. Well, I was a willing victim, and here I am, prepared to deal with Mr. Banker, provided we can reach an agreement. What do you think of me as a business woman?”

Boyd smiled at her enthusiasm. “I think you are fine in every way, and I hope you take all of his money away from him. I can't get any.”

“It will take a lot of capital and time to develop the mine, and I am fighting now for control—he is a tight−fisted old fellow.”

“I should say he is,” remarked Emerson. “He has just thrown a bomb into our camp that makes my teeth rattle. He promised to back me for one hundred thousand dollars, and this morning went back on his word and lay down, absolutely.”

“Begin at the beginning, and tell me everything,” commanded the girl. “I'm dying to know what you have been doing. Now, right from the start, mind you.”

They had reached Emerson's hotel, and, escorting her to the luncheon−room, he proceeded to trace his progress from the day he had bade her farewell in the snows of Kalvik. They had finished their meal before his narrative came to a close.

“To−day Hilliard called me in and coolly informed me that his bank could not make the loan he had promised me, notwithstanding the fact that I had relied on his assurances and ordered my supplies, which are now being shipped.”

"Did he offer any reason for his withdrawal?"

"Oh, I dare say he gave a reason, but he beclouded it with so many words that it was merely a fog by the time he got through. All I could distinguish in the general obscurity was that he would not produce. He said something about the bank being overloaded and the board refusing its consent. It's remarkable what a barricade a banker can build out of one board."

"And yet, as I understand it, you have sold your output in advance, at a fixed price."

"Correct."

"It is very strange! The bank would be perfectly safe."

"He merely bulkheaded himself in with a lot of smooth language, and when I tried to argue myself over I just slid off. The moment I stepped into his office I felt the temperature drop. Something new has come up; what it is, I don't know. Anyhow, he froze me out."

"We must raise that money somewhere or we are ruined," Cherry observed, with decision.

"Well, rather!" Boyd agreed, with a desperate grimace.

The girl laughed. "Mr. Hilliard and I merely tried each other's mettle this morning. I am to return at four."

"Let's meet later and dress each other's wounds," he suggested. Cherry's presence had heartened him wonderfully, and the sight of her brightly animated face across the table inspired him with a kind of joyous courage, the like of which he had scarcely felt since their former meeting. In her company his worries had almost disappeared, laughter had become a living thing, and youth a blessing.

"I'll agree to anything," she answered; then, becoming suddenly earnest, she spoke with shining eyes: "Mr. Hilliard is going to open up this copper, and it is going to make me rich—rich! I can't tell you what that means to me—you wouldn't understand. I can leave that whole North Country behind me, and all that it signifies. I can be what I want to be—what I really am."

Boyd saw the great yearning in her eyes, saw that she was fairly breathless with the intensity of her hope. He reached forth and, taking her tightly clasped hands in his, said, simply:

"If I can help you in any way it will be my greatest pleasure." Her glance dropped before his straight gaze, and she answered:

"You are a good man. I am glad to have you for a friend. But you will pardon my selfishness, won't you? I didn't mean to put forward my own affairs when yours are going so badly."

"They went very well," he declared, "until I tried to climb this— glacier."

"Did that newspaper story frighten Mr. Hilliard?"

"I couldn't make out whether it did or not."

"Let's see! It was nearly a week ago that it appeared."

"Five days, to be exact."

"It takes three days to come from Chicago, doesn't it?"

"What has that to do with it?"

"Hasn't it struck you as strange that Hilliard should wait until you had sewed yourself up in a web of contracts and obligations before advising you of the bad news?"

"If you mean that this is the doing of that Chicago outfit, why did they wait so long? If the Associated Press sent that item to Chicago, or if they were advised from here, why didn't they wire back? It all could have been effected by telegraph in no time."

"It wouldn't be possible to do such a thing by wire or by mail, and, besides, Willis Marsh doesn't work that way. If that despatch was printed in Chicago, and if he saw it, I predict trouble for you in raising one hundred thousand dollars in Seattle."

"You are not a bit reassuring. However, I shall soon determine." He arose. "I'll call for you at seven, and I'll wager right now that your fears are groundless. Prepare to see me return with a ring through the nose of our giant."

"At seven, sharp!" she agreed. "Meanwhile I shall delight myself with a shopping expedition. I'm a perfect sight."

At seven she descended from her room in answer to his call, to find him pacing the hotel parlor, his jaw set stubbornly.

"What luck?" she demanded.

“You spoke with the tongue of a prophet. Money has suddenly become very scarce in Seattle.”

“How many banks did you try?”

“Three. I shall try the rest to−morrow. How did you fare?”

“First blood is mine. I feel that I shall capture Mr. Hilliard. Now, no more business, do you understand? No, you are not to mention the subject again. You need a rest. Do you know that your face is haggard and drawn? You are tired out.”

After a moment's pause, he acknowledged: “I believe I am. I—I am very glad you have come, Cherry.”

CHAPTER XIV. IN WHICH THEY RECOGNIZE THE ENEMY

Boyd Emerson slept well that night, notwithstanding the disturbing occurrences of the day, for during the evening Cherry had tactfully diverted him from all mention of business, trusts, or canneries, much as a good physical director, on the eve of a contest, relieves the grinding monotony of an athlete's training. The brain, after all, is but flesh and blood, and, like the muscles, requires rest; an unbroken intensity of contemplation tends inevitably to weariness and pessimism.

They had dined gayly, tete−a−tete, while care fled before the girl's exuberant spirits. Contentment had deepened in the companionable enjoyment of a play, and later a little supper−party, at which Big George and Alton Clyde were present, had completed Boyd's mental refreshment, to Cherry's satisfaction.

True, it had required all her skill to prevent the big fisherman from holding forth upon the issue uppermost in his mind; but his loyalty to her was doglike, and once he found that his pet topic was tabooed, he lapsed into a good−natured contemplation of his finger−nails, which he polished industriously with his napkin.

The girl had further demonstrated her power over all sorts and conditions of men by reducing the blase young club−man to a state of grinning admiration, “Fingerless” Fraser alone had been missing from the coterie. He had discovered them from a distance, to be sure, and come over to exchange greetings with Cherry, but the disastrous result of the fellow's garrulity was still so fresh in Boyd's mind that he could not invite him to join them, and Fraser, with singular modesty, had quickly withdrawn, to wander lonesomely for a while, till sheer ennui drove him to bed. His dejection awakened little sympathy in Boyd, who felt happier for the removal of his irritating presence.

In the morning Boyd was brought sharply back to a realization of his difficult position by a letter from Mildred Wayland.

“Father and I had another scene over you,” wrote Mildred. “It was the first quarrel we ever had, and I'm half sick as a result. I simply can't bear that sort of thing, and we have agreed to drop the subject. What roused him to such a sudden fury I'm sure I don't know.”

Boyd knew, however, and the knowledge did not add to his comfort.

It seemed, indeed, as if the Trust's enmity had marked him in the eyes of the whole financial world; he was again denied assistance at the banks, and this time in a manner to show him the futility of argument or further effort. The reasons given were as final as they were vague, and night found the young promoter half dazed and desperately frightened at the completeness of the disaster which had overwhelmed him in the brief space of thirty−six hours. He could not blind himself to the situation. Those Chicago men who had backed him were personal friends, and they had risked their hard−earned dollars purely upon the strength of his vivid assurances. He had prevailed upon them to invest more than they could afford, and while ultimate failure might be forgiven, it savored less of indiscretion than of criminal culpability to be left at the very outset of the enterprise with a shipload of useless machinery upon the docks at Seattle. Ruin was close upon him.

In his perplexity he turned naturally to Cherry, who listened to his tale of repeated failure with furrowed brows, pondering the matter as seriously as if the responsibility had been her own.

“The battle has begun sooner than I expected,” she said, at length. “I never dreamed they could fix the banks so quickly.”

“Somehow, I can't believe this is the work of the Trust people; I don't see how they could accomplish so much in so short a time. Why, it came like a thunderclap.”

“I hope I am wrong,” she answered, “but something unexpected must have happened to change Mr. Hilliard's attitude. What could it be except pressure from higher sources?”

“Has he dropped any hint before you?”

“Not a hint. He wouldn't let go of anything. Why, he is too close−fisted to drop his r's.”

“So I am told. He belongs to that anomalous class who are as rigid in business methods as they are loose in private morals.”

“Indeed!” Cherry seemed curious.

“But inasmuch as his extravagance begins at 10 P.M. and ends at 10 A.M., it doesn't seem to affect his social standing. However, we needn't discuss his personal character; there's enough to think of without that. Will you take dinner with me this evening, so that we can talk over any further developments?”

“I am to dine with Mr. Hilliard,” said the girl.

“Oh!” Boyd's tone of disappointment seemed disproportionate to the occasion. He endeavored to disguise his feeling by saying, lightly: “You are breaking into exclusive circles. He lives in quite a palace, I'm told.”

“I—I'm not dining at his home.” Cherry hesitated, and Boyd flashed a sharp glance at her. A faint color flushed her cheeks, as she explained: “He could not see me at the office to−day, so he arranged for me to take dinner with him.”

“I see.” Boyd detected a note hitherto strange in his own voice. “I am going to try the Tacoma banks to−morrow. Would you like to run over with me in the morning. The Sound trip is beautiful.”

“I would love to,” she exclaimed. “I may have something to report if I can make Mr. Hilliard talk.”

“Out of curiosity, I should like to know what influenced him.” All women were more or less suspicious, he reflected, and some of them were highly intuitive; still, he could not believe that this was all Willis Marsh's doing. As he mused he idly thumbed the pages of a magazine. He was about to lay it down when his eye caught a well−known face, and he started, then glanced at the date of issue. It was a duplicate of that copy which had affected him so deeply in Cherry's house at Kalvik. He lifted his eyes to find her scrutinizing him.

“No, you can't cut out that page,” she said, with a slightly embarrassed laugh.

“Where did you run across this?”

“I didn't run across it” she admitted; “I scoured the book−stalls for it all the morning. Curiosity is a feminine trait, you know.”

“I don't quite understand.”

“That missing page has caused me insomnia for months. But now I'm as puzzled as ever, for there are two pictures, one on either side of the leaf, and each has possibilities. Which is it—the society bud or the prima donna?”

“I don't know what you mean,” he answered, somewhat stiffly. His love for Mildred Wayland had always been so sacred and inviolable a thing that even Cherry's frank inquisitiveness seemed an intrusion.

“I'll call for you in time for the nine−o'clock boat,” he added, as he arose to go. “Meanwhile, if you get a hint from Hilliard, it may be useful.”

Left to his own devices, Boyd spent the evening in gloomy solitude, vainly seeking for some way out of his difficulties. But, despite his preoccupation with his own affairs, a vague feeling of resentment at the thought of Cherry and Hilliard kept forcing itself upon his mind. Perhaps the girl's indiscretion was of no very serious nature; yet he found it hard to excuse even a small breach of propriety upon her part. Surely, she must understand the imprudence of dining alone with the banker. His attentions to her could have but one interpretation. And she was too nice a girl to compromise herself in the slightest degree. Although he told himself that a business reason had prompted her, and reflected that the business methods of women are baffling to the mind of mere man, his reasoning quite failed to reconcile him to the situation. In the end he had to acknowledge that he did not like the look of it in the least.

But in the morning he found it impossible to maintain a critical attitude in Cherry's presence. She had finished her breakfast when he called, and was awaiting him, clad in a brown velvet suit which set off her trim figure with all the effectiveness of skilful tailoring. Brown boots and gloves to match, with a dainty turban in which lay the golden gleam of a pheasant's plumage, completed the picture. She was as perfect to the eye as the morning itself.

“Well, did Hilliard expose the hidden mysteries of the banking system?” he questioned, as they walked down toward the water front.

“He did. It is no mystery at all now.”

“Then it was that newspaper story that frightened him.”

“Indirectly, perhaps. He didn't mention it.”

“What did he say?”

“Nothing.”

“Nothing! Then how—?",

“He informed me that you are in love with the society girl and not with the actress. He said you are engaged to

marry Miss Wayland."

"Yes. But what did he say about the loan?"

"Only what I have told you. The rest is easy. Had you been less secretive, I would have known instantly whom to blame for this trouble. Wayne Wayland and Willis Marsh are working double, and inasmuch as you are *persona non grata—"*

"Who told you I am *persona non grata?"*

"You told me yourself without intending to. Please give me credit for some shrewdness. If you had been a welcome suitor, you would have had no difficulty in raising twice two hundred thousand dollars in Chicago. Then, too, I remember the story you told me at Kalvik, your mental attitude— many things, in fact. Oh, it was very simple."

"Well, what of it? What has all that got to do with my present difficulty?"

"Listen! You want to marry the daughter of the greatest trust−builder in the country, and he doesn't want you for a son−in−law. You undertake an enterprise which seriously threatens his financial interests, and if successful in that, you could defy his opposition in the other matter. Now all goes well until he learns of your plans, then he strikes with his own weapons. A word here and there, a hint to the banks, and your fine castle comes tumbling down about your ears. I thought you had more perception."

The girl's voice was sharp, and she wore that expression of unyouthful weariness that Boyd had noted before. He could not help wondering what bitter experience had taught her disillusion, what strange environment had edged her wits with worldly wisdom.

"We haven't figured Marsh in at all," he said, tentatively.

"He figures, nevertheless, as I intend to show you to−day. To begin with, please notice that unobtrusive man in the gray suit—not now! Don't look around for a minute. You will see him on the opposite side of the street."

Boyd turned, to observe a rat−faced fellow across the way, evidently bound for the Tacoma boat.

"Is he following us?"

"I see him, everywhere I go."

Boyd's face clouded angrily, at which Cherry exclaimed: "Now, for Heaven's sake, don't mimic Big George, or we'll never learn anything!"

"I won't stand for a spy!" he growled.

"And be arrested?"

"No," he assured her, grimly. "It may be as you suspect, but you needn't fear that I'll ever go to jail for assaulting one of Willis Marsh's helpers."

She glanced up quickly, as if detecting a double meaning in his words; then, at the smouldering fires she beheld, observed, in a gentler tone: "You care a great deal for Miss Wayland, don't you?"

His only answer was a deep breath and a slow turning of the head, but once she had seen the look in his eyes she needed no other. She could only say: "I hope she is worthy of all she is causing you to suffer, Boyd, so few of us are."

She did not speak again, but in her heart was a great heaviness. They reached the dock and lost sight of the spy, only to have him reappear soon after the boat cleared, and while neither spoke of it, they felt his presence during the whole trip.

Before them Rainier lifted its majestic, snow−crowned head high into the heavens, its serrated slopes softened by a purple haze, its soaring crest limned in blazing glory by the sun. The bay beneath them was like a huge silver shield, flat−rolled and glittering, inlaid with master cunning between wooded hills that swept away into mysterious distances, there to rise skyward in an ever−changing, ever−charming confusion. It reflected fairy−like islands, overgrown till they bowed to their mirrored likenesses. Now a smiling inlet opened up a perspective of golden sand and whispering shingle; again a frowning bluff slipped past, lost in lonely contemplation of its own inverted image. The day was gorgeous, inspiring. Their course lay through an enchanted region, so suggestive of splendid possibilities that Boyd was constrained to observe:

"You know, if the Pilgrim Fathers had landed here in the first place, New England would never have been discovered," a remark at which Cherry nodded in complete agreement.

At Tacoma Boyd left her, to go about his business, but joined her later at lunch, with the joyful announcement:

“I've had better luck, this time. They said there would be no difficulty whatever in handling the matter, and they are to let me know definitely to−morrow.”

“Did Hawkshaw hound you to the bank?” she inquired.

“I rather think so.”

“Then to−morrow will tell the tale.”

“You mean the bank will turn me down?”

“Yes, if I've sized up the situation correctly. I dare say these banks are as cautious as those in Seattle, and a few words over the telephone would do the trick.”

“I'm inclined to give that shadow a little personal attention,” the young man mused; but when she questioned him, he only smiled and assured her of his caution.

Again on the return trip they discovered the fellow among the passengers, but Boyd made no sign until the boat was landing. Then Cherry found that he had edged her into the crowd massed at the gangway, and caught sight of the man in gray immediately ahead of them. She noticed that while Emerson maintained a flow of conversation his eyes were constantly upon the fellow's back, and that he kept a position close to his shoulder, regardless of jostling from the others. She could not tell what this foreboded, nor did she gain a hint of Boyd's purpose, until the gang−plank was in place and they were out upon it. A narrow space separated the boat from the dock; as they crossed this, Boyd slipped and half fell on the slanting planks. She never knew exactly what happened, except that he released her arm and lunged violently against the man in gray, who was next him. It occurred with the suddenness of pure accident, and the next she saw was the stranger plunging downward along the piling, clutching wildly at the vessel's side, while Boyd clung to the guard−rope as if about to lose his balance.

The man's cry as he struck the water alarmed the crowd and caused a momentary stampede, in which Cherry and Boyd were thrust shoreward; but the confusion quickly subsided, as an officer flung a heaving−line to the gasping creature beneath. A moment later the hatless spy was dragged to the dock, indignant and sputtering.

“I'm very sorry, sir.” Boyd apologized, profusely. “It was all my fault. The plank was steep, and I was forced off my feet. Whenever I'm followed too closely, I lose my head—it's a weakness I have.”

The man ceased cursing to dart a sharp glance at him, but he was still too unmanned by his cold immersion to do more than chatter angrily. In the hubbub Emerson led his companion out into the street, where she beheld him shaking with suppressed laughter.

“Boyd,” she cried, in a shocked voice, “then it was—you—you might have killed him! Suppose his head had struck a timber!”

“Yes, that would have been too bad!” he declared; then, at the sight of her face, his chuckle changed to a wolfish snarl. “He'll know enough to keep away from me hereafter. I won't play with him the next time.”

“Don't! Don't! I never saw you look so. Why, it might have been murder!”

“Well?” He stared at her, curiously.

“I—I didn't think it of you.” She shuddered weakly, but he only shrugged his shoulders and said, with a finality that cut off further discussion: “He's a spy! I won't be spied upon.”

When Boyd entered his room at the hotel, whither he had gone after leaving Cherry at Hilliard's bank, Big George greeted him excitedly.

“Here's hell to pay. We can't get that barkentine.”

“The *Margaret?* Why not? The charter was all arranged.”

“The agent telephoned that we couldn't have her.”

“What reasons did he offer?”

“None. We can't have her, that's all.”

“She's the only available ship on the Sound. Our stuff will be here in a fortnight.”

“Some of it will.”

“What do you—?”

“Boilers held up.”

“Boilers?”

“Yes. Read that.” Balt tossed him a telegram.

“'Shipment delayed,'“ read Boyd. “Well! This is growing interesting. Thank Heaven, other people handle machinery!” He reached for a blank, and hurriedly wrote a message cancelling his order. “I guess Cherry was

right. Marsh is fighting to delay us.” He began a recital of the morning's occurrences, but before he had finished he was called to the telephone.

“More bad news!” he exclaimed, as he re−entered the room. “The Jackson− Nebur Company say they can't make delivery of their order. I wonder what next.”

“We don't need nothing more to cripple us,” George declared, blankly. “Any one of these blows is a knockout.”

It was perhaps an hour later that Cherry entered unannounced.

“I just ran in for a minute to tell you something new. When I came up from the bank, the elevator boy at the hotel made a mistake and carried me past my floor. Without noticing the difference, I went down the hall, and whom should I run right into, coming out of a room, but our detective! As he opened the door I heard him say, 'Very well, sir, I'll report to−morrow.'”

“To whom was he reporting?”

“I don't know. A few minutes later I called you up, to tell you about it; but while I was waiting for my number, the operator evidently got the wires crossed or left a switch open, for I heard this much of a conversation:

“'Our contract covers fifty thousand cases at five dollars. We thought that was at least twenty cents under the market.'

“I was about to ring off when I remembered that you had sold your output of fifty thousand cases to Bloc Company for five dollars a case, so I listened, on a chance, and heard another voice reply—”

“Whose voice?”

“I don't know. It said, 'We'll undersell that by one dollar.'

“'Good Lord!' said the first speaker, 'that means a loss of—' and then I was cut off. I thought I'd better come over in person instead of trusting to the wire.”

“And you didn't recognize either speaker?”

“No. But I discovered at the office that rooms 610 and 612—the suite I saw that detective coming out of—are occupied by a Mr. Jones, of New York, who arrived three days ago. I'll bet anything you please that you'll hear from Bloc Company within twenty−four hours, and that the occupant of those rooms at the Hotel Buller is Willis Marsh.”

Big George began to mutter profanely. “It looks like they had us, and all because Fraser's tongue is hung in the middle.”

“All the same, we'll fight it out,” said Emerson, grimly. “If I can raise that money in Tacoma—“ Again the telephone bell buzzed noisily.

“Bloc Company,” predicted Cherry, but for once she was wrong.

“A call from Tacoma,” said Boyd, the receiver to his ear; “it must be the Second National. They were not to let me know till to−morrow.” Through the open door of the adjoining room his words came distinctly, while the others listened in tense silence.

“Hello! Yes! This is Boyd Emerson.” Then followed a pause, during which the thin, rasping voice of the distant speaker murmured unintelligibly.

“Why not? Can't you give me a reason? I thought you said—Very well. Good− bye.”

Emerson hung up the receiver carefully, and with the same deliberation turned to face his companions. He nodded, and spread his hands outward in an unmistakable gesture.

“What! already?” queried the girl.

“They must have been reached by 'phone.”

“That detective may have called Marsh up from there.”

“That means it won't do any good to try further in Tacoma. The other banks have undoubtedly been fixed, or they soon will be. If I can slip away undiscovered, I'll try Vancouver next, but I haven't much hope.”

“It looks bad, doesn't it?” said Cherry.

“As we stand at present,” Boyd acknowledged, “we are the owners of one hundred thousand dollars' worth of useless machinery and unsalable supplies.”

“And all,” mused the girl, “because of a loose tongue and a little type!”

CHAPTER XV. THE DOORS OF THE VAULT SWING SHUT

“I say, old man, just how do we stack up?” questioned Alton Clyde, when, later in the week, he had succeeded in pinning Boyd down for a moment's conversation. “Blessed if I know what's going on.”

“Well, we're up against it.”

“How?”

“That newspaper story started it.” Emerson's teeth snapped angrily, and Clyde's colorless eyes shifted. “Fraser let his tongue wag, and immediately the banks closed up on me. I've tried every one in this city, in Tacoma, in Vancouver, and in Victoria, but it seems that they have all been advised of war in the canning business. Our ship was taken away from us, and although I have found another, I'm afraid to charter it until I see my way out. Then there have been delays in various shipments—boilers, tin, lumber, and all that. I haven't worried you with half the details; but George and I have forgotten what a night's rest looks like. Now Bloc Company are trying to get out of their contract to take our output.” Emerson sighed heavily and sank deeper into his chair, his weariness of mind and body betrayed by his utter relaxation. “I guess we are done for. I'm about all in.”

“Glory be!” exclaimed the dapper little club−man, with a comical furrow of care upon his brow. “When you give up, it is quitting time.”

“I haven't given up; I am doing all I can, but things are in a diabolical tangle. Some of our supplies are here; others are laid out on the road; some seem to be utterly lost. We have had to make substitutions of machinery, our bills are overdue, and—but what's the use! We need money. That's the crux of the whole affair. When Hilliard balked, he threw the whole proposition.”

“And I'm stung for ten thou,” reflected Clyde, lugubriously. “Ten thousand drops of my heart's red blood! Good Lord! I'm a fierce business man. Say! I ought to be the purchasing agent for the Farmers' Alliance; gold bricks are my specialty. I haven't won a bet since the battle of Bull Run.”

“What about the twenty−five thousand dollars that you raised?” Emerson asked.

Clyde began to laugh, shrilly. “That's painfully funny. I hadn't thought about that.”

“The situation may be remarkable, but I don't see anything humorous in it,” said Emerson, dryly.

“Oh, you would if you only knew, but I can't tell you what it is. You see, I promised not to divulge where the money came from, and when I give my word I'm a regular Sphinx. But it's funny.” After an instant he said, in all seriousness: “If Hilliard holds the combination to this thing, why don't you have Cherry help us?”

“Cherry! How can she help?”

“She can do anything she wants with him.”

“What do you mean?”

“I may be a heavy autumn frost as a financier,” the younger man remarked, “but when it comes to women I'm as wise as a wharf rat. I've been watching her work, and it's great; people have begun to talk about it. Every night it's a dinner and a theatre party. Every day, orchids and other extortionate bouquets, with jewel−boxes tied on with blue ribbons. His motor is at her disposal at all times, and she treats his chauffeur with open contempt. If that doesn't signify—”

“Nonsense!” exclaimed the other with disgust. “She is too nice a girl for that. You have misconstrued Hilliard's politeness.”

Finding his worldly wisdom at issue, Clyde defended himself stoutly. “I tell you, he has gone off his blooming balance; I know the symptoms; leave it to old Doctor Clyde.”

“You say other people have noticed it?”

“I do! Everybody in town except you and the news−dealer at the corner— he's blind.”

Emerson rose from his chair, and began to pace about slowly. “If Hilliard has turned that girl's head with his attentions, I'll—”

Clyde threw back his head and laughed in open derision. “Don't worry about her—he is the one to be pitied. She's taking him on a Seeing−Seattle trip of the most approved and expensive character.”

“She isn't that kind,” Emerson hotly denied.

“Now don't be a boy until your beard trips you up. That girl is about to break into old Hilliard's vault, and while she's in there, with the gas lighted and a suit case to lug off the bank−notes, why not tell her to toss in a few bundles for us?”

“If I can't get along without taking money from a woman, I'll throw up the whole deal.”

The curious look which Boyd had noted once before came into Clyde's eyes, and this time, to judge by the young fellow's manner, he might have translated it into words but for the entrance at that moment of Cherry herself, accompanied by “Fingerless” Fraser.

“What luck in Vancouver?” she inquired,

“None whatever. The banks won't listen to me and I can't interest any private parties.”

“See here,” volunteered Fraser, “why don't you let me sell some of your stock? I'm there with the big talk.”

Emerson turned on him suddenly. “You have demonstrated that. If you had kept your mouth shut we'd have been at sea by now.”

The fellow's face paled slightly as he replied: “I told you once that I didn't tip your mit.”

“Don't keep that up!” cried Boyd, his much−tried temper ready to give way. “I can put up with anything but a lie.”

Noting the signs of a rising storm, Clyde scrambled out of his chair, saying: “Well, I think I'll be going.” He picked up his hat and stick, and hurriedly left the room, followed in every movement by the angry eyes of Fraser, who seemed on the point of an explosion.

“I don't believe Fraser gave out the story,” said Cherry, at which he flashed her a grateful glance.

“You can make a book on that,” he declared. “I may be a crook, but I'm no sucker, and I know when to hobble my talk and when to slip the bridle. I did five years once when it wasn't coming to me, and I can do it again—if I have to.” He jammed his hat down over his ears, and walked out.

“I really think he is telling the truth,” said the girl. “He is dreadfully hurt to think you distrust him.”

“He and I have threshed that out,” Emerson declared, pacing the room with nervous strides. “When I think what an idiotic trifle it was that caused this disaster, I could throttle him—and I would if I didn't blame myself for it.” He paused to stare unseeingly at her.” I'm waiting for the crash to come before I walk into room 610 at the Hotel Buller and settle with 'Mr. Jones, of New York.'”

“You aren't seriously thinking of any such melodramatic finish, are you?” she inquired.

“When I first met you in Kalvik, I said I would stop at nothing to succeed. Well, I meant it. I am more desperate now than I was then. I could have stood over that wretch at the dock, the other day, and watched him drown, because he dared to step in between me and my work, I could walk into Willis Marsh's room and strangle him, if by so doing I could win. Yes!” he checked her, “I know I am wrong, but that is how I feel. I have wrung my soul dry. I have toiled and sweated and suffered for three years, constantly held down by the grip of some cursed evil fortune. A dozen times I have climbed to the very brink of success, only to be thrust down by some trivial cause like this. Can you wonder that I have watched my honor decay and crumble?—that I've ceased to care what means I use so long as I succeed? I have fought fair so far, but now, I tell you, I've come to a point where I'd sacrifice anything, everything to get what I want—and I want that girl.”

“You are tired and overwrought,” said Cherry, quietly. “You don't mean what you say. The success of this enterprise, with any happiness it may bring you, isn't worth a human life; nor is it worth what you are suffering.”

“Perhaps not, from your point of view,” he said, roughly, then struck his palm with closed fist. “What an idiot I was to begin all this—to think I could win with no weapons and no aid except a half−mad fisherman, an addle−brained imbecile, a confidence man—”

“And a woman,” supplemented Cherry. Then, more gravely: “I'm the one to blame; I got you into it.”

“No, I blame no one but myself. Whatever you're responsible for, there's only one person you've harmed—yourself.”

“What do you mean?” asked Cherry.

Her surprise left him unimpressed.

“Let's be frank,” he said. “It is best to have such things out and be done with them. I traded my friendship for money and I am ruined. You are staking your honor against Hilliard's bank−notes.” Her look commanded him, pleaded with him, to stop; but her silence only made him the more fiercely determined to force an explanation. “Oh, I'm in no mood to speak gently,” he said; then added, with a sting of contempt in his tone: “I didn't think you

would pay quite that price for your copper−mine."

Cherry Malotte paled to her lips, and when she spoke her voice was oddly harsh. "Kindly be more explicit; I don't know what you are talking about."

"Then, for your own good, you'd better understand. According to accepted standards, there is one thing no woman should trade upon."

"Go on!"

"You have set yourself to trap Hilliard, and, from what I hear, you are succeeding. He is a married man. He is twice your age. He is notorious— all of which you must know, and yet you have deliberately yielded yourself to him for a price."

Suddenly he found the girl standing over him with burning eyes and quivering body.

"What right have you to say such things to me?" she cried. "A moment ago you acknowledged yourself a murderer—at least in thought; you said you would sacrifice anything or everything to gain your ends. Do you think I'm like that, too? Are my methods to be called shameful because your own are criminal? And suppose they were! Do you think that you and your love for that unfeeling woman, who sent you out to toil and suffer and sweat your soul dry in the solitude of that horrible country, are the only issues in the world?"

"We won't speak of her," he broke in, sharply.

"Oh yes, we will You say I have set a price on myself. Well, she set a price on herself, but you can't see it. Her price was your honor, that has crumbled; your conscience, that has rotted. You have paid it, and you would pay double if she exacted it. But one thing you shall not do: you shall not judge of my bargains, nor decide what I have paid to any man."

Never before had Boyd seen a woman so transformed by the passion of anger. Her lids had drooped, half hiding her eyes. Her whole expression had hardened; she was the picture of defiant fury. The mask had slipped, and he caught a glimpse of the naked, passionate soul, upheaved to its depths. Oddly enough, he felt it thrill him.

"I beg your pardon," he said. "You are your own mistress, and you have the right to make any bargain you choose."

She turned away, and, going to the window, stared down upon the busy street, striving to calm herself. For a time the room was silent, save for the muffled sounds from below; then she faced him again, and he saw that her eyes were misty with tears. "I want you to know," she said, "that I understand your position perfectly. If you don't succeed, you not only lose the girl but ruin yourself, for you can never repay the men who trusted you. That is a very big thing to a man, I know, yet there must be a way out—there always is. Perhaps it will present itself when you least expect it." She gave him a tired little smile before lowering her veil.

He rose, and laid his hand on her arm. "Forgive my brutal bluntness. I'm not clever at such things, but I would have said as much to my sister if I had one."

It was an honest attempt to comfort her, but it failed. "Good−bye," she said; "you mustn't give up."

All the way back to her hotel her mind dwelt bitterly upon his parting words. "His sister! his sister!" she kept repeating. "God! Can't he see?" If he had shown even a momentary jealousy of Hilliard it would not have been so hard, but this impersonal attitude was maddening! The man had but one idea in the world, one dream, one vision—another woman. Alone in her room, she still felt the flesh of her arm burn, where he had laid his hand, and then came the thrill of that forgotten kiss. How many times had she felt the pressure of his lips upon hers! How many hopes had she built upon that memory! But the thought of Boyd's indifference rose in sharp conflict with the tenderness that prompted her to help him at any cost. After all, why not take what was offered her and let this man shift for himself? Why not live her life as she had planned it before he came? The reward was at hand—she had only to take it and let him go down as a sacrifice to that ice−woman he coveted.

Dusk was falling when she ceased pacing the floor, and with set, defiant face went to the telephone, to call up Hilliard at the Rainier Club.

"I have thought over your proposition and I have changed my mind," she said. "Yes, you may send the car for me at seven." Then, in reply to some request, she laughed back, through white lips: "Very well, if you wish it —the blue dress. Yes! The blue decollete dress." She hung up the receiver, then stood with hands clinched while a shiver ran through her slender body. She stepped to a closet, and flung open the door to stare at the array of gowns.

"So this is the end of my good resolutions," she laughed, and snatched a garment recklessly from its hook.

“Now for all the miserable tricks of the trade!”

CHAPTER XVI. WILLIS MARSH COMES OUT FROM COVER

George Balt, Clyde, and Fraser formed a glum trio as they sat in a nook of the hotel cafe, sipping moodily at their glasses, when, on the following afternoon, Emerson joined them. But they sensed some untoward happening even before he spoke; for his face wore a look of dazed incredulity, and his manner was so extraordinary that they questioned in chorus:

"What's the matter? Are you sick?"

"No," said he. "But I—I must have lost my mind."

"What is it?"

"The trick is turned."

"The trick!"

"I have raised the money."

With a shout that startled the other occupants of the room, Balt and Clyde jumped to their feet and began to caper about in a frenzy. Even "Fingerless" Fraser's expressionless face cracked in a wide grin of amazement.

"About noon I was called on the 'phone by Hilliard. He asked me to come down to the bank at once, and I went. He said he had reconsidered, and wanted to put up the money. It's up. He'll back us. I've got it in writing. It's all cinched. One hundred thousand dollars—and more, if we need it."

"You must have made a great talk," declared Clyde.

"I said nothing. He offered it himself, as a personal loan. It has nothing to do with the bank."

"Well, I'm—!" cried Big George.

"And that goes two ways," supplemented Fraser.

"I'm going to tell Cherry, now. She will be delighted."

Alton Clyde tittered. "I told you she could pull it off," he said.

"This was Hilliard's own notion," Boyd returned, coldly. "He merely reconsidered his decision, and—"

"Turn over! You're on your back."

"It was only yesterday afternoon that I talked with Cherry. I dare say she hasn't seen him since."

"Well, I happen to know that she has. As I came home last night I saw them together. They came out of that French cafe across the street, and got into Hilliard's car. She was dressed up like a pony."

"What's that got to do with it?" demanded "Fingerless" Fraser.

"She pulled the old fellow's leg, that's all," explained Alton.

"Well, it wasn't your leg, was it?" inquired Fraser, sourly.

"No; I've no kick coming. I think she's mighty clever."

"If I thought she had done that," said Emerson, slowly, "I wouldn't touch a penny of the money."

"I don't care where the money came from or how it got here," rumbled Balt. "It's here; that's enough."

"I care, and I intend to find out."

"Oh, come now, don't spoil a good piece of work," cautioned Clyde, visibly perturbed at Boyd's expression. "You know you aren't the only one to consider in this matter; the rest of us are entitled to a look−in. For Heaven's sake, try to control this excess of virtue, and when you get into one of those Martin Luther moods, just reflect that I have laid ten thousand aching simoleons on the altar."

"Sure!" supplemented George; "and look at me and Cherry. Success means as much to her as it does to any of us, and if she pulled this off, you bet she knew what she was doing. Anyhow, you ain't got any right to break up the play."

But Boyd clung to his point with a stubbornness which he himself found it difficult to explain. The arguments of the others only annoyed him. The walk to Cherry's hotel afforded him time for reflection which, while it deepened his doubt, somewhat lessened his impatience, and when he was shown into her presence he did not begin in the impetuous manner he had designed. A certain hesitation and dread of the truth mastered him, and, moreover, the girl's appearance dismayed him. She seemed almost ill. She was listless and fagged. Upon his announcement of the good news, she only smiled wearily, and said:

“I told you not to give up. The unexpected always happens.”

“And was it unexpected—to you?” he asked, awkwardly.

“What happens is nearly always unexpected—when it's good.”

“Not to the one who brings it about.”

“What makes you think I had anything to do with it?”

“You were with Hilliard last night.”

She nodded slightly, “We closed our negotiations for the copper−mine last night.”

“How did you come out?”

“He takes it over, and does the development work,” she answered.

“That means that you are independent; that you can leave the North Country and do all the things you want to do?” This time her smile was puzzling. “You don't seem very glad!”

“No! Realization discounts anticipation about ninety per cent but don't let's talk about me. I—I'm unstrung to−day.”

“I'm sorry you aren't going back to Kalvik,” he said, with genuine regret.

“But I am,” she declared, quickly. “I'm going back with you and George if you will let me. I want to see the finish of our enterprise.”

“See here, Cherry, I hope you didn't influence Hilliard in this affair?”

“Why probe the matter?”

“Because I haven't lost all my manhood,” he answered, roughly. “Yesterday you assumed the blame for this trouble, and spoke of sacrifices—and— well, I don't know much about women; but for all I know, you may have some ridiculous, quixotic strain in your make−up. I hope you didn't—”

“What?”

“Well, do anything you may be sorry for.” At last he detected a gleam of spirit in her eyes.

“Suppose I did. What difference to you would that make?” He shifted uncomfortably under her scrutiny.

“Suppose that Mr. Hilliard had called on me for some great sacrifice before he gave up that money. Would you allow it to affect you?”

“Of course,” he answered. Then, unable to sit still under her searching gaze, he arose with flushed face, to meet further discomfiture as she continued:

“Even if it meant your own ruin, the loss of the fortune you have raised among your friends—money that is entrusted to you—and—and the relinquishment of Miss Wayland? Honestly, now”—her voice had softened and dropped to a lower key—“would it make any difference?”

“Certainly!”

“How much difference?”

“I'm in a very embarrassing position,” he said, slowly. “You must realize that with others depending on me I'm not free to follow my own inclinations.”

She uttered a little, mocking laugh. “Pardon me. It was not a fair question, and I shouldn't have asked it; but your hesitation was sufficient answer.” Then, as he broke into a heated denial, she went on:

“Like most men, you think a woman has but one asset upon which to trade. However, if I felt responsible for your difficulties, that was my affair; and if I determined to help extricate you, that also concerned me alone.” He stepped forward as if to protest, but she silenced his speech with an imperious little stamp of her foot. “This spasm of righteousness on your part is only temporary—yes it is”—as he attempted to break in—“and now that you have voiced it and freed your mind, you can feel at rest. Have you not repeatedly asserted that to win Miss Wayland you would use any means that offered? You are not really sincere in this sudden squeamishness, and I would like you better if you had seized your advantage at once, without stopping to consider whence or how it came. That would have been primitive—elemental—and every woman loves an elemental lover.”

He was no subtle casuist, and found himself without words to reply. The girl's sharp challenging of his motives had disconcerted him without helping him to a clearer understanding of his own mind, and in spite of the cheering turn his fortunes had taken it was in no very amiable mood that he left her at last, no whit the wiser for all his questioning. In the hotel lobby below he encountered the newspaper reporter who had fallen under Fraser's spell upon their first arrival from the North. The man greeted him eagerly.

“How d'y'do, Mr. Emerson. Can you give me any news about the fisheries?”

"No!"

"I thought there might be something new bearing on my story."

"Indeed! So you are the chap who wrote that article some time ago, eh?"

"Yes, sir. Good, wasn't it?"

"Doubtless, from the newspaper point of view. Where did you get it?"

"From Mr. Clyde."

"Clyde! You mean Fraser—Frobisher, I should say."

"No, sir. Alton Clyde! He was pretty talkative the night I saw him." The reporter laughed, meaningly.

"Drunk, do you mean?"

"Oh, not exactly drunk, but pretty wet. He knew what he was saying, however. Can't you give me something more?"

"Nothing." Boyd hurried to his hotel, a prey to mingled anger and contrition. So Fraser had told the truth, after all, and with a kind of sullen loyalty had chosen to remain under a cloud himself rather than inform on a friend. It was quite in keeping with the fellow's peculiar temperament. As it happened, Boyd found the two men together and lost no time in acquainting them with his discovery.

"I've come to apologize to you," he said to Fraser, who grinned broadly and was seized with a sudden abashment which stilled his tongue. Emerson turned to Clyde. "Why did you permit me to do this injustice?"

"I—I didn't mean to give out any secrets—I don't remember doing it," Alton apologized, lamely. "You know I can't drink much. I don't remember a thing about it, honestly." Boyd regarded him coldly, but the young man's penitence seemed so genuine, he looked so weak, so pitifully incompetent, that the other lacked heart to chastise him. It requires resistance to develop heat, and against the absence of character it is impossible to create any sort of emotion.

"When you got drunk that night you not only worked a great hardship on all of us, but afterward you allowed me to misjudge a very faithful man," declared Boyd. "Fraser's ways are not mine, and I have said harsh things to him when my temper prompted; but I am not ungrateful for the service he has done me and the sacrifices he has made. Now, Alton, you have chosen to join us in a desperate venture, and the farther we go the more vigorous will be the resistance we shall meet. If you can't keep a close mouth, and do as you are told, you'd better go back to Chicago. By rare good luck we have averted this disaster, but I have no hope of being so fortunate again."

"Don't climb any higher," admonished "Fingerless" Fraser. "He's all fluffed up now. I'll lay you eight to one he don't make another break of the kind."

"No, I was so com−cussed−pletely pickled that I forgot I even spoke about the salmon−canning business. I'll break my corkscrew and seal my flask, and from this moment until we come out next fall the demon rum and I are divorced. Is that good news?"

"Everything is a joke to you, isn't it?" said Boyd. "If this trip doesn't make a man of you, you'll never grow up. Now I've got work for all of us, including you, Fraser."

"What is it?"

"Go down to the freight−office and trace a shipment of machinery, while I—"

"Nix! That ain't my line. If you need a piece of rough money quick, why I'll take my gat and stick somebody up in an alley, or I'll feel out a safe combination for you in the dark; but this chaperoning freight cars ain't my game. I'd only crab it."

"I thought you wanted to help."

"I do, sure I do! I'll be glad when you're on your way, but I must respectfully duck all bills−of−lading and shipping receipts."

"You are merely lazy," Emerson smiled. "Nevertheless, if we get in a tight place, I'll make you take a hand in spite of yourself."

"Any time you need me," cheerfully volunteered the other, lighting a fresh cigar. "Only don't give me child's work."

As if Hilliard's conversion had marked the turning−point of their luck, the partners now entered upon a period of almost uninterrupted success. In the reaction from their recent discouragement they took hold of their labors with fresh energy, and fortune aided them in unexpected ways. Boyd signed his charter, securing a tramp steamer then discharging at Tacoma. Balt closed his contracts for Chinese labor, and the scattered car−loads of material,

which had been lost en route or mysteriously laid out on sidings, began to come in as if of their own accord. Those supplies which had been denied them they found in unexpected quarters close at hand; and almost before they were aware of it *The Bedford Castle* had finished unloading and was coaling at the bunkers.

A brigade of Orientals and a miniature army of fishermen had appeared as if by magic, and were quartered in the lower part of the city awaiting shipment. Boyd and Big George worked unceasingly in the midst of a maelstrom of confusion, the centre of which was the dock. There, one throbbing April evening, *The Bedford Castle* berthed, ready to receive her cargo, and the two men made their way toward their hotel, weary, but glowing with the grateful sense of an arduous duty well performed. The following morning would find the wharf swarming with stevedores and echoing to the rattle of trucks, the clank of hoists, and the shrill whistles of the signalmen.

“Looks like they couldn't stop us now,” said Balt.

“It does,” agreed Emerson. “We ought to clear in four days—that'll be the 15th.”

“It smells like an early spring, too,” the fisherman observed, sniffing the air. “If it is, we'll be in Kalvik the first week in May.”

“Is your sense of smell sharp enough to tell what's happening up there?”

“Sure.”

“Suppose it's a backward season?”

“Then we'll lay in the ice alongside the Company boats till she breaks. That may be in June.”

“I would like to get in early, and have the buildings started before Marsh arrives. There's no telling what he may try.”

George gave his companion a short nod. “And there ain't no telling what we may try right back at him. Anyhow, he'll have to fight in the open, and that's better than this shadow−boxing that we've been doing.”

“I'm off to tell Cherry,” said Boyd. “She'll need to be getting ready.”

His course took him past Hilliard's bank, and when abreast of it he nearly collided with a man who came hurrying forth, an angry scowl between his eyes giving evidence of a surly humor. In the well−groomed, fiery−haired, plump−figured man who, absorbed in his own anger, was rushing by without raising his eyes, Emerson recognized the manager of the North American Packers' Association.

“Good−evening, Mr. Marsh.”

Marsh whirled about. “Eh? Ah!” With a visible effort he smoothed the lines from his brow; his full lips lost their angry pout, and he showed his teeth in a startled, apprehensive smile.

“Why, yes—it's Emerson. How are you, Mr. Emerson?” He extended a soft hand, which Boyd took. Apparently reassured by this mute response, Marsh continued: “I heard you were in town. How is the new cannery coming on?”

“Nicely, thank you. When did you arrive from the East?”

“I just got in. Haven't had time to get straightened out yet. We—Mr. Wayland and I—were speaking of you before I left Chicago. We were— somewhat surprised to learn that you were engaging in the same line of business as ourselves.”

“Doubtless.”

“I told him there was room for us all.”

“You did?”

“Yes! I assured him that his resentment was unwarranted.”

“He resents something, does he?”

“Well, naturally,” Marsh declared, with a wintry smile. “In view of the circumstances I may truthfully say that his feelings embrace not only a sense of resentment, but the firmly fixed idea that he has been betrayed—however, you are no doubt aware of all that. You have an able champion on the ground.” He looked out across the street abstractedly. “Miss Wayland and I did our utmost to convince him you merely took a legitimate commercial advantage in dining at his house the night before you left.”

“It was good of you to take my part,” said Boyd, with such an air of simple cordiality that Marsh shot a startled glance at him. “Now that we are to be neighbors this summer, I hope we will get well acquainted, for Mr. Wayland spoke highly of you, and strongly advised me to pattern after you.”

Marsh hid his bewilderment behind an expression which he strove to make as friendly as Emerson's own. “I

understand you are banking here," he said, jerking his head toward the building at his back.

"Yes. I was offered a number of propositions, but Mr. Hilliard was so insistent and made such substantial inducements that I finally placed the business with him."

The animosity that glimmered for one fleeting instant in Marsh's eyes amused Boyd greatly, advertising as it did, that for once the Trust's executive felt himself at a disadvantage. The younger man never doubted for an instant that his coup in securing Hilliard's assistance at the eleventh hour was responsible for his enemy's sudden appearance from cover, nor that the arrival of *The Bedford Castle* had brought Marsh to the banker's office out of hours in final desperation. From the man's bearing he judged that the interview had not been as placid as a spring morning, and this awoke in him not only a keen sense of elation but the very natural desire to goad his opponent.

"All in all, we have been singularly fortunate in our enterprise thus far," he continued, smoothly. "We were held up on some of our machinery, but in every instance the delay turned out a blessing in disguise, for it enabled us to buy in other quarters at a saving."

"I'm delighted to hear it," Marsh declared. "When do you sail?"

"Immediately. We begin to load to−morrow."

"I have changed my plans somewhat," the other announced. "I'll follow your tracks before long."

"What is your hurry?"

"Repairs. Kalvik is our most important station, so I want to get it in first−class shape before Mr. Wayland and Mildred arrive."

"Mildred!" ejaculated Boyd, surprised past resenting Marsh's use of the girl's first name. "Is she coming?"

The other's smile was peculiarly irritating.

"Oh, indeed yes! We expect to make the trip quite an elaborate excursion. Sorry I can't ask you to join us on the homeward voyage, but—" he shrugged his fat shoulders. "Run in and see me before you leave. I may be able to give you some pointers."

"Thank you. I hope you'll enjoy the summer up there in the wilderness. It will be a relief to get away from all conventions and restraints."

The men extended their hands and the Trust's manager said, in final invitation, "Drop in on me any day at the office. I'm at the National Building."

"Oh, you've moved, eh?" said Boyd, with a semblance of careless interest.

"Moved? No!"

"Indeed! I thought you were still at 610, Hotel Buller." With a short laugh and a casual gesture of adieu he turned, leaving the manager of the Trust staring after him, an astonished pucker upon his womanish mouth, a vindictive glare in his eyes. Not until his rival had turned the corner did Willis Marsh remove his gaze. Then he found that he was trembling as if from weakness.

"The ruffian!" He reached into his pocket and produced a gold cigarette− case, repeatedly snapping the heavy sides together with vicious force. When he attempted to light a match it broke in his fingers, then in a temper he threw the cigarette from him and hurried away, his plump face working, his lips drawn into a spiteful fold.

For the first time in a fortnight Boyd allowed himself the luxury of a long sleep, and a late breakfast on the following morning. But the meal came to an abrupt conclusion when Balt, who always arose with the sun, rushed in upon him and exclaimed:

"Hey! come on down to the dock, quick. There's hell to pay!"

"What's up now?"

"Strike! The longshoremen have walked out on us. I was on hand early to oversee the loading, but the whole mob refused to commence. There's some union trouble because *The Bedford Castle* discharged her cargo with scab labor."

"In Tacoma?"

"No. In Frisco; next to her last trip."

"Why, that's ridiculous! What does Captain Peasley say?"

"He says—I'll have to wait till we're outside before I can repeat what he says."

Together the two hurried to the water−front to find a crowd of surly stevedores loafing about the dock, and an English sea−captain at breakfast in his cabin, his attention divided equally between toast, tea, marmalade and profanity.

“The beggars are mad, absolutely mad,” declared the Captain. “I can't understand it. I'm still in my bed when I'm aroused by an insolent loafer who calls himself a walking delegate and tells me his union won't load me until I pay some absurd sum.”

“What did you tell him?” inquired Emerson.

“What did I tell him?” Captain Peasley laid down his knife gently and wiped the tea from his drooping mustache, then squared about in his seat. “Here's what I told him as near as my memory serves.” Whereupon he broke into a tornado of nautical profanity so picturesquely British in its figures, and so whole−souled in its vigor, that his auditors could not but smile. “Then I bashed him with my boot, and bloody well pursued him over the rail. Two thousand dollars! Sweet mother of Queen Anne! Wouldn't I look well, now, handing four hundred pounds over to those highbinders? My owners would hang me.”

“So they demand two thousand dollars!”

“Yes! Just because of some bally rot about who may and who may not work for a living on the docks at Frisco.”

“What are you going to do about it?”

“I'm going to make a swimming delegate out of the next walking emissary that boards me. Two thousand dollars!” He hid half a slice of toast behind his mustache and stirred his tea violently.

“It's Marsh again,” said Big George.

“I dare say,” Emerson answered. “It's a hold−up pure and simple. However, if ships can be unloaded with non−union labor they can be loaded in the same manner, and Captain Peasley talks like a man who would like to have the argument out. I want you to stay here and watch our freight while I see the head of the union.”

CHAPTER XVII. A NEW ENEMY APPEARS

When Boyd returned some two hours later he found the dock deserted save for Big George, who prowled watchfully about the freight piles.

“Well, did you fix it up?” the fisherman inquired.

“No,” exclaimed Boyd. “It's a rank frame−up, and I refused to be bled.”

“Good for you.”

“There are some things a fellow's manhood won't stand for. I'll carry that freight aboard with my own hands before I'll be robbed by a labor union at the bidding of Willis Marsh.”

“Say! Will you let me load this ship my way?” George asked.

“Can you do it?”

Balt's thick lips drew back from his yellow teeth in that smile which Emerson had come to recognize as a harbinger of the violent acts that rejoiced his lawless soul.

“Listen,” said he, with a chuckle. “Down the street yonder I've got a hundred fishermen. Half of them are drunk at this minute, and the rest are half drunk.”

“Then they are of no use to us.”

“I don't reckon you ever seen a herd of Kalvik fishermen out of a job, did you? Well, there's just two things they know, fishing and fighting, and this ain't the fishing season. When they hit Seattle, the police force goes up into the residence section and stufts cotton in its ears, because the only thing that is strong enough to stand between a uniform and a fisherman is a hill.”

“Can you induce them to work?”

“I can. All I'm afraid of is that I can't induce them to quit. They're liable to put this freight aboard *The Bedford Castle*, and then pull down the dock in a spirit of playfulness and pile it in Captain Peasley's cabin. There ain't no convulsion of nature that's equal to a gang of idle fishermen.”

“When can they begin?”

“Well, it will take me all night to round them up, and I'll have to lick four or five, but there ought to be a dozen or two on hand in the morning.” George cast a roving eye over the warehouse from the heavy planking under foot to the wide−spanning rafters above. “Yes,” he concluded, “I don't see nothing breakable, so I guess it's safe.”

“Would you like me to go with you?”

The giant considered him speculatively. “I don't think so. I ain't never seen you in action. No, you better stay here and arrange to guard this stuff till morning. I'll do the rest.”

Boyd did not see him again that day, nor at the hotel during the evening, but on the following morning, true to his word, the big fellow walked into the warehouse followed by a score or more of fishermen. At first sight there was nothing imposing about these men: they were rough−garbed and unkempt, in the main; but upon closer observation Boyd noticed that they were thick−chested and broad−shouldered, and walked with the swinging gait that comes from heaving decks. While the majority of them were neither distinctly American nor markedly foreign in appearance, being rather of that composite caste that peoples the outer reaches of the far West, they were all deeply browned by sun and weather, and spoke the universal idiom of the sea. There were men here from Finland and Florida, Portugal and Maine, fused into one nondescript type by the melting−pot of the frontier. Some wore the northern mackinaw in spite of the balmy April morning, others were dressed like ranch hands on circus day, and a few with the ornateness of Butte miners on parade.

Certain ones displayed fresh contusions on cheek and jaw, or peered forth from lately blackened eyes, and these, Boyd noticed, invariably fawned upon Big George or treated him with elephantine playfulness, winking swollen lids at him in a mysterious understanding which puzzled the young man, until he saw that Balt himself bore similar signs of strife. The big man's lips were cut, while back of one ear a knot had sprung up over night like a fungus.

They fell to work quickly, stripping themselves to their undershirts; they manned the hoists, seized trucks and

bale−hooks, and began their tasks with a thoroughly non−union energy. Some of them were still so drunk that they staggered, their awkwardness affording huge sport to their companions, yet even in their intoxication they were surprisingly capable. There was a great deal of laughter and disorder on every hand, and all made frequent trips to the water−taps, returning adrip to the waist, their hair and beards bejewelled with drops. Boyd saw one, a well−dressed fellow in a checked suit, remove his clothes and hang them carefully upon a nail, then painfully unlace his patent−leather shoes, after which, regardless of the litter under foot and the splinters in the floor, he tramped about in bare feet and red underwear. Without exception, they seemed possessed by the spirit of boys at play. Having seen them well under way and the winches working, George sought out Boyd and proudly inquired:

"What do you think of them, eh?"

"They are splendid. But where are the others?"

"Well, there are two or three that won't be able to get around at all." He meditatively stroked the knuckles of his right hand, which were badly bruised. "But the balance will be here to−morrow. These are just the mildest−mannered ones—the family men, you might say. The others will show up gradual. You see, if there had been any fighting going on here, I'd have got most of them right off the bat, but there wasn't any inducement to offer except hard work, so they wasn't quite so anxious to commence."

"Humph! There ought to be enough excitement before long to satisfy any one," said Boyd, with a trace of worry in his voice.

"As sure as you're a foot high!" exclaimed George, hopefully. "It's the only way we'll get that ship loaded on time. All we need is a riot or two."

A man passed them trundling a heavy truck, but seeing Big George, he paused, wiped the sweat from his face, then grinned and winked fraternally.

"Hey! If this work is too heavy for you, why don't you quit?" growled Balt, but strangely enough the fellow took no offence. Instead, he closed his swollen eye for a second time, then spat upon his hands, and, as he struggled with his burden, grunted pleasantly:

"I pretty near—got you, Georgie. If you hadn't 'a' ducked, we'd 'a' been at it yet, eh?"

Balt smiled in turn, then gingerly felt of the knob behind his ear.

"Did you have a fight with him?" queried Emerson.

"Not exactly a fight, but he put this nubbin on my conch," answered the fisherman. "He's a tough proposition, one of the best we've got."

"What was the trouble?"

"Nothing! I used to have to lick him every year. We've sort of missed each other lately."

"Then you were merely renewing a pleasant acquaintance?" laughed the younger man. "He hit you in the mouth too, I see."

"No, I got that from a stranger. I was bedding him down when he kicked me with his boot. He ain't here this morning."'

"If I were you, I'd go up to the hotel and get some sleep," Boyd advised. "I'll oversee things."

George hesitated. "I don't know if I'd better go or not. They've all got hang−overs, and they're liable to bu'st out any minute if you don't watch them. They ain't vicious, understand; they just like to frolic around."

"I'll watch them."

After a contemplative glance at his companion's well−knit figure, Balt gave in, with the final caution: "Don't let them get the upper hand, or there won't be no living with them."

After his departure, Boyd was not long in learning the cause of his hesitancy, for no sooner did the men realize the change in authority over them than they undertook to feel out the mettle of their new foreman. Directly one of them approached him, with the demand:

"Get us a drink, boss; we're thirsty."

"There is the water−tap," said Emerson. "Help yourself."

"Go on! We don't want water. Rustle up a keg of beer, will you?"

"Nothing doing."

He turned back to his task, but a moment later Boyd saw him making for the shore end of the dock, and with a few strides placed himself in his path.

"Where are you going?"

“After a drink, of course.”

“You want to quit, eh?”

The man eyed him for an instant, then answered: “No! The job's all right, but I'm thirsty.”

Those working near ceased their labors and gathered around, whereupon their companion addressed them.

“Say! It's a great note when a fellow can't have a drink. Come on, boys, I'll set 'em up.” There was a general laugh and a forward movement of all within hearing, which Boyd checked with a rough command.

“Get back to work, all of you.” But the spokesman, disregarding his words, attempted to pass, whereupon without warning Boyd knocked him down with a clean blow to the face. At this the others yelled and rushed forward, only to be met by their foreman, who had snatched a bale−hook. It was an ugly weapon, and he used it so viciously that they quickly gave him room.

“Now get to work,” he ordered, quietly. “You can quit if you want to, but I'll lay out the first fellow that goes after a drink. Make up your minds what you want to do. Quick!”

There was a moment's hesitation, and then, with the absurd vagary of a crowd, they broke into loud laughter and slouched back to work, two of them dragging the cause of the outburst to the water−faucet, where they held his head under the stream until he began to sputter and squirm. Before those at the gangway had noticed the disturbance it was all over, and thereafter Boyd experienced no trouble. On the contrary, they worked the better for his proof of authority, and took him into their fellowship as if he had qualified to their entire satisfaction. Even the man he had struck seemed to share in the general respect rather than to cherish the least ill−feeling. The respite was brief, however, for the work had not continued many hours before a stranger made his way quietly in upon the dock and began to argue with the first fisherman he met. Boyd discovered him quickly, and, approaching him, demanded:

“What do you want?”

“Nothing,” said the new−comer.

“Then get out.”

“What for? I'm just talking to this man.”

“I can't allow any talking here. Hurry up and get out.”

“This is a free country. I ain't hurting you.”

“Will you go?”

“Say! You can't load that cargo this way,” the man began, threateningly. “And you can't make me go—”

At which Emerson seized him by the collar and quickly disproved the assertion, to the great delight of the fishermen. He marched his prisoner to the dock entrance and thrust him out into the street with the warning: “Don't you let me catch you in here again.”

“I'm a union man and you can't load that ship with 'scabs!'“ The stranger swore as he slunk off. “You'll be sorry for this.” But Boyd motioned him away and summoned two of his men to stand guard with him.

All that morning the three held their posts, refusing to admit any one who did not have business within, the while a considerable crowd assembled in the street. The first actual violence, however, occurred when the fishermen knocked off for the noon hour. Sensing the storm about to break, Boyd called up the Police Department from the dock−office, then summoned Big George, who appeared in quick time. It was with considerable difficulty that the non−union crew fought its way back to resume work at one o'clock.

During the afternoon the strikers made several attempts to enter the dock− shed, and it required a firm stand by the guards to restrain them. These growing signs of excitement pleased the fishermen intensely, and at each advance of the crowd it became as great a task to hold them back as it was to check the union forces. During one of these disturbances Captain Peasley made his way shoreward from the ship to scan the scene, and the sight of his uniform excited the ire of the strikers afresh. After a glance over the mob, he remarked to Emerson:

“Bli'me! It looks like a bloody riot already, doesn't it? Four hundred pounds to those dock wallopers! Huh! You know if I allowed them to bleed me that way—”

At that instant, from some quarter, a railroad spike whizzed past the Captain's head, banging against the boards behind him with such a thump that the dignified Englishman ducked quickly amid a shout of derision. He began to curse them roundly in his own particular style.

“You'd better keep under cover, Captain,” advised Emerson. “They don't seem to care for you.”

“So it would appear,” he agreed. “They're getting nawsty, aren't they? I hope it doesn't lawst.”

“Well, I hope it does,” said George Balt. “If they'll only keep at it and beat up some of our boys at quitting−time the whole gang will be here in the morning.”

It seemed that his wishes bade fair to be realized, for, as the day wore on, instead of diminishing, the excitement increased. By evening it became so menacing that Boyd was forced to send in an urgent demand for a squadron of bluecoats to escort his men to their lodgings, and it was only by the most vigorous efforts that a serious clash was averted. Nor was this task the easier since it did not meet with the approval of the fishermen themselves, who keenly resented protection of any sort.

True to George's prediction, the next morning found the non union men out in such force that they were divided into a night and a day crew, half of them being sent back to report later, while among the mountains of freight the work went forward faster than ever. But the night had served to point the anger of the strikers, and the dock owners, becoming alarmed for the safety of their property, joined with Emerson in establishing a force of a dozen able−bodied guards, armed with clubs, to assist the police in disputing the shore line with the rioters. The police themselves had proved ineffective, even betraying a half−hearted sympathy with the union men, who were not slow to profit by it. Even so, the day passed rather quietly, as did the next. But in time the agitation became so general as to paralyze a wide section of the water−front, and the city awoke to the realization that a serious conflict was in progress. The handful of fishermen, hidden under the roof of the great warehouse, outnumbered twenty to one, and guarded only by a thin line of pickets, became a centre of general interest.

As the violence of the mob, stimulated rather than checked by the indifference of the police, became more openly daring, so likewise did the reprisals of the fishermen, goaded now to a stubborn rage. They would not hear to having their food brought to them, but insisted daily on emerging in a body at noon and spending the hour in combat. Not to speak of the physical disabilities they incurred in these affrays, the excitement distracted them and affected their work disastrously, to the great concern of their employer.

It was on the fourth day that Boyd espied the man in the gray suit among the strikers and pointed him out to his three companions, Clyde and Fraser having joined him and George in a spirit of curiosity. Clyde was for immediately executing a sally to capture the fellow, explaining that once they had him inside the dock−house they could beat him until he confessed that Marsh was behind the strike, but his valor shrank amazingly when Fraser maliciously suggested that he himself lead the dash.

“No!” he exclaimed. “I'm not a fighting man, but I'm a good general. You know, Napoleon was about my size.”

“I never noticed the resemblance,” remarked Fraser.

“All the same, your idea ain't so bad,” said Balt. “There's somebody stirring those fellows up, and I think it's that detective. I wouldn't mind getting my hands on him, and if you'll all stick with me I'll go out after him.”

“Not for mine,” hastily declared “Fingerless” Fraser. “I don't want to fight anybody. I'm here as a spectator.”

“You're not afraid?” questioned Emerson.

“Not exactly afraid, but what's the use of my getting mixed up in this row? It ain't *my* cannery.”

Now, while a mob is by nature noisy and threatening, there is little real danger in it until its diffusive violence is directed into one channel by a leader. Then, indeed, it becomes a terrible thing, and to the watchers at the dock it became evident, in time, that a guiding influence was at work among their enemies. Sure enough, late in the afternoon of the fourth day, without a moment's warning, the strikers rushed in a body, bearing down the guards like reeds. They came so unexpectedly that there was no time to muster reinforcements at the gate; almost before the fishermen could drop their tasks, their enemies were inside the building and pandemonium had broken loose. The structure rocked to the tumult of pounding heels, of yells and imprecations, the lofty roof serving to toss back and magnify the uproar.

Emerson and his companions found themselves carried away before the onslaught like chips in the surf, then sucked into a maelstrom where the first duty was self−preservation. Behind locked doors and shivering glass a terrified office−clerk, receiver to ear, was calling madly for Police Headquarters, while in the main building itself the crowd bellowed and roared and the hollow floor reverberated to the thunder of trampling feet and the crash of tumbling freight−piles.

Boyd succeeded in keeping his footing and eventually fought his way to a backing of crated machinery, where he stooped and ripped a cleat loose; then, laying about him with this weapon, he cleared a space. It was already difficult to distinguish friend from foe, but he saw Alton Clyde go down a short distance away and made a rush to

rescue him. His pine slat splintered against a head, he dodged a missile, then struck with the fragment in his hand, and, snatching Clyde by the arm, dragged him out from under foot. Battered and bruised, the two won back to Emerson's first position, and watched the tide surge past.

At the first alarm the fishermen had armed themselves with bale−hooks and bludgeons, and for a time worked havoc among their assailants; but as the fight became more general they were forced apart and drawn into the crowd, whereupon the combatants split up into groups, milling about like frightened cattle. Men broke out from these struggling clusters to nurse their injuries or beat a retreat, only to be overrun and swallowed up again in a new commotion.

Emerson saw the big, barefooted fisherman in the red underclothes, armed with a sledge−hammer, go through the ranks of his enemies like a tornado, only to be struck by some missile hurled from a distance. With a shout of rage the fellow turned and flung his own weapon at his assailant, felling him like an ox, then he in turn was blotted out by a surge of rioters. But there was little time for observation, as the scene was changing with kaleidoscopic rapidity and there was the ever−present necessity of self− protection. Seeing Clyde's helpless condition, Emerson shouted:

“Come on! I'll help you aboard the ship.” He found a hardwood club beneath his feet—one of those cudgels that are used in pounding rope−slings and hawsers—and with it cleared a pathway for Clyde and himself. But while still at a distance from the ship's gangway, he suddenly spied the man in the gray suit, who had climbed upon one of the freight−piles, whence he was scanning the crowd. The man likewise recognized Emerson, and pointed him out, crying something unintelligible in the tumult, then leaped down from his vantage−point. The next instant Boyd saw him approaching, followed by several others. He endeavored to hustle Clyde to the big doors ahead of the oncomers, but being intercepted, backed against the shed wall barely in time to beat off the foremost.

His nearest assailant had armed himself with an iron bar and endeavored to guard the first blow with this instrument, but it flew from his grasp, and he sustained the main force of the impact on his forearm. Then, though Boyd fell back farther, the others rushed in and he found himself hard beset. What happened thereafter neither he nor Alton Clyde, who was half− dazed to begin with, ever clearly remembered, for in such over−charged instants the mental photograph is wont to be either unusually distinct or else fogged to such a blur that only the high−lights stand out clearly in retrospect.

Before he had recognized the personal nature of the assault, Emerson found himself engaged in a furious hand−to−hand struggle where a want of room hampered the free use of his cudgel, and he was forced to rely mainly upon his fists. Blows were rained upon him from unguarded quarters, he was kicked, battered, and flung about, his blind instinct finally leading him to clinch with whomsoever his hands encountered. Then a sudden blackness swallowed him up, after which he found himself upon his knees, his arms loosely encircling a pair of legs, and realized that he had been half− stunned by a blow from behind. The legs he was clutching tried to kick him loose, at which he summoned all his strength, knowing that he must go down no further; but as he struggled upward, something smote him in the side with sickening force, and he went to his knees again.

Close beside him he saw the club he had dropped, and endeavored to reach it; but before he could do so, a hand snatched it away and he heard a voice cursing above him. A second time he tried to rise, but his shocked nerves failed to transmit the impulse to his muscles; he could only raise his shoulder and fling an arm weakly above his head in anticipation of the crushing blow he knew was coming. But it did not descend, Instead, he heard a gun shot—that sound for which his ears had been strained from the first—and then for an instant he wondered if it had been directed at himself. A weight sank across his calves, the legs he had been holding broke away from his grasp; then, with a final effort, he pulled himself free and staggered to his feet, his head rocking, his knees sagging. He saw a man's figure facing him, and lunged at it, to bring up in the arms of “Fingerless” Fraser, who cried sharply:

“Are you hurt, Bo?”

Too dazed to answer, he turned and beheld the body of a man stretched face downward on the floor. Beyond, the fellow in the gray suit was disappearing into the crowd. Even yet Boyd did not realize whence the shot had come, although the smell of powder was sharp in his nostrils. Then he saw a gleam of blue metal in Fraser's hands.

“Give me that gun!” he panted, but his deliverer held him off.

“I may need it myself, and I ain't got but the one here! Let's get Clyde out of this.”

Stepping over the motionless form at his feet, Fraser lifted the young club−man, who was huddled in a formless heap as if he had fallen from a great height, and together the two dragged him toward *The Bedford Castle*. As they went aboard, they were nearly run down by a body of reinforcements that Captain Peasley had finally mustered from between decks. Down the gang−plank and over the side they poured, grimy stokers, greasy oilers, and swearing deckhands, equipped with capstan−bars, wrenches, and marlin−spikes. Without waiting to observe the effect of these new−comers, Boyd and Fraser bundled Alton into the first cabin at hand, then turned back.

“Better stay here and look after him. You're all in, yourself,” the adventurer advised. “I'm going to hunt up George.”

He was away on the instant, with Boyd staggering after him, still weak and shaking, the vague discomfort of running blood at the back of his neck, muttering thickly as he went: “Give me your gun, Fraser! Give me your gun!”

The battle was still raging when the police arrived, after an interminable delay, and it ceased only at the rough play of night−sticks, and after repeated charges of the uniformed men had broken up the ranks of the strikers. The dock was cleared at length, and wagon−loads of bleeding, struggling combatants rolled away to jail, union and non−union men bundled in together. But work was not resumed that day, despite the fact that Big George, bruised, ragged, and torn, doubled his force of pickets and took personal charge of them.

That night, under glaring headlines, the evening papers told the story, reporting one fisherman fatally hurt, one striker dead of a gunshot wound, and many others injured.

CHAPTER XVIII. WILLIS MARSH SPRINGS A TRAP

The ensuing days were strenuous ones for the partners, working as they did, with a crippled force and under constant guard. Riot was in the air, and violence on every side. By the police, whose apathy disappeared only when an opportunity occurred of arresting the men they were supposed to protect, they were more handicapped than helped. The appearance of a fisherman at any point along the water−front became a sure signal for strife.

Day by day the feeling on both sides grew stronger, till the non−union men were cemented together in a spirit of bitterest indignation, which materially lessened their zeal for work. Every act of violence intensified their rage. They armed themselves, in defiance of orders, tossed restraint to the winds, and sought the slightest opportunity of wreaking vengeance upon their enemies. Nor were the rioters less determined. Authority, after all, is but a hollow shell, which, once broken, is quickly disintegrated. Fierce engagements took place, populating the hospitals. It became necessary to guard all property in the warehouse districts, and men ceased to venture there alone after dark.

One circumstance caused Boyd no little surprise and uneasiness—the fact that no vigorous effort had been made to fix the blame for the striker's death on that riotous afternoon. Surely, he reasoned, Marsh's detective must have witnessed the killing, and must recognize the ease with which the act could now be saddled upon him. If delay were their object, Emerson could not understand why they did not seek to have him arrested. The consequences might well be serious if Marsh's money were used; but, as the days slipped past and nothing occurred, he decided that he had been overfearful on this score, or else that the manager of the Packers' Trust had limits beyond which he would not push his persecution.

A half−mile from Captain Peasley's ship, the rival Company tenders were loading rapidly with union labor, and it seemed that in spite of Boyd's plan to be first at Kalvik, Marsh's force would beat him to the ground unless greater efforts were made. When he communicated these fears to Big George, the fisherman suddenly became a slave−driver. He passed among his men, cajoling, threatening, bribing, and they began to work like demons, with the result that when the twentieth arrived he was able to announce to his partner that the work would be finished some time during the following morning.

The next day Emerson and Clyde drove down to the dock with Cherry in a closed carriage, experiencing no annoyance beyond some jeers and insults as they passed through the picket line. Boyd had barely seen them comfortably established on board, when up the ship's gangway came “Fingerless” Fraser radiantly attired, three heavily laden hotel porters groaning at his back, the customary thick−waisted cigar between his teeth.

“Are you going with us?” Boyd inquired.

“Sure.”

“See here. Is life one long succession of surprise parties with you?”

“Why, I've figgered on this right along.”

“But the ship is jammed now. There is no room.”

“Oh, I fixed that up long ago. I am going to bunk with the steward.”

“Well, why in the world didn't you let us know you were coming?”

“Say, don't kid yourself. You knew I couldn't stay behind.” Fraser blew a cloud of smoke airily. “I never start anything I can't finish, I keep telling you, and I'm going to put this deal through, now that I've got it started.” With a half−embarrassed laugh and a complete change of manner, he laid his hand upon Boyd's shoulder, saying: “Pal, I ain't much good to myself or anybody else, but I like you and I want to stick around. Maybe I'll come in useful yet—you can't tell.”

Emerson had never glimpsed this side of the man's nature, and it rather surprised him.

“Of course you can come along, old man,” he responded, heartily. “We're glad to have you.”

To one who has never witnessed the spring sailing of a Northern cannery− tender, the event is well worth seeing; it is one of the curiosities of the Seattle water−front. Not only is there the inevitable confusion involved in the departure of an overloaded craft, but likewise there is all the noisy excitement that attends a shipment of Oriental troops.

The Chinese maintain such a clatter as to drown the hoarse cries of the stevedores, the complaint of the creaking tackle, and the rumble of the winches. They scurry hither and yon like a distracted army, forever in the way, shouting, clacking, squealing in senseless turmoil. They are timid as to the water, and for them a voyage is at all times beset with many alarms. It is no more possible to restrain them than to calm a frightened herd of wild pigs, nor will they embark at all until their frenzy has run its course and died of its own exhaustion. To discipline them according to the seamen's standard is inadvisable, for many of them are “cutters,” big, evil, saffron−hued fellows, whose trade it is to butcher and in whose dextrous hands a knife becomes a frightful weapon.

The Japs, ordinarily so noiseless and submissive, yield to the contagion and add their share to the uproar. Each man carries a few pounds of baggage in bundles or packs or valises, and these scanty belongings he guards with shrieking solicitude.

While the pandemonium of the Orientals who gathered to board *The Bedford Castle* was sufficient in itself to cause consternation, it was as nothing to that which broke loose when the fishermen began to assemble. To a man they were drunk, belligerent and, declamatory. A few, to be sure, were still busy with the tag ends of the cargo, but the majority had gone to their lodgings for their packs, and now reappeared in a state of the wildest exuberance; for this would be their last spree of the season, and before them lay a period of long, sleepless nights, exposure, and unceasing labor, wherein a year's work must be crowded into three months. They, therefore, inaugurated the change in befitting style.

On the whole, no explosive has ever been invented that is so noisy in its effect, so furiously expansive in its action, as the fumes of cheap whiskey. The great dock−shed soon began to reverberate to the wildest clamor, which added to the fury of the crowd outside. The strikers, unable to enter the building, flowed down upon the adjoining wharf, or clambered to the roofs nearby, whence they jeered insultingly. Among them was a newspaper photographer, bent on securing an unusual picture for his publication, and in truth the scene from this point of view was sufficiently novel and striking.

The decks of the big, low−lying tramp steamer were piled high with gear of every description. A trio of stout tow−boats were blocked up amidships, long piles of lumber rose higher than a man's head, and the roofs of the deck−houses were jammed with fishing−boats nested, one inside the other, like pots in a kitchen. Every available inch was crowded with cases of gasoline, of groceries, and of the varied provisions required on an expedition of this magnitude. Aft, on rows of hooks, were suspended the carcasses of sheep and bullocks and hogs; there seemed to be nowhere another foot of available room. The red water−line of the ship was already submerged, yet notwithstanding this fact her derricks clanged noisily, her booms swung back and forth, and her gaping hatches swallowed momentary loads. Those fishermen who had come aboard early had settled like flies in the rigging, whence they taunted their enemies, hurling back insult for insult.

It was much like the departure of a gold steamer during the early famine stages of the northward stampede, save that now there were no women, while the confusion was immeasurably greater, and through it all might be felt a certain strained and angry menace. All the long afternoon *The Bedford Castle* lay at her moorings subjected to the customary eleventh−hour delays. As the time dragged on, and the liquor died in the fishermen, it became a herculean task to prevent them from issuing forth into the street, while the crowds outside seemed possessed of a desperate determination to force an entrance and bring the issue to a final settlement. But across the shore end of the dock a double cordon was drawn which hurled back the intruders at every advance.

The fishermen who remained inside the barnlike structure, unable to come at their enemies, fought among themselves, bidding fair to wreck the building in the extravagance of their delirium, while outside the rival faction kept up a fire of missiles and execrations. As the hours crept onward the tension increased, and at last Boyd turned to Captain Peasley saying, “You'd better be ready to pull out at any minute, for if the mob breaks in we'll never be able to hold these maniacs.” He pointed to the black swarm aloft, whence issued hoarse waves of sound. “I don't like the look of things, a little bit.”

“They are a trifle strained, to be sure,” the Captain acknowledged. “I'll stand by to cast off at your signal, so you'd better pass the word around.”

Boyd left the ship and went to the dock−office, for there still remained one thing to be done: he could not leave without sounding a final note of triumph for Mildred. How sweet it would be to her ears he knew full well, yet he could not help wondering if she would feel the thrill that mastered him at this moment. As he saw the empty spaces where had stood those masses of freight which he had gathered at such cost, as he heard his own

men bellowing defiance at his enemies and realized that his first long stride toward success had been taken, his heart swelled with gladness and the breath caught momentarily in his throat. After all, he was going to win! Out of the shimmering distance of his desire, the lady of his dreams drew closer to him; and ere long he could lay at her feet the burden of his travail, and then—. Oblivious to the turmoil all about, he wrote rapidly, almost incoherently, to Mildred, transcribing the mood of mingled tenderness and exultation which possessed him.

"Outside the building," he concluded, "there is a raging mob. They would ruin me if they could, but they can't do it, they can't do it. We have beaten them all, my lady. We have won!"

He was sealing his letter, when, without warning, "Fingerless" Fraser appeared at his side, his fishlike eyes agleam, his colorless face drawn with anxiety.

"They've come to grab you for killing that striker," he began, breathlessly; "there's a couple of 'square−toes' on the dock now. Better take it on the 'lam'—quick!"

"God!" So Marsh had withheld this stroke until the last moment, when the least delay would be fatal. Boyd knew that if he were brought into court he would have hard shift to clear himself against the mass of perjured testimony that his rival had doubtless gathered; but even this seemed as nothing in comparison with the main issue. For one wild instant he considered sending George Balt on with the ship. That would be folly, no doubt; yet plainly he could not hold *The Bedford Castle* and keep together that raging army of fishermen while he fought his way through the tedious vexations of a trial. He saw that he had under−estimated his enemy's cunning, and he realized that, if Marsh had planned this move, he would press his advantage to the full.

"There's two plain−clothes men," he heard Fraser running on. "I 'made' 'em as they were talking to Peasley. You'd better 'beat' it, quick!"

"How? I couldn't get through that crowd. They know me. Listen!" Outside the street broke into a roar at some taunt of the fishermen high up in the rigging. "I can't run away, and if those detectives get me I'm ruined."

"Well! What's to be done?" demanded Fraser, sharply. "If you say the word, we'll shoot it out with them, and get away on the ship before—"

"We can't do that—there are a dozen policemen in front here."

"Well, you'll have to move quick, or they'll 'cop' you, sure."

Boyd clinched his hands in desperation. "I guess they've got me," he said, bitterly. "There's no way out."

His eyes fell upon the letter containing his boastful assurance of victory. What a mockery!

"From what they said I don't think they know you," Fraser continued. "Anyhow, they wanted Peasley to point you out. When they come off, maybe you can slip 'em."

"But how?" Boyd seized eagerly upon the suggestion. "The wharf is empty— see! I'll have to cross it in plain sight."

Through the rear door of the office that opened upon the dock proper they beheld the great floor almost entirely clear. Save for a few tons of freight at which Big George's men were working, it was as unobstructed as a lawn; and, although it was nearly the size of a city block, it afforded no more means of concealment than did the little office itself, with its glass doors, its counter, and its long desk, at the farther end of which a bill−clerk was poring over his task. Iron−barred windows at the front of the room looked out upon the street; other windows and a door at the right opened upon the driveway and railroad track, while at the rear the glass− panelled door through which they had just been peering gave egress only to the dock itself, up which the two officers were likely to come at any instant. Even as Emerson, with a last desperate glance, summed up the possible places of concealment, Fraser exclaimed, softly:

"There they are now!" and they saw at the foot of the gang−plank two men talking with Big George. They saw Balt point the strangers carelessly to the office, whence he had seen Boyd disappearing a few moments before, and turn back to his stevedores; then they saw the plain−clothes men approaching.

"Here! Gimme your coat and hat, quick!" cried Fraser in a low voice, his eyes blazing at a sudden, thought. He stripped his own garments from his back with feverish haste. "Put mine on. There! I'll stall for you. When they grab me, take it on the run. Understand!"

"That won't do. Everybody knows me." Boyd cast an apprehensive glance at the arched back of the bill−clerk, but Fraser, quick of resource in such a situation, forced him swiftly to make the change, saying:

"Nix. It's your only 'out.' Stand here, see!" He indicated a position beside the rear door. "I'll step out the other way where they can see me," he continued, pointing to the wagon−way at the right. "Savvy? When they grab me,

you beat it, and don't wait for nothing."

"But you—"

Already they could hear the footsteps of the officers.

"I'll take a chance. Good−bye."

There was no time even for a hand−shake; Fraser stepped swiftly to the door, then strolled quietly out into the view of the two men, who an instant later accosted him.

"Are you Mr. Boyd Emerson?"

The adventurer answered brusquely, "Yes, but I can't talk to you now."

"You are under arrest, Mr. Emerson."

Boyd waited to hear no more. The glass door swung open noiselessly under his hand, and he stepped out just as the bill−clerk looked up from his work, staring out through the other entrance.

"Fingerless" Fraser's voice was louder now, as if for a signal. "Arrest me? What do you mean? Get out of my way."

"You'd better come peaceably."

Boyd heard a sharp exclamation—"Get him, Bill!" And then the sound of men struggling. He ran, followed by a roar from the strikers, in whose full view Fraser's encounter with the plain−clothes men was taking place. A backward glance showed him that Fraser had drawn his pursuers to the street. He had broken away and dodged out into the open, where the other officers responded at a call and seized him as he apparently undertook to break through the cordon. This diversion served an unexpected purpose. Not only did it draw attention from Emerson's retreat, but it also gave the mob its long−awaited opportunity. Recognizing in the officers' quarry the supposed figure of Emerson, the hated cause of all this strife, the strikers gave vent to a great shout of rage and triumph, and surged forward across the wide street, carrying the police before them with irresistible force.

In a moment it became not a question of keeping the entrance to the wharf, but of protecting the life of the prisoner, and the policemen rallied with their backs to the wall, their clubs working havoc with the heads that came within striking distance.

Scarcely had Boyd reached Big George, when a wing of the besieging army swept in through the unguarded entrance and down the dock like an avalanche, leaving behind them the battling officers and the hungry pack clamoring for the prisoner.

"Drop that freight, and get aboard the best way you can!" Boyd yelled at the fishermen, and with a bound was out into the open crying to Captain Peasley on the bridge:

"Here they come! Cast off, for God's sake!"

Instantly a wild cry of rage and defiance rose from the clotted rigging and upper works of *The Bedford Castle*. Down the fishermen swarmed, ready to over−flow the sides of the ship, but, with a sharp order to George, Boyd ran up the gang−plank and rushed along the rail to a commanding position in the path of his men, where, drawing his revolver, he roared at them to keep back, threatening the first to go ashore. His lungs were bursting from his sprint, and it was with difficulty that his voice rose above the turmoil; but he presented such a figure of determination that the men paused, and then the steamship whistle interrupted opportunely, with a deafening blast.

The dozen men who had been slinging freight on the dock hastened up the gang−plank or climbed the fenders, while the signal−man clung to the lifting tackle, and, at the piping cry of his whistle, was swung aloft out of the very arms of the rioters.

Above, on the flying bridge, Captain Peasley was bellowing orders; a quartermaster was running up the iron steps to the pilot−house; on deck the sailors were fighting their way to their posts through the ranks of the raging fishermen and the shrieking confusion of the Orientals; the last men aboard, with a "Heave Ho!" in unison, slid the gang−plank upward and out of reach. The neighboring roofs, lately so black, were emptying now, the onlookers hastening to join in the attack.

Big George alone remained upon the wharf. As he saw the rush coming he had ordered his men to abandon their load; then he ran to the after−mooring, and, taking slack from a deck hand, cast it off. Back up the dock he went to the forward hawser, where, at a signal, he did the same, moving, toward the last, without excessive hurry, as if in a spirit of bravado. The ship was clear, and he had not cut a hawser. He had done his work; all but a ton or two of the cargo was stowed. There was no longer cause for delay.

“Get aboard! Are you mad?” Emerson shouted, but the cry never reached him. Back he came slowly, in front of the press, secure in his tremendous strength, defiance in his every move, a smouldering challenge in his eyes; and noting that gigantic frame with its square−hewn, flaming face, not one of his enemies dared oppose him. But as he passed they yapped and snarled and jostled at his heels, hungry to rend him and only lacking courage.

As yet the ship, although throbbing to the first pulsations of her engines, lay snug along the piling, but gradually her stern swung off and a wedge of clearance showed. Almost imperceptibly she drew back and rubbed against the timbers. A fender began to squeeze and complain. The dock planking creaked. Sixty seconds more and she would be out of arm's−reach, and still George made no haste. Again Boyd shouted at him, and then with one farewell glower over his shoulder the big fellow mounted a pile, stretched his arms upward to the bulwarks, and swung himself lightly aboard.

Even yet Emerson's anxiety was of the keenest; for, notwithstanding the stress of these dragging moments, he had not forgotten Fraser, the vagabond, the morally twisted rascal, to whose courage and resourcefulness he owed so much. He strained his eyes for a glimpse of the fellow, at the same time dreading the sight of a uniform. Would the ship never get under way and out of hailing distance? If those officers had discovered their mistake, they might yet have time to stop him. He vowed desperately that he would not let them, not if he had to take *The Bedford Castle* to sea with a gun at the back of her helmsman. He made his way hurriedly to the bridge, where he hastily explained to Captain Peasley his evasion of the officers; and here he found Cherry, her face flushed, her eyes sparkling with excitement, but far too wise to speak to him in his present state of mind.

A scattered shower of missiles came aboard as the strikers kept pace with the steamer to the end of the slip, exciting the fishermen, who had again mounted the rigging, to a simian frenzy. Oaths, insults, and jeers were hurled back and forth; but as the big steamer gathered momentum and slid out of her berth, they grew gradually more indistinct, until at last they became muffled, broken, and meaningless. Even then the rival ranks continued to volley profanely at each other, while the Captain, with hand on the whistle−rope, blew taunting blasts; nor did the fishermen descend from their perches until the forms on the dock had blurred together and the city lay massed in the distance, tier upon tier, against the gorgeous evening sky.

CHAPTER XIX. IN WHICH A MUTINY IS THREATENED

Even after they were miles down the Sound, Boyd remained at his post, sweeping the waters astern in an anxious search for some swift harbor craft, the appearance of which would signal that his escape had been discovered.

“I won't feel safe until we are past Port Townsend,” he confessed to Cherry, who maintained a position at his side.

“Why Port Townsend? We don't stop there.”

“No. But the police can wire on from Seattle to stop us and take me off at that point.”

“If they find out their mistake.”

“They must have found it out long ago. That's why I've got Peasley forcing this old tub; she's doing ten knots, and that's a breakneck speed for her. Once we're through the Straits, I'll be satisfied. But meanwhile—“ Emerson lowered his glasses with a sigh of fatigue, and in the soft twilight the girl saw that his face was lined and careworn. The yearning at her heart lent poignant sympathy to her words, as she said:

“You deserve to win, Boyd; you have made a good fight.”

“Oh, I'll win!” he declared, wearily. “I've got to win; only I wish we were past Port Townsend.”

“What will happen to Fraser?” she queried.

“Nothing serious, I am sure. You see, they wanted me, and nobody else; once they find they have the wrong man I rather believe they will free him in disgust.”

A moment later he went on: “Just the same, it makes me feel depressed and guilty to leave him—I—I wouldn't desert a comrade for anything if the choice lay with me.”

“You did quite right,” Cherry warmly assured him.

“You see, I am not working for myself; I am doing this for another.”

It was the girl's turn to sigh softly, while the eyes she turned toward the west were strangely sad and dreamy. To her companion she seemed not at all like the buoyant creature who had kindled his courage when it was so low, the brave girl who had stood so steadfastly at his shoulder and kept his hopes alive during these last, trying weeks. It struck him suddenly that she had grown very quiet of late. It was the first time he had had the leisure to notice it, but now, when he came to reflect on it, he remembered that she had never seemed quite the same since his interview with her on that day when Hilliard had so unexpectedly come to his rescue. He wondered if in reality this change might not be due to some reflected alteration in himself. Well! He could not help it.

Her strange behavior at that time had affected him more deeply than he would have thought possible; and while he had purposely avoided thinking much about the banker's sudden change of front, back of his devout thankfulness for the miracle was a vague suspicion, a curious feeling that made him uncomfortable in the girl's presence. He could not repent his determination to win at any price; yet he shrank, with a moral cowardice which made him inwardly writhe, from owning that Cherry had made the sacrifice at which Clyde and the others had hinted. If it were indeed true, it placed him in an intolerable position, wherein he could express neither his gratitude nor his censure. No doubt she had read the signs of his mental confusion, and her own delicate sensibility had responded to it.

They remained side by side on the bridge while the day died amidst a wondrous panoply of color, each busied with thoughts that might not be spoken, in their hearts emotions oddly at variance. The sky ahead of them was wide−streaked with gold, as if for a symbol, interlaid with sooty clouds in silhouette; on either side the mountains rose from penumbral darkness to clear−cut heights still bright from the slanting radiance. Here and there along the shadowy shore−line a light was born; the smell of the salt sea was in the air. Above the rhythmic pulse of the steamer rose the voices of men singing between decks, while the parting waters at the prow played a soft accompaniment. A steward summoned them to supper, but Boyd refused, saying he could not eat, and the girl stayed with him while the miles slowly slipped past and the night encompassed them.

“Two hours more,” he told her, as the ship's bell sounded. “Then I can eat and sleep—and sing.”

Captain Peasley was pacing the bridge when later they breasted the glare of Port Townsend and saw in the

distance the flashing searchlights of the forts that guard the Straits. They saw him stop suddenly, and raise his night−glasses; Boyd laid his hand on Cherry's arm. Presently the Captain crossed to them and said:

"Yonder seems to be a launch making out. See? I wonder what's up." Almost in their path a tiny light was violently agitated. "By Jove! They're signalling."

"You won't stop, will you?" questioned Emerson.

"I don't know, I am sure. I may have to."

The two boats were drawing together rapidly, and soon those on the bridge heard the faint but increasing patter of a gasoline exhaust. Carrying the same speed as *The Bedford Castle*, the launch shortly came within hailing distance. The cyclopean eye of the ship's searchlight blazed up, and the next instant, out from the gloom leaped a little craft, on the deck of which a man stood waving a lantern. She held steadfastly to her course, and a voice floated up to them:

"Ahoy! What ship?"

"*The Bedford Castle*, cannery−tender for Bristol Bay," Peasley shouted back.

The man on the launch relinquished his lantern, and using both palms for a funnel, cried, more clearly now: "Heave to! We want to come aboard."

With an exclamation of impatience, the commanding officer stepped to the telegraph, but Emerson forestalled him.

"Wait, they're after me, Captain; it's the Port Townsend police, and if you let them aboard they'll take me off."

"What makes you think so?" demanded Peasley.

"Ask them."

Turning, the skipper bellowed down the gleaming electric pathway, "Who are you?"

"Police! We want to come aboard."

"What did I tell you?" cried Emerson.

Once more the Captain shouted: "What do you want?"

"One of your passengers—Emerson. Heave to. You're passing us."

"That's bloody hard luck, Mr. Emerson; I can't help myself," the Captain declared. But again Boyd blocked him as he started for the telegraph.

"I won't stand it, sir. It's a conspiracy to ruin me."

"But, my dear young man—"

"Don't touch that instrument!"

From the launch came cries of growing vehemence, and a startled murmur of voices rose from somewhere in the darkness of the deck beneath.

"Stand aside," Peasley ordered, gruffly; but the other held his ground, saying, quietly:

"I warn you. I am desperate."

"Shall I stop her, sir?" the quartermaster asked from the shadows of the wheel−house.

"No!" Emerson commanded, sharply, and in the glow from the binnacle−light they saw he had drawn his revolver, while on the instant up from the void beneath heaved the massive figure of Big George Balt, a behemoth, more colossal and threatening than ever in the dim light. Rumbling curses as he came, he leaped up the pilot−house steps, wrenched open the door, and with one sweep of his hairy paw flung the helmsman from his post, panting,

"Keep her going, Cap', or I'll run them down!"

"We stood by you, old man," Emerson urged; "you stand by us. They can't make you stop. They can't come aboard."

The launch was abreast of them now, and skimming along so close that one might have tossed a biscuit aboard of her. For an instant Captain Peasley hesitated; then Emerson saw the ends of his bristly mustache rise above an expansive grin as he winked portentously. But his voice was convincingly loud and wrathful as he replied:

"What do you mean, sir? I'll have my blooming ship libelled for this."

"I'll make good your losses," Emerson volunteered, quickly, realizing that other ears were open.

"Why, it's mutiny, sir."

"Exactly! You can say you went out under duress."

"I never heard of such a thing," stormed the skipper. Then, more quietly, "But I don't seem to have any choice

in the matter; do I?”

“None whatever.”

“Tell them to go to hell!” growled Balt from the open window above their head.

A blasphemous outcry floated up from the launch, while heads protruded from the deck−house openings, the faces white in the slanting glare. “Why don't you heave to?” demanded a voice.

Peasley stepped to the end of the bridge and called down: “I can't stop, my good man, they won't allow it, y' know. You'll have to bloody well come aboard yourself.” Then, obedient to his command, the search−light traced an arc through the darkness and died out, leaving the little craft in darkness, save for its dim lantern.

Unseen by the amazed quartermaster, who was startled out of speech and action, Emerson gripped the Captain's shoulder and whispered his thanks, while the Britisher grumbled under his breath:

“Bli' me! Won't that labor crowd be hot? They nearly bashed in my head with that iron spike. Four hundred pounds! My word!”

The sputter of the craft alongside was now punctuated by such a volley of curses that he raised his voice again: “Belay that chatter, will you? There's a lady aboard.”

The police launch sheered off, and the sound of her exhaust grew rapidly fainter and fainter. But not until it had wholly ceased did Big George give over his post at the wheel. Even then he went down the ladder reluctantly, and without a word of thanks, of explanation, or of apology. With him this had been but a part of the day's work. He saw neither sentiment nor humor in the episode. The clang of the deep−throated ship's bell spoke the hour, and, taking Cherry's arm, Boyd helped her to the deck.

“Now let's eat something,” said she.

“Yes,” he agreed, relief and triumph in his tone, “and drink something, too.”

“We'll drink to the health of 'Fingerless' Fraser.”

“To the health of 'Fingerless' Fraser,” he echoed. “We will drink that standing.”

A week later, after an uneventful voyage across a sea of glass, *The Bedford Castle* made up through a swirling tide−rip and into the fog− bound harbor of Unalaska. The soaring “goonies” that had followed them from Flattery had dropped astern at first sight of the volcanic headlands, and now countless thousands of sea−parrots fled from the ship's path, squattering away in comic terror, dragging their fat bodies across the sea as a boy skips a flat rock. It had been Captain Peasley's hope, here at the gateway of the Misty Sea, to learn something about the lay of the big ice−floes to the northward, but he was disappointed, for the season was yet too young for the revenue−cutters, and the local hunters knew nothing. Forced to rely on luck and his own skill, he steamed out again the next day, this time doubling back to the eastward and laying a cautious course along the second leg of the journey.

Once through the ragged barrier that separates the North Pacific from her sister sea, the dank breath of the Arctic smote them fairly. The breeze that wafted out from the north brought with it the chill of limitless ice−fields, and the first night found them hove−to among the outposts of that shifting desert of death which debouches out of Behring Straits with the first approach of autumn, to retreat again only at the coming of reluctant summer. From the crow's−nest the lookout stared down upon a white expanse that stretched beyond the horizon. At dawn they began their careful search, feeling their way eastward through the open lanes and tortuous passages that separated the floes, now laying−to for the northward set of the fields to clear a path before them, now stealing through some narrow lead that opened into freer waters.

The Bedford Castle was a steel hull whose sides, opposed to the jaws of the ponderous masses, would have been crushed like an eggshell in a vise. Unlike a wooden ship, the gentlest contact would have sprung her plates, while any considerable collision would have pierced her as if she had been built of paper. Appreciating to the full the peril of his slow advance, Captain Peasley did all the navigating in person; but eventually they were hemmed in so closely that for a day and a night they could do nothing but drift with the pack. In time, however, the winds opened a crevice through which they retreated to follow the outer limits farther eastward, until they were balked again.

Opposed to them were the forces of Nature, and they were wholly dependent upon her fickle favor. It might be a day, a week, a month before she would let them through, and, even when the barrier began to yield, another ship, a league distant, might profit by an opening which to them was barred. For a long, dull period the voyagers lay as helpless as if in dry−dock, while wandering herds of seals barked at them or bands of walruses ceased their fishing and crept out upon the ice−pans to observe these invaders of their peace. When an opportunity at last

presented itself, they threaded their way southward, there to try another approach, and another, and another, until the first of May had come and gone, leaving them but little closer to their goal than when they first hove−to. Late one evening they discerned smoke on the horizon, and the next morning's light showed a three−masted steamship fast in the ice, a few miles to the westward.

“That's *The Juliet*,” Big George informed his companions, “one of the North American Packers' Association tenders.”

“She was loading when we left Seattle,” Boyd remarked.

“It is Willis Marsh's ship, so he must be aboard,” supplemented Cherry. “She's a wooden ship, and built for this business. If we don't look out he'll beat us in, after all.”

“What good will that do him?” Clyde questioned. “The fish don't bite—I mean run—for sixty days yet.”

Emerson and Balt merely shrugged.

To Cherry Malotte this had been a voyage of dreams; for once away from land, Boyd had become his real self again—that genial, irrepressible self she had seen but rarely—and his manner had lost the restraint and coolness which recently had disturbed their relations. Of necessity their cramped environment had thrown them much together, and their companionship had been most pleasant. She and Boyd had spent long hours together, during which his light−heartedness had rivalled that of Alton Clyde—hours wherein she had come to know him more intimately and to feel that he was growing to a truer understanding of herself. She realized beyond all doubt that for him there was but one woman in all the world, yet the mere pleasure of being near him was an anodyne for her secret distress. Womanlike, she took what was offered her and strove unceasingly for more.

Two days after sighting *The Juliet* they raised another ship, one of the sailing fleet which they knew to be hovering in the offing, and then on the fifth of the month the capricious current opened a way for them. Slowly at first they pushed on between the floes into a vast area of slush−ice, thence to a stretch as open and placid as a country mill−pond. The lookout pointed a path out of this, into which they steamed, coming at length to clear water, with the low shores of the mainland twenty miles away.

At sundown they anchored in the wide estuary of the Kalvik River, the noisy rumble of their chains breaking the silence that for months had lain like a smother upon the port. The Indian village gave sign of life only in thin, azure wisps of smoke that rose from the dirt roofs; the cannery buildings stood as naked and uninviting as when Boyd had last seen them. The Greek cross crowning the little white church was gilded by the evening sun. Through the glasses Cherry spied a figure in the door of her house which she declared was Constantine, but with commendable caution the big breed forebore to join the fleet of kyaks now rapidly mustering. Taking Clyde with them, she and Boyd were soon on their way to the land, leaving George to begin discharging his cargo. The long voyage that had maddened the fishermen was at last at an end, and they were eager to begin their tasks.

A three−mile pull brought the ship's boat to Cherry's landing, where Constantine and Chakawana met them, the latter hysterical with joy, the former showing his delight in a rare display of white teeth and a flow of unintelligible English. Even the sledge−dogs, now fat from idleness, greeted their mistress with a fierce clamor that dismayed Alton Clyde, to whom all was utterly new and strange.

“Glory be!” he exclaimed. “They're nothing but wolves. Won't they bite? And the house—ain't it a hit! Why, it looks like a stage setting! Oh, say, I'm for this! I'm getting rough and primitive and brutal already!”

When they passed from the store, with its shelves sadly naked now, to the cozy living quarters behind, his enthusiasm knew no bounds. Leaving Chakawana and her mistress to chatter and clack in their patois, he inspected the premises inside and out, peering into all sorts of corners, collecting souvenirs, and making friends with the saturnine breed.

Cherry would not return to the ship, but Emerson and Clyde re−embarked and were rowed down to the cannery site, abreast of which lay *The Bedford Castle*, where they lingered until the creeping twilight forced them to the boat again. When they reached the ship the cool Arctic night had descended, but its quiet was broken by the halting nimble of steam− winches, the creak of tackle, the cries of men, and the sounds of a great activity. Baring his head to the breezes Boyd filled his lungs full of the bracing air, sweet with the flavor of spring, vowing secretly that no music that he had ever heard was the equal of this. He turned his face to the southward and smiled, while his thoughts sped a message of love and hope into the darkness.

CHAPTER XX. WHEREIN “FINGERLESS” FRASER RETURNS

Big George had lost no time, and already the tow−boats were overboard, while a raft of timber was taking form alongside the ship. As soon as it was completed, it was loaded with crates and boxes and paraphernalia of all sorts, then towed ashore as the tide served. Another took its place, and another and another. All that night the torches flared and the decks drummed to a ceaseless activity. In the morning Boyd sent a squad of fishermen ashore to clear the ground for his buildings, and all day new rafts of lumber and material helped to increase the pile at the water's edge.

His early training as an engineer now stood him in good stead, for a thousand details demanded expert supervision; but he was as completely at home at this work as was Big George in his own part of the undertaking, and it was not long before order began to emerge from what seemed a hopeless chaos. Never did men have more willing hands to do their bidding than did he and George; and when a week later *The Juliet*, with Willis Marsh on board, came to anchor, the bunk−houses were up and peopled, while the new site had become a beehive of activity.

The mouth of the Kalvik River is several miles wide, yet it contains but a small anchorage suitable for deep−draught ships, the rest of the harbor being underlaid with mud−bars and tide−flats over which none but small boats may pass; and as the canneries are distributed up and down the stream for a considerable distance, it is necessary to transport all supplies to and from the ships by means of tugs and lighters. Owing to the narrowness of the channel, *The Juliet* came to her moorings not far from *The Bedford Castle* .

To Marsh, already furious at the trick the ice had played him, this forced proximity to his rival brought home with added irony the fact that he had been forestalled, while it emphasized his knowledge that henceforth the conflict would be carried on at closer quarters. It would be a contest between two men, both determined to win by fair means or foul.

Emerson was a dream−dazzled youth, striving like a knight−errant for the love of a lady and the glory of conquest, but he was also a born fighter, and in every emergency he had shown himself as able as his experienced opponent.

As Marsh looked about and saw how much Boyd's well−directed energy was accomplishing, he was conscious of a slight disheartenment. Still, he was on his own ground, he had the advantage of superior force, and though he was humiliated by his failure to throttle the hostile enterprise in its beginning, he was by no means at the end of his expedients. He was curious to see his rival in action, and he decided to visit him and test his temper.

It was on the afternoon following his arrival that Marsh, after a tour of inspection, landed from his launch and strolled up to where Boyd Emerson was at work. He was greeted courteously, if a bit coolly, and found, as on their last meeting, that his own bearing was reflected exactly in that of Boyd. Both men, beneath the scant politeness of their outward manner, were aware that the time for ceremony had passed. Here in the Northland they faced each other at last as man to man.

“I see you have a number of my old fishermen,” Marsh observed.

“Yes, we were fortunate in getting such good ones.”

“You were fortunate in many ways. In fact you are a very lucky young man.”

“Indeed! How?”

“Well, don't you think you were lucky to beat that strike?”

“It wasn't altogether luck. However, I do consider myself fortunate in escaping at the last moment,” Boyd laughed easily. “By the way, what happened to the man they mistook for me?”

“Let him go, I believe. I didn't pay much attention to the matter.” Marsh had been using his eyes to good advantage, and, seeing the work even better in hand than he had supposed, he was moved by irritation and the desire to goad his opponent to say more than he had intended: “I rather think you will have a lot to explain, one of these days,” he said, with deliberate menace.

“With fifty thousand cases of salmon aboard *The Bedford Castle* I will explain anything. Meanwhile the police may go to the devil!” The cool assurance of the young man's tone roused his would−be tormentor like a

personal affront.

"You got away from Seattle, but there is a commissioner at Dutch Harbor, also a deputy marshal, who may have better success with a warrant than those policemen had." The Trust's manager could not keep down the angry tremor in his voice, and the other, perceiving it, replied in a manner designed to inflame him still more:

"Yes, I have heard of those officers. I understand they are both in your employ."

"What!"

"I hear you have bought them."

"Do you mean to insinuate—"

"I don't mean to insinuate anything. Listen! We are where we can talk plainly, Marsh, and I am tired of all this subterfuge. You did what you could to stop me, you even tried to have me killed—"

"You dare to—"

"But I guess it never occurred to you that I may be just as desperate as you are."

The men stared at each other with hostile eyes, but the accusation had come so suddenly and with such boldness as to rob Marsh of words. Emerson went on in the same level voice: "I broke through in spite of you, and I'm on the job. If you want to cry quits, I'm willing; but, by God! I won't be balked, and if any of your hired marshals try to take me before I put up my catch I'll put you away. Understand?"

Willis Marsh recoiled involuntarily before the sudden ferocity that blazed up in the speaker's face. "You are insane," he cried.

"Am I?" Emerson laughed, harshly. "Well, I'm just crazy enough to do what I say. I don't think you're the kind that wants hand−to−hand trouble, so let's each attend to his own affair. I'm doing well, thank you, and I think I can get along better if yon don't come back here until I send for you. Something might fall on you."

Marsh's full, red lips went pallid with rage as he said "Then it is to be war, eh?"

"Suit yourself." Boyd pointed to the shore. "Your boatman is waiting for you."

As Marsh made his way to the water's edge he stumbled like a blind man; his lips were bleeding where his small, sharp teeth had bitten them, and he panted like an hysterical woman.

During the next fortnight the sailing−ships began to assemble, standing in under a great spread of canvas to berth close alongside the two steamships; for, once the ice had moved north, there was no further obstacle to their coming, and the harbor was soon livened with puffing tugs, unwieldy lighters, and fleets of smaller vessels. Where, but a short time before, the brooding silence had been undisturbed save for the plaint of wolf−dogs and the lazy voices of natives, a noisy army was now at work. The bustle of a great preparation arose; languid smoke−wreaths began to unfurl above the stacks of the canneries; the stamp and clank of tin− machines re−echoed; hammer and saw maintained a never−ceasing hubbub. Down at the new plant scows were being launched while yet the pitch was warm on their seams; buildings were rising rapidly, and a crew had gone up the river to get out a raft of piles.

On the morning after the arrival of the last ship, Emerson and his companions were treated to a genuine surprise. Cherry had come down to the site as usual—she could not let a day go by without visiting the place—and Clyde, after a tardy breakfast, had just come ashore. They were watching Big George direct the launching of a scow, when all of a sudden they heard a familiar voice behind them cry, cheerfully:

"Hello, white folks! Here we are, all together again."

They turned to behold a villanous−looking man beaming benignly upon them. He was dirty, his clothes were in rags, and through a riotous bristle of beard that hid his thin features a mangy patch showed on either cheek. It was undeniably "Fingerless" Fraser, but how changed, how altered from that radiant flower of indolence they had known! He was pallid, emaciated, and bedraggled; his attitude showed hunger and abuse, and his bony joints seemed about to pierce through their tattered covering. As they stood speechless with amazement, he made his identification complete by protruding his tongue from the corner of his mouth and gravely closing one eye in a wink of exceeding wisdom.

"Fraser!" they cried in chorus, then fell upon him noisily, shaking his grimy hands and slapping his back until he coughed weakly. Summoned by their shouts, Big George broke in upon the incoherent greeting, and at sight of his late comrade began to laugh hoarsely.

"Glad to see you, old man!" he cried, "but how did you get here?"

Fraser drew himself up with injured dignity, then spoke in dramatic accents. "I worked my way!" He showed

the whites of his eyes, tragically.

"You look like you'd walked in from Kansas," George declared.

"Yes, sir, I *worked! Me!"*

"How? Where?"

"On that bloody wind−jammer." He stretched a long arm toward the harbor in a theatrical gesture.

"But the police?" queried Boyd.

"Oh, I squared them easy. It's you they want. Yes, sir, I *worked* ." Again he scanned their faces anxiously. "I'm a scullery−maid."

"What?"

"That's what I said. I've rustled garbage−cans till the smell of food gives me a cold sweat. I'm as hungry as a starving Cuban, and yet the sight of a knife and fork turns my stomach." He wheeled suddenly upon Alton Clyde, whose burst of shrill laughter offended him. "Don't cry. Your sympathy unmans me."

"Tell us about it," urged Cherry.

"What's the use?" he demanded, with a glare at Clyde. "That bone−head wouldn't understand."

"Go ahead," Boyd seconded, with twitching lips. "You look as if you had worked, and worked hard."

"Hard? I'm the only man in the world who knows what hard work is!"

"Start at the beginning—when you were arrested."

"Well, I didn't care nothing about the sneeze," he took up the tale, "for I figure it out that they can't slough me without clearing you, so I never take no sleeping−powders, and, sure enough, about third drink−time the bulls spring me, and I screw down the main stem to the drink and get Jerry to your fade—"

"Tell it straight," interrupted Cherry. "They don't understand you."

"Well, there ain't any Pullmans running to this resort, so I stow away on a coal−burner, but somebody flags me. Then I try to hire out as a fisherman, but I ain't there with the gang talk and my stuff drags, so I fix it for a hide−away on *The Blessed Isle*—that's her name. Can you beat that for a monaker? This sailor of mine goes good to grub me, but he never shows for forty−eight hours—or years, I forget which. Anyhow, I stand it as long as I can, then I dig my way up to a hatch and mew like a house−cat. It seems they were hep from the start, and battened me down on purpose, then made book on how long I'd stay hid. Oh, it's a funny joke, and they all get a stomach laugh when I show. When I offer to pay my way they're insulted. Nix! that ain't their graft. They wouldn't take money from a stranger. Oh, no! They permit me to *work* my way. The scullion has quit, see? So they promote me to his job. It's the only job I ever held, and I held it because it wouldn't let go of me, savvy? There's only three hundred men aboard *The Blessed Isle*, so all I have to do, regular, is to understudy the cooks, carry the grub, wait on table, wash the dishes, mop the floors, make the officers' beds, peel six bushels of potatoes a day, and do the laundry. Then, of course, there's some odd tasks. Oh, it was a swell job—more like a pastime. When a mop sees me coming now it dances a hornpipe, and I can't look a dish−rag in the face. All I see in my dreams is potato−parings and meat−rinds. I've got dish− water in my veins, and the whole universe looks greasy to me. Naturally it was my luck to pick the slowest ship in the harbor. We lay three weeks in the ice, that's all, and nobody worked but me and the sea−gulls."

"You deserted this morning, eh?"

"I did. I beat the barrier, and now I want a bath and some clean clothes and a whole lot of sleep. You don't need to disturb me till fall."

He showed no interest whatever in the new plant, refusing even to look it over or to express an opinion upon the progress of the work; so they sent him out to the ship, where for days he remained in a toad−like lethargy, basking in the sun, sleeping three−fourths of the time and spending his waking hours in repeating the awful tale of his disgraceful peonage.

To unload the machinery, particularly the heavier pieces, was by no means a simple matter, owing to the furious tides that set in and out of the Kalvik River. The first mishap occurred during the trip on which the boilers were towed in, and it looked to Boyd less like an accident than a carefully planned move to cripple him at one stroke. The other ships were busily discharging and the roadstead was alive with small craft of various kinds, when the huge boilers were swung over the side of *The Bedford Castle* and blocked into position for the journey to the shore. George and a half−dozen of his men went along with the load while Emerson remained on the ship. They were just well under way when, either by the merest chance or by malicious design, several of the rival

Company's towboats moored to the neighboring ships cast off. The anchorage was crowded and a boiling six−mile tide made it difficult at best to avoid collision.

Hearing a confused shouting to shoreward, Boyd ran to the rail in time to see one of the Company tugs at the head of a string of towboats bearing down ahead of the current directly upon his own slow−moving lighter. Already it was so close at hand as to make disaster seem inevitable. He saw Balt wave his arms furiously and heard him bellow profane warnings while the fishermen scurried about excitedly, but still the tug held to its course. Boyd raised his voice in a wild alarm, but had they heard him there was nothing they could have done. Then suddenly the affair altered its complexion.

The oncoming tug was barely twice its length from the scow when Boyd saw Big George cease his violent antics and level a revolver directly at the wheel−house of the opposing craft. Two puffs of smoke issued from weapon, then out from the glass−encased structure the steersman plunged, scrambled down the deck and into the shelter of the house. Instantly the bow of the tug swung off, and she came on sidewise, striking Balt's scow a glancing blow, the sound of which rose above the shouts, while its force threw the big fellow and his companions to their knees and shattered the glass in the pilot−house windows. The boats behind fouled each other, then drifted down upon the scow, and the tide, seizing the whole flotilla, began to spin it slowly. Rushing to the ladder, Emerson leaped into another launch which fortunately was at hand, and the next instant as the little craft sped out from the side of *The Bedford Castle*, he saw that a fight was in progress on the lighter. It was over quickly, and before he reached the scene the current had drifted the tows apart. George, it seemed, had boarded the tug, dragged the captain off, and beaten him half insensible before the man's companions had come to his rescue.

“Is the scow damaged?” Emerson cried, as he came alongside.

“She's leaking, but I guess we can make it,” George reassured him.

They directed the second launch to make fast, and, towed by both tugs, they succeeded in beaching their cargo a mile below the landing.

“We'll calk her at low tide,” George declared, well satisfied at this outcome of the misadventure. Then he fell to reviling the men who had caused it.

“Don't waste your breath on them,” Boyd advised. “We're lucky enough as it is. If that tug hadn't sheered off she would have cut us down, sure.”

“That fellow done it a−purpose,” George swore. “Seamen ain't that careless. He tried to tell me he was rattled, but I rattled *him* .”

“If that's the case they may try it again,” said the younger man.

“Huh! I'll pack a 'thirty−thirty' from now on, and I bet they don't get within hailing distance without an iron−clad.”

The more calmly Emerson regarded the incident, the more he marvelled at the good−fortune that had saved him. “We had better wake up,” he said. “We have been asleep so far. If Marsh planned this, he will plan something more.”

“Yes, and if he puts one wallop over we're done for,” George agreed, pessimistically. “I'll keep a watchman aboard the scows hereafter. That's our vital spot.”

But the days sped past without further interference, and the construction of the plant progressed by leaps and bounds, while *The Bedford Castle*, having discharged her cargo, steamed away to return in August.

The middle of June brought the first king salmon, scouts sent on ahead of the “sockeyes;” but Boyd made no effort to take advantage of this run, laboring manfully to prepare for the advance of the main army, that terrific horde that was soon to come from the mysterious depths, either to make or ruin him. Once the run proper started, there would be no more opportunity for building or for setting up machinery. He must be ready and waiting by the first of July.

For some time his tin−machines had been busy, night and day, turning out great heaps of gleaming cans, while the carpenters and machinists completed their tasks. The gill−netters were overhauling their gear, the beach was lined with fishing−boats. On the dock great piles of seines and drift−nets were being inspected. Three miles below, Big George, with a picked crew and a pile−driver, was building the fish−trap. It consisted of half−mile “leads,” or rows of piling, capped with stringers, upon which netting was hung, and terminated in “hearts,” “corrals,” and “spillers,” the intricate arrangements of webbing and timbers out of which the fish were to be taken.

It was for the title to the ground where his present operations were going forward that George had been so

cruelly disciplined by the “interests;” and while he had held stubbornly to his rights for years in spite of the bitterest persecution, he was now for the first time able to utilize his site. Accordingly his exultation was tremendous.

As for Boyd, the fever in his veins mounted daily as he saw his dream assuming concrete form. The many problems arising as the work advanced afforded him unceasing activity; the unforeseen obstacles which were encountered hourly required swift and certain judgment, taxing his ingenuity to the utmost. He became so filled with it all, so steeped with the spirit of his surroundings, that he had thought for nothing else. Every dawn marked the beginning of a new battle, every twilight heralded another council. His duties swamped him; he was worried, exultant, happy. Always he found Cherry at his shoulder, unobtrusive and silent for the most part, yet intensely observant and keenly alive to every action. She seemed to have the faculty of divination, knowing when to be silent and when to join her mood with his, and she gave him valuable help; for she possessed a practical mind and a masculine aptitude for details that surprised both him and George. But, rapidly as the work progressed, it seemed that good−fortune would never smile upon them for long. One day, when their preparations were nearly completed, a foreman came to Boyd, and said excitedly:

“Boss, I'd like you to look at the Iron Chinks right away.”

“What's up?”

“I don't know, but something is wrong.” A hurried examination showed the machines to be cunningly crippled; certain parts were entirely missing, while others were broken.

“They were all right when we brought them ashore,” the man declared. “Somebody's been at them lately.”

“When? How?” questioned Boyd. “We have had watchmen on guard all the time. Have any strangers been about?”

“Nobody seems to know. When we got ready to set 'em just now, I saw this.”

The Iron Chink, or mechanical cleaner, is perhaps the most ingenious of the many labor−saving devices used in the salmon fisheries. It is an awkward−looking, yet very effective contrivance of revolving knives and conveyors which seizes the fish whole and delivers it cleaned, clipped, cut, and ready to be washed. With superhuman dexterity it does the work of twenty lightning−like butchers. Without the aid of these Iron Chinks, Boyd knew that his fish would spoil before they could be handled. In a panic, he pursued his investigation far enough to realize that the machines were beyond repair; that what had seemed at first a trivial mishap was in fact an appalling disaster. Then, since his own experience left him without resource, he hastened straightway to George Balt. A half−hour's run down the bay and he clambered from his launch to the pile−driver, where, amid the confusion and noise, he made known his tidings. The big fellow's calmness amazed him.

“What are you going to do now?”

“Butcher by hand,” said the fisherman.

“But how? That takes skilled labor—lots of it.”

George grinned. “I'm too old a bird to be caught like this. I figured on accidents from the start, and when I hired my Chinamen I included a crew of cutters.”

“By Jove, you never told me!”

“There wasn't no use. We ain't licked yet, not by a damned sight. Willis Marsh will have to try again.”

CHAPTER XXI. A HAND IN THE DARK

While they were talking a tug−boat towing a pile−driver came into view. Boyd asked the meaning of its presence in this part of the river.

“I don't know,” answered Big George, staring intently. “Yonder looks like another one behind it, with a raft of piles.”

“I thought all the Company traps were up−stream.”

“So they are. I can't tell what they're up to.”

A half−hour later, when the new flotilla had come to anchor a short distance below, Emerson's companion began to swear.

“I might have known it.”

“What?”

“Marsh aims to 'cork' us.”

“What is that?”

“He's going to build a trap on each side of this one and cut off our fish.”

“Good Lord! Can he do that?”

“Sure. Why not? The law gives us six hundred yards both ways. As long as he stays outside of that limit he can do anything he wants to.”

“Then of what use is our trap? The salmon follow definite courses close to the shore, and if he intercepts them before they reach us—why, then we'll get only what he lets through.”

“That's his plan,” said Big George, sourly, “It's an old game, but it don't always work. You can't tell what salmon will do till they do it. I've studied this point of land for five years, and I know more about it than anybody else except God 'lmighty. If the fish hug the shore, then we're up against it, but I think they strike in about here; that's why I chose this site. We can't tell, though, till the run starts. All we can do now is see that them people keep their distance.”

The “lead” of a salmon−trap consists of a row of web−hung piling that runs out from the shore for many hundred feet, forming a high, stout fence that turns the schools of fish and leads them into cunningly contrived enclosures, or “pounds,” at the outer extremity, from which they are “brailed” as needed. These corrals are so built that once the fish are inside they cannot escape. The entire structure is devised upon the principle that the salmon will not make a short turn, but will swim as nearly as possible in a straight line. It looked to Boyd as if Marsh, by blocking the line of progress above and below, had virtually destroyed the efficiency of the new trap, rendering the cost of its construction a total loss.

“Sometimes you can cork a trap and sometimes you can't,” Balt went on. “It all depends on the currents, the lay of the bars, and a lot of things we don't know nothing about. I've spent years in trying to locate the point where them fish strike in, and I think it's just below here. It'll all depend on how good I guessed.”

“Exactly! And if you guessed wrong—”

“Then we'll fish with nets, like we used to before there was any traps.”

That evening, when he had seen the night−shift started, Emerson decided to walk up to Cherry's house, for he was worried over the day's developments and felt that an hour of the girl's society might serve to clear his thoughts. His nerves were high−strung from the tension of the past weeks, and he knew himself in the condition of an athlete trained to the minute. In his earlier days he had frequently felt the same nervousness, the same intense mental activity, just prior to an important race or game, and he was familiar with those disquieting, panicky moments when, for no apparent reason, his heart thumped and a physical sickness mastered him. He knew that the fever would leave him, once the salmon began to run, just as it had always vanished at the crack of the starter's pistol or the shrill note of the referee's whistle. He was eager for action, eager to find himself possessed of that gloating, gruelling fury that drives men through to the finish line. Meanwhile, he was anxious to divert his mind into other channels.

Cherry's house was situated a short distance above the cannery which served as Willis Marsh's headquarters,

and Boyd's path necessarily took him past his enemy's very stronghold. Finding the tide too high to permit of passing beneath the dock, he turned up among the buildings, where, to his surprise, he encountered his own day−foreman talking earnestly with a stranger.

The fisherman started guiltily as he saw him, and Boyd questioned him sharply.

“What are you doing here, Larsen?”

“I just walked up after supper to have a talk with an old mate.”

“Who is he?” Boyd glanced suspiciously at Larsen's companion.

“He's Mr. Marsh's foreman.”

“Emerson spoke out bluntly: “See here. I don't like this. These people have caused me a lot of trouble already, and I don't want my men hanging around here.”

“Oh, that's all right,” said Larsen, carelessly. “Him and me used to fish together.” And as if this were a sufficient explanation, he turned back to his conversation, leaving Emerson to proceed on his way, vaguely displeased at the episode, yet reflecting that heretofore he had never had occasion to doubt Larsen's loyalty.

He found Cherry at home, and, flinging himself into one of her easy− chairs, relieved his mind of the day's occurrences.

“Marsh is building those traps purely out of spite,” she declared, indignantly, when he had finished. “He doesn't need any more fish—he has plenty of traps farther up the river.”

“To be sure! It looks as if we might have to depend upon the gill− netters.”

“We will know before long. If the fish strike in where George expects, Marsh will be out a pretty penny.”

“And if they don't strike in where George expects, we will be out all the expense of building that trap.”

“Exactly! It's a fascinating business, isn't it? It's a business in which the unexpected is forever happening. But the stakes are high and—I know you will succeed.”

Boyd smiled at her comforting assurance, her belief in him was always stimulating.

“By−the−way,” she continued, “have you heard the historic story about the pink salmon?”

He shook his head.

“Well, there was a certain shrewd old cannery−man in Washington State whose catch consisted almost wholly of pink fish. As you know, that variety does not bring as high a price as red salmon, like these. Well, finding that he could not sell his catch, owing to the popular prejudice about color, this man printed a lot of striking can−labels, which read, 'Best Grade Pink Salmon, Warranted not to Turn Red in the Can.' They tell me it worked like a charm.”

“No wonder!” Boyd laughed, beginning to feel the tension of his nerves relax at the restfulness of her influence. As usual, he fell at once into the mood she desired for him. He saw that her brows were furrowed and her rosy lips drawn into an unconscious pout as she said, more to herself than to him:

“I wish I were a man. I'd like to engage in a business of this sort, something that would require ingenuity and daring. I'd like to handle big affairs.”

“It seems to me that you are in a business of that sort. You are one of us.”

“Oh, but you and George are doing it all.”

“There is your copper−mine. You surely handled that very cleverly.”

Cherry's expression altered, and she shot a quick glance at him as he went on:

“How is it coming along, by−the−way? I haven't heard you mention it lately?”

“Very well, I believe. The men were down the other day, and told me it was a big thing.”

“I'm delighted. How does it seem, to be rich?”

There was the slightest hint of constraint in the girl's voice as she stared out at the slowly gathering twilight, murmuring:

“I—I hardly know. Rich! That has always been my dream, and yet—”

“The wonderful feature about dreams,” he took advantage of her pause to say, “is that they come true.”

“Not all of them—not the real, wonderful dreams,” she returned.

“Oh yes! My dream is coming true, and so is yours.”

“I have given up hoping for that,” she said, without turning.

“But you shouldn't give up. Remember that all the great things ever accomplished were only dreams at first, and the greater the accomplishments, the more impossible they seemed to begin with.”

Something in the girl's attitude and in her silence made him feel that his words rang hollow and commonplace. While they had talked, an unaccustomed excitement had been mounting in his brain, and it held him now in a kind of delicious embarrassment. It was as if both had been suddenly enfolded in a new and mysterious understanding, without the need of speech. He did not tell himself that Cherry loved him; but he roused to a fresh perception of her beauty, and felt himself privileged in her nearness. At the same time he was seized with the old, half−resentful curiosity to learn her history. What wealth of romance lay shadowed in her eyes, what tragic story was concealed by her consistent silence, he could only guess; for she was a woman who spoke rarely of herself and lived wholly in the present. Her very reticence inspired confidence, and Boyd felt sure that here was a girl to whom one might confess the inmost secrets of a wretched soul and rest secure in the knowledge that his confession would be inviolate as if locked in the heart of mountains. He knew her for a steadfast friend, and he t'elt that she was beautiful, not only in face and form, but in all those little indescribable mannerisms which stamp the individual. And this girl was here alone with him, so close that by stretching out his arms he might enfold her. She allowed him to come and go at will; her intimacy with him was almost like that of an unspoiled boy—yet different, so different that he thrilled at the thought, and the blood pounded up into his throat.

It may have been the unusual ardor of his gaze that warmed her cheeks and brought her eyes back from the world outside. At any rate, she turned, flashing him a startled glance that caused his pulse to leap anew. Her eyes widened and a flush spread slowly upward to her hair, then her lids drooped, as if weighted by unwonted shyness, and rising silently, she went past him to the piano. Never before had she surprised that look in his eyes, and at the realization a wave of confusion surged over her. She strove to calm herself through her music, which shielded while it gave expression to her mood, and neither spoke as the evening shadows crept in upon them. But the girl's exaltation was short−lived; the thought came that Boyd's feeling was but transitory; he was not the sort to burn lasting incense before more than one shrine. Nevertheless, at this moment he was hers, and in the joy of that certainty she let the moments slip.

He stopped her at last, and they talked in the half−light, floating along together half dreamily, as if upon the bosom of some great current that bore them into strange regions which they dreaded yet longed to explore.

They heard a child crying somewhere in the rear of the house, and Chakawana's voice soothing, then in a moment the Indian girl appeared in the doorway saying something about going out with Constantine. Cherry acquiesced half consciously, impatient of the intrusion.

For a long time they talked, so completely in concord that for the most part their voices were low and their sentences so incomplete that they would have sounded incoherent and foolish to other ears. They were roused finally by the appreciation that it had grown very late and a storm was brewing. Boyd rose, and going to the door, saw that the sky was deeply overcast, rendering the night as dark as in a far lower latitude.

“I've overstayed my welcome,” he ventured, and smiled at her answering laugh.

With a trace of solicitude, she said:

“Wait! I'll get you a rain−coat,” but he reached out a detaining hand. In the darkness it encountered the bare flesh of her arm.

“Please don't! You'd have to strike a light to find it, and I don't want a light now.”

He was standing on the steps, with her slightly above him, and so close that he heard her sharp−drawn breath.

“It *has* been a pleasant evening,” she said, inanely.

“I saw you for the first time to−night, Cherry. I think I have begun to know you.”

Again she felt her heart leap. Reaching out to say good−bye, his hand slipped down over her arm, like a caress, until her palm lay in his.

With trembling, gentle hands she pushed him from her; but even when the sound of his footsteps had died away, she stood with eyes straining into the gloom, in her breast a gladness so stifling that she raised her hands to still its tumult.

Emerson, with the glow still upon him, felt a deep contentment which he did not trouble to analyze. It has been said that two opposite impulses may exist side by side in a man's mind, like two hostile armies which have camped close together in the night, unrevealed to each other until the morning. To Emerson the dawn had not yet come. He had no thought of disloyalty to Mildred, but, after his fashion, took the feeling of the moment unreflectively. His mood was averse to thought, and, moreover, the darkness forced him to give instant attention to his path. While the waters of the bay out to his right showed a ghostly gray, objects beneath the bluff where he

walked were cloaked in impenetrable shadow. The air was damp with the breath of coming rain, and at rare intervals he caught a glimpse of the torn edges of clouds hurrying ahead of a wind that was yet unfelt.

When the black bulk of Marsh's cannery loomed ahead of him, he left the gravel beach and turned up among the buildings, seeking to retrace his former course. He noticed that once he had left the noisy shingle, his feet made no sound in the soft moss. Thus it was that, as he turned the corner of the first building, he nearly ran against a man who was standing motionless against the wall. The fellow seemed as startled at the encounter as Emerson, and with a sharp exclamation leaped away and vanished into the gloom. Boyd lost no time in gaining the plank runway that led to the dock, and finding an angle in the building, backed into it and waited, half−suspecting that he had stumbled into a trap. He reflected that both the hour and the circumstances were unpropitious; for in case he should meet with foul play, Marsh might plausibly claim that he had been mistaken for a marauder. He determined, therefore, to proceed with the greatest caution. From his momentary glimpse of the man as he made off, he knew that he was tall and active—just the sort of person to prove dangerous in an encounter. But if his suspicions were correct there must be others close by, and Boyd wondered why he had heard no signal. After a breathless wait of a moment or two, he stole cautiously out, and, selecting the darkest shadows, slipped from one to another till he was caught by the sound of voices issuing from the yawning entrance of the main building on his right. The next moment his tension relaxed; one of the speakers was a woman. Evidently his alarm had been needless, for these people, whoever they were, made no effort to conceal their presence. On the contrary, the woman had raised her tone to a louder pitch, although her words were still undistinguishable.

Greatly relieved, Boyd was about to go on, when a sharp cry, like a signal, came in the woman's voice, a cry which turned to a genuine wail of distress. The listener heard a man's voice cursing in answer, and then the sound of a scuffle, followed at length by a choking cry, that brought him bounding into the building. He ran forward, recklessly, but before he had covered half the distance he collided violently with a piece of machinery and went sprawling to the floor. A glance upward revealed the dim outlines of a “topper,” and showed him farther down the building, silhouetted briefly against the lesser darkness of the windows, two struggling figures. As he regained his footing, something rushed past him—man or animal he could not tell which, for its feet made no more sound upon the floor than those of a wolf−dog. Then, as he bolted forward, he heard a man cry out, and found himself in the midst of turmoil. His hands encountered a human body, and he seized it, only to be hurled aside as if with a giant's strength. Again he clinched with a man's form, and bore it to the floor, cursing at the darkness and reaching for its throat. His antagonist raised his voice in wild clamor, while Boyd braced himself for another assault from those huge hands he had met a moment before. But it did not come. Instead, he heard a cry from the woman, an answer in a deeper voice, and then swift, pattering footsteps growing fainter. Meanwhile the man with whom he was locked was fighting desperately, with hands and feet and teeth, shouting hoarsely. Other footsteps sounded now, this time approaching, then at the door a lantern flared. A watchman came running down between the lines of machinery, followed by other figures half revealed.

Boyd had pinned his antagonist against the cold sides of a retort at last, and with fingers clutched about his throat was beating his head violently against the iron, when by the lantern's gleam he caught one glimpse of the fat, purple face in front of him, and loosed his hold with a startled exclamation. Released from the grip that had nearly made an end of him, Willis Marsh staggered to his feet, then lurched forward as if about to fall from weakness. His eyes were staring, his blackened tongue protruded, while his head, battered and bleeding, lolled grotesquely from side to side as if in hideous merriment. His clothes were torn and soiled from the litter underfoot, and he presented a frightful picture of distress. But it was not this that caused Emerson the greatest astonishment. The man was wounded, badly wounded, as he saw by the red stream which gushed down over his breast. Boyd cast his eyes about for the other participants in the encounter, but they were nowhere visible; only an open door in the shadows close by hinted at the mode of their disappearance.

There was a brief, noisy interval, during which Emerson was too astounded to attempt an answer to the questions hurled broadcast by the new−comers; then Marsh levelled a trembling finger at him and cried, hysterically:

“There he is, men. He tried to murder me. I—I'm hurt. I'll have him arrested.”

The seriousness of the accusation struck the young man on the instant; he turned upon the group.

“I didn't do that. I heard a fight going on and ran in here—”

“He's a liar,” the wounded man interrupted, shrilly. “He stabbed me! See?” He tried to strip the shirt from his

wounds, then fell to chattering and shaking. “Oh, God! I'm hurt.” He staggered to a packing−case and sank upon it weakly fumbling at his sodden shoulder.

“I didn't do that,” repeated Boyd. “I don't know who stabbed him. I didn't.”

“Then who did?” some one demanded.

“What are you doing in here? You'd a killed him in a minute,” said the man with the lantern.

“We'll fix you for this,” a third voice threatened.

“Listen,” Boyd said, in a tone to make them pause. “There has been a mistake here. I was passing the building when I heard a woman scream, and I rushed in to prevent Marsh from choking her to death.”

“A woman!” chorused the group.

“That's what I said.”

“Where is she now?”

“I don't know. I didn't see her at all. I grappled with the first person I ran into. She must have gone out as you came in.” Boyd indicated the side door, which was still ajar.

“It's a lie,” screamed Marsh.

“It's the truth,” stoutly maintained Emerson, “and there was a man with her, too. Who was she, Marsh? Who was the man?”

“She—she—I don't know.”

“Don't lie.”

“I'm hurt,” reiterated the stricken man, feebly. Then, seeing the bewilderment in the faces about him, he burst out anew: “Don't stand there like a lot of fools. Why don't you get him?”

“If I stabbed him I must have had a knife,” Emerson said, again checking the forward movement. “You may search me if you like. See?” He opened his coat and displayed his belt.

“He's got a six−shooter,” some one said.

“Yes, and I may use it,” said Emerson, quietly.

“Maybe he dropped the knife,” said the watchman, and began to search about the floor, followed by the others.

“It may have been the woman herself who stabbed Mr. Marsh,” offered Emerson. “He was strangling her when I arrived.”

Roused by this statement to a fresh denial, Marsh cried out:

“I tell you there wasn't any woman.”

“And there isn't any knife either,” Emerson sneered.

The men paused uncertainly. Seeing that they were undecided whether to believe him or his assailant, Marsh went on:

“If he hasn't a knife, then he must have had a friend with him—”

“Then tell your men what we were doing in here and how you came to be alone with us in the dark.” Emerson stared at his accuser curiously, but the Trust's manager seemed at a loss. “See here, Marsh, if you will tell us whom you were choking, maybe we can get at the truth of this affair.”

Without answering, Marsh rose, and, leaning upon the watchman's arm, said:

“Help me up to the house. I'm hurt. Send the launch to the upper plant for John; he knows something about medicine.” With no further word, he made his way out of the building, followed by the mystified fishermen.

No one undertook to detain Emerson, and he went his way, wondering what lay back of the night's adventure. He racked his brain for a hint as to the identity of the woman and the reason of her presence alone with Marsh in such a place. Again he thought of that mysterious third person whose movements had been so swift and furious, but his conjectures left him more at sea than ever. Of one thing he felt sure. It was not enmity alone that prompted Marsh to accuse him of the stabbing. The man was concealing something, in deadly fear of the truth, for rather than submit to questioning he had let his enemy go scot−free.

Suddenly Boyd paused in his walk, recalling again the shadowy outlines of the figure with whom he had so nearly collided on his way up from the beach. There was something familiar about it, he mused; then, with a low whistle of surprise, he smote his palms together. He began to see dimly.

For more than an hour the young man paced back and forth before the door of his sleeping−quarters, so deeply immersed in thought that only the breaking storm drove him within. When at last he retired, it was with the

certainty that this night had placed a new weapon in his hand; but of what tremendous value it was destined to prove, he little knew.

CHAPTER XXII. THE SILVER HORDE

The main body of salmon struck into the Kalvik River on the first day of July. For a week past the run had been slowly growing, while the canneries tested themselves, but on the opening day of the new month the horde issued boldly forth from the depths of the sea, and the battle began in earnest. They came during the hush of the dawn, a mad, crowding throng from No Man's Land, to wake the tide−rips and people the shimmering reaches of the bay, lashing them to sudden life and fury. Outside, the languorous ocean heaved as smiling and serene as ever, but within the harbor a wondrous change occurred.

As if in answer to some deep−sea signal, the tides were quickened by a coursing multitude, steadfast and unafraid, yet foredoomed to die by the hand of man, or else more surely by the serving of their destiny. Clad in their argent mail of blue and green, they worked the bay to madness; they overwhelmed the waters, surging forward in great droves and columns, hesitating only long enough to frolic with the shifting currents, as if rejoicing in their strength and beauty.

At times they swam with cleaving fins exposed: again they churned the placid waters until swift combers raced across the shallow bars like tidal waves while the deeper channels were shot through with shadowy forms or pierced by the lightning glint of silvered bellies. They streamed in with the flood tide to retreat again with the ebb, but there was neither haste nor caution in their progress; they had come in answer to the breeding call of the sea, and its exultation was upon them, driving them relentlessly onward. They had no voice against its overmastering spell.

Mustering in the early light like a swarm of giant white−winged moths, the fishing−boats raced forth with the flowing tide, urged by sweep and sail and lusty sinews. Paying out their hundred−fathom nets, they drifted over the banks like flocks of resting sea−gulls, only to come ploughing back again deep laden with their spoils. Grimy tugboats lay beside the traps, shrilling the air with creaking winches as they “brailed” the struggling fish, a half−ton at a time, from the “pounds,” now churned to milky foam by the ever−growing throng of prisoners; and all the time the big plants gulped the sea harvest, faster and faster, clanking and gnashing their metal jaws, while the mounds of salmon lay hip−deep to the crews that fed the butchering machines.

The time had come for man to take his toll.

Now dawned a period of feverish activity wherein no one might rest short of actual exhaustion. Haste became the cry, and comfort fled.

At Emerson's cannery there fell a sudden panic, for fifty fishermen quit. Returning from the banks on the night before the run started, they stacked their gear and notified Boyd Emerson of their determination. Then, despite his utmost efforts to dissuade them, they took their packs upon their shoulders and marched up the beach to Willis Marsh's plant. Larsen, the day−foreman, acted as their spokesman, and Boyd recognized, too late, the result of that conversation he had interrupted on the night of his visit to Cherry.

This defection diminished his boat−crew by more than half, and while the shoremen stoutly maintained their loyalty, the chance of putting up a pack seemed lost. Success or failure in the Behring Sea fisheries may depend upon the loss of a day. Emerson found himself facing a situation more desperate than any heretofore; Marsh had delayed the execution of his plans until the run had started, and there was no possibility of recruiting a new force. Alarmed beyond measure, Boyd swallowed his pride and went straightway to his enemy. He found Marsh well recovered from his flesh−wound of a week or more before, yet extremely cautious for his safety, as he evidenced by conducting the interview before witnesses.

“We are short−handed, and I gave instructions to secure every available man,” he announced at the conclusion of Emerson's story. “It is not my fault if your men prefer to work for me.”

“Then you force me to retaliate,” said Boyd. “I shall hire your men out from under you.”

Marsh laughed provokingly.

“Try it! I am a good organizer if nothing else. If you send emissaries to my plants, it will cause certain violence—and I think you had better avoid that, for we outnumber you ten to one.”

Stormy accusations and retorts followed, till Emerson left the place in helpless disgust.

Nor had he hit upon any method of relief when Cherry came down to the plant on the following morning, though he and Big George had spent the night in conference. She lost no time in futile indignation, but inquired straightway:

"What are you doing about it? The fish have begun to run, and you can't afford to lose an hour."

"I have sent a man to each of the other plants to hire fishermen at any price, but I have no hope that they will succeed. Marsh has his crews too well in hand for that."

Cherry nodded. "They wouldn't dare quit him now. He'd never let them return to this country if they did. Meanwhile, the rest of your force is on the banks, I presume."

"Yes."

"How many boats have you?"

"Ten."

"Heavens! And this is the first day of the run! It looks bad, doesn't it? Has the trap begun to fill?"

"No. George is down there now. I guess Marsh succeeded in corking it. Meanwhile all the other plants are working while my Chinks are playing fan−tan."

Cherry gazed curiously at her companion, to see how he accepted this latest shift of fortune. She knew that it spelled disaster; for a light catch, with the tremendous financial loss entailed, would not only mean difficulty with Hilliard's loan, but other complications impossible to forecast. Her mind sped onward to the effect of a failure upon Boyd's private affairs. He had told her in unmistakable terms that this was his last chance, the final hope upon which hung the realization of his dreams. In some way his power to hold Mildred Wayland was bound up with his financial success. If he should lose her, where would he turn? she asked herself, and something within her answered that he would look for consolation to the woman who had stood at his shoulder all these weary months. Sudden emotion swept over her at the thought. What cared she for his success or failure? He was the one man she had ever known, the mate for whom she had been moulded. If this were his last chance, it promised to be the opportunity she had so long awaited; for once that other was out of his mind, Cherry felt that he would turn to her. She knew it intuitively, knew it from the light she had seen in his eyes that night at her house, knew it by the promptings of her own heart at this moment. She began to tremble, and felt her breast swelling with a glad determination; but he interrupted her flight of fancy with a sigh of such hopeless weariness that her pity rose instinctively. He gave her a sad little smile as he said:

"I seem to bring misfortune upon every one connected with me, don't I? I'm afraid I'm a poor sort."

How boyish he was, the girl thought tenderly, yet how splendidly brave he had been throughout the fight! There was a voiceless, maternal yearning in her heart as she asked him, gravely:

"If you fail now, it will mean—the end of everything, will it not?"

"Yes." He squared his tired shoulders. "But I am not beaten yet. You taught me never to give up, Cherry. If I have to go back home without a catch and see Hilliard take this plant over, why—I'll begin once more at something new, and some day I will succeed. But I sha'n't give up. I'll can what salmon we catch and then begin all over again next season."

"And—suppose you don't succeed? Suppose Hilliard won't carry you?"

"Then I shall try something else; maybe I shall go to mining again, I don't know. Anyhow, *she* would not let me grow disheartened if she were here, she wouldn't let me quit. She isn't that sort."

Cherry Malotte stirred and shifted her gaze uncertainly to the gleaming bay. Abreast of them the fleet of fishing−boats were drifting with the tide; in the distance others were dotted, clear away to where the opal ocean lay. A tug was passing, and she saw the sun flash from the cargo in its tow, while the faint echo of a song came wafting to her ears. She stood so for a long moment, fighting manfully with herself, then wheeled upon him suddenly. There was a new tone in her voice as she said:

"If you will let me have one of your launches, I may be able to help you."

"How?" he demanded, quickly.

"Never mind how—it's a long chance and hardly worth trying, but—may I take the boat?"

"Certainly," said he, "there's one lying at the dock."

He led her to the shore and saw her aboard, then waved good−bye and walked moodily back to the office, gratified that she should try to help him, yet certain that she could not succeed where he and George had failed.

"Fingerless" Fraser had breakfasted late, as was his luxurious custom, and shortly before noon, in the course

of his dissatisfied meanderings, he found his friend in the office, lost in sombre thought. It was the first time in many weeks that he had seen this mood in Boyd, and after a fruitless effort to make him talk, he fell into his old habit of imaginary reading, droning away to himself as if from a printed page:

"'Your stay among us has not been very pleasant, has it?' Mr. Emerson inquired.

"'Not so that you could notice it," replied our hero. 'I don't like fish, and I never did.'

"'That is the result of prejudice; the fish is a noble animal,' Mr. Emerson declared.

"'He's not an animal at all,' our hero gently corrected. 'He's a biped, a regular wild biped without either love of home or affection for his children. The salmon is of a low order of intelligence, and has a Queen Anne slant to his roof. No person with a retreating forehead like that knows very much. The only other member of the animal kingdom that is as foolish as the salmon is Alton Clyde. The fish has got a shade the best of it over him; but as for friendship and the gentler emotions—why, the salmon hasn't got them at all. The only thing he's got is a million eggs and a sense of direction. If he had a spark of intelligence he'd lay one egg a year, like a hen, and thus live for a million years. But does he? Not on your Sarony! He's a spendthrift, and turns his eggs loose—a hatful at a time. He's worse than a shotgun. And then, too, he's as clannish as a Harvard graduate, and don't associate with nobody out of his own set. No, sir! Give me a warm−blooded animal that suckles its young. I'll take a farmer, every time,'

"'These are points I had never considered,' said Mr. Emerson, 'but every business has its drawbacks, you'll agree. If I have failed as a host, what can I do to entertain you while you grace our midst?'

"'You can do most anything,' remarked his handsome companion, 'You can climb a tree, or do anything except fish all the time.'

"'But it is a dark night without, and I fear some mischief is afoot!'

"'True! But yonder beautcheous gel—'"

Roused by the familiarity of these lines, Emerson looked up from his preoccupation and smiled at Fraser's serious pantomime.

"Am I as bad as all that?" he inquired, with an effort at pleasantry.

"You're worse, Bo! I guess you didn't know I was here, eh?"

"No. By−the−way, what about that 'beautcheous gel and the mischief that is afoot? What is the rest of the story?"

"I don't know. I never got past that place. Say! If I had time, I'll bet I could write a good book. I've got plenty to say."

"Why don't you try it?"

"Too busy!" yawned the adventurer, lazily. "Gee, this is a lonesome burg! Kalvik is sure out in the tall grass, ain't it? I feel as if I'd like to break a pane of glass. Let's start something."

"I don't find it particularly dull at the present moment." Boyd rose and began to pace the room.

"Oh, I heard all about your trouble. I just left the pest−house."

"The what?"

"The pest−house—Clyde's joint. Ain't he a calamity?"

"In what way?"

"Is there any way in which he ain't?"

"You don't like him, do you?"

"No, I don't," declared "Fingerless" Fraser stoutly, "and what's more I'm glad I don't like him. Because if I liked him, I'd associate with him, and I hate him."

"What's the matter?"

"Well, I like silence and quietude—I'm a fool about my quiet—but Clyde—" he paused, as if in search for suitable expression. "Well, whenever I try to say anything he interrupts me." After another pause he went on: "He's dead sore on this place, too, and whines around like a litter of pups. He says he was misled into coming up here, and has a hunch he's going to lose his bank−roll."

"Last night's episode frightened him, I dare say."

"Yes. Ever since he got that wallop on the burr in Seattle a guinea pig could lick him hand to hand. You'd think that ten thou' he put up was all the wealth of the Inkers."

"The wealth of what?"

"Inkers! That's a tribe of rich Mexicans. However, I suppose I'd hang to my coin the same way he does if I had

a mayonnaise head like his. He's an awful shine as a business−man,"

"So he's homesick, eh?"

"Sure! Offered to sell me his stock." Fraser threw back his head and gave vent to one of his rare laughs. "Ain't that a rave?"

"Here he comes now," Boyd announced, with a glance out the window, and the next instant Alton Clyde entered, a picture of dejection.

"Gee! This is fierce, isn't it?" the club−man began, flinging himself into the nearest chair. "They tell me it's all off, finally. What are you going to do?"

"Put up what fish I can with a short crew," said Boyd.

"We'll lose a lot of money."

"Probably."

Clyde's tone was querulous as he continued:

"I'm sorry I ever went into this thing. You bet if I had known as much in Chicago as I know now, I would have hung on to my money and stayed at home."

"You knew as much as we did," Boyd declared, curtly.

"Oh, it's all right for you to talk. You haven't risked any coin in the deal, but I'm a rotten businessman, and I'll never make my ante back again if I lose it."

"Don't whine about it," said Boyd, stiffly. "You can at least be game and lose like a man."

"Then we *are* going to lose, eh?" queried Clyde, in a scared voice. "I thought maybe you had a plan. Look here," he began an instant later, "Cherry pulled us out once before, why don't you let her see what she can do with Marsh?"

Boyd scanned the speaker's face sharply before speaking.

"What do you mean by that?"

"I mean she can work him if she tries, the same way she worked Hilliard."

"Marsh isn't in the mood to listen to arguments. I have tried that."

"Who said anything about arguments? You know what I mean."

"I don't care to listen to that sort of talk."

"Why not? I'm entitled to have my say in things." Clyde was growing indignant. "I put in ten thousand of my own money and twenty−five thousand besides, on your assurances. That's thirty−five thousand more than you put up—"

"Nevertheless, it doesn't give you the right to insult the girl."

"Insult her! Bah! You're no fool, Boyd. Why did Hilliard advance that loan?"

"Because he wanted to, I dare say."

"What's the use of keeping that up? You know as well as I do that she worked him, and worked him well. She'd do it again if you asked her. She'd do anything for you."

Boyd broke out roughly: "I tell you. I've heard enough of that talk, Alton. Anybody but an idiot would know that Cherry is far too good for what you suggest. And when you insult her, you insult me."

"Oh, she's *good* enough," said Clyde. "They're all good, but not perhaps in the way you mean—"

"How do you know?"

"*I* don't know, but Fraser does. He's known her for years. Haven't you, Fraser?" But the adventurer's face was like wood as they turned toward him.

"I don't know nothing," replied "Fingerless" Fraser, with an admirable show of ignorance.

"Well, judge for yourself." Clyde turned again to Emerson. "Who is she? Where did she come from? What is she doing here alone? Answer that. Now, she's interested in this deal just as much as any of us, and if you don't ask her to take a hand, I'm going to put it up to her myself."

"You'll do nothing of the sort!" Boyd cried, savagely.

Clyde rose hastily, and his voice was shaking with excitement as he stammered:

"See here, Boyd, you're to blame for this trouble, and now you either get us out of it or buy my stock."

"You know that I can't buy your stock."

"Then I'll sell wherever I can. I've been stung, and I want my money. Only remember, I offered the stock to you first."

“You've got a swell chance to make a turn in Kalvik,” said Fraser. “Why don't you take it to Marsh?”

“I will!” declared Alton.

“You wouldn't do a trick like that?” Emerson questioned, quickly.

“Why not? You won't listen to my advice. You're playing with other people's money, and it doesn't matter, to you whether you win or lose. If this enterprise fails, I suppose you can promote another.”

“Get out!” Boyd ordered, in such a tone that the speaker obeyed with ludicrous haste.

“Fingerless” Fraser broke the silence that fell upon the young man's exit.

“He's a nice little feller! I never knew one of those narrow−chested, five−o'clock−tea−drinkers that was on the level. He's got eighteen fancy vests, and wears a handkerchief up his sleeve. That put him in the end book with me, to start with.”

“Did you know Cherry before you came to Kalvik?” Boyd asked, searching his companion's face with a look the man could not evade.

“Only casual.”

“Where?”

“Nome—the year of the big rush.”

“During the mining troubles, eh?”

“Sure.”

“What was she doing?”

“Minding her business. She's good at that.” Fraser's eyes had become green and fishy, as usual.

“What do you know about her?”

“Well, I know that a lot of fellows would 'go through' for her at the drop of a hat. She could have most anything they've got, I guess. Most any of them miners at Nome would give his right eye, or his only child, or any little thing like that if she asked it.”

“What else?”

“Well, she was always considered a right good−looking party—”

“Yes, yes, of course. But what do you know about the girl herself? Who is she? What is her history?”

“Now, sir, I'm an awful poor detective,” confessed “Fingerless” Fraser. “I've often noticed that about myself. If I was the kind that goes snooping around into other people's business, listening to all the gossip I'm told, I'd make a good witness. But I ain't. No, sir! I'm a rotten witness.”

Despite this indirect rebuke, Boyd might have continued his questioning had not George Balt's heavy step sounded outside. A moment later the big fellow entered.

“What did you find at the traps?” asked Emerson, eagerly.

“Nothing.” George spoke shortly. “The fish struck in this morning, but our trap is corked.” He wrenched off his rubber boots and flung them savagely under a bench.

“What luck with the boats?”

“Not much. Marsh's men are trying to surround our gill−netters, and we ain't got enough boats to protect ourselves.” He looked up meaningly from under his heavy brows, and inquired: “How much longer are we going to stand for this?”

“What do you mean? I've got men out hunting for new hands.”

“You know what I mean,” the giant rumbled, his red eyes flaming. “You and I can get Willis Marsh.”

Emerson shot a quick glance at Fraser, who was staring fixedly at Big George.

“He's got us right enough, and it's bound to come to a killing some day, so the sooner the better,” the fisherman ran on. “We can get him to−night if you say so. Are you in on it?”

Boyd faced the window slowly, while the others followed him with anxious eyes. Inside the room a death−like silence settled. In the distance they heard the sound of the canning machinery, a sound that was now a mockery. To Balt this last disaster was the culmination of a persecution so pitiless and unflagging that its very memory filled his simple mind with the fury of a goaded animal. To his companion it meant, almost certainly, the loss of Mildred Wayland—the girl who stood for his pride in himself and all that he held most desirable. He thought bitterly of all the suffering and hardship, the hunger of body and soul, that he had endured for her sake. Again he saw his hopes crumbling and his dreams about to fade; once more he felt his foothold giving way beneath him, as it had done so often in the past, and he was filled with sullen hate. Something told him that he would never have

the heart to try again, and the thought left him cold with rage.

Ever since those fishermen had walked out on the evening before, he had clung to the feeble hope that once the run began in earnest, George's trap would fill and save the situation; but now that the salmon had struck in and the trap was useless, his discouragement was complete; for there were no idle men in Kalvik, and there was no way of getting help. Moreover, Mildred Wayland was soon to arrive—the yacht was expected daily—and she would find him a failure. What was worse, she would find that Marsh had vanquished him. She had kept her faith in him, he reflected, but a woman's faith could hardly survive humiliation, and it was not in human nature to lean forever upon a broken reed. She would turn elsewhere—perhaps to the very man who had contrived his undoing. At thought of this, a sort of desperation seemed to master him; he began to mutter aloud.

"What did you say?" queried Balt.

"I said that you are right. The time is close at hand for some sort of a reckoning," answered Boyd, in a harsh, strained voice.

"Good!"

Emerson was upon the point of turning when his eyes fell upon a picture that made him start, then gaze more intently. Out upon the placid waters, abreast of the plant, the launch in which Cherry had departed was approaching, and it was loaded down with men. Not only were they crowded upon the craft itself, but trailing behind it, like the tail of a kite, was a long line of canoes, and these also were peopled.

"Look yonder!" cried Boyd.

"What?"

"Cherry has got—a crew!" His voice broke, and he bolted toward the door as Big George leaped to the window.

"Injuns, by God!" shouted the giant, and without stopping to stamp his feet into his boots, he rushed out barefoot after Boyd and Fraser; together, the three men reached the dock in time to help Cherry up the ladder.

"What does this mean?" Boyd asked her, breathlessly. "Will these fellows work?"

"That's what they're here for," said the girl. After her swarmed a crowd of slant−eyed, copper−hued Aleuts; those in the kyaks astern cast off and paddled toward the beach.

"I've got fifty men, the best on the river; I tried to get more, but— there aren't any more."

"Fingerless" Fraser slapped himself resoundingly upon the thigh and exploded profanely; Boyd seized the girl's hands in his and wrung them.

"Cherry, you're a treasure!" The memory of his desperate resolution of a moment before swept over him suddenly, and his voice trembled with a great thankfulness.

"Don't thank me!" Cherry exclaimed. "It was more Constantine's work than mine."

"But I don't understand. These are Marsh's men."

"To be sure, but I was good to them when they were hungry last winter, and I prevailed upon them to come. They aren't very good fishermen; they're awfully lazy, and they won't work half as hard as white men, but it's the best I could do." She laughed gladly, more than repaid by the look in her companion's face. "Now, get me some lunch. I'm fairly starved."

Big George, when he had fully grasped the situation, became the boss fisherman on the instant; before the others had reached the cook−house he was busied in laying out his crews and distributing his gear. The impossible had happened; victory was in sight; the fish were running—he cared to know no more.

That night the floors of the fish−dock groaned beneath a weight of silver− sided salmon piled waist−high to a tall man. All through the cool, dim−lit hours the ranks of Chinese butchers hacked and slit and slashed with swift, sure, tireless strokes, while the great building echoed hollowly to the clank of machines and the hissing sighs of the soldering−furnaces.

CHAPTER XXIII. IN WHICH MORE PLANS ARE LAID

It seemed to Boyd that he had never felt such elation as during the days that followed. He trod upon air, his head was in the clouds. He joked with his men, inspiring them with his own good−humor and untiring energy. He was never idle save during the odd hours that he snatched for sleep. He covered the plant from top to bottom, and no wheel stopped turning, no mechanical device gave way, without his instant attention. So urgent was he that George Balt became desperate; for the Indians were not like white men, and proved a sad trial to the big fellow, who was accustomed to drive his crews with the cruelty of a convict foreman. Despite his utmost endeavors, he could not keep the plant running to capacity, and in his zeal he took the blame wholly upon himself.

While the daily output was disappointing, Emerson drew consolation from the prospect that his pack would be large enough at least to avert utter ruin, and he argued that once he had won through this first season no power that Marsh could bring to bear would serve to crush him. He saw a moderate success ahead, if not the overwhelming victory upon which he had counted.

Up at the Trust's headquarters Willis Marsh was in a fine fury. As far as possible, his subordinates avoided him. His superintendents, summoned from their work, emerged from the red−painted office on the hill with dampened brows and frightened glances over their shoulders. Many of them held their places through services that did not show upon the Company's books, but now they shook their heads and swore that some things were beyond them.

Except for one step on Emerson's part, Marsh would have rested secure, and let time work out his enemy's downfall; but Boyd's precaution in contracting to sell his output in advance threatened to defeat him. Otherwise, Marsh would simply have cut down his rival's catch to the lowest point, and then broken the market in the fall. With the Trust's tremendous resources back of him, he could have afforded to hammer down the price of fish to a point where Emerson would either have been ruined or forced to carry his pack for a year, and in this course he would have been upheld by Wayne Wayland. But as matters stood, such tactics could only result in a serious loss to the brokers who had agreed to take Boyd's catch, and to the Trust itself. It was therefore necessary to work the young man's undoing here and now.

Marsh knew that he had already wasted too much time in Kalvik, for he was needed at other points far to the southward; but he could not bear to leave this fight to other hands. Moreover, he was anxiously awaiting the arrival of *The Grande Dame,* with Mildred and her father. One square of the calendar over his desk was marked in red, and the sight of it gave him fresh determination.

On the third day after Boyd's deliverance, Constantine sought him out, in company with several of the native fishermen, translating their demand to be paid for the fish they had caught.

“Can't they wait until the end of the week?” Emerson inquired.

“No! They got no money—they got no grub. They say little baby is hongry, and they like money now. So soon they buy grub, they work some more.”

“Very well. Here's an order on the book−keeper.”

Boyd tore a leaf from his note−book and wrote a few words on it, telling the men to present it at the office. As Constantine was about to leave, he called to him:

“Wait! I want to talk with you.”

The breed halted.

“How long have you known Mr. Marsh?”

“Me know him long time.”

“Do you like him?”

A flicker ran over the fellow's coppery face as he replied:

“Yes. Him good man.”

“You used to work for him, did you not?”

“Yes.”

“Why did you quit?”

Constantine hesitated slightly before answering: “Me go work for Cherry.”

“Why?”

“She good to my little broder. You savvy little chil'ren—so big?”

“Yes. I've seen him. He's a fine little fellow. By the way, do you remember that night about two weeks ago when I was at Cherry's house?—the night you and your sister went out?”

“I 'member.”

“Where did you go?”

Constantine shifted his walrus−soled boots. “What for you ask?”

“Never mind! Where did you go when you left the house?”

“Me go Indian village. What for you ask?”

“Nothing. Only—if you ever have any trouble with Mr. Marsh, I may be able to help you. I like you—and I don't like him.”

The breed grunted unintelligibly, and was about to leave when Boyd reached forth suddenly and plucked the fellow's sheath−knife from its scabbard. With a startled cry, Constantine whirled, his face convulsed, his nostrils dilated like those of a frightened horse; but Emerson merely fingered the weapon carelessly, remarking:

“That is a curious knife you have. I have noticed it several times.” He eyed him shrewdly for a moment, then handed the blade back with a smile. Constantine slipped it into its place, and strode away without a word.

It was considerably later in the day when Boyd discovered the Indians to whom he had given the note talking excitedly on the dock. Seeing Constantine in argument with them, he approached to demand an explanation, whereupon the quarter−breed held out a silver dollar in his palm with the words:

“These men say this money no good.”

“What do you mean?”

“It no good. No can buy grub at Company store.”

Boyd saw that the group was eying him suspiciously.

“Nonsense! What's the matter with it?”

“Storekeeper laugh and say it come from you. He say, take it back. He no sell my people any flour.”

It was evident that even Constantine was vaguely distrustful.

Another native extended a coin, saying;

“We want money like this.”

Boyd took the piece and examined it, whereupon a light broke upon him. The coin was stamped with the initials of one of the old fishing companies, and he instantly recognized a ruse practiced in the North during the days of the first trading concerns. It had been the custom of these companies to pay their Indians in coins bearing their own impress and to refuse all other specie at their posts, thus compelling the natives to trade at company stores. By carefully building up this system they had obtained a monopoly of Indian labor, and it was evident that Marsh and his associates had robbed the Aleuts in the same manner during the days before the consolidation. Boyd saw at once the cause of the difficulty and undertook to explain it, but he had small success, for the Indians had learned a hard lesson and were loath to put confidence in the white man's promises. Seeing that his words carried no conviction, Emerson gave up at last, saying:

“If the Company store won't take this money, I'll sell you whatever you need from the commissary. We are not going to have any trouble over a little thing like this.”

He marched the natives in a body to the storehouse, where he saw to it that they received what provisions they needed and assisted them in loading their canoes.

But his amusement at the episode gave way to uneasiness on the following morning when the Aleuts failed to report for work, and by noon his anxiety resolved itself into strong suspicion.

Balt had returned from the banks earlier in the morning with news of a struggle between his white crew and Marsh's men. George's boats had been surrounded during the night, nets had been cut, and several encounters had occurred, resulting in serious injury to his men. The giant, in no amiable mood, had returned for reinforcements, stating that the situation was becoming more serious every hour. Hearing of the desertion of the natives, he burst into profanity, then armed himself and returned to the banks, while Boyd, now thoroughly alarmed, took a launch and sped up the river to Cherry's house, in the hope that she could prevail upon her own recruits to return.

He found the girl ready to accompany him, and they were about to embark when Chakawana came running

from the house as if in sudden fright.

“Where you go?” she asked her mistress.

“I am going to the Indian village. You stay here—”

“No, no! I no stop here alone. I go 'long too.” She cast a glance over her shoulder.

“But, Chakawana, what is the matter? Are you afraid?”

“Yes.” Chakawana nodded her pretty head vigorously.

“What are you afraid of?” Boyd asked; but she merely stared at him with eyes as black and round as ox−heart cherries, then renewed her entreaty. When she had received permission and had hurried back to the house, her mistress remarked, with a puzzled frown:

“I don't know what to make of her. She and Constantine have been acting very strangely of late. She used to be the happiest sort of creature, always laughing and singing, but she has changed entirely during the last few weeks. Both she and Constantine are forever whispering to each other and skulking about, until I am getting nervous myself.” Then as the Indian girl came flying back with her tiny baby brother in her arms, Cherry added: “She's pretty, isn't she? I can't bear ugly people around me.”

At the native village, in spite of every effort she and Boyd could make, the Indians refused to go back to work. Many of them, so they learned, had already reported to the other canneries, evidently still doubtful of Emerson's assurances, and afraid to run the risk of offending their old employers. Those who were left were lazy fellows who did not care to work under any circumstances; these merely listened, then shrugged their shoulders and walked away.

“Since they can't use your money at the store, they don't seem to care whether it is good or not,” Cherry announced, after a time.

“I'll give them enough provisions to last them all winter,” Boyd offered, irritated beyond measure at such stupidity. “Tell them to move the whole blamed village down to my place, women and all. I'll take care of them.” But after an hour of futile cajolery, he was forced to give up, realizing that Marsh had been at work again, frightening these simple people by threats of vengeance and starvation.

“You can't blame the poor things. They have learned to fear the hand of the companies, and to know that they are absolutely dependent upon the cannery stores during the winter. But it's maddening!” She stamped her foot angrily. “And I was so proud of my work. I thought I had really done something to help at last. But I don't know what more we can do. I've reached the end of my rope.”

“So have I,” he confessed. “Even with those fifty Aleuts, we weren't running at more than half capacity, but we were making a showing at least. Now!” He flung up his hands in a gesture of despair. “George is in trouble, as usual. Marsh's men have cut our nets, and the yacht may arrive at any time.”

“The yacht! What yacht?”

“Mr. Wayland's yacht. He is making a tour of this coast with the other officers of the Trust and—Mildred.”

“Is—is she coming here?” demanded Cherry, in a strained voice.

“Yes.”

“Why didn't you tell me?”

“I don't know, I didn't think you would be interested.”

“So she can't wait? She is so eager that she follows you from Chicago clear up into this wilderness. Then you won't need my assistance any more, will you?” Her lids drooped, half hiding her eyes, and her face hardened.

“Of course I shall need your help. Her coming won't make any difference.”

“It strikes me that you have allowed me to make a fool of myself long enough,” said Cherry, angrily. “Here I have been breaking my heart over this enterprise, while you have known all the time that she was coming. Why, you have merely used me—and George, and all the rest of us, for that matter—“ She laughed harshly.

“You don't understand,” said Boyd. “Miss Wayland—”

“Oh yes, I do. I dare say it will gratify her to straighten out your troubles. A word from her lips and your worries will vanish like a mist. Let us acknowledge ourselves beaten and beg her to save us.”

Boyd shook his head in negation, but she gave him no time for speech.

“It seems that you wanted to pose as a hero before her, and employed us to build up your triumph. Well, I am glad we failed. I'm glad Willis Marsh showed you how very helpless you are. Let her come to your rescue now. I'm through. Do you understand? I'm through!”

Emerson gazed at her in astonishment, the outburst had been so unexpected, but he realized that he owed her too much to take offence.

“Miss Wayland will take no hand in my affairs. I doubt if she will even realize what this trouble is all about,” he said, a trifle stiffly. “I suppose I did want to play the hero, and I dare say I did use you and the others, but you knew that all the time.”

“Why won't she help you?” queried Cherry. “Doesn't she care enough about you? Doesn't she know enough to understand your plight?”

“Yes, but this is my fight, and I've got to make good without her assistance. She isn't the sort to marry a failure, and she has left me to make my own way. Besides, she would not dare go contrary to her father's wishes, even if she desired—that is part of her education. Oh, Wayne Wayland's opposition isn't all I have had to overcome. I have had to show his daughter that I am one of her own kind, for she hates weakness.”

“And you think that woman loves you! Why, she isn't a woman at all—she doesn't know what love means. When a woman loves, do you imagine she cares for money or fame or success? If I cared for a man, do you think I'd stop to ask my father if I might marry him or wait for my lover to prove himself worthy of me? Do you think I'd send him through the hell you have suffered to try his metal?” She laughed outright. “Why, I'd become what he was, and I'd fight with him. I'd give him. all I had—money, position, friends, influence; if my people objected, I'd tell them to go hang, I'd give them up and join him! I'd use every dollar, every wile and feminine device that I possessed in his service. When a woman loves, she doesn't care what the world says; the man may be a weakling, or worse, but he is still her lover, and she will go to him.”

The words had come tumbling forth until Cherry was forced to pause for breath.

“You don't understand,” said Boyd. “You are primitive; you have lived in the open; she is exactly your opposite. Conservatism is bred in her, and she can't help her nature. It was hard even for me to understand at first; but when I saw her life, when I saw how she had been reared from childhood, I understood perfectly. I would not have her other than she is; it is enough for me to know that in her own way she cares for me.”

Cherry tossed her head in derision. “For my part, I prefer red blood to sap, and when I love I want to know it—I don't want to have it proved to me like a problem in geometry. I want to love and hate, and do wild, impulsive things against my own judgment.”

“Have you ever loved in that way?” he inquired, abruptly.

“Yes,” she answered, without hesitation, looking him squarely in the eye with an expression he could not fathom. “Thank Heaven, I'm not the artificial kind! As you say, I'm primitive. I have lived!” Her crimson lips curled scornfully.

“I didn't expect you to understand her,” he said. “But she loves me. And I—well, she is my religion. A man must have some God; he can't worship his own image.”

Cherry Malotte turned slowly to the landing−place and made her way into the launch. All the way back she kept silence, and Boyd, confused by her attack upon the citadel of his faith and strangely sore at heart, made no effort at speech.

“Fingerless” Fraser met him at the water's edge.

“Where in the devil have you been?” he cried, breathlessly.

“At the Indian village after help. Why?”

“Big George is in more trouble; he sent for help two hours ago. I was just going to 'beat it' down there.”

“What's up?”

“There's six of your men in the bunk−house all beat up; they don't look like they'd fish any more for a while. Marsh's men threw their salmon overboard, and they had another fight. Things are getting warm.”

“We can't allow ourselves to be driven from the banks,” said Boyd, quickly. “I'll get the shoremen together right away. Find Alton, and bring him along; we'll need every man we can get.”

“Nothing doing with that party; he's quit like a house cat, and gone to bed.”

“Very well; he's no good, anyhow; he's better out of the way.”

He hurried through the building, now silent and half deserted, gathering a crew; then, leaving only the Orientals and the watchman to guard the plant, he loaded his men into the boats and set out.

All that afternoon and on through the long, murky hours of the night the battle raged on the lower reaches of the Kalvik. Boat crews clashed; half− clad men cursed each other and fought with naked fists, with oars and

clubs; and when these failed, they drove at one another with wicked one− tined fish “pues.” All night the hordes of salmon swarmed upward toward the fatal waters of their birth, through sagging nets that were torn and slit; beneath keels that rocked to the impact of struggling, heedless bodies.

CHAPTER XXIV. WHEREIN “THE GRANDE DAME” ARRIVES, LADEN WITH DISAPPOINTMENTS

As the sun slanted up between the southward hills, out from the gossamer haze that lay like filmy forest smoke above the ocean came a snow−white yacht. She stole inward past the headlands, as silent as a wraith, leaving a long, black streamer penciled against the sky; so still was the dawn that the breath from her funnel lay like a trail behind her, slowly fading and blending with the colors of the morning.

The waters were gleaming nickel beneath her prow, and she clove them like a blade; against the dove−gray sky her slender rigging was traced as by some finely pointed instrument; her sides were as clean as the stainless breasts of the gulls that floated near the shore.

As she came proudly up through the fleets of fishing−boats, perfect in every line and gliding with stately dignity, the grimy little crafts drew aside as if in awe, while tired−eyed men stared silently at her as if at a vision.

To Boyd Emerson she seemed like an angel of mercy, and he stood forth upon the deck of his launch searching her hungrily for the sight of a woman's figure. When he had first seen the ship rounding the point he had uttered a cry, then fallen silent watching her as she drew near, heedless of his surroundings. His heart was leaping, his breath was choking him. It seemed as if he must shout Mildred's name aloud and stretch his arms out to her. Of course, she would see him as *The Grande Dame* passed—she would be looking for him, he knew. She would be standing there, wet with the dew, searching with all her eyes. Doubtless she had waited patiently at her post from the instant land came into sight. Seized by a sudden panic lest she pass him unnoticed, he ordered his launch near the yacht's course, where he could command a view of her cabin doors and the wicker chairs upon her deck. His eyes roved over the craft, but all he saw was a uniformed officer upon the bridge and the bronzed faces of the watch staring over the rail. By now *The Grande Dame* was so close that he might have flung a line to her, and above the muffled throbbing of her engines he heard the captain give some low−spoken command. Yet nowhere could he catch a glimpse of Mildred. He saw close−drawn curtains over the cabin windows, indicating that the passengers were still asleep. Then, as he stood there, heavy−hearted, drooping with fatigue, his wet body chilled by the morning's breath, *The Grande Dame* glided past, and he found the shell beneath his feet rocking in her wake.

As he turned shoreward George Balt hailed him, and brought his own launch alongside.

“What craft is that?” he inquired.

“She is the Company's yacht with the N. A. P. A. officers aboard.”

The big fellow stared curiously after the retreating ship.

“Some of our boys is hurt pretty bad,” he observed. “I've told them to take in their nets and go back to the plant.”

“We all need breakfast.”

“I don't want nothing. I'm going over to the trap.”

Emerson shrugged his shoulders listlessly; he was very tired. “What is the use? It won't pay us to lift it.”

“I've watched that point of land for five years, and I never seen fish act this way before,” Balt growled, stubbornly. “If they don't strike in to− day, we better close down. Marsh's men cut half our nets and crippled more than half our crew last night.” He began to rumble curses. “Say! We made a mistake the other day, didn't we? We'd ought to have put that feller away. It ain't too late yet.”

“Wait! Wayne Wayland is aboard that yacht; I know him. He's a hard man, and I've heard strange stories about him, but I don't believe he knows all that Marsh has been doing. I'm going to see him and tell him everything.”

“S'pose he turns you down?”

“Then there will be time enough to—to consider what you suggest. I don't like to think about it.”

“You don't have to,” said Balt, lowering his voice so that the helmsmen could not hear. “I've been thinking it over all night, and it looks like I'd ought to do it myself. Marsh is coming to me anyhow, and—I'm older than you be. It ain't right for a young feller like you to take a chance. If they get me, you can run the business alone.”

Boyd laid his hand on his companion's shoulder.

"No," he said. "Perhaps I wouldn't stick at murder—I don't know. But I won't profit by another man's crime, and if it comes to that, I'll take my share of the risk and the guilt. Whatever you do, I stand with you. But we'll hope for better things. It's no easy thing for me to go to Mr. Wayland asking a favor. You see, his daughter is—Well, I—I want to see her very badly."

Balt eyed him shrewdly.

"I see! And that makes it dead wrong for you to take a hand. If it's necessary to get Marsh, I'll do it alone. With him out of the way, I think you can make a go of it. He's like a rattler—somebody's got to stomp on him. Now I'm off for the trap. Let me know what the old man says."

Boyd returned to the cannery with the old mood of self−disgust and bitterness heavy upon him. He realized that George's offer to commit murder had not shocked him as much as upon its first mention. He knew that he had thought of shedding human blood with as little compunction as if the intended victim had been some noxious animal. He felt, indeed, that if his love for Mildred made him a criminal, she too would be soiled by his dishonor, and for her sake he shrank from the idea of violence, yet he lacked the energy at that time to put it from him. Well, he would go to her father, humble himself, and beg for protection. If he failed, then Marsh must look out for himself. He could not find it in his heart to spare his enemy.

At the plant he found Alton Clyde tremendously excited at the arrival of the yacht, and eager to visit his friends. He sent him to the launch, and, after a hasty breakfast, joined him.

On their way out, Boyd felt a return of that misgiving which had mastered him on his first meeting with Mildred in Chicago. For the second time he was bringing her failure instead of the promised victory. Now, as then, she would find him in the bitterness of defeat, and he could not but wonder how she would bear the disappointment. He hoped at least that she would understand his appeal to her father; that she would see him not as a suppliant begging for mercy, but as a foeman worthy of respect, demanding his just dues. Surely he had proved himself capable. Wayne Wayland could hardly make him contemptible in Mildred's eyes. Yet a feeling of disquiet came over him as he drew near *The Grande Dame*.

Willis Marsh was ahead of him, standing with Mr. Wayland at the rail. Some one else was with them; Boyd's heart leaped wildly as he recognized her. He would have known that slim figure anywhere—and Mildred saw him too, pointing him out to her companions.

With knees shaking under him, he came stumbling up the landing−ladder, a tall, gaunt figure of a man in rough clothing and boots stained with the sea—salt. He looked older by five years than when the girl had last seen him; his cheeks were hollowed and his lips cracked by the wind, but his eyes were aflame with the old light, his smile was for her alone.

He never remembered the spoken greetings nor the looks the others gave him, for her soft, cool hands lay in his hard, feverish palms, and she was smiling up at him.

Alton Clyde was at his heels, and he felt Mildred disengage her hand. He tore his eyes away from her face long enough to nod at Marsh,—who gave him a menacing look, then turned to Wayne Wayland. The old man was saying something, and Boyd answered him unintelligibly, after which he took Mildred's hands once more with such an air of unconscious proprietorship that Willis Marsh grew pale to the lips and turned his back. Other people, whom Boyd had not noticed until now, came down the deck—men and women with field−glasses and cameras swung over their shoulders. He found that he was being introduced to them by Mildred, whose voice betrayed no tremor, and whose manners were as collected as if this were her own drawing−room, and the man at her side a casual acquaintance. The strangers mingled with the little group, levelled their glasses, and made senseless remarks after the manner of tourists the world over. Boyd gathered somehow that they were officers of the Trust, or heavy stockholders, and their wives. They seemed to accept him as an uninteresting bit of local color, and he regarded them with equal indifference, for his eyes were wholly occupied with Mildred, his ears deaf to all but her voice. At length he saw some of them going over the rail, and later found himself alone with his sweetheart. He led her to a deck−chair, and seated himself beside her.

"At last!" he breathed. "You are here, Mildred. You really came, after all?"

"Yes, Boyd."

"And are you glad?"

"Indeed I am. The trip has been wonderful."

“It doesn't seem possible. I can't believe that this is really you—that I am not dreaming, as usual.”

“And you? How have you been?”

“I've been well—I guess I have—I haven't had time to think of myself. Oh, my Lady!” His voice broke with tenderness, and he laid his hand gently upon hers.

She withdrew it quickly.

“Not here! Remember where we are. You are not looking well, Boyd. I don't know that I ever saw you look so badly. Perhaps it is your clothes.”

“I am tired,” he confessed, feeling anew the weariness of the past twenty− four hours. He covertly stroked a fold of her dress, murmuring: “You are here, after all. And you love me, Mildred? You haven't changed, have you?”

“Not at all. Have you?”

His deep breath and the light that flamed into his face was her answer. “I want to be alone with you,” he cried, huskily. “My arms ache for you. Come away from here; this is torture. I'm like a man dying of thirst.”

No woman could have beheld his burning eagerness without an answering thrill, and although Mildred sat motionless, her lids drooped slightly and a faint color tinged her cheeks. Her idle hands clasped themselves rigidly.

“You are always the same,” she smiled. “You sweep me away from myself and from everything. I have never seen any one like you. There are people everywhere. Father is somewhere close by.”

“I don't care−”

“I do.”

“My launch is alongside; let me take you ashore and show you what I have done. I want you to see.”

“I can't. I promised to go ashore with the Berrys and Mr. Marsh.”

“Marsh!”

“Now don't get tragic! We are all going to look over his plant and have lunch there—they are expecting me. Oh, dear!” she cried, plaintively, “I have seen and heard nothing but canneries ever since we left Vancouver. The men talk nothing but fish and packs and markets and dividends. It's all deadly stupid, and I'm wretchedly tired of it. Father is the worst of the lot, of course.”

Emerson's eyes shifted to his own cannery. “You haven't seen mine—ours,” said he.

“Oh yes, I have. Mr. Marsh pointed it out to father and me. It looks just like all the others.” There was an instant's pause before she ran on. “Do you know, there is only one interesting feature about. them, to my notion, and that is the way the Chinamen smoke. Those funny, crooked pipes and those little wads of tobacco are too ridiculous.” The lightness of her words damped his ardor, and brought back the sense of failure. That formless huddle of buildings in the distance seemed to him all at once very dull and prosaic. Of course, it was just like scores of others that his sweetheart had seen all the way north from the border−line. He had never thought of that till now.

“I was down with the fishing fleet at the mouth of the bay this morning when you came in. I thought I might see you,” he said.

“At that hour? Heavens! I was sound asleep. It was hard enough to get up when we were called. Father might have instructed the captain not to steam so fast.”

Boyd stared at her in hurt surprise; but she was smiling at Alton Clyde in the distance, and did not observe his look.

“Don't you care even to hear what I have done?” he inquired.

“Of course,” said Mildred, bringing her eyes back to him.

Hesitatingly he told her of his disappointments, the obstacles he had met and overcome, avoiding Marsh's name, and refraining from placing the blame where it belonged. When he had concluded, she shook her head.

“It is too bad. But Mr. Marsh told us all about it before you came. Boyd, I never thought well of this enterprise. Of course, I didn't say anything against it, you were so enthusiastic, but you really ought to try something big. I am sure you have the ability. Why, the successful men I know at home have no more intelligence than you, and they haven't half your force. As for this—well, I think you can accomplish more important things than catching fish.”

“Important!” he cried. “Why, the salmon industry is one of the most important on the Coast. It employs ten

thousand men in Alaska alone, and they produce ten million dollars every year."

"Oh, let's not go into statistics," said Mildred, lightly; "they make my head ache. What I mean is that a fisherman is nothing like—an attorney or a broker or an architect, for instance; he is more like a miner. Pardon me, Boyd, but look at your clothes." She began to laugh. "Why, you look like a common laborer!"

He became conscious for the first time that he cut a sorry figure. Everything around him spoke of wealth and luxury. Even the sailor that passed at the moment was better dressed than he. He felt suddenly awkward and out of place.

"I might have slicked up a bit," he acknowledged, lamely; "but when you came, I forgot everything else."

"I was dreadfully embarrassed when I introduced you to the Berrys and the rest. I dare say they thought you were one of Mr. Marsh's foremen."

Never before had Boyd known the least constraint in Mildred's presence, but now he felt the rebuke behind her careless manner, and it wounded him deeply. He did not speak, and after a moment she went on, with an abrupt change of subject:

"So that funny little house over there against the hill is where the mysterious woman lives?"

"Who?"

"Cherry Malotte."

"Yes. How did you learn that?"

"Mr. Marsh pointed it out. He said she came up on the same ship with you."

"That is true."

"Why didn't you tell me? Why didn't you write me that she was with you in Seattle?"

"I don't know; I didn't think of it." She regarded him coolly.

"Has anybody discovered who or what she is?"

"Why are you so curious about her?"

Mildred shrugged her shoulders. "Your discussion with Willis Marsh that night at our house interested me very much. I thought I would ask Mr. Marsh to bring her around when we went ashore. It would be rather amusing. She wouldn't come out to the yacht and return my call, would she?" Boyd smiled at her frank concern at this possibility.

"You don't know the kind of girl she is," he said. "She isn't at all what you think; I don't believe you would be able to meet her in the way you suggest."

"Indeed!" Mildred arched her brows. "Why?"

"She wouldn't fancy being 'brought around,' particularly by Marsh."

From her look of surprise, he knew that he had touched on dangerous ground, and he made haste to lead the conversation back to its former channel. He wished to impress Mildred with the fact that if he had not quite succeeded, he had by no means failed; but she listened indifferently, with the air of humoring an insistent child.

"I wish you would give it up and try something else," she said, at last. "This is no place for you. Why, you are losing all your old wit and buoyancy, you are actually growing serious. And serious people are not at all amusing."

Just then Alton Clyde and a group of people, among whom was Willis Marsh, emerged from the cabin, talking and laughing. Mildred arose, saying:

"Here come the Berrys, ready to go ashore."

"When may I see you again?" he inquired, quickly.

"You may come out this evening."

His eyes blazed as he answered, "I shall come!"

As the others came up, she said:

"Mr. Emerson can't accompany us. He wishes to see father."

"I just left him in the cabin," said Marsh. He helped the ladies to the ladder, and a moment later Emerson waved the party adieu, then turned to the saloon in search of Wayne Wayland.

In Mr. Wayland's stiff greeting there was no hint that the two men had ever been friendly, but Emerson was prepared for coolness, and seated himself without waiting for an invitation, glad of the chance to rest his tired limbs. He could not refrain from comparing these splendid quarters with his own bare living shack. The big carved desk, the heavy leather chairs, the amply fitted sideboard, seemed magnificent by contrast. His eyes roved

over the walls with their bookshelves and rare paintings, and between velour hangings he caught a glimpse of a bedroom all in cool, white enamel. The unaccustomed feel of the velvet carpet was grateful to his feet; he coveted that soft bed in yonder with its smooth linen. For all these things he felt the savage hunger that comes of deprivation and hardship.

Mr. Wayland had removed his glasses, and was waiting grimly.

"I have a good deal to say to you, sir," Emerson began, "and I would like you to hear me through."

"Go ahead."

"I am going to tell you some things about Mr. Marsh that I dare say you will disbelieve, but I can verify my statements. I think you are a just man, and I don't believe you know, or would approve, the methods he has used against me."

"If this is to be an arraignment of Mr. Marsh, I suggest that you wait until he can be present. He has gone ashore with the women folks."

"I prefer to talk to you, first. We can call him in later if you wish."

"Before we begin, may I inquire what you expect of me?"

"I expect relief."

"You remember our agreement?"

"I don't want assistance; I want relief."

"Whatever the distinction in the words, I understand that you are asking a favor?"

"I don't consider it so."

"Very well. Proceed."

"When you sent me out three years ago to make a fortune for Mildred, it was understood that there should be fair play on both sides—"

"Have you played fair?" quickly interposed the old man.

"I have. When I came to Chicago, I had no idea that you were interested in the Pacific Coast fisheries, I had raised the money before I discovered that you even knew Willis Marsh. Then it was too late to retreat. When I reached Seattle, all sorts of unexpected obstacles came up. I lost the ship I had chartered; machinery houses refused deliveries; shipments went astray; my bank finally refused its loan, and every other bank in the Northwest followed suit. I was harassed in every possible way. And it wasn't chance that caused it; it was Willis Marsh. He set spies upon me, he incited a dock strike that resulted in a riot and the death of at least one man; moreover, he tried to have me killed."

"How do you know he did that?"

"I have no legal proof, but I know it just the same."

Mr. Wayland smiled. "That is not a very definite charge. You surely don't hold him responsible for the death of that striker?"

"I do; and for the action of the police in trying to fix the crime upon me. You know, perhaps, how I got away from Seattle. When Marsh arrived at Kalvik, he first tried to sink my boilers; failing in that, he ruined my Iron Chinks; then he 'corked' my fish−trap, not because he needed more fish, but purely to spoil my catch. The day the run started he bribed my fishermen to break their contracts, leaving me short−handed. He didn't need more men, but did that simply to cripple me. I got Indians to replace the white men, but he won them away by a miserable trick and by threats that I have no doubt he would make good if the poor devils dared to stand out.

"His men won't allow my fellows to work; we have had our nets cut and our fish thrown out. Last night we had a bad time on the banks, and a number of people were hurt. The situation is growing worse every hour, and there will be bloodshed unless this persecution stops. All I want is a fair chance. There are fish enough for us all in the Kalvik, but that man has used the power of your organization to ruin me—not for business reasons, but for personal spite. I have played the game squarely, Mr. Wayland, but unless this ceases I'm through."

"You are through?"

"Yes. The run is nearly a week old, and I haven't begun to pack my salmon. I have less than half a boat crew, and of those half are laid up."

The president of the Trust stirred for the first time since Boyd had begun his recital; the grim lines about his mouth set themselves deeper, and, staring with cold gray eyes at the speaker, he said:

"Well, sir! What you have told me confirms my judgment that Willis Marsh is the right man in the right

place.”

Completely taken back by this unexpected reply, Boyd exclaimed:

“You don't mean to say that you approve of what he has done?”

“Yes, of what I know he has done. Mr. Marsh is pursuing a definite policy laid down by his board of directors. You have shown me that he has done his work well. You knew before you left the East that we intended to crush all opposition.”

Emerson's voice was sharp as he cried: “I understand all that; but am I to understand also that the directors of the N. A. P. A. instructed him to kill me?”

“Tut, tut! Don't talk nonsense. You admit that you have no proof of Willis' connection with the attempt upon your life. You put yourself in the way of danger when you hired scab labor to break that strike. I think you got off very easily.”

“If Marsh was instructed to crush the independents, why has he centred all his efforts on me alone? Why has he spent this summer in Kalvik and not among the other stations to the south?”

“That is our business. Different methods are required in different localities.”

“Then you have no criticism to make—you uphold him?” Boyd's indignation was getting beyond control.

“None whatever. I cannot agree that Marsh is even indirectly responsible for the collision of the scows, for the damage to your machinery, or for the fighting between the men. On the contrary, I know that he is doing his best to prevent violence, because it interferes with the catch. He hired your men because he needed them. Nobody knows who broke your machinery. As for your fish−trap, you are privileged to build another, or a dozen more, wherever you please. Willis has already told me everything that you have said, and it strikes me that you have simply been outgeneraled. Your complaints do not appeal to me. Even granting your absurd assumption that Marsh tried to put you out of the way, it seems to me that you have more than evened the score.”

“How?”

“He is still wearing bandages over that knife−thrust you gave him.”

Emerson leaped to his feet.

“He knows I didn't do that; everybody knows it!” he cried. “He lied to you.”

“We won't discuss that,” said Wayne Wayland, curtly. “What do you want me to do?”

“I want you to end this persecution. I want you to sail him off.”

“In other words, you want me to save you.”

Emerson swallowed. “I suppose it amounts to that. I want to be let alone, I want a square deal.”

“Well, I won't.” Wayne Wayland's voice hardened suddenly; his sound, white teeth snapped together. “You are getting exactly what you deserve. You betrayed me by spying upon me while you broke bread in my house. I see nothing reprehensible in Mr. Marsh's conduct; but even if I did, I would not censure him; any measures are justifiable against a traitor.”

Boyd Emerson's face went gray beneath its coating of tan, and his voice threatened to break as he said:

“I am no traitor, and you know it. I thought you a man of honor, and I came to you, not for help but for justice. But I see I was mistaken. I am beginning to believe that Marsh acted under your instructions from the first.”

“Believe what you choose.”

“You think you've got me, but you haven't. I'll beat you yet.”

“You can't beat me at anything.” Mr. Wayland's jaws were set like iron.

“Not this year perhaps, but next. You and Marsh have whipped me this time; but the salmon will come again, and I'll run my plant in spite of hell!”

Wayne Wayland made as if to speak, but Boyd went on unheeding: “You've taken a dislike to me, but your conduct shows that you fear me. You are afraid I'll succeed, and I will.”

“Brave talk!” said the older man. “But you owe one hundred thousand dollars, and your stockholders will learn of your mismanagement.”

“Your persecution, you mean!” cried the other. “I can explain. They will wait another year. I will raise more money, and they will stand by me.”

“Perhaps I know more about that than you do.”

Emerson strode toward the desk menacingly, crying, in a quivering voice:

“I warn you to keep your hands off of them. By God! don't try any of your financial trickery with me, or

I'll—”

Wayne Wayland leaped from his chair, his face purple and his eyes flashing savagely.

“Leave this yacht!” he thundered. “I won't allow you to insult me; I won't stand your threats. I've got you where I want you, and when the time comes you'll know it. Now, get out!” He stretched forth a great square hand and closed it so fiercely that the fingers cracked. “I'll crush you—like that!”

Boyd turned and strode from the cabin.

Half−blinded with anger, he stumbled down the ladder to his launch.

“Back to the plant!” he ordered, then gazed with lowering brows and defiant eyes at *The Grande Dame* as she rested swanlike and serene at her moorings. His anger against Mildred's father destroyed for the time all thought of his disappointment at her own lack of understanding and her cool acceptance of his failure. He saw only that his affairs had reached a final climax where he must bow to the inevitable, or—Big George's parting words came to him—strike one last blow in reprisal. A kind of sickening rage possessed him. He had tried to fight fair against an enemy who knew no scruple, partly that he might win that enemy's respect. Now he was thoroughly beaten and humbled. After all, he was merely an adventurer, without friends of resources. His long struggle had made him the type of man of whom desperate things might be expected. He might as well act the part. Why should he pretend to higher standards than Wayne Wayland or Marsh? George's way was best. By the time he had reached the cannery, he had practically made up his mind.

It was the hour of his darkest despair—the real crisis in his life. There are times when it rests with fate to make a strong man stronger or turn him altogether to evil. Such a man will not accept misfortune tamely. He is the reverse of those who are good through weakness; it is his nature to sin strongly.

But the unexpected happened, and Boyd's black mood vanished in amazement at the sight which met his eyes. Moored to the fish−dock was a lighter awash with a cargo that made him stare and doubt his vision. He had seen his scanty crew of gill−netters return empty−handed with the rising sun, exhausted, disheartened, depleted in numbers; yet there before him were thousands of salmon. They were strewn in a great mass upon the dock and inside the shed, while from the scow beneath they came in showers as the handlers tossed them upward from their pues. Through the wide doors he saw the backs of the butchers busily at work over their tables, and heard the uproar of his cannery running full for the first time.

Before the launch had touched, he had leaped to the ladder and swung himself upon the dock. He stumbled into the arms of Big George.

“Where—did those—fish come from?” he cried, breathlessly.

“From the trap.” George smiled as he had not smiled in many weeks. “They've struck in like I knew they would, and they're running now by the thousands. I've fished these waters for years, but I never seen the likes of it. They'll tear that trap to pieces. They're smothering in the pot, tons and tons of 'em, with millions more milling below the leads because they can't get in. It's a sight you'll not see once in a lifetime.”

“That means that we can run the plant—that we'll get all we can use?”

“Hell! We've got fish enough to run two canneries. They've struck their gait I tell you, and they'll never stop now night or day till they're through. We don't need no gill−netters; what we need is butchers and slimers and handlers. There never was a trap site in the North till this one; I told Willis Marsh that years ago.” He flung out a long, hairy arm, bared half to the shoulder, and waved it exultantly. “We built this plant to cook forty thousand salmon a day, but I'll bring you three thousand every hour, and you've got to cook 'em. Do you hear?”

“And they couldn't cork us, after all!” Emerson leaned unsteadily against a pile, for his head was whirling.

“No! We'll show that gang what a cannery can do. Marsh's traps will rot where they stand.” Big George shook his tight−clinched fist again. “We've won, my boy! We've won!”

“Then don't let us stand here talking!” cried Emerson, sharply. “Hurry! Hurry!” He turned, and sped up the dock.

He had come into his own at last, and he vowed with tight−shut teeth that no wheel should stop, no belt should slacken, no man should leave his duty till the run had passed. At the entrance to the throbbing, clanging building he paused an instant, and with a smile looked toward the yacht floating lazily in the distance. Then, with knees sagging beneath him from weariness, he entered.

CHAPTER XXV. THE CLASH

“I've heard the news!” cried Cherry, later that afternoon, shrieking to make herself heard above the rattle and jar of the machinery.

“There seems to be a Providence that watches over fishermen,” said Boyd.

“I am happy, for your sake, and I want to apologize for my display of temper. Come away where I won't have to scream so. I want to talk to you.”

“It is music to my ears,” he answered, as he led her past the rows of Chinamen bowed before their soldering−torches as if busied with some heathen rites. “But I'm glad to sit down just the same. I've been on my feet for thirty−six hours.”

“You poor boy! Why don't you take some sleep?”

“I can't. George is coming with another load of fish, and the plant is so new I am afraid to leave it even for an hour.”

“It's too much for one man,” she declared.

“Oh, I'll sleep to−morrow.”

“Did you see—her?” questioned Cherry.

“Yes!”

“She must be very proud of you,” she said, wistfully.

“I—I—don't think she understands what I am trying to do, or what it means. Our talk was not very satisfactory.”

“She surely must have understood what Marsh is doing.”

“I didn't tell her that.”

“Why not?”

“What good would it have done?”

“Why”—Cherry seemed bewildered—“she could put a stop to it; she could use her influence with her father against Marsh. I expected to see your old crew back at work again. Oh, I wish I had her power!”

“She wouldn't take a hand under any circumstances—it wouldn't occur to her—and naturally I couldn't ask her.” Boyd flushed uncomfortably. “Thanks to George's trap, there is no need.” He went on to tell Cherry of the scene with Mr. Wayland and its stormy ending.

“They have used all their resources to down you,” she said, “but luck is with you, and you mustn't let them succeed. Now is the time to show them what is in you. Go in and win her now, against all of them.”

He was grateful for her sympathy, yet somehow it made him uncomfortable.

“What was it you wished to see me about?” he asked.

“Oh! Have you seen Chakawana?”

“No.”

“She disappeared early this morning soon after the yacht came in; I can't find her anywhere. She took the baby with her and—I'm worried.”

“Doesn't Constantine know where she is?”

“Why, Constantine is down here, isn't he?”

“He hasn't been here since yesterday.”

Cherry rose nervously. “There is something wrong, Boyd. They have been acting queerly for a long time.”

“Then you are alone at your place,” he said, thoughtfully. “I think you had better come down here.”

“Oh no!”

“I shall send some one up to spend the night at your house. You shouldn't be left unprotected.” But just then Constantine came sauntering round the corner of the building.

“Thank Heaven!” cried Cherry. “He will know where the others are.”

But when his mistress questioned him, Constantine merely replied: “I don' know. I no see Chakawana.”

“They have been gone since morning, and I can't find them anywhere.”

“Umph! I guess they all right.”

“There is something queer about this,” said Emerson. “Where have you been all day?”

“I go sleep. I tired from fighting last night. I come back now and go work. Bime'by Chakawana come back too, I guess.”

“Well, I don't need you to−night, so you'd better go back to Cherry's house and stay there till I send for you.”

Constantine acquiesced calmly, and a few minutes later accompanied his mistress up the beach.

As she passed Marsh's cannery, Cherry saw a tender moored to the dock, and noticed strangers among the buildings. They stared at her curiously, as if the sight of a white girl attended by a copper−hued giant were part of the picturesqueness they expected. As she drew near her own house, she saw a woman approaching, and while yet a stone's−throw distant she recognized her. A jealous tightening of her throat and a flutter at her breast told her that this was Mildred Wayland.

Cherry would have passed on silently, but Miss Wayland checked her.

“Pardon me,” she said. “Will you tell me what that odd−looking building is used for?” She pointed to the village above.

“That is the Greek church.”

“How interesting! Are there many Greeks here?”

“No. It is a relic of the Russian days. The natives worship there.”

“I intended to go closer; but the walking is not very good, is it?” She glanced down at her dainty French shoes, then at Cherry's hunting−boots. “Do you live here?”

“Yes. In the log house yonder.”

“Indeed! I tried to find some one there, but—you were out, of course. You have it arranged very cozily, I see.” Mildred's manner was faintly patronizing. She was vexed at the beauty and evident refinement of this woman whom she had thought to find so different.

“If you will go back I will show it to you from the inside, Miss Wayland.” Cherry enjoyed her start at the name and the look of cold hostility that followed.

“You have the advantage of me,” said Mildred. “I did not think we had met. You are—?” She raised her brows, inquiringly.

“Cherry Malotte, of course.”

“I remember. Mr. Marsh spoke of you.”

“I am sorry.”

“I beg your pardon?”

“I say I am sorry Mr. Marsh ever spoke of me.”

Mildred smiled frigidly. “Evidently you do not like him?”

“Nobody in Alaska likes him. Do you?”

“You see, I am not an Alaskan.”

It occurred to Cherry that this girl was ignorant of the unexpected change in Boyd's affairs. She decided to sound her—to find out for herself the answer to those questions which Boyd had evaded. He had not spoken to Mildred of Marsh. Perhaps if she knew the truth, she would love him better, and even now her assistance would not be valueless.

“Do you know that Mr. Marsh is to blame for all of Boyd's misfortune?” she said.

“Boyd's?”

“Yes, Boyd's, of course. Oh, let us not pretend—I call him by his first name. I think you ought to know the truth about this business, even if Boyd is too chivalrous to tell you.”

“Why do you think he has not told me?”

“I have just come from him.”

“If Mr. Emerson blames any one but himself for his failure, I am sure he would have told me.”

“Then you don't know him.”

“I never knew him to ask another to defend him.”

“He never asked me to defend him. I merely thought that if you knew the truth, you might help him.”

“I? How?”

“It is for you to find a way. He has met with opposition and treachery at every step; I think it is time some one

came to his aid."

"He has had your assistance at all times, has he not?"

"I have tried to help wherever I could, but—I haven't your power."

Mildred shrugged her shoulders. "You even went to Seattle to help him, did you not?"

"I went there on my own business."

"Why do you take such an interest in Mr. Emerson's affairs, may I ask?"

"It was I who induced him to take up this venture," said Cherry, proudly. "I found him discouraged, ready to give up; I helped to put new heart into him. I have something at stake in the enterprise, too—but that's nothing. I hate to see a good man driven to the wall by a scoundrel like Marsh."

"Wait! There is something to be said on both sides. Mr. Marsh was magnanimous enough to overlook that attempt upon his life."

"What attempt?"

"You must have heard. He was wounded in the shoulder."

"Didn't Boyd tell you the truth about that?"

"He told me everything," said Mildred, coldly. This woman's attitude was unbearable. It would seem that she even dared to criticise her, Mildred Wayland, for her treatment of Boyd. She pretended to a truer friendship, a more intimate knowledge of him. But no—it wasn't pretense. It was too natural, too unconscious, for that; and therein lay the sting.

"I shall ask him about it again this evening," she continued. "If there has really been persecution, as you suggest, I shall tell my father."

"You won't see Boyd this evening," said Cherry.

"Oh yes, I shall."

"He is very busy and—I don't think he can see you."

"You don't understand. I told him to come out to the yacht!" Mildred's temper rose at the light she saw in the other woman's face.

"But if he should disappoint you," Cherry insisted, "remember that the fish are running, and you have no time to lose if you are going to help."

Mildred tossed her head. "To be frank with you, I never liked this enterprise of Boyd's. Now that I have seen the place and the people—well, I can't say that I like it better."

"The country is a bit different, but the people are much the same in Kalvik and in Chicago. You will find unscrupulous men and unselfish women everywhere."

Mildred gave her a cool glance that took her in from head to foot.

"And vice versa, I dare say. You speak from a wider experience than I." With a careless nod she picked her way toward the launch, where her friends were already assembling. She was angry and suspicious. Her pride was hurt because she had not been able to feel superior to the other woman. Instead, she had descended to the weak resource of innuendo, while Cherry had been simple and direct. She had expected to recognize instantly the type of person with whom she had to deal, but she found herself baffled. Who was this woman? What was she doing here? Why had Boyd never told her of this extraordinary intimacy? She remembered more than one occasion when he had defended the woman. She resolved to put an end to the affair at once; Boyd must either give up Cherry or—

During the talk between the two young women Constantine had kept at a respectful distance, but when Mildred had gone he came up to Cherry, with the question:

"Who is that?"

"That is Miss Wayland. That is the richest girl in the world, Constantine."

"Humph!"

"And the pity of it is, she doesn't understand how very rich she is. Her father owns all these canneries and many more besides, and lots of railroads—but you don't know what a railroad is, do you?"

"Mebbe him rich as Mr. Marsh, eh?"

"A thousand time richer. Mr. Marsh works for him the way you work for me."

Being too much a gentleman to dispute his mistress' word, Constantine merely shook his head and smiled broadly.

"She fine lady," he acknowledged. "She got plenty nice dress—silik."

"Yes, silk."

"She more han'somer than you be," he added, with reluctant candor. "Mebbe that's lie 'bout Mr. Marsh, eh? White men all work for Mr. Marsh. He no work for nobody."

"No, it is true. Mr. Marsh knows how rich she is, and that is why he wants to marry her."

The breed wheeled swiftly, his soft soles crunching the gravel.

"Mr. Marsh want *marry* her?" he repeated, as if doubting his ears.

"Yes. That is why he has fought Mr. Emerson—they both want to marry her. That is why Marsh broke Mr. Emerson's machinery, and hired his men away from him, and cut his nets. They hate each other—do you understand?"

"Me savvy!" said Constantine shortly, then strode on beside the girl. "Me think all the time Mr. Emerson goin' marry you."

Cherry gasped. "No, no! Why, he is in love with Miss Wayland."

"S'pose he don' marry her?"

"Than Mr. Marsh will get her, I dare say."

After a moment Constantine announced, with conviction: "I guess Mr. Marsh is damn bad man."

"I'm glad you have discovered that. He has even tried to kill Mr. Emerson; that shows the sort of man he is."

"It's good thing—get marry!" said Constantine, vaguely. "The Father say if woman don' marry she go to hell."

"I'd hate to think that," laughed the girl.

"That's true," the other affirmed, stoutly. "The pries' he say so, and pries' don' lie. He say man takes a woman and don' get marry, they both go to hell and burn forever. Bime'by little baby come, and he go to hell, too."

"Oh, I understand! The Father wants to make sure of his people, and he is quite right. You natives haven't observed the law very carefully."

"He say Indian woman stop with white man, she never see Jesus' House no more. She go to hell sure, and baby go too. You s'pose that's true?"

"I dare say it is, in a way."

"By God! That's tough on little baby!" exclaimed Constantine, fervently.

All that night Boyd stayed at his post, while the cavernous building shuddered and hissed to the straining toil of the machines and the gasping breath of the furnaces. As the darkness gathered, he had gone out upon the dock to look regretfully toward the twinkling lights on *The Grande Dame*, then turned doggedly back to his labors. Another load had just arrived from the trap; already the plant, untried by the stress of a steady run, was clogged and working far below capacity. He would have sent Mildred word, but he had not a single man to spare.

At ten o'clock the next morning he staggered into his quarters, more dead than alive. In his heart was a great thankfulness that Big George had not found him wanting. The last defective machine was mended, the last weakness strengthened, and the plant had reached its fullest stride. The fish might come now in any quantity; the rest was but a matter of coal and iron and human endurance. Meanwhile he would sleep.

He met "Fingerless" Fraser emerging, decked royally in all the splendor of new clothes and spotless linen.

"Where are you going?" Boyd asked him.

"I'm going out into society."

"Clyde is taking you to the yacht, eh?"

"No! He's afraid of my work, so I'm going out on my own. He told me all about the swell quilts at Marsh's place, so I thought I'd lam up there and look them over. I may cop an heiress." He winked wisely. "If I see one that looks gentle, I'm liable to grab me some bride. He says there ain't one that's got less than a couple of millions in her kick."

Boyd was too weary to do more than wish him success, but it seemed that fortune favored Fraser, for before he had gone far he saw a young woman seated in a patch of wild flowers, plucking the blooms with careless hand while she drank in the beauty of the bright Arctic morning. She was simply dressed, yet looked so prosperous that Fraser instantly decided:

"That's her! I'll spread my checks with this one."

"Good−morning!" he began.

The girl gave him an indifferent glance from two fearless eyes, and nodded slightly. But "Fingerless" Fraser

upon occasion could summon a smile that was peculiarly engaging. He did so now, seating himself hat in hand, with the words:

"If you don't mind, I'll rest a minute. I'm out for my morning walk. It's a nice day, isn't it?" As she did not answer, he ran on, glibly: "My name is De Benville—I'm one of the New Orleans branch. That's my cannery down yonder." He pointed in the direction from which he had just come.

"Indeed!" said the young lady.

"Yes. It's mine."

A wrinkle gathered at the corners of the stranger's eyes; her face showed a flicker of amusement.

"I thought that was Mr. Emerson's cannery," she said.

"Oh, the idea! He only runs it for me. I put up the money. You know him, eh?"

The girl nodded. "Yes; I know Mr. Clyde also."

"Who—Alton?" he queried, with reassuring warmth. "Why, you and I have got mutual friends. Alton and me is pals." He shook his head solemnly. "Ain't he a scourge?"

"I beg your pardon."

"I say, ain't he an awful thing? He ain't anything like Emerson. There's a ring−tailed swallow, all right, all right! I like him."

"Are you very intimate with him?"

"Am I? I'm closer to him than a porous plaster. When Boyd ain't around, I'm him, that's all." From her look Fraser judged that he was progressing finely. He hastened to add: "I always like to help out young fellows like him. I like to give 'em a chance. That's my name, you know, Chancy De Benville—always game to take a chance. Is that your yacht?"

"No. My father and I are merely passengers."

"So you trailed the old skeezicks along with you? Well, that's right. Make the most of your father while you've got him. If I'd paid more attention to mine I'd have been better off now. But I was wild." Fraser winked in a manner to inform his listener that all worldly wisdom was his. "I wanted to be a jockey, and the old party cut me off. What I've got now, I made all by myself, but if I'd stayed in Bloomington I might have been president of the bank by this time."

"Bloomington! I understood you to say New Orleans."

"My old man had a whole string of banks," Fraser averred, hastily.

"Tell me—is Mr. Emerson ill?" asked the girl.

"Ill enough to lick a den of wildcats."

"He intended coming out to the yacht last night, but he disappointed us."

"He's as busy as an ant−hill. I met him turning in just as I came out for my constitutional."

"Where had he been all night?" Her voice betrayed an interest that Fraser was quick to detect. He answered, cannily:

"You can search me! I don't keep cases on him. As long as he does his work, I don't care where he goes at quitting time." He resolved that this girl should learn nothing from him.

"There seem to be very few white women in this place," she said, after a pause.

"Only one, till you people came. Maybe you've crossed her trail?"

"Hardly!"

"Oh, she's all right. Take it on the word of a fire−man, she's an ace."

"Mr. Emerson told me about her. He seems quite fond of her."

"I've always said they'd make a swell−looking pair."

"One can hardly blame her for trying to catch him."

"Oh, you can make book that she didn't start no love−making. She ain't the kind to curl up in a man's ear and whisper. She don't have to. All she needs to do is look natural; the men will fall like ripe persimmons."

"They have been together a great deal, I suppose."

"Every hour of the day, and the days are long," said Fraser, cheerfully. "But he ain't crippled; be could have walked away if he'd wanted to. It's a good thing he didn't, though, because she's done more to win this bet for us than we've done ourselves."

"She's unusually pretty," the girl remarked, coldly.

“Yes, and she's just as bright as she is good−looking—but I don't care for blondes.” Fraser gazed admiringly at the brown hair before him, and rolled his eyes eloquently. “I'm strong for brunettes, I am. It's the Creole blood in me.”

She gathered up her wild flowers and rose, saying:

“I must be going.”

“I'll go with you.” He jumped to his feet with alacrity.

“Thank you. I prefer to walk alone.”

“Couldn't think of it. I'll—“ But he paused at the lift of her brows and the extraordinarily frigid look she gave him. He stood in his tracks, watching her descend the river trail.

“Declined with thanks!” he murmured. “I'd need ear−muffs and mittens to handle her. I think I'll build me some bonfire and thaw out. She must own the mint.”

At the upper cannery Mildred found Alton Clyde with the younger Berry girl. She called him aside, and talked earnestly with him for several minutes.

“All right,” he said, at length. “I'm glad to get out, of course; the rest is up to you.”

Mildred's lips were white and her voice hard as she cried:

“I am thoroughly sick of it all. I have played the fool long enough.”

“Now look here,” Clyde objected, weakly, “you may be mistaken, and—it doesn't look like quite the square thing to do.” But she silenced him with an angry gesture.

“Leave that to me. I'm through with him.”

“All right. Let's hunt up the governor.” Together they went to the office in search of Wayne Wayland.

A half−hour later, when Clyde rejoined Miss Berry, she noticed that he seemed ill at ease, gazing down the bay with a worried, speculative look in his colorless eyes.

Boyd Emerson roused from his death−like slumber late in the afternoon, still worn from his long strain and aching in every muscle. He was in wretched plight physically, but his heart was aglow with gladness. Big George was still at the trap, and the unceasing rumble from across the way told him that the fish were still coming in. As he was finishing his breakfast, a watchman appeared in the doorway.

“There's a launch at the dock with some people from above,” he announced. “I stopped them, according to orders, but they want to see you.”

“Show them to the office.” Boyd rose and went into the other building, where, a moment later, he was confronted by Wayne Wayland and Willis Marsh. The old man nodded to him shortly. Marsh began:

“We heard about your good−fortune. Mr. Wayland has come to look over your plant.”

“It is not for sale.”

“How many fish are you getting?”

“That is my business.” He turned to Mr. Wayland. “I hardly expected to see you here. Haven't you insulted me enough?”

“Just a moment before you order me out. I'm a stockholder in this company, and I am within my rights.”

“You a stockholder? How much stock do you own? Where did you get it?”

“I own thirty−five thousand shares outright.” Mr. Wayland tossed a packet of certificates upon the table. “And I have options on all the stock you placed in Chicago. I said you would hear from me when the time came.”

“So you think the time has come to crush me, eh?” said Emerson. “Well, you've been swindled. Only one−third of the capital stock has been sold, and Alton Clyde holds thirty−five thousand shares of that.”

The old man smiled grimly. “I have not been swindled.”

“Then Clyde sold out!” exploded Boyd.

“Yes. I paid him back the ten thousand dollars he put in, and I took over the twenty−five thousand shares you got Mildred to take.”

“Mildred!” Emerson started as if he had been struck. “Are you insane? Mildred doesn't own—Why, Alton never told me who put up that money!”

“Don't tell me you didn't know!” cried Wayne Wayland. “You knew all the time. You worked your friends out, and then sent that whipper−snapper to my daughter when you saw you were about to fail. You managed well; you knew she couldn't refuse.”

“How did you find out that she held the stock?”

“She told me, of course.”

“Don't ask me to believe that. If she hadn't told you before, she wouldn't tell you now. All I can say is that she acted of her own free will. I never dreamed she put up that twenty−five thousand dollars. What do you intend to do, now that you have taken over these holdings?”

“What do you think? I would spend ten times the money to save my daughter.” The old man was quivering.

“You are only a minority stockholder; the control of this enterprise still rests with me and my friends.”

“Your friends!” cried Mr. Wayland. “That's what brings me here—you and your friends! I'll break you and your friends, if it takes my fortune.”

“I can understand your dislike of me, but my associates have never harmed you.”

“Your associates! And who are they? A lawless ruffian, who openly threatened Willis Marsh's murder, and a loose woman from the dance−halls.”

“Take care!” cried Emerson, in a sharp voice.

The old man waved his hands as if at a loss for words. “Look here! You can't be an utter idiot. You must know who she is.”

“Do you? Then tell me.”

Wayne Wayland turned his back in disgust. “Do you really wish to know?” Marsh's smooth voice questioned.

“I do.”

“She is a very common sort,” said Willis Marsh. “I am surprised that you never heard of her while you were in the 'upper country.' She followed the mining camps and lived as such women do. She is an expert with cards—she even dealt faro in some of the camps.”

“How do you know?”

“I looked up her history in Seattle. She is very—well, notorious.”

“People talk like that about nearly every woman in Alaska.”

“I didn't come here to argue about that woman's character,” broke in Mr. Wayland.

“You have said enough now, so that you will either prove your words or apologize.”

“If you want proof, take your own relation with her. It's notorious; even Mildred has heard of it.”

“I can explain to her in a word.”

“Perhaps you can also explain that affair with Hilliard. If so, you had better do it. I suppose you didn't know anything about that, either. I suppose you don't know why he advanced that loan after once refusing it. They have a name for men like you who take money from women of her sort.”

Emerson uttered a terrible cry, and his face blanched to a gray pallor.

“Do you mean to say—I sent—her—to Hilliard?”

“Hilliard as good as told me so himself. Do you wonder that I am willing to spend a fortune to protect my girl from a man like you? I'm going to break you. I've got a foothold in this enterprise of yours, and I'll root you out if it takes a million. I'll kick you back into the gutter, where you belong.”

Boyd stood appalled at the violence of this outburst. The man seemed insane. He could not find words to answer him.

“You did not come down here to tell me that,” he said, at last.

“No. I came here with a message from Mildred; she has told me to dismiss you once and for all.”

“I shall take my dismissal from no one but her. I can explain everything.”

“I expected you to say that. If you want her own words, read this.” With shaking fingers, he thrust a letter before Emerson's eyes. “Read it!”

The young man opened the envelope, and read, in a hand−writing he knew only too well:

“DEAR BOYD,—The conviction has been growing on me for some time that you and I have made a serious mistake. It is not necessary to go into details —let us spare each other that unpleasantness. I am familiar with all that father will say to you, and his feelings are mine; hence there is no necessity for further explanations. Believe me, this is much the simplest way.

“MILDRED.”

Boyd crushed the note in his palm and tossed it away carelessly.

“You dictate well,” he said, quietly, “but I shall tell her the truth, and she will—”

“Oh no, you won't. You won't see her again. I have seen to that. Mildred is engaged to Willis Marsh. It's all

settled. I warn you to keep away. Her engagement has been announced to all our friends on the yacht."

"I tell you I won't take my dismissal from any one but her. I shall come aboard *The Grande Dame* to−night."

"Mr. Marsh and I may have something to say to that."

Boyd wheeled upon Marsh with a look that made him recoil.

"If you try to cross me, I'll strip your back and lash you till you howl like a dog."

Marsh's florid face went pale; his tongue became suddenly too dry for speech. But Wayne Wayland was not to be cowed.

"I warn you again to keep away from my daughter!" he cried, furiously.

"And I warn you that I shall come aboard the yacht to−night alone."

The president of the Trust turned, and, followed by his lieutenant, left the room without another word.

CHAPTER XXVI. IN WHICH A SCORE IS SETTLED

Cherry Malotte, coming down to the cannery on her daily visit, saw Willis Marsh and Mr. Wayland leaving it. Wondering, she hurried into the main building in search of Boyd. The place was as busy as when she had left it on the afternoon before, and she saw that the men had been at work all night; many of them were sprawled in corners, where they had sunk from weariness, snatching a moment's rest before the boss kicked them back to their posts. The Chinese hands were stoically performing their tasks, their yellow faces haggard with the strain; at the butchering−tables yesterday's crew was still slitting, slashing, hacking at the pile of fish that never seemed to grow less. Some of them were giving up, staggering away to their bunks, while others with more vitality had stood so long in the slime and salt drip that their feet had swelled, and it had become necessary to cut off their shoes.

Boyd was standing in the door of the office. In a few words he told her of Mr. Wayland's threat.

“Do you think he can injure the company?” she inquired, anxiously.

“I haven't a doubt of it. He can work very serious harm, at least.”

“Tell me—why did he turn against you so suddenly? What made Miss Wayland angry with you?”

“I—I would rather not”

“Why? I'm your partner, and I ought to be told, You and George and I will have to work together closer than ever now. Don't let's begin by concealing anything.”

“Well, perhaps you had better know the whole thing,” said Boyd, slowly. “Mildred does not like you; her father's mind has been poisoned by Marsh. It seems they resent our friendship; they believe—all sorts of things.”

“So I am the cause of your trouble, after all.”

“They blame me equally—more than you. It seems that Marsh made an inquiry into your—well, your life history—and he babbled all the gossip he heard to them. Of course they believed it, not knowing you as I do, and they misunderstood our friendship. But I can explain, and I shall, to Mildred. Then I shall prove Marsh a liar. Perhaps I can show Mr. Wayland that he was in the wrong. It's our only hope.”

“What did Marsh say about me?” asked the girl.

She was pale to the lips.

“He said a lot of things that at any other time I would have made him swallow on the spot. But it's only a pleasure deferred. With your help, I'll do it in their presence. I don't like to tell you this, but the truth is vital to us all, and I want to arm myself.”

Cherry was silent.

“You may leave it to me,” he said, gently. “I will see that Marsh sets you right.”

“There is nothing to set right,” said the girl, wearily. “Marsh told the truth, I dare say.”

“The truth! My God! You don't know what you're saying!”

“Yes, I do.” She returned his look of shocked horror with half−hearted defiance. “You must have known who I am. Fraser knew, and he must have told you. You knew I had followed the mining camps, you knew I had lived by my wits. You must have known what people thought of me. I cast my lot in with the people of this country, and I had to match my wits with those of every man I met. Sometimes I won, sometimes I did not. You know the North.”

“I didn't know,” he said, slowly. “I never thought—I wouldn't allow myself to think—”

“Why not? It is nothing to you. You have lived, and so have I. I made mistakes—what girl doesn't who has to fight her way alone? But my past is my own; it concerns nobody but me.” She saw the change in his face, and her reckless spirit rose. “Oh, I've shocked you! You think all women should be like Miss Wayland. Have you ever stopped to think that even you are not the same man you were when you came fresh from college? You know the world now; you have tasted its wickedness. Would you change your knowledge for your earlier innocence? You know you would not, and you have no right to judge me by a separate code. What difference does it make who I am or what I have done? I didn't ask your record when I gave you the chance to win Miss Wayland, and neither you nor she have any right to challenge mine.”

“I agree with you in that.”

“I came away from the mining camps because of wagging tongues—because I was forever misjudged. Whatever I may have been, I have at least played fair with that girl; it hurts me now to be accused by her. I saw your love for her, and I never tried to rob her. Oh, don't look as if I couldn't have done differently if I had tried. I could have injured her very easily if I had been the sort she thinks me. But I helped you in every way I could. I made sacrifices, I did things she would never have done.”

She stopped on the verge of tears. Boyd felt the justice of her words. He could not forget the unselfish devotion and loyalty she had shown throughout his long struggle. For the hundredth time there came to him the memory of her services in the matter of Hilliard's loan, and the thought caused him unspeakable distress.

“Why—did you do all this?” he asked.

“Don't you know?” Cherry gazed at him with a faint smile.

Then, for the first time, the whole truth burst upon him. The surprise of it almost deprived him of speech, and he stammered:

“No, I—I—“ Then he fell silent.

“What little I did, I did because I love you,” said the girl, in a tired voice. “You may as well know, for it makes no difference now.”

“I—I am sorry,” he said, gripped by a strong emotion that made him go hot and cold. “I have been a fool.”

“No, you were merely wrapped up in your own affairs. You see, I had been living my own life, and was fairly contented till you came; then everything changed. For a long time I hoped you might grow to love me as I loved you, but I found it was no use. When I saw you so honest and unselfish in your devotion to that other girl, I thought it was my chance to do something unselfish in my turn. It was hard—but I did my best. I think I must love you in the same way you love her, Boyd, for there is nothing in all the world I would not do to make you happy. That's all there is to the poor little story, and it won't make any difference now, except that you and I can't go on as we have done; I shall never have the courage to come back after this. You will win Miss Wayland yet, and attain your heart's desire. I am only sorry that I have made it harder for you— that I cannot help you any further. But I cannot. There is but one thing more I can do—”

“I want no more sacrifice!” he cried, roughly. “I've been blind. I've taken too much from you already.”

The girl stood for a moment with her eyes turned toward the river. Then she said:

“I must think. I—I want to go away. Good−bye.”

“Good−bye,” he returned, and stood watching her as she hurried away, half suspecting the tears that were trembling amid her lashes.

It was not until supper−time that Boyd saw “Fingerless” Fraser, and questioned him about his quest for an heiress.

“Nothing doing in the heiress business,” replied the adventurer. “I couldn't stand the exposure.”

“They were cold, eh?”

“Yep! They weathered me out.”

“Did you really meet any of those people?”

“Sure! I met 'em all, but I didn't catch their names. I 'made' one before I'd gone a mile—tall, slim party, with cracked ice in her voice.”

Boyd looked up quickly. “Did you introduce yourself?”

“As Chancy De Benville, that's all. How is that for a drawing−room monaker? She fell for the name all right, but there must have been something phony about the clothes. That's the trouble with this park harness; if I'd wore my 'soup and fish' and my two−gallon hat, I'd have passed for a gentleman sure. I'm strong for those evening togs. I see another one later; a little Maduro colored skirt with a fat nose.”

“Miss Berry.”

“I'm glad to meet her. I officed her out of a rowboat and told her I was Mr. Yonkers of New York. We was breezing along on the bit till Clyde broke it up. He called me Fraser, and it was cold in a minute. Fraser is a cheap name, anyhow; I'm sorry I took it.”

“Do you mean to say it isn't your real name?” asked his companion, in genuine bewilderment.

“Naw! Switzer is what I was born with. Say it slow and it sounds like an air brake, don't it? I never won a bet as long as I packed it around, and Fraser hasn't got it beat by more than a lip.”

“Well!” Boyd breathed deeply. “You are the limit.”

“Speaking of clothes, I notice you are dressed up like a fruit salad. What is it? The yacht!”

“Yes.”

“You'd better hurry; she sails at high tide.”

“Sails!”

“Alton told me so, and said that he was going along.”

“Thank Heaven for that, anyhow, but—I don't understand about the other.”

Boyd voiced the question that was foremost in his mind.

“Did you know Cherry in the 'upper country'?”

“Nope.”

“She said you did.”

“She said that?”

“Yes. She thought you had told me who she was.”

“Hell! She might have known I'd never crack. It's her own business, and— I've got troubles enough with this cannery on my hands.”

“I wish you had told me,” said Emerson.

“Why? There's no use of rehearsing the dog−eared dope. Nobody can live the past over again, and who wants to repeat the present? It's only the future that's worth while. I guess her future is just as good as anybody's.”

“What she told me came as a shock.”

“Fingerless” Fraser grunted. “I don't know why. For my part, I can't stand for an ingenue. If ever I get married, Cherry's the sort for me. I'm out of the kindergarten myself, and I'd hate to spend my life cutting paper figures for my wife. No, sir! If I ever seize a frill, I want her to know as much as me; then she won't tear away with the first dark−eyed diamond broker that stops in front of my place to crank up his whizz−buggy. You never heard of a wise woman breaking up her own home, did you? It's the pink−faced dolls from the seminary that fall for Bertie the Beautiful Cloak Model.”

Fraser whittled himself a toothpick as he went on:

“A feller in my line of business don't gather much useful information, but he certainly gets Jerry to the female question in all its dips, angles, and spurs. Cherry Malotte is the squarest girl I ever saw, and while she may have been crowded at the turn, she'll finish true. It takes a thoroughbred to do that, and the guy that gets her will win his Derby. Now, those fillies on the yacht, for instance, warm up fine, but you can't tell how they'll run.”

“We're not talking of marriage,” said Boyd, as he rose. When he had gone out, Fraser ruminated aloud:

“Maybe not! I ain't very bright, and we may have been talking about the weather. However, if you're after that wild−flower dame with the cold− storage talk instead of Cherry Malotte, why, I hope you get her. There's no accounting for tastes. I certainly did my best to send you along this morning.” Turning to the Jap steward, he remarked, sagely: “My boy, always remember one thing—if you can't boost, don't knock.”

Wayne Wayland was by no means sure that Boyd would not make good his threat to visit the yacht that evening, and in any case he wished to be prepared. A scene before the other passengers of *The Grande Dame* was not to be thought of. Besides, if the young man were roughly handled, it would make him a martyr in Mildred's eyes. He talked over the matter with Marsh, who suggested that the sightseers should dine ashore and spend the evening with him at the plant. With only Mildred and her father left on the yacht, there would be no possibility of scandal, even if Emerson were mad enough to force an interview.

“And what is more,” declared Mr. Wayland, “I shall give orders to clear on the high tide. That fellow is a menace, and the sooner Mildred is away from him the better. You shall go with us, my boy.”

But when he went to Mildred, to explain the nature of his arrangements, he found her in a furious temper.

“Why did you announce my engagement to Mr. Marsh?” she demanded, angrily. “The whole ship is talking about it. By what right did you do that?”

“I did it for your own sake,” said the old man. “This whelp, Emerson, has made a fool of you and of me long enough. There must be an end to it.”

“But I don't love Willis Marsh!” she cried. “You forget I am of age.”

“Nonsense! Willis is a fine fellow, he loves you, and he is the best business man for his years I have ever known. If it were not for this foolish boy−and−girl affair, you would return his love. He suits me, and— well, I

have put my foot down, so there's an end of it."

"Do you intend to force me to marry him?"

Mr. Wayland recognized the danger−signal.

"Absurd! Take all the time you wish; you'll come around all right. That reprobate you were engaged to defied me and defended that woman."

He told of his stormy interview with Boyd, concluding: "It is fortunate we found him out, Mildred. I have guarded you all my life. I have lavished everything money could buy upon you. I have built up the greatest fortune in all the West for you. I have kept you pure and sweet and good—and to think that such a fellow should dare—" Mr. Wayland choked with anger. "The one thing I cannot stand in a man or a woman is immorality. I have lived clean myself, and my son shall be as clean as I."

"Did you say that Boyd threatened to come aboard this evening?" questioned the girl.

"Yes. But I swore that he should not."

"And still he repeated his threat?" Mildred's eyes were strangely bright. She was smiling as if to herself.

"He did, the braggart! He had better not try it."

"Then he'll come," said Mildred.

It was twilight when Willis Marsh was rowed out to the yacht. He found Mr. Wayland and Mildred seated in deck−chairs enjoying the golden sunset while the old man smoked. Marsh explained that he had excused himself from his guests to go whither his inclination led him, and drew his seat close to Mildred, rejoicing in the fact that no one could gainsay him this privilege. In reality, he had been drawn to *The Grande Dame* largely by a lurking fear of Emerson. He was not entirely sure of the girl, and would not feel secure until the shores of Kalvik had sunk from sight and his rival had been left behind. But in spite of his uneasiness, it was the happiest moment of his life. If he had failed to ruin his enemy in the precise way he had planned, he was fairly satisfied with what he had accomplished. He had shifted the battle to stronger shoulders, and he had gained the woman he wanted. Moreover, he had won the unfaltering loyalty of Wayne Wayland, the dominant figure of the West. Nothing could keep him now from the success his ambition demanded. It added to his satisfaction to note the group of lusty sailors at the rail. He almost wished that Emerson would try to come aboard, that he might witness his discomfiture. Meanwhile he did his best to be pleasant.

His complaisant enjoyment was interrupted at last by the approach of the second officer, who announced that a lady wished to see Mr. Wayland.

"A lady?" asked the old man, in surprise.

"Yes, sir. She came alongside in a small boat, just now, with some natives. I stopped her at the landing, but she says she must see you at once."

"Ah! That woman again." Mr. Wayland's jaws snapped. "Tell her to begone. I refuse to see her."

"Very well, sir!" The mate turned, but Mildred said, suddenly:

"Wait! Why don't you talk to her, father?"

"That creature? I have nothing to say to her."

"Quite right!" agreed Marsh, with a cautionary glance at the speaker. "She is up to some trick."

"She may have something really important to say to you," urged the girl.

"No."

Mildred leaned forward, and called to the ship's officer: "Show her up. I will see her."

"Mildred, you mustn't talk to that woman!" her father cried.

"It is very unwise," Marsh chimed in, apprehensively. "She isn't the sort of person—"

Miss Wayland chilled him with a look and waved the mate away, then sank back into her chair.

"I have talked with her already. I assure you she is not dangerous."

"Have your own way," Mr. Wayland grunted. "But it is bound to lead to something unpleasant. She has probably come with a message from—that fellow."

Willis Marsh squirmed uncomfortably in his seat. He fixed his eyes upon the knot of men at the starboard rail; an expression of extreme alertness came over his bland features. His feet were drawn under him, and his fingers were clinched upon the arms of his chair. Then, with a sharp indrawing of his breath, he leaped up and darted down the deck.

Over the side had come Cherry Malotte, accompanied by an Indian girl in shawl and moccasins—a slim,

shrinking creature who stood as if bewildered, twisting her hands and staring about with frightened eyes. Behind them, head and shoulders above the sailors, towered a giant copper− hued breed with a child in his arms.

They saw that Marsh was speaking to the newcomers, but could not distinguish his words. The Indian girl fell back as if terrified. She cried out something in her own tongue, shook her head violently, and pointed to her white companion. Marsh's face was livid; he shook a quivering hand in Cherry Malotte's face. It seemed as if he would strike her; but Constantine strode between them, scowling silently down into the smaller man's face, his own visage saturnine and menacing. Marsh retreated a step, chattering excitedly. Then Cherry's voice came clearly to the listeners:

"It is too late now, Mr. Marsh. You may as well face the music."

Followed by the stares of the sailors, she came up the deck toward the old man and his daughter, who had arisen, the Indian girl clinging to her sleeve, the tall breed striding noiselessly behind. Willis Marsh came with them, his white lips writhing, his face like putty. He made futile detaining grasps at Constantine, and in the silence that suddenly descended upon the ship, they heard him whispering.

"What is the meaning of this?" demanded Mr. Wayland.

"I heard you were about to sail, so I came out to see you before—"

Marsh broke in, hoarsely: "She's a bad woman! She has come here for blackmail!"

"Blackmail!" cried Wayne Wayland. "I thought as much!"

"That's her game. She wants money!"

Cherry shrugged her shoulders and showed her white teeth in a smile.

"Mr. Marsh anticipates slightly. You may judge if he is right."

Marsh started to speak, but Mildred Wayland, who had been watching him intently, was before him.

"Who sent you here, Miss?"

"No one sent me. If Mr. Marsh will stop his chatter, I can make myself understood."

"Don't listen to her—"

Cherry turned upon him swiftly. "You've got to face it, so you may as well keep still."

He fell silent.

"We heard that Mr. Marsh was going away with you, and I came out to ask him for enough money to support his child while he is gone."

"His child!" Wayne Wayland turned upon his daughter's fiance with a face of stern surprise. "Willis, tell her she is lying!"

"She's lying!" Marsh repeated, obediently; but they saw the truth in his face.

Cherry spoke directly to Miss Wayland now. "I have supported this little fellow and his mother for a year." She indicated the red−haired youngster in Constantine's arms. "That is all I care to do. When you people arrived, Mr. Marsh induced Chakawana to take the baby up−river to a fishing−camp and stay there until you had gone. But Constantine heard that he intended to marry you, and hearing also that he intended leaving to−night, Constantine brought his sister back in the hope that Mr. Marsh would do what is right. You see, he promised to marry Chakawana long before he met you."

Mildred could have done murder at the expression she saw in Cherry's face. This woman she had scorned had humbled her in earnest. With flashing eyes she turned upon her father.

"Since you were so prompt in announcing my engagement, perhaps you can deny it with equal promptness."

"Good God! What a scandal if this is true!" Wayne Wayland wiped his forehead.

"Oh, it's true," said Cherry.

In the silence that followed the child struggled out of Constantine's arms and stood beside his mother, the better to inspect these strangers. His little face was grimy, his clothes, cut in the native fashion, were poor and not very clean; yet he was more white than Aleut, and no one seeing him could doubt his parentage. The seamen had left their posts, and were watching with such absorption that they failed to see a skiff with a single oarsman swing past the stern of *The Grande Dame* and make fast to the landing. Still unobserved, the man mounted the companionway swiftly.

For once in his life Wayne Wayland was too confused for definite speech. Willis Marsh stood helpless, his plump face slack−jowled and beaded with sweat. He could not yet grasp the completeness of his downfall, and waited anxiously for some further sign from Mildred. It came at last in a look that scorched him, firing him to a

last effort.

"Don't believe her!" he broke out. "She is lying to protect her own lover!" He pointed to Chakawana. "That girl is the child's mother, but its father is Boyd Emerson!"

"Boyd Emerson was never in Kalvik until last December," said Cherry. "The child is three years old."

"It seems I am being discussed," said a voice behind them. Emerson clove his way through the sailors, striding directly to Marsh. "What is the meaning of this?"

Mildred Wayland laid a fluttering hand upon her breast. "I knew he would come," she breathed.

Constantine broke his silence for the first time, addressing Mildred directly.

"This baby b'long Mr. Marsh. He say he goin' marry Chakawana, but he lie; he goin' marry you because you are rich girl." He turned to Marsh. "What for you lie, eh?" He leaned forward with a frightful scowl. "I tell you long time ago I kill you if you don' marry my sister."

"Now I understand!" exclaimed Boyd. "It was you who stabbed him that night in the cannery."

"Yes! Chakawana tell him what the pries' say 'bout woman what don' marry. My sister say she go to hell herself and don' care a damn, but it ain't right for little baby to go to hell too."

"What do you mean by that?" asked Mr. Wayland.

"The Father say if white man take Indian woman and don' marry her, she go to hell for thousan' year—mebbe two, three thousan' year. Anyhow, she don' never see Jesus' House. That's bad thing!" The breed shook his head seriously. "Chakawana she's good girl, and she go to church; I give money to the pries' too, plenty money every time, but he says that's no good— she's got to be marry or she'll burn for always with little baby. By God! that's make her scare', because little baby ain't do nothing to burn that way. Mr. Marsh he say it's all damn lie, and he don't care if little baby do go to hell. You hear that? He don't care for little baby."

Constantine's eyes were full of tears as he strove laboriously to voice his religious teachings. He went on with growing agitation:

"Chakawana she's mighty scare' of that bad place. and she ask Mr. Marsh again to marry her, but he beat her. That's when I try to kill him. Mebbe Mr. Emerson ain't come so quick, Mr. Marsh go to hell himself."

Wayne Wayland turned upon Marsh.

"Why don't you say something?"

"I told you the brat isn't mine!" he cried. "If it isn't Emerson's, it's Cherry Malotte's. They want money, but I won't be bled."

"You marry my sister?" asked Constantine.

"No!" snarled Willis Marsh. "You can all go to hell and take the child with you—"

Without a single warning cry, the breed lunged swiftly; the others saw something gleam in his hand. Emerson jumped for him, and the three men went to the deck in a writhing tangle, sending the furniture spinning before them. Mildred screamed, the sailors rushed forward, pushing her aside and blotting out her view. The sudden violence of the assault had frightened her nearly out of her senses. She fled to her father, striving to hide her face against his breast, but something drew her eyes back to the spot where the men were clinched. She heard Boyd Emerson cry to the sailors:

"Get out of the way! I've got him!" Then saw him locked in the Indian's arms. They had gained their feet now, and spun backward, bringing up against the yacht's cabin with a crash of shivering glass. A knife, wrenched from the breed's grasp, went whirling over the side into the sea. Cherry Malotte ran forward, and at her voice the savage ceased his struggles.

Wayne Wayland loosed his daughter's hold and thrust his way in among the sailors, kneeling beside the man he had chosen for his son−in−law. Emerson joined him, then rose quickly, crying:

"Is there a doctor among your party?"

"Doctor Berry! Send for Berry! He's gone ashore!" exclaimed Mr. Wayland.

"Quick! Somebody fetch Doctor Berry!" Boyd directed.

As the sailors drew apart, Mildred Wayland saw a sight that made her grow deathly faint and close her eyes. Turning, she fled blindly into the cabin. A few moments later Emerson found her stretched unconscious at the head of the main stairs, with a hysterical French maid sobbing over her.

CHAPTER XXVII. AND A DREAM COMES TRUE

For nearly an hour Boyd Emerson sat alone on the deck of *The Grande Dame*, a prey to conflicting emotions, the while he waited for Mildred to appear. There was no one to dispute his presence now, for the tourists who had followed Doctor Berry from the shore in hushed excitement avoided him, and the sailors made no effort to carry out their earlier instructions; hence he was allowed opportunity to adjust himself to the sudden change. It was not so much the unexpected downfall of Willis Marsh, and the new light thus thrown upon his own enterprise that upset him, as a puzzling alteration in his own purposes and inclinations. He had come out to the yacht defiantly, to make good his threat, and to force an understanding with Mildred Wayland, but now that he was here and his way made easy he began to question his own desires. Now that he thought about it, that note, instead of filling him with dismay, had rather left him relieved. It was as if he had been freed of a burden, and this caused him a vague uneasiness. Was it because he was tired by the struggle for this girl, for whom he had labored so faithfully? After three years of unflagging devotion, was he truly relieved to have her dismiss him? Or was it that here, in this primal country, stripped of all conventions, he saw her and himself in a new light? He did not know.

The late twilight was fading when Mildred came from her state−room. She found Boyd pacing the deck, a cigar between his teeth.

“Where are those people?” she inquired.

“They went ashore. Marsh doesn't care to press a charge against the Indian.”

“I hear he is not badly hurt, after all.”

“That is true. But it was a close shave.”

Mildred shuddered. “It was horrible!”

“I never dreamed that Constantine would do such a thing, but he is more Russian than Aleut, and both he and his sister are completely under the spell of the priest. They are intensely religious, and their idea of damnation is very vivid.”

“Have you seen father?”

“We had a short talk.”

“Did you make up?”

“No! But I think he is beginning to understand things better—at least, as far as Marsh is concerned. The rest is only a matter of time.”

“What a frightful situation! Why did you ever let father announce my engagement to that man?”

Emerson gazed at her in astonishment. “I? Pardon me—how could I help it?”

“You might have avoided quarrelling with him. I think you are very inconsiderate of me.”

Boyd regarded the coal of his cigar with a slight gleam of amusement in his eyes as she ran on:

“Even that woman took occasion to humiliate me in the worst possible way.”

“It strikes me that she did you a very great service. I have no doubt it was quite as distasteful to her as to you.”

“Absurd! It was her chance for revenge, and she rejoiced in making me ridiculous.”

“Then it is the first ignoble thing I ever knew her to do,” said Boyd, slowly. “She has helped me in a hundred ways. Without her assistance, I could never have won through. That cannery site would still be grown up to moss and trees, and I would still be a disheartened dreamer.”

“It's very nice of you, of course, to appreciate what she has done. But she can't help you any more. You surely don't intend to keep up your acquaintance with her now.” He made no reply, and, taking his silence for agreement, she went on: “The trip home will be terribly dull for me, I'm afraid. I think—yes, I shall have father ask you to go back with us.”

“But I am right in the midst of the run. I can't leave the business.”

“Oh, business! Do you care more for business than for me? I don't think you realize how terribly hard for me all this has been—I'm still frightened. I shall die of nervousness without some one to talk to.”

“It's quite impossible! I—don't want to go back now.”

“Indeed? And no doubt it was impossible for you to come out here last night for the same reason.”

"It was. The fish struck in, and I could not leave."

"It was that woman who kept you!" cried Mildred. "It is because of her that you refuse to leave this country!"

"Please don't," he said, quietly. "I have never thought of her in that way—"

"Then come away from this wretched place. I detest the whole country—the fisheries, the people, everything. This isn't your proper sphere. Why come away, now, at once, and begin something new, something worth while?"

"Do you realize the hopes, the heartaches, the vital effort I have put into this enterprise?" he questioned.

But she only said:

"I don't like it. It isn't a nice business. Let father take the plant over. If you need money, I have plenty—"

"Wait!" he interrupted, sharply. "Sit down, I want to talk to you." He drew the wrap closer about her shoulders and led her to a deck−chair. The change in him was becoming more apparent. He knew now that he had never felt the same since his first meeting with Mildred upon the arrival of *The Grande Dame*. Even then she had repelled him by her lack of sympathy. She had shown no understanding of his efforts, and now she revealed as complete a failure to grasp his code of honor. It never occurred to her that any loyalty of man to man could offset her simple will. She did not see that his desertion of George would be nothing short of treachery.

It seemed to him all at once that they had little in common. She was wrapped completely in the web of her own desires; she would make her prejudices a law for him. Above all, she could not respond to the exultation of his success. She had no conception of the pride of accomplishment that is the wine of every true man's life. He had waged a bitter fight that had sapped his very soul, he had made and won the struggle that a man makes once in a lifetime, and now, just when he had proved himself strong and fair in the sight of his fellows, she asked him to forego it all. Engrossed in her own egoism, she required of him a greater sacrifice than any he had made. Now that he had shown his strength, she wanted to load him down with golden fetters—to make him a dependent. Was it because she feared another girl? She had tried to help him, he knew—in her way—and the thought of it touched him. That was like the Mildred he had always known—to act fearlessly, heedless of what her father might do or say. Somehow he had never felt more convinced of the sincerity of her love, but he found himself thinking of it as of something of the past. After all, what she had done had been little, considering her power. She had given carelessly, out of her abundance, while Cherry—He saw it all now, and a sudden sense of loyalty and devotion to the girl who had really shared his struggles swept over him in a warm tide. It was most unlike his distant worship of Mildred. She had been his dream, but the other was bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh.

For a long time the two sat talking while these thoughts took gradual form in the young man's mind, and although the deck was deserted, Miss Wayland had no need now to curb her once headstrong wooer.

He could not put into words the change that was working in him; but she saw it, and, grasping its meaning at last, she began to battle like a mother for her child. His awakening had been slow, and hers was even slower; but once she found her power over him waning, her sense of loss grew and grew as he failed to answer to her half−spoken appeal.

Womanlike, she capitulated at last. What matter if he stayed here where his hopes were centred? This life in the North had claimed him, and she would wait until he came for her. But still he did not respond, and it was not long until she had persuaded herself that his battle with the wilderness had put red blood into his veins, and his conduct had been no worse than that of other men. Finally she tried to voice these thoughts, but she only led him to a stiff denial of the charges she wished to forgive. As she saw him slipping further away from her, she summoned all her arts to rekindle the flame which had burned so steadily; and when these failed, she surrendered every prejudice. It was his love she wanted. All else was secondary. At last she knew herself. She could have cried at the sudden realization that he had not kissed her since their parting in Chicago; and when she saw he had no will to do so, the memory of his last embrace arose to torture her. She was almost glad when a launch bringing her father came from the shore, and the old man joined them.

The two men bore themselves with unbending formality, unable as yet to forget their mutual wrongs. The interruption gave Boyd the opportunity he had not been brave enough to make, and he bade them both good−bye, for the tide was at its flood, and the hour of their departure was at hand.

There was a meaningless exchange of words, and a handshake in the glare from the cabin lights that showed Mildred's pallid lips and frightened eyes. Then Emerson went over the side, and the darkness swallowed him up.

The girl clutched at her father's arm, standing as if frozen while the creak of rowlocks grew fainter and fainter and died away. Then she turned.

"You see—he came!" she said.

The old man saw the agony that blanched her cheeks, and answered, gently:

"Yes, daughter!" He struggled with himself, "And if you wish it, he may come again."

"But he won't come again. That is what makes it so hard; he will never come back."

She turned away, but not quickly enough to keep him from seeing that her eyes were wet. Wayne Wayland beheld what he would have given half his mighty fortune to prevent. He cried out angrily, but she anticipated his thought.

"No, no, you must never injure him again, for he was right and we were wrong. You see I—couldn't understand."

He left her staring into the night, and walked heavily below.

Emerson felt a great sense of relief and deliverance as he leaned against his oars. His heart sang to the murmur of the waters overside; for the first time in many months he felt young and free. How blind he had been and how narrow had been his escape from a life that could lead to but one result! The girl was sweet and good and wonderful in many ways, but—three years had altered him more than he had realized. He had begun to understand himself that very afternoon, when Cherry had told him her own unhappy secret. The shock of her disclosure had roused him from his dream, and once he began to see himself as he really was the rest had come quickly. He had been doubtful even when he went out to the yacht, but what happened there had destroyed the last trace of uncertainty. He knew that for him there was but one woman in all the world. It was no easy battle he had fought with himself. He had been reared to respect the conventions, and he knew that Cherry's life had not been all he could wish. But he fronted the issue squarely, and tried to throttle his inbred prejudice. Although he had felt the truth of Fraser's arguments and of Cherry's own words, he had still refused to yield until his love for the girl swept over him in all its power; then he made his choice.

The one thing he found most difficult to accept was her conduct with Hilliard. Those other charges against the girl were vague and shadowy, but this was concrete, and he was familiar with every miserable detail of it. It took all his courage to face it, but he swore savagely that if the conditions had been reversed, Cherry would not have faltered for an instant. Moreover, what she had done had been done for love of him; it was worse than vile to hesitate. Her past was her own, and all he could rightfully claim was her future. He shut his teeth and laid his course resolutely for her landing, striving to leave behind this one hideous memory, centring his mind upon the girl herself and shutting out her past. It was the bitterest fight he had ever waged; but when he reached the shore and tied his skiff, he was exalted by the knowledge that he had triumphed, that this painful episode was locked away with all the others.

Now that he had conquered, he was filled with a consuming eagerness. As he stole up through the shadows he heard her playing, and when he drew nearer he recognized the notes of that song that had banished his own black desolation on the night of their first meeting. He paused outside the open window and saw by the shaded lamplight that she was playing from memory, her fingers wandering over the keyboard without conscious effort. Then she took up the words, with all the throbbing tenderness that lives in a deep, contralto voice:

"Last night I was dreaming of thee, love—was dreaming;
I dreamed thou didst promise—"

Cherry paused as if entranced, for she thought she heard another voice join with hers; then she bowed her head and sobbed in utter wretchedness, knowing it for nothing more than her own fancy. Too many times, as in other twilights past, she had heard that mellow voice blend with hers, only to find that her ears had played her false and she was alone with a memory that would never die.

Of all the days of her life this was the saddest, this hour the loneliest, and the tears she had withheld so bravely as long as there was work to do came now in unbidden profusion.

To face those people on the yacht had been an act of pure devotion to Boyd, for her every instinct had rebelled against it; yet she had known that some desperate stroke in his defence must be delivered instantly. Otherwise the ruin of all his hopes would follow. She had hit upon the device of using Constantine and Chakawana largely by chance, for not until the previous day had she learned the truth. She had not dared to hope for such unqualified success, nor had she foreseen the tragic outcome. She had simply carried her plan through to its natural conclusion. Now that her work was done, she gave way completely and wept like a little girl. He was out there now with his love. They would never waste a thought upon that other girl who had made their happiness possible.

The thought was almost more than she could bear. Never again could she have Boyd to herself, never enjoy his careless friendship as of old; even that was over, now that he knew the truth.

The first and only kiss he had ever given her burned fresh upon her lips. She recalled that evening they had spent alone in this very room, when he had seemed to waver and her hopes had risen at the dawning of a new light in his eyes. At the memory she cried aloud, as if her heart would break:

"Boyd! Boyd!"

He entered noiselessly and took her in his arms.

"Yes, dear!" he murmured. But she rose with a startled exclamation, and wrenched herself from his embrace. The piano gave forth a discordant crash. Shrinking back as from an apparition, she stared into his flushed and smiling face; then breathed:

"You! Why are you—here!"

"Because I love you!"

She closed her eyes and swayed as if under the spell of wonderful music; he saw the throbbing pulse at her throat. Then she flung out her hands, crying, piteously:

"Go away, please, before I find it is only another dream."

She raised her lids to find him still standing there then felt him with fluttering fingers.

"Our dreams have come true," he said, gently, and strove to imprison her hand.

"No, no!" Her voice broke wildly. "You don't mean it. You—you haven't come to stay."

"I have come to stay if you will let me, dear."

She broke from his grasp end moved quickly away.

"Why are you here? I left you out there with—her. I made your way clear. Why have you come back? What more can I do? Dear God! What more can I do?" She was panting as if desperately frightened.

"There is but one thing more you can do to make me happy. You can be my wife."

"But I don't understand!" She shook her head hopelessly. "You are jesting with me. You love Miss Wayland."

"No. Miss Wayland leaves to−night, and I shall never see her again."

"Then you won't marry her?"

"No."

A dull color rose to Cherry Malotte's cheeks; she swallowed as if her throat were very dry, and said, slowly:

"Then she refused you in spite of everything, and you have come to me because of what I told you this afternoon. You are doing this out of pity —or is it because you are angry with her? No, no, Boyd! I won't have it. I don't want your pity—I don't want what she cast off."

"It has taken me a long time to find myself, Cherry, for I have been blinded by a vision," he answered. "I have been dreaming, and I never saw clearly till to−day. I came away of my own free will; and I came straight to you because it is you I love and shall always love."

The girl suddenly began to beat her hands together.

"You—forget what I—have been!" she cried, in a voice that tore her lover's heartstrings. "You can't want to—marry me?"

"To−night," he said, simply, and held out his arms to her. "I love you and I want you. That is all I know or care about."

He found her upon his breast, sobbing and shaking as if she had sought shelter there from some great peril. He buried his face in the soft masses of her hair, whispering fondly to her till her emotion spent itself. She turned her face shyly up at length and pressed her lips to his. Then, holding herself away from him, she said, with a half−doubtful yet radiant look:

"It is not too late yet. I will give you one final chance to save yourself."

He shook his head.

"Then I have done my duty!" She snuggled closer to him. "And you have no regrets?"

"Only one. I am sorry that I can't give you more than my name. I may have to go out into the world and begin all over if Mr. Wayland carries out his threat. I may be the poorest of the poor."

"That will be my opportunity to show how well I love you. You can be no poorer than I in this world's goods."

"You at least have your copper−mine."

"I have no mine," said the girl. "Not even the smallest interest in one."

“But—I don't understand.”

She dropped her eyes. “Mr. Hilliard is a hard man to deal with. I had to give him all my share in the claims.”

“I suppose you mean you sold out to him.”

“No! When I found you could not raise the money, I gave him my share in the mine. With that as a consideration, he made you the loan. You are not angry, are you?”

“Angry!” Emerson's tone conveyed a supreme gladness. “You don't know—how happy you have made me.”

“Hark!” She laid a finger upon his lips. Through the breathless night there came the faint rumble of a ship's chains.

“*The Grande Dame!*” he cried. “She sails at the flood tide.”

They stood together in the open doorway of the little house and watched the yacht's lights as they described a great curve through the darkness, then slowly faded into nothingness down the bay. Cherry drew herself closer to Boyd.

“What a wonderful Providence guides us, after all,” she said. “That girl had everything in the world, and I was poor—so poor—until this hour. God grant she may some day be as rich as I!”

Out on *The Grande Dame* the girl who had everything in the world maintained a lonely vigil at the rail, straining with tragic eyes until the sombre shadows that marked the shores of the land she feared had shrunk to a faint, low−lying streak on the horizon. Then she turned and went below, numbed by the knowledge that she was very poor and very wretched, and had never understood.

THE END