

THE GHOST OF  
HEMLOCK CANYON



HAROLD BINDLOSS

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# THE GHOST OF HEMLOCK CANYON

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BY HAROLD BINDLOSS

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AUTHOR OF

"The Bush Rancher," "Cross Trails," "Green Timber,"  
"Lister's Great Adventure," "The Man from the  
Wilds," "Pine Creek Ranch," "Ranching for  
Sylvia," "Wyndham's Pal," etc.



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# The Ghost of Hemlock Canyon

## I

### MRS. MARVIN LOOKS BACK

ALL was quiet at the Marvin ranch-house by the British Columbian lake, and across the shining water a tranquil sunset glimmered on the snow. The head of the lake was narrow, and for a space along the other shore, the dark pines' reflections trembled on the glassy surface. The lake, however, was not at rest. Slow ripples splashed the gravel, and where a rock rose from the depths wrinkling lines curved about the stone. One sensed dynamic force, and behind the woods a river throbbed with a measured beat.

For two thousand feet from the water's edge, the stiff pines went up. At the bottom, the dusky-green pyramids were large and distinct; farther back, they dwindled to dim, blue spires and melted in the rocks. Then white streaks crept up the gullies, and united in a broken-topped, majestic belt of snow. The belt was not all white. Warm, yellow beams touched the splintered peaks, and the hollows were ethereal blue. In the background, the sky was saffron, and a pale star began to shine.

The house was large, although Marvin had hauled the shiplap boards for forty miles over a mountain trail. The posts and beams were hewn from long, straight trunks, and one smelt the roofing shingles, hand-split from scented cedar bolts. On one side, a large, oblong clearing followed the beach; but when one looked the other way, the forest stopped, a hundred yards off, at the edge of the slashing, where massive logs were piled to burn.

For a British Columbian homestead, the living-room was spacious and, although the walls were plain matchboard, not remarkably austere. When the cold snaps were keen Mrs. Marvin liked the basement stove, but a big open fireplace occupied the end of the room, and she had fixed a large glass above the mantle. At the top of the glass was a noble wapiti head.

Mrs. Marvin was short and plump, and as a rule serene, although she had at one time used stern economy and borne some stress of mind. The strain



had not yet altogether vanished, but Hannah Marvin's pluck was good, and if she sometimes brooded nobody knew. Now she occupied an American rocking-chair, and, sewing mechanically, gave her husband an interested glance.

Marvin was at his roll-top desk by the window. His figure was thin but muscular and his hands were firm and large. In his youth he had swung the ax and pulled the cross-cut saw, although he was for long a business man and traded, with advantage to himself, in real estate. All the same, city-lot speculators did not doubt his honesty; when you dealt with Marvin, you got the ground for which you paid. Moreover, as a rule, civic development followed the lines he indicated, and that was something, since trustful investors not infrequently get stung. Yet, although Marvin's customers were numerous, his friends were not. He was not the sort to give another his confidence, and he asked no man's advice.

Now his hair was going white and his face was lined. His mouth was firm and his nose was large; his glance was keen and sometimes rather truculent. One pictured him swiftly resolute, hard, and impatient when others were cautiously slow. John Marvin sprang from pioneering stock. Fired by raw ambition to get rich quick, he left the primitive family homestead, and started for the settlements. Since his qualities were sternly utilitarian, he made good at business; and then, when he had conquered, resumed his proper job.

Marvin used courage and judgment, and bought where back-block land was cheap, although it implied his hiring expensive labor to chop the great trees. For a time, to haul in supplies was almost impossible, and only his cattle could reach a market on their feet; then a road crept up the valley, and speculators talked about mines and mills. When Marvin looked from the window all he saw by the darkening lake was his, and, but for the rows of stumps, much of the ground was cleared.

He, however, was thinking about the letters on his desk, and his emotions were mixed. One letter gave him a happy thrill he had not known for long; another was disturbing, although he tried to persuade himself his disturbance was ridiculous. By and by he put down the *Victoria Colonist*, in which he had studied the C.P.R. steamship and train time-table.

"Kate ought to be at Montreal to-morrow," he said. "She'll wire, but the message will lie at the office. I guess I'll harness up the rig and start for the settlement Thursday morning."

“Thursday’s soon enough,” Mrs. Marvin remarked in a tranquil, happy voice. “I must get the rooms fixed for her and her friend—it was lucky I bought the rugs and curtains at the Vancouver drygoods sale. Kate says I’m going to love Rhoda, and she hopes she’ll stay for good. Well, we have sure been lonely; but I don’t know— You’re not going to worry about it, Jake?”

“I’m a lonely man, Hannah, but since we shipped Kate off to Europe I’ve been sorry for you. Anyhow, Miss Staines is not going to bother me. If the girl is Kate’s friend, she’s certainly all right. I’ll be glad to have bright young folks about the house.”

Mrs. Marvin agreed. When the axes stopped in the evening and all one heard was the river, the homestead was bleakly quiet, and she and Jake got old. To let her daughter go had cost her much, but Kate had inherited her father’s talents and must enjoy a cultivation her mother had not known. Mrs. Marvin was ambitious for the girl, and when the Vancouver bank agent boasted about his daughter’s progress at a famous Old Country school, she had allowed Jake to fix things and tried to be resigned. Well, Kate knew England and France, but she declared the Western woods were home, and now she was coming back Mrs. Marvin rejoiced.

The other letter struck a different note. Mrs. Marvin knew it bothered Jake and he waited for her remarks. She, however, must use some tact, for under his surface hardness Jake was sensitive. The writer was the nephew of his partner, long since dead, and until the mail arrived they had not known Denis Aylward existed.

“The young fellow is going to look you up. Will he stay at the ranch?” she said.

“He will not,” Marvin replied in a harsh voice. “I could not stand for it, but maybe I can fix him up a job.”

“He wants a job? Looks as if he wasn’t rich. We thought the Aylward folks had money.”

“The boy was in France and says he cannot *stick* a lawyer’s office. He’s got about five hundred dollars and reckons he’d like to locate somewhere he could grow fruit, but he’s willing to take a post and learn his business.” Marvin laughed, a dry, impatient laugh. “Five hundred dollars! To locate him on an irrigation lot in the orchard belt! Well, his uncle talked like that. Old Country folks imagine they needn’t sweat. They’re sort of entitled to go where they want.”

“I’ve known some get there; your partner did,” Mrs. Marvin remarked.

“Tom had qualities. The boys liked him,” Marvin agreed and frowned. “He put up the money, but I planned and worked for both. When the washout carried him down the rapid, we were making good, and I got a smart accountant to value up Tom’s interest for his relations in the Old Country. Their lawyers were satisfied and I thought it done with; but sometimes I’ve felt Tom Aylward hadn’t done with me, and I’d better have gone down in the flood. Now his nephew is coming to the ranch!”

“Oh, Jake, there’s no use in worrying,” said Mrs. Marvin, but her voice was sympathetic, and she hesitated before she resumed: “Anyhow, since the young fellow is coming out to us, Tom’s Old Country relations knew you were not to blame.”

Marvin said nothing. He looked straight in front, and Mrs. Marvin knew his queer brooding glance. She had wanted to think about her daughter, but she could not. Like her husband, she sometimes felt Tom Aylward haunted them.

Yet when she pictured the generous, careless Englishman, she admitted the feeling was ridiculous. There was not a mean streak in Aylward, and when he and Jake put up their sign at the springing mining town the realtor business grew. Aylward talked and joked; the money was his and he was the customers’ favorite, but the labor and plans were Jake’s. When they had closed a big deal they went off to the mountains for a hunting, prospecting trip. In those strenuous times, a business man apologized for a holiday, and one might yet find a mineral vein or a placer of alluvial gold. Marvin, in fact, found twelve ounces, but he came back alone.

Then the trouble began. The magistrate was a rude storekeeper and magnified the importance his office gave him; Marvin’s chief competitor, Snedden, was spiteful and unscrupulous. Although Marvin’s tale was frank and circumstantial, doubts and ominous whispers spread: the town was a sober town, in which theatrical frontiersmen could not live. For the most part, the miners were Methodists from Cornwall and Wales; they had put out the red lights and sternly banished the tin horns and clairvoyants. Mrs. Marvin had thought their wives her friends, but when her husband’s business melted she hated the gang.

Marvin’s pluck was stubborn and for a time he kept up his sign. In fact, Mrs. Marvin’s persuasion at length accounted for his pulling out for Vancouver. At the coast city, his luck, in some respects, was good, since his arrival synchronized with an expansion of trade and industry. His customers were strangers, keen to buy building lots, milling timber, and mineral

claims, and Marvin knew his job. He began to get rich, but the tragic tale about his lost partner followed him to the coast, and although his business talent was acknowledged, he was not asked to join the older citizens' clubs. Until his bank-roll was large he grimly carried on; and then, for he was by inheritance a pioneer, bought the ranch in the woods.

Sometimes Mrs. Marvin thought Jake's obstinate pride accounted for much. He was not a good mixer and had no use for fools. In fact, all he did was marked by stern efficiency, and he would sooner fight than conciliate his antagonist. Perhaps there was the trouble, for Marvin's habit was to win. When he thought himself injured, he was ruthless, and men he broke frankly hated him.

Anyhow, Mrs. Marvin was glad she had let Kate go to England before the girl understood why her father was left alone, and on the whole she thought Jake was happier in the woods. Hannah herself was satisfied. She was very stanch and, like her husband, she sprang from frontier stock. The big ranch prospered, and when one was strenuously occupied one forgot—Then Kate was coming home to banish the loneliness.

For all that, the Aylward boy's letter was disturbing, and for Jake's sake she would sooner Denis had stopped in the Old Country. Somehow it did look as if Tom Aylward had not yet done with them.

Mrs. Marvin resolved she would not allow it to bother her. Her bent was practical, and since the hired men were going down the lake for some sheep at daybreak, she must put up their food. She glanced at Marvin, sitting by the window; and then, lest her sympathy might jar, stole away.

## II

# IN THE LOOKING-GLASS

MARVIN, by the ranch-house window, forgot his daughter would soon be home. Denis Aylward's letter was crumpled in his muscular fist, and he heard the river in the dusk. Somehow its broken throb was like the beat of hurrying feet, and Marvin set his mouth. He was not at all romantic and his imagination was in firm control, but the footsteps he had heard long since by a flooded river haunted him. Now the sunset melted from the snow and the light in the big room was fading, they seemed to get distinct—

A branch cracked in the slashing; leaves gently shook, as if somebody crept along the uneven trail. Marvin knew the branch had borne the fierce sun's heat and a light wind blew down the valley and moved the broad maple-leaves. A few maples grew near the water-front, and maples love good soil. That was all, but Marvin turned from the window and frowned.

Although the light was nearly gone, the mirror by the fireplace shone with reflections from the sky. Mrs. Marvin's taste was not cultivated and the glass had attracted her at a Vancouver furnishing-sale. The frame was rudely carved, but it enclosed a noble picture.

Crossed by the window-bars' thin shadows, pines and rocks rolled up the slopes. Where they stopped, glimmering snow began, and in the far background, touched the sky. By contrast with the dusky room, the bright belt at the picture's top was conspicuous, and Marvin's glance got fixed. Perhaps Denis Aylward's letter had something to do with it and perhaps Marvin's concentration helped; but the dark pines slowly melted and reappeared, as if a fresh landscape occupied the frame. Marvin angrily jerked his head, for he knew the spot, but he did not turn his glance. His habit was to front things, and although he set his mouth he studied the growing picture.

A camp-fire burned by a big hemlock's roots, and, a hundred feet below, an angry green river brawled in a canyon. The green was the stain of the

glaciers' clay; Marvin knew the snow on the peaks melted in the hot sun. The bent figure by the parallel hearth logs was his; the other was Aylward's. Tom smoked his pipe and bantered Marvin about his industry. Marvin rejoined that one must cook supper, although Tom would sooner loaf. He recaptured the words he used, almost as if he heard his scornful voice, and he frowned impatiently.

In Western cities, clairvoyants, diviners, and fakirs of sorts, yet use their arts for gain. Marvin knew nothing about hypnotism, crystal-gazing, and telepathy. The fakirs' business was to plunder trustful fools, but he hated their experiments, particularly when men he knew declared some were not altogether bunk. Marvin had inherited a superstitious vein from his pioneering ancestors. His stock was Puritan; the type that burned the Salem witches.

Turning from the mirror, he lighted his pipe. The stinking sulphur match's flame dimmed the reflection in the glass; but when his pipe was going and he looked back, the picture of the camp in the rocks had not disappeared. In fact, Aylward's careless pose and smile were plainer than before. Marvin clenched his fist, and, as if driven by a force his brain rebelled against, reviewed the last holiday he and the other took.

The excursion did not begin fortunately. Marvin for some time had borne a heavy strain and was yet highly strung. He felt he had not got much help from Tom. Aylward talked persuasively and his cheerful confidence encouraged customers; but when they were satisfied he allowed his partner to work out the plans and remove the obstacles. As a rule Marvin did not grumble. Aylward was a white man and the money was his.

They had risked much in a mining speculation; Marvin had thought all they had might go, but he held on and the company was floated. Then when they started on their holiday Aylward packed .38 cartridges for their .44 rifle, and forgot the compass. In a way, it was not important, but Marvin had carried a heavy load and his nerves were raw. He reflected, with a sense of grievance, that Tom was like that.

Although they were friends and partners, their temperaments jarred. Marvin was sternly frugal, willing to use the utmost effort of brain and body, and logical as far as he knew. His philosophy was utilitarian; he hated fools and slobs. Sometimes he hated Aylward's polite carelessness. Tom refused to bother; when Marvin swore he smiled.

They had supposititiously gone prospecting and they found a pocket of alluvial gold. Aylward talked at large about floating a hydraulic company;

Marvin labored for some days in melted snow, and then remarked that the pocket was cleaned up and they might not find another for twelve months. When they camped by the river, the gold, and most of their food, was on board the canoe. Aylward's job was to pull her up and carry the stuff to camp, but he declared he would first get supper—

Marvin's pipe had gone out. The tobacco did not taste good, and although he rebelled, the mirror drew his brooding glance. He thought he saw blue smoke curl about the big trunks and the stiff pines roll down the gulch. They had portaged the canoe round a rapid and left her on the gravel by a pool. To reach the spot was awkward; one must scramble down a precipitous ravine, and then plow across the stones and driftwood between the rocks and the water.

They began their supper, but Marvin was not at ease. He thought the rapid's turmoil ominously loud, and the rumbling note got sharper. All day the sun was scorching, and he knew the snow on the high peaks melted.

"The river might come down, Tom," he said. "I'm through, and if you have had enough, I'll help you pack our truck to camp. Then we ought to haul the canoe farther up the bank."

"You're not a restful camp-mate," Aylward rejoined with a laugh. "Anyhow, you pitched the tent, cut the beds, and cooked supper; but I undertook to be accountable for the canoe and outfit. Division of labor's useful, although I admit your habit is to carry out two-thirds of the job; mine is not to worry but let you go ahead. The important thing is, you're a bully cook and your flapjacks are remarkably good. You might give me another and shove across the drips."

Perhaps it was strange, but Marvin thought he accurately recaptured Aylward's words. At all events, his reply was much like that, and it annoyed him. Sometimes Tom loafed for half an hour over a meal; Marvin thought ten minutes was long enough. The thing, of course, was a small thing, but for most of the day he had waded in glacier-water and tracked the canoe upstream.

"You are not taking supper while the band plays at a London restaurant," he remarked. "We are in the woods, and our blankets and breakfast are down the gulch. If you go for them now, I'll pack half the load, although I have done my share. If you wait until you're forced you can carry up the lot."

"Well, that's all right," said Aylward tranquilly. "I'll promise not to bother you, but I hate to hurry after supper, and I'm not going yet."

In the quiet room at the ranch-house, Marvin reflected that Tom was obstinate. For all his easy cheerfulness, you could not hustle him. Then sometimes his humorous English politeness jarred. In Canada one did not use Old Country rules, but Marvin admitted a sort of jealousy. He supplied the labor and driving-force; Aylward, so to speak, spread himself and talked. Yet the boys liked Tom, and as far as possible left Marvin alone. Well, he was not a good mixer, and anyhow, for two or three months, he had borne a cruel strain.

He thought the rapid got angrier, but for a time Aylward calmly smoked his pipe. Then a floating tree crashed against a rock and a fresh turmoil throbbled across the woods. A rotten glacier's foot perhaps had caved; perhaps the hot sun had suddenly released a flood. Anyhow, the river was coming down, and Marvin jumped to his feet.

"Now you have got to go," he said.

"It looks like that," Aylward agreed. "All the same, I mustn't bother you. I undertook the job."

"Oh, shucks!" shouted Marvin. "Don't talk. Come on!"

The need for speed was obvious. A week's supply of food, their blankets, rifle, and a small bag of gold were on board the canoe. As a rule, when the snow-fields melt, the river's rise is swift, and sometimes the flood rolls down a canyon in a high, curling wave.

Plunging across sharp stones, and sliding where the pitch was steep, they reached the bottom of the ravine. The water lapped the driftwood stranded by other floods, the canoe was a hundred yards off, and Marvin doubted if they could get there. He, however, meant to try, and Aylward did not hesitate.

When they stopped by the canoe, the water was round their boots and the noise up the canyon was like the roar of a big freight-train. Aylward seized the bow, but Marvin pushed him back.

"We can't save her. Get hold of the camp-truck!"

He gathered up their blankets, the rifle, and the gold. He could carry more, but when he reached for something else Aylward stopped him.

"Shove off with your load. Since I ought to have gone before, I'll bring the heavy stuff."

Marvin refused to go and waited sullenly. Tom's firmness annoyed him, but after all he had declared he would not help. Aylward seized the cotton



bag in which they carried their flour and pork and groceries. The bag, slung by Marvin's old braces, went on one's back, but after Aylward pushed his arms through the straps he stopped to pick up some other articles, and when they started the flood was near their knees.

For all that, Marvin, who was in front, did not go as fast as he might. Tom had meant to be nasty; he ought to have given him half the load. Moreover, had he not refused to go at the proper time, they might have saved the canoe. The big bag was heavy, and so long as his partner could not make much speed, Marvin was not going to run, but he was willing for him to sweat. He hated to be baffled by an obstinate loafer, and his jealousy and their small disputes, so to speak, had culminated in a savage moodiness.

Although Marvin did not hurry, he began to be afraid. The water was rising fast, and until they reached the spot where they had scrambled down, they could not climb the rocks. For a time he heard Aylward gasp and splash; and then the current got shallower, and they reached a narrow belt of gravel and driftwood. Aylward was three or four yards behind; his thick hiking boots rattled on the stones and sometimes rotten branches smashed. Then the road in the canyon drowned the noise he made.

Twenty yards off, a broken slab went up to a ledge from which the climb to the top was not hard. Marvin wanted to stop and hustle Aylward along, but there was not time to take part of his load. They must make the spot before the flood covered the gravel. Marvin was at the bottom a few moments in front; his impulse was to wait and shove the other up the awkward slab, but if he boosted Tom, he must throw down the rifle, and the Winchester was nearly new. Besides, the obstinate fool's loafing had entangled them, and he would perhaps refuse to be helped. At the top of the slab Marvin could throw the stuff he carried on the ledge and pull him up.

Balancing his load awkwardly, he pushed his boot into a crack and began to climb. He knew he ought to wait, but he did not hurry altogether because he was afraid; he was rather moved by sullen stubbornness than fear. In fact, had Tom not been nasty, he would have stopped.

He climbed for two or three yards; and then a roar deafened him and a white wave rolled furiously down the channel. A broken pine rode on its crest; battered trunks and white, peeled branches tossed in the flood. Marvin's boots were in the water and he let the blankets go; but, mechanically gripping the rifle, he crawled on to the ledge. Although the effort cost him much, he turned and looked back. The muddy green torrent swirled across the slab, but Tom was gone.

Five minutes afterwards, Marvin, breathless and trembling, reached the camp. Breakers crashed in the rapid, broken trees struck the rocks, and thirty pounds of camp supplies were strapped to Aylward's back. Marvin's skin was wet by sweat and his big hands shook. Had he firmly seized his proper load, had he but stopped for a moment at the bottom of the slab, Tom might have made the camp. Moreover, Marvin knew he had not got rattled; he had consciously indulged his moodiness. All he had thought was, Tom had refused to go when he might and must take his punishment.

In the morning the river fell and for two horrible days Marvin searched the rocks and pools. He knew there was no use in searching, but until he had done so he dared not start. Then at daybreak he threw the rifle on his shoulder and took the mountain trail. He hated his load; to some extent it accounted for the tragedy at the slab, but he had two or three cartridges of the proper size and he might find a deer. The nearest settlement was some distance off, and all his food was a hard bannock.

Marvin did not find a deer, but he shot a blue grouse, and wild berries are numerous in the British Columbian woods. Rocks split by frost blocked his path up the ravines, and on the lower benches the forest was thick. Devil's-club thorn tore his clothes, and he was forced to cross tangled, fallen trees, buried in giant fern.

He had no blanket and at night the dew was cold; mosquitoes banished sleep, but he could not light a smudge-fire, for his matches were gone. Moreover, if the mosquitoes did leave him alone, he heard Aylward's boots rattle on the stones. Sometimes when the sun was hot he went to sleep on his feet, and wakened with a jolt if he struck a tree. He was exhausted, and faint from want of food, but he went fast, for he thought Aylward gasped and stumbled in the gloom behind the trunks. The haunting footsteps began in the lonely woods, and Marvin, looking back on his career, felt as if Tom had followed him ever since.

When he reached the mining town his tale was received with bleak suspicion. His neighbors knew Aylward and he had recently disputed and the other had supplied the capital Marvin used. Then Marvin carried a rifle and had brought back gold. The quantity was not large, but he had not long since sold a claim to a mining company and had perhaps wanted all the profit of a fresh speculation.

Marvin faced his calumniators, and the storekeeper-magistrate admitted, rather unwillingly, that he was satisfied. Yet the doubts were not banished, and Marvin soon was conscious that only his wife believed his innocence.

He told her much about the tragedy, but she did not know he had refused to stop for Aylward at the bottom of the slab.

When he resolved to sell his business Hannah agreed, and in a sense he had made good at Vancouver. Anyhow, he had got rich, and when his ambition was satisfied had gone back to the woods; Marvin was by inheritance a bush pioneer. His ranch would soon be a model ranch, and until Denis's letter arrived, he had almost persuaded himself that Aylward's haunting him was an illusion. Yet, when he was tired and bothered and the river throbbed in the dark, he heard his partner's feet on the rocks.

Now Tom's nephew proposed to join him, and he must help the boy find an occupation. Denis Aylward must not stay at the ranch. Marvin frankly could not stand seeing him about—

A stick cracked in the clearing and cedar-branches shook. The river's turmoil was louder, and the glass on the mantel was cloudy and dim. Marvin threw back the window-frame, pulled down the shade, and got a light.

### III

## DENIS STARTS WEST

LOCOMOTIVE bells rang, wheels rolled, and soft-coal smoke floated about the high roof. In the morning the C.P.R. station at Montreal is a busy spot, and Denis Aylward, sitting on his Colonist mattress, studied the hurrying crowd. It looked as if the smart young men and women were importantly occupied; they went by as fast as they could go, and but one or two gave him and his belongings an interested glance.

Denis admitted with a touch of humor that in the busy station he was perhaps exotic, although a swarm of ruder foreign emigrants waited at the end of the platform. His clothes, used on an English farm, were not remarkably good, and he had given the railroad a dollar for his straw bed. Denis, studying the emigrants, hoped the bed had not been used before. A baggage-master at the dock had taken his trunk; his other luggage was on the mattress; a shabby British-warm greatcoat, a tin kettle and plate, and a basket of food. To some extent he obstructed the traffic, but he could not find a quiet spot, and he waited philosophically for the Vancouver express to start.

Since he landed, two or three hours ago, he had got breakfast on a high stool at a cheap restaurant where an electric organ blared. To walk up St. James's afterward to the big quiet cathedral was some relief; and then in the clear, fresh morning he climbed the Mountain. From the wooded slopes he saw the noble river, and the blue hills rolling back to Vermont. Denis wanted to stay, but at the station all he could find out was that his train would start when the emigrants were on board.

Going downhill by the Windsor, he regarded the ambitious block humorously. At one time, he had stopped at hotels like that; but it was in the good days before the war, and he had since occupied dugouts in France. He strolled back down St. James's, and bought and loaded a basket at a grocery-store by the Grand Trunk depot. Now he sat on his mattress against the station wall and, smoking a cigarette, reviewed the circumstances that accounted for his being there.

His father was long since dead; his mother died when he was in France, but Denis refused to dwell on that. Although Mrs. Aylward was rather an important lady at the small market town, she was not as rich as Denis had thought and money melted in the war. A council of relations, however, decided that Denis's sisters must remain at their expensive school and he resume his studies at the lawyer's office. When he was a registered solicitor, they would talk about things again. In the meantime, the chief trustee promised to see the young fellow through his articleed apprenticeship.

Denis was not altogether willing, but he went. In France he had known adventure, strain that stimulated as well as exhausted one, and before the end, responsibility. Young as he was, he had used command, and men had confidently followed where he led. When the war was over he had had enough, but he frankly could not stand the office. To draft a prolix conveyance bored him horribly, and he hated the disputes about small sums at the county court. He wanted to use his nerve and muscle, and when the days got long and spring winds blew, the wide world called.

At length he rebelled, and the trustee who administered Mrs. Aylward's supposititious estate was frank. Denis had got already all there was for him, and his relations imagined he did not want to squander his sisters' vanishing inheritance. For all that, if he were resolved to emigrate, his relations would, for six months, help him study practical agriculture at an English farm. Then, if a winter spent in byres and muddy fields had not discouraged him, he might start for Canada.

Denis agreed, and when the winter was gone the trustee wrote him a check. "If at the end of twelve months, you have as much money as you have now, I'll undertake to double the sum," he said. "If you have not, you must not expect a fresh subsidy."

Denis thanked him and said the offer was a sporting offer and he hoped to claim the check. Since he had refused a useful occupation, his relations were perhaps justified to think him something of a wastrel. The check was small; Denis imagined old Stormont meant to try him out, and since he had no illusions about the golden West, he resolved to use stern economy. It accounted for his buying a second-class steamship ticket and crossing Canada on board an emigrant car. Denis was young and sometimes romantic, but he was not at all a fool.

At length it looked as if his train would start. Bells clashed and big, flat-sided baggage-cars, dusty Colonists, dining-cars, and Pullmans rolled into the track; Denis had not imagined a locomotive could haul so large a load.

Kneeling on the grimy slabs, he began to roll up his mattress, and two young women passed. One gave him a swift but rather careless glance; the other turned her head and Denis thought her amused. They no doubt knew him for an impecunious tenderfoot, but not very long since fashionable young women had acclaimed him a conquering hero. People soon forgot!

Denis had cultivated philosophy in France, but for a moment or two his glance followed the girls. Their clothes were fashionable and he imagined them important at some Western town. She who had studied him walked with a queer rhythmic grace. Denis did not know if he exaggerated, but he thought her glance imperious. The girl, in fact, had followed the rocky trails of the Pacific Slope, and mountaineers and woodsmen know how to use their feet. They went to a first-class car and Denis folded his greatcoat. He had nothing to do with young women of their type and he must get on board.

Another two girls advanced along the platform. They were young and, in spite of their rather naïve shyness, attractive. Their eyes were liquidly bright, and the bloom the wet west wind gives was on their skin. Denis had got to know the Misses Cullen on board ship.

“We cannot find Danny,” said one in a disturbed voice, marked by a soft Irish intonation. “He went to the lawyer’s office and he’s not come back. The train is going to start. And what will we do?”

“Where is the office?” Denis inquired.

“Danny didn’t tell us. He was to be back in half an hour,” the other replied.

Denis jumped to his feet. He did not consciously stand like a soldier, but he was an athletic young fellow and his balance and pose were good. As a rule his look was careless, but now he knitted his brows. The Misses Cullen trusted him, he knew they had not much money, and he must think for them. Somehow one did trust Denis Aylward.

“You have got your tickets. I suppose your friends will meet you at the other end?”

They agreed and waited, with an implied respect for his judgment that Denis thought humorous.

“It’s awkward, but I think you ought to start,” he said. “You see, the next train goes to-morrow and Montreal hotels are expensive. Then your friends will be at the station and I believe Danny said their home was some distance off across the hills. But you must decide—”

An interpreter began to shout, gates were thrown back, and loaded foreign emigrants streamed across the platform. The girls glanced at the noisy, pushing crowd, hesitated, and then signing Denis, started for the train. He put them on board a second-class car and went back as fast as possible. Nobody had removed his luggage, but he admitted it was not remarkably tempting loot.

Pushing through the crowd about the steps, he put the stuff on board a Colonist car, and surveyed his quarters for the next five days. At one end, behind a partition, was a rusty stove, and a water-tank in the roof supplied a row of small basins. A passage went along the middle of the car, and between the seats on either side were sliding boards, on which one could dine and sleep. Above, hung by chains, polished shelves pulled down from the roof for upper berths. Since he had a British-warm and a dollar mattress, Denis thought he had not much grounds to grumble.

In another way, his luck was good; his traveling companions were British. The women were not numerous, and their clothes carried the stains of the crowded emigrant deck. After the stormy voyage they were pale and jaded. Denis thought the men small clerks, artisans, and so forth, who on their return from France had found their occupation gone. He saw some pinched faces and bent shoulders, but for the most part they were a sturdy lot. Men of their stamp had followed him nobly across the Salient's mud. Moreover, it looked as if they were resolved to hold the car. Those who knew the Eastern Front had not much use for their recent allies, and three or four muscular fellows kept the steps.

"All British here! Next truck for that lot," one shouted to a railroad official shepherding a foreign mob.

"I was at Salonika, and I've had some," he explained to Denis.

"Some?" said a companion. "At my shop on another front, we had a ruddy sight too much. The blighters, to show how they liked us, charged us double for all we got—" He turned and gave Denis a twinkling glance. "Looks as if you'd got into the wrong horse-truck, *sir!*"

Denis smiled. "I expect you spotted the old coat? Well, you see, the pips are gone, and I was not entitled to wear them very long. Anyhow, my ticket is Colonist."

He got a seat by a window and pulled out his pipe. On the platform the pushing crowd began to melt; steam throbbed, and raucous voices shouted, "All ab-o-a-rd."

The throbbing steam was quiet, a bell tolled, and the couplings jarred.

“Tails up, the old brigade!” said somebody. “We’re over the top.”

The clanging bell got louder, wheels began to roll, and the long cars lurched ahead. Hoarse shouts marked the Colonists’ advance, and when somebody pulled out a concertina, swelled into a song, and *Tipperary* rolled along the half-mile train. Laughing and singing, the boys took the Western road, as they took the roads in France; but Denis had not thought to see Montreal citizens on the platforms stand fast and lift their hats. All had not forgotten, and where the job was sternest, the Maple Leaves lay thick in Flanders mud.

Denis thrilled with queer emotion. For one thing, he thought the joker’s remark logical. On board the swift, clean steamship he, so to speak, was yet on British soil; England went where the red ensign flew. Now the flag carried the Canadian beaver, and he fronted an adventure in which headquarters would not think for him. He must trust his luck and his talents, and for all his youth, he admitted they were not remarkably numerous.

In fact, when he studied his companions he thought their chance to make good better than his. For example, one was a blacksmith, and another a carpenter. Men like that could take a job for which, in Canada, the pay was first-class. He knew some athletic games, some old Greek and Latin, and a little about English law; but there he stopped. All he really had was his nerve and muscle. When he turned down his occupation he, so to speak, stripped himself of the rather imaginary advantages one claimed for his sort.

Yet he must not be daunted. In France he had more than once started on a forlorn hope and somehow had triumphantly seen it out. The morning was fresh, the sun shone, and adventure called.



## IV

# TRAVELING COMPANIONS

THE train stopped for some time at Ottawa, and when the cars rolled into the station Denis was among the first who jumped from the crowded vestibules. Although the afternoon was sunny, he had pulled on his big coat. He hoped he was not unjust to his fellow-passengers, but in France a soldier's best title to his property was his watchfulness. A British-warm was a useful article, and Denis had no other coat.

He went to the telegraph-office, and after a few minutes a clerk, who had not answered his polite inquiries, threw him an envelope, as one throws a bone to an importunate dog. Denis was young, and for a time had used command, but he smiled philosophically. In Canada, a telegraph-operator was, no doubt, important, but he himself was not.

"You got something on me?" the clerk inquired.

"I don't know," said Denis in a meditative voice. "Much depends on one's point of view, and you might not see the joke."

"You're blocking the passage," the clerk remarked. "If you're through with your business, suppose you pull out."

Denis went. His impulse was to climb across the counter, but to let himself go might be expensive and he imagined the Misses Cullen waited. They were on the platform, jostled about by the swarming emigrants, and looking anxious and forlorn. When one saw Denis she ran forward and touched his arm. He thought her disturbance vanished, and the light touch moved him.

"Will there be time to go to the post-office?" she asked. "Nobody will stop to tell us where it is."

"As a rule, in Canada, the telegraph-office is at the station. Anyhow, I have got a message for Miss Monica Cullen."

Monica tore open the envelope and smiled happily.

“Dan will follow in the morning; we are not to wait. What would we have done, Mr. Aylward, if you’d not been about?”

“You’d have stayed on board, as Danny orders,” Denis replied. “Well, we have half an hour. Let’s go and see the town.”

The girls he had remarked at Montreal went by, and one turned her head. Her glance was coolly critical, as if she were interested. Denis’s coat was shabby, but he carried the stamp of a British officer; the Misses Cullen were audibly Irish, and for all their youthful charm, fresh from the bogs. Anyhow, they were his friends, and with one on either side, he started for the town.

About ten o’clock in the evening, he walked along the train and stopped for a few minutes on a platform. Dark forest rolled by, and the beams from the windows touched tangled, slanted trunks. Water shone in a ravine, and he heard a river brawl. Rocks leaped from the gloom and melted, and the train roared on a bridge.

Denis pushed back the door and went through the vestibule to a second-class car. Since Danny was left at Montreal, he ought perhaps to see if the girls were all right. When he stopped in the doorway, it looked as if they were not.

But for a bench or two at the other end, the car was no longer open. At each side of the middle passage curtains gently swung. In some places, the light from the swaying lamps pierced the thin material and one vaguely saw uncouth recumbent figures. A cold draught blew along the passage, cinders beat upon the roof, and dust eddied about the floor. The passengers had gone to bed; one or two in upper berths struggled to pull off their clothes, but the Misses Cullen yet occupied the uncurtained bench. Monica’s arm was round the other and Denis thought Bride wept. Well, he imagined he knew the trouble, but he went forward and inquired.

Monica blushed and explained in an embarrassed voice. The railroad’s Dublin agent stated that second-class passengers were entitled to use the sleeping-berths, but the porter declared they must buy a fresh ticket. Danny kept the joint purse, and Monica doubted if all the money she and Bride had would buy the food they needed for the next five days.

“Very well,” said Denis. “The thing can soon be fixed and you mustn’t bother. I’ll see Danny about it at the other end.”

Bride—he imagined her name was Bridget—dried her tears. She was young, and although she had not known much luxury, the loneliness daunted her. Monica shook her head.

“No,” she said firmly, “you are kind, but it cannot be done like that. When Danny’s train got there, you would be gone, and we do not borrow where we cannot pay.”

Denis liked her pride and he liked her rather formal talk. For all her musical accent, her English was colloquially good. He felt she, so to speak, translated; but he knew he could not persuade her.

“If you’re going to be obstinate, we must try another plan,” he said. “One is not forced to buy a ticket for a Colonist sleeping-berth, and I have a mattress and some other things I don’t particularly need. In two or three minutes I’ll bring the stuff along.”

He went off, and when he returned with his coat and bed, the load jammed in the door. A colored porter looked at him severely across the top.

“This car’s a second-class sleeper, suh. We got no use for emigrant truck.”

“Get out of the way,” said Denis. “I’ll see you in the smoking-compartment when I go back.”

The porter hesitated, but he blocked the passage. The Company’s rules were strict, and all one might get from an emigrant did not justify much risk.

“You do’n’ put your stuff on board my car. Shoo, boy, before I fire you!”

Since Denis did not move, he seized the bed, braced his legs against a seat, and pulled. Denis put his hand on the fellow’s chest, and pushed. The porter reeled back and sat down, noisily, on the boards. Opening curtains tossed, and somebody shouted:

“Them fellows get too fresh. Sick it to him good!”

A firm hand seized Denis’s arm, and, swinging round, he fronted the conductor.

“What the—?” inquired the railroad man, and then saw the battered mattress and the Misses Cullen on the uncurtained bench.

“Scat!” he ordered the porter, and signed Denis into the vestibule.

“The girls,” said Denis, “are going to the Coast and will be on board for four or five nights. They have no sleeper-tickets, and their brother was left behind at Montreal.”

“Sure I know. I’m sorry for the colleens.”

"There's not much use in being sorry," Denis remarked, and pulled out his wallet. "It looks as if they were your countrywomen, and perhaps something could be wangled. I believe you say *fixed*."

"Ye need not translate: I have heard the word. 'Tis a fine coat ye have got, although the stars is gone! Well, we old pals was up in Dublin when the law courts was burned: but I was in the mud at Paschendaele with Sam Hughes's gang."

"You're a queer lot," said Denis. "Perhaps you think we are— But I expect a conductor is sergeant-major on board his train. What about the girls?"

"Ah," said the other, "the grand old days is gone, and, for a conscientious man, the times is hard. Ye cannot travel on a box of cigars, and there's not much use in throwing the money ye collect at the roof. The company takes the lot."

"Then, at one time, that was not the rule?"

The conductor grinned. "Ye kept the dollars that did not stick. Now all the papers ye get are numbered and they check your counterfoils. Mike but twice miscalculated, and he was fired last trip. Anyhow, ye can put up your pocket-book. Your mattress is not the company's, and to lend a friend your coat is not agin the law."

He sternly ordered the porter to carry Denis's bed and get some curtains. In a few minutes the Misses Cullen's corner was a passable bedroom, and Denis went off. The conductor indicated his retreating form and smiled.

"A fine soldier boy, an' modest! Well, all I can do's to O.K. your corner right through to the Coast. Sleep well, Mavourneen, and waken fresh as the dew on the heather."

Denis climbed to his shelf under the roof. The polished boards were hard and the night was cold, but he had known colder beds and was soon asleep.

At daybreak the long train was deep in the Laurentian wilds. The clearings had vanished, and small, tangled pines, cracked by frost and torn by storms, rolled by the clanging cars. Sometimes one saw low rocky hills, and shining lakes pierced the woods. Rivers plunged down the ravines, and at intervals the cars stopped at a dreary settlement with a big water-tank. For the most part, however, the slim, gray trunks sped by in endless rows.

Farther west, the line curved about the rocks by Lake Superior. Now and then Denis remarked an ore dump and a steamboat wharf, but as a rule the

landscape was bleak and austere desolate. At Port Arthur the swift panorama struck a different note. Rows of new frame houses bordered the water-front, as if to link up with Fort William ten miles off. Industrial smoke floated about the fresh clearings; giant grain-elevators towered above the wharfs. From the twin ports Canada's wheat goes down the lakes, and in fall the mile-long trains block the railroad-tracks.

The elevators vanished and the cars plunged again into the lonely woods. For three or four hundred miles the track pierced the wilderness; and then the dark pines stopped, and willow and poplar bluffs melted into open plain at Winnipeg.

Denis saw a muddy river, fresh ranks of elevators, flour-mills, and ambitious hotels, but although the train stopped for some hours, the prairie city did not interest him much. At length he had reached the wheat belt, where a man might live by his labor in the wind and sun. One, no doubt, must front drawbacks. For example, a friend of his went broke, and was frozen; but some made good. Denis had seen the Winnipeg flour-mills and the Port Arthur wharfs.

When the cars rolled west he studied the moving landscape. Spacious wooden homesteads and windmill-pumps went by; he saw wide belts of vivid green where the fresh wheat sprang. Then short grass, rippling in the wind, went back to the horizon, and only scattered poplar bluffs, like islands, broke the lonely plain.

Cultivation as yet was checkered. Sometimes, for an hour or two, the homesteads were numerous and the train sped by wire fences and black, gumbo roads. Then they plunged into dreary sandhills where battered jack-pines grew. The towns were small and not remarkable. Portage and Brandon were quiet and somehow English; Regina was obviously growing, and Denis saw the noble white parliament house by Wascana Lake. He remarked the stockyards at Medicine Hat; and then the train crossed the muddy Bow and climbed the Alberta tablelands to the shining Rockies.

They crossed the high pass in the dark, and when the sun was up stopped for some time on a lonely mountain-side. Denis understood that plunging rocks had broken a snow-shed, but speed was not important and he was satisfied to look about. Sitting down on the step of a first-class car, he lighted a cigarette.

Fifty yards off, a riband of snow, like a frozen river, curved between the rocks, and the sun, reflected from its sparkling surface, was pleasantly hot. Where the white belt stopped, the pines began, and rolled down in dark-

green ranks to a foam-streaked river. Denis thought they went down for a thousand feet; anyhow, he got a sense of profound depth and the rapid's hoarse turmoil hardly pierced the throb of the locomotive pump. The morning was fresh; he smelt the keen scent of the pines and the creosote in the railroad-ties. All he saw moved him and the sooty train did not jar. The mountain wilds were beautiful beyond his dreams, and the track man had built was the road to adventure.

Somebody came from the vestibule and Denis got up. Two girls were on the steps and one rather imperiously signed him to stop. Denis had remarked her proud, searching glance at Montreal and Ottawa.

"We need not disturb you. The cars are cold and grimy, and the sunshine called us to come out," she said.

"This is the sunniest spot along the train; you get the snow's reflections," Denis remarked. "Well, I thought I'd like to see the locomotive that pulled us across the pass."

He did not start. Had the girl wanted him to go, he imagined she would have indicated her wish. Instead, she smiled, and beckoning her companion, sat down on the steps.

"You will not bother us, and one must not be selfish. I believe we are held up for some time, and we are already two or three hours behind the schedule."

"One might stop at a much less attractive spot, and my time is not at all valuable," Denis rejoined and leaned against a broken pine a few yards off. "In Canada, I expect the admission's strange."

"You are English?"

"Obviously English?" said Denis. "It's perhaps a drawback?"

"Something depends—" the girl replied. "Well, I think you are keener than some Englishmen I have met. The model you use in the Old Country is good, but when you imply that there is not another we don't like you. In fact, we rather expect you to copy ours. However, I do not think that is hard. As a rule, the strangers who join us are soon stancher Canadians than the native-born."

"There was, I believe," said Denis, "a fox who lost his tail. He declared he wondered why he had ever carried the awkward thing. After all, when speed's important, a draggled brush is a handicap."

The girl laughed frankly. "Then you would sooner travel light?"

“To some extent,” Denis agreed, in a thoughtful voice. “When one is forced to take the road, there is not much use in carrying stuff one can go without. The trouble is to choose which to throw on the rubbish-heap, but recent events have helped. We have dumped much we thought indispensable before nineteen-fourteen.”

The girl smiled, but she gave him an understanding glance.

“The fox you talked about inherited his brush, and I expect to lose it hurt. But are you going to the cities?”

“No,” said Denis. “I have had enough. I thought I might grow fruit.”

“Then, perhaps you are lucky. The things most useful in the woods cannot be dumped. If you have got them, you ought to make good.”

“For example?”

A touch of color came to the girl’s face, but she said, “Steadiness and pluck; the power to take hard knocks and hold on. But I’m not a philosopher and one must be practical. Perhaps you can chop? And pull a cross-cut?”

“I cannot chop,” said Denis; “I doubt if I’d know a cross-cut, except that it’s a saw. However, if I’m forced, I certainly can dig. Well, that’s not much to boast about, but I want to earn five hundred dollars in the next twelve months. In a way, a relation bet I could not. Do you think it impossible?”

“The sum is not very large,” the girl replied. “On the whole, I would not be daunted. The proper plan is to try—”

A deep whistle blew, and a man on the track began to shout, “All aboard.” The girls went up the steps, and Denis thought one for a moment turned. Then the bell clashed, the cars rolled ahead, and Denis jumped on his. The throb of wheels got faster and the train plunged into a dark snow-shed.

# V

## THE TRAIL

**S** MALL frame houses straggled down the hill by the descending track. Denis saw orchards, a church with a little wooden tower, and a big water-tank. The brakes jarred, the cars stopped, and, jumping down, he ran along the line. The Misses Cullen were on the platform-steps, and Monica gave him her hand. Bride's fresh face was touched by delicate color; her look was frankly sorrowful.

"We were watching for you," she said. "All our friends on board the ship are gone. You're the last and nicest. And now we're lonely."

"Smile and look in front," said Denis. "You will soon collect another lot. Then by dark you'll be with your relations, and Danny's but a day behind."

"Ah," said Monica, "the friends one knows are best, and when one needs help one finds out which are true."

Denis began to be embarrassed and he glanced about. Water splashed by the tank; the locomotive-pump clanged. Men dragged hose-pipes along the car roofs. One or two were occupied by a hot axle-box. Thick black smoke rolled across the pines. In a few minutes the train would roar down the tremendous gorge in front on its last race to the sea.

By the baggage-car, a tall, thin man controlled two restive horses. The team was good and the man was obviously important, because the station-agent stood by the car until the baggage-hands threw out the trunks for which he waited. The girls to whom Denis had talked joined him and climbed into the rig. The horses plunged, and the lurching vehicle vanished in a red dust-cloud up the hill. The party, however, had nothing to do with Denis, and the Misses Cullen would soon be gone.

"We will not forget you," Monica resumed. "When we were lonely and anxious you were kind. You're the sort one trusts."

"I wonder—" said Denis, smiling. "At the beginning, I thought Danny had some doubts."



“It was the coat,” Bride rejoined, in an apologetic voice, although her eyes sparkled. “The buttons annoyed him. After the Black and Tans burned the creamery, we don’t like the uniform.”

“Then, if you are logical, you ought not to like me. After all, the uniform was mine.”

Bride was very young and she blushed like a rose.

“Sure we hate England; ’tis wan’s duty; but wan loves some Englishmen.”

Since she no longer translated, Denis imagined she was moved. The bell, however, clanged and wheels and couplings groaned. Monica seized the brass rail, and when she gave Denis her hand he felt it tremble.

“The best of good luck go with ye. All ye want in life—”

The car lurched. Pullmans, baggage-cars, and Colonists rolled noisily by, and the figures on the swaying platform got small and indistinct. Denis turned, and as he walked along the track he smiled. The girls exaggerated, but he would lend his coat another time for a worse reward. The shabby war-stained material had sheltered Monica. Perhaps it had helped her feel less forlorn, but for all he knew it might have covered the frank, impulsive Bride. Well, he was not a sentimentalist, and both were gone. The rattle of the train was getting faint and he must take the trail.

His trunk had not arrived, and he bought some food at the settlement store. The storekeeper also supplied a large cotton flour-bag, a pair of braces, and some thin nails, by which Denis could carry his coat and the groceries like a pack. He strapped on the load, inquired his way, and started uphill.

Giant firs and hemlocks bordered the trail. The dust was soft and red, but where bright beams pierced the shade the trunks and ground were checkered by shimmering gold. Denis began to breathe harder. He had got soft on board ship, and the afternoon was hot. All the same, he had forty miles to go, and he pushed on.

After a time, the trees got smaller. Smooth rocks crossed the trail, and stones rolled under Denis’s boots. The top of the hill was open, and he looked about.

In front, a valley curved into the woods and rocks. Pines like dusky pyramids rolled down the steep slopes and, getting smaller, melted in a deep, blue gulf where a thin white river ran. Upstream, the valley turned behind

folding hills, and in the distance a glacier sparkled. No smoke stained the landscape. All one saw was rocks and pines and sky.

The trail, plowed by wagon-wheels, went downhill. At some spots, one edge had slipped across the top of a precipice; at another spot, large stones from a snow-swept gully had buried the uneven road. All the same, it led on downhill, and Denis doubted if an athletic man could make much progress in the bush. Thick fern and tangled raspberry-canecanes grew between the trunks, and where big trees had crashed one must use an ax to clear a path.

A vivid, green-and-red woodpecker tapped on a slab of bark, and a little willow grouse flew to a branch and fearlessly watched Denis pass a few yards off. Then a sharp rhythmic note pierced the brooding calm, as if somebody in the distance beat a drum. Denis wondered whether a chopper was at work; but the noise stopped and began afresh at another spot. Human muscle could not force a passage through the brush so fast, and Denis speculated about the creature's speed. He had not before heard a blue grouse call its mate.

By and by all was quiet. A light wind touched the pines and the heat began to go, but the blue shadows were yet splashed by sparkling gold. The smell of balsam and pine got keener, and Denis pushed ahead. He had no map, but he thought if it were possible to steer straight north his line to the Arctic Sea might not touch a clearing man had made. One got a sense of vastness; the wide spaces called.

His head was up, his light, muscular figure was firmly poised. The braces pressed his shoulders with a strain he knew, and he went with the quick step he used when the battalion swung along the roads in France.

Then the trail began to climb and his skin got wet. The yellow beams had vanished, and when he looked ahead the valley was dark but for the glacier's silver streak. A stream splashed in the stones and Denis threw down his load. He had no ax, but he broke thin branches for a bed, and a dead hemlock supplied dry fuel. Brewing green tea, he fried bacon and crackers; and then, sitting by the fire, lighted his pipe.

Blue smoke curled about the straight trunks; a star shone above the glacier. The creek's splash was musical, and Denis thought about the other Aylward who had taken the forest trail. When Tom Aylward started for the canyon, it looked as if he were making good. His letters were optimistic; a relation had yet the packet his mother had kept. Then it looked as if his partner were a good sort; anyhow, Marvin was just. His letter was frank, and

he had sent a useful sum and a valuation certificate, although Denis imagined the fellow might have kept the lot.

So far as Denis knew, Marvin could not have saved his partner. The flood broke suddenly and his uncle was embarrassed by his load. He was not going to bother Marvin, but he was a raw stranger and the fellow might put him on the proper track. Denis remembered his uncle. Tom Aylward was big and humorous; he liked to joke, and he walked with a sort of careless swing, but the picture was indistinct. Well, he was gone, and now Denis faced the mountains the other had crossed. In the quiet evening he seemed to hear his rolling step, as he had heard it, long since, on the gravel in an English garden.

The important thing was, when Tom Aylward started for Canada he had money to invest, but Denis had not. The Aylwards' fortunes had not mended in the war, and Denis, glancing at the massive trunks, reflected that money was needed as well as muscle to clear ground for cultivation on the Pacific Slope. However, he must not be daunted, and he began to think about something else.

Monica and Bride, he supposed, had now joined their friends. In a few weeks they would forget him, and for all their fresh charm, Denis was resigned. The other girls had got in the rig; he did not know where they went, but if it was to a ranch, the ranch was, no doubt, large and prosperous. They were cultivated young women, and one carried the stamp of command. Perhaps her relations indulged her, but Denis thought he had sensed force and pride and keen intelligence. Anyhow, like the Misses Cullen, she had vanished.

Denis admitted philosophically that a girl of her sort would not think about him again. Moreover, he must concentrate on getting a job. For all the poets and dramatists, he rather thought man's real business was to labor at something useful; anyhow, one must supply oneself with food and clothes.

Well, he was perhaps not romantic; in France the boys had bantered him about his soberness. Denis was not at all a prig. He was frankly modern and challenged old-fashioned rules, but he was unconsciously fastidious. The ladies of the cabarets had not attracted him, and he could picture calmly the young women of another sort with whom he had joked and danced.

Brooding by the fire, he recaptured half-forgotten names and faces: singers at concert parties behind the line, nurses, Red Cross helpers, and post-war tennis girls. Some were kind and some were scornful. All had some

charm, and Denis thought them a plucky lot, but none in particular had moved him much.

Although they had vanished, it now looked as if they were coming back. When the red flames leaped about the branches, unsubstantial figures floated in the curling smoke and vague faces smiled. Denis's pipe was cold, but he could not bother to get a light. The river's turmoil had melted; he thought he heard jazz music; and then the measured beat of feet and a marching-song.

A high fresh note, disturbing like a bugle, rolled across the woods, and Denis sharply turned his head. A timber wolf in the rocks? A loon on the river? He did not know; but the wilds had called and banished his fantasy. Only the pine-trunks loomed in the smoke, and the mountain creek splashed. Denis threw fresh wood on the fire, and in a few minutes was asleep.

## VI

# THE CHOPPERS

A BIG drop splashed on Denis's face, and, pushing back his coat, he looked about. The light was good and he had slept longer than he ought, but he could not see the hills across the river for rolling mist and the pine-needles trembled in the rain. His hip-joint hurt, for some time had gone since he had slept on the ground, his coat was wet, and muddy ashes marked the spot where his fire had burned. It was awkward. Somehow he had reckoned on a fine morning, but he must get breakfast and shove off. Marvin's ranch was the next stop and he wanted to get there before the sun set.

The wet wood smoldered and his kettle refused to boil. Damp crackers and partly melted bacon were not appetizing, and after a few minutes he pulled on his pack. Water flowed down the hillside, and where the trail had been graded the soil was a bog. Vague mountain-tops pierced the mist and vanished, and the dripping pines murmured in the warm Chinook wind. Moreover, the trail went uphill and Denis's coat began to embarrass him. All the same, it did not look as if there was much use in waiting for the rain to stop, and he did not mean to camp another night in the woods.

At noon he reached the slope of a high tableland. The valley, filled by mist, curved round the hill; but on the rocks in front the trees were thin, and since the trail followed the river, Denis reckoned he might cut out a mile or two if he crossed the top. He had not had much breakfast, the food in his bag was wet, and he must try to make the ranch for supper.

He faced the climb, and at the beginning his progress was good, but when he imagined he ought to descend thick forest blocked his path. Saplings, fern, and thorny canes choked the gaps between the trunks, and broken branches pierced the tangle. The roots of the pines and firs keep the surface, and the trees the storms brought down lay where they fell. As a rule, their tops were tilted, and among their giant limbs the underbrush grew high. Denis saw he could not get through, and he kept the level summit, where, by comparison, the ground was clear.

By and by he got disturbed. The trees began to roll across the bench and forced him back to the rocks on the other side. His line now slanted away from the valley, the ground was broken, and he could not go fast. To turn back was unthinkable, but if he kept the stony top, he might find a creek and follow its channel to the river. He hoped he would do so soon, for his wet coat was heavy and the Chinook wind was hot. In fact, he imagined that had he not carried a pack in France and, in the good days before the war, scrambled about the rocks in Switzerland, he must have stopped some time since.

At length a ravine cut the slope, and Denis leaned against a rock. The bank was precipitous and an angry creek brawled in the stones at the bottom. His line to the valley was not attractive, and before he started he ought to get some food.

Denis untied the flour-bag and swore. The crackers had dissolved in a pulpy mess; his tea had run from the soaked packet and stuck to the bacon. He must wait for supper at the ranch, and he did not altogether know where the homestead was. To think about it would not shorten the journey, and on a steep pitch one sometimes used the standing glissade. Denis balanced himself and shoved off.

For five or six yards he went down in front of a wave of rattling stones; and then he reached a steep, wet slab that the bank's contour had hid. Denis's boot struck a knob, and until he plunged into the creek, that was all he knew. Anyhow, he had got down, and if he could follow the channel, he must presently reach the trail by the river.

The stones were large, the pools were deep, and for the most part one could not crawl along the rocky bank. Denis imagined he could not get wetter, and he stuck to the creek's bed. He was going down, but he began to think the current went ominously fast. Not long since, it was a chain of rapids; now it was getting like a waterfall. At the top of an awkward pitch he stopped and studied the descent. The rocks on each side were nearly smooth, and Denis admitted he could not get up. In front, the creek plunged across precipitous slabs, until, two or three hundred feet below, the banks rolled back. Denis doubted if he could reach the bottom, but it was obvious he must try.

Were he, for example, in Cumberland, with a steady companion and an Alpine rope, he might not think the gully awkward. He, however, was alone and tired; his boots were not nailed for the mountains, and the soaked British-warm was an embarrassing load. All the same, he must stick to the

old coat, and, pushing it through the pack straps, he dropped to a rock in the cascade. Then he crawled obliquely down a crack in a treacherous slab, and studied another that slanted, smooth with moss, to an angry pool. Seeing no hold, he sat down and let himself go.

He brought up in the water, and the next pitch was daunting. All the rock was splashed or swept by foam, and at some spots the stream plunged in a frothing arch for three or four yards. Denis, however, could not get up the slab, and he could not remain in the pool. He pulled tight his awkward pack and risked the descent.

His luck perhaps was good, but here and there he found some support for his groping boot; on the rocks one trusts one's knees and feet. Although Denis did not claim to be a good mountaineer, he had balance and caution, and he mechanically felt for the proper spot. He got down; the gully's walls fell back, and after another creek joined the first, belts of gravel lined the bank. By and by he saw a gap in the trees, and soon afterwards sat down under a balsam by the muddy trail.

Denis pulled out his watch. He had not thought the time was four o'clock, and when his glance searched the hillside it looked as if he was but two or three miles from the spot at which he left the trail. Anyhow, the rain was stopping and under the thick balsam the ground was not remarkably wet. After rubbing several damp matches, he lighted his pipe and cogitated.

There was no use in grumbling. If one hated rough adventures, one must keep the beaten track. He might have done so; moreover, he might have kept his English post. His temperament really accounted for his roaming the Canadian woods, wet and hungry, like a British tramp. However, he could not go back; when one took a rash plunge one was forced to take another. For example, his glissading down the slab. Well, he had at length rejoined the trail, and he wondered where it would carry him to fresh adventures. To philosophize about it would not help, although he would sooner philosophize than walk.

With something of an effort, Denis got up. His soaked boots had begun to gall his feet, and, perhaps because he had not had much food, his side hurt. One, however, soon got soft. At the farm his labor about the byres and stables was rather messy than bracing, and the winter days were short. In the Canadian woods, man lived by muscular effort; and Denis's fatigue implied that his experiment might be rash. For all that, he had chosen Canada, and setting his mouth, he pushed ahead.

By and by he got drowsy. The pine-tops were vague, the trunks were indistinct. Sometimes he plunged into a hole, and sometimes he stumbled on a root that crossed the track. Then for a few minutes he saw where he went, but his watchfulness vanished, and all he was conscious of was mechanical effort. Although he could not bother to pull out his watch, he knew it was evening, and he wondered where he would stop for the night. He doubted if he could make the Marvin ranch.

At length he saw a big chopped tree. The top of the stump was two yards from the ground and three feet across. Another great log, from which the branches were hewn, lay beside the trail. The white chips were fresh; Denis smelt the resin in the wood, and imagined the choppers were not far off.

A few minutes afterwards, smoke floated about the trail and he saw a shanty by a creek. In the open-fronted shack a man was occupied by a stove. A companion, sitting on a box, rubbed an ax, and two or three more loafed about and smoked. Their wet overalls and dark-colored shirts were thin, and their bodies were modeled like the statues of Greek athletes. Denis had thought only boxers and acrobats were marked by the balance and queer muscular suppleness that stamped the fellows.

Denis's pose was slack. His face was rather white, and his clothes were splashed by mud. A few yards off, two brawny oxen pulled at a bundle of hay. Although the nearest man gave him a welcoming nod, Denis dully studied the hay.

"The stuff's not grass," he said. "Do you mow your oats for cattle-feed?"

"Sure," said one. "When the trees are off the ground, on a red soil, you can start with oats—"

"But you could thrash the oats and give the cattle orchard-grass."

The chopper smiled. "The first few crops won't head up good, and we haven't got a thrasher across the mountains yet. But are you for the lake?"

Denis assented. Since he was tired and hungry, the hay's interesting him was queer. He had meant to ask for food.

"The ranches are twelve miles off," another man remarked. "We are going to get more rain."

"Then, I'm afraid I can't make it. Can I stop for the night?"

"Certainly," said one. "Steve's gone home, and you can have his blankets. Go right in and hang your coat by the stove. We'll take supper soon as Bill gets on a move."



“I’m ready. Maybe you’re waiting for the band,” the cook rejoined and threw rattling tin plates on the table.

Denis thought the bacon and fried potatoes, doughy flapjacks and flavored syrup, remarkably good, and he drained a large can of pungent tea. The trouble was, his hosts had finished before he had well begun, and in a very few minutes the heaped plates were clean. Restored by hot drink and food, he studied their camp. The shack was built of branches and roofed by bark. Rain beat the slabs, but the stove’s soothing heat drove back the damp. The table-top was split, comparatively straight, from a cedar log, and springy branches were fixed to posts for beds. Denis smelt wet clothes, balsam from the forest, and aromatic smoke.

“I suppose you are mending the trail,” he said. “Does your boss want help?”

“Are you going to buy a ranch?” the cook inquired.

Denis replied that in the meantime he was not; but he did not see what it had to do with his getting a job.

“To grade the trails is the bush rancher’s perquisite,” said one. “The politicians give us a road *appropriation*, and we get busy more or less when we like. The province needs settlers and parliament pays something to keep us on the ground.”

The young fellow was hard and muscular, but his voice was cultivated. Denis thought some expense was justified so long as it supported settlers of his type.

“If you have got a ranch, you get a job,” another remarked. “The boys pick the foreman and he doesn’t hustle you too bad.”

“But what about your fields and stock? When you are making roads you cannot plow.”

“My stock’s my working oxen, and when I have oats to feed them in winter I reckon I’m all right. In summer Tom and Jerry hunt their grub where they can find some.”

Denis drowsily pondered. On an English farm, stock implied the flocks and herds by whose increment the farmer lived. He imagined he might learn something about Canadian ranching economy that the emigration pamphlets did not state.

“To begin with, you must buy your forest block; and then you must engage labor to clear the ground. You need a house and stable. What’s the

smallest sum on which one can start?"

They refused to fix a sum. Much depended on the rancher; but the young fellow with the cultivated voice admitted that he had used three thousand dollars.

"We clear the ground," he stated, rather dryly. "My trouble was I could not chop. But you might give a smaller sum and a mortgage on the ranch."

"You might?" interjected another. "I guess you 'most always *must*."

Denis knitted his brows. A mortgage implied interest, and a sinking fund to repay the loan. Unless one could sell crops or young cattle, the bill could not be met. But there was another thing.

"I expect one can learn to chop. How long must one practise?"

"Some folks kaint learn," a big fellow replied with a chuckle. "When they've whittled down both feet they quit. It's most time Jim let up."

Jim laughed. "We all carry some marks. The only man who boasted he never cut himself was admiring his new house when the ax he left on the shingles slipped down. Legend states he did not afterwards need two boots. Anyhow, I have used the ax since I left McGill, and sometimes I wish Nature gave us plated legs."

The young fellow was lean and athletic. Denis pictured his leading a football team at the University; yet he admitted the ax baffled him. The thing was ominous, but Denis must find out as much as possible about the small rancher's methods.

The others expounded; they were a frank, good-humored lot. One got one's block of forest, put up one's shack (sometimes a tent must serve) and began to cut the trees. Food was expensive, but one could kill a deer and trout, and nobody bothered about the game laws. Anyhow, a rancher could claim some exemption. When one's bank-roll melted, one looked for a job. If the government were not cutting trails, one tried the sawmills and maybe the mines.

So long as the money one earned held out, one resumed one's chopping, and if possible bought a span of oxen. Buck and Bright helped one pile the logs to burn and pulled out the stumps. When one had cleared four or five acres, one planted an orchard, sowed oats for fodder, and began to buy young stock. A tough, slow job; but in the meantime the country was opening up. Settlements sprang about the mines, and population followed one into the wilds. By the time one had stuff to sell, the market arrived.

“Then I suppose you take your profit?” Denis remarked. “You are certainly entitled to some reward.”

“Well, I don’t know,” said one. “When the trout in the river are poisoned by sawmill dumps, and city sports’ automobiles scare the deer off the woods, I reckon some of us will pull up stakes and shove on again ahead—” He smiled and turned to his companions. “We hate to be crowded. Who’s for the Peace River?”

“The Mackenzie,” said another. “When we get going, we’re going all the way.”

They laughed, but Denis thought all was not a joke. The men were pioneers; their business was to break the trail. For all that, they were not roughneck frontiersmen. Denis liked their type, and thought them sober, useful citizens. Two, he had some grounds to imagine, had graduated at Canadian universities.

To some extent, their talk daunted him. He had not the abilities they had perhaps inherited. The land they cleared was theirs, and they could use the woodman’s tools. All he had was his imperfectly trained muscle and some stubbornness. His road, rather obviously, went uphill, but he had started and he must front the climb.

The tobacco-smoke floating about the shack got thick and the choppers’ figures indistinct. Rain beat the roof and the stove snapped, but the noise got faint, and Denis stretching his legs across his branch bed, knew nothing more.

## VII

# DENIS ARRIVES

WHERE the trail curved down to a sparkling lake Denis stopped and leaned against a fence. When he left the choppers' camp after breakfast he was not remarkably fresh, and he had gone leisurely through the quiet woods. Now his long journey was over, he was bothered by a queer hesitation. In order to reach the Marvin ranch he had traveled six thousand miles, but he did not know if his host were keen to welcome him.

In the meantime, all he saw was interesting. Rocks and stately pines rolled down to the lake; the sun was on the woods, and the smell of balsam and cedar in the slashed belt was pungently sweet. The fence zigzagged, something like the teeth of a saw. At the corners, the split rails interlocked, and no fastenings were used, but the ground in the angles could not be plowed. One built that sort of fence where land was cheap.

Long rows of stumps crossed the field in front, and pale-green oats thinly covered the soil. Denis remarked their color. If Marvin thrashed his crop, the yield would be small. In the next field the stumps were gone and the timothy grass was high and strong; the lamb's-tail heads rolled in the wind, reflecting silver gleams. Farther back, log-piles and felled trees marked the clearing's advance. In the gloom behind the tangle axes crashed, and when a great fir plunged down, cowbells chimed and red cattle sped like deer through the underbrush. They did not stop for the thickets, and one jumped a big fallen trunk.

Denis followed the path across an orchard to the spacious house. He remarked the deep veranda and the smooth corral sloping to the lake. The barns, roofed by hand-split shingles, were large and good. In fact, the Marvin homestead struck a prosperous note. It was the house of a man who knew his job and, for the most part, used efficiently the material he found on the spot. Only the shiplap walls were, in a sense, foreign. Denis was satisfied that Marvin was efficient, but he speculated about his other qualities. Well, he soon would know.

He reflected that he himself looked rather like a British tramp. Since he gave away his bed he had not pulled off his clothes, and they carried the stains of his scramble down the gully. The rocks had scraped his wet and rather large English boots. It, however, was not important, and he imagined he would not be long at the ranch, although he liked the spot.

Across the sparkling lake, the rocks and pines went up; a curving glacier vanished behind the dim blue woods, and, farther back, glimmering peaks cut the sky. Since the big tree crashed, all was quiet but for the river's throb. Denis sensed the landscape's austere beauty, although he thought about something else. If Marvin, for his partner's sake, were friendly, he was the only friend Denis had in Canada, and he must present himself.

He went up the veranda steps. Nobody was about, but after a time a Chinese house-boy, rubbing flour from his yellow hands, arrived. Denis inquired for Marvin and the other indicated a passage and went off. Denis pushed back a door at the other end, and a man got up from his desk in the spacious matchboarded room. He was tall, but not bulky; his figure was firmly lined, his face was thin and brown, and his glance was keen. Denis thought him something of the commanding-officer type.

"I am Denis Aylward," he said. "I expect you got my letter?"

"You did not state your boat," said Marvin, and gave him his hand, but somehow Denis got a hint of reserve. "However, we can fix you at the ranch-house until you have looked around."

For a moment or two he studied his guest. Denis's look was frank; he carried himself like a soldier, and for all his shabby clothes, one knew the boy thoroughbred. In fact, he was queerly like his uncle, twenty years since, and his voice was Tom Aylward's voice. Marvin indicated a chair and put up the papers on his desk.

"The mail goes out in the morning and I was ordering supplies. Well, you thought you would like it in Canada, and your relations were willing for you to join me? Your uncle, of course, was my partner, and although I don't know the others, I transacted some business for Mrs. Aylward a long time since."

Denis sensed a question. Marvin's look was imperturbable, but he waited.

"Mrs. Aylward is my grandmother, and she, at all events, approved. Although she is old, her judgment's shrewd, and she thought you—"

"Well?" said Marvin, for Denis hesitated.

“She declared you were an honest man,” said Denis with an apologetic smile. “I believe her lawyers agreed that the settlement you sent across was generous. Then you see, she kept my uncle’s letters, and when I studied one or two I felt you might perhaps put me on the proper track—”

For a few moments Marvin was quiet, and, resting his arms on his desk, looked straight in front. His settlement of Aylward’s claim was just; he did not think a captious accountant could dispute an item in the bill. To know his partner’s mother was satisfied was something.

“But you have other relations,” he said.

“They were not enthusiastic about my experiment. For one thing, my articles—the apprenticeship agreement—cost a good sum, and they thought me rash to turn down a useful occupation. Perhaps I was rash, but, after France, I could not stand the office; I really think I tried. All the same, when the trustees saw I was resolved, they agreed that I ought to look you up.”

Marvin’s look was inscrutable, but he was moved. For long he had speculated about his partner’s folks. He had reckoned on a touch of suspicion; perhaps frank distrust. Now he knew they had not doubted him; Aylward’s letters home had satisfied them. Well, Tom was generous, but unconsciously Marvin frowned. After all, the others did not know—

“To begin with, we must fix what you’d like to do,” he said.

“My notion is to go to work on a ranch, the first where they’ll engage me. I must, if possible, earn five hundred dollars in twelve months. If I can do so, my trustee undertakes to double the amount, and I might then think about preempting some land.”

Marvin smiled. His habit was not to smile, but he liked the young fellow’s pluck. He was keener than his uncle; Denis Aylward’s blood was red: Marvin knew men. Since wages were high, he could use the lad; but the plan would not do. He did not want another Aylward about the ranch: he wanted to forget—

“Your folks mean to try you out? Well, maybe I can fix you. Rob Stoddart down the lake wants some help, and in the morning we’ll go along and see him. Now I must put through my orders for the stores, and we’ll look for Mrs. Marvin.”

Denis got up. He saw his host did not want to go.

“You are occupied; I must not disturb you, sir. Mrs. Marvin will perhaps allow me to present myself.”

His habit was to move quickly; the door shut and he was gone. Marvin heard his step in the passage and forgot the papers on his desk. The boy walked like his uncle; his step was the step Marvin sometimes heard in the dark.

Denis was rather preoccupied. On the whole, he liked his host, but he had noted a queer reserve, and Marvin had not urged him to remain long. However, all he wanted was to get to work. He looked up, and a girl with whom he had nearly collided gave him a smile. Denis thought her attractive, although hers was not the modern, virile stamp. Her lines were curved, her glance was soft, and marked by a touch of coquetry. Denis had seen her on board the train.

"I ought to have looked where I went," he said. "Perhaps you are Miss Marvin— But now I think you're not."

"Sometimes second thoughts are best. At all events, I am Rhoda Staines. However, since you don't know Kate, your recognizing the mistake is rather remarkable."

"For one thing, I have just interviewed Mr. Marvin," said Denis, modestly.

"And I am not at all his sort?" Rhoda rejoined, with a smile. "Well, perhaps that is so; but you wanted Kate—"

"I am Kate Marvin," said another voice, and the girl to whom Denis had talked by the glacier advanced. "You are Denis Aylward. Until a few moments ago I did not know you had arrived."

"Mr. Marvin was engaged with some letters, and as I did not want to bother him, I thought I'd look for Mrs. Marvin."

"Mother is engaged with some baking. At the ranch we are an industrious lot; but Rhoda and I have not yet got busy. Let's go to the porch."

The veranda was cool and commanded a noble view, and Denis was satisfied to rest in an easy-chair. He thought Miss Marvin studied him and Miss Staines was amused. Perhaps his arriving like a tramp was something of a joke.

"You are tired," said Rhoda in a sympathetic voice. "The trail is rather dreadful, and I suppose you were forced to camp under the trees."

"My camp was a success. My breakfast in the rain was not, and soon afterwards I got badly entangled in the rocks. The only way out was an

awkward ravine.”

“Then, you came down Hemlock Creek?” said Kate, with some surprise. “Before the trail was cut, the rocks bothered experienced packers who sometimes crossed the bench. You, of course, were not loaded, but you carried a big coat.”

“There was the trouble,” Denis agreed. “The coat is not very good, but I have no other, and it looks as if the railroad has lost my trunk.”

“Well, where did you stop for the next night? The rain was heavy.”

“In the evening I made a trail-cutters’ camp. They were a hospitable lot and gave me a first-class supper.”

“Then, you liked your supper? You are not fastidious!”

Denis’s eyes twinkled. He saw where Miss Marvin led.

“The food was good, and they gave me the best they had. Then, although it is perhaps not important, I liked the men. Their talk was interesting.”

Kate admitted that he was keener than she had thought; but she knew he was not playing up in order to be polite. Denis Aylward had some attractive qualities. Had he not been a good mixer, she doubted if he would have liked his hosts. If one refuses to meet the Western woodsman frankly, his remarks are rude.

“What did you talk about?” she asked.

“For the most part, ranching. I was interested and the information I got did not altogether support the statements in the guide-books printed for emigrants. One, of course, must make allowance for official hopefulness, but in France one began to think politicians and government departments had a talent for—”

“Optimistic exaggeration?” Kate suggested. “Perhaps ours are not very scrupulous. But were you disheartened?”

“There was not much use in being downhearted,” Denis rejoined. “The time to hesitate is before you start. When you have got going, you must go ahead. Rather like a copy-book motto, but I think it’s logical.”

“Then, you intend to buy a ranch?”

“To begin with, I am going to take a job. In the morning Mr. Marvin will look up your neighbor, Stoddart, and if he agrees, I’ll get to work.”



Kate thought it strange. His uncle was her father's partner, he was rather an engaging young fellow, and for a time he might have stopped at the ranch. Denis saw she was puzzled, but he himself had speculated about the reception. Marvin certainly had not urged him to stop.

"Oh, well, I expect you will be happy at Stoddart's. He is a fine old fellow," Kate remarked.

"I suppose your Irish friends went on to Vancouver?" said Miss Staines.

"To Hope, not far from the city. Did you know they were Irish?"

"One carries a stamp; for example, we knew you were English," said Rhoda, smiling. "That you were friends was obvious. When I went through the car one morning, the older girl gave you back your coat, which she had, no doubt, mended."

Denis laughed, a frank boyish laugh.

"The implication is logical, but it's not accurate. Although Miss Cullen is my friend, she did not mend my coat."

Rhoda said nothing, and he turned to Kate.

"I suppose Mr. Marvin cleared the ranch. To think he did so is encouraging, because I understand he was not a rancher."

"He had some advantages—his grandfather reached the province by the old Oregon Trail, and Father's first home was a log shack in the rocks; but he was ambitious and engaged in business. I believe your uncle's help was useful, and for a time the combine prospered—"

"I know," said Denis quietly. "The flood at the canyon broke the partnership. My uncle was a very good sort, but I imagine the talent for business was Mr. Marvin's. At all events, he carried on."

"To carry on is Father's habit. I think he did not stop until he had got all the career he chose could give. When Vancouver sprang like a mushroom the realtor house was famous, and I believe an agreement was Marvin's stood for a safe deal. Then, when Father had conquered, he let all go and went back to the woods."

Miss Staines got up and carelessly strolled across the corral to the lake. Denis noted her rather languid, graceful walk.

"Rhoda's bored," Kate remarked, with an indulgent glance.

“Anyhow, I am interested,” Denis declared. “To some extent, Mr. Marvin’s letting go was queer; but he had realized his ambition, and there was nothing more for him to get. In the old days, men who had had enough turned monks, and in modern India some take the road and carry the begging-bowl. Mr. Marvin, however, is not a contemplative—I believe it’s the proper word.”

“He certainly is not,” Kate agreed with a smile. “To give up all you have fought for is perhaps something of an exploit; but it is not Father’s plan. It’s possible he felt his business was to break fresh soil; you see, his folks were pioneers— But I don’t know, and he does not talk about it. Well, ranching is a man’s job. Do you think you’ll like it?”

“Oh, yes,” said Denis. “To make good is another thing, and I expect I have not inherited much that ought to help. My father was a lawyer at a quiet English town. Perhaps my best qualification is I carried a heavy load in France and could dig as well as another.”

“That is something, but I doubt if it is very important. As a rule, the old-type chopper is a splendid animal; but to use the ax is not enough. Agriculture is our least-studied industry, and when the dull and slack go broke people wonder why. On a forest ranch a man must use every talent he has. If he grows fruit he must fight mildews and insect pests; if he feeds stock, he must know the chemistry of the soil the pines have sterilized. The old rules are out of date, but to experiment without knowledge is rash. Well, have I daunted you?”

“On the whole, you’re not encouraging. I cannot chop, I am not rich, and my talents are not conspicuous. All the same, in the morning I hope to make a start.”

“Oh, well,” said Kate, with a smile, “the proper plan is to measure the obstacles, and then refuse to stop.”

She got up, for Mrs. Marvin called them to supper.

## VIII

# MISS STAINES GOES FISHING

S LANTED sunbeams touched the log walls at the Stoddart homestead and sparkled on nickel knives and tin plates. By the window an iridescent humming-bird hovered about the arrowhead flowers. Denis held his knife awkwardly. Since seven o'clock in the morning he had used a grub-hoe at the bottom of a muddy trench, and now his hands were sore and his back hurt. His employer, with a long shovel, removed the broken roots and soil, but it did not look as if he were tired.

Stoddart's hair was white and his face was lined, but his back was straight and the woodsman's balance marked his movements. The platform on which a chopper works is a narrow plank notched into the trunk, and where one's path through the bush is across, and along, big mossy logs one learns to use one's feet.

The kitchen was narrow, and at one end a split-board partition enclosed another room. When the homestead was built, Stoddart had used for front and back the longest logs he could conveniently move. At the corners, where the logs crossed, they were notched, and the uneven gaps between their surfaces were chinked with moss and clay. All the material for house and furniture was hewn in the clearing, and Denis thought the American cook-stove jarred. The ridge-pole had rather ominously begun to sag, and the bottom of the curve was over the rancher's bed. Stoddart was something of a fatalist, and when Denis suggested their shoring up the beam he refused.

"The stick's good Douglas fir; I'm thinking it will see me oot," he said.

"Unless it stands much longer than I imagine, I hope it will not, sir," Denis rejoined. "Suppose it came down when you were in bed?"

"Aweel, I hae leaved my life, and noo I'm my lone and getting done, nobody would bother much. We'll no' fash about it, but ye're a polite laddie."

Denis let it go. He liked the old fellow and thought his philosophic calm sincere. In fact, although he had but recently joined him, he reckoned his

employer his friend. In the meantime, he concentrated on the supper he himself had cooked. The bacon was all right, the fried potatoes, dusted with curry, were perhaps not remarkably hard; he did not know about the yeast-powder bannock one served fresh and hot with sweet Magnolia drips. When he turned out the doughy mess, Stoddart shook his head.

"I ken when I have had enough. Ye can take the lot."

"It might be rash," said Denis. "I'm sorry, sir."

"The folk I'm friendly with call me *Rob*. If ye get outside yon stuff, ye'll need some exercise."

"Not immediately," said Denis, and added with a touch of resignation: "If I yoked the oxen, I might pull up the hemlock stump."

Stoddart's eyes twinkled. "I was thinking ye might like to catch a trout for breakfast. If the fish did not rise, ye could paddle across to Marvin's. Ye have not bothered him very much."

Denis got a fishing-rod, but when he started for the lake he cogitated. He had not bothered Marvin; nothing indicated that the rancher wanted his society. Mrs. Marvin was kind, but she had not urged him to come back. Denis thought it strange, although he was rather puzzled than hurt. The old fellow had got him a useful job, which was all he really wanted, and the girls' arrival had nothing to do with his coldness. Denis smiled; he had been frank, and since Miss Marvin and Miss Staines were sophisticated young women, his drawbacks were obvious. Anyhow, the evening was fine and he resolved to let the puzzle go.

Stoddart's canoe was light and cleverly modeled by a Siwash Indian from a cedar log. For all her narrow beam, her long flat floor gave her stability; the stern was pointed, and the fine bow went up in a flowing curve to a rude bird's-head. She paddled easily, but the single blade, used on one side, is awkward for a beginner, and Denis's course was by no means straight.

The evening was calm and the sun was yet on the rocks. Sometimes a puff of wind trailed a faint blue smear across the lake, but the languid ripple would not hide the line and in a few moments it was gone. There was not much use in fishing where the water was smooth as glass, and Denis leisurely steered for the eddies at the river-mouth. After eight or nine hours in the muddy trench, he was willing to loaf.

He was not going to Marvin's, but when he allowed the canoe to drift, the current carried her towards a point not far from the ranch. Thick forest

bordered the rocky beach, and somebody signaled in the shadow by the trunks. For a minute or two Denis concentrated on steering for a patch of gravel, and when the bow struck a rock a few yards from the proper spot he looked up and saw Miss Staines walk along a log that had fallen into the water. He liked her pose and confidence; the dark woods were a noble background for her firmly lined figure. All the same, Denis was conscious of a ridiculous disappointment. He had not thought to see Rhoda Staines.

"Fishing's my favorite sport; but I haven't yet thrown a fly on a Canadian lake," she said.

"I expect the canoe will carry us both," Denis replied. "Can you get on board?"

The canoe was narrow, and he could not, for a projecting branch, push her against the log. Denis had expected Miss Staines to hesitate, but she sprang lightly from the trunk, touched his steadying hand, and laughed.

"I have not capsized you; but you might have found an easier spot."

"It's possible," Denis agreed. "I was satisfied to make the beach. A canoe is feminine, and Stoddart's, at all events, goes where she wants."

"Then, you are not a boatman?"

"I can handle a yacht's dinghy, and pull a long oar; the Canadian paddle is another thing. Besides, after experimenting with the grub-hoe, my hands are blistered. When one thinks about it, some very simple tools are hard to use until one masters them; for example, the ax and scythe, the fiddle-bow, and, I expect, the boomerang."

"You admit you don't know much about the last?"

"One must be modest. All the same, I imagine the woodsman's ax is the other's relation; anyhow, its habits are similar. When the boomerang is thrown it returns to its owner's hand; when a beginner swings the ax it returns to his leg. Both are curved. A straight tool goes straight."

"A scythe is curved," Miss Staines remarked.

"There's the trouble," Denis agreed. "When you were on the lake, a day or two since, I expect you saw me mowing. I mowed for some hours, but when Stoddart called me off I had not cut much grass."

"I suppose he did not bother to be polite? Canadians are frank."

"Rob is a Scot, and the Scottish habit is not to let oneself go. He hates to be extravagant and does not use eloquence when an epigram meets the bill."

Anyhow, he studied the knock-down timothy and stated that he *jaloosed* I needed a flail. All the same, the old fellow didn't mean to be nasty. He's a first-class sort and had some grounds to be annoyed. However, let's talk about something else."

"If your hands are not sore, perhaps you would sooner paddle?" Rhoda remarked.

Denis thought she had noted the canoe's erratic track and he laughed.

"I expect my hands will be sore for the next few weeks; but if you mean to catch a trout, we must get to work. For all that, I can listen."

He sent the canoe along and Rhoda resumed: "The charm of fishing is its uncertainty. You watch the eddies and ripples, and calculate where a trout ought to feed. Then you try to float the fly across the spot, as if it were alive; but you don't know, and you may waste skill and effort where the fish are not. Besides, you must choose the proper bait; if the trout is greedy for a fly, there is not much use in offering him a revolving bit of tin. Sometimes, however, all goes as you hope, and when the water breaks and the reel whirrs you get a splendid thrill. You have lured and won a prize from the mysterious depths. Yes, I really think fishing a fascinating sport!"

"Something depends on your temperament," Denis rejoined. "Your meditations, elaborated, would make a rather neat homily—"

He stopped and Rhoda smiled. They were near the river-mouth, and an eddy seized the canoe's bow and swung her from her track. For a few moments Denis's paddle splashed savagely; and then he gave Miss Staines the fishing-rod.

"Looks as if I must stick to my navigation. Suppose you try your luck?"

The light had faded from the water, and where an eddy revolved a trout leaped. Rhoda, balancing cautiously, swung the rod, and when the trace fell the rippled surface broke. That was all, but after a moment or two the fly went back, and a shining silver streak forged upstream. Denis seized the net and presently lifted the trout on board. Miss Staines was a good fisherman.

She hooked another: a larger fish that bored stubbornly into the depths. The rod bent, the reel clinked, and sometimes Denis labored with the paddle. Miss Staines was cool and efficient; her mouth was set, and when she gave him an order her voice was commanding. He had thought her soft and womanly, but now he saw another girl. However, she meant to get the trout, and his business was to help.

A battered pine floated downstream. The log was large and two or three broken branches were in the water. If the trout went underneath, the gut trace would go, and Denis sweated at the paddle. He was awkward; the canoe swung across the current and headed for the tree. The bow jarred, Rhoda swayed with the shock, and her comment was frank. Then she put her hand on Denis's shoulder, and somehow was on the log.

Denis had thought to see her in the water, but he shoved off the canoe. On the tree, Miss Staines could steer the trout past the branches, and she obviously did not want him to meddle. For a minute or two he waited; and then she gave him a sharp order and the gleaming trout circled slowly by the canoe. Measuring the net's sweep, he lifted the fish. He had thought it might be awkward, but when he pushed back the canoe Rhoda jumped for the bow. The canoe rocked and Denis said:

"I suppose you swim?"

"If I were forced, I might swim five or six yards."

"In the circumstances, perhaps, your luck and nerve were good."

"I rather think one depends on the other," Rhoda rejoined.

"To some extent, it's possible," Denis agreed. "But are you not going to try a fresh cast?"

Rhoda signed him to look about. The light was going, and the snow on the high peaks had faded to faint ethereal blue. The pines had lost their sharp outline and their long ranks were shadowy, but the lake yet reflected the pale glimmer in the sky, and a dim silver belt cut the rocks along the bank. But for the circling eddies the water was smooth, and Denis did not see a splash.

"The rise is over," said Rhoda with a laugh. "If you want to catch fish, you must know their habits and fish when they are feeding."

Denis liked her laugh. Her voice had an attractive husky note, as if it came from low in her throat.

"It looks logical, and you do catch trout. But are you staying at the ranch long?"

"I don't know yet," said Rhoda as if she pondered. "Kate's suggestion was that I might stay for good, but I have relations at Victoria. If they were anxious for me to join them, I might do so. So far, I rather think they are not."

"Then, you have known Miss Marvin for some time?"

For a few moments Rhoda was quiet; and then, as if his interest persuaded her, she told Denis her artless tale.

She and Kate had met at a famous English school. When Kate arrived Rhoda had been there long enough to assimilate the school's traditions; moreover, she had inherited a point of view that helped. Kate, of course, had not. She was proud, and frankly scornful about conventions the others thought important. Canadians were like that; but in the Old Country one could not be independent. Denis, no doubt, knew—

Denis smiled and admitted that he did know. At an English school and in the army, one was forced to take one's cue from one's companions and play up. Independence cost too much. He imagined it was so in Canada; only the rules were different.

"The mouse helped the lion." Miss Staines modestly resumed. Kate was marked by keen intelligence, courage, and rather scornful sincerity; Rhoda's most useful talent was perhaps a sort of *savoir faire*. At all events, she steered her friend past pitfalls into which the other might have plunged.

The canoe drifted smoothly down the lake and Denis's idle paddle trailed in the water. Miss Staines' quiet husky voice was soothing, and he thought the portraits of herself and Kate lifelike. Anyhow, she was an attractive mouse. Rhoda was small and soft, and as a rule compliant, but kind for all her quick subtlety. Denis pictured her cutting the meshes that entangled her rasher friend.

After a time, Kate began to see all she owed the other, and did not disown the debt. In fact, Rhoda declared she was royally generous. Besides, she was rich, and Rhoda's father and mother were dead. Her relations had grumbled about sending her to the expensive school and intimated that as soon as possible she must support herself.

Her tale moved Denis to sympathy. Rhoda Staines was not the stuff to front rude jars and seize for herself advantages that others were given; but after all, he did not know— He had studied her when she caught the trout. She certainly had pluck, but sometimes all that pluck can do is to help one hide one's hurt.

At length the time arrived when Rhoda must find an occupation, and although she hated the post a relation offered she doubted if she could get another. Rhoda admitted her abilities were, so to speak, not the conspicuous sort. Kate triumphantly solved the puzzle. She was to stop for some time in London, and then go to Paris; her hosts were strangers and she wanted a



companion she knew. If Rhoda were willing, her father would fix it by telegram.

Marvin did so. They went to Paris, Switzerland, and Italy, and now Rhoda was at the ranch. She was perhaps something of an adventuress; but when she refused the post in England her relations had done with her. Well, her hosts were kind, Kate was a staunch friend, and in the meantime she was satisfied.

She stopped and Denis began to paddle. Thin mist curled about the pines and the light was nearly gone. The paddle's measured splash and the gurgle at the bows echoed in the rocks. Rhoda was quiet and Denis pondered her narrative. He sympathized with her loneliness and admired her fortitude; he had but vaguely remarked her firm resolve to leave the post she did not like alone. Although it had nothing to do with him, he was glad she was happy at the ranch.

When they reached Marvin's landing Rhoda picked up the trout, through whose gills Denis had threaded a piece of twine. Somehow he thought her carrying off the trout was typical, and when he paddled across the lake he smiled.

Half an hour afterwards, Stoddart, smoking his pipe in the homestead kitchen, heard a step and looked up.

"Where are the trout?" he asked.

"Miss Staines took the two we caught to the ranch. Since she caught them, they were hers," Denis replied.

"Just that!" said Stoddart, with a touch of dryness. "Weel, the lass is bonnie and no' a fool; but if I was a romantic laddie, I'd have taken t' ither."

"I doubt if I am romantic," said Denis, smiling. "Then I have not much grounds to think Miss Marvin would have gone with me."

## IX

# THE SHEEP-GUARD

DENIS scoured the supper plates in the sand by the lake; he was thorough in all he did, and the sharp grit polished the greasy metal.

Stoddart, on the bench along the homestead wall, rested his foot against a log and humorously watched his helper. The lad was willing and civil; he acknowledged Rob his boss, and the old man reflected that in Canada it was not always so. When Stoddart ruled a logging gang he had sometimes used a handspike to enforce his authority.

“We ken the virtue o’ cleanliness, but ye’ll no’ leave much tin on my good plates,” he said.

Denis carried the plates to the kitchen and sat down on the step.

“Is your leg any better?”

“It might be worse,” said Stoddart, and shifted his foot. Sometimes he was rheumatic and he and Denis had labored at the bottom of a wet trench. “I’m bothered about the sheep in the high fold,” he continued. “I was meaning to bring them down to shear, but I doubt my leg will no’ carry me across the rocks.”

“They have some hay,” said Denis. “Do you think I could drive them down?”

Stoddart thought not. The fold was across the river and the ford was awkward. Although he had a few cattle, the sheep were his pride, but the flock was small, and since the timber wolves were numerous, did not increase much. Now Marvin’s hired man had informed him that the wolves were again about.

“Maybe I’ll get there soon; but if ye’d like to be useful, ye might watch the fold,” he said. “So long as they scent ye, the brutes will no’ gang near the flock.”

Denis understood that on the Pacific Slope the big grey timber wolves will not molest a man. For all that, he would sooner he had a rifle, and he

asked for Stoddart's.

"Cartridges are no' cheap," the old fellow observed. "I doot if ye'll get sight o' the beasts, and there's no' much use in emptying good shells on the rocks. Then I dinna ken if ye can shoot."

"Suppose you let me try?"

"Aweel," said Stoddart, and pulled out his nickel tobacco-box. "Yon spruce is sixty yards, and I might risk a standing shot. If ye miss, ye'll no' tak' the gun—" He studied Denis, and put up the box. "Ye're smiling? Get the lid o' yon yeast-powder can. Ye'll use two cartridges. Nae mair."

The bright lid was about two inches across; the rifle was a Winchester, with the cylindrical magazine under the barrel. Its balance was not the balance of the army rifle, and Denis put it to his shoulder once or twice. Then two reports jarred across the woods, and, running to the tree, he gave Stoddart the torn circle of tin.

"Outers; but I might have spoiled your box," he said. "You see, the sighting's fresh and I didn't know the proper pull-off."

For a minute or two he experimented, but since Stoddart was frugal, he used the spent cartridges. The explosion had perhaps slightly enlarged the shells, for the ejector worked stiffly, but by and by Denis was satisfied.

"Tak' a blanket and the ax," said Stoddart. "Maybe ye'll need to cut a few stakes to mend the corral."

Denis went for the articles, but Stoddart took the ax from him and tried the edge with his thumb.

"Aye," he said, "ye're particular about your gun! A tool to work with is anither thing."

Pulling a small round hone from his pocket, he rubbed the curved blade.

"I'll no' claim she'd cut a floating thread; but if ye use her, ye'll need to watch your feet. In the woods ye dinna ken when ye'll want an ax and she's better keen."

Denis set off. His load was awkward and the evening was not yet cool, but at the ford the glacier-water stung his skin. The cold plunge braced him for the climb, and he went up the rocks under the big dark pines. On the stony soil the underbrush was thin, and when he crossed the foot-trail to the Marvin ranch he thought his progress good.

For a few moments Denis stopped and got his breath. At the bottom of the valley, faint reflections yet glimmered on the lake, but the pines were shadowy and mist floated about the hill. A shining window marked the ranch, and Denis unconsciously frowned.

He was happy at Stoddart's, but after all he was young, and Kate and Rhoda were jolly girls. Anyhow, Rhoda was, but when he pictured Kate's calm, searching glance, jolly was perhaps not the proper word. Miss Marvin somehow was dignified; she had not the other's coquettish charm. In fact, she was not so obviously flesh and blood. Kate's talk was a sort of challenge to his intellect and pluck. She moved him to vague ambitions; Rhoda soothed.

All the same, when he went to the ranch an errand of Stoddart's accounted for his visit. Marvin was civil, and Mrs. Marvin was motherly and kind; but they did not ask him to come back. Well, the house was theirs, and he must reach the fold before dusk fell.

The sheep-fold occupied a flat, enclosed on three sides by woods and rocks. Stoddart had built a loose wall and strengthened two or three spots with stakes. The sheep lay quietly in the short brush, and when Denis had cut a few spruce-branches he sat down in a hollow behind the wall.

Mist crept down the hill and the night got as dark as the summer night would be. Sometimes distant cowbells chimed and a cedar's flat sprays shook. Then all got very quiet and Denis heard the river, far down in the gloom. Lighting his pipe, he pulled the blanket across his chest and began to muse.

At the ranch one was occupied from one's early breakfast to dark. One had no time for reflection, but now he might review his experiment and weigh his plans for the future. At length, he had something to go upon. Denis tried to concentrate, but he was tired, the tobacco was soothing, and the plans did not materialize. He shrugged impatiently. He had not emigrated in search of sentimental adventures. His business was to mend his fortunes.

Yet when the stars came out behind the pines he thought about the girls at the ranch-house and pondered Rhoda's tale. Denis had met her, and Kate, since their fishing excursion, and although he had not planned to do so, it looked as if the meetings were not altogether by chance—Denis stopped there. He must not be ridiculous; his drawbacks were marked, and Rhoda was not at all a fool. Sometimes, in fact, he sensed a calculating shrewdness. But she had charm; the sort of charm that carried one away.

The queer thing was, he did not want to think about Rhoda. Miss Marvin was another type, and when he met Kate it certainly was by chance. One knew her proud, sometimes she was openly contemptuous, and she carried herself with imperious grace. Denis did not see her stooping to shabbiness. Kate was fine, straight stuff—

Anyhow, he was ridiculous. He had nothing to do with Miss Marvin, or Miss Staines, and he had undertaken to guard Stoddart's flock. Well, the sheep were quiet and nothing indicated that wolves were about. Denis rested his back against the wall and went to sleep.

Some time afterwards he looked up. A pine-branch gently shook and when he touched his blanket the dew was cold on the wool. The flock moved about the corral, as if they were disturbed; and then a hoarse, wailing note pierced the gloom. Denis had heard a wolf howl before; but when another, some distance off, replied he set his mouth. The brutes were signaling. They had scented the sheep, and Stoddart declared that when they hunted a deer the pack worked by plan. Flankers blocked the ravines by which the victim might escape, and, as a rule, the hunt ended in a blind alley where the deer could not use its speed.

The choppers said the wolves were afraid of man, but when the ominous call echoed in the rocks and Denis heard the sheep press close, to feel the Winchester across his knees was some comfort. The ax Stoddart had sharpened rested against the wall a yard or two off.

Denis remembered a gruesome tale. The wolves of the Pacific Slope were, it seemed, less bold than their relations in North Ontario. A trapper, left behind one winter evening by his companion when his snowshoe broke, did not reach the logging camp for which they steered, and a party went back along the other's trail. Where the trail stopped by a frozen lake they found stained and trampled snow, an ax with a crusted blade, and torn rags and fur. Denis refused to recall the particulars; but three timber-wolves' skulls were cleanly split— He was not going to dwell on the story.

The disturbing noise got farther off and stopped. The sheep were quiet and the night was rather cold. Denis had not expected to sleep again, but he had been at work for ten or twelve hours and drowsiness conquered. He wakened suddenly, and shivered, but somehow he imagined the cold had not roused him. All was quiet and he smelt the sheep; their soft woolly bodies brushed the stones behind him, and he knew the flock was huddled compactly against the wall. Since he heard nothing, he wondered why they were afraid.

After a few moments a dry stick cracked. On the other side of the corral something pushed through the brush. A wolf would not face a man? If the animal behind the stones had got his scent, it was not daunted much. Anyhow, it advanced, and he thought it began to follow the wall.

Denis jumped up. A light wind touched the cedar-sprays, and since it blew across the fold, the animal had scented him, but it did not stop. Its advance was slow and somehow ponderous; a wolf was light and agile like a dog. Denis looked about and frankly considered his retreat.

A few yards off, the rocks went down steeply and a big fir had at some time fallen against the slope. Its branches were broken and ragged ends stuck out from the tangle. A short distance in front, the corner of the wall cut Denis's view. His rifle commanded the spot, and although his skin was wet by sweat, he braced up. He was not going; he had engaged to guard the sheep.

A very large, indistinct object came round the corner. Its gait was rocking and awkward, but, so to speak, deliberate. Denis knew it for a bear, and he knew it looked for him. He had not long since disturbed a little black bear feeding on the swamp cabbage, and the shy creature plunged into the brush. The huge brute in front was another sort.

There was no use in running. He ought to have gone before, and in the woods the bear could beat his speed. Besides, his knees were slack. The range, however, was short, and, trying for steadiness, he threw the rifle to his shoulder. Twice the trigger gave, the barrel jerked, and thin smoke blew across his eyes. He knew the heavy bullets had gone where he aimed; but the bear did not stop. Then the striking-bolt jarred with a faint metallic clang and the cartridge did not explode. Denis savagely jerked another into its place, but the barrel was steady and there was no report.

Something had jammed, and throwing down the rifle, he jumped for the ax. The bear was but two or three yards off; it advanced upon him upright, balanced on its hind legs like a man. Behind him the ground was broken and the rocks went down. Somehow he must stop the brute.

The ax-haft was long and curved, and Denis's body, bending from the waist, followed its sweep. Instinctively he knew where the swing must stop, and when the keen blade jarred he threw himself back. The shaft was torn from his hands and the bear lurched forward. Denis's foot got no support, and plunging down the bank, he crashed into the tree.

A broken branch pierced his coat and for a moment held him fast. He struggled furiously, and when the cloth tore, struck another branch. The rotten wood smashed, and he plunged down into the tangle behind the slanted trunk. His head struck a rock, he rolled through cracking underbrush and fern, and for some time knew nothing more.

When Denis dully looked up day had broken. He was cold, but his hat was gone, and his head hurt. He touched it cautiously and saw his hand was red. Then he began to think his shoulder hurt worse; anyhow, his arm was horribly stiff, and his torn sleeve was wet with blood. The branch that pierced his coat had, no doubt, ripped his flesh. He got up awkwardly and a fresh trickle ran down his chilled skin.

Although he was dizzy, he could keep his feet, and the bear was not about. Since the brute had not followed him, it had perhaps had enough. His rifle was broken, and to get away as soon as possible was obviously the proper plan. Denis set his mouth and went unsteadily downhill.

# X

## KATE'S PATIENT

AT the top of the steep slope to the ford Denis leaned against a tree. He was very cold and the river was fed by melted snow. If he got across he must climb the rocks on the other side, and he shrank from the effort. His legs were not steady and his head swam. He might, however, make the Marvin ranch and somebody would ferry him across to Stoddart's. In the meantime, he must rest, and he sat down in the dead pine needles. Then the trees seemed to reel about and suddenly got indistinct—

Somebody spoke, and Denis awkwardly lifted his head. The sun had pierced the wood and yellow splashes flickered on the trunks. A yard or two off, Kate Marvin stood in the tall fern. Denis thought her look was pitiful, but her face was shadowy and began to melt. He felt he must not let her go and he tried to get up. Kate gently pushed him back.

“You mustn't move,” she said, and vanished.

Denis waited. He knew Kate would not desert him, and in a few moments she was back. She carried a bent strip of bark, like a little trough, and splashed some water on his face. Then she gave him the bark, stopping one end with her hand.

“Drink it,” she ordered.

The cold water steadied Denis, and with something of an effort he got on his feet.

“Thank you. I must try to reach Stoddart's. Perhaps your hired man would paddle me across.”

“If you are better, I will help you to our house. But how did you get hurt?”

“I fell down the rocks and into a dead tree. A sharp branch went through my coat and I expect it cut my arm. Then I suppose I knocked my head.”



Kate thought it rather obvious. His hair was crusted and his clothes were stained by blood. She took his arm and when he feebly objected, she smiled.

“You mustn’t be independent. I am nearly as strong as you.”

Denis saw there was no use in disputing. Miss Marvin meant to be firm, and when they started he knew she did not boast. On the sharp stones she balanced like a mountaineer, she steadied him where the fir roots crawled in the treacherous gravel, and when he faltered her touch gave him fresh confidence. In his weakness, he pictured her triumphantly strong and beautiful, but compassionate. At length, however, he stumbled and sat down in the moss at the bottom of a tree.

“If you don’t mind, I’d like to rest for a minute or two,” he said in an apologetic voice. “You are very kind, and although I’m ashamed to bother you, I was lucky when you arrived.”

“Sometimes in the morning I climb the hill. Before the sun gets hot all is wonderfully fresh and the balsams smell— Perhaps we went too fast, but your cuts ought to be bandaged as soon as possible. Were you in the woods all night?”

“I was sheep-guard,” Denis replied with a frown. “Now I think about it, my watching the flock was not much use— All I did was to break Stoddart’s rifle and fall down the rocks. Still, you see, the bear was at the top, and the cartridges were duds.”

Kate gave him a searching glance. It looked as if he had been afraid where no danger was, and had not stopped to guard his flock. She had thought him harder stuff.

“The small black bear is not a savage animal and, as a rule, will not venture where it scents a man.”

“Then perhaps the bear I met was not black,” Denis rejoined. “It certainly was not small, and it carried two bullets as if it was not hurt—”

He tried to brace up. It looked as if Miss Marvin doubted him; he must persuade her his statement was accurate. The trouble was, he was queerly slack and his brain did not work.

Kate noted his disturbance. She did not want to think his nerve had gone and he had shot at large, and then, because his hand shook, had jammed the magazine. Yet she did not see another explanation. She ought not to bother him, but she felt she must know.

“Were you near enough to see the animal properly?”

"I think I was about two yards off," Denis replied. "Until I'd fired two shots, the magazine worked, and I knew I had not missed. When you hold a rifle straight, you do know— Then I heard the striker click, but the cartridge did not explode—"

Kate stopped him. His tale was not plausible, but his queer hurt look moved her. After all, he was fresh to the woods and perhaps it was not strange that his imagination had carried him away. A black bear certainly would not advance upon a man who used a rifle, and the savage grizzlies haunted the high lonely rocks. Yet somehow she was willing to be persuaded he did not exaggerate, and Wilmslow, at the Crossing ranch, talked about a cinnamon. A cinnamon bear was a dangerous brute.

"Stoddart has lost some sheep?" she said.

"Eight or nine; some not long since. He reckoned the wolves the thieves."

"When your rifle jammed, you jumped for the dead tree?"

"I didn't consciously jump," said Denis in a dull voice. "When I grabbed the ax, I knew I mustn't swing too far, and at the end of the stroke I tried to stop—I meant to recover and I suppose I swung back—anyhow, next moment I was plunging down the rocks—"

He frowned. He did not see why Miss Marvin questioned him, but he hoped she was satisfied. Then he knew she was satisfied. A touch of color stained her skin and for a moment her glance was embarrassed.

"The bear was not a black bear," she said. "We will talk about it again. In the meantime, we must get you to the ranch."

She gave Denis her hand and they set off. He imagined he leaned against her; sometimes his head swam and he did not see where they went, but Kate supported him nobly, and at length they reached the clearing. A man threw down his ax and ran to help, and in a few minutes Kate and he steadied Denis up the veranda steps.

Marvin heard the noise and went to the door, but when he saw the group he stopped. Denis's hair was matted by dust and blood, his face was pinched, and now his boyish look had vanished he was strangely like the other Aylward who was once Marvin's friend. Marvin pictured Tom, battered by the rocks, in the savage flood— Moreover, Kate's white clothes were marked by fresh red stains. The thing was ominous, but Marvin dared not dwell upon it, and he went to help.

They carried Denis to a couch in the big room, bandaged his head, and cut his coat from his arm. Men hurt in the woods had been carried to the ranch before, and Mrs. Marvin was capable and ready. When she bathed the torn flesh she turned to the hired man.

“A branch might make a ragged gash; but there are two or three.”

“That’s so,” agreed the chopper. “It was not a branch, ma’am. *Claws*, I guess.”

Denis looked up languidly, but Kate had turned her head and the others did not interest him. Besides, their ministrations hurt. He refused to go to bed; as soon as he was a little steadier he must get back to Stoddart’s. Mrs. Marvin saw he was resolved, and when she had given him a hot drink she signaled the others and left him alone. The room was cool and quiet and Denis was soon asleep.

After a time, the throbbing cuts disturbed him and he was conscious that somebody was about. Turning his head awkwardly, he saw Miss Staines in Mrs. Marvin’s rocking-chair.

“I tried to be very quiet,” she said. “When the others carried you up the steps I got a shock, but all I could do was to keep out of their way. I haven’t Kate’s steadiness and nerve; she is very capable and I am afraid I am not. All the same, I thought I might steal in and see if you wanted anything when you woke.”

Denis conquered his disappointment. Rhoda was a good sort, although she was not like Kate.

“You are kind, but although my arrival was rather theatrical, I’m not yet done for. In fact, I’m going to get up. For Miss Marvin to find her patient on the veranda would be something of a joke, and I believe I can make it—”

He threw off the blanket, and getting up, balanced unsteadily, but when Rhoda went to help he waved her back. She was soft and attractive, and if he put his arm around her, he knew she would not be jarred. All the same, to be supported by an attractive girl was risky. In fact, after the queer emotions Kate had excited in the morning, the proper plan was to return to Stoddart’s and get on with his chopping. For some time he must concentrate on his occupation; to indulge in romantic dreams would but unsettle him.

“You might perhaps carry the blanket,” he said, and started cautiously for the door.

Although he bumped against the post, he reached the step and he gave Rhoda a triumphant smile.

“Got there! Somebody remarked that a woodsman needs plated legs. When you go on sheep-guard, I rather think you need a plated head.”

Rhoda fetched him an easy-chair and fixed the blanket; but she put her chair a little behind his. If he wanted to see her, he must turn. She wondered whether he would use the slight effort. In front, blue shadows trailed across the lake. A warm wind swept the shady veranda and the pine-branches tossed. For a few minutes Denis was satisfied to rest, and Rhoda’s mouth got rather hard.

She had sensed his disappointment; he had thought to see Kate. He was a handsome, athletic young fellow and she liked his careless humor; but she had thought that was all. Rhoda frankly admitted that she was something of an adventuress. If she could not get a good post in Canada, she must find a husband who could properly support her. Denis, of course, could not, and all she had wanted was his society when the ranch was dull.

Yet, when he looked up and frowned not long since, she had felt a jealous pang. Kate had much, but if she was not satisfied and wanted Denis Aylward, she must fight for him. Rhoda knew her charm, but Kate’s sincerity and pride were embarrassments. She began to talk in a quiet voice, and Denis turned and rather languidly played up.

After some time Kate came from the house. She was behind the others, and for a moment she stopped and knitted her brows. Since she had been anxious about Denis, she thought her annoyance justified. He had turned, in order to face Rhoda, and so far as Kate could see, the awkward pose did not bother him. He talked in a languid, humorous voice and Rhoda smiled. She leaned forward, as if to be nearer Denis, and her look was gently sympathetic. With the sparkling lake and dark pines for a background, the picture had perhaps some charm, but Kate was scornful.

“We thought you asleep,” she said to Denis. “How did you get across the floor?”

Rhoda turned, rather quickly, and Kate imagined her speed implied something like conscious guilt. Denis smiled.

“Nobody helped. I went on my own feet. Mrs. Marvin is a first-class doctor; but since I must get back to Stoddart’s, I was glad to know I could crawl about.”

“You cannot start until morning.”

"It's awkward," said Denis. "You see, I'd like to stay, but Rob cannot use his leg, and I expect he's anxious about his flock. The trouble is, I cannot give him much comfort, because I don't yet know if the bear robbed the fold."

"You soon will know," Kate rejoined, rather dryly.

A man crossed the clearing. He carried an ax, and a bulky pack was fastened behind his shoulders. Since he faced the veranda, the greater part of his load was hidden, but it looked as if he carried some weight. At the bottom of the steps he threw down his pack, and going up, gave Denis a friendly grin.

"For a Cheechacko you have surely got some gall."

"What about the sheep?" Denis asked.

"They're all right. The bear was dead."

"A black bear?"

"Black bear nothing!" exclaimed the hired man. "A cinnamon most as big as an ox. I sweated some packing home his pelt."

He sat down on the boards and rolled a cigarette. At a bush ranch a chopper is one of the household, and Marvin's man liked an audience. Denis saw Marvin himself at the door, but he did not join the group. Kate was rather plainly interested.

"Looks as if you waited for the brute," the fellow resumed. "I followed his trail from the corner; you were in the dip behind the wall, and I reckon you shot straight. You plugged him twice before you put him out with the ax."

"You stopped a cinnamon with an ax?" Marvin said to Denis.

"Sure he did," the hired man replied. "The bear's shoulder was cut to the bone."

"I'd first got off two shots and knew they did not miss," Denis remarked with some embarrassment.

"Three shells were on the rocks," said the chopper. "There's another thing; your rifle isn't broke. If you pull evenly, she pumps in the shells."

Denis was puzzled, but he began to see a light.

"Now I think about it, when I experimented at Stoddart's, I probably shoved back an empty shell into the magazine. I hadn't used an American

rifle, and I wanted to try the pull-off and the ejector. Rob, you know, is careful about his ammunition. It looks as if I had pushed in two good cartridges in front of the dud.”

“You have got it!” the chopper agreed. “Well, I’ll go along and peg out the hide, but a Cheechacko’s luck is queer. A trapper wouldn’t find a Cinnamon in this belt of country if he hunted for a month.”

“I hope I shan’t find another,” said Denis, smiling.

Marvin and the man went off and Denis began to talk. His sleep had helped him to conquer his languidness, and he imagined Rhoda had observed his embarrassment, for she played up. On the whole, Kate was quiet, and Denis wondered whether she weighed the hired man’s tale. Well, he had admitted he was not a first-class sheep-guard; but after all a woodsman thought his stopping the cinnamon something of an exploit.

He waited at the ranch for supper; and then, although Mrs. Marvin protested, got the hired man to ferry him across to Stoddart’s.

## XI

# DENIS COOKS SUPPER

THE evening was hot and Marvin in an easy-chair smoked his pipe and studied the *Colonist*. In the room across the veranda, Miss Staines played the piano Marvin had hauled over the mountain trail for his daughter's use. For its light weight, the piano was the best a Vancouver store could supply, and Rhoda's touch was cultivated.

Marvin did not know much about music. He liked straight melody, and since Miss Staines knew he was on the veranda, her playing an air from the *Tales of Hoffmann* was typical. The *barcarolle* harmonized with the murmur of the pines and the languid ripples' splash. Mrs. Marvin occupied herself with some sewing, but by and by she said:

"The girl's a real clever musician."

"That's so," Marvin agreed. "She doesn't stop at music; Rhoda's pretty smart all round. Anyhow, she's a useful pal for Kate, and we need bright young folks to wake us up. So long as she is happy, you better keep her at the ranch."

Mrs. Marvin pondered. She was getting fat, and as a rule was marked by a sort of motherly kindness and good-humored calm, but her brain was keen. On the whole, she approved her husband's plan, although she saw some drawbacks. However, she wanted to talk about something else.

"You reckoned you were going to be happy when Kate was home," she said. "Well, now the girls are here, the house is another house; but I feel you're not content."

"If I'm not, it has nothing to do with Kate and Rhoda."

Mrs. Marvin refused to be baffled. Jake had admitted something and, for the most part, she got where she wanted to go. Now she thought she would risk a direct advance.

"Tom was at Stoddart's. I expect he asked for Aylward?"

“The young fellow was chopping. That’s all I know.”

“You are queer, Jake,” Mrs. Marvin commented. “Denis is your partner’s nephew, but when he was hurt and I wanted to nurse him, you kind of hustled him off. Anyway, he saw you didn’t want him to stay. He would not have bothered you, and I like the boy.”

Marvin gave her a dry smile. “Since you know why I don’t want him, you are certainly obstinate. So far as I can see, Denis is all right; the trouble is, he is Tom Aylward’s nephew, and somehow his coming to us was ominous. Well, I guess you reckoned you’d force me to talk about it—When I was glad to have Kate home, he brought back the gloom I’d thought was going. Perhaps I am queer, but I’ve carried an awkward load, and I get tired. Maybe you think I exaggerate? It’s possible, Hannah; but Denis Aylward stands for all I’ve tried to forget.”

“It’s done with; there’s no use in brooding. Tom was drowned because he took too steep a chance and the flood came down before he knew. He ought to have started sooner. You couldn’t help it.”

Marvin went to the rails and looked across the lake. He did not want his wife to observe him. Hannah’s stanchness hurt; she did not know all and he dared not enlighten her. By and by he turned.

“Some things are never done with; but let’s be practical. The boy is the sort women like. You like him. Suppose he and Kate—?”

“Well?” said Mrs. Marvin, quietly.

“Kate has beauty and talent. If she’s ambitious, she could make a first-class marriage. If she likes the woods, why the ranch is hers, and she would run it like a man. Well, what has Denis Aylward got? Some Old Country culture that won’t help him much. He has no use for business, he knows nothing about land-clearing, and he cannot buy a ranch. You find his sort loading up the cars on Vancouver wharf.”

“He’s white,” said Mrs. Marvin. “Kate is rich. But you’re not through, Jake. I haven’t got all your argument.”

Marvin moodily crossed the floor and when he stopped his look was grim.

“You are going to get it! Some folks imagined I was not keen to save my partner, and some hinted I put him out. I wanted his money; I had not played straight and dared not face a reckoning. *You* know Tom’s relations got every



cent that was his and I ordered the accountant to value his interest at the top —”

“I do know,” said Mrs. Marvin. “They were satisfied, and the boy allows that you were just.”

“All the same, the tale will stick to me as long as I live. The d—— crooks I broke will not let it go. They whisper at their clubs and the Boards of Trade; but my fool lawyer has not yet hauled one to court.”

“Then you have got a lawyer watching?” said Mrs. Marvin in surprise.

“That is so,” said Marvin, and clenched his fist. “Soon as he gets a plain statement to go on, we fight, and if I put up all I’ve got, I’ll smash the slandering brute. In the meantime, there’s no use in storming. Here’s the trouble— Suppose Aylward married Kate, and then found out folks thought I’d killed his relation? If she heard the tale and he did not, the thing might be worse. I could not stand for Tom Aylward’s haunting her, as I feel he has haunted me. When Kate steadied the young fellow up the steps, it looked as if his uncle’s blood was on her dress.”

Mrs. Marvin shivered. She was not superstitious, but sometimes her husband’s moody fancies frightened her.

“You are surely foolish, Jake. It’s long since, and most all the folks who slandered you are gone. Kate and Denis will not hear the tale, and if he’s taken a shine to one of the girls, it is Rhoda Staines. You don’t need to worry and I’m not going to.”

“Oh, well,” said Marvin, as if he indulged her. “Where is Kate?”

“She went fishing a while since. Perhaps she means to wait for sundown,” Mrs. Marvin replied tranquilly.

Marvin went off and she pondered. Jake was queer, and since Denis came his queerness had got worse. Besides, he exaggerated; people forgot, and since the lawyer had not spotted his calumniators, Mrs. Marvin doubted if any were yet about. Well, Jake had known trouble, and although he had conquered, she knew the fight was hard. The lines on his face were not all the marks he carried.

She began to speculate about Denis Aylward. She liked the young fellow and knew he was not a philanderer. Sometimes he met the girls, but if he was attracted, Mrs. Marvin thought Rhoda the attraction. Rhoda was his sort and when he was at the ranch had used her charm. Kate had, no doubt, remarked it, but she did not bother, and that was something.

Mrs. Marvin went to the steps and her glance searched the lake. Ripples sparkled in the sun; the pines' reflection trembled in the calm belt under the hill. That was all; but Kate had launched her canoe two or three hours since and ought to be back. Where was she?

Kate was at the Stoddart ranch. She had gone fishing, but the sun was bright and the trout would not rise. Kate put up her rod, and when the canoe drifted by a point, heard an ax in the woods. The stroke was uneven, and Kate smiled. She knew Denis used the ax. Perhaps she ought to ask if he were now all right; anyhow, the trout were not feeding, and she steered for the beach.

A small tree crashed and Denis rubbed his wet hands on his overalls and examined his long boots. He had thought to see a cut, but since he did not, he pulled out his pipe and studied the trunk's ragged end.

"The blighted thing looks as if it was *bitten* off!" he said.

Somebody laughed, and he saw Kate in the shadow under a big hemlock.

"I think not; a beaver's teeth are sharp. What about your ax?"

Denis held up the tool and indicated the notched edge.

"British Columbian rocks are ubiquitous and magnetic. They attract steel, but so long as I do not, I mustn't grumble. Rob, however, will no doubt be annoyed. To grind down a notch like that will occupy him for half an hour.

"In the meantime, you need not put up your pipe."

"One is not forced to smoke, and to work with Rob is a good tobacco cure. To-day he's down the lake at Wilmslow's, and I thought I'd slack, and perhaps get on with a small undertaking I doubt if he'd approve."

Kate sat down. Although the bandage was yet round Denis's head and a bulge on his blue shirt indicated another on his arm, his eyes sparkled and his laugh was joyous.

"What are you going to do with the tree?" she asked.

"The trunk is straight, and the fork is at the proper spot to carry a ridge-pole."

"Then, do you mean to build a house?"

"I thought I might mend Stoddart's, before he gets back."

"But why?"

Denis sat down and rubbed his ax.

“The homestead ridge-pole has begun to sag and Rob’s bed is under the weakest spot. If the beam and roof came down when he was asleep, it might be awkward. Well, the old fellow’s a consistent Presbyterian. When it’s time for him to start West he’s ready to take the road, but until he gets the call, there’s no use in bothering. However, I’d be sorry to see him knocked out, and my bed is not far from the beam. In the circumstances, I thought I’d fix a prop.”

“Then, Rob’s philosophy does not satisfy you?”

“I am young,” said Denis. “Youth questions all and must be convinced. For us the past is gone; we push forward, perhaps towards a clearer light than the theologians saw at Geneva three hundred years since. In the meantime, to speculate about it will not help me trim the log.”

He began to chop and Kate remarked his awkwardness. She wondered whether his arm hurt or if her amused glance embarrassed him. By and by the ax rebounded from a branch and sank into another an inch from his leg. Denis frowned.

“It’s by no means the nearest,” he observed.

Kate got up. “Perhaps I ought to go. When one is engaged in an awkward job one doesn’t like to be watched.”

“So long as you come back—” said Denis. “You see, I am modest, and there’s another thing. When you chop, the rule is to keep your eye on the notch; but, in some circumstances it’s rather difficult.”

Kate went off and wondered whether the difficulty was that she was in the picture. Denis seemed to imply something like that, but she was not annoyed. At all events, he reckoned on her coming back and she might perhaps indulge him. After a time cowbells chimed, and pushing through the underbrush, she saw Denis. He carried a large bundle of hay and a rope, and two big red oxen docilely followed. One pushed its mouth into the hay, and Denis rubbing the animal’s brawny neck, freed the rope from the other’s horns. Then he threw down his load and gave Kate a smile.

“Oats are a useful bait, but since Buck and Bright rose at once, I expect my luck was good. I’ve known Rob hunt them for three or four hours. A tractor’s advantage is, it does not roam about the woods.”

“When his clearing is small, a rancher cannot be extravagant with his hay. Now you have caught your oxen, will you allow them to eat it all?”

“A plow ox is not remarkably dull, and if you want him to trust you, you mustn’t cheat. Besides, to cheat an animal is shabby. Well, since the hay, and my time, are Stoddart’s, I’ll take a rest and let Bright get a meal.”

“Where it’s possible, we use a tractor, and Father is satisfied it pays; but he cannot persuade Stoddart to experiment.”

Denis’s eyes twinkled. “Rob has not much use for modern machines. They have neither soul nor conscience, and a tractor’s an ill, *camsteary* brute that will not go when you want! Well, perhaps he exaggerates; but, you see, he’s old.”

“When one gets old, the golden days are the days that are gone.”

“Ours are in front,” said Denis. “Yet when we are as old as Stoddart we may think him justified—”

He stopped and for a moment surveyed the landscape. In the foreground the lake shone; on the other side, the pines, in long melting rows, rolled across a broad peninsula. Their tops were not even, and where the sun struck, some stood out from the somber mass like high, fretted spires. Farther back, woods and rocks went up to the glimmering snow.

“If I get rich and fat, to remember I once drove an ox-team in the woods will be something,” he resumed. “I’ll dream about summer on the Pacific Slope. By George! it’s beautiful—”

Kate smiled. His boyish enthusiasm moved her, but she did not see him getting fat. He was hard and athletic and, for all his bandaged head, she thought he stood for triumphant youth. Moreover, for the most part, the woods whose beauty thrilled him were hers.

“The hay is gone. Are you not going to yoke your team?” she said presently.

Denis called the oxen, and lifted the hollowed beam to their muscular necks. They allowed him to fix the wooden bows, and Kate noted their quietness. The brawny animals trusted their master. Then he hooked a chain to the log, and they hauled their load lightly through the snapping brush.

In front of the homestead Denis let them go, and putting down rollers, moved the trunk inside. To get it on end was another thing, and he went for a tackle Stoddart used for lifting stumps.

“It begins to look as if I was rash,” he said. “To lift the prop is two men’s job, and if I put much strain on the tackle, I’ll pull the roof-tree down. Yet if the thing is to be fixed, it must be fixed before Rob comes back.”

"There is a way out, and you have not much ground to be independent," said Kate. "Fasten your tackle to the ridge; I'll help you raise the prop."

Denis hesitated, but she gave him an impatient glance.

"We won't pretend. I am a rancher's daughter. Let's get to work."

Denis strained and sweated. So far as it was possible, he must bear the load, but Kate was cool and quick, and since she knew much about handling logs, he took her orders. At length, they drove the prop firmly under the beam, and she looked at the watch on her wrist.

Effort had brought the blood to her skin, but that was all and the mossy log had not marked her light summer dress. Although Kate had helped like a man, it did not look as if she had borne much strain, and Denis thought she had not much cause to use a vanity-bag.

"I cannot be back for supper," she said.

"In Canada the rule seems to be, if you don't arrive at the proper time, you must go without. Well, I'm not perhaps a first-class cook, but when I really concentrate, I can please old Rob, and since I know your pluck, I hope you'll stop."

Kate agreed, and Denis cut potatoes, sliced bacon, and mixed flour. Sometimes she gave him useful instructions, and sometimes he heard a trill of frank laughter. By contrast with the sunshine, the house was dark, but opposite the door a bright beam touched the wall and Kate's light dress cut the dusky background. Denis knew himself awkward, but Kate was not; he felt she harmonized as if the homestead were hers. Yet she knew London and Paris, and he saw her, for example, dining at the Frontenac in Quebec.

The supper was better than he had thought. At all events, Kate did not seem to be fastidious, and when he put up the plates she gave him a smile.

"I don't think you boasted. On the whole, Stoddart ought to be pleased."

"You are kind. I expect you resolved you would not let me down. Well, I hope your politeness did not cost you much."

"Modesty is attractive. In Canada, the drawback is, as a rule it does not pay," said Kate. "However, the sun is getting low, and I must start."

She went off, and when her canoe vanished behind a point Denis smoked his pipe. Somehow Kate braced him; one sensed her force and confidence. She had inherited much from Marvin, who had cleared the big ranch. She was cultivated, but for all her sophisticated charm, she could handle a log

like a lumberman. But to muse about Kate Marvin would lead him nowhere; and he ought, as far as possible, to rub down the notch in Stoddart's ax.

## XII

# SNOW-WATER

FOR two or three weeks fierce sunshine scorched the pines. In the valley the heat was tropical, and the logs strewn about the slashing cracked. Pungent resinous smells floated across the woods; in the clearing the red soil crumbled to dust and the sun sucked the color from the flagging oats.

One no longer heard the blue grouse drum, and the woodpeckers' tapping stopped. The woods were very quiet, and only where the shade was thick was labor possible. Stoddart, however, did not relax much, and when he and Denis were not pulling a cross-cut saw through the gummy trunks they chopped fir-roots at the bottom of a deep ditch.

Denis thought his employer was not logical. Rob had already broken all the ground he could cultivate; he had not a relation to inherit the reward for his toil, and when advancing age checked his activity the forest would creep back. Yet, so long as he could use the ax, he drove his clearing farther into the shade. The pioneers could not rest. Labor was as much a habit as a conscious effort for something to be got. In fact, Rob had all he wanted, and Denis imagined he would sooner see his cattle fat than be rich.

On the whole, Denis was content at Stoddart's, but a strange restlessness began to bother him. All he knew of Canada was the ranch; he was young, and he wanted to know more. Besides, when he was a boy his uncle was his hero, and he wanted to see the settlement where Marvin and the other put up their sign. Then perhaps he ought to see the canyon.

He said something like that to Stoddart when, one scorching afternoon, they rested for a few minutes in the shade, and Rob seemed to meditate.

"When your hair's as white as mine, ye'll be willing to let a' that's done with bide; but if ye're resolved to go, I suppose ye must. Anyway, the man was your kin—"

Denis had remarked that sometimes the Scots are oracular, and although he was puzzled, he said a week would be enough, and went on with his

digging. When he stopped, his overalls were splashed with mud, and red dust stuck to his skin. The evening was very hot and he went for a swim.

The head of the lake curved to the river-mouth, and the strongest current followed the hollow bank. On the other side, where Denis was, the stream hardly touched the salient curve, and in the slack shallow eddies the water was warm. Denis plunged in, and with swinging left arm, plowed across the broken shadows. But for a second or two between the strokes, his eyes were covered, and when at length he looked about he saw he was not where he thought.

Muddy-green, revolving swirls stained the water, battered branches floated by, and along the other bank the current foamed across the stones. Moreover, in the green eddies the water was very cold. The hot sun had melted the snow-fields and the river was coming down. Denis knew that where a channel bends the main stream keeps the entrant curve. It went very fast, and while he floated he began to drift across. Then he saw a big dead pine swing round a point and slide down a rippling belt into the wide lake. Since he did not want to go that way, he began to swim.

His side-stroke was powerful, but when he lifted his head he was a hundred yards downstream and farther from the bank; besides, the cold cramped his muscles and cut his breath. Across a revolving turmoil, he saw the crystal slack. It looked as if the pines went upstream, ominously fast.

Denis used the crawl-stroke and did not see where he went; he knew he was tossed about and sometimes pulled under. A floating branch struck him, but he dared not break stroke in order to look about. When he reached the slack he would know, and he must get there as soon as possible. For a few minutes, all of which he was conscious was his labored breathing and his measured swing.

Then the cramping cold vanished and he saw white stones shine five or six feet below. The eddies were smooth and transparent; he had reached the slack. Swimming easily, he landed on the driftwood and went for his clothes. When he was dressed he lay in the hot stones and lighted his pipe. His adventure had not disturbed him, but perhaps it was lucky he swam rather well; and while he languidly enjoyed the reaction a broken pine floated by.

The trunk swung obliquely across to the other side, and when it plunged into the stream along the hollow curve its shattered branches thrashed the flood. Where a rock deflected the current it circled, and then lurched ahead and was swept into deep water round the point. Denis was interested, for he had wanted to find out where the log would go. Now he knew, he thought a



strong swimmer could land behind the rock. Jumping up, he started for the ranch.

When the ditch was dug Denis took the settlement trail, and some days afterwards threw down his pack by a lonely river. Prospectors' and lumbermen's trails now pierced the woods that were trackless when Marvin and Aylward made their excursion, and Denis's journey on foot across the hills was not difficult. Since he had studied a letter Marvin had long since written, he was satisfied he had found the proper spot.

A hundred feet below him, a green flood brawled in the gorge. Small pines dotted the precipitous ravine down which his relation and Marvin had climbed, and Denis, listening to the river's turmoil, pictured their savage haste. He saw the cliff under which they had sped to the canoe, and the angry current lapping the gravel and driftwood three or four feet from the rocks. There was the slab Marvin, on the return journey, had reached two or three yards in front. Since the strip of beach was very narrow, Marvin, unless he stopped and turned, could not see the other. Not far off, a rock projected and cut the view. They would not know the flood was upon them until it swirled past the corner. Denis saw the loaded men stop at the awkward pitch; and then the wave broke, and one was gone.

Now he had studied the ground, he knew Marvin's tale was accurate. Weighed at the scene of the tragedy, it was convincing, and Denis got up and strapped on his pack. He was not going to camp by the canyon; for all he knew, the clamorous rapid tossed about his uncle's bones. Since daybreak, he had followed Tom Aylward's trail; but Tom had stopped for good at the bottom of the slab.

Denis's march to the settlement did not bother him much. It was summer in the woods, and after the first two days he was not forced to struggle through fern and tangled brush. A broken trail, and then a miners' road, went down the valley, and he saw the marks of wheels. Fresh clearings began to dot the levels where the river ran, and sometimes the smoke of a blasting-shot curled about the trees.

Yet when Marvin went that way there was not a trail, and Denis speculated about his emotions. Marvin was exhausted and hungry; he was perhaps harrowed by a poignant sense of loss. Somehow Denis was persuaded he had not felt remorse. The fellow was hard stuff, and not the sort to get rattled and think only for himself when the flood came down. One did not see him desert his loaded partner where he might have helped.

All the same, Denis thought the tragedy haunted Marvin. The old fellow had not forgotten, and perhaps it accounted for his strange reserve. Denis knew he was physically like his uncle, and he supposed the likeness disturbed the rancher. After all, Marvin had got him the sort of job he wanted.

Kettering was not the frontier town Tom Aylward's letters pictured. The log shacks were gone, and four wooden church-towers dominated the neat frame houses. An ambitious post-office occupied the corner where the Marvin and Aylward office had stood, and giant poles carried telephone wires across the busy street. In the background, the smoke from a smelter's stacks rolled across the orchards up the valley.

For the most part, the realtor-house's customers were gone, but Denis, inquiring at the store, found one or two who remembered his uncle. They stated that Aylward was a general favorite; a regular fellow, one declared; but when Denis thought about it afterwards, he imagined they kept something back.

He stopped for the night at a large new hotel, and in the evening smoked his pipe on the veranda in front of the house. The boarded floor was wide and between the central pillars steps went down, six or seven feet, to the wooden sidewalk.

When Denis arrived most of the chairs were occupied. People came and loafed about, and went, for a Canadian hotel is a sort of free club where one may ask for the news and talk. Nobody inquires if one is a customer, and citizens whose time is not valuable crowd the rotunda. From the guests' point of view, the custom has some drawbacks, but as a rule Western landlords are resigned.

By and by a man crossed the floor. Denis noted that he slouched and his clothes were shabby, but he was a big, muscular young fellow. Fetching a chair, he sat down by Denis.

"Saw your name in the register, and when you talked to Smithson at the grocery I was waiting to buy some tobacco. Maybe you are Tom Aylward's son?"

"His nephew," said Denis. "Did you know my uncle?"

"I remember him; that's all. Sort of highbrow Englishman, but we hadn't much pick on Tom. Anyhow, I knew his partner, Marvin; a d—— greedy hog."

Denis was not attracted. He sensed the other's truculence, and the fellow's look implied that he expected him to agree.

"Unless you are older than I think, when Marvin was at the settlement you were a boy."

"That's so," said the other. "I'm Julius Snedden's son; the J. T. Snedden real-estate office, and until Marvin put up his shingle, the only realtor shop in town."

Denis began to see a light. Marvin's had gone ahead; the Snedden house had not. Well, if Snedden were like his son, one could account for it.

"I suppose the new office took some of your customers?" he said.

"Marvin took the lot. He broke the old man by a d—— crooked deal. Corralled the business that was going to be mine; and now, when I oughter been a leading citizen, I'm shoveling rock on the smelter-dump."

"I don't see Marvin putting up a crooked deal," Denis rejoined.

"Then you certainly can't see. Do you know the hog?"

"To some extent," said Denis. "I'm at a ranch near his. Marvin, so to speak, is not a mixer. He's hard, perhaps; but I know he's straight."

Snedden looked at him with surprise, and Denis thought his surprise sincere. Then he laughed, a hoarse, malicious laugh.

"Well, I guess anybody could fool an Englishman, but your boosting Marvin surely is some joke! Looks as if you didn't know *he put your uncle out?*"

The blood came to Denis's skin, but the monstrous accusation rather moved him to rage than horror. He knew it frankly ridiculous. Yet the brute was not drunk. Perhaps he wanted to revenge his father's imaginary injury on Marvin's defender. Anyhow, if he meant to force a quarrel, Denis would indulge him.

"Do you imply that Marvin killed his partner?" he asked.

"Now you get it! If nobody has put you wise, it's time you knew——"

Snedden looked about, as if he wanted an audience, and Denis saw the others were interested. Some perhaps were in the town when his uncle and Marvin carried on the real estate business. Control was hard, but before he stopped the cruel slander he must have something to go upon.

“Aylward put up the money,” Snedden resumed. “He sure could talk, and when the boys had a good pay-roll he persuaded them to speculate and took the wad. Marvin laid low, but when he’d got the trade and broken my old man, he hadn’t much use for a partner, and he fixed it for him and Aylward to take a prospecting trip. Well, the woods are lonely and Marvin’s a good shot. I guess he left his partner in the mountains with a bullet-mark in his back.”

“Thomas Aylward was drowned,” said Denis, in a hard, distinct voice, for he wanted all who had heard Snedden to hear his reply. “Marvin did not use his money. He called an accountant and sent to England every dollar my relations were entitled to claim.”

Snedden got up and threw back his chair.

“For a blasted tenderfoot, you have got some gall! The man who calls me a liar must take what’s coming to him.”

“I’ll risk it,” rejoined Denis.

He did not know if he was logical, but for him to conquer the bully might discredit his tale. Although he doubted if he could do so, he meant to try; anyhow, before he was knocked out, he hoped to hurt the other.

“Unless he was forced, a gun-man would not give up the sum he stole from his victim,” he resumed. “Marvin at once reckoned up all he owed and satisfied my relations’ lawyers before they began to inquire. Aylward was carried down the canyon by a flood, and a day or two since I saw the spot. Your tale is deliberately, maliciously false; and it’s plainly absurd.”

He guarded, and got in a straight, left-hand knock. His weight was behind the blow, but Snedden did not stop. They grappled, and when they crashed against a chair the other’s boot was hooked behind Denis’s leg. Denis saw he must not be scrupulous; the brute was not going to fight by rule. When two or three chairs had gone over, he broke away and knocked his antagonist across the floor. Snedden came back, his head low like a battering-ram. In order to get his arms round Denis’s body he was willing to take some punishment, and when they locked he used his knees and boots. He was the heavier man, and nobody is engaged on a Canadian ore-dump whose muscles are not good.

Denis began to see his provoking the fight was rash. He knew something about boxing, but in the savage grapple skill and speed were not of much use. Besides, an up-thrust knee is more dangerous than a fist, he was

embarrassed by his clothes, and he knew his unscrupulous antagonist would not be content to knock him out. The fellow meant to disable him for good.

A blow that staggered Snedden gained Denis a moment in which he tore off his coat. When the fight began Snedden had not bothered to pull off his; Denis admitted he ought to follow the brute, but his breath was gone. Besides, he did not see distinctly, for his face was wet with blood.

Snedden came back, and Denis maneuvered for room. He dared not risk a fresh mauling, but he was quick on his feet, and his reach was long. Speed was useful, for Snedden charged like a wounded buffalo. Gasping and bleeding, they circled the veranda while the onlookers pressed back against the posts and walls. Nobody meddled; the fight was not a sporting-club competition, and the young stranger had asked for trouble. Denis glimpsed indistinct faces, and if he sensed any emotion, it was cold surprise. He, so to speak, had lasted longer than the spectators thought, but nobody shouted for his antagonist. However, the brute meant to grapple, and he must concentrate on keeping away.

Their maneuvers carried him level with the steps. Snedden was nearer the opening in the rails; Denis by the wall, doubted if he himself could get away. In the circumstances, he must attack and trust his luck. Snedden saw his object and pushed out his leg. If the Englishman tripped, he had got him, and the fight would soon be over.

Denis did not trip. Snedden was awkwardly balanced, and unless he were quicker than Denis thought, he could not stop the straight, old-fashioned lead. Denis's right foot left the ground; he lunged, arm and body together, on the other leg. His fist reached Snedden's jaw; the fellow reeled and vanished down the steps. Denis sat down, and audience and veranda revolved. After a few moments, somebody gave him his coat.

"Bill's gone," said the other. "Looks as if he reckoned you might get after him. All the same, if you're stopping in town, you better watch out, particularly when it's dark."

"Thanks! I expect to be off in the morning," said Denis, and turned to the others. "You perhaps heard Mr. Snedden's tale, and I hope you noted my reply. Since I am Thomas Aylward's nephew, you can rely on its accuracy. Now will somebody direct me to a chemist's?"

"The drugstore's two or three blocks off," said one. "You have got some sand, young fellow, and I'll come along."

He helped Denis down the steps, but the chemist knew something about treating battered men, and Denis got back to the hotel without assistance. In the morning he started for the lake, and when he arrived he saw that he must give Stoddart his confidence.

“I expect you knew the tale?” he concluded.

“Ye may mind I was not keen for ye to gang; but I’m thinking my neighbor does not suspect I ken.”

“Nothing of it is true,” said Denis. “The thing’s unthinkable!”

“Just that!” agreed Stoddart. “Marvin’s obstinate; when he’s crossed he’s *thrawn*— Maybe they disputed in the woods and sometimes it bothers him. But sure as deith, he never lifted hand to your uncle’s hurt!”

Denis let it go. The old fellow knew his neighbor, and he knew men. Moreover, one could trust him: Rob did not cheat.

## XIII

# KATE PONDER'S

DENIS was laboriously occupied grubbing a large stump. The trunk was six feet high and three feet across, an awkward obstruction to the plow. Other stumps, surrounded by tall fern, dotted the field. The rows were uneven and broken, for Stoddart had removed the largest obstacles until one could drive a furrow that did not curve remarkably.

Denis liked the old fellow's pluck. To clear a ranch was something of a job, and, so far as one could see, the reward was not generous. Yet one must not be discouraged. Sometime one would reap where one had sowed, and the soil a rancher cleared was his. Then since Denis must labor for all he got, he would sooner do so in the woods than in a musty office.

A fir's roots, for the most part, keep the surface, and Denis had chopped all he found on top. Now he sweat in a dark cavern under the trunk, where the soil his efforts loosened showered upon his head. His business was to cut the roots that went down; some were as thick as his leg, and he had not much room to swing the ax.

At length he crawled out, and brushing the mold from his hat and overalls, studied the job. Although he thought the stump was loose, he doubted if the oxen could pull out the mass. He must split it by dynamite, and he began to force an auger into the gummy wood, but he had forgotten to bring some grease and the steel spiral jammed. Denis's hands got sore and his skin got wet. He had sweat for three or four hours, and he imagined a hundred stumps yet encumbered the field— Well, if one began to calculate, one would look for an occupation that was easier than ranching.

He took a stick of giant-powder from a box. The stick was rather like a candle, and when he had pinched a detonator on to a fuse, he kneaded the plastic material round the copper cap. Although the manufacturers claimed their products could be exploded only by a detonator, Denis used some caution, and when he pushed the stuff into the hole he handled it tenderly. Then he lighted the fuse and got behind the largest tree in the neighborhood.

A ringing crash, sharp like a pistol-shot, rolled across the woods; pale flame and thin vapor leaped about the stump, and when the fumes had blown away Denis thought the job was good. The oxen would now be able to pull out the shattered mass. Sitting down in the shade, he began to rub the curved grub-hoe blade, but after a few minutes he turned his head. A stick cracked, and he saw Kate Marvin in an opening between the trunks. He hoped he was not conspicuous, since he did not want her to stop. His overalls needed mending, and he yet carried the marks of the encounter at the settlement hotel. The marks had, rather obviously, not been got by accident, and Kate had arrived at another time when he, so to speak, was something the worse for wear. Then he knew she saw him, for he got a hint of amusement as she advanced.

“I was looking for Stoddart and heard a shot,” she said. “We want his advice about a sick sheep.”

Denis said Rob was building a fence by the house, and Kate sat down.

“Oh, well, the morning is hot and for a few minutes I think I’ll rest in the shade. You took a short holiday. Where were you?”

She thought Denis hesitated; his battered look had already excited her curiosity. When she crossed the lake she had imagined she might meet him, but she would not admit it accounted for her visit to Stoddart’s. Denis, no doubt, knew the hired men’s time was supposed to be more valuable than hers.

“I was in the hills behind Kettering,” he replied. “I expect you know the little town?”

“When we left I was a child and I have not been back,” said Kate in a thoughtful voice. “Perhaps it’s strange, but I have felt that Father does not like Kettering, although he and your uncle began business there.”

“To some extent, it explains my excursion. I was at the canyon,” Denis remarked quietly.

Kate gave him a sympathetic nod, and he hoped she would let it go. He did not want to talk about his adventures, particularly since he saw Kate had not heard the ominous tale. Marvin’s not allowing her to revisit Kettering was justifiable, but Denis did not think it significant. The tale, of course, was false from the beginning. For one thing, Marvin was Kate’s father.

Denis believed his argument logical. Kate was straight and proud; he knew she hated shabbiness. To imagine her a treacherous scoundrel’s



daughter was absurd. Then he was aware that she calmly inspected him. Sometimes when Kate was interested she was imperiously frank.

“It looks as if your holiday was rather strenuous,” she remarked.

Denis was embarrassed, but his mouth curved humorously.

“To some extent, it was so,” he agreed. “There is perhaps not much use in my stating I fell down the rocks?”

“I think not. At all events, the fall did not account for the knocks you got. Then one begins to think your part is protagonist; our phrase is *up against it*. Did you meet another bear?”

“Oh, well,” said Denis, “I suppose I must indulge you. To be baffled is annoying, but I don’t suppose you know much about the sensation.”

“Perhaps I am indulged. It has nothing to do with your supposititiously falling on the rocks.”

“Then, the trouble was, I met a settler; a truculent, offensive bully. Somehow he entangled me in a dispute.”

“To do so was hard?” said Kate. “But perhaps it is not important. What did you dispute about?”

Denis looked up. Kate wanted to know; he rather thought her resolved to know, but he must be firm.

“I’m not really quarrelsome, and all I want is to be left alone. Still one hates to be bullied and the hick did not know where to stop. It’s possible he didn’t like my English accent; some Canadians do not, and he may not have liked my English clothes. They were bought before I was in France, and the Kettering citizens are rather surprisingly up-to-date.”

Kate gave him a searching glance. To be baffled jarred, but for all Denis’s pretended carelessness, she knew him obstinate.

“Then, you are not going to tell me?”

“No,” said Denis, in a quiet voice. “One hates to talk about a ridiculous quarrel, but sometimes one is forced to fight.”

“I suppose that is so; for one’s friends, one’s pride in one’s country, and perhaps for one’s personal honor,” Kate agreed. “But I was at Kettering, and I may know the man. Who was he?”

“Snedden,” said Denis, for Kate’s eyes were on him and he dared not cheat. “Somebody called him Bill.”

“Ah,” said Kate, “he was something of a bully; but I begin to see a light. His father and mine were business rivals and your uncle was a partner in the opposition house. Well, I imagine Snedden was a formidable antagonist?”

Denis smiled. He was not going to help her follow the clue.

“That is so; I expect you have noted that I carry his marks. However, although I had certainly had enough, the dispute ended by Bill’s plunging down the hotel steps.”

“Splendid!” said Kate and got up. “Since I knew Bill Snedden, I expect your quarrel was just, and I admit I like my friends to win. However, I must look for Stoddart.”

“I’d like to help you, but Rob might not approve,” said Denis in an apologetic voice. “You see, a hired man’s business is to stay with his job.”

Kate turned and gave him a queer look.

“You stick to your traditions. Well, frankness has some advantages; but one is not forced to exaggerate— How long do you expect to be a hired man?”

“I don’t know. Sometimes I wonder— Anyhow, until I can honestly state I have doubled the sum I brought to Canada, I must be resigned to take a laborer’s pay. The sum was not large, and I doubt if I am extravagant; but perhaps you have remarked that money melts.”

Although Kate laughed, her laugh struck a sort of commanding note.

“Frugality will not hurt you much, and if you know where you want to go, the Canadian plan is to concentrate on getting there. In the bush, at all events, we do not cultivate your Old Country indifference. Our methods and ambitions are frankly primitive. We hustle and sweat, and when we are baffled we swear; but we hold on and do not stop for obstacles. Well, I expect you see the implication? And I wish you luck!”

She went off, and when Denis began to grub the next stump he smiled. Miss Marvin was bracing; the girls he had known in England since the war used another philosophy. She fired boyish ambitions that he had begun to think out of date. Yet it was perhaps possible one really could get where one resolved to go. Denis pictured the men he knew in France who had made good. When one thought about it, their talents were not extraordinary.

He, however, would sooner picture Kate—fronting him under the big hemlock, a touch of color in her face, and a sparkle in her eyes. Kate was a girl to follow—Denis did not see her led—but she would not take the easy

road, and if one went with her, one's purpose must be honest and one's nerve be firm. Denis frowned and seized his ax. Since he was a hired man, he must not be a romantic fool. He admired Kate Marvin, but that was all. Moreover, he got his pay for grubbing stumps; and he began to chop.

In the evening Marvin, as his habit was, smoked his pipe on the veranda. Since he got breakfast at seven o'clock, he had used brain and muscle, and now he was entitled to relax. Good choppers and tools were expensive; Marvin had no use for the other sort. The ranch was large, but to feed his stock implied effort and careful thought. Then the forest was a stubborn antagonist and he must grimly hold the ground he won. Marvin's ranching must pay. It was a business proposition, and he was a business man.

Marvin's talents were utilitarian. He might perhaps have made his mark at any occupation where the reward was reckoned by dollars, but there he stopped. Although he knew, and had used, men, he was not cultivated; he sprang from rude pioneering stock and his instincts were primitive. To some extent, it explained the jealousy his partner had excited. Marvin had vaguely sensed in Aylward's careless talk a nobler code than his.

Mrs. Marvin occupied her rocking-chair, and by and by Kate came up the steps.

"I have never gone back to Kettering, and I don't think you have done so," she said.

Mrs. Marvin looked up, rather quickly. Kate unconsciously ventured on dangerous ground, and she knew Jake was on his guard.

"I have not," he agreed. "Although I believe the folks are getting ambitious and boast about their town, they're old-time hicks. But you know Montreal, London, and Paris. Why do you want to see the back-block settlement?"

"Oh, well, I was born there. Then at Stoddart's I met Denis Aylward and he has recently come back."

"The young fellow was at Kettering?" said Marvin, sharply. "Why did he go?"

"Since his uncle helped you start the realtor house, I suppose he was interested. I rather think Thomas Aylward was Denis's hero."

For a moment or two Marvin said nothing. His look was inscrutable, but Kate thought him disturbed.

"Well?" he resumed. "Was Denis impressed by the one-horse town?"

"I don't know," said Kate, and added with a smile: "Since he came back rather battered, he had perhaps not much reason to like the Kettering people. I understand Bill Snedden provoked him to a fight on the hotel porch."

Marvin's chair cracked, as if he had conquered an impulse to jump up; but he fronted Kate quietly and his voice was ominously calm.

"Do you know what they fought about?"

"Denis refused to enlighten me. He's modest, you know, but his reserve was rather puzzling; particularly since I think the grounds for the dispute are obvious. When we were at Kettering, Bill was a swaggering tyrant and his father ran the opposition house. Thomas Aylward was, of course, your partner, and Bill, thinking he might bully a tenderfoot, perhaps talked about Aylward in a way that Denis resented. I expect he did not reckon on Denis's throwing him down the steps."

"The boy has some gall," said Marvin, and getting up abruptly, knocked out his pipe on a post.

"Looks as if you had got it," he resumed. "Anyhow, I beat old man Snedden. He was a backwoods hick; the sort that hates to take a check and stuffs his safe with greasy bills. When he was forced to pay for a telephone he reckoned he was broke. Now, some dull folks are honest, but some are not, and Snedden didn't see you can't get far when you start from a crooked deal. If he could steal five dollars, he thought he was smart. Well, the boys got to know the Marvin-Aylward house was straight, and when they left him, Snedden framed up a job on us. Though the trick was a rube's trick, we were embarrassed for money, and he might have put the bluff across—I won't bother you with particulars. Aylward saw the way out, but it cost us nearly all we had. Well, Tom was not greedy and my rule was to leave a competitor who played straight alone; but Snedden was not that sort. We reckoned the brute might get us another time; and I knocked him out."

"You took the proper line, but it had not much to do with Denis Aylward," said Kate, and went off.

A few minutes afterwards she stopped by a white drift-log on the gravel by the lake. Slow ripples splashed languidly against the stones and a light breeze touched the trees. The noise was soothing, but Kate knitted her brows.

Marvin's narrative explained Bill's provoking Denis to fight, but in a way she thought it labored, as if her father felt he must account for the quarrel. Then, when he knew Denis was at Kettering, he was disturbed.

Since Denis's finding out that his uncle and Marvin had broken Snedden was not important, his disturbance was strange.

Moreover, she knew her father was not happy when Denis was at the ranch, although he had no cause to dislike or doubt the young fellow. Her father was keen, and she was persuaded he had noted Denis's modest pluck and humorous sincerity. Kate herself had noted some other attractive qualities.

She blushed and admitted she had sometimes thought she saw an object for Marvin's antagonism. He was ambitious for her, and Denis frankly stated that he was not rich. All the same, when she pondered it coolly, the explanation did not carry much weight. If she loved Denis Aylward and he wanted her, her father knew she would marry him. He, in a sense, had acknowledged the independence she claimed; he knew she had inherited his firmness, and she thought he approved. At all events, his habit was to indulge her.

Well, she did not love Denis, and it looked as if all he wanted was a ranch; but sometimes her imagination painted inviting pictures. For example, she could give Denis a ranch; Kate admitted she liked to be generous. She could help him realize ambitions, which she thought were hers. Progress was not for the crowded cities alone. Canadian cultivation advanced across the wilds and youth must lead. Kate's habit was to lead, but she did not see Denis tamely follow her; she would hate a husband she must push along. They would go forward side by side, equal partners in a splendid adventure.

She pictured Denis fronting the obstacles with joyous carelessness. She had met his sort in the Old Country, and where others stormed they joked. Well, the boys had joked in France, and she saw Denis waiting for the cinnamon and throwing Snedden down the steps.

Kate shrugged impatiently and got up. Denis did not want her and she was satisfied at the ranch. Besides, her father, for some mysterious reason, refused to cultivate the young fellow. He knew something she did not, and since she was not in love with Denis, to humor him and let the puzzle go was the proper line. Kate resolved to do so, but when she started for the house her look was not altogether tranquil and her mouth was tight.

## XIV

# THE PADDLE-SONG

THE scythe-handle slipped and Denis stopped and drove a nail behind the band. The screw that locked the wooden grip was worn, and he imagined Rob had given him the least useful tool. Denis acknowledged he was not an expert mower, and to fix the handle allowed him to straighten his aching back and rest his blistered hands.

They were cutting oats for hay and the sun was very hot. Across the field, Stoddart and another advanced with an easy swing. Their bodies swayed at the same moment and they kept stroke for stroke. The curved blades shone and circled, and one heard the keen edge shear the stalks. Movement and sound were rhythmic, and Denis sensed a sort of economical efficiency. Muscle, shaft, and blade were finely adjusted to their work; the mowers did not waste an effort or an inch of sparkling steel.

The scythe was an ancient tool, but where stumps were numerous it yet beat the automatic harvester. To some extent, it baffled Denis, and his business was to mow about the fern-girdled stumps and in the corners of the fence. Now he had fixed the handle, he had better get on with the job.

Pigeons called across the clearing and the pine-tops murmured in the wind. Denis sweat, and sometimes, when the scythe-point took the soil, he swore. For all that, his job, if he could but master it, was a man's job, and the background for the harvest field was majestically beautiful. He had chosen the forest for his antagonist, and the fight at all events was clean. In the woods one could not cheat, and the tricks man used against man in the cities helped one nowhere. For example, if one could not mow, there was no use in pretending. One's skill was measured by the stuff one cut. Then the handles jarred and Denis grinned. While he cogitated, the point had struck another blasted root!

By and by Stoddart signaled, and Denis joined the others in the shade. Rob opened a basket and pulled out some very stringy venison, a hard bannock, and a vacuum flask of sweet green tea. His neighbor had brought

doughy flapjacks and crumbling flakes of steel-head salmon the Indians had cured in smoke. The salmon was a delicacy; the venison was not. One must cut the tough fibers across, as one cuts a tobacco-plug, and Rob rubbed his knife on his dusty boot.

Nobody, however, was fastidious, and for a time all were willing to rest in the shade. Sweet resinous smells floated about the clearing, the cedar-sprays gently swung in the light breeze, and the lake sparkled behind the big straight trunks. By and by a dark bar crept round a point and moved jerkily, like a water-beetle, across a shining bay. Denis remarked a bird's-head bow and knew it for a Siwash canoe.

"The survey boys," said rancher Marshall. "They're sending ahead their camp truck, but I expect the main guard's on the settlement trail. I'd surely like to go along!"

"I think I'd like it," said Denis. "Where are they going?"

Stoddart turned and indicated the glacier's silver curve.

"Over the neck on the snowline, and across the rocks to the valleys in the North. Yon lot's a Government outfit, and I'm thinking they'll shove ahead while the summer lasts."

"I suppose nobody is yet in the back-blocks they'll search?"

"A few Siwash, curing salmon. Maybe ye'd meet a white prospector and a timber-right gang; but ye might travel a hundred miles and no' see a camp-fire's smoke. Now I'm getting old and done, but when I could pack a hundred pounds and my legs were good, soon as the days got long and the blue grouse drummed, I was for the woods."

"You looked for useful minerals?"

"The excuse was as good as another, and ye might yet strike a pocket o' alluvial gold. I have washed a ton o' dirt for maybe half an ounce. Half an ounce would pay for hydraulicking? Ye cannot pack pumps and engines across a glacier. Anyhow, ye do not; ye roam the woods and reckon all ye see is yours. Some day ye'll come back and clear a ranch where nobody has gone before. Aweel, my ranch is by the lake, and the days when I looked far are gone."

Denis lighted his pipe and pondered. He was young, the golden days were yet in front, and adventure called. He speculated about the virgin heights the survey gang would climb, and the valleys haunted only by the wolves and deer. A phrase of Stoddart's stuck—where nobody had gone

before. Still the surveyor would not engage a tenderfoot, and Denis must not indulge in adventures that did not pay. His business was to earn the sum his trustee had fixed, and when Stoddart got up he resumed his mowing.

In the afternoon a canoe stopped in front of the Marvin ranch. The house was hot, the mail had recently arrived, and Marvin had carried his letters to the veranda. Across the floor Mrs. Marvin sewed and drowsed. Miss Staines languidly studied a novel by the window of a shady room at the other end. The tale bored her, but Mrs. Marvin was half asleep, and if one disturbed Marvin when he was occupied he was annoyed. In the meantime she thought the others did not know she was about.

A gentleman came up the steps. He was not young, but his figure was athletic and his skin was brown. His boots were long and a strap carrying a small leather case crossed his soft buckskin coat, Marvin put up his letters and shoved back his chair.

“Hello, Courtauld! Starting on your summer picnic? Sometimes I think I ought to have taken a Government post. How far are you going?”

The surveyor laughed, and when Mrs. Marvin greeted him, sat down and stretched his legs.

“Until this morning, I haven’t paddled a canoe for seven months and one gets cramped. Our orders are if possible to make the bench lands by Sentinel Butte, and I reckon we are going all the way. I’d like to stop for supper, but we shove off at daybreak and there are a number of things to fix. In about five minutes I must start up the lake.”

Marvin gave him a drink and a cigar, and Courtauld resumed:

“The department will not allow me a technical assistant, and after a hard day in thick brush, to check up one’s calculations by a tent lamp makes one tired. Well, I thought I might find a young fellow who knew the woods to help me tally scores, do the simpler figuring, and so forth; but nobody at the settlement seemed to meet the bill.”

Mrs. Marvin looked up, but said nothing. Marvin’s mouth was tight and she knew she must not meddle.

“You want a clerk who knows something about trigonometry?”

“I do not,” said Courtauld with a smile. “Surveying is not a clerk’s occupation, and the department would not stand for his pay; but I don’t expect they’d grumble about an extra packer on the roll. I want a smart young fellow for general handy man; if possible, a college boy who has



located in the bush. If I could get the proper sort, he would earn a useful wad and I guess he'd like the trip. Do you know somebody who might suit?"

Marvin did know. There was the trouble, and Mrs. Marvin remarked his frown.

"I could send you a roughneck packer who can carry a hundred pounds, and I know a college boy, British army type; but I reckon the gang must carry all the stuff he brings."

"A tenderfoot?"

"A raw Cheechacko. Unless you watched out, you'd lose him in the woods."

"Then he's not my man," said Courtauld, and began to talk about something else.

He went a few minutes afterwards, and Marvin walked up and down the veranda. Mrs. Marvin waited. When Jake was disturbed, his habit was to move about. Miss Staines imagined he would see her if he turned his head, and she noiselessly stole away. At length he stopped, and Mrs. Marvin gave him a quiet glance.

"Denis would have liked it, and Courtauld would have fixed for him to get good pay."

"That is so. Twenty years since, I'd have liked it," said Marvin in a moody voice. "Well, I hate to be shabby, and Tom Aylward's money put me where I am. I'd be glad to boost his nephew, but he will not take a city post. Looks ridiculous, Hannah, but I just can't stand for having the boy around."

Mrs. Marvin gave him a soothing glance.

"You're not ridiculous, Jake; maybe you're fanciful. When Tom Aylward went down the canyon, you were not to blame, and anyhow, it's done with long since."

"Things like that are never done with," Marvin rejoined. "Sometimes I feel I ought to have plunged after Tom. I feel he haunts me because I was scared and let him go alone—"

"You certainly were not scared. Where a thing was possible, I haven't known you hesitate. For you to drown would not have saved your partner."

For a moment or two Marvin was quiet and the lines in his face were distinct. Then he went to the rails and leaned against a post.

“We won’t talk about it, Hannah. When the boy arrived I’d begun to forget; but so long as he is at the lake he keeps the trouble fresh. Well, when winter comes Rob will not have much use for a hired man and will let him go. However, if Denis had come back with a good wad, he might have stayed; Rob would be glad to board him if he did the chores. Now I own my meanness, but the boy engaged to earn a sum his relations fixed, and he’ll be forced to quit.”

Mrs. Marvin said nothing. When Jake set his mouth he could not be moved. Besides, they had disputed about Denis before, and she resumed her sewing. Marvin went back to his letters, but his thoughts were troublesome.

After supper Denis launched Stoddart’s canoe and paddled moodily across the lake. Rob’s talk had somehow revived the restlessness he hoped his holiday had banished. He was not a woodsman, but he had carried a heavy load in France, and he longingly pictured the survey party’s march across the wilds. Resignation was hard; he wanted to talk to somebody sympathetic, and now and then in the evening Rhoda walked to the point.

He saw her in the gloom of the pines and when he paddled to the beach she joined him. Sometimes the ranch was dull and Rhoda got bored. Although she was fond of Kate, she was jealous; Kate had so much and she so little. Then Denis was a handsome young fellow, and Rhoda liked to use her charm, particularly since she imagined Kate attracted him. In fact, Rhoda was resolved that Kate, for once, must go without.

For a time she was quiet and Denis leisurely dipped the paddle. After the scorching day, the evening was fresh and cool. A languid double ripple, opening like a fan, trailed behind the canoe; in front only the trout broke the calm reflections of the big, dark trees. Rhoda pondered Marvin’s interview with the surveyor. She thought it would interest Denis, but in the meantime she did not see her line.

By and by, a faint, measured thudding stole out of the silence down the lake. The noise got louder and voices joined the paddles’ steady beat. The singing softened by distance, was musical, and Rhoda looked up.

“It goes well. The water is like a sounding-board, and the time is good; but a chorus on the lake is something fresh. Do you know the concert party?”

“I expect it’s the survey gang,” said Denis, with a frown. “They are bringing up supplies, and in the morning they start for the North. If I were a better woodsman I’d have joined them.”

“You would really like to go?”

“Of course. Old Rob’s a good sort, and on the whole I’m happy at the ranch, but these fellows are going to climb high passes nobody knows much about. They’ll shove across forests where only the Indians camp. In fact, they’re starting for a sort of no-man’s land. Well, if I’m theatrical, you’ll probably be amused; but I’m not yet old and sober, and perhaps you sometimes speculate about the back-of-beyond? The land that’s different from, and better than, anything you know!”

“To do so is rash,” said Rhoda. “A girl, at all events, must keep the beaten path. The queer thing is, Marvin admitted he would like to go. You see, the surveyor was at the ranch in the afternoon.”

Denis said nothing, but he sent the canoe ahead with a quicker stroke. Rhoda, watching him, carelessly tapped the gunwale in time to the paddlers’ song. The canoe had swung round an island, and the steady throb and lusty voices got distant.

“The melody is good,” said Rhoda. “I had expected to hear rag-time stuff; but this goes with a fine, smooth swing. Perhaps you know the Russian boat-song? It’s vaguely like the other.”

“In a way, it’s a classic,” Denis replied. “American seamen rolled it out in the spacious days when the sailing ships went round Cape Horn. The strange thing is, these fellows know it. But let’s listen—”

The paddles beat loudly in the evening calm. Three canoes like dark bars plowed across the shadows and the water splashed at their bows. The hoarse voices swelled and Rhoda heard—*The wide and shining river*.

“*Shenandoah!*” said Denis. “They don’t sing like Chaliapin; but you feel they’re keen to take the trail, and at daybreak they’ll start for no-man’s land. By George, I want to go!”

He stopped his paddle and, a hundred yards off, the canoes forged by. Muscular bodies swung, and foam swirled about the paddles. One heard the blades thud, the bent figures straightened, and the dark hulls surged ahead. A gasp marked the rhythm, and then the song rolled on; the canoes crept round another point and vanished behind the trees. Denis turned and saw Rhoda’s glance was sympathetic.

“After all, you might have gone,” she remarked.

“Then you know something I don’t know?” said Denis with surprise.

“When the surveyor was at the ranch he asked if Marvin knew a young fellow who could help him with his calculations.”

“I might have helped,” said Denis, and the blood came to his skin. “Why did he not send for me?”

Rhoda saw she must be accurate.

“He did talk about you, but the surveyor wanted a man who knew the woods, and Marvin admitted you were a Cheechacko.”

Denis knitted his brows and Rhoda saw he tried for calm.

“After all, I *am* a Cheechacko, but I think he might have risked it. The surveyor might not have found out my rawness until we had gone some distance and he could not send me back.”

“You try to be just. Sometimes it’s rather hard,” said Rhoda in a gentle voice.

“Oh, well, my uncle was Marvin’s partner, and helped him get rich. However, I suppose he could not honestly state I was a first-class woodsman. Then since my relation’s help was useful some time has gone and people soon forget—”

He began to paddle, and Rhoda knew where to stop. She had noted a touch of bitterness.

“I am sorry, Denis. Perhaps I ought to have said nothing; but one does not like to see one’s friends let down. However, we have stopped longer than I thought.”

Denis gave her a grateful look and steered for the landing.

## XV

# MOONLIGHT

AFTER supper one evening, Denis, lying in the stones by the water's edge, heard Stoddart call and went to the house.

"If your hand's no' very sore, ye'd maybe like an errand to Marvin's," the old fellow said.

Denis hesitated. When they were piling logs to burn, a heavy trunk at the top of the pyramid began to roll back down the skids. Since Rob and he were underneath, Denis used a savage effort, and although they stopped the log, the strain hurt his wrist. The small injury, however, would not prevent his paddling if he were keen to go to the ranch. He thought Rob remarked his hesitation.

"My hand will soon be all right. If you want something, I could steer the canoe across."

"We'll need to cross-cut some logs the morn; the saw is dull, and my file's no' very good. Ony way, unless ye wanted, ye need not bother them at the house; the foreman will get ye the file in the workshop. For a' that, I wouldna say but ye might meet the lasses."

"It's possible," said Denis. "When the evening is fine, they are generally about the water-front."

Stoddart gave him a twinkling glance.

"Weel, I ken ye're modest, but so long as ye meet them baith, ye will not run much risk. If yin's away, something depends on which the ither is. To watch your step is whiles a useful plan."

Denis imagined Rob had said something like that before, but to be annoyed was not worth while. It looked as if the old fellow thought him more important than he was.

"My business is to borrow the files you want," he said, and started for the lake.

Pushing off the canoe, he paddled slackly. To bend his hand was awkward and his mood was thoughtful. The survey expedition had vanished in the wilds and Denis was resigned, but to feel Marvin had refused to help him join the party hurt. After all, he had fought for the fellow and taken some nasty knocks. The seed Rhoda Staines had planted had begun to sprout.

Denis mused about her as he steered across the lake. She was kind and sympathetic; Kate was cool and somehow critical. Denis felt she weighed him, and if he cheated she would know. Kate was bracing; it was the proper word. When he talked to her he was moved by clean ambitions; he felt he must use honestly all the talents he had. He pictured her scorn for the indulgent and slack. Yet, when he was hurt, he had known her pitiful tenderness.

Well, to join the survey gang might have helped him get ahead. In the northern valleys land could be got by preëmption, and one could learn from the packers which was worth the registration fee. Then the pay was good and Stoddart's was small, though Denis imagined Rob gave him all his help was worth. If Rhoda's supposition were accurate, Marvin might have persuaded the surveyor to engage him; but Marvin had refused.

Denis saw he had got back to the point from which he started. The queer thing was, when he began to think about Rhoda his thoughts turned to Kate. Yet while Kate was aloof and fastidious, Rhoda was pliant and soothing. She rather allured than commanded; Rhoda was frankly flesh and blood. But, for all her attractive softness, Denis knew she hated to be baffled. Once, in order to catch a trout, she had risked a jump to a floating log. Rhoda, unlike Kate, would take the easy road, but Denis imagined she got where she wanted to go.

Well, he was getting nowhere. His thoughts went round in a circle, and so long as he was Stoddart's hired man, to be interested by girls like Kate and Rhoda was ridiculous. After all, man's real business was to labor at a useful job. If romance, typified by a woman, called, one might follow; but one ought not, so to speak, to look for romantic adventures. Kate certainly would not. One sensed in her a sort of ascetic vein; she was remote and virginal—

Denis frowned and paddled faster. He was not going round the circle another time. His wrist began to hurt, and since Marvin's landing was farther off, he steered for the wooded point, from which a trail followed the beach to the ranch. Pulling up the canoe, he took the trail and presently joined the

foreman in a workshop behind the homestead. The man said if he waited he would give him the files, but in the meantime he was using them and Denis might like to see how a saw was properly sharpened.

Denis was interested. A saw was not the rather primitive tool he had thought, but each part was beautifully fitted for the work it must do. Smoking his pipe, he watched the foreman bend the points over to left and right, and then push his file across the teeth. The oblique cut was an even angle, but left alternate teeth until he reversed the blade and went back the other way. At length he held the saw to the light and Denis noted the double row of shining points, supported by a thin steel band that would slide smoothly through the rather wider gap they cut. All was harmoniously symmetrical; the job was a workman's job.

"Fine!" he said. "How long do you think a beginner would take to learn the trick?"

"If your eye is true and your touch is light, you might get it in twelve months, but you want to practise on a saw another fellow has to pull."

Denis's smile was reflective. Sometimes his rawness daunted him. To break virgin soil demanded skill and patience; in fact, it demanded qualities he was not sure he had. However, the man was friendly and he began to talk.

When Denis knocked out his pipe the light was going. The cooling air exhilarated one like wine, and a full moon began to touch the lake with silver. In the distance cowbells chimed and the river throbbed behind the woods. Following the trail to the point, he saw a dark figure under the trees and quickened his step. Where the trail opened to the lake, Rhoda Staines turned and faced him.

"You were going fast," she said. "Stoddart perhaps waits for you? If that is so, you mustn't stop."

"I got up speed a few moments since," Denis rejoined. "If I stopped for good, I imagine Rob would not miss me much; anyhow, he had nothing to do with my hurrying."

"Oh, well, one hates to be lonely, and to feel one is not needed is worse. But I had thought a young man hated to admit he was not indispensable."

"Then, perhaps I'm unusually modest; but you have spotted the trouble. Not to be wanted is humiliating. A man is indispensable when he's master of his occupation and is satisfied it is his proper job."

“You are not sure about yours?” said Rhoda, and indicated a big log. “Well, I can stop for a few minutes, and if it helps your meditations, you had better smoke.”

Denis lighted a cigarette, and although he smiled, his smile was not altogether humorous.

“When you are bored, you must signal and we’ll talk about something else. You see, my intention is to be a rancher.”

“You said you were modest,” Rhoda observed.

“It looks as if I were too ambitious. In order to be a rancher, you must own a ranch; or you must have the pluck and skill one needs when one hacks one’s clearing out of the forest. In the meantime, I have no money, and I begin to doubt if I have much skill. When I’m in pretty good form, I can cut up a tree in a morning, and Marvin’s foreman reckoned I might in twelve months learn to sharpen the saw I used. You see the proposition I am up against? I believe the idiom is good Canadian.”

“Pluck helps. Not long since you fought a cinnamon bear.”

“So long as my legs are good, I will not fight another,” said Denis firmly. “Some time since I could not join the survey gang because I am not a woodsman, and half an hour ago Marvin’s foreman further damped my raw enthusiasm. Until I saw you in front, I felt downhearted.”

For a few moments Rhoda said nothing. She knew Denis did not altogether joke and, if she wanted, she might work on his mood. Across the lake, a dim light marked the Stoddart ranch, and when she turned her head the windows at the Marvin homestead shone behind the trees.

“I am not bored, Denis, and I understand,” she said in a soft, husky voice that he thought was like pigeons calling in the firs. “The West claims to be democratic, but our friends are a sort of landed aristocracy. Entrenched in their log castles, they’re a privileged lot; when they want things done that will make their ranching easier, they bully the Government.”

“They built their castles. They themselves hewed the logs. That’s something.”

“You don’t play up,” said Rhoda. “When I make a speech, I like applause. Well, since they know themselves secure, they are hospitably kind; but I think that’s all. They feel we are not their sort; we are landless adventurers and do not belong— So long as we help or amuse them, we may remain, but nobody bothers much when we go.”



"I may stay so long as I am cheap and comparatively useful. You, however, are Kate's friend and not at all an adventurer."

Rhoda laughed, a soft, cooing laugh.

"Kate's a dear, but she's important, and I am not. When I started for Canada, my relations were very willing; the other plan was to take a post I hated. I have friends at Victoria, but they do not seem very keen for me to join them. However, I may do so. An adventuress' business is to capture a rich husband, but the sort I would like is not numerous in the wilds."

Denis was moved. In the moonlight, Rhoda was small and girlish; but for all her youth and loneliness she bravely fronted the world. Then he was aware that she studied him humorously.

"It's unfortunate you are not rich," she said.

Denis looked up, rather quickly, and then smiled.

"That is so. I have realized it for some time, and now I have fresh grounds—All the same, I have not a proverbial bean."

"Oh, well," said Rhoda, "I am not remarkably rash, and you must not be alarmed. I expect I'd hate a log shack, and bacon and potatoes would get monotonous. Besides, I cannot cook and I cannot sew. Kate is rich, but she does both efficiently."

"If it's much comfort, I sympathize. The roughest roughneck chopper could beat me at any job I undertook."

"Our talents are not utilitarian and our habits are expensive," Rhoda continued. "There's the difficulty, because Canadians have not much use for ornamental people. When we are pulled out from our proper background, we are rather a helpless lot, and our relations buy us a ticket and assure us we will make good in the Dominions. One understands why Dominion politicians talk about *dumping*."

"Some do make good," said Denis. "Then in France some fellows we had thought priceless fools were the best men we had."

"We are in Canada. What are we going to do about it?" Rhoda rejoined.

"I don't know. In the meantime, we must hold on and trust our luck. I'm not altogether daunted; but for a girl it's harder—"

Rhoda turned her head. The moon pierced the netted branches and Denis thought her shoulders moved. She was small and girlish and somehow

forlorn, and when he touched her gently he knew she wept. Carried away by unthinking pity, he took her in his arms.

“Brace up, my dear,” he said. “We are not yet beaten. Look in front and smile. You are going to conquer.”

He felt her tremble; but for that, she was quiet, as if she were comforted. Denis thrilled and kissed her. Rhoda’s arm went round his neck; her skin was warm and very smooth. In a moment or two, however, she pushed him back, and he knew he must let her go.

He got up and leaned against a tree. He was confused and shaken by mixed emotions. Rhoda’s tears were gone, and so far as he could distinguish, her look was calm.

“In the morning you will forget you kissed me, and I’ll persuade myself you did not,” she said.

“But I cannot forget,” said Denis with some awkwardness. “To try would be unthinkable.”

Rhoda turned to him in the moonlight and he thought she smiled.

“You mean to be nice, but you mustn’t exaggerate. I was lonely and you were sorry. To know somebody minded gave me back my pluck. But that is all, Denis. I’d hate you to think you must pretend.”

“Why do you take the pretense for granted?” Denis inquired.

“We are not romantic fools; at least, I am not,” said Rhoda tranquilly. “If you were very keen about it, I would not marry you. For all that, you have helped, perhaps more than you know. Now we are going to be soberly practical, and I must go back.”

She started for the homestead and Denis said nothing, for he knew she was firm. He himself was puzzled. He had not meant to kiss Rhoda, but he had done so and it looked as if she were not much annoyed. All the same, she had indicated that his rashness had implied nothing.

After a minute or two she began to talk. Rhoda’s dreary mood had vanished, her talk was cheerful, and sometimes she gave Denis a trustful, friendly glance. It almost looked as if they were lovers, but he was not cheated. Rhoda had fixed her line and expected him to agree. When they reached the clearing she touched him and he saw somebody leaned against the fence. Denis pulled down the rails and Marvin turned.

“I was at the workshop, sir. Rob wanted a file.”

“I was at the point,” said Rhoda. “The evening was fine.”

Denis thought she struck a note of rather malicious humor, but Marvin’s look was inscrutable.

“That’s so,” he agreed. “Well, one is not young for long!”

He went off across the field, and Rhoda gave Denis her hand.

“Sometimes I do not know if I like my host,” she said, and stepped back, rather quickly. “It’s done with, Denis! Now we are sensible. In the morning you’ll forget.”

## XVI

# MARVIN SEES A PLAN

A COLD wind swept the valley and white-topped waves rolled up the lake. Denis's canoe had shipped some water, and when he landed on the gravel behind the point he was breathless and his clothes were wet. Summer was going, and for two or three weeks torrential rain had beaten the dripping woods. The maples by the lake had begun to turn, although their broad leaves had not yet put on the gold and crimson splendor of the fall.

Denis pulled up the canoe and searched the gloom under the pines. Although Rhoda had signaled that she expected him, nobody was about and Denis thought his annoyance justified. The evening was stormy, and he was not keen to paddle back across the lake in the dark. In fact, he admitted he was not very keen to start.

All the same, Rhoda's window-shade was lowered half-way down; one could see the window from Stoddart's landing. Denis wondered why she had signaled, and thought it possible she had wanted to find out if he would face the gale. Anyhow, he must wait for a few minutes, and sitting down behind a boulder he mused—

To begin with, he hated to steal across to the rendezvous. When he wanted to see Rhoda the straightforward plan was to ask for her at the homestead; but Rhoda did not agree and Denis doubted if Marvin would approve. Since he knew Snedden's statement slanderous, Marvin's inhospitality was puzzling. Denis, however, had resolved to let it go. He wanted to think about his friendship for Rhoda, if friendship was the proper word.

Rhoda's charm was seductive, but he doubted if she really wanted a lover, and she knew he could not support a wife. All he could hope for was that his relations might send him a sum which, if he were very frugal, might help him chop a small clearing. He, however, might well be disappointed, and Rhoda, as she frankly admitted, was not the sort to be happy in a log shack.

Yet he was sorry for Rhoda. Like himself, she was lonely, and for a girl to front the world alone was hard. If his sympathy were some support, all he could give was hers. So far, Denis felt he was on firm ground, but he knew he did not stop there and Rhoda would not be satisfied for him to do so. Sometimes she moved him queerly, and he rather thought she consciously used her charm.

When one had properly started on one's career one might think about marriage; but, until some progress was obvious, one must concentrate on one's occupation. Philandering certainly led one nowhere. In the meantime, one was not forced to live like a monk; attractive girls were numerous, and so long as all they wanted was a jolly pal Denis had rather enjoyed their society. In some circumstances, one might run all risks and marry on nothing; but the girl must be the proper stuff and Rhoda declared she was not. Denis saw Kate Marvin gallantly take the plunge—

Kate, however, had nothing to do with him; and it looked as if his simple rules did not always go. He had not, until recently, reckoned on the urge of flesh and blood. To be sternly logical was harder than he had thought; somehow one got entangled before one knew. At all events, Rhoda was not logical. She declared her husband must be rich—and she did not want an ardent lover; but she called Denis across the lake. Sometimes he rebelled, particularly when the evening was stormy and she did not keep the rendezvous.

He heard steps in the gloom and jumped to his feet, but his satisfaction was not marked. The pine-branches tossed in the savage wind and surf beat the stones. Since Rhoda, after forcing him to wait, had at length arrived, he must stop for a time, and then risk crossing the angry lake in the dark.

“You have got here: I was going to shove off—” he said, and stopped in confusion, for the girl he had advanced to meet was not Rhoda.

“Kate!” he gasped.

“That is so,” Kate agreed. “If you are much disappointed, I am sorry!”

“I was surprised,” said Denis. “Until you were a yard or two off, I did not know you.”

“Something like that was evident,” Kate remarked. “Had you known me sooner, you might have tried to be polite? However, if you expect Rhoda, she is occupied with a book. Perhaps she did not imagine you would paddle across on so stormy an evening; but you handle a canoe much better than you at one time did.”

“Then, you saw me on the lake—” said Denis.

He felt his remark might carry an unfortunate implication, but Kate smiled.

“It did not account for my taking the trail to the Point. For one thing, you would have made an easier landing at the cove on the other side. But Rhoda perhaps does not know the spot.”

Denis braced up. He had no grounds to be embarrassed, and although he thought Kate rather scornfully amused, from her point of view, his fighting the gale while Rhoda tranquilly read her novel, perhaps was humorous.

“If you are going round by the new clearing, may I go with you? Behind the trees one is sheltered from the wind.”

“Ought you not to get back? The light is going and the water is rough.”

“If I went at once, it would be dark before I was across. Now the evenings get long, the shack is dull. Rob smokes and meditates. Sometimes I turn over an old *Colonist*, and sometimes I mend my clothes.”

“It does not look exciting,” Kate remarked. “But can you mend your clothes?”

“Since Rob firmly refuses, I am forced to try. I cannot claim to make a tailor’s job. The Canadian plan is to throw old clothes away, but I mustn’t be extravagant.”

Kate pictured Denis’s awkwardness. She saw him frown when the thread entangled, and although she smiled, the picture moved her.

“I expect you get very bored?” she said, and somehow Denis knew her scornful mood was gone.

“No,” he said. “After all, I really think I’m content at Rob’s. When the old fellow does resolve to talk, he’s interesting, and I did not reckon on hectic evenings in the Canadian wilds. In fact, after two or three months’ post-war jazz in London, I had had enough. Besides, when you have rolled logs up the skids since daybreak, you are satisfied to loaf and cogitate. Anyhow, you loaf.”

“But to turn down all one knows and begin a fresh, and ruder, life must cost one something.”

“The cost depends on your standard of value. Since nobody can seize all he’d like, you must let something go. Well, suppose you choose

independence, bodily health, and natural beauty? They are yours in the woods.”

“But not for nothing. You must pay for your independence by strenuous labor.”

“You pay, in some coin, for all you get,” Denis rejoined. “Then the bill is heaviest at the beginning. The apprentice must put up a fee to be taught his job, and I’d like the sum the lawyer got for my articles. There was an example of rash extravagance!”

Kate laughed. Denis talked like the young fellow who at the beginning had attracted her.

“Then the hard start has not discouraged you? I am interested. Please go on.”

“Sometimes I was rather discouraged. In British Columbia the trees are numerous and large, and when I had chopped a few, and began to calculate, the sum was alarming. Unless I could speed up, to clear a ranch might occupy me for a hundred years. Well, I resolved to speed up, and I reflected that all a lumberman does a determined tenderfoot can learn to do. Then you stated that ranching does not altogether depend on the rancher’s muscle. Modern agriculture gives one room to use one’s talents, and our colleges declare their object is to enlarge their students’ understanding. I don’t know if they make good the claim; but you perhaps see the inference?”

“It is rather evident,” Kate agreed. “If you stay with your job, you will presently get the bushman chopper’s technical skill, and you will then bring into action abilities he has not. After all, it’s possible. But, in the meantime, are you going to stop with Stoddart for the winter?”

“Nothing’s yet fixed,” said Denis soberly. “I like Rob, but my progress depends on my winning my relation’s bet. If he doubles the sum I undertook to earn, I will have a useful wad to go on with.”

“And that is all you expect?”

“Frankly, I don’t know— Sometimes I imagine the old fellow really means to try me out. You see, I turned down my occupation; but if I can satisfy him, he and the others might help me buy a ranch. So long as they were willing and I calculated I might pay back the loan, I would take their help. Anyhow, I’d sooner my relations did not think me a slacker.”

Kate approved. Denis’s philandering with Rhoda excited a scornful annoyance she could hardly justify, but he had some qualities she admired.

“You imagine Rob might cut your pay for the winter months?”

“That is so. Since nothing much is doing, I expect he’d be forced— Well, I’d sooner stay, but time slips by, and if my pay goes down, I cannot win my bet. In the circumstances, I might pull out.”

Kate was sympathetic. Her father could solve Denis’s problem and get a willing helper, but she had noted his antagonism, and she must not meddle. Besides, if Denis went for a time, his doing so might break his entanglement with Rhoda. Perhaps Kate’s interest was strange, but she wanted him to recover his freedom.

“Your business is to win the bet,” she said. “However, we have gone some distance and I must turn back.”

They started for the homestead, and by and by Kate sent Denis off to the canoe. After a struggle in the surf, he got on board. His long boots were full and the canoe had shipped some water. Short, breaking waves rolled up the lake, and in the savage wind the high, bird’s-head bow was an embarrassment; but Denis made the passage, and when he pulled up the canoe he laughed. His moodiness had vanished, and although Rhoda had let him down he was not annoyed.

A few days afterwards, a storekeeper from the settlement arrived at the Marvin ranch and stopped for the night. Lunt was perhaps a typical frontier merchant. One could buy a can of peaches or a tobacco-plug at his store, but he would outfit a prospecting expedition and, if the leaders were lucky, help them float the mine. He supplied trustworthy customers for long periods without sending in his bill, and the interest he charged was not unjustly high. Moreover, he sometimes helped one, who gave him a mortgage, buy a ranch. In fact, where none had much money Lunt was a useful and on the whole, an honest man.

After supper he and Marvin transacted some business; and then the rancher remarked:

“I suppose you mean to look up my neighbors. The boys’ bills get long?”

“Oh, well, I’m not a big man and the bank is certainly not rash; but since you have talked about it, I expect you know how Stoddart’s fixed. I don’t want to put the screw on the old fellow.”

“I didn’t know his land was *plastered*,” said Marvin with surprise.



"The debt's not very large. My father helped Rob start and I hold his mortgage. Rob has paid the interest and a sort of sinking fund that has whittled down the loan; but he owes a sum I'd like to get and now he asks me to wait. He has some sheep he'd like to hold over for next year's lambs."

"The flock is good," said Marvin, and lighted his pipe, for he wanted to ponder. If Lunt claimed his debt, Stoddart must use economy, and Marvin knew where he himself would begin.

"Well?" said the storekeeper. "What do you think I ought to do about it? I like Rob and I'd hate to be mean."

For a moment or two Marvin did not reply. Stoddart was his neighbor and to some extent his friend, and Marvin was not given to shabbiness. He, however, saw a plan, and although it might cost Rob much it would banish Denis. When the boy was gone, Marvin hoped to recapture the tranquillity his arrival had disturbed.

"Rob is old," he said. "In the mountains the cold-snaps are fierce and sometimes the snow is deep. When the timber wolves are hungry you must watch your flock, but Rob could not stand for sheep-guard at night in the frost. Anyhow, he has lost sheep, and his clearing's small. I doubt if he has put up all the feed he needs for his cattle."

"You can sell out stock you cannot feed."

"If you can drive them to the railroad," said Marvin dryly. "I've known the passes blocked for quite a time by snow, and when your oats and timothy run out the stock get poor. Nobody will give a good price for half-fed animals."

"That's so," Lunt agreed. "But the boys tell me Rob has got a hired man."

Marvin smiled. He did not want to hurt Rob, and for him to hurt Denis was horribly unjust, but the boy must go. Marvin dared not risk his attracting Kate.

"He has engaged a lad from a lawyer's office in the Old Country. Rob is frugal. I guess his ranching would not stand for a good woodsman's pay, but if I wanted cheap help, I'd sooner hire up a Vancouver drygoods clerk."

"Then, you reckon I ought to hand Rob my bill? You see, I'm willing to take some chances on the old man's making good."

Marvin knew the other trusted him and his word would carry weight, but for a moment he hesitated.

“The risk is not mine and to advise you is not my job. Then, Rob is a good rancher and a friendly neighbor— All the same, when you are up against a business proposition, you ought to use business rules.”

“My creditors certainly do so,” Lunt agreed with a resigned shrug. “Well, my wad’s not large, and I guess Rob must hand out the sum he owes.”

Marvin nodded. His plan had worked, but he wanted to talk about something else.

## XVII

# DENIS MOVES ON

UPPER was over at the log homestead; Denis put up the plates and Stoddart lighted his pipe. In the morning the storekeeper had called at the ranch, and after he went Denis thought Rob preoccupied. For all that, until the light began to go, he and Denis had fastened fresh shingles on the roof of the barn. Rob's temperament was calmly philosophical, and when, missing a nail, he struck his thumb and flung the hammer across the roof, Denis knew something bothered him.

The evenings were getting cold, and resinous billets snapped cheerfully in the stove. A tin kerosene lamp hung from a beam, and Denis's business was to polish the glass and trim the wick. Although no woman entered the homestead, the log-walled room was clean and Rob's housekeeping was marked by methodical efficiency. Denis for four years was a soldier, and the bushman who cannot cook and husband his supplies must starve. In the wilds, man lives by independent effort, and where he is slack he bears the consequences.

Denis did not grumble. He must pay for his apprenticeship; he had all he really needed and the shack was homelike. Then, in the crowded cities civilization implied fierce competition. Perhaps Denis was proud; he was willing to labor, but he hated to push. In the meantime, he saw Rob pondered, and by and by the old fellow looked up.

"Sometimes ye must chose one o' two lines, and when ye dislike both the job is bothersome."

"I expect that is so," Denis agreed. "The choice perhaps has something to do with the storekeeper's visit?"

Rob nodded. "Lunt wants his money; I don't want to sell my sheep, but since he will not wait I have got to pay. Had the fella been patient, I'd hoped the lambs would help me cut the mortgage. The time fixed runs out and Lunt will soon be entitled to foreclose."

"Then the ranch is not altogether yours?" said Denis with surprise.

“I’d reckoned it might be mine while I’d yet the strength to get aboot and could enjoy the fruits o’ my labor. When I began, my roll was five hundred dollars, and Lunt’s father undertook to see me out. Weel, I’ve payed instalment and interest, an’ noo the balance isna’ very large—”

“Were you not rash to start in debt?”

“Maybe,” said Rob. “Still, I knew my creditor, and unless I borrowed, I could not start ava. For twenty years I’d traveled the province: mining, railroading, sweating with lumber gangs. So long as I was young, the life was good, and when the construction bosses knew me I could take a foreman’s job—”

He stopped, and, knocking out his pipe, resumed in a meditative voice:

“Comes a time when ye feel the driving-force ye had is gone and soon the boys ye lead will find out. Ye have tried and tasted a’ that strength can gain; ye have reached the height-o’-lands, and the best’s behind. Noo the road is down the hill— Aweel if I could not lead, I yet could labor, and I built my homestead in the valley where a’ was quiet.”

“I’m young, but if I get a ranch I’ll be content,” Denis remarked. “However, you have cleared some ground and have a useful bunch of stock. When you began were you fresh to the job?”

“Lang syne I was a shepherd lad in the Scottish hills. Where ye have oats and seeds grass, cattle pay; but my pride’s the flock I bred and noo am forced to sell. For a’ that, I have no quarrel with the storekeeper body. He but claims his own, and since I’m his debtor the sheep must go. But there’s another thing; when I have met his bill I canna be extravagant—”

Extravagance was not a fault of Rob’s and Denis saw he was embarrassed.

“While nothing much is doing you will not need a hired man, and you might save his pay?”

“There ye have it,” Stoddart agreed, as if Denis’s keenness was some relief. “For the winter, I cannot pay; but I was thinking ye might bide and start again in spring. Ye’d get your board: all I’d ask is your company and some help with the chores.”

In Canada an arrangement of the sort is common, and Denis knew Stoddart would be just. In fact, Rob was rather his host than his employer. Then he had begun to feel the ranch was home, and he was not keen to

exchange his corner by the stove for a chair in a row at the workman's crowded boarding-house. Yet he saw that he must go.

"I'd like to stay," he said in an apologetic voice. "I do not want you to think me shabby; but—"

He narrated his relation's challenge and his undertaking to win the bet. When he concluded, rather awkwardly, Stoddart nodded.

"Ye must go, but if ye do not get a better job, I'll hope to see you back in spring. And ye'll mind, so long as I hold the ranch, there's aye a plate and bed for ye at the bit hoose by the lake— That's fixed, and noo our business is to find ye a post."

Rob lighted his pipe and deliberated. He was seldom rash, but by and by he nodded, as if he saw his line.

"I have it! Ye'll ask for Alan Ferguson at the Vancouver wharf and tell him ye come from me. When we filled in the willow muskeg for the C.P.R. I was construction foreman and Alan my leading hand. I mind she swallowed the granite as fast as the cars dumped the rock; but when we fed her brush and branches we put the rails across— Alan's noo important, but a Scot disna' forget, and if ye're willing to push a cargo truck, he'll put ye on the roll."

"I'll go," said Denis. "If Ferguson is your sort, I don't expect to grumble, and I hope he will not."

"When ye are gone the ranch will be lonesome," said Stoddart in a quiet voice. "But for Lunt, we might have fixed for ye to stop. The queer thing is, the fella's no' as hard as some, and he kens I meet my bills. I wonner why he was resolved he would not wait—"

He knocked out his pipe and brooded. Denis got an old *Colonist* and studied the C.P.R. time-table and the Vancouver hotel advertisements. Since he must move on, he resolved to start as soon as Rob was willing.

A week afterwards, he crossed the lake one evening to the Marvin homestead. Logs snapped in the big open fireplace and Mrs. Marvin sewed by the hearth. Marvin was occupied at his desk and Rhoda was at the piano, but when Denis came in the music stopped. Marvin turned rather sharply, and Kate put up her book. Denis sensed a sort of tension, as if his arrival disturbed the group. Anyhow, he knew he had excited all but perhaps Mrs. Marvin's curiosity. She gave him her hand and tranquilly indicated a chair.

"My errand is to say good-by, ma'am," he said, and turned to Marvin. "I felt I ought to thank you for sending me to Stoddart's, sir. Rob is altogether a white man, and now I must move on, I'm sorry."

"Then you are pulling out?"

"I start at daybreak. I mustn't bore you by particulars, but in the winter nothing much is doing and he agrees I ought to go where pay is good. Rob is forced to be frugal. However, you perhaps know something about it."

Marvin's look was inscrutable, but Denis thought he studied him and weighed his remark.

"All I know is, a small rancher must use economy."

"Oh, well," said Denis, "it explains my pulling out. I'd have stopped if possible. Rob is a fine old fellow."

He saw the others were interested. Mrs. Marvin had put up her sewing and her brows were knit, as if she pondered. Rhoda's glance was searching and her mouth was rather tight. Denis remarked that she did not look at Kate. Kate's pose was quiet; he imagined she had not moved since she pushed back her book. Somehow he began to be embarrassed.

"I suppose you are starting for Vancouver?" Marvin resumed. "Just now trade at the ports is slack."

"Rob has a friend at Vancouver and thinks he would put me on the C.P.R. wharf."

"I like your pluck, but I might get you a better post," said Marvin with a smile.

For a moment Denis was quiet. Rhoda's eyes were fixed on him and a touch of color stained her skin. He thought she signaled; at all events, he knew she wanted him to agree. Kate's look was calm. Denis felt that although she refused to meddle, she waited his reply. Well, Marvin, of course, was entitled to leave him alone, but his coolness had hurt, and Denis would not take his help.

"To begin with, I think I'll see Rob's friend, sir. Since I'm a tenderfoot, I mustn't be ambitious, but after helping Rob, I reckon I can load up sugar-bags and boxes of tea."

Marvin said nothing. He might have found the boy a softer job; to know he had done so might have been some relief, but so long as the young fellow went, he was resigned. Kate, however, looked up, and when her glance met

Denis's he knew she approved. Denis did not mean to stop. He had used the proper rules, and turning to Mrs. Marvin, he politely took his leave. Kate went with him to the veranda, and at the steps gave him her hand.

"Was my father's suggestion hard to refuse?" she asked.

"On the whole, I think not," Denis replied. "Although Mr. Marvin's offer was kind, I felt I must not bother him—" He stopped and resumed with a smile, "You see, the ground is awkward."

"Yes," said Kate, "I do see. Well, I wanted you to refuse. Although you are not afraid to labor, you are proud."

"Sometimes pride is expensive and I have not yet met the bill."

"Ah," said Kate, "you will not default, and one pays for shabbier things than independence. I think you are going to make good, and I wish you luck."

She let him go, and when Denis went down the steps he thrilled. Kate's philosophy was his. When one was young one would sooner take hard knocks than grudging favors. Moreover, he reflected that Kate, no doubt, knew the others might think her giving him good-by significant; but he smiled, for he imagined it would not bother Kate. Her habit was imperious. The rules she used were hers.

The canoe leaked and for a few minutes Denis was occupied throwing out the water. Then he heard a step, and when he straightened his back Rhoda crossed the belt of stones.

"I could not get away," she gasped. "I thought you might wait."

Denis had not meant to wait, but he said nothing, and Rhoda went on:

"You must go back and take Marvin's offer."

"No," said Denis firmly. "I expected you'd agree that it's impossible."

"I do not agree. Marvin meant to be kind. At all events, you cannot take a laborer's job at the docks."

"It looks as if I must. We are in Canada, and now I think about it, one or two of my pals in France drive taxicabs in town. Besides, you did not think it humiliating for me to take Stoddart's pay."

"For a time, perhaps, you were forced. Now you are absurd. Marvin can get you a proper post."

“I wonder—” said Denis. “For one thing, I am not a business man. I might be a third-class clerk, but I’d certainly not get rich. My part is to make things; I cannot buy and sell.”

Rhoda sat down. Somehow she had reckoned on carrying Denis back. Had she succeeded, Kate must acknowledge her triumph; besides, she hated to let him go.

“You are very obstinate, and I don’t think you are grateful,” she rejoined. “After all, you ought to be flattered.”

“For me to play up would not help,” said Denis soberly. “Let’s try to be frank. You indicated some time since that your husband must be rich, and I think we agreed that I was not qualified for the post. Well, I certainly am not rich and I do not expect at any time to own a ranch like Marvin’s. For all that, I might clear some ground, the woods are very beautiful, and a rancher’s life has some charm. To build one’s house oneself, to push out in front of the crowd, and live by one’s independent effort is a fine adventure. Are you willing to risk it?”

“You know I am not,” said Rhoda. “To begin with, I’d embarrass you; and then the woods bore me. Besides, I have not your hopefulness, and perhaps I have not your pluck.”

“The trouble is, I do not see another plan,” said Denis grimly.

Rhoda was quiet. She had turned her head and he thought she pondered.

“If you are not happy at Marvin’s and my society is some comfort, I am sorry to go; but since you do not want me for a husband, there is not much use in my stopping.”

“I suppose there is not,” said Rhoda and got up. “You are a good sort, Denis, but your point of view is rather old-fashioned.”

She gave him her hand and stepped back with a smile.

“That’s all, Denis! I am not going to marry you, and I’d sooner you did not pretend— Although I do not see its charm, I think you may get your ambition. And good-by!”

She vanished and Denis shoved off the canoe. Rhoda had refused him and his emotions were rather mixed, but on the whole he was conscious of some relief. Then he smiled and began to paddle. In the morning he must take the trail for the settlement.



## XVIII

# THE WHARF-HAND

**S**AWMILL smoke streaked the sky, and across the broad inlet white mountains sparkled in the sun. A fresh breeze curled the water and thin surf splashed the stones under the giant pines by Beaver Point. A cargo-boat, trailing a smoke-cloud, steamed for the Narrows; and then the shining hull of a big white liner cut Denis's view. Her red-checkered house flag snapped in the wind, the Beaver ensign streamed from her taffrail staff; whistles called, foam seethed in the deep propellers' wake, and she circled majestically for the wharf.

Denis turned his head and looked the other way. Ambitious hotels, stores, and office blocks rolled back from the water-front and melted up the hill. A noble steel and concrete city had grown beyond the flat where once the sawmill Slab Town stood, and dominated a noble picture of forest, sea, and snow.

On Hastings Street Denis had studied the banks and offices, noting the high tiers of windows, the moldings, and columns. He imagined the industries of British Columbia would not support a city like that. Well, the liner was from Japan, and yard-engines pushed American freight-cars across the switches behind the wharf. Then a deep whistle pierced the jangling bells, and the long Pacific express took a curve by the water-front. For the most part, the passengers had got on board at Montreal, and somebody remarked that she was not very much behind time.

On the whole, Denis approved Vancouver. The city was clean and new; one felt it had but started on its advance. In its streets people went fast, but somehow their step was light and their look hopeful. All, it seemed, had something worth while to do, and he thought them marked by a rather aggressive confidence. He, however, must find his job and he inquired for Stoddart's friend.

A wharf-hand directed him to an office across the tracks, and when Ferguson received him Denis imagined he must use the conciseness one

used in an orderly-room. Ferguson was large and muscular. His look was imperturbable and, although his face was fleshy, somehow ascetic, like a monk's. To picture human emotions moving him was hard. He listened mechanically to Denis's brief remarks.

"Ye were at Stoddart's. How is all with Rob?" he said.

Denis replied that Rob was well and his flock and herd increased. Ferguson nodded.

"Ye are seeking a job? A British officer?"

As a rule, a Canadian in authority does not bother to be polite, and Denis thought Ferguson's inquiry ironical. To some extent his supposition was accurate. The wharfinger had sweated and gone without, and, asking no man's help, had stubbornly forced his way as far as his abilities allowed. Now he sometimes indulged his scorn for a softer, luckier type, for whom he imagined all was made easy. Well, Denis had encountered an antagonism like that before and had tried to cultivate humorous toleration.

"Eventually, I was an officer; but I was a private, sergeant, and cadet. The cadets, so to speak, went through the mill again."

"Just that," said Ferguson, as if he saw the argument. "Ye would not get a batman if ye joined the C.P.R."

"When the British infantryman is not fighting he's something like a navvy," Denis rejoined. "He loads up stuff for the engineers, digs gun-pits for the artillery, and scavenges for the sanitary gang. Perhaps my qualification is that I have done the lot."

For a few moments Ferguson pondered. Efficiency was a sort of religion, and so far as his control went, every dollar the railroad paid stood for a hundred cents' worth of labor. All the same, Denis was not discouraged. The fellow knew old Rob, and friendship means something to a Scot.

"If, in a week, you think me slack, you can fire me," he said.

"That is so," Ferguson agreed, and his vanishing twinkle indicated a touch of humor. "If ye are willing to load up cargo, ye can start in the morning. Ask for Brant or Cullen. They'll see ye get to work."

He indicated that the interview was over and Denis went off. In the meantime, he had got all he wanted, and on the whole he liked Ferguson. The fellow was the company's servant and must be just.

At daybreak he returned to the wharf. The morning was fresh and a keen salty smell pierced the engine smoke. Bells clanged and big shadowy cars rumbled along the tracks. Behind the water-front, tiers of concrete buildings reflected the pearly light; it looked as if a marble city rolled up the hill. The liner's boat-deck towered above the wharf, but her winches as yet were quiet, and Denis, waiting for the foreman, was bothered by an uneasiness he had known in France.

He was not daunted by effort and perhaps not very much by risk. The trouble rather was he did not know if he could bear a strain he had not tried. In industry, as in war, one must do all one's comrades did and pull one's proper weight. To break was not an individual fault; it jarred the whole machine. Although one gasped and grumbled, one must keep step.

Whistles called and the noise echoed in the cargo-sheds and high gray walls. Steam throbbed, the liner's winches rattled, and foreman Brant sent Denis on board. In her hold the light was not yet good and steam and smoke blew about the hatch above. Dust floated to the shining gap and bent figures toiled in the gloom. Swift wire ropes rattled, bales plunged from rammed tiers, men beat tight the looped slings, and the load went up; but before the rocking mass vanished, a fresh sling leaped down the hatch. On the wharf the freight-cars waited and the winches must not stop. All under deck must hustle and Denis got to work.

Two or three hours afterward, he stopped for a moment and tried to get his breath. His side hurt, his mouth was parched, and his hands were raw; but he knew he was not knocked out. When he, in a sense, got going, his nervous shrinking went. The strain was hardest before the start.

Mechanically, moved perhaps by instinct, he looked up. His hand was on the iron ladder, and some yards above a hoisted load struck the coaming ledge. It looked as if a bale slipped from the jarred sling, and if the bale plunged down the hatch, all the load would go. Moreover, the gang was occupied where the stuff would crash. A guy-line controlled the hoisting-wire, but perhaps the man in charge for a moment turned his head. In the turmoil a shout might not carry, and Denis rushed up the ladder.

Jumping from the hatch, he seized the guy and shocked against a man. Both went down, but Denis's jump had swung the sling from the hatch. When he struck the deck the load crashed, dust tossed in the blowing steam, and massive bales rolled about. The load, however, had not descended on the gang, and Denis lay across the guy-holder's chest. It looked as if his

being there annoyed the fellow. Somebody threw him back and the other got up. A third man lifted a commanding hand.

“Steve will take your job. Yeese have wan more chance. Get busy at the shoot.”

Denis thought he ought to know the voice, but the speaker turned.

“Mr. Aylward! In the hold! I’ll soon have ye out av that.”

“Mr. Cullen!” said Denis. “I hope your sisters are happy and well.”

“I’m *Danny*. When I have told them the girls will be wild to see yeese. But come on. The hold is not the sphot for a beginner.”

“Until you have seen Brant, perhaps I’d better stay where I was sent.”

A shout pierced the turmoil. “Cullen! The car gang’s waiting. Where the —— is Dan?”

Cullen waved his hand and vanished, and Denis resumed his labor. Until the whistles blew he had not much leisure to reflect, but when he opened his dinner-pail in a quiet corner he speculated—

Dan Cullen sprang from Celtic peasant stock, and had cultivated a patch of barren soil somewhere in the bogs. The political upheaval disturbed his farming and Denis imagined he was “up in the 16.” At all events, Danny was a stanch Republican, and British irregulars had burned the creamery which was his main support. In the circumstances, some antagonism for a British officer might be logical, but the fellow’s warm greeting was sincere.

Denis admitted that all the help he gave the Misses Cullen hardly entitled him to reckon on their brother’s friendliness. All the same, Danny seemed to think the loan of a dollar mattress something to be grateful for, and since he had somehow got a foreman’s post, meant to pay his debt. The queer thing was, although Denis had met English Canadians, the men who tried to help him were a Scot and an Irish Republican. He, however, was English and did not mean to exploit his friends.

He returned to the hold, and when the bales were sent up, went to a lower deck, where he dragged sticky bags of sugar from the tiers in the dark wings. Sometimes his companions bantered him; sometimes a boy carrying a water-pail gave him a drink. Denis thought the gang a hefty, rudely good-humored lot, but the voices of three of four were cultivated. For the most part, he was breathless; his overalls got stained, and his sticky skin was wet by sweat. When the winches stopped and he crawled up the ladder, to straighten his aching back was hard.

Supper at his hotel was, like breakfast, a thin, hard steak, potatoes, and a slab of cold pie. His room was a seven-foot cubicle and he imagined he could push down the partition wall. When he remarked about it, another guest told him that not long since the dollar-hotel bedrooms had packing-paper walls and sometimes an inebriated stranger walked straight through them.

At daybreak Denis was back on the wharf, but when he steered for the liner's gangway, foreman Brant signaled him to stop.

"Since you're Dan Cullen's towny, we will not send you below. You can fall in with the truck boys. Maybe you'll like the change."

"I'd sooner Dan did not give me a softer job than I'm entitled to take," Denis replied.

The Canadian looked at him hard and smiled.

"That's all right! In this country, you take all you can get, and you're for a change. If you use some judgment, I don't know but you might now and then sit on your truck."

For most of the day, Denis had not much leisure in which to repose. Bales and bags and boxes sped like a noisy avalanche down the cargo-shoots, and his business was to convey the goods the dispatcher indicated to the cars. He, however, was in the sunshine, the truck ran smoothly, and sometimes when the winches' speed got slack, he for a few moments rested on a sticky sugar-bag.

In the evening he had frankly had enough. His hands were battered and his nails were broken, but speed was getting easier and he began to think he might soon find his stride. Anyhow, in three or four minutes the hard day would be over, and he leaned against the handles of his tilted truck.

The doors of a car near him clanged, and he heard the yard-engine's bell. Then a mountain locomotive snorted explosively, and soft-coal smoke rolled back like a sulphurous fog along the jarring train. Denis reckoned the locomotive was half a mile in front, but car followed car across the switches and melted in the smoke. When the caboose clanged past, Cullen leaped from the step.

"For the most av two days I had not time to look for ye," he said. "Now we can confabulate and the girls expect ye to take supper with us."

Denis said he would be delighted and the whistle blew.

## XIX

# BRIDE SEES “FAUST”

THE street-car stopped outside the stone city's limits, and Denis, getting down, found the Cullens occupied some part of a small wooden house.

Danny stated that the other occupants were Leinster folk. Since, as a rule, all a Western citizen can claim is a cramped bedroom and a chair at a hotel, Denis imagined his host's luck was good. How Danny had got his home and his post at the wharf was another thing, and Denis did not inquire.

Perhaps a political ideal had something to do with it, and perhaps the cultivation of a language the Saxon could not use. Denis had some grounds to know the Scots and Gaels were clannish, and sometimes he had regretted his folk were not.

The small house was supplied with mechanical inventions, but Denis did not note the methodical neatness that ruled at the Stoddart shack. In fact, where a man was forced to study housekeeping, he imagined his efficiency surpassed a woman's. At all events, Rob could find a small article in the dark; Monica Cullen admitted at supper she did not know where the spoons had gone.

Her welcome moved Denis, and when Bride gave him her hand her eyes sparkled. The touch of rawness that had marked the girls had vanished. Monica had a sort of calm dignity; little Bride was frankly beautiful. To some extent, their clothes were fashionable; they had posts at a store and the pay was good. Denis thought they had in Canada blossomed like wild flowers transplanted in fertile soil.

Then, although Monica did not perhaps use all the rules important hostesses know, her hospitality was marked by instinctive kindness. It looked as if the Misses Cullen had inherited a fine courtesy from ancestors who labored in the lonely bogs. Denis was young, but perhaps his imagination did not altogether carry him away.

“We had six spoons,” said Cullen when Monica gave Denis his cup. “Now all but two have disappeared and Bride has need to blush. Denis's

friends at the officers' mess did not stir their coffee with the wrong end av a fork."

"'Tis the way things have; they vanish and you find them where they are not. Sometimes I think the *good folks* practise conjuring tricks," Monica replied, and turned to Denis. "In the army, you knew where every strap was and you did not lose your button-stick."

"As a rule, we did not lose our stuff. Sometimes useful things were *won*. Well, perhaps there are yet fairies on the Pacific Slope. Anyhow, after my bannocks and pork at Stoddart's, your supper has a magic touch."

"Bride is cook," said Monica. "When the stove will go, and Mrs. Bryan is not about, we do not grumble much. Kate Bryan is a kind soul, but if she has her boys' dinner forgotten, she borrows the best of ours."

"To-night I was firm with the creature," Bride remarked. "But we were talking about the good folk. They have not yet them all chased from Canada. We met one on the train."

"The conductor was your countryman. Had he been an Anglo-Saxon, he'd have dumped the goblin. I admit we are not a romantic lot. Anyhow, I am not remarkably fairylike and would not thrive on stolen cream and the essence of flowers. By comparison, Bride's supper has numerous advantages. But you were, I think, going to the mountains. You did not stay long."

Dan Cullen smiled. "Our folk are not selfish, and when we strike a fine country we call our friends. When they get there we begin to think where we'd have them put, and we cannot always find the proper sphot. Besides, wan sometimes likes to stand on wan's own feet."

"Always; so long as one's shoes are good," said Bride with a hint of feeling.

She began to talk about something else, but Denis imagined Dan had said, discreetly, all there was to be said. He himself had thought his uncle's partner, on whom he had perhaps a claim, might in some way direct and further his ranching ambition. Marvin, however, had refused. All to whom he owed any gratitude were strangers, like Stoddart and Cullen, and both were poor.

When supper was over Dan carried off the plates, which he and Denis cleaned at the hot-water tap. Then they sat by the stove and engaged in happy careless talk. Denis frankly liked the stanch Republican; moreover, he sensed in his hosts a subtle intelligence and humorous allowance for his

point of view that he had not always known in the Old Country. The Misses Cullen were perhaps not altogether sophisticated, but they certainly were not dull.

An American touring company had announced their visit to the opera-house, and when Denis suggested that all should go Bride's eyes sparkled. When he knew the opera was *Faust* he wondered. Monica had stated they were not playgoers, and Bride was fresh from a convent school.

"You will tell us the story and then we'll understand the play," said Monica. "When people sing and the music's fine, you do not hear all the words."

Denis glanced at Cullen, but Danny obviously did not know the *Faustus* legend.

"Well, I suppose the central idea is—an old man is given back his youth. He has studied much, he perhaps knows all that doctors and philosophers knew five hundred years since. You wonder how he will use the knowledge. In another famous story, the devil is allowed to experiment by stripping a wise man of everything he values, and he stands the test. Faust is given all he asks for, but he fails—"

"He got a fresh chance," said Bride. "And he knew no better? The foolish things he did before, he did again?"

"Something like that," Denis agreed. "He, however, was handicapped by a bargain he made at the start; but you will see how a great German poet handles the old tale."

"It's hard to wait, but Saturday will not be long," said Bride.

On the Saturday evening they went to the opera, and Denis felt he had honestly earned all the enjoyment he could get. For a week he had manhandled cargo on the noisy wharf. His nails were broken and his stiff muscles ached, but until the whistles called in the dusk of Monday morning he could go slack. Then to feel his skin and clothes at length were clean was some relief, and he knew he would not be bored.

Denis liked Gounod's music and his companions were an interesting study. The Misses Cullen did not use much reserve. Bride's color came and went, her eyes shone, and she was keen as a schoolgirl for her first party; but perhaps the excursion was rather a visit to Fairyland. Monica was quiet, but Denis knew her highly strung. She turned her small finely-poised head as if she searched the crowded house, and her wandering glance was kind. Denis imagined Monica liked to see others happy.



It looked as if the close-packed audience was, at least, content. Women were not very numerous; the men were marked by a sort of expectant alertness that Denis had not noted when he went to the opera in the Old Country. He thought none resigned to be bored; for six days the crowd had labored strenuously, and now they meant to get some satisfaction from the show. On the whole, they were not divided by their occupations, for in the West an opera-house is a democratic institution. Merchants, store-clerks, and railroad-hands mingled. In one row Denis noted two or three traffic bosses, and a number of his comrades on the wharf. The clothes of all were good, and the truck-pushers were athletic young fellows. Their look was keen and intelligent, and Denis thought some thoroughbred.

The lights went down, and when the curtain rolled back he heard Bride draw her breath. For a time she was very quiet, but she shuddered and once she mechanically touched his arm. Then between the acts she said:

“The poor, rash man! He gives his soul for youth and pleasure. And will he have to pay?”

“Perhaps you ought to wait and see. As a rule, one pays for all one gets. You may have heard the thing before, but old folks believe it true.”

“Then, they don’t *know*,” Bride declared. “All that’s best in life you get for nothing.”

“I wonder—” said Denis. “Well, it’s possible.”

Monica smiled indulgently.

“ ’Tis the Sisters have her taught things like that.”

“But you, yourself, rather doubt?”

“One hopes,” said Monica. “When I’m old I’ll know.”

“Faust forgot.”

“He got back his youth,” said Monica. “Sure the tempter was cunning. Faust is not an old man transformed. He is all a boy.”

Denis thought her comment shrewd; she had given him a clue he had missed when he saw *Faust* before, but he pondered Bride’s shy confidence that one got the best for nothing. Well, he admitted, one was given love, and Bride was beautiful. Denis began to see she was not raw, but as yet altogether fresh. One could move her and where she trusted her faith would stand some shocks. Denis, like Faust rejuvenated, was youthful flesh and blood; but he had noted Mephistopheles’ ironical leer. The devil knew the

stuff on which he worked. Denis moved a little back from the adjoining chair. The girl who occupied it was not for him.

By and by he saw she studied Marguerite. The actress rather obviously sprang from Nordic stock; she was, in fact, a Minnesota Swede.

“Do you like her?” he inquired when the curtain went down.

“She has grace,” said Bride. “Her hair’s like shining silk, her eyes are blue like the flax; but you know she’s Saxon!”

“Marguerite was something of the sort; only her name and the music are French. I believe the German poet meant to draw her fresh and innocent.”

“When she took the jewels the cunning wian had her trapped. Hard, shining, sparkling things, and she has the cold Saxon eye.”

“Bride!” said Monica softly, and Cullen met Denis’s glance and grinned.

“Then you don’t like our color?” said Denis, smiling. “Well, your hair and eyes are dark as Rosaleen’s. I believe a poet talked about the dark and true and tender North.”

“They cheated him,” Bride declared. “The North is *black*, but it is not tender. But the next act’s starting, and I want to see—”

The drama and the music absorbed her. Sometimes for a few moments her little shoes tapped the boards; sometimes her light figure swayed in harmony with the flowing rhythm. Bride did not know Gounod’s music and had but once seen a play, but she had inherited poetical imagination from a dramatic race and the ancient legend is not entangled by modern complexities. On the romantic stage she saw, with a child’s eyes, Evil, personified, fight for a human soul. Moreover, she knew the struggle was not imaginary. The tale was supported by the Sisters’ austere code. The waltz and the Flower Song charmed her; the rolling Soldiers’ Chorus carried her away.

“It’s entirely grand,” she said. “Maybe you have heard our Soldiers’ Song?”

“Oh, yes,” said Denis, with a smile. “One of the Munsters sang it, by request, at our mess in France. If the confession does not annoy you, I’d sooner hear Gounod’s. He sang another I did like, *The Rising of the Moon*.”

“Good for the boy!” said Dan.

“There was pluck for ye,” Monica agreed.

Denis thought her moved. As a rule, the Misses Cullen used colloquial English, but when one touched their emotions they were bilingual.

“But what did yees do?” she resumed. “The rest av ye, sitting by in British uniform with the English oak-leaves on your caps.”

“The oak-leaves go with the big brass hats, but I think we cheered the man. He sang with some spirit and his voice was good.”

“You’re a queer lot,” Bride remarked with a puzzled frown.

Denis laughed. “You stated something like that before. Danny perhaps is an irreconcilable—or ought it not to be an *incurruptible*?”

“Good for ye!” said Cullen. “Whin I began to study politics I borried the *French Revolution* from the Institute. Them boys was thorough; they make a shweeping job— But now I disremember if I took back the book.”

“Oh, well, when you think about it, there’s not much use in hating folks; and then, you see, Jerry was in the other line, in a manner, across the street. On the whole, he was not a bad sort, and when he sang his frightful hymns we had a sort of feeling that he grinned. Anyhow, when the brass hats were not about and we liked the tune, we joined. The *Watch*, of course, goes with a splendid swing.”

For a moment or two Bride pondered, and then she blushed.

“Denis, ye have the right of it. If ye are fine enough, it’s good to laugh. At the end of all, charity’s the conqueror.”

“The child is wise. The Sisters have her taught,” Monica remarked.

“When we have seen the last act I expect you’ll agree that the poet justifies the good ladies,” Denis agreed.

He stopped, for a man in the row behind leaned across.

“Maybe you folks will quit talking. The fiddles are getting busy and we’d like to hear the band.”

Danny jumped to his feet, but the other was two or three yards off. The chairs were occupied and firmly bolted down.

“For five cents, I’d climb across and shweep the floor wid ye.”

“ ’Attaboy!” shouted a wharf hand. “Call it a quarter, and sick it to him, Pat!”

Denis, rather forcibly, pushed Cullen back. A cornet struck a mellow note, the violins joined, and the curtain rolled up.

Bride was very quiet, her eyes fixed on the stage, and Denis knew the tale and the music triumphantly carried her away. He wondered where she was, for only her tense, slender body was in the Vancouver opera-house. Perhaps she wept in Marguerite's prison, since her tears were frank, but sometimes her glance was like a soldier's glance. The girl had unconsciously engaged in the primeval conflict, and when she signed the Cross Denis imagined the drama was no longer a theatrical illusion. Bride herself was protagonist; she fronted the powers of the dark. Well, he had seen a cleverer Mephistopheles and a famous singer play Marguerite; but they had not stirred him like the American touring company. Perhaps Bride's emotion had something to do with it.

The curtain dropped on the last act, the calls were acknowledged, and he was in the porch, Bride's hand on his arm. Her color had melted, but her eyes shone like stars.

"He won out; after all, she saved him!" she said in a low voice. "In the morning I'll maybe remember it's only a theayter play— But all's true, Denis. In the end, the devil must be beaten."

Denis smiled, but said nothing. So long as Bride was satisfied, there was nothing to be said. Anyhow, since civilization stood, evil, on the whole, destroyed itself. He admitted the remark was Kate Marvin's and, he rather thought, another's. They, however, were on the pavement and he steered Bride through the crowd to a candy-store.

## XX SPEED

As a rule, winter lightly touches the Canadian Pacific Coast, but sometimes the cold-snaps are keen, and four months after Denis went to the Vancouver wharf a big *Empress* boat arrived in a snowstorm. She had met a typhoon in the China Seas; blinding snow had held her up in the Straits of San Juan. Her holds were full to the hatches, but since she was behind the time schedule, the traffic chiefs must hurry her back to sea. To “turn her round” is the cargo-loader’s phrase.

When the hatches were pulled off Ferguson went on board and jumped on a derrick-boom. Snow blew about him and the men who rigged the cargo-chutes on the wharf below. Another gang trampled the slush on deck, but when Ferguson signaled, men and noisy winches stopped. Balanced on the high derrick, his hand lifted, he was a commanding figure.

“The *Empress* boats run to schedule and you know when she ought to start,” he said. “Well, she has got to go, and your job is to move her freight. I reckon you’ll do it, and the Company will not be mean about your time. That’s all, boys. You can get to work.”

He jumped down, and the winches clamored. Bales and boxes crashed in the trampled snow, and the race against time began.

Denis beat his numbed hands and pulled out a bundle of shipping-bills. Across the wharf, the freight-cars waited and the truck gang must put their load on board. Brant, inspired perhaps by Cullen, had given him some authority, but Denis imagined Ferguson approved. For the most part, the old fellow kept his office. So long as all went smoothly he was not seen on the wharf, but he was reputed to know how much, from the Company’s point of view, every man’s time was worth, and when he did meddle somebody’s pay went up and another’s stopped. All with a grievance might appeal to Ferguson, but unless one’s claim were just, to appeal was rash.

At the beginning, Denis knew but little about handling cargo and sometimes admitted he did not want to know more. For all that, when he had

led his platoon he had cultivated some talent for organization; he knew where obedience galled, and he hated to bully. Sometimes a joke and a swift explanation carried weight where a command would not, and when he, unofficially, took control none grumbled.

“Stick the Spokane bill on the front car; the stuff for her will soon be out,” he directed a companion. “Then there’s a lot for Calgary—I can’t find the blamed note.”

The papers he sorted stuck to his wet hands. He turned over the bundle, and a box, plunging down the chute, swept him off his legs. The other laughed, but Denis got back from the avalanche of cargo and presently found the bill.

For a time the notes occupied him, and then his glance searched the wharf. Brant and Cullen were not about, and the truckers must be sent where they could labor economically. None must handle half a load, and the cargo must not pile up. If they were forced to stop the stream, Ferguson would know and names might be deleted from the pay-clerk’s roll.

The job was harder than Denis at one time had thought. The men must be moved as a chess-player moves his pieces, and they did not, like a platoon, advance in one direction. So far, none blocked another’s path, and the trucks were full. Somebody touched Denis and he saw the foreman. Brant was a big Scandinavian and the snow stuck to his skin coat from which the hair had begun to fall. His eyes, nearly hidden by his battered fur cap, were cold, hard blue; but when he had studied the hurrying groups he nodded.

“All right! Call three boys from the fore-hatch bunch. Then I’ll keep them stepping. You can get a truck.”

Denis was willing. When one moves cargo one does not use a coat, and the snow had begun to soak his overalls. He was cold, and when he seized his truck his numbed hands slipped on the wet wood. The snow was soft and melted under the trampling feet; Denis’s boots sank in the treacherous slush and did not get proper hold. To shove his truck was awkward, and sometimes he was forced to reload the goods he jolted off. For all that, the car-loaders waited for the stuff and he dared not be slow.

His journey was back and forward along a sloppy, beaten path. One started, gasping, with a horrible strain on arms and chest; one returned with one’s head lifted, breathing, for a few moments, easily. Sugar-bags, baled silk, and tea-chests sped like an angry torrent down the inclined chutes, and

the winches that supplied the flood did not tire. The winch-man turned a valve; Denis must push a truck. Steam was properly man's servant, but on the wharf it was his master, and flesh and blood must keep the pace the hammering machines set. Denis, sweating, sliding, and sometimes swearing, in the snow, felt the thing unjust.

At noon he went to his hotel. The big dining-room was crowded and it looked as if the basement heater went full blast. Denis's clothes and the others' steamed and the damp ran down the window-glass. A large number of the diners were from the railroad-yard; their hands were greasy, and their slate-colored shirts were stained with soft-coal soot.

Nobody talked. At a cheap hotel the waitresses are not indulgent, and if one wants one's proper share, one must use some speed. Denis frankly did so and ate his hard steak like a famished animal. The dessert was doughy cold pie and coffee. The girl jarred the cup and the muddy liquid spilled. She liked Denis, but the house was full. If a boarder lost his coffee, why, his luck was bad!

After dinner Denis pulled out his watch and went to the bleak hall. If one put one's feet on the radiator-pipes in front of the large window, one could tilt one's hard chair at an easy angle and stretch one's legs. To balance was rather awkward, and since the glass was but a yard off, it was like reposing in the street; but for a few minutes Denis could go slack and nobody on the crowded pavement looked in. A row of tired men, lounging uncouthly by a hotel window, was not a romantic spectacle.

Sometimes the bleakness jarred. Although Vancouver was an attractive city, a wharf-hand rather saw its ugliness than its beauty. Denis's food was, at all events, sufficient, and he had proper clothes, but until he was asleep, he was a helpless unit in a pushing crowd, driven by economic forces his sort could not control. Denis imagined it was like that in London and Montreal, although when, after the Armistice, he was in town money had bought him freedom, and friends had rejoiced to feast a conquering hero.

Denis smiled. He had done with the Old Country, but sometimes he was homesick for Stoddart's shack and the austere beauty of the wilds. In fact, but for the Cullens, he doubted if he could have remained in Vancouver. In the evenings his habit was to look them up, the house was a rendezvous for sober young fellows, and when they went to a concert or the pictures he joined the party.

Denis was not jealous. Although the girls were charming, he was neither's lover, and sometimes he speculated about his coolness. Both were

frank and kind, and marked by a sort of instinctive refinement; moreover, they had qualities useful in the West. Monica was calm, and for all her youth, wise. Wise was perhaps the proper word, for in her gentle morality there was nothing calculating and mean. Bride was eager, plucky, and beautiful. Had Denis resolved to marry one, he would not know which, and he imagined his not knowing was significant— He pulled out his watch, stretched his stiff muscles, and started for the wharf.

In the afternoon the strain got worse. A biting wind helped the donkey-boiler's fires and the winches speeded up. Fresh men were sent to the holds, and a roaring, shocking stream of goods swept the cargo-chutes. The snow was trampled to slimy mire and one's boots slipped on the planks. All the same, the loads were heavier and the trucks must keep a faster pace.

After a time, Denis thought himself justified to leave his truck. To rest was impossible, but a fresh occupation was some relief, and the yard-engine waited to move a row of cars. The men on board one could not put all the stuff the truckers brought, and Denis went to their help.

Behind the big doors the light was bad. The covers of the bales were wet and slippery, but since the goods were valuable one must not use a hook. The bales must be manhandled: hoisted by blistered hands and galled shoulders to the high tiers, and to ram them back one sometimes used one's head. Yet the yard-engine whistled, and if the train did not pull out on time, all imagined somebody would be fired.

The men were willing. On the Canadian Pacific slope pay is good, but choppers, sawmill- and railroad-hands give full value for the sums they get. Then all were young and marked by something of the pride an athlete knows when he uses power and speed. The gang swore and sweated, but the massive bales went up.

At length the car was loaded and Denis jumped stiffly from the door. The light was going and a keen wind swept the ruffled Inlet. Steamers' lights twinkled with frosty brilliance and the snow on the planks solidified. Wheels did not run smoothly on the uneven surface and Denis's overalls were wet. He hated to face the piercing wind and his glance rested longingly on the dark mouth of a shed. For a few minutes he might pretend to stack some goods, but if he indulged his tired body, the proper spot for him was the lawyer's office he had rashly left. He shrugged resignedly, and went for his truck.

By and by the arc-lights' beams pierced the dusk, and electric cargo-lights blazed about the liner's hatches. Streaming radiance touched the high



white hull and splashed the wharf, but when one had crossed the illuminated belts one plunged awkwardly into the dark. Denis, returning for a fresh load, was puzzled by the gloom; but a moment since the snow had shone like frosted silver. A truck's steel front jarred his leg, and when he sat down in the frozen stuff his truck's handles struck his back. Then another truck and some heavy chests of tea crashed on both. With something of an effort he got up and looked for the man who had run him down.

"My fault!" remarked the other in a humorous voice. "Now you are on your feet, perhaps you can see a blighted tea-box?"

"I see two," said Denis. "I believe I felt some more."

"I want another and a bag. If the articles had gone over the wharf, I would not grumble much. However, to be fired is expensive, and I am stopping you."

Denis helped him put up his load, and when they pulled the bag across the boxes somebody began to shout.

"Dillon! Where in thunder are you? Sorry you got to hustle, but the boss don't like to wait."

"*Adsum*. Coming, my lord!" said Dillon, and vanished in the dark.

Denis laughed, but somehow the encounter braced him, for he knew Dillon's sort. Where the strain was hardest they joked, but after all, it was not Dillon the truck knocked down. In the meantime, however, the liner's cargo poured tumultuously from the chute.

By and by the wind dropped and a bright moon shone in the serene sky. The frost got biting and the wheels crashed noisily over crackling ice. Since one must speed up, the cold was welcome, and although the dark hours dragged Denis pushed his truck. When he reached his hotel the occupants had gone to bed. Denis crept up the stairs and in a few minutes was asleep.

In the dark morning cold rain swept the streets, and Denis, hurrying along the greasy pavement, felt he hated the whistles that called him to work. His thin overalls were wet and the wind was piercing. On the wharf a coat was a subject for the foreman's ironical remarks. If a trucker pulled his proper weight, he would not be cold, and nobody ought to bother about getting wet. In the meantime, the locomotive-bells began to toll and he pushed along in the dreary crowd.

Smoke and steam blew about the wharf and blue arc-lights glimmered in the fog. The rain had not melted all the snow and one must splash and

stumble in the greasy mess. It looked as if the winch-men were refreshed by sleep, and the flood of cargo raced down the chutes faster than before.

As a rule in Canadian industry, labor is economically used, and Denis admitted the bosses' staff work was good. Where men and cars were needed they were; but none was sent to a post at which he was not fully occupied. For all that, when a loaded train pulled out fresh cars did not arrive and stacks of goods sprang up by the track. When the frontage was blocked the gang stopped. Some sat down slackly, and some, like Denis, walked impatiently about.

For a few minutes he was justified to rest, but the winches rattled and the cargo piled up. If the pile got very large, one could not sort the stuff; anyhow, when one again got going one must use sterner efforts than before. He, of course, was not accountable, but the block annoyed him, as it annoyed the gang.

At length, a bell clanged and fresh cars rolled along the track. The men jumped up, but the stoppage had disorganized the wharfinger's plans. Before the gang could move the pile, fresh stuff arrived, and soon the trucks could not get to the cars. Denis knew the men were beaten, and although the business was not his, he called one.

"Look for Brant and let him know how we are fixed. If he and Cullen are not about, go to the office."

"I guess not," the young fellow replied. "The Company's notion is, a foreman ought to be about, and for Brant to state that he was wanted somewhere else might not cut much ice. For a wharf boss, I allow he's a pretty good sort."

"Don't talk!" said Denis. "Get busy. The stuff's heaping up."

"Well, there's another thing: on a railroad job, the man who owns he can't make good, takes some chances. Now you get me?"

Denis nodded. In the industrial army he was a private soldier and not entitled to ask for supports; but unless his officers ordered up any reserves they had, work must stop. The gangways to the cars were blocked.

"You can say the message was mine. If there's trouble, I'll stand for it. But shove off!"

The other went, and Denis savagely tried to cut down the growing stacks of goods. When one's hands are wet, to drag about cases bound by slippery hoops, and bales in soaked covers, is awkward; besides, there was no longer

space for the stream of trucks. He gasped and strained, but although he might be fired for meddling, he meant to stay with it. The gang played up. Denis had perhaps a talent for leadership, at all events, he led, and where the jam was thickest he was first to seize a load.

For all their efforts, the stacks got higher, and the fellow who carried the message did not return. They were losing ground, and the confusion by the track would soon be worse confounded. Then, when all were exhausted, Brant with another gang plunged into the turmoil. Ferguson had sent his reserves, and Denis modestly took the background. He had had enough, but Brant's lot were comparatively fresh and the cool Scandinavian was the proper man to put the tangle straight.

Denis got his lunch in a corner of a shed. At the hotel one might give a waitress one's dinner-pail, and, if the cook were indulgent, the food one carried off was good. Sometimes, however, one got scraps of meats for which the house's customers had not much use. One trusted one's luck, but Denis had not much reason to grumble about this. The waitress liked his Old Country politeness.

The afternoon and evening were horribly long and the rain did not stop. Denis could not get to his hotel, and his supper was some broken pie from the bottom of his pail. The blue arc-lights swept the wharf, but behind the piled goods the shadows were thick, and the men flagged. They had labored stubbornly, but they were human and the machines they served did not tire.

At length Denis jumped from the step of a loaded car and somebody fastened the big doors. Up the track, another shouted, lanterns flickered, and brakes-men ran along the roofs. Dazzling lights flared in the rain and huge engines snorted. Denis straightened his back and got his breath, and when he dragged himself across the wharf the locomotive-bells stopped.

Midnight was not far off, but the last stack of goods had melted, and the cars that carried the stuff had started for the East. In the morning he could lie in bed, and if the waitress were good-humored, might not go without his breakfast.

## XXI

# DENIS'S COUNSELOR

NOTHING much was doing at the railroad-wharf. The liner had gone to sea, and the majority of the wharf-hands blocked the windows at the cheap hotels. Their recent efforts had earned them a useful sum, and until another boat arrived, they were willing to loaf.

Denis and a few more one morning rather leisurely transferred some goods from the cars to a shed. Since he was a fresh man, he had speculated about his being kept on the pay-roll. Cullen perhaps had fixed things; in Canada *fixed* had something of the significance *wangled* had in France. Somehow Danny was indulged. Two or three of his countrymen occupied good railroad posts and others helped manipulate civic politics. Denis considered *manipulate*, and wondered whether *wangle* was not again the proper verb. All the same, he was not satisfied that Danny had meddled. When the gang were forced to wait for the yard-engine to move the cars, he mechanically felt for his pipe, and stopped. A wharf-hand seated on a box and tranquilly smoking was not the sort of picture a traffic boss approved, but if one jumped up and thrust one's hot pipe into one's pocket, one burned one's overalls. Denis had not long since done so, and Monica had mended the hole. He, however, did not see a foreman, and he languidly studied the tops of the big office blocks and the houses on the hill.

Vancouver was a handsome city, although in some places its architecture was pretentious. On the whole, Denis liked the citizens, but he had discovered that they expected a stranger to know and use their rules. In the democratic West, all, as far as possible, were molded to one pattern. Denis admitted that independence was not much encouraged in the Old Country, but there the standard patterns were more numerous. People knew where one belonged by one's idiom, point of view, and clothes. The Canadian plan had perhaps some advantages; particularly when one was a wharf-hand.

Anyhow, the Western type was a good type. The men were hefty fellows, willing to use brain and muscle, and none bothered much about his food and physical comfort. They undertook romantic adventures in the mountains,

they engaged in rather reckless speculations, and all were marked by a sort of pugnacious confidence. In fact, at the coast city, the dominant note was hope.

Denis's reflections were disturbed. A young fellow crossed the wharf and gave him a sympathetic grin.

"I guess you're for it! Old Man Ferguson wants you at the office."

There was no use in trying to guess the superintendent's object, and Denis went off. At the office Ferguson indicated a chair and leaned on his desk.

"Do you like it on the wharf?"

"On the whole, I think I ought to be satisfied, sir."

"You're not rash. However, the Company's men must be punctual, willing, and able, where all's not planned for them, to use some common sense. So far, I have a good account o' ye."

"One might claim the qualities and yet be modest," Denis remarked.

He imagined Ferguson's eyes twinkled, but he did not know. The superintendent's habit was not to relax.

"Well, if ye believe they're yours, we might offer you a better post. We need another man to sort cargo and I am told ye have some fitness for the job. It carries higher pay."

"I must thank you for thinking about me—" Denis began and hesitated, for Ferguson's glance was faintly humorous.

"Maybe ye know, in Company's service, promotion goes by merit?"

Denis wondered. Cullen was, no doubt, a useful man, but his advance was fast. Denis himself was Stoddart's friend, and Rob and Ferguson at one time were comrades. Had he not known Rob, he rather thought he might have waited.

"I suppose the post is a permanent post, sir. You would expect the man you engaged to remain?"

"We might," said Ferguson dryly. "Something would depend on his competence."

"I'd like to try," said Denis, smiling. "The drawback is, for me to take the post and then go off would be shabby. You see, I might go back to Stoddart's. So far, I don't know—"

“Ye’re an honest lad; but ye might consider— The Company is large and powerful. Our tracks run like a gridiron across the map o’ Canada, and the Montreal chiefs have good posts to give the proper men. A young fellow with abilities might make some progress, and his starting on the Vancouver wharf would not be a handicap. Still, if ye have engaged to rejoin Stoddart, that’s another thing.”

“I have not engaged,” said Denis. “In the meantime, I don’t altogether see my line.”

“When you do see, you can look me up,” said Ferguson, and sent him off.

In the evening Denis called at the post-office and was given a letter. He knew the hand, and the envelope carried a British stamp, but if he was not at the hotel for supper he must go without, and he pushed the letter into his pocket. When he had satisfied his appetite he went to the hall and lighted his pipe. The letter was from his trustee, and after Denis’s interview with Ferguson the old fellow’s writing to him was something of a coincidence.

At all events, he must read the letter carefully, for Denis knew his relation. Peter Stormont indulged a sort of crabbed humor and sometimes his remarks carried a weight one did not feel until they were pondered. He stated that he imagined Denis had not yet won his bet and perhaps began to think his emigrating rash. Stormont understood that in the West life was rather strenuous, and the romantic thrill one got when one made a bold experiment did not last—

Denis frowned. He sensed Stormont’s ironical vein, but Peter was not entitled to take his having had enough for granted. Denis, in fact, had made some progress, and if he remained at the wharf for another month, would make up the sum he had engaged to earn. Stormont, however, was not, as a rule, very obvious, and Denis concentrated on the next paragraph.

A bailiff was required for a small country estate: Denis knew the estate. The man for the post ought to know something about the law relating to property in land, and something about agriculture. Denis might perhaps claim to do so, but Stormont imagined conspicuous ability was not required. The landlord was a manufacturer and had bought the estate because he wanted a country house to which he could now and then retire, and some shooting. When he was not there somebody must superintend, and if Denis would like the post, it might be got for him.

Denis knitted his brows. Stormont was a queer old fellow; Denis pictured his rather malicious chuckle when he stated that conspicuous ability was not required. Yet he offered a post some young fellows might be keen to take, and Denis hoped he was not a thin-skinned fool.

Reloading his pipe, he looked about. The hall was bleak and rather dirty. Cigar-ends and burned matches were strewn about the cracked, board floor. But for a large, battered table, all the furniture was a row of hard wooden chairs. One smelt cooking, hot iron, and stale tobacco. A gramophone played a fox-trot out of tune; the boarders talked in harsh voices and joked boisterously with people who strolled in from the street.

By contrast, Denis pictured the amenities he might enjoy at the English country house; the silent, skilful servants, the spaciousness and calm. Smooth lawns and rose gardens sloped from the terrace to a stream. On the other side were noble woods where cock pheasants crowed; and then pastures and turnip-fields, haunted by partridges, rolled up the hill. Denis pictured the guns cracking in the fresh autumn morning.

Well, he must choose one of three divergent lines. Stormont's offer attracted him, but he saw drawbacks. The management of a small estate was not a business proposition. If he went, he would minister to a rich man's pleasure, superintend his shooting parties, control his gamekeepers, and so forth. Denis pictured the fellow's sporting friends: fat profiteers who carried expensive guns but could not shoot. He must indulge and humor them, as if he were a sort of valet.

No! If he must be a servant, he would sooner serve the Canadian railroad company. To load up the big cars and perhaps help control the traffic was a man's job. Ferguson had cautiously implied that he might be useful, and Ferguson did not flatter. Denis saw himself directing the stream of freight that flowed for three thousand miles across the continent. The picture had some charm.

For all that, the quiet woods called. On the railroad he would be a subaltern in a disciplined industrial army, and mechanical discipline jarred. In the woods one was independent and might assert one's individuality, so long, at all events, as one could buy a ranch. There was the trouble, since Denis could not. Unless his relations helped, and he had no real grounds to think them willing, he must engage himself for a hired man.

Well, he was not going to be hasty, and he would weigh things. In fact, he might talk to Monica about it. Monica was kind and wise; anyhow, where

Denis advanced by awkward argument, she instinctively saw the proper plan. Denis hoped she would help him see his.

After work stopped on Saturday, they crossed the Inlet to North Vancouver and followed the beach to a quiet cove in the rocks. The late afternoon was sunny and a warm Chinook wind touched the dark pines' tops. Denis rolled a white drift-log against a ledge for Monica; and then sitting in the stones narrated his interview with Ferguson and gave her Stormont's letter. By and by she put up the folded sheet, and for a few moments looked straight in front.

From the beginning she had known that Denis would go and she would be lonely when he was gone. Yet that was all. He was not her lover; had she wanted a lover, she knew two or three— The boys were fine boys, but none had Denis's strange charm. Well, Monica must be resigned, and there was another thing: Bride must not be hurt. The child was young and did not see, as Monica saw, that Denis was not their sort. Anyhow, she did not see all his being another sort implied.

In the meantime, he had asked Monica's help to solve his puzzle and her counsel must be wise. When she gave him back the letter she thought she saw something he did not. Monica sprang from peasant stock, and the cultivators of the soil sometimes know human nature better than city folk.

"He's old an' crabbed?" she said.

"You are pretty keen," Denis agreed. "All the same, he's not spiteful. I seem to see his dry twinkle when he wrote—"

"As if he wanted you to be annoyed; but thought it a joke?"

"Something like that! Although my ability is not conspicuous, I *was* rather annoyed. His object for provoking me is another thing."

Monica smiled. "After all, it's plain! When a man is angry he does not look for the easy way— So long as he shows you he can fight, he doesn't mind getting hurt. Your relation knows. He wrote about the post because it was his duty; but he would sooner you did not take the job."

Denis looked at her hard, and laughed.

"By George, I think you have got it! It's possible Peter means to buck me up. He bet me I could not earn the sum he fixed, and now he implies he's satisfied I am beaten. Very well, *I'll show him*; I believe the phrase is good American. Anyhow, I'm not going back."



Monica's eyes sparkled. She herself reacted strongly from a touch of the spur and she liked the boy's spirit; but the English calculated, and she thought he would rather be firm than rash.

"Now ye talk like wan av us!" she said. "But what about Mr. Ferguson? He wants ye at the wharf."

"Ah," said Denis, "I don't know— If I was logical, I'd take his offer. The railroad's pay is good, and by and by I might get a better post. Still, I really have not much liking for organized industry, and summer is splendid in the woods."

"It is not always summer," Monica remarked.

"Oh, well," said Denis, smiling, "sometimes, for all the Immigration Bureau's statements, winter is sharp on the Coast. Not long since we unloaded a liner in the snow. Then, you see, although some people like to tramp along with the crowd and advance by order, some do not. The big battalions keep the dusty road; you cannot push ahead when you are fresh, and when you are tired you cannot stop. If you do not keep the measured pace, the brigade rolls over you. The pioneers in front are *men*; the fellows in the column are numbers."

Monica nodded. She had inherited a dislike for mechanical method; but Denis was Saxon and since he had asked her counsel, she must think as the Saxons thought.

"If you stop with the others, you know where your food and bed are, and when you're sick somebody's business is to care for you. In front, it's not like that, and one's not young for long. When one gets old, to be alone is dreary."

"It's possible," Denis agreed, and mused.

One was not forced to be alone, and if another shared one's labors the shack in the pines would not be dreary. Monica had fronted poverty and was not daunted by effort. Her charm was marked and he knew her kindness. Yet he did not see her sitting by his stove at the log house, and he knew she knew he did not.

"If I were practical, I'd stop with Ferguson," he resumed. "Looks as if I had got back to the spot where I shoved off; but sometimes you feel as if you must take the line you like, although every argument points the other way. One must follow one's bent—"

“One must follow one’s heart; in the end it’s best,” said Monica, and gave him a quiet glance. “If yours is in the woods, there’s the place for you!”

Denis noted that her voice was calm, as if at length her doubts were gone. It looked as if her woman’s insight had pierced his specious arguments. Although he knew himself ridiculous, his heart was in the woods, where Kate Marvin was. Monica, however, got up.

“The sun will soon set and the wind gets cold,” she said. “I see the ferry-boat crossing, and we must go back.”

## XXII

# IN STANLEY PARK

DENIS, in the hall at the hotel, balanced an old magazine and some writing-paper on his knee. Two checker-players occupied the table and a lounging group noisily criticized the moves. Then sometimes his boot slipped on the radiator-pipe and his writing-block was jarred. In the circumstances, the proper light touch was difficult, and he informed Stormont, rather bluntly, that after thinking about it, he doubted if his talents were the sort a sporting manufacturer's bailiff required. All the same, it looked as if they might be useful in Canada and he was willing to cancel Stormont's bet. Denis imagined Stormont's object for risking the sum was good, but to profit by his rashness might be shabby.

The letter was not altogether the letter he had wanted to write, and his bluff might cost him something, but he sealed the envelope. Stormont was a sportsman, and Denis thought his refusal would excite the other's curiosity. Then he wrote to Stoddart, and when Rob replied, went one morning to the office at the wharf.

"Ye think before ye jump," Ferguson remarked. "I was wondering when ye'd let me know if ye would like the cargo-sorter's job. The Company could get another man."

"I expect you'd get a number," Denis agreed. "The difficulty was, I doubted if I ought to take the post unless I meant to stay. Now I have weighed things, I see I must quit before long."

"Then ye are going back to Rob?"

Denis, rather apologetically, stated his plans. He had not thought to find Ferguson interested, but the wharfinger nodded.

"Ye have some gall and I like your honesty. Well, for as long as ye want it, the post is yours. Send Brant to me."

A few days afterwards, Denis got to work. Sorting cargo was a softer job than pushing a truck, and, now he knew the city, he was happy at Vancouver.

Yet his resolve to go was firm, and the doubts he had not long since felt had vanished. When one took the road there was no use in looking back.

On the Pacific Coast spring comes swiftly, and when the days got longer warm winds blew across the Straits and the broad Inlet sparkled in the sun. In the evenings Denis and the Cullens went to concerts and walked in Stanley Park.

In the meantime, Rhoda Staines was bored at the ranch and reminded her relations at Victoria that she was not very far off. Their reply was an invitation to visit them, accompanied by her friend.

Kate and Rhoda went, and stopped for some time. Rhoda's relations were important and their house was a center for social functions, but during the visit Rhoda's jealousy was somehow intensified. Although, with some exceptions, the Canadian cities' model is American, Victoria's is English. Kate's type was the Western type, and perhaps it was strange, but she rather than Rhoda was the favorite in their hosts' circle.

Yet, in a sense, her charm was unconscious. She was proud and refused to use much effort to be popular. Rhoda did use some effort, and she reflected moodily that where she must scheme and calculate, Kate was given all a girl was justified to want.

On their return they stopped at Vancouver. Mrs. Marvin needed some supplies from the millinery and drygoods stores, and since the train started soon after the boat arrived, they went to a hotel. In the evening, when their business at the shops was transacted, they walked in Stanley Park.

The evening was fine, and Bride and Denis started for the park. Denis called at the post-office and was given a letter. He knew Stoddart's hand, but Bride waited and he pushed the envelope into his pocket.

Vancouver's park is a belt of primeval forest, and the civic authorities have not unduly meddled with Nature's magnificence. On the warm Pacific Slope the trees are large, and when the first Spanish explorers searched the coast the stately pines and firs were old.

Bride and Denis went quietly past the rows of giant trunks. Sometimes sunshine splashed the bark, and touched the wineberry-leaves with gold, but the yellow beams were but piercing lights in the long, dim avenues. Sometimes the high tops murmured and one heard the tide in the Narrows behind Beaver Point. In a spot like that one went quietly, but Denis imagined Bride pondered. As a rule, she was impulsively joyous; now her look was thoughtful.

They stopped at a bench, and Denis pulled out a decorated box he had got at a candy-store. Bride was frankly fond of sweets, but when two or three were gone she put up the box.

“Don’t you want to read your letter?” she inquired.

Denis smiled and tore open the envelope. Bride’s curiosity was naïve as a child. In some respects she was yet a child, and he doubted if she would like the news he thought to get.

“The letter is from my pal, Stoddart, at the lake.”

“I know,” said Bride. “He wants you! And you’re going?”

Denis nodded. Bride’s voice was rather sharp. The queer thing was, now Rob called him, his eagerness to start was gone.

“As soon as Ferguson gets another man—at the week-end, perhaps.”

“And you’re glad to go? Labeling cargo on the wharf is not your job, and we are not the friends you want! You’ll meet the girls we saw on board the train. I know they are at the lake.”

Since Denis believed he had not talked about Kate and Rhoda, he thought Bride’s statement strange.

“You and Danny and Monica are the best friends I have. Rob is a very good sort, but he’s old, and at his ranch my job is generally to chop roots at the bottom of a wet trench. Miss Marvin and Miss Staines are at the lake, but one is rich and the other admits she is extravagant. A second-class chopper mustn’t look too high.”

“I was nasty,” said Bride, and blushed as she resumed: “Sometimes when one is hurt one is spiteful; but, oh, Denis, dear, we’ll miss you when you’re gone!”

Although the confession touched Denis, he knew she was not in love with him. Bride was romantic and he was her confidant and trusted pal. He admitted he liked the post.

“After all, I am not going very far, and when I have got a log shack, you and Dan and Monica must come up and stop with me. The shack, however, is not yet started, and by the time the roof is up I expect Danny will be a traffic boss and you will have a fine new house at North Vancouver.”

“And a husband at the lumber-mills?” said Bride, with a smile that cost her much. “But where’s the use of marrying when you cannot have the boy

you want? You needn't be sober, Denis; it's joking I am. Well, we knew we would lose you; but to know you are really going, sure it's another thing!"

"Now all's fixed, I'm not keen to go. The trouble is, I must."

"Ah," said Bride, "and what will we do without you? You taught me to sing, and it was you told Danny what sort of music to play on his fiddle."

Denis laughed. He was not much of a musician, but he knew good music, and Bride's instinctive taste was sound. Her notes were true and soft, and he had perhaps indicated faults she might avoid.

"You mustn't exaggerate. I've known you sing like a thrush when day is breaking in the Old Country."

"Oh," said Bride, "they sing the sweetest when the blackthorn flowers; but to think about it hurts. The Old Country's gone for good, and I'll not hear the thrush again— Then when we went to the pictures and concerts, you told me things and showed me where the play was fine. Danny's kind, but he cannot help us much because the poor fella doesn't know—"

She brooded, and for a few moments Denis said nothing. He had not tried to mold the girl; Bride, as she was, was charming. All the same, it looked as if she were anxious for a higher cultivation, and he had perhaps unconsciously helped. Although she was not going to grieve for a lover gone, she might miss her guide.

"After all, the Old Country's crowded, Bride, and nobody had much use for us," he said presently. "They gave us jobs we could not do, and where we had prosperous friends they were scornful because we did not get rich like them. In Canada we are happy, and although one must hustle, one gets one's reward. Our plan's to look in front, and you have charm and talents, you perhaps don't yet know, that will carry you ahead. In fact, you are going ahead. You have a sort of joyous confidence you had not on board the train."

Bride touched him, as if it were some comfort, and he thought her eyes were wet.

"You're the hopeful boy, Denis, but I'm not joyful now. I'm homesick for the soft rain and the peat-smoke— Well, sometimes the gray skies were dreary, and in Canada the sun shines. Then the city's big and fine and new— I was but wance in Dublin, and for Belfast, I would not soil my shoes in ut! Sure, if wan was sensible, wan might be happy."

"That's the stuff!" Denis remarked.

Bride turned to him impulsively, and although but a few moments since he had thought her tearful, she laughed.

“We’re going to miss you, Denis darling, all and all the time. It’s you that has the glad heart; you know where to joke—”

She stopped, and Denis, looking up, saw Kate and Rhoda in the path. Bride must not think him embarrassed; he had, in fact, no cause for embarrassment, although he was awkwardly conscious that Bride and he looked like lovers. The others advanced. For Kate to hesitate was, of course, impossible, and he had not thought to see her take the other path. She did not stop, but she gave him a careless bow, and Rhoda gave him a humorous glance. Her smile was touched by malice, and the blood leaped to Denis’s skin. He hoped Bride did not remark it, but when the others were fifty yards off she studied him calmly.

“They are the girls from the lake; I know them because they talked to you when the train stopped in the snow. The tall wan’s cold and proud, but ye might trust her. I doubt the other. She’s cunning and she has the greedy eye.”

“It’s not very important,” said Denis. “The shade gets cool. Let’s walk to the Point.”

“I think I’d like to see the pictures. The *Colonist* says the acting’s clever,” Bride rejoined, and they started for the town.

## XXIII

# RHODA'S OPPORTUNITY

THE MONTREAL express rolled smoothly up the Fraser Gorge. Dust and fragments of ballast tossed in the long train's wake, and sooty locomotive-smoke curled about the pines; but the rattling cinders did not reach the observation-car and on the platform the sun was hot. Rhoda occupied herself with a book, and now and then gave Kate a swift glance. Kate leaned against the rails, as if she watched the landscape.

Fifty yards below the track, the green river brawled in the rocks; rail-joints clicked, and the mountain locomotive's explosive snorts rolled back in a measured rhythm. Across the river, silver mist floated up the ravines. Ragged firs dotted the crags; but sometimes dark forest rolled back and melted far up the tremendous slopes. Then, where the river-flat was narrow, all one saw was rocks and foam and streaming rows of trees.

Rhoda imagined the majestic panorama did not interest Kate. Moreover, although her summer clothes were fresh, she did not seem to know the rails were greasy. Sometimes when the car jolted she swayed, but she did not turn her head, and the speeding landscape was a good background for her quiet figure. Although Kate had said nothing about their meeting Denis in the park, Rhoda thought her preoccupation significant. Since Rhoda meant to talk about the encounter, the time was opportune.

"I begin to doubt Denis's romantic story about his going to the Coast in order to win his bet," she said.

"You imply that he knew his Irish friends were at Vancouver?"

"It looks like that," said Rhoda reflectively. "Miss Cullen probably let him know. Denis is rather a handsome young fellow, and she perhaps has naïve ambitions. I thought him fastidious; but, after all, the girl is beautiful."

"Then you know her name?" said Kate in a careless voice.

Rhoda was not cheated. Although she did not want Denis for a husband, to let him go had hurt, and she was resolved he was not for Kate. Kate had



already all a girl ought to want, and since chance had given Rhoda power to wound her friend, she indulged her jealousy. Besides, she might punish Denis. When she had tried to stir him to passion, his firmness had humiliated her.

“Oh, well, I was interested. To think about marrying Denis was, of course, ridiculous; but to see another carry off one’s admirer is annoying. The word is old-fashioned, but I believe it’s appropriate.”

Kate turned, and Rhoda knew her languid scornfulness was pretended.

“Sometimes one imagines one is admired!”

“It’s possible,” said Rhoda, with a laugh. “I, at all events, did not, for Denis not very long since asked me to marry him. I admit he was embarrassed, and perhaps I gently steered him farther than at the beginning he meant to go. Although you know my caution, I, like Denis, am flesh and blood, and sometimes one is lonely— However, he did ask me to marry him. Now I do not pretend I am flattered, but since my husband must support me, I try to be philosophical.”

Kate’s pose got stiff and a touch of color came to her skin.

“After all, you do not know Denis is Miss Cullen’s lover.”

“He did not stop us and boast about it,” Rhoda agreed. “In the circumstances, however, his modesty was not remarkable; but the implication was rather plain. You perhaps noted his arm, extended across the bench, as if to encircle the girl, her melting look, and so forth—”

“I did not,” Kate declared in a haughty voice.

“Well, I shamelessly indulged my curiosity. The spot was quiet, and Denis was confused; I think Miss Cullen had shed some tears before we arrived. A lovers’ dispute. One understands the sequel is a tender reconciliation; although I myself have not met the man who would move me to weep.”

Kate frowned. The picture jarred, and she sensed a touch of malice, although she did not know if she or Denis were its object. He had stood for so much that she approved; she had thought him frank and stanch. She had trusted his sincerity. In fact, she had thought—Kate stopped there, but when she saw Rhoda’s smile her eyes sparkled.

“Shabby philandering is not humorous.”

“Oh, well,” said Rhoda, “my code is not very stern and I try to see the joke. Then, perhaps Denis really is humorous. Romantic steadfastness—constancy, if you like—is out of date; but Denis’s affections are strangely mutable. In a few months, they were offered me and Miss Cullen, and I think I know another—”

Kate’s look got very hard and her mouth was tight.

“It’s possible Denis saw he could not capture you, and thought me less fastidious,” Rhoda resumed carelessly. “Although to some extent I played up, it looks as if Miss Cullen’s society had the greater charm and he resolved to rejoin her. To think he coolly weighed our attractions is humiliating. Some men, however, are like that—”

“I think we’ll let it go,” said Kate, and pushed back the door.

The car rocked, but when she went along the passage Rhoda noted her firm poise and upright head. When Kate carried herself imperiously, to leave her alone was the proper plan. She was not a fool, but Rhoda thought herself a rather good devil’s advocate and the circumstantial evidence was strong. At all events, if Denis at some time tried to resume his friendship with Kate, he would get a jar, but Rhoda was not going to dwell upon it. She, like Kate, had done with Denis Aylward.

The train roared up the valley and Kate, brooding by a window, mechanically watched the pines leap past. She had taken a nasty knock and her trust in her judgment was gone. Denis had cheated her as if she were a romantic schoolgirl. That, however, was not all. Kate was fastidious, and although she thought her philosophy up-to-date and liberal, something of a Puritan.

Denis had frankly interested her. She had sensed in him a sort of ascetic vein, and she had, very foolishly, imagined his rather obvious admiration for herself sincere. In fact she had not approved his excursions with Rhoda, but since she hated shabby jealousy she tried to be tolerant. To know Denis had wanted to marry Rhoda was another thing. Yet, very soon afterwards, he had joined Miss Cullen.

Kate’s color got high, for a remark of Rhoda’s had stung; some men were like that. They were *amatory*, roused by any woman’s charm. Well, Kate had no use for the type, but she was not going to brood about it, and she got up and went off impatiently along the rocking train. She thought a girl she had met in Victoria was in a front car.

A few days after Kate and Rhoda arrived, the storekeeper from the settlement stopped at the ranch for the night. When the light was going, he and Marvin smoked their pipes on the veranda, and Lunt presently remarked:

“I have got to drum up the boys about their bills. Yours is rather long, and although the reckoning is not due, if you would write me a check for part, I’d be glad.”

“If you knock off a good discount, you can have it all,” said Marvin. “Is the bank pushing you?”

“They make me tired!” said Lunt with feeling. “The new boss is greedier than a road-agent, and you can’t get ten dollars unless you give security. If I must pay their interest, I better shut down my store.”

“When one studies wholesale prices at the Board of Trade, it looks as if there ought to be some margin,” Marvin rejoined with a smile. “But you are not extravagant. Where’s the trouble?”

“If you want to know, I’ll put you wise. You don’t get rich quick at a settlement store, and some time since a realtor fellow came along. He had got an option on some land around Vancouver they were going to survey for building lots; the *Colonist* had talked about the city’s extension, and I thought the fellow straight. Well, I speculated, but the land taxes are steep and development is slow.”

“Exactly,” said Marvin. “I think I know the man, and his proposition’s sound. The city has got to use the land. If you sell out, you’ll get back your money, but you ought to wait.”

“I want to wait,” Lunt agreed. “But I got to meet the taxes and fees for surveying, and so forth. Holding up land’s expensive, but I’d hate to quit and then see the city bosses get busy at the extension scheme—”

He stopped to knock out his pipe, and across the lake a window at the Stoddart ranch began to shine behind the trees.

“Rob has got a light,” he resumed. “The old fellow’s mortgage is running out, and although I’ve got something by instalments, he owes me a useful wad. If he paid, it would help me carry on, but I guess I got to wait. Maybe he’s going to feed some fresh stock, because his hired man is coming back.”

Marvin looked at him hard. “Are you talking about the English lad who quit in the fall?”

"I certainly am. You reckoned him a Cheechacko, but when we met up at the hotel I thought the boy hefty and bright. Ainsdel, Ayling, something like that."

Marvin's chair jarred on the boards. He frowned and for a few moments said nothing, but when he turned to Lunt his look was inscrutable.

"You ought to hold your Vancouver lots. Are you willing to sell Stoddart's mortgage?"

"If I liked your proposition, I might, but I'm not keen. The old man sort of promised we wouldn't put Rob off the ranch. However, I got to have money and the boys don't pay their bills."

"We'll talk about it again," said Marvin. "I must see my foreman. Before you go you can give me particulars."

When Lunt crossed the lake in the morning, Marvin knew all about his transaction with Stoddart, but since the storekeeper seemed to require some urging, nothing was fixed. Not long after the canoe started Kate came down the veranda steps. Marvin stopped her.

"Did you know Denis Aylward rejoins Stoddart?"

"I did not," said Kate, and her look got hard, as if she were disturbed. "In fact, I had begun to imagine he would stay in Vancouver."

"Anyhow, he is coming back, and since he is not a first-class ranch-hand, the thing is strange. At Vancouver a workman's pay is good. I wondered whether you knew something about it."

Kate smiled, a scornful smile. At one time, she might have imagined the object for Denis's return.

"It has nothing to do with me, and I am not much interested."

Marvin gave her a searching glance. Kate did not, at all events, want Denis back.

"Rob gets old," he said reflectively. "He has debts at the settlement and I expect he is bothered to carry on. Well, Denis Aylward is young and was keen to own a ranch. I reckon his folks have money and they might be willing to give the boy a boost. Although he's awkward he's hefty, and by and by he'd be a useful man. It's possible Rob and he have fixed something about a partnership."

Kate wondered. So far as she knew, Denis's capital was the small sum he had engaged to win. All the same, her father's supposition, if it were

accurate, would explain his coming back. Moreover, he would be at the lake for good.

“Denis did not give me his confidence, but I imagine he did not expect his relations to help him much,” she replied carelessly. “However, if you think Rob embarrassed, why don’t you buy his ranch? The land is good, and if you did not want it, you could sell for a better price. In a few years we will have an automobile road, and an improved ranch will be worth a good sum.”

For a moment or two Marvin quietly studied her. Kate’s proposition was economically sound, but he imagined she had not stated all her argument. Although the girl had some talent for business, she was a girl. Denis had annoyed her and she wanted to punish him, but unless he had first interested her, she would not be annoyed. In the meantime Kate was willing to banish the offender, and Marvin thought she might be indulged.

“I might speculate,” he said, as if it were not important. “Anyhow, I’ll weigh the plan; but until I see my line, I don’t want you to talk—”

“Where you trust me, my habit is not to talk,” Kate rejoined and started for the lake.

Although her heart beat, her resolve was firm. She knew herself horribly shabby and was ashamed; but Denis must not return to the Stoddart ranch.

## XXIV

# MARVIN'S JUSTIFICATION

**A**LTHOUGH the light was going, Mrs. Marvin sewed mechanically. To be usefully occupied was a habit she had got in days when effort and frugality were forced. Yet the days that were gone were happy and sometimes when she looked back she sighed.

Marvin smoked his pipe by the window. He had got back from the settlement an hour since and Mrs. Marvin imagined he had something on his mind, but she conquered her curiosity. When Jake thought she ought to know he would put her wise. Besides, she must finish her sewing before the light went.

In the meantime, Marvin brooded. Although but two or three years since to cross the mountains had not bothered him, he was tired. Then he did not want to talk about the business he and Lunt had transacted, but Mrs. Marvin would soon find out and he would not have her think he had tried to cheat her. He felt he must justify the course he meant to take. Marvin was hard and where he was forced to fight his habit was to win, but he had some scruples and he was not cruel.

At the settlement he hesitated, and had he found a convincing argument, he might have turned down his plan. All the arguments, however, pointed the other way and while he waited for Lunt the Montreal express stopped at the water-tank. Marvin, loafing about the station, saw a gentleman he knew at a vestibule. Nelson and he had, a number of years since, successfully carried out a bold speculation. Marvin liked the fellow, but after the reckoning Nelson, who ought to have been satisfied, had carried his business to another house.

The dusty cars were hot, and it looked as if Nelson meant to get down and walk about for a minute or two; but when he saw Marvin he gave him a careless nod and went into the vestibule. Since Marvin afterwards saw him on the track at the other end of the long train he knew Nelson refused to meet his former associate. Although he was a shrewd business man, he

believed the tale Marvin's broken antagonists had not allowed to die. Marvin clenched his fist. The tale was plausible and not altogether false.

The encounter banished his doubts. He carried out his business with Lunt and started for the ranch; but as he went he brooded and where the trail followed the river he heard Aylward's steps on the stones. The thing was, of course, nonsensical. All the same, he felt that Aylward wanted something and pursued him relentlessly. Had he been altogether unscrupulous, he might not have bothered; but on the whole Marvin was an honest, stubborn man, and now in his chair at the ranch-house he glanced furtively at his wife's looking-glass.

All he saw, however, was a reflected picture of the sky and woods. That was something. When he had thought he saw the canyon, his disordered imagination had carried him away, and after he had banished Denis he might yet conquer his strange illusion. He knew it was an illusion, but he had inherited a superstitious vein from his mother and something of her stern Calvinistic code. After all, in jealous obstinacy, he had allowed Aylward to drown.

"When I was at the settlement I bought Stoddart's mortgage from Lunt," he said.

Mrs. Marvin stopped sewing and gave him a disturbed glance.

"But you have all the land you want, Jake, and Rob is old. If you put him off the ranch, what's he going to do?"

"I don't aim to rob him. Unless he agrees to a valuation, the block and homestead must be publicly sold, and when my claim is satisfied he takes the rest of the sum we get. If I let him stop, he could not carry on. In fact, his clearing begins to go back."

"But suppose he hired up a man?"

"He has got a man. That's where we are hit. Denis Aylward will soon be along."

"Ah," said Mrs. Marvin, "I begin to see— But you just can't do it, Jake. You have shown big men a stiff front, and when you got away with it I was proud. You fought straight; but to break Rob Stoddart is like hurting a child. When you take the poor old fellow's homestead he has nowhere to go. He has pinched and sweated to pay his debt; he reckoned that for a year or two before he went the ranch might be his."

"I feel mean about it," Marvin admitted moodily. "All the same, I don't see another plan, and if Denis again joins up with Rob, we can't get rid of him. Rob will take him for his partner. If you sit quiet for a minute, I'll show you—"

Mrs. Marvin acknowledged he reasoned shrewdly. At Vancouver Denis's pay was, no doubt, pretty good; on a ranch his labor, for some time, would hardly be worth his board. Yet he meant to own a ranch, and his folks were not poor. The boy reckoned he could persuade them to put up a sum— Yet Mrs. Marvin was not satisfied.

"You are going to feel mean about it as long as you live," she said. "We have known poverty and worse trouble; but the trouble didn't break us because we'd done no wrong. Maybe I'm old-fashioned, but I surely know one's duty to one's neighbor stands for all time."

Marvin got up and for a few moments walked about the room. His ancestors were Puritans, and in the lonely log shack his mother had taught him the best she knew. In the cities he had adopted an easier morality; but to some extent a child's convictions rule him when he is a man. Besides, his wife had influenced him farther than he had thought. Anyhow, his word went, and he had taken nothing that was not his. And he had prospered! Some folks might think it strange; but they were fools. The old laws yet stood. Where crooks predominated, society must crash.

Yet when the flood swept the canyon he had indulged his sullen jealousy, and in consequence Aylward went down the rapid. There, at all events, he had cheated his wife. Hannah did not know, and for her sake as much as his, he would not enlighten her. His folly had entangled him, and the time to acknowledge his offense was gone. He had paid, and must pay; but his wife and daughter must not bear his punishment.

"I can't stand for seeing Denis at Stoddart's," he said. "In a way, Tom Aylward forced us to quit Kettering, he got after me at Vancouver, and now it looks as if his nephew is carrying on his job. Well, you have heard me talk like that before, and we'll let it go for foolishness. I can pack my load; but Kate has nothing to do with it. There's my justification and I can't be moved."

"Does Kate know Denis has fixed to come back?"

"Until I told her, she did not. When she did know I reckon she was mad."



“But if she was annoyed—” said Mrs. Marvin, and stopped, for she saw her husband’s smile.

“Two sorts of people annoy you; the folks you hate, and the others you care about. The rest are not important. Well, Kate was mad, and my notion is she met Aylward at Vancouver. Looks as if they had disputed, and since Kate was hurt the young fellow counts for something.”

Mrs. Marvin agreed. Jake was shrewd and she thought his notion accurate.

“After all, Denis’s main drawback is, he’s Tom Aylward’s nephew,” she remarked.

“The drawback’s the consequence,” Marvin rejoined. “Sometime Kate and he will find out that folks believe I killed his uncle. Well, Kate is proud and I reckon Denis’s blood is red. I’m back at the spot where we stopped another time; but now we have got to fix our line. Suppose when Kate and the boy found out, they were married? What d’you think they’d do about it?”

“They might refuse to believe.”

“No,” said Marvin, drearily. “The tale is plausible, and if they tried to track it down, they’d find folks who declared it true. The thing’s not done with. Sometimes I think Stoddart knows; and Denis fought Snedden at Kettering. He reckoned the brute was drunk and meant to rile him; but when he hears the tale again he’ll begin to doubt. Then at the settlement Nelson was getting off the cars, but when he saw me he stopped. The fellow’s a white man and not at all a fool. We put across a big deal, but he turned me down. Kate’s interested, Hannah, and we can’t risk it.”

Mrs. Marvin said nothing. Marvin’s argument carried weight. He saw her hesitation, and went on:

“In any circumstances, marriage is something of a plunge; only patience and trust can see it through, but Denis and Kate must take a dangerous chance from the start. Suppose one found out and dared not let the other know? Suppose both found out? Well, the boy is white and Kate’s our girl. I reckon they’d front the slander; but it would hurt. Sometimes Kate might think he doubted her and me. Kate has not your gentleness, and when things were awkward Denis would hate the hard streak she’d inherited from her father, Tom Aylward would haunt them; when they thought about him they’d exaggerate their small disputes. He would break their trust and sympathy,

and force them to jar. He follows me like a shadow; but he shall not follow Kate.”

“Oh, well,” said Mrs. Marvin, drearily, “since I cannot tell her all, there’s no use in my meddling. Kate is stubborn, and for all you think they quarreled, if she likes the boy she will stick to him. Anyhow, you mustn’t take Rob’s homestead, and I see another way. I’d hate to think we treated Denis Aylward crookedly, but the province is big and he could preempt a ranch at another spot. Suppose you put it up to Rob that if he lets the boy go, you’d be an easy creditor?”

“The plan will not work. Rob knows something and Denis heard Snedden talk. If I went to Rob with your proposition, they’d believe the tale was true.”

“But Rob will know you put him off his ranch.”

Marvin smiled. “I guess I can get a realtor house to file my claim and fix the sale. Then I expect to be in town soon and I’ll look up my lawyer.”

“If you’re resolved, I suppose I’ve got to say nothing, but we are going to be sorry, Jake,” Mrs. Marvin replied.

She went off. Marvin stopped, and for a time brooded in the dark.

When Marvin was in Vancouver Denis arrived at the Stoddart homestead. He was glad to be back and he knew Rob’s welcome was sincere, but for a day or two he did not cross the lake. He had not much grounds to think the Marvins would be glad to see him, and he was not keen to meet Miss Staines. In fact, he doubted if he wanted to meet Kate, and when he pictured their encounter in the park he frowned.

Kate had politely acknowledged him, but that was all. She probably imagined him Bride’s lover, and he did not see himself stating that he was not. For one thing, Kate might speculate about his reasons for thinking she would like to know. Then Bride was his friend; he must not imply that he, in any sense, apologized for her. All the same, the encounter was awkward, and Denis admitted that his luck was bad.

After a day or two Rob, one morning, gave him a message for Marvin’s, and although he would sooner have had another errand, he went. Soon after he landed at the Point he met the foreman, and started back for the canoe, but at a corner he saw Kate in the path. Denis conquered his impulse to go another way. He was annoyed because he was embarrassed. So far as he could see, Kate was very cold.

“I suppose you carried some message for Stoddart and met one of the men?” she said. “Why did you not go to the house? We have not seen you since your return.”

Denis imagined she knew. Although Kate’s voice was careless, he sensed a touch of mocking humor.

“For one thing, Rob waits for me to help him pile some logs.”

“And then?” said Kate.

“Oh, well, I did not see Mr. Marvin about and I believe Mrs. Marvin doesn’t like to be disturbed in the morning.”

“Do you mean to stay with Rob? After Vancouver, you will perhaps be dull.”

Kate’s look was politely sympathetic, but somehow Denis imagined she meant to be nasty.

“Dullness implies some leisure,” he rejoined. “So long as you’re occupied, you do not get bored. Rob’s habit is to see his hired man does not run out of a job.”

“Since he sent for you, you ought to be flattered,” Kate remarked. “However, if he waits, I expect you ought not to stop.”

She went off and Denis dragged his canoe down the bank. Stoddart’s canoe was rather a substantial craft and he used some force. Kate had stopped because he was in the path and she would not bother to avoid the meeting. Denis did not imagine she had wanted his society. She was serene and polite, but although he doubted if he was awkward, he knew her ironically amused. Well, he supposed she thought him an amatory sentimentalist, and he admitted she was perhaps entitled to do so.

In the meantime, Rob and the oxen waited by the log-pile. Denis seized the paddle and rather savagely drove the canoe across the lake.

## XXV

# STODDART TAKES A KNOCK

A SHOUT pierced the shade and the blue grouse's drumming stopped. Denis put down his ax and looked about. Cedar-branches swung in the warm Chinook wind; the straight trunks were checkered by splashes of luminous gold and blue, but Denis saw nobody. The shout was perhaps from the lake, and he pushed through the tall fern. A wet paddle flashed in the sun, and a canoe slid across the sparkling water and stopped. A man on board threw Denis two letters.

"There's your lot. I guess the long one's a bill. If I'd gone for your landing, she'd have taken some water and I've got all I want."

Shining surf beat the stones in front of the homestead and Denis saw the mail-bags were wet.

"The breeze is fresh and you have got a load," he said. "Still, in summer, I think I'd like your job."

"It helps me hold on. I guess that's all; the Government isn't generous," the other rejoined. "When they load me *letters* I don't grumble; but the boys reckoning to get their seed-clover by parcels-post was some joke on me. Well, she's shipped some water and the sun is hot. When they find the blamed stuff's growing in the bags, they'll think the laugh's on them."

He began to paddle and Denis mused. The fellow was chopping a clearing some distance back, and before the ranch was productive a number of years must go. In the woods nobody had money, but, if one's luck were good, one might earn a small sum by carrying mail and cutting roads. The postman gave the Government three days a week; in the other three, and sometimes four, he labored on his ranch. It was perhaps a typical example of ranching economy. The poor man who made good must hustle.

Denis carried the letters to the homestead, but Rob was not about, and putting the long envelope on the table, he tore open the other. Then he sat down and lighted his pipe.

The letter was from Stormont, and Stormont's habit was to leave one to guess. All the same, he stated that his engagement stood, and since Denis had got the sum he undertook to earn, Stormont had deposited an equal sum at the Bank of Montreal. So far all was straightforward, but Denis felt his relation's next remarks required some thought.

Stormont admitted he had been rash; but the loser must pay, and in the particular circumstances, he paid willingly. Moreover, since he himself did not follow the mob, he rather liked Denis's pluck. As a rule, the beaten path was not the straightest, but curved about obstacles bold spirits would sooner front. Unless, however, one was the proper stuff to make good one's boast, there was not much use in asserting one's individuality.

Denis smiled. Stormont's moralizing was logical, but he did not altogether see where it applied. Yet, as a rule, the old fellow meant something, and Denis resumed his reading.

If he felt he had the qualities a pioneer needed, Stormont thought he ought to set his mouth and push ahead. Time was going, and Denis was not a boy. His business was to get somewhere, and Stormont admitted he would hate to see him stopped.

Well, the stuff was the sort of stuff an old-fashioned prig might write; but Stormont was not a prig. In fact, Denis pictured his humorous twinkle when he got to work. Then he left one to guess— If one allowed for his idiosyncrasies, his last statement was perhaps important.

On the whole, Denis admitted that he was bucked. The implication was, Stormont approved his hardihood and would not see him beaten. Besides, the Bank of Montreal would meet his check for a useful sum. For all that, his immediate business was to finish his chopping and move Stoddart's flock, and when he had put some food in his dinner-pail he left the homestead. After lunch he started for the rocks. Denis was not a first-class shepherd, but he was something of a mountaineer, and where the flock went he could go. While he crawled about the gullies and ledges he pondered Stormont's letter and his satisfaction grew. If he were forced, he thought he might reckon on the old fellow's support, and that was something; but Denis resolved he would first use all his powers.

In the evening he thought Stoddart disturbed, and when after supper they went to the bench in front of the house the rancher was moodily quiet.

"The sheep are in good order, and although you were forced to sell some, I expect you'll soon build up the flock," Denis remarked.

"I had thought I might, but I'm not caring noo," Rob replied. "There's no' much use in laboring for your creditor."

"It's unthinkable," Denis agreed. "All the same, I understood you satisfied Lunt and did not expect him to bother you again for some time."

"He got his interest; I could not pay the balance o' the loan. Weel, I was his father's customer, and maybe he had not the heart to seize my ranch. Anyway, he has sold the mortgage and I must pay or quit."

Denis said nothing. Rob's grim calm was ominous, and Denis imagined sympathy might jar. Besides, he himself was moved by savage indignation. The thing was cruel, and in a sense, horribly unjust. Stoddart was entitled, for a few years, to enjoy the fruits of his patient toil. Denis felt he wanted to meet the fellow who had cheated him. Then Stoddart pulled out the long envelope.

"Ye were a *halfling* lawyer. I take it the notice is good?"

Denis studied the document and nodded.

"In the Old Country, your creditor's claim would stand. I, however, imagine the Canadian homestead laws to some extent protect a settler's property."

"The laws do not apply to mortgaged land."

"At all events, unless you agree with the fellow, he must sell your ranch by auction, and when his claim is met you take all that's left. You ought to get a good sum."

Stoddart smiled, a dreary smile.

"I must bear the costs. Had Lunt but let me bide, I'd have paid his loan, and when the load was lifted I might have hired the help I need. A' I'll get will not buy me a cleared ranch on which I can leeve, an' noo I'm old and done, I cannot chop a fresh block."

Denis's anger got hot. For Rob to start afresh was impossible. It looked as if the years of thought and effort had gone for nothing. The old fellow did not exaggerate.

"I cannot see what your new creditor expects to gain by buying the mortgage. He ought to get back his money, but the profit on the transaction cannot be large. Well, the notice is sent by a real estate man, and he might be the agent for another. It almost looks as if somebody wanted to hurt you."

"So far as I ken, there's naebody in Canada would wish me ill."

“That’s something of a boast, but I expect it’s justified,” said Denis, and resumed hesitatingly: “Do you think Marvin wants your ranch?”

“I do not. Marvin has a’ the land he can cultivate. Then, had he wanted mine, he would have tried to fix the thing with me. The fellow’s hard, but he likes a square deal.”

Denis admitted it was so. Marvin, in fact, was not the sort to scheme against his neighbor; but if he had not done so, Denis could see no light. He, however, did see where he himself, to some extent, might help, and he gave Rob Stormont’s letter.

“I have won my bet,” he said with rather boyish awkwardness. “The amount, of course, is not large, but I’d be glad to write you a check.”

Stoddart’s stern look vanished, and Denis knew he was touched.

“Ye’re a trustful laddie; but my creditor would take your check and the money’s all ye’ve got.”

“Ah,” said Denis, “I don’t know. In fact, I wonder—”

He hesitated, for he began to see the famous scheme, and his awkwardness vanished when he went on: “By George, we’re not yet beaten; there may be a way out! But suppose you weigh my relation’s letter? To begin with, you must understand he’s something of a Scot.”

“Ye’re meaning—?” said Stoddart, politely.

Denis laughed, an eager laugh, for the plan began to carry him away.

“I’m not going to apologize, Rob, and I know something about your people’s temperament. You hate a direct statement, as you hate to boast; you like to imply things. You cover your kindness, as if you were ashamed, and for all your claim to be practical, you’re a romantic lot. Window-dressing is not your habit; you’d sooner hide the fine goods you stock. However, the main thing is, my relation is not unlike you. And now suppose you read his letter?”

Stoddart did so, and by and by looked up.

“I’m no’ saying but a Scot might have written yon.”

“A *kindly Scot*?”

“Aweel,” said Rob, “there is another sort.”

Denis smiled. “We don’t get forward much. Does the letter imply a promise of fresh support? If I could use his support economically, do you

think Stormont would give me a lift?"

"It's possible; I dinna ken," said Stoddart, and added with a touch of dryness: "Ye're a modest laddie!"

Denis thought the comment significant; Rob was like Stormont, and he knew men.

"Very well. So far, the thing is supposititious— But if I can help you meet the mortgage, will you take me for your partner?"

Stoddart's glance, for once, was uncertain, and his hand shook. Now he might perhaps be enabled to throw down the load, Denis knew his debt had weighed. In fact, he knew Rob for an old, tired man, who but a few minutes since had faced crushing defeat.

"I ought to refuse, but I've lang pinched for the bit clearing, and if they take it from me I have nothing left. But ye must think weel. A small rancher's life is all labor; I am by with it, and soon ye'll get nae help from me. Ye are young and ye weel might take an easier road. When ye were at the wharf I had a line from Ferguson—Alan's fastidious, but he was satisfied. Ye ought to gang back. The railroad has use for useful men, and Alan would see ye got your chance—"

He stopped on a sort of admonitory note; and Denis knew he tried to be just. Rob wanted him, and it looked as if Ferguson had done so. Well, that was something. The wharf boss demanded efficiency and did not suffer fools. All the same, Ferguson's satisfaction no longer carried weight. Denis had fixed his course.

"You are not going to daunt me," he replied. "A rancher's life is a clean life, and it's the life I like. In the cities you labor under orders, and perhaps, if you are lucky, in time you take command. Hired man and boss, however, are bound by rigid rules. Well, for four years I was bossed, and it got monotonous, but I do not see myself putting on the brass hat. In the woods a man must take his own line, and if he's willing to labor, the reward is his. You are up against the forest; the fight is a straight fight, and if you can take the knocks you get, you win. However, I mustn't bore you. All that really matters is, I'm happy at the lake, and I mean to stay."

"Ye're stanch," said Stoddart, in a quiet voice. "I doot ye're no' altogether wise."

"One must risk something, although I cannot claim I have yet much to lose," Denis rejoined. "In the circumstances, I ought to find out, and since Wilmslow starts for the settlement in the morning, I'll get busy."



He went for some writing-paper, but composition was hard. He must persuade Stormont the venture was economically sound; moreover, if he took Stormont's help, his boasted independence would be gone. Yet, where he would have asked nothing for himself he was willing to ask for Rob. Sometimes he stopped and frowned, but at length he fastened the envelope.

"Perhaps I have not much right to think the old fellow will play up, but in about a month we'll know," he said. "If he does not, we must try to find another plan."

"When Marvin sent ye to the homestead I was lucky," Stoddart remarked with sternly controlled emotion.

## XXVI

# MARVIN'S REFUSAL

FOR some time after his letter went Denis was hopeful; and then he began to doubt. Stormont had not promised to help him, and although he stated he paid his debt willingly, he might be annoyed by the implication Denis had hopefully drawn. One might admit that one approved the line one's relation took, but to risk a good sum on his making fresh progress was another thing; particularly since Denis had stated that he did not know when he could pay the loan. In fact, when he pondered it calmly, he acknowledged his request, so to speak, was cool.

For all that, he had undertaken to see Rob out, and in order to be prepared for Stormont's refusal he must look for an alternative plan. The plan was rather obvious, although its execution might be difficult; Denis must persuade somebody to lend him, without security, the sum Rob needed. Well, Marvin was the proper man, and Denis resolved to try. He doubted if Marvin would agree, but time was going, and if Stormont let him down he must have another scheme. Since he imagined Stoddart would not approve, he said nothing about his intention. After all, a provisional partner had some privileges.

Searching the woods across the lake with the glasses one morning, he pushed off the canoe and landed at the Point. Marvin had taken the ox-trail to some ground he had recently cleared, but Denis had not reckoned on Kate and Rhoda's joining him by another path. When he reached the spot, they occupied a log in the shade, and Marvin, a few yards off, talked to a chopper. The girls acknowledged Denis's good-morning, but that was all. After a few moments Marvin sent off his workman and looked up inquiringly.

"I expected to find you here, sir, and hoped you might give me a few minutes."

"Certainly," said Marvin, and signed Denis to sit down. "I am not particularly occupied. Well?"

Denis hesitated. He would sooner they had not an audience, but Kate was generous and he might get her support.

“Rob is rather in trouble; but I dare say you know the circumstances—”

Marvin turned, rather sharply. His look was inscrutable, but somehow Denis felt his remark was not fortunate. He, however, saw Kate was interested.

“I know he’s embarrassed for money, but that is all. Rob’s habit is not to give his neighbors his confidence. If he has told you his trouble, you ought perhaps to be flattered.”

Denis wondered whether the fellow’s comment implied a question. To enlighten him about the suggested partnership would explain Rob’s frankness, but Denis resolved he would not. He had no grounds to think Marvin schemed to seize his neighbor’s ranch; in fact, to picture him shabbily plotting was ridiculous. For all that, Denis was haunted by a vague suspicion, and he must not be rash.

“Lunt has sold the mortgage to a realtor-house, and the buyers notify Rob that if he cannot pay they will seize the ranch. Lunt had already claimed his right to foreclose, although Rob believed he would not do so. In consequence, the realtor people can take possession when they like.”

Kate gave Marvin a swift glance, and then studied the landscape. Denis saw his statement had not altogether surprised her, and since, as a rule, she was sympathetic, he was puzzled. Rhoda knitted her brows. Denis had not thought to excite Rhoda’s curiosity, but he saw she pondered. He began to feel the others knew something he did not and, except perhaps for Rhoda, were subtly antagonistic. They were cleverer than he, but he had undertaken to champion Rob and he was going to do so.

“After all,” said Marvin, “I reckon the debt is not very large.”

“In a way, there’s the hardship, sir. The young stock are thriving, and when we plow the slashed belt Rob will have winter feed for a bigger bunch. In fact, if he can hold on, the ranch will soon be his; but if his creditors force a sale, he cannot clear another block. He cannot engage expensive labor, and for long all he got for himself was the flour and pork and tea he used. When your wages bill is four or five dollars a week, to clear land pays, and Rob, in a manner, invested the difference in order that it might support him when he was old.”

“You begin to know something about ranching economy! If you’re not yet disheartened, your nerve is good.”

Denis unconsciously frowned. He sensed again a sort of question; Marvin wanted to know if he had had enough. Well, he was not going to satisfy him. The fellow was antagonistic, and Denis saw he had not moved Kate. On the whole, her look was bored. The queer thing was, he thought Rhoda studied him and Marvin. Sometimes she gave Denis a swift glance, as if she signaled, but her message eluded him. It, however, looked as if he were not much of a champion, and he must brace up.

“Rob is old, sir. He has fought a long fight, and to be beaten when at length he believed he was winning is hard. Had Lunt waited, Rob would have paid his debt, and he declares the fellow’s father undertook not to press his claim when the mortgage did run out. If his ranch is sold he has nowhere to go. To labor is his habit, but his occupation would be gone, and I expect nobody would have much use for the broken old fellow. If he could but carry on, he might for a few years be happy at his ranch—”

He stopped and Kate looked up. A touch of color stained her skin, but her look got harder and she turned her head.

“Does Rob know you came across to see me?” Marvin inquired.

“He does not,” Denis admitted. “I stole across when he was mending a fence. If he finds out where I went, I expect he’ll be annoyed.”

“Very well. Since you resolved to meddle, what’s your proposition?”

“You might take up the mortgage. I believe Rob would presently meet the bill, and you would get better interest than you would get at the bank. If, however, he could not pay, the ranch would be yours to sell, and in the meantime your security would improve. So long as fresh settlers inquire for homesteads, the value of a cleared ranch must go up.”

“To some extent your argument is sound; I understand you were a lawyer. Perhaps it’s strange, but I think you do not see *Rob* gets the improved value. All his creditors take is their debt.”

“Ah,” said Denis, “for the most part the improvement melted in the interest. Rob chopped the trees and grubbed the stumps; the mortgage-holder took the profit. But my argument rather is, the old fellow’s heart is in his job. Give him hope that he may buy his freedom and for a time habit will carry him happily on. Take his ranch and you break him. When he puts away his ax he’s done for.”

For a few moments the others were quiet. Rhoda’s eyes were fixed on Denis and he thought she approved. Then it looked as if he at length had roused Kate; her color was high, although her mouth was tight. Marvin’s

look was rather grim. Denis's voice was his uncle's voice; sometimes in days long gone Tom had pleaded like that for a defaulting customer. There was the drawback; to help Stoddart would not cost Marvin much, but Denis must not continue the other Aylward's persecution.

"To keep Rob at the ranch is not a business proposition," he said. "He gets slow, but the block he has cleared is not large enough to stand for a good hired man's pay. Then sometimes rheumatism cripples him and soon he will be forced to quit. Rob is stubborn, but one cannot fight advancing years. If he was in want, I might meddle, but he is not. The old-time pioneers are frugal, and when Rob's debt is paid I reckon he'll have all he really needs."

"So long as he can drive an ox-team, all he wants is to carry on."

"Ah," said Marvin, "that is another thing! Age must conquer, and a time comes when we, like Rob, must allow a fresh man to undertake our job. I'm sorry, but Rob must be resigned."

Perhaps it was strange, but Denis thought Marvin was sorry, although he meant to be firm. Fronting the other, Denis unconsciously clenched his fist and tilted back his head. His pose was braced and his glance steady, like a soldier's glance.

"Economically, I suppose you are justified, sir; but when the years do conquer us, to remember a few unselfish extravagances might be something. All the same, to be generous where another pays is not remarkably noble, and I mustn't bother you again. My meddling has not helped Rob much, and since he imagines I'm grubbing a hemlock-stump, I must be off."

He lifted his battered hat and vanished in the shade; Marvin, with a queer smile, turned to the girls. Kate's pose was very quiet and she looked straight in front. Rhoda's glance searched Marvin and its ironical humor jarred.

"Denis is a pretty good example of unreflecting youth," he said. "If the boy was rich he'd no doubt indulge Rob, and the old fellow would let down a useful ranch!"

"Yours was, of course, the proper line," Rhoda agreed, but her voice was mocking. "You are practical, and I suppose you felt you must follow your bent."

Marvin looked at her rather hard; and then indicated the oats and lamb's-tail grass that rolled in the wind across the big clearing. The field changed

color like the sea, and in the far background was dotted by indistinct stumps which had not long since supported giant firs.

“My bent is practical. There’s my apology!”

“You are entitled to boast. The ranch is a splendid ranch, and I believe the realtor house you built was famous. Denis will never own a block like this; he has not your qualities.”

“Yet you would sooner have his?”

“They are not mine,” said Rhoda, smiling. “I rather think I use your rules; but I do not claim there are no others— Besides, when your estate is land and office blocks you cannot carry it away. The fee simple, if that is the word, is not yours. All you get is a lease that must soon run out.”

“Can one carry away anything?” Marvin inquired.

“I wonder— Some people believe the justice and kindness we may use are ours for good. Well, my load will not be large, and I’d be prouder, for example, to carry Denis’s. However, you have not inquired about Kate’s philosophy. At one time she was the champion of all who needed help, and I have known a tale of injustice move her to imperious rage.”

The blood leaped to Kate’s skin, but she was quiet, and Marvin frowned. He knew Rhoda’s cleverness and he thought she mocked them both.

“Anyhow, I like your modesty,” he remarked.

“Not to pretend is something. I’m a frankly selfish Hedonist and try to get all the satisfaction I think will not cost me much.”

“One must pay for all one gets,” Marvin declared.

Kate began to be intrigued, for she thought Rhoda, so to speak, did not talk at large. At all events, she watched Marvin with an observant eye.

“In consequence, one uses some caution,” Rhoda rejoined. “Since a plunge might be expensive, one stops and weighs the risk. Sometimes, however, one is carried away. Love and jealousy are powerful, and one forgets to calculate— But I expect a sober rancher knows nothing about things like that.”

Marvin shrugged. “The times change and you young folks are frank. Well, I reckon at one time my blood was as red as another’s.”

“Kate’s is red,” said Rhoda, with a laugh. “In some respects, one feels she’s very much your daughter.”

Across the clearing a tree crashed, and Marvin got up. Rhoda went off; Kate stopped and brooded. She was puzzled, for she knew Rhoda's malicious vein and imagined she had meant to hurt; but to see where she had thought to hurt Marvin was another thing.

## XXVII

# THE SLASHING

**T**HICK smoke rolled across the clearing, the dead branches in the underbrush burned like a furnace, and along the forest's edge small red flames, finding hold where the heat had dried the needles, leaped to the high firs' tops. Marvin burned his slashing, the belt where the big trunks and chopped branches lay in tangled wreckage, and although he had used some judgment the fire was fiercer than he had thought. For one thing, he had not reckoned on the breeze that curled the lake in angry waves and blew the greedy flames into the standing timber. The pines and firs are resinous, and when a fire licks their trunks some green wood will burn.

Much depends on a rancher's starting his fire at the proper time and spot. A successful *burn* saves expensive labor, for the flames in a few hours destroy brush and branches that might occupy the choppers and teams for days. The large trunks are not, as a rule, consumed; but, where there was an intricate tangle, they lie among the ashes in even rows. Afterwards they are sawed across and rolled in piles to burn when altogether dry. The job, however, is risky, and sometimes a careless rancher, planning to burn his slashed belt, destroys a forest.

Marvin was not careless, but the fire had rather got away from him, although he did not think it would run far into the green woods. The trouble was, he had left a grove of splendid firs to shelter his homestead. On the whole, he was not much disturbed, but he had called his men to strip the slashed trees in front of the grove.

Rhoda Staines had joined the gang. She doubted if her help was useful, but she dragged away the small dry stuff the choppers cut. Kate's brawny oxen hauled out giant branches no man could move; Denis and another pulled a big cross-cut saw; Stoddart steered a plunging horse-team through the tangle. When the fire began to run back from the slashing, Denis had paddled Rob across the lake. In the circumstances Rhoda thought them generous, and their arrival supplied her with an argument she meant presently to use. In the meantime she was tired and a red blister hurt her



hand, and when a wave of smoke blew across the gang she sat down and looked about.

Behind the smoke, small conflagrations twinkled in the high green spires; sometimes the vapor was pierced by a leaping yellow blaze. The fire roared on a savage, throbbing note, branches snapped, and the axes beat a broken rhythm. Then Marvin's voice, commanding but measured, pierced the turmoil. Rhoda thought he knew where all but perhaps she herself were, and when one was not occupied he moved him to another spot. He handled his willing gang as if the men were pieces on a chessboard, and although, for the smoke, he could not see all the board, one felt he knew the game and was going to win.

Rhoda imagined Marvin already held the fire in check. The cool old fellow had qualities; he might be a difficult opponent, but Rhoda knew her case was good. By and by the smoke rolled back, and Kate and her oxen loomed in the thinning haze. The big red animals strained in front of a heavy branch, and where they lurched ahead the torn brush tossed like waves. Kate, with a pointed stick, steered them round the stumps. Broken twigs and fern brushed the tops of her long boots; she balanced like a woodsman in the crackling stuff, and Rhoda noted her competence.

The oxen lumbered by, and Rhoda saw Denis. His body was thrown back from his waist; his arms were tense and straight, and the big saw rasped in the gummy wood. His head went back with a measured swing, and Rhoda remarked that his skin was stained by soot and sweat. For all that, his look was joyous, and his bent figure was molded in fine flowing lines. Denis, braced for action, was a model for a sculptor, and when he melted in the smoke Rhoda pondered.

She had enlarged upon his imaginary intrigue mainly because she wanted to hurt Kate, although to think she might punish Denis was some satisfaction. He was not the sort she could marry, and when he started for the Coast she was more or less resigned. For all that, now he was back at Stoddart's she was resolved that he should stay. In fact, when the fire was conquered she must interview Marvin. In the meantime the smoke had begun to clear, and since the others were occupied she got to work. When she dragged a small branch from the fire's path a sweating chopper grinned.

Marvin soon got control. The blaze died out in the green woods, and the gap he had cut stopped its advance towards the house. Along the belt of slashing the flames roared and tossed, but the small stuff was soon

consumed and the thick branches burned sullenly. Marvin sent off his men, and Kate, calling one to take the oxen, joined Rhoda.

“I don’t expect you are burned!”

“I am not,” said Rhoda, smiling. “Where I was forced I might risk my skin, but since I have not a rich father, I don’t dare risk my clothes. Well, I hope you are not burned, because it looks as if the fire had not daunted you.”

Kate studied her stained hands and dress, and laughed.

“When one is hot and highly strung one is sometimes nasty. Let’s go for a swim—”

She looked round and saw Denis. His hot face was smeared with powdery ash and Kate noted the charred holes in his coat. She admitted he was generous, but his generosity humiliated her and she would sooner he had gone by.

“I think the gravel bank by the river-mouth is your bathing-ground?” he said.

“As a rule, it is,” Kate agreed. “The stones on our side of the lake are large and the deep water is cold.”

“Well, I believe you are not strong swimmers. Rhoda owned that she was not.”

“I have made some progress,” Rhoda rejoined. “When I am fresh, I can keep up for thirty yards. Kate’s limit is about a hundred—”

“Your progress does not interest Denis. The gravel bank is a safe spot,” Kate remarked.

“For all that, you might note that an athletic man’s fastest swimming is about two miles an hour.”

“What about athletic women?” Rhoda inquired.

“I do not know the record. When you go for distance, buoyancy counts, and some women, so to speak, are floatier than we—”

Rhoda’s frank laugh stopped him.

“Your niceness is charming, Denis, but the word you might have used rather applies to me than Kate. Well, I do not go for distance, and my speed is thirty yards in ten minutes.”

“Perhaps these particulars are unnecessary,” said Kate, as if she were bored. “If you are going, we will start.”

Denis’s face got red, but he blocked her path.

“If you think me meddlesome, I apologize. Still, you see, the river’s speed is four miles an hour, and when the snow melts it runs very fast. If you bathe from the gravel bank in hot weather, you ought to keep the slack, and leave the water should the rapids get noisy. That’s all, Miss Marvin.”

He stepped back and lifted his cap. Rhoda gave him a smile.

“You mean well, Denis, although your tact is not conspicuous. We will remember your warning.”

They went off and Rhoda glanced at Kate.

“When you think about it, he was rather noble.”

Kate colored and for a moment or two was quiet. Then she said:

“His help at the fire was useful; but, after all, Stoddart came across, and the debt my father refused to pay is Rob’s.”

“Denis knows something the other does not; I expect he did not enlighten Stoddart about his visit,” Rhoda rejoined.

Kate said nothing, but she went faster, and Rhoda smiled, a rather malicious smile.

When they landed on the smooth pebbles the water was clear and low. Languid ripples splashed the bank and where a large stone broke the surface the eddies were like wrinkled silk. Slow bubbles trailed behind a dipping cedar-branch, and only the throb from the canyon disturbed the brooding calm. To picture the river angry was hard.

For all that, Rhoda kept the slack. She knew her powers were feeble, and where the sun pierced the shallows the water was warm. Kate boldly steered for the other bank, and allowed the main stream to carry her away. Rhoda, remarking her hardihood, reflected that Denis certainly had not used much tact. When Kate got back she was breathless and rather exhausted, but her look was sternly satisfied. They dressed, and when they sat in the hot sun Rhoda said:

“I do not know if your experiment was worth while. You have perhaps found out how far you can swim, but you have not persuaded me that Denis ought not to have warned us. It’s possible, however, you wanted to persuade yourself.”

"I wanted to swim," Kate replied carelessly.

"Oh, well," said Rhoda, "I have not known you go as far before; but you don't like to be influenced by other's arguments. You, no doubt, inherited your firmness. Mr. Marvin is hard to persuade."

Kate studied her for a moment or two.

"When I am annoyed you will know. In the meantime, I do not see where you lead."

"It is not really important. At all events, resolution carries one somewhere, but I get jostled off the path."

"I wonder—" said Kate. "You have a sort of *resilience* that absorbs the shocks. But we will not bother about it. Let's bask in the sun."

For a time she lay upon the warm stones and watched the wrinkled current steal by. Cedar-branches gently swung, and the canyon's throb was soothing. Kate's body was slack, her eyes were half shut, and a white-headed eagle circling round the spot was not afraid; but for all her quietness she pondered drearily.

Perhaps she was hard and her hardness intensified the jars she got; Rhoda yielded and recovered. Kate would sooner fight, but sometimes conflict hurt one's pride. To scheme was humiliating. Yet she had not long since approved, if she had not, indeed, suggested, her father's cruel plan.

All the same, she had got a nasty jar, and there was no use to pretending it did not hurt. She had believed in Denis Aylward; she had thought him modest, kind, and stanch, and for all his boyish humor she had known his courage was a man's. In fact, she admitted she had thought— Well, she was cheated. Denis was Miss Cullen's lover, he had been Rhoda's lover, and no doubt there were others.

It looked as if Rhoda was not disturbed by his fickleness, and Kate gave her a languidly scornful glance. Rhoda was soft and attractive, and not at all fastidious. Like Denis, she was satisfied with a handsome face and a well-molded figure. Yet where Denis was carried away, Rhoda rather experimented with the emotions she knew how to excite. Well, sex attraction was powerful, but its power went; and then, if one had not looked for something finer and stabler, nothing was left.

Kate, however, was persuaded that much might be left. Her mother had pinched and fought for her husband and yet trusted him; her father loved and respected his old-fashioned wife. Both sprang from hard Puritan stock and

were not carried away by fickle passions; their life was a partnership for useful effort. Their sort cleared the forests and built the railroads across the rocks. Kate, herself, although she boasted her freedom, was a Puritan, and she scorned the indulgent loafers who knew no law but the satisfaction of animal instinct and whose main study was the latest fashion in dance-steps and drinks. One acknowledged man was flesh and blood, but if he did not squander his best inheritance he was something more—

Rhoda also meditated, but her reflections were not like Kate's. Kate had called her *resilient*, and to some extent the description applied. If she was strongly driven back, she did not resist, but when the shock had passed she was where she was before. Then her bent was rather practical than romantic, and since Denis went to help at Marvin's slashing she began to see a plan.

## XXVIII

# RHODA EXPERIMENTS

O XEN and horse-teams trampled the ashes in Marvin's slashing. Men, bent over their cant-poles, rolled the sawed trunks from their charred entanglements, and teamsters hooked on chains. Brawny animals labored in the tossing black dust, and where the big logs ground across dead branches the bruised wood smoked.

At convenient spots along the clearing's edge, the teams were stopped in front of growing piles of lumber, and the driver pushed a rope round the middle of the log. Then he led his team behind the pile, and when they again advanced the log, revolving in the looped rope, rolled up inclined skids to its niche in the pyramid. Since it balanced awkwardly on its center, men with handspikes steadied and supported the ends. The log must be landed before they and the oxen tired, for if the team could not hold the load, somebody would be smashed. Marvin had used a tractor, but once, when speed was urgent, the engine stopped.

To pile logs is a laborious and sometimes a risky, job; but Marvin knew the tools he used and risked something only where he was forced. Although the foreman superintended, the plan was the rancher's plan, and his being about accounted for its working with smooth efficiency.

Marvin knew where to meddle, but he knew where to leave his men alone, and he occupied a log, a hundred yards from the gang, in a big hemlock's shade. A gun rested against a branch, for hawks had raided the chicken-coops, but Marvin did not expect to shoot. He must not let down his foreman, and the gun was an excuse for his being there.

By and by he looked up. Rhoda crossed the clearing, and where the ground was broken she advanced daintily. Her summer clothes were as expensive as her means allowed, and the recent fashion sanctioned some display of her charm. Marvin speculated about her feelings had she heard his men's remarks, but on the whole he imagined Rhoda would not be much disturbed. He watched her with dry amusement. Although she went

cautiously across trampled fern and broken saplings, her movements were marked by a sort of feline grace. A panther stole through the wet brush like that.

In the burned clearing the girl was exotic. Slashed trees, straining horses, and the grim, dust-stained choppers were not her proper background. Marvin pictured her getting down from an expensive automobile at the Hotel Vancouver and joining a fashionable group in the big dining-room. Rhoda had nothing to do with strain and effort; her business was to charm rich and idle men, and Marvin reckoned she knew her job. Although he did not trust Rhoda Staines, in a way he liked her. For one thing, the girl was not at all a fool.

When she joined him he gave her a careless nod, and waited. He imagined she had not crossed the slashing for the charm of his society. Rhoda's smile was apologetic. Marvin's clothes were faded by the sun and stained by soil. His skin was like brown parchment; his figure was leanly muscular. Rhoda thought his looks hard and cold as the blue gun-barrel. All the same, when the old fellow was not occupied, he was sometimes polite.

"I suppose you are going to burn the timber in those stacks. Are you not extravagant?" she said.

"When man starts a fresh job he is, as a rule, extravagant and messes up the landscape with stuff he ought to use," Marvin agreed. "Economy implies organized industry, and we are in the wilds. We haven't yet got a sawmill, and you cannot transport logs like ours across a mountain range."

"Oh, well, I suppose you must clear the ground; but when you burned the slashing you might have burned your house."

"It's possible, although I was not much scared. Soon after we started to cut out the dry stuff the wind dropped."

Rhoda had thought to advance circuitously, but Marvin was plainly on his guard, and his reply perhaps indicated that he saw where she steered him. It looked as if she must be frank.

"You had useful help. When the smoke got thick Stoddart and Denis paddled across."

"Stoddart is a pretty good neighbor," Marvin admitted. "If you like, I'll allow that Denis is a hefty young fellow and can pull a saw!"

"You ought to acknowledge they helped you save your homestead."

“The wind dropped. I guess the house would not have burned. However, my neighbors thought I was up against it and meant to stop the fire.”

“Stoddart *is up against it*.”

“That is so,” said Marvin coolly. “My refusing to boost him is justified on economic grounds.”

“I imagined your grounds were not altogether economic,” Rhoda rejoined.

Marvin studied her with dry amusement.

“You are sorry for Rob?”

“I am sorry for Denis. In order to be with Stoddart, he gave up a good post. But I am sorry for Stoddart, and to meet his debt would not embarrass you much.”

“They have a pretty good champion! The boy wanted to marry you?”

“I refused. Another time I might be less firm. I don’t yet know—but let’s be frank. If I took Denis off your hands, your keeping Stoddart at the ranch might pay.”

Marvin smiled.

“If you reckon to marry Denis, you do not need my help! I don’t, however, see you keeping house at the Stoddart shack.”

“You perhaps mean to be nice,” said Rhoda. “Well, the important thing is, if I did marry Denis, he would not be at the shack very long. I believe I could soon persuade him to take a city post. When Denis was gone, Stoddart’s being there would not annoy you—”

She stopped. Marvin’s point of view was old-fashioned and he might not think her frankness plausible. Besides, she did not like his baffling smile.

“You imply that I aim to put Denis off the ranch?” he said.

His glance was searching; but, after all, Rhoda had not thought to persuade him easily. In fact, she had reckoned on something of a fight. The old fellow was stubborn, but the advantage was hers.

“It really looks like that! To begin with, when the surveyor started for the mountains he inquired for a young man, and you might have sent Denis. The pay would have helped him win his bet and you knew he was keen about it. You thought his getting the sum might keep him at Stoddart’s for



the winter, and you declared he was a tenderfoot and would get lost in the woods.”

“Ah,” said Marvin, “now I begin to see light! Does Denis know I refused?”

“Oh, yes,” said Rhoda. “Denis is rather trustful and I thought he ought to understand he must depend on his own efforts. So far, however, it is all he does know.”

Marvin knitted his brow. The baggage meant to put the screw on him! Well, some men had tried and had got their punishment: Snedden, for example. He had smashed the fellow and Denis knocked out his son. In a way, perhaps, that was awkward, since Denis had not fought for nothing—But the baggage imagined she could force him to indulge her, and he liked her nerve! Marvin did not see himself being bluffed by a girl.

“I reckon you’re not yet through,” he said coolly. “Suppose you go ahead.”

“Some time since Stoddart was forced to sell his sheep. Shortly before he did so, his creditor looked you up and consulted you about the debt. You saw how he might be used.”

“You, I suppose, were at the veranda window?”

“On that occasion, I was not,” said Rhoda, smiling, although her heart beat. “The scheme was rather obvious, and the strange thing is nobody suspected your part. Well, Lunt claimed his debt, and in consequence, Denis went to Vancouver. I expect you thought you had done with him and to find out he was coming back was something of a knock. I don’t know if you sent for Lunt, but he arrived and you persuaded him to call in Stoddart’s mortgage.”

For a moment or two Marvin said nothing. The girl was clever and not at all scrupulous. It looked as if she did not know he had bought the mortgage, but she did know he had pushed on Stoddart’s creditor, and she knew his object. If she talked, her tale would be convincing and on the whole accurate.

“Suppose I admitted your guess was pretty good? What are you going to do about it?”

“I did not guess. However, you mustn’t imagine I am trying to bully you. To hurt my host would be shabby and Kate is my friend. For all that, I think

you ought to let Stoddart keep his ranch. He is old, and it would not be for very long— However, you have heard Denis's more eloquent arguments."

"You are pretty smart," Marvin remarked with a dry smile. "I don't know about Denis's talents, but if you used yours properly, you might boost him into a first-class post. All the same, I expect you'll squander them in social intrigues and stunts. Your sort would sooner boss an exclusive circle than see your husband build a railroad. All you want money for is extravagance."

"It's possible," Rhoda admitted. "Still, my extravagance does not really interest you."

Marvin signed her to be quiet, and looked straight in front. To keep Stoddart at the ranch would not cost him much, and he imagined the baggage would, as she had in a sense engaged, carry Denis off. The drawback was, Marvin might not then have done with her. She was greedy and meanly ambitious. If Denis's progress were not fast, she might expect fresh help. Marvin was resolved he would not subsidize Denis's wife. He had had enough of the Aylward bunch.

"I'm sorry, but Rob has got to quit," he said. "One must stop somewhere and my rule's to be firm at the beginning. Another time you might put it up to me that I ought to buy your husband a ranch."

"I'll undertake I will not," Rhoda declared with a laugh. "I might perhaps suggest you found him an occupation at Vancouver."

"No," said Marvin. "When I offered to do so he refused. My habit's to stand pat, and you can't move me—" He gave her a steady, humorous glance and inquired: "What about it?"

Rhoda got up. "Nothing about it, Mr. Marvin! The idiom is altogether to the point. You are not as kind as I thought, but, since I am not a fool, I think that's all."

She went off and Marvin cogitated. The girl certainly was not a fool. She knew if she talked about her surmise, her power was gone. She might, of course, punish him for his obstinacy, but he must take the chance. To be revengeful would not help her capture Denis, and it would imply her leaving the ranch. Anyhow, Tom Aylward had haunted him for long, and to meet an antagonist who was flesh and blood, on the whole, was a relief.

## XXIX

# STRAYING OXEN

A FAINT breeze touched the Douglas firs and dropped; a cloud rolled back from the sun, and the lake shone like glass. One could not bear the heat and glitter, and Denis climbing Marvin's fence, plunged into the shade. When he saw a rail had torn his overalls he shrugged. His luck had recently not been good, and since his nerves were getting raw, he must use some control.

To begin with, he had once or twice met Kate, and although she had stopped he had sensed a cool reserve. Somehow her politeness hurt. Then, although he calculated a letter ought to have arrived a week since, he had had no reply from Stormont and the time allowed for Rob to meet his debt would soon run out. It looked as if he had cheated himself and Rob, and when the old fellow knew their hope was false the knock would hurt worse than the first. In fact, since Denis started for the Coast, trouble of one sort or another had followed him, and to reflect that his misfortunes were not deserved was not much comfort.

Then Stoddart's oxen had crossed the river, and after breakfast Denis set off to search the bush. Now he reckoned it was four o'clock, and he had followed elusive cowbells across rocks and muskegs, but he had not found the brutes. When smashing savagely through the tangled brush, he did see an animal it was one of Marvin's steers. Besides, he had gone without his lunch.

Although Denis hated to be baffled, there was no use in continuing the search. The afternoon was fiercely hot, and a smooth rock dropped to deep water a few yards off. A plunge would brace him before he crossed the dazzling lake and he began to pull off his boots, but after a moment or two he stopped. Rhoda Staines, carrying a sunshade and a magazine, advanced delicately along the uneven path. Denis jumped up; but to look as if he were charmed was hard.

“I suppose you were at the ranch?” Rhoda remarked, rather maliciously. “The heat is fatiguing, and you perhaps thought you would take a rest. I imagine you did not know I was about.”

“The sun is fierce,” Denis agreed. “I, however, was not at the ranch, and my reason for stopping was to go for a swim.”

Rhoda sat down on a mossy shelf and laughed.

“Oh, well, if you wait for a few minutes, the water will not get cold. You don’t play up, but on a languid afternoon one cannot bother to be nice. Besides, to some extent, your sincerity is your charm. The heat really gets insupportable. Do you think it will thunder?”

“The sky’s threatening. Anyhow, if we did get a storm, I wouldn’t grumble so long as I made the homestead before it arrived. To hear the trees smash might be soothing.”

Rhoda’s nod implied ironical sympathy.

“Then, you feel you want to break things? Well, I expect you are disturbed; anyhow, about Rob.”

Denis gave her a keen glance and his face got red, because he knew she mocked him.

“I am disturbed about Rob. You see, in a way, I undertook to help, but I begin to think my plans will not work.”

“To be baffled is annoying. I suppose you have not found out who is Stoddart’s creditor?”

“We have concentrated on trying to find the means to pay the debt. By comparison, the other matter doesn’t interest us much.”

Rhoda pondered. She had led Denis where she wanted him to go, but she imagined he was not altogether frank. Yet, if he knew who claimed the debt, her power would be gone, and she might perhaps meddle to greater advantage at another time.

“It looks as if you were not very keen to find out,” she said meaningly.

“After all, there is no use in guessing,” Denis agreed. “All that really matters is, we cannot pay—”

He mused. Rhoda knew something and had experimented, but he was not going to urge her to enlighten him. In fact, he really was not keen to find out. Marvin was for some time his uncle’s partner, and Denis would believe

the fellow cruel and treacherous when his treachery was proved. If he admitted Marvin had schemed to break his neighbor, Snedden's statement must be weighed. Denis had refused to do so. Perhaps he was not logical, for although he knew the tale a slander, he shrank from the job.

"When Stoddart goes you must go," Rhoda resumed. "Your friends are at Vancouver; I expect you will join them. Marvin might get you a post."

"I am not going to Vancouver," said Denis, in a firm, quiet voice. "When Marvin was willing to help I would not allow him. You may remember we disputed about it. I'd sooner not talk about it again."

Rhoda got up languidly.

"Then, I shall not meddle. You are very obstinate, but in the circumstances, you have perhaps not much to boast about."

She went off and Denis smiled, a rather dreary smile. Rhoda had meant to be nasty, but he certainly was not entitled to boast.

A plunge in the lake to some extent banished his moodiness, but his embarrassments were not yet over, for where a gap was cut in the woods he saw Kate Marvin under a shady maple. The spot commanded the fields about the ranch, and Rhoda's parasol and light clothes were rather conspicuous against the green background. Kate's book was in the wine-berries, and Denis imagined she knew Rhoda crossed the field. When she stopped him her cool, detached look fired his blood. For all his careless humor, Denis's blood was red, and since he got up nothing had gone smoothly.

"We are not a very hospitable lot, but when you would like to see Rhoda you might ask for her at the homestead," Kate remarked.

"You imagine I had fixed to meet Miss Staines twenty minutes since?"

"I really did not think much about it," Kate replied. "Rhoda left me half hour ago, but at present she is crossing the long field, and as she might have got there sooner, it looks as if she had stopped in the path."

"Oh, well," said Denis, "I certainly met Rhoda, but I did not expect to do so. I have been trailing Rob's oxen since breakfast, and all I wanted was to get back to the ranch."

Kate studied him coolly. His annoyance implied that he had not wanted to see Rhoda; but Kate knew he had not meant to admit it. When Denis was angry he was naïve. Her curiosity was excited, and she saw she might use his remark.

“Yet I believe you asked Rhoda to marry you.”

Denis’s face got red. If he were entitled to think about marriage, he wanted to marry Kate. Although he was angry, her beauty stirred him; his impulse was to take her in his arms. In a way, the situation was humorous. Kate thought he wanted Rhoda Staines, and she was justified to think him Bride Cullen’s lover.

He, however, must try for calm. Kate weighed him, and he knew her critical intelligence. She would not be carried away by prejudice. Kate was fine hard stuff and would keep the balance just. There was the trouble, because he must not take a shabby line and the circumstantial evidence might tip the beam.

“I did ask Miss Staines to marry me. She refused, and I am forced to admit she was logical—”

“Rhoda is logical,” Kate remarked.

“Anyhow, she did refuse, and I could not urge her; but nobody but myself and Rhoda has much grounds to be interested,” Denis rejoined.

Kate noted his upright carriage, his tilted head, and his fixed angry glance. She did not see Denis Aylward carrying on an intrigue; but Rhoda might—

“That is so,” she agreed. “I am not remarkably interested, but I am Rhoda’s hostess, and I thought you ought to know we would receive you at the ranch. After all, however, I expect you do know.”

“Mrs. Marvin is kind. At one time, you yourself were friendly. For all that, I do not mean to bother you. Mr. Marvin’s house, of course, is his, and nothing indicates that he gets much satisfaction from my society.”

Kate’s calm began to melt. Denis did not exaggerate, but he had, perhaps unconsciously, implied that he could account for her breaking their friendship. In fact, the implication was that she was jealous.

“Anyhow,” he continued, rather boyishly, “I have not lost all my friends. Some, I expect, are not very critical, but they’re stanch. Old Rob, for example. You can trust a Scot!”

“Yet you left him! You had friends at Vancouver, and the railroad’s pay is good.”

Denis’s brown face flushed darkly red, and Kate was glad to think him hurt. For all that, she admitted her retort was the sort of retort a raw girl

might use. The dispute, in fact, was getting vulgar, and Denis was accountable.

“I imagined you knew why I went,” he said. “Anyhow, although the railroad pay is good, I came back. My support, perhaps, is not worth much, but since Rob’s neighbors are willing to leave him alone to bear his troubles, it is his. Well, I mustn’t bore you—”

He lifted his cap and Kate’s mouth went tight. To close the interview was her privilege.

“Oh, well,” she said, “I was not much occupied, but I expect you ought to start. If you stopped longer than you wished to stop, I am sorry.”

Denis plunged into the brush. His progress was noisy, and when a branch whipped off his cap Kate began to smile. Then she heard a faint, jangling chime, and since Denis pushed on for his canoe, she got up. After all one must not be spiteful.

“Denis!” she called.

He stopped and turned his head, but he did not come back. Kate frowned.

“Are you altogether exhausted? I do not like to shout.”

“Sorry,” said Denis, advancing a yard or two.

“Well?”

“Where did you look for the oxen?”

“I searched the range foot and the back ground, as far as I could walk.”

“Then you might perhaps search the muskeg a quarter of a mile off.”

Denis waited for a few moments, and then the broken chime rolled distinctly across the woods.

“Yes!” he said. “Bright’s bell rings flat. Well, I suppose your calling me back was kind.”

“You seem to doubt! Would you sooner I had left you alone?”

“You *were* kind. Still, you see, I’ve hunted the brutes since morning, and I was going for my canoe. Now I must drive them three or four miles to the ford and if they got drowned, I think I’d be resigned. My luck has not been good recently.”

“Oh, well,” said Kate, “if you are satisfied your object’s good, I suppose that’s the main thing. But if we philosophize about it, the oxen may resume their travels.”

Denis steered for the muskeg and Kate laughed. She heard him shout, but the shouts were not savage, and when he crossed an opening in the woods the big animals followed him like dogs. Kate picked up her book and started for the house. By and by she met Marvin and he gave her a keen glance.

“Rhoda went with you; she came back, a while since, herself.”

“That is so,” Kate agreed. “I believe the sand-flies bothered her. Anyhow, we did not quarrel.”

“Well, I’d trust Rhoda Staines just where I was forced. Maybe you know she’s not fond of you?”

For some time Kate had not trusted Rhoda. She had sensed the other’s antagonism, but she did not want to be shabbily revengeful.

“It’s possible,” she said. “For all that, when she might have got a post I persuaded her to join me. I do not think she liked the post, but in a way I made myself accountable for her.”

“Then, you want her to stay?”

“I’m willing,” Kate replied. “By and by I expect she will leave us for her relations at Victoria. I doubt if they are keen, but when the ranch gets very dull their hesitation will not stop Rhoda. In the meantime, I think we’ll let it go.”



# XXX

## STORMONT'S REPLY

A DAZZLING flash leaped from a black cloud and thunder crashed in the rocks. Jarring echoes rolled about the clearing, the oxen stopped, and Denis cautiously tightened the rope he carried. The other end was twisted round Bright's horns, but Buck was free. Although a plow ox is not a nervous animal, Buck did not like thunder, and if the storm stampeded him, Denis imagined he could not hold Bright.

The corral was a hundred yards off and the slip-rails were up. He must use both hands to pull out the bars, and in a few moments tremendous rain would beat the woods. When he reached the corral big drops began to fall, and he hitched the rope to a post. A blue flash dazzled him and the top rail jammed. Bright tossed his massive head, the fence rocked, and Denis swore. Since he got up in the morning all had gone crookedly, and to get soaked and lose the oxen, fifty yards from the homestead, was the proper climax for a trying day.

The fence, however, bore the strain, and Denis pulled out the last rail and got behind the animals. Crashing thunder shook the pines, the oxen collided and plunged for the gap. Denis struck his boot against a cedar root and rolled in the fern. When he got up, the animals, with tails curled and tossing heads circled the enclosure. Denis threw back the rails and ran for the homestead.

Savage rain beat the roof and the windows streamed. Denis, shaking the big drops from his cap, smelt hot, steaming soil. By a few seconds he had beaten the storm and he got his breath laboriously. Stoddart, in a corner, smoked his pipe.

"Ye're back," he said. "I did not hear ye. Did ye get the beasts?"

"They are in the corral. When the thunder frightened Bright he nearly pulled down the fence and I imagined my remarks carried across the lake. You see, I'd searched the country for the team right back to the far bench;

and then Kate Marvin heard them in the muskeg, a hundred yards from the water!”

“Just that!” said Stoddart. “She would think it a joke?”

“Although I doubt if she was much amused, she was perhaps entitled to think me a joke,” Denis rejoined with dreary humor. “In a way, my excursion was typical, and when all your plans go wrong, good intentions are not much use. Mine plunge me into some queer entanglements.”

“Aweel,” said Stoddart, “there’s a letter for ye.”

Denis imagined Rob’s statement was relevant, for the envelope carried an English stamp and he knew the hand. In a way, he had rashly undertaken to see Rob out, and now he must brace up for a fresh knock. His bleak humor vanished and his face set sternly, but when he tore open the envelope his touch was firm. For a few moments the letter engrossed him; and then his eyes sparkled and the blood leaped to his skin.

“Old Stormont’s a sportsman! I could not have grumbled had he turned my cool suggestion down, but he agrees to finance us! I’ve got the sum we want!”

He gave Stoddart the letter and began to fill his pipe, but his hand was no longer steady and he broke the match. The strain he had borne was harder than he knew, and the reaction left him slack. Stoddart, rubbing his spectacles, studied the letter, and Denis saw him smile. The writer knew his young relation and argued like a Scot. Then Rob nodded.

“If ye’re resolved, ye can take up the mortgage and I will be your debtor.”

“The stipulation was, I was to be your partner. Then the mortgage covers the ranch, but not the stock. Without the stock, the ranch would not be much use; and although I might buy the mortgage, I could not buy your experienced guidance and sound advice. Rather like a lawyer’s statement, but I think I’m accurate.”

“Ye’re a generous laddie; but ye’ll need to be cautious. Your relation’s check is a loan, and he implies ye will not get another.”

“I would not take a gift. Unless one is willing to be a servant, one must sometimes run a risk, although in this transaction Stormont bears the risk. In fact, if I didn’t know he was willing, I’d return his check. However, when you think about it, we younger folk are not as independent as we like to believe.”

“Ye have some understanding,” Stoddart remarked.

“I am in a humble vein, and if it will not bore you, I’ll finish my apology. I had hoped to push ahead on my own feet, but it was soon obvious that the roughnecks would beat me in staying power and speed. My lot used the reserves our fathers stored. We haven’t your frugality and capacity for labor, but we have machines you had not, and chemists and botanists work for us. If I send a stamp to a Government bureau, they’ll supply me with facts about stock and fruit-trees that you found out by costly experience. The conclusion is, for all our drawbacks, we may go farther than you have got.”

“Since I was a boy I labored, but I have not paid my mortgage,” said Stoddart, dryly. “But if ye are resolved to be my partner, let’s be practical.”

For some time he calculated, and Denis agreed that the partnership he sketched was just. When he had noted the particulars, Stoddart got some fresh paper and for a few minutes wrote laboriously.

“Ye’ll need to start for Vancouver the morn. Mackenzie, on Hastings, will see the mortgage discharged and draft the agreement we have made. Then ye’ll give him this paper; he’ll ken the right wording and the will he draws will stand.”

Denis took the document, and saw he was Stoddart’s heir.

“Ye maybe think I’m humorous,” said Stoddart, dryly. “Weel, a partnership’s a kittle arrangement, and I would like ye to get back your ain. Then a’ the folk for whom I cared are gone, and if aught is over when I take the trail, I would not have the Government file a claim.”

Denis was moved. Rob meant to guard his partner, and when all his debts were paid, Denis thought something would be left.

“You are kind, Rob; but, after all, I’m not entitled—”

“Nane is better entitled,” said Stoddart firmly. “There’s but another thing: when ye’re needing a house, ye’ll take the homestead and help me build a bit shack across the clearing.”

“The homestead’s yours. Besides. I expect it will be long before I need a house.”

“After a’, ye’re better slow than sorry. Ye can be married in ten minutes, but the leddy’s yours for life. No’ very lang since I was anxious for ye.”

Denis got up and occupied himself with the stove, but before he got a light he used five or six matches, and Stoddart’s twinkle indicated that the

old fellow could account for his extravagance.

After supper Denis talked and sketched ambitious plans. The strain was vanishing, and at length he felt as if he might let himself go. In the meantime, the thunder stopped and a boisterous wind began to sweep the valley. The thermometer fell, the tossing pines roared, and the rain on the roof shingles was like the roll of drums.

Stoddart smoked and sometimes nodded. He knew the long road on which the other had but set out, and he had stubbornly fronted its numerous obstacles. When he started, his hopes perhaps were not as high as Denis's, but the boy's gay courage would carry him far, and he would not, like Rob, climb the hill alone. Anyhow, he must not daunt the lad, and where his Scot's conscientiousness allowed, he agreed. Dark came soon, the stove burned low, and they went to bed.

In the morning the rain had stopped, but when Denis made his pack torn clouds rolled across the sky and the lake was streaked with angry foam. After breakfast Stoddart went to the door.

"Ye'll no' get through the ford, and I doubt the canoe will no' carry ye across the water."

Denis saw the spindrift blow, but he seized his pack.

"I must chance it, Rob. The mortgage is not yet paid and the time we've got is short. I feel, if I slacked, our antagonist might beat us, after all. When we know we have won, we'll celebrate. Besides, the wind is fair."

Stoddart saw the boy was resolute. Some speed was advisable, and he let him go.

At the landing Denis pushed the canoe through the noisy surf, and when the water beat his waist crawled on board across the stern. For a few minutes he sweated at the paddle, and then stepped the short mast, but he did not fix the pole that extended the small sprit-sail. If he pushed up the sprit, he might soon afterwards be in the water. In fact, he rather doubted if she would bear the half-set sail, but unless she did so, she would presently drive ashore on Marvin's beach. Denis had pulled off his coat and boots, and hauling aft the sheet, he seized the paddle.

The triangular, folded sail swelled like a balloon, and the canoe's bird-head bow went up. She started like a locomotive, and the short white seas foamed about her pointed stern. When they rolled ahead, her gunwale was a foot below their crests, and although but little water leaped on board, Denis was strenuously occupied. So long as one can hold her straight, a Siwash

canoe will run before a nasty sea; but he knew if she luffed she would capsize, and if she fell off to leeward, the sail would jibe across.

He heard surf and turned his head. Behind the sail, twenty yards off, foam leaped about the stones on the point by Marvin's ranch; but twenty yards was room enough and the bay opened in front. Then he saw Marvin's foreman watching him from a rock.

"You can't make it," the fellow shouted. "Spill your sail and shoot her in behind the rocks. I'll take your tracking-line."

"I'm for Vancouver," said Denis, and the canoe, her forefoot lifted from the water, lurched savagely ahead.

Spindrift streaked the bay, and when the gusts were fierce a curling ridge frothed behind the depressed stern. None, however, broke on board, and although Denis labored breathlessly, he held her straight. Her beam was narrow, but her floor was long, and length stands for speed. At the river-mouth, where the wind opposed the green flood and the channel was deeply furrowed, she shipped some water, and Denis's boots washed against his legs. Balancing on the gunwale, he steered for a slack, and when her bow took the gravel jumped overboard. Five minutes afterwards she was some distance up the bank, and Denis pulled on his soaked boots. Then he slipped the pack-straps over his shoulders and took the trail up the rocks.

Kate, on the ranch-house veranda, saw the canoe speed by the point, and went for Marvin's glasses. The steersman was Denis, and since he must know he might capsize, she speculated about his errand. Then it began to look as if he did not steer for the ranch; in fact, now he had passed the point Kate did not see where he could land. Rolling savagely, the canoe lurched across the bay, and Kate, following her with the glasses, saw the flour-bag pack. Denis was going to the settlement. When he camped he would need food and a blanket, but the blanket, folded separately, was by the mast and the pack was large. Denis would not stop at the settlement; he was going to the Coast.

Kate frowned and tried for calm. After all, she had not much to go on and she must not allow vague surmises to carry her away. If Denis were for Vancouver, when he had but recently returned, it looked as if he went for good. But there was no use in guessing. If she waited, she would know.

Some time afterwards, Rhoda came up the steps.

"Tom is back from the point," she said carelessly. "The canoe is Stoddart's, and Denis is bound for Vancouver."

Kate knew her carelessness was pretended, but Rhoda went to the house, and when Kate was alone her eyes sparkled and angry color flushed her face. Denis had left Stoddart and was going to rejoin Miss Cullen. When he properly knew Rob's difficulties his courage had melted, and the girl had perhaps entangled him. Kate felt her scorn was justified and to indulge it was some relief. Yet she had a sort of subconscious feeling that after all Denis was not like that. She ought to weigh things, but she could not, and she allowed angry emotions to carry her away.

## XXXI

# THE FLOOD

FOR a week after the storm fierce sunshine scorched the woods, and one hot evening Kate took the settlement trail. Where the track crossed the high rocks the timber was thin, and in the evening a cool breeze blew down the pass. Kate wanted to be alone. Rhoda had begun to jar; Kate pictured her spiteful satisfaction when she repeated the foreman's statement that Denis had started for the Coast. Rhoda knew she knew all his going back to Vancouver implied. Kate tried to persuade herself she was glad Denis was gone and would not bother them again; but to do so was hard.

Then Marvin was preoccupied and moody. Kate thought he waited for news about the Stoddart ranch; his agents would soon be entitled to take possession. It was possible he had got some news, for when Kate began to climb the pass the mail-carrier went by.

Near the top she sat down in the wine-berries. She heard the river in the canyon and sometimes the light wind in the pines; and then she turned her head. Somebody farther up the trail was singing, and by and by the beat of feet on rock marked the rhythm. The song was not the sort of song one might think to hear in the wilds, and now and then the melody halted, as if the singer plunged into a hole. After a few moments Kate knew him and although her heart beat she was very still. In the shadow between the big trunks, she ought not to be conspicuous.

The measured tramp got louder and Denis crossed a belt where the trees were thin. His step was a soldier's step: a bushman's gait was different. His head was up and the heavy pack pulled his shoulders flat. The red dust of the trail was on his clothes and his damp brown skin, but he swung buoyantly along. When Denis started, Kate had thought he stole away. Now he carried himself like a conqueror.

By and by he vanished behind the trunks and Kate got up. She remembered that he had set out in the morning after the mail-carrier had arrived, and, picturing his triumphant look, she began to see why he had

gone. He had not deserted Stoddart; his business at the Coast was to baffle the old fellow's creditor. Dusk, however, would soon fall and the dew was on the fern. Kate, weighing her surmises, started for the ranch.

In the meantime, the mail-carrier had stopped at the homestead, and Marvin took a bundle of letters to his desk in the big room. Although the light had begun to fade, Mrs. Marvin was sewing, and he pushed back the long window behind his chair. The rapid in the canyon was noisy. In the quiet evening its throb was harshly distinct. Marvin knew if he waited he would hear the haunting steps, and he began to sort the letters. Then he saw the realtor house's stamp and tore open the envelope. His look got very grim and he clenched his fist.

"The Aylwards have beaten me! Denis has paid Stoddart's mortgage and I suppose the ranch is his! I guess the boy is going to finish his uncle's job."

Mrs. Marvin's first emotion was frank relief, but when she glanced at her husband she got disturbed. The shadows deepened the lines in his face; one sensed the tense muscles under the furrowed skin. His pose was ominously still.

"The boy doesn't know—" she said, and stopped.

She could not break Jake's illusion, and, in a sense, his thinking Aylward haunted him was not extravagant. Since the tragedy at the canyon she had felt a shadow rested on their house. At one time she had hoped Kate's return might banish the gloom, but Denis had arrived, and Jake had perhaps real cause to be afraid. Well, there was no use in talking, and Mrs. Marvin took the letters for herself and Kate and stole away.

For some time Marvin did not know she was gone. The rapid's turmoil got louder, and although the wind had dropped ripples splashed along the beach. Then Marvin heard another noise and his skin got wet by sweat. Aylward's footsteps were ominously distinct and their hurried beat jarred his brain.

Aylward had not pursued him as relentlessly before. It looked as if he brushed through the grass at the bottom of the veranda steps and did not mean to stop. For him to climb the steps would imply disaster to Marvin and his household.

Marvin braced up. He was a sober rancher, and must not indulge his imagination like a neurotic fool. Had he not done so at the beginning, when exhausted and conscious-stricken he fled through the woods, he would now be free from the d—— obsession. The realtor people's letter had disturbed



him: that was all. Denis's buying the ranch was awkward, and so far Marvin did not know what he ought to do about it. By and by he might see his line, and, getting a light, he resolutely concentrated on his mail.

Mrs. Marvin heard steps, but she knew her daughter's walk, and she stole across the veranda and stopped Kate in the path.

"Your father is busy; I don't think you ought to bother him," she said and indicated the lighted window. "He is going through his mail. Denis has bought the mortgage on Stoddart's ranch."

"I know," Kate replied in a quiet voice. "He went down the pass not long since and did not see me, but he looked triumphant. Well, I suppose father is annoyed?"

"He is queer," Mrs. Marvin agreed, and after hesitating for a moment, added meaningly: "I reckon you and Rhoda ought to leave the boy alone."

"I cannot control Rhoda, but I am not at all anxious to bother Denis," said Kate with a touch of haughtiness. "But I expected some letters."

Mrs. Marvin said two had arrived, and they went to the house.

In the morning the smoke from a distant forest fire floated across the sky like a yellow fog, but the heat was almost insupportable. The wind had dropped, the roof shingles crackled, and the smell of the pines floated about the house, clogging and sweet as honey.

Kate started to climb the pass, but effort was difficult, and when the sand-flies drove her back she joined Rhoda and Mrs. Marvin on the veranda. None wanted to talk, and for once Mrs. Marvin rested with folded hands. Rhoda presently went to sleep, and Kate, putting down the book she could not read, mused drearily. She was resolved she would not think about Denis, but sometimes she glanced across the lake.

The glassy water was like a sounding-board, and when Kate heard an ax she knew Denis's rather uneven stroke. Then cowbells chimed, and she pictured his chaining the oxen to a massive log. Yet the lake was not altogether quiet. Ripples splashed the stones, and one sensed a sort of rhythmic pulse in the water, as if its depths were disturbed. The canyon was noisy, but the river had not risen much. If the afternoon were as hot as the morning, Kate thought she might conquer her languidness and go for a swim.

Marvin's habit was not to stop for snow or sun, and after breakfast he sent a hired man down the lake, and started with another for a hill bench

where he thought his young cattle fed. They carried dinner-pails, and for some distance followed the canyon.

In the pass the air was stagnant and the limp cedar-sprays did not move; the pines were as stiff and quiet as if they were carved. Only the rapid's hoarse turmoil broke the brooding calm, and when Marvin took the rocks, to hear the noise get fainter was some relief. Although he went slowly, his breath was labored and his muscles were slack. Moreover, he was bothered by a queer nervous strain. The quiet was ominous: Marvin felt that something threatened.

Where they pushed through burned timber he used caution, but the high black rampikes were firm, and when a pillar of charcoal crashed he was in the green woods. Balancing on a hemlock-log, they crossed a ravine, and he drove the creeper spikes in his boots firmly into the rotten bark. Only fools were rash, but the vague uneasiness Marvin tried to conquer was not for himself. If he were forced, he could take his punishment, and when he had schemed to banish Denis Aylward he had thought for Kate.

Marvin found the young stock where he calculated. The steers were getting fat, and when he tallied the herd he saw none had strayed. His hired man brewed some tea and they got dinner in the shade of a rock. The high bench commanded a noble view, and across the glimmering lake a pillar of smoke went up. Marvin frowned. Stoddart and Denis burned the log-piles; they had cleaned up the slashing and would plow between the stumps. In fact, the smoke indicated that they meant to carry on the ranch.

Denis, however, was not just then with Rob. Soon after the logs began to burn he set out for the sheep-fold; and when Marvin knocked out his pipe and went down the hillside, Denis followed his sheep across the rocks behind the river-mouth.

When Marvin got back in the afternoon the man he sent down the lake had not returned. All was quiet at the homestead, and but for Mrs. Marvin in a corner of the veranda nobody was about.

"Hello!" he said, smiling. "You didn't hear me come up the steps; but I reckon you're entitled to take a rest. Where are the girls?"

"They went to bathe a while since," Mrs. Marvin replied drowsily. "If they could stand for the sun on the water, Kate thought they'd paddle to the gravel-bank on Stoddart's side."

Marvin's smile vanished. His foreman had the service canoe, and the other was small and uncertain. Then Rhoda, at all events, was not much of a

swimmer. Marvin hardly thought the river would yet come down; the snow along the timber-line had already melted; but he did not know, and the water had begun to rise. Anyhow, he must take no chances.

"I guess I'll go along," he said.

"You must walk, and you can't cross the river," Mrs. Marvin objected. "The girls will be back before you are through the clearing."

Somehow Marvin doubted, and he went to the railing and shouted for his man.

"I'm going," he said, and hurried down the steps.

When one left the clearing, the path, for a short distance, commanded the narrows at the head of the lake, and Marvin saw small branches and light driftwood float by. He went faster, but the trees presently cut his view, and when he was level with another opening, a muddy green belt followed the steep bank. Along its other edge, revolving eddies tossed the clay the glaciers carried down into the crystal water, and the noise in the canyon was like the roar of a train.

Marvin's fatigue vanished, and he began to run. In a few minutes, a flood might sweep the narrows and he could not yet see the gravel-bank. The bank was across the river; but Kate had left the ranch some time since, and as she had, Marvin hoped, finished her swim, he might warn her not to launch the canoe.

Kate was in the water. She had paddled leisurely up the lake, and when she and Rhoda landed the stream along the gravel was slack. On the other side, it certainly went rather fast, and a turmoil marked the point behind which the bay curved back. The slack, however, was warm and shining, and at its lower end a backwash flowed smoothly along the bank. One could swim to the spot, and return across the smooth stones. Kate pulled up the canoe carelessly and put on her bathing-suit.

When she was near the tail eddy she heard Rhoda shout and she turned upstream. Now she fronted the current, she felt its speed, and the water had suddenly got cold. Rhoda, eight or nine yards off, went round in a green whirlpool, and when Kate steered for her, she was swept across towards the other side. Then the eddy spun downstream, and Kate saw the gravel slip back.

She was pulled under, as if somebody had seized her legs, and when she came up Rhoda was farther off. The eddies, however, revolved, and a side-swirl might shorten the distance. The green current raced across obliquely

for the hollow curve, and they might yet reach land. Anyhow, she must not get flurried. The river was coming down, and when one swam for one's life one must be cool.

Kate did not reach Rhoda. After a few moments she did not know where the other was. Angry waves buffeted her and she was tossed about. A broken pine drove by, but when she tried to seize a branch a whirlpool pulled her down. All she really knew was she was being savagely carried downstream.

## XXXII

# AYLWARD'S CLAIM

MARVIN, smashing through fern and brush, saw two small dark objects break the flood. The objects were swimmers' heads and sped downstream towards the rocks for which he steered. Their advance, however, was not straight, and Marvin knew muscular effort had nothing to do with their speed. Sometimes they gyrated in circles; sometimes one for a moment vanished, and then again there were two.

Marvin's breath was horribly labored, his heart beat like a hammer, and his side hurt; but fear gave him strength and, for all his years, he was yet in front of his hired man. After a time, willows and sapling pines cut his view. He must cross the belt of swale, and when he plunged into the entangling branches horror for a few moments numbed his brain.

Aylward, at length, claimed his debt. A life for a life, and he demanded Kate's. Tom was a merciless creditor, and when the debt was paid Marvin's punishment would not end. In the meantime, he must break through the thicket, and mechanical effort restored him some control.

Shouting for the hired man, he swerved. Before he reached the spot for which he aimed the girls might be carried past; but, if they were yet on the surface, one might stop them farther downstream. The narrows were not straight, and on Marvin's side, the main current swung furiously along the rocks in the entrant curve. If his speed were good, he might yet cheat his creditor; but if it was impossible, he would pay handsomely, for where Tom claimed a victim he should get two.

Marvin broke from the thicket. The ground in front was rocky and the trees were not numerous, but he had fifty yards to go and the girls must not be carried past the point, behind which the lake got wide. He no longer saw them. The bank was high, his heart pounded horribly, and his head swam. The river got indistinct and the hired man had vanished, but Marvin clenched his fists and lurched stubbornly ahead.

His luck was better than he knew. Denis, moving Stoddart's sheep on the other side, saw the flood leap from the canyon. Kate swam down the slack; her slim body, distinct in the dark bathing-suit, moving like a seal's in flowing curves. Then a green eddy swung her round in a circle, and Denis sped across the rocks.

He did not consciously stop to pull off his boots, but when he jumped on a shelf, a little below the tail of the slack, a stone jarred his foot. All he knew was, not a moment must be lost, and in the next jump he took the water, breast-forward like a dog. The plunge steadied him. Speed was important, but he must use some judgment, and he looked about.

An eddy swung him into the main stream, and since he had raced along the bank, Kate was but eight or nine yards off. She swam steadily; Rhoda, a little further off, was helplessly tossed about. Behind the girls, the canoe floated downstream. In deep water to get on board a stiff boat is awkward; but unless one is an acrobat, to board an unstable canoe without some help is impossible. Denis did not try. He had capsized a stiffer canoe than Marvin's and he steered for Kate. She heard his breathless shout and turned her head.

"Go for Rhoda! I believe I can swim across," she gasped.

Denis saw Rhoda could not, and he swerved.

"Wait for the canoe. She'll float you. I am coming back!"

The crawl stroke carried him across the eddy, and when he lifted his head Rhoda was close in front. She was obviously exhausted, but so long as she did not splash, Denis thought she would not sink. Rhoda Staines was short and her figure was frankly round. On the whole, her exhaustion was not a drawback.

Denis seized a fold of her bathing-suit and turned on his side. His left hand was somewhere behind Rhoda's shoulders; his right arm, sweeping back to his hip, under water, helped his crossing legs propel him and his load. Rhoda could not turn and grapple him, and his thin overalls were not a great embarrassment.

Although the strain got hard, he towed the girl as if she were a log, and the current swept them into the entrant curve. Then, for a few moments, Denis tried to look about. They were not far from the bank, but the water was deep and the flood swirled furiously along the rocks. If they were flung against the stones, one or both must take a cruel knock, and if Rhoda were torn from him, he might lose her in the deep, muddy stream.

It was awkward, and Denis, swimming easily, allowed himself to drift. He dared not yet try to land, but he must not be carried into the broken water at the point. Behind the reefs, the icy current swept across the lake. Afterwards he imagined his brain functioned mechanically; he was not conscious that he weighed the risks, he rather knew.

Somebody shouted, and Marvin ran for a spot a short distance in front. He meant to jump, but Marvin was old, and in the water would be a fresh embarrassment. Another man labored behind him, and Denis thought the fellow did the proper thing, for he threw his master against the stones and leaped waist-deep, into the flood.

In a few moments the fellow seized Denis's hand. The current swung Denis round, and since he supported Rhoda, when he brought up, the shock was hard, but he held on and twisted his body between the rocks and her soft flesh. Then he knew the man seized her, and he had another job. He bent his legs, braced his feet against a stone, and, sinking his head, pushed off.

When he broke the surface, the canoe had floated past the spot and was some distance in front. She trailed a dark, half-submerged object, and Denis knew Kate's hand was on the pointed stern. Since Kate was not much of a swimmer, she used some control, for she had not tried to climb on board. She no doubt knew the canoe would capsize.

So long as her body was in the water, she would not need much support; the trouble was, the flood was melted snow and the cold got numbing. If the canoe were swept across the lake, Kate could not hold on for long, and Denis saw he must reach her before she drifted past the point. The canoe's speed was the current's speed, but, for a short distance, the crawl stroke is fast.

The stream, swirling up from the uneven bottom, broke, and short waves washed across his head. He breathed with explosive gasps, and he could not steer by sight. A branch struck him, his side hurt, and the cold began to cramp his muscles. All he saw was a dull reflection through the water, but he must not yet slacken speed in order to find out where he went.

At length he thought he might risk it, and sinking his arms, he swam like a frog. The canoe was three or four yards off, and a few strokes carried him to her stern. Gasping exhaustedly, he seized the gunwale, and his free hand fastened in Kate's bathing-suit. A light hold would support her, and he was horribly afraid she might let go. She said nothing; her face was pinched and her lips were blue. Denis's breath was gone, and for a time he floated slackly behind the canoe.

Then his brain resumed control. The hired man was in the water, perhaps sixty yards off, and the distance indicated the current's speed. The fellow could not overtake them for some time, and if he did so, Denis doubted if he could help. He did not see Marvin, and he measured the distance to the point. They were nearly level with the corner and the flood rolled furiously across the broken rocks. To land might be awkward, if one could reach the spot, but Denis dared not try. He was exhausted and Kate was numbed and slack. Before he could float her half the distance, they would be carried past.

The canoe lurched and swung broadside-on across the stream. Short waves splashed about them, and for a minute or two Denis was occupied by holding Kate. Then he saw the point slip back and angry water open between him and the rocks. Marvin's man had vanished. Denis imagined he had found he could not overtake the canoe and had headed for the bank.

"Where is your other canoe?" he asked Kate.

"The foreman went down the lake to help Wilmslow dip his sheep," she replied in a lifeless voice. "I suppose we'll drift across the bay?"

Denis dully cogitated. If Wilmslow dipped all his sheep, the foreman would not be back until evening, and hope of help from land was gone. Marvin had no other canoe, and Rob was occupied in the slashing. The bay was wide, and although the current might carry them across, it would soon lose speed. All the same, the eddying belt of muddy green yet flowed down the lake, and its temperature was near the temperature of melting ice. Kate could not hold on for long; in fact, Denis could not.

"We must brace up," he said. "If I helped, d'you think you could get on board?"

"If I tried, I'd capsize the canoe."

Denis thought it possible, but something must be risked. To some extent, he could help, and Kate was lighter than he. Besides, one of them must stay in the water.

"You have got to try! I'll steady the canoe, and you can rest your foot on my back."

"I'm beaten, Denis," Kate said drearily. "The cold is horrible— And if I did get on board, I could not pull you up."

Denis agreed. Were both fresh, he might, so long as Kate balanced the canoe, lift his body by a wrist-turn and plunge on board across the stern. But he was not fresh; to talk was hard, and when Kate declared she was beaten



she did not exaggerate. Yet he knew the defeat was physical; her nerve was not gone.

“You could paddle,” he rejoined and pushed her against the stern. “Try! It’s easier than you believe.”

He allowed himself to sink, and Kate’s foot touched his hip. Her hand pressed his arm, and then her knee was in his back. She used him for a ladder, but the canoe’s bow began to tilt and the stern went down. It looked as if the gunwale would go under water. Denis had not a fulcrum for his feet, but his hold was good and he bent his arms.

“Now!” he gasped and arched his back. “You are going on board!”

His load was suddenly lifted. Water splashed, the canoe rocked but did not capsize, and Denis went horribly slack. Although he had hardly thought their exploit possible, Kate was not in the water. For some time he floated, his hand on the gunwale; and then he awkwardly lifted his head. Kate lay, limp and wet, in the bottom of the craft. Her face and bare arms were like dull ivory.

“You must paddle, dear,” he said.

Kate groped about for the paddle and got awkwardly on her knees. Denis shifted his hands to the other side and the canoe began to move. The irregular splash steadied and he allowed himself to float against the crawling hull. His submerged body was a heavy drag, but he could not yet reach the beach. In fact, he doubted if he could hold on. By and by Kate stopped her paddle.

“Are you all right, Denis?” she asked breathlessly.

“I’ll be happier when you land me.”

A faint touch of color crept to Kate’s skin, and he knew a reaction had begun. Then he saw that was not all.

“I cannot pull you on board; but if you try to swim to land, I’ll capsize the canoe.”

“Very well,” said Denis. “Now suppose you go ahead!”

The paddle splashed faster, but its beat was uneven and the canoe swerved about. Although Kate was getting control, so long as he dragged alongside, she could not properly steer. For all that, her word went. If he did not hold on, she would capsize the canoe, and he saw all her threat implied. Yet their progress was slow and the water was horribly cold.

Denis heard another paddle. The stroke was fast, and hope revived. Marvin's foreman was coming back and had seen them, for his shout rolled across the lake.

"Hurry, Tom!" Kate replied in a strained voice. "Paddle for your life!"

The rapid splash got furious, and Denis heard water break against surging bows. By and by a canoe shocked against the other and firm hands seized him. He was pulled on board and saw Kate in the bottom of the larger craft.

"Go for the landing. She's all in, and I cannot help," he gasped.

It looked as if Kate fainted. Now the strain was over, the strength urgent need had somehow given her went, and the returning color melted from her skin. Her eyes shut, but when she sank back to the spruce-branch floor, Denis's arms closed round her and her head was on his breast. He did not know if the foreman thought it strange; the fellow was occupied sending the canoe along.

A group waited by the landing, and when Marvin shouted Kate languidly looked up. The bow shocked in the gravel, and leaning on Denis's arm, she got over the gunwale. Mrs. Marvin threw a blanket round her, but the stones hurt her numbed feet and she stumbled. Marvin pushed back his wife.

"I'll carry her to the house."

"No," said Kate feebly. "Denis—"

Denis stooped and took her in his arms.

"The job is mine, sir. By Mrs. Marvin's leave—"

Kate's arms went round his neck. She rested against him like a tired child, but Denis set his mouth. Kate was a finely built woman and his muscles were cramped. The others knew they must not meddle and although he labored for breath, he crossed the belt of stones and lurched up the steps. In the house he gave Kate to her mother and made shakily for the veranda bench.

Marvin wanted to give him dry clothes, but Denis refused. His recent efforts had brought some warmth to his chilled skin and the evening was very hot. He waited, and by and by Mrs. Marvin came to the door. Rhoda, she stated, was in bed, and not much the worse for her adventure; and if Kate got a refreshing sleep, she would, no doubt, be down for breakfast.

“I can’t force you to stop, but if you must go, we’ll expect you in the morning,” she said, and gave Denis a frank, meaning look.

Denis’s heart beat, and he went down the steps triumphantly. Marvin had said nothing, and when his wife went back to Kate he leaned against a post. Tom Aylward, by proxy, claimed his debt, but since the payment was not the payment Marvin had not long since thought to make, he was willing to meet the bill. Yet there was something Denis and Kate must know, and, after all, his treachery at the canyon might cost them much.

## XXXIII

# MARVIN'S SURRENDER

IN the morning Denis crossed the lake, and when he pulled up the canoe he saw a white figure by the veranda railing. Kate awaited his arrival, and although she might have met him at the landing, he admitted she took the proper line. If he meant to claim her, he must claim her, openly, at her father's house. For all Marvin's hostility, Denis was going to do so.

At the top of the steps Kate gave him her hand, and Denis was reassured. All sign of strain had vanished. He thought Kate as fresh as the woods at daybreak; but she was perhaps not altogether the girl he had thought he knew. The proud reserve one sometimes sensed was gone.

"When you pushed off at Stoddart's landing, I saw you had not paid for your exploit," she said, and indicated the glasses on a chair. "I admit I was anxious about you."

"We are young," said Denis, smiling. "Youth can take some knocks, and as soon as I got out of the water my slackness went."

"It looked like that," Kate remarked. "For one thing, you carried me up the steps. All the same, you lurched about, and you hit the railing. I hoped you would not drop me!"

Denis thought she struck the proper note; he hated to be theatrical, and he humored her.

"Oh, well, one likes to finish a job. I, however, believed you but half conscious."

Kate blushed. "I knew when you stumbled. For a time, my nerve was gone. I wanted somebody to take care of me, and you were the proper man. Since the others were fresh and you were not, I might have paid for my selfishness. After all, one hates to be ridiculous."

"Ah," said Denis, "I'd like to keep the job I undertook. I mustn't boast, dear, but, if you dare risk it, I'll try to take care of you for good."

Kate turned her head. She said nothing, and Denis's heart beat. After a few moments he leaned forward and touched her.

"Perhaps I'm rashly ambitious; but I have the honor to ask if you will marry me."

She looked up, and although she smiled, her face was like a rose.

"Now you are early-Victorian, although I believed we were up-to-date! You know I claimed you shamelessly, but after you swam back for me it was not important and I think you were not jarred. All the same, you must be frank. Were you very keen to marry Rhoda not long since?"

Denis hesitated. His look was embarrassed and Kate laughed.

"You refuse to let Rhoda down? Oh, well, you use the rules you know, and I like your fastidiousness; but perhaps I was entitled to inquire. There is another thing. Did you want to marry Miss Cullen?"

"I did not. Bride Cullen is a charming girl, but I was not her lover."

"Perhaps I ought to be satisfied," Kate remarked. "I really thought Miss Cullen charming, and Rhoda, of course, is clever. For all that, you resisted their attractions."

"From the beginning, I was pulled another way. When you went along the platform at Montreal and I was camped among my shabby luggage, I knew if ever I married, you were the sort for me. I liked your fearless look and your proud carriage. Somehow I knew your independence, and although I was a third-class emigrant, I felt you sympathized with mine. When you talked to me by the glacier and at the ranch all I had imagined was justified, but I knew I mustn't be a romantic fool. The obstacles were pretty numerous, and, for that matter, they haven't yet vanished."

"After all," said Kate, "I think my pluck is as good as yours. If you are very keen, Denis, we might risk it."

Denis turned to take her in his arms, but stopped. Mrs. Marvin at the door called them to breakfast, and he advanced with humorous confusion.

"Kate has agreed to marry me. I hope you approve."

Mrs. Marvin's look was very sober, but she kissed Kate and gave Denis her hand.

"I like you, and but for one thing, I reckon you are the man for Kate. Well, my husband has got to put you wise, and I expect you will show a front. Anyhow, Kate's my daughter and I'm your friend."

“Where is Mr. Marvin?” Denis inquired.

“He went off soon after sun-up and he’s not yet back. But breakfast’s waiting.”

They went to the house. Breakfast was rather a silent function, for Mrs. Marvin brooded, and although Denis dared not indulge his disturbing speculations, to talk carelessly was hard. All waited for Marvin, and when he at length arrived and called Kate and Denis to the veranda they were conscious of some relief.

“You want to marry my daughter?” he said to Denis.

“That is so, sir,” Denis agreed.

“I have promised to marry Denis,” Kate declared.

“Very well,” said Marvin, “there is something you must know—” He turned to Mrs. Marvin. “Hannah, I want you to stay. When Denis and Kate landed, the line I had to take was plain. Now they must fix theirs, but to put them wise is hard—”

He stopped for a few moments. The lines in his face were deep, and Denis, for the first time, thought him old and worn. His glance, however, was steady and his look resolute.

“Denis is like his uncle, my partner,” he resumed. “In a way, he stands for Tom and the Aylward lot. I want him to get that: it’s important. Well, I’m not out to make the best defense I can; I’m trying to be just, to my partner and myself.

“Tom Aylward was a regular fellow. In the Old Country they’d call him a good sort. He was straight; Tom never went back on his word. He was a good mixer, and for all his English cultivation, the boys liked him. But I guess Denis knew his uncle.”

“I was but a boy, sir. Still I think the portrait’s accurate.”

“You are going to get mine,” said Marvin. “I was a raw young bushman, and I started the realtor house with your uncle’s money. I had some capacity for business and I was willing to sweat. I concentrated on the money, and all I thought about was to push the house ahead. Maybe you wonder where I lead? When I’m through, you’ll know.

“Your uncle was another type. Tom had qualities and resources I had not. Where I swore he smiled, and queer things pleased him. When we were nearly beat he’d sit on the porch and smoke. Tom refused to worry so long

as the Chinook tossed the branches and the woods were smelling clean; but when the company built the smelter and boosted the town he stormed. For all that, the plan that pulled us through was as often Tom's as mine."

Denis tried to conquer his impatience. He perhaps had not his uncle's philosophy, but the clash of temperament was obvious and he wanted Marvin to go on.

"Maybe I was jealous," the rancher said quietly. "The money was Tom's, and the customers who helped us most were his. The boys knew I'd give them a square deal; but they'd sooner talk to Tom. That wasn't all. My habit was to hustle, and when I got busy I hit up the pace. Tom was obstinate, and if I tried to put a move on him, he'd go slower than before. When I got riled he laughed. Until he joined me, I'd fought for all I got; Tom somehow got much for nothing, but I felt he ought to pull his proper weight.

"By and by we put across a deal that came near to break us, and when all was straight we loaded up a canoe and took a holiday. My nerves were raw, and Tom was languid. I had pushed him pretty hard and he wanted to loaf. When I was tired my notion was to pitch in on a different job. Maybe you see us as we were when we started for the woods?"

"If it's some comfort, I know how your partner saw you," Denis remarked. "His mother kept his letters, and when I talked about emigrating I was given the bundle. He said you were a good sample of the frontier type: keen, resolute, and altogether trustworthy. He thought you might supply the touch of hardness he perhaps required; the drawback was, you might carry him along faster than he was willing to go. Perhaps you recognize his humorous touch?"

"Tom was humorous," Marvin agreed. "The trouble was, I had not much use for his jokes. Anyhow, we started for the woods and the heat was fierce; but we reckoned to prospect for gold in the creeks about the height-of-land, and I meant to get there before the floods came down. You see, our camp truck was an awkward load, and the bush was thick, but so long as the water was low, we could track the canoe up the canyon—"

Marvin stopped. The others knew he had so far but tried to draw his partner and himself, in order that all might understand the reactions the contrast implied. Now he had reached the climax of his tale, he hesitated, and when he continued, his narrative was broken.

Denis noted Mrs. Marvin's strange calm. He saw she gave her husband her sympathy and sometimes she glanced at Kate. Kate was very quiet, but

her color had melted and Denis knew her afraid. Well, he thought both soon must take a smashing knock.

In the meantime he must concentrate on Marvin's tale, and since he had studied the ground, he pictured the tired men laboriously tracking their canoe upriver. Where they toiled across a portage he saw the blood-thirsty mosquitoes and sand-flies swarm about their heads. He saw the men flounder in the angry rapids. Marvin remarked that the sun was like a furnace and the water was melted ice.

"Tom reckoned the excursion was not the restful holiday he had meant to take, and nobody could hustle in the scorching heat," he said. "I claimed he agreed to make the height-of-land, and we were going through. We argued about it, and when the canoe pulled us off our feet we both got pretty mad.

"Well, we made the canyon, two or three days behind schedule, and I saw the water had begun to rise. I was for shoving ahead for a sand-bar upstream; Tom allowed we'd stop, and since we hadn't nooned, he wanted his supper before we pitched camp. I reckoned we'd see all fixed and safe, and then I'd be satisfied to rest. Tom declared I wasn't logical. If we could get through the canyon, he had no use for carrying the stuff up the rocks and manhandling the canoe; if I thought a flood might come down, we oughtn't to be there—"

Denis imagined the dispute got acrimonious. The clash, so to speak, was inevitable, but Marvin talked with effort, and the tale went awkwardly. He pictured the gloomy canyon and the rapid, foaming between the rocks.

"I carried some truck to the top and cooked supper: Tom undertook to bring all I'd left— After supper the rapid was loud and I got anxious. I wanted him to go for his load, and I'd come down and help. Tom declared he'd smoke out his pipe—

"When he did go the water was rising. Before I could grab all I wanted, it was round our boots, and Tom told me to shove off. The job was his; he'd engaged to bring the stuff, and he didn't want me to meddle. Well, I was riled; we were both riled, and I went. He had got the heavy stuff, loaded up in a flour-bag, on his back, and I ought to have waited. We had 'most a hundred yards to go, the river pushing us against the rocks, and to make the ravine where we got down we must climb an awkward slab.

"Well, I wanted to stop for him, but Tom was stubborn and I was savage. Although I was willing to help, he had sent me off, and when the water was at our feet we mustn't dispute. At the bottom of the slab I waited, maybe a



moment or two. I heard his feet on the stones—and I've heard them ever since—I was the stronger man and I might boost him and his load to a shelf in the ravine; but I would not, unless he asked. If I mustn't help when I wanted, I'd let him sweat. Well, I went up, and when I made the shelf the flood rolled down the canyon—”

All were very quiet. Kate's face was blanched and she shivered. Mrs. Marvin perhaps was the least moved, and Marvin turned to her, slowly and awkwardly.

“You trusted me, Hannah! I cheated you.”

“I wasn't cheated, Jake,” said Mrs. Marvin, in a gentle voice. “All along I knew it happened something like that. I never knew you scared, and if you had thought Aylward would let you help, you'd have saved him.”

Then she turned to Denis, and her glance was searching.

“You wanted to marry our daughter. Well?”

Denis had got a nasty knock. His uncle at one time was his hero, and although he loved Kate Marvin, her father, carried away by jealous passion, to some extent was accountable for his partner's drowning. Denis felt his youth weigh, but he must be just. He knew Marvin had not exaggerated and had kept nothing back.

“My part is a horribly awkward part; but, in a sense, I do stand for my uncle and the Aylward family. Then I've been told I am like him in person and temperament. Well, Tom Aylward was a sportsman, sir; when he lost, I expect you found he smiled and paid. At all events, I cannot picture his claiming a shabby revenge. You quarreled; perhaps you were forced to jar, and when one's blood is hot one does not see all the consequences. I feel he would not have made you accountable, and I dare not.”

He crossed the floor and touched Kate. She got up and they went down the steps. For a moment or two the others were quiet; and then Marvin said:

“I was a fool to be afraid. You are a great woman, Hannah, and the Aylwards are a generous lot. I let my partner down; his nephew gave me my daughter back. Well, I took my punishment, and now it's over. Our job's to put things straight, and I can make the boy.”

“It's done with long since,” said Mrs. Marvin quietly. “I guess Tom Aylward's satisfied, and you won't hear his steps again. But all that one entangles cannot be put straight, and Denis will take nothing that is yours. Yet I'm not afraid for him and Kate. They're fine stuff and she's your

daughter. The boy is like his uncle, but he has qualities Tom Aylward never had.”

THE END.

## TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Misspelled words and printer errors have been corrected. Where multiple spellings occur, majority use has been employed.

Punctuation has been maintained except where obvious printer errors occur.

Book name and author have been added to the original book cover. The resulting cover is placed in the public domain.

[The end of *The Ghost of Hemlock Canyon* by Harold Bindloss]